

# IV • PHILOLOGY

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## Character of a Russian Translation of Poem “Winter” (“Kys”) by Abai

**Abstract.** The article deals with the history, practice and character of a Russian translation of poem “Winter” (“Kys”) by Abai. The Russian-speaking readers may be limited in understanding the key inner thought of this poem, since the translators themselves did not fully “see into” what the original meant to say. They simply translated the poem word-for-word, and only carried across a certain part of its meaning. Simply by looking at them, we can see an absolute disconnect between the meaning of the original and the translations.

**Keywords:** winter, blind, literary interconnections, original, nature, fiction.

### Introduction

The original by Abai, “Kys” (Winter), we see that the poet describes wintery nature through an animated image, by endowing the winter season, the blizzards, and the frost with a soul. Undoubtedly, this works toward immersing the reader, giving him an impression. Whereas, reading a Russian translation would not likely leave the same lasting impression. At the same time, the Russian-speaking readers may be limited in understanding the key inner thought of this poem, since the translators themselves did not fully “see into” what the original meant to say. They simply translated the poem word-for-word, and only carried across a certain part of its meaning. Simply by looking at them, we can see an absolute disconnect between the meaning of the original and the translations.

### Methods

Literal and historical, typological, statistical methods and text comparative analysis were used because of the theme features, purposes and tasks except linguistic- literal research.

### Main body

Nature is an environment for humans to work and live in. Descriptions of nature occupy a certain place in the literary works of all significant classical poets. Every one of them had a different unique way

to elegize Nature, depending on their time and environment. While some sang songs about the mysteries of being, others described human spirits. Among the many themes that Abai was elegizing, Nature had a special place. He grew up around Nature and knew how to love it. When you read such his poems as, “Küz” (“Autumn”), “Kys” (“Winter”), “Jaz” (“Summer”), you vividly see the diversity of different natural events. You see the images of a jolly summer, a cool foggy autumn, or the cruel frosts and winter blizzards. Many translators have provided Russian translations of Abai’s descriptive poetry about Nature. Among them, V. Rozhdestvensky, Yu. Kuznetsov, M. Sultanbekov, and others. Standing out from the rest is one poem by Abai, Kys (Winter).

Let us do a bit of analysis of those translations. We know that this poem starts with these lines:

*Aq kiiimdi, deneli, aq saqaldı,*

*Soqır, mılqaw, tanımas tiri jandı.*

*Üsti-bası - aq qıraw, tüsi swıq, Basqan jeri sıqırlap kelip qaldı.*

Abai uncovers winter’s special features by describing peculiar features specific to this season. Here, winter is represented not as a natural image but as a human figure: a giant in white clothes sporting a white beard, denying life, etc. These expressions form the main meaningful values that represent notions and images. Should one of them be omitted or

changed, the poem would lose much of its meaning and significance. For the translator, losing the content and meaning from the original would constitute a serious deficiency. Let us have a look at the Russian translation of “Kys.”

*Aq kiiimdi, deneli, aq saqaldi,  
Soqır, mısqaw, tanımas tiri jandı.*

Here is Yu. Kuznetsov’s take on those lines:

*A giant in white coat, silver beard  
There’s no one he sees, for he is blind and numb  
[1].*

When reading this translation, one would imagine a giant human figure in a white furcoat and a white beard. He does not see anyone, he is blind and numb. The translator has created a very sharp, concrete, and obvious image. Once read, this image will not fade away easily. From this particular point of view, it is obvious that the translator, while working on these particular lines, has been able to find a powerful solution. However, one cannot help but think that such an image describes, namely, a giant human figure, not winter at all.

Yu. Kuznetsov translated the word-group “aq kiiimdi” as *aq ton* (in a white furcoat), and the notion of “deneli,” as *alıp* (a giant). The author of this translation fell short of carrying across the meaning of the words “kiiim,” “deneli,” since the expression *aq ton* cannot precisely translate the notion of “aq kiiimdi.” Secondly, a word that translates a common, nominal meaning of a thing in the original, the author has replaced it for a specific, own name. Therefore, we are unable to assert with confidence that such a solution by the translator precisely carries across the content of the original or of its content unit.

The line “Soqır, mısqaw tanımas tiri jandı” is given this translation: “He sees no one, for he is blind and numb.” Here, it would be advisable to look at such content and structural units as (a) *blind*; (b) *numb*; (c) *denying*. The author of the translation should have translated these three notions according to their own specific content. However, as we see he was unable to carry the translation fully. In the translation, two out of three notions have been translated: (a) *soqır - blind*; (b) *mısqaw - numb*. The third notion (*tanımas*) has been omitted. Instead, the author gives us the notion *eşkimdi körmeydi* “*sees no one*” (*registers no one*). First of all, this is the author’s very own understanding that has been included in the content of the translation; secondly, this is similar to the notion “*soqır*” (*blind*).

Therefore, the author of the translation, by omitting one notion from the trinity in the original, creates two notions close in meaning to the one notion (*soqır - blind*) in the remaining double in the original (*eşkimdi körmeydi; soqır - see no one; blind*).

*Üsti-bası aq qıraw, tüsi swıq,*

- here is how Yu. Kuznetsov translated this line:

*His steely face adorned with white frost [1].*

When translated backwards, we will get this meaning:

*Izbarlı bette aq qıraw jarqıraydı.*

This translation absolutely does not correspond to the original. Abai described an unanimated event as an animated one. Whereas the author of the translation was unable to carry across an animated image of an unanimated notion. The notions “Üsti-bası,” “tüsi swıq” in the original have been translated as “His steely face.” Therefore, a system of two significant notions in the original, such as “üsti-bası aq qıraw” and “tüsi swıq” found no description in the translation. We assert so because the word “üsti-bası” found in this priceless original, was not translated altogether. At the same time, while the author translates the expression “aq qıraw” as “white frost,” he somehow understands “tüsi swıq” as “his steely face.” For a reader who has not had the opportunity to compare the Kazakh and Russian versions of the poem, the Russian version will definitely not carry across the content of the original. The Russian-speaking readers, therefore, will find it difficult to feel, through this translation, the mastery of Abai who describes winter as a human figure, by endowing an unanimated thing with a soul.

