

TOWARD A MORE RIGOROUS SCHOLARSHIP ON PHONETIC TRANSLATION IN INDONESIAN LITERARY TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing body of research on literary translation in Indonesia, there is a notable scarcity of studies addressing phonetic translation, which concerns the preservation of sounds and other auditory features of literary text. An examination of the proceedings of the Konferensi Linguistik Tahunan Atma Jaya (KOLITA) from 2021 to 2025 reveals a conspicuous absence of focused study on phonetic translation in literary translation. Across, KOLITA's linguistic investigations are rather rooted in semantic equivalence, cultural adaptation, and readability. The underrepresentation of inquiries into phonetic translation, coupled with the historical emphasis on meaning-centered approaches in Indonesian translation scholarship, contributes to the marginalization of phonetic concerns. This limits the understanding of literary text's sonic dimensions and constrains the development of translation practices that could preserve the musicality of the source text. This paper calls for future translation practice and scholarship that preserve or transfer also the sonic richness of the source text. By addressing sonic elements, scholars and translators can better capture the full expressive range of source language, extending beyond syntactic and semantic concerns and cultural fidelity to embrace the sonic richness that shapes readers' aesthetic experience, and thereby fostering more holistic translation practice and scholarship.

Keywords: *Literary translation, phonetic translation, Indonesian translation studies*

ABSTRAK

Meskipun penelitian tentang penerjemahan sastra di Indonesia semakin berkembang, studi yang membahas penerjemahan fonetik, yang berkaitan dengan pelestarian bunyi dan fitur dengarannya, masih terbatas. Dari prosiding Konferensi Linguistik Tahunan Atma Jaya (KOLITA) dari tahun 2