This line:

*Basqan jeri sıqırlap, kelip qaldı, –*

was translated by Yu. Kuznetsov as

*Everything creaks and cracks under a heavy  
foot [1].*

Here is how we translated this line:

*Awır tabanniñ astında bäre sıqırlap, sıqırlaydı.*

The expression “basqan jeri” was not translated from the original. If the word “Sıqırlap” (to creak) was translated word-for-word, the expression “kelip

qaldı” was absent from the translation. The author, by himself, his own “everything cracks” and “under a heavy foot.” On the one side, the translator did his best to carry Abai’s thought across, but fell short when describing it precisely. Despite there are several different variants of a Russian translation of this poem out there, we can confidently say none of them carries a detailed translation of Abai’s creative image.

Let us have a look at the translation by V. Rozhdestvensky:

*In a whitefurcoat, broad-shouldered, snow color is his hair [1].*

A reverse translation:

*Aqtondi, üqti, qardan aq saqaldı.*

V. Rozhdestvensky translates the word-group “aq kïimdi” as “in a white furcoat,” the word “deneli” as “broad-shouldered,” and “aq saqaldı” as “snow color is his hair.” Content-wise, the author adds his own wording thereby allowing himself a certain liberties with translation. The word-group in the original, “aq saqaldı” is presented to Russian-speaking readers as “snow color is his hair.” This part, “snow color,” is something that the author took the liberty adding by himself. Let us have a look at the next line in this translation:

*Blind and numb, he is with a great silver beard [1], –*

A reverse translation goes as follows:

*Soqır, mısqaw, ülkenkïmis saqaldı.*

The words in the original, “tanımas tiri jandı,” were omitted from the translation. Instead, the author add his own “ülkenkïmis”.

At the same time, both in the first and second line we see the word “сақал.” In other words, the translator used this word twice in two separate lines. Looking at this translation, we can say that the content and meaning of the original was not revealed.

*An enemy to all that lives, with a clouded brow [1]*

A reverse translation of this line reads as follows:

*Kirtigen qabaqpen ömir süredi, barlıǵına jaw.*

Not one word was translated precisely. The content of the original poem failed to be discovered.

*He, the squeaky one, treads in the steppes, covered in snow, [1] –*

A reverse translation of the fourth line of the poem: *Ol, sıqırlap, qarlı dalada jür.* In this line, words were added by the author all by himself. The author points at a certain human figure, calling it “He.” In the original, Abai was not describing a human image. Therefore, we conclude that the translator fell short understanding the meaning of the poem.

Here is M. Sultanbekov’s take:

*White-bearded, an old man in white clothes  
Deaf and numb to anything and anyone, with no distinction [1].*

A reverse translation reveals the following meaning:

*Aq saqaldı, aq kïimdi qarıya  
Barlıq närsege mısqaw barlıq närsege talǵamsız,*

–

in his work, M. Sultanbekov phrases as “an old man in white clothes.” In the original text, there is no word “old man” (“qarıya” in Kazakh). Word-groups “Aq kïimdi” and “aq saqaldı” are translated while there is no translation of “deneli.” Instead, the author added his very own “old man” (qarıya). In the second line, we see a Russian version (deaf) of the word “mısqaw.” The word “soqır” from the priceless original was not translated, and the meaning of *tanımas tiri jandı* was interpreted by the author as “to anything and anyone, with no distinction.” From a structural point of view, the translation was done the way it was. If we talk about the content side of this work, then it is a rather different picture as the readers who are new to this translation and have seen it for the first time, are presented with an image of an old man, not winter and Nature.

The author gives the following translation:

*White frost as his décor and cruel in the looks,  
He steadily treads upon the squeaky snow [1].*

A reverse translation:

*Üstinde aq qıraw, tüsi swıq  
Sıqırlaǵan qardı qayrattana bastı, –*

is a bit closer to the original. In this line, the author also failed to carry across the original’s notion of *basqan jeri, kelip qaldı*. We only see a translation of the word “squeaky” (sıqırlaǵan). As for the

content, the readers are obviously presented with an image of a snow-covered old man, not winter as a season.

### **Conclusion**

Reading the original by Abai, “Kys” (Winter), we see that the poet describes wintry nature through an animated image, by endowing the winter season, the blizzards, and the frost with a soul. Undoubtedly, this works toward immersing the reader, giving him an impression. Whereas, reading a Russian translation would not likely leave the same lasting impression. At the same time, the Russian-speaking readers may be limited in understanding the key inner thought of this poem, since the translators

themselves did not fully “see into” what the original meant to say. They simply translated the poem word-for-word, and only carried across a certain part of its meaning. Simply by looking at them, we can see an absolute disconnect between the meaning of the original and the translations.

In order for foreign-language readers to be able to “feel” the same impressions as their Kazakh-speaking counterparts “feel,” a translator must be able to speak and understand the language at the same level as Abai. Unfortunately, those who can do it can be counted on one hand. As we said earlier, many people have tried translating Abai. However, poetic originality that is so intrinsic to Abai’s genius, is lacking from those translations.

### **References**

1. Available at [www.abai-in8l.kz](http://www.abai-in8l.kz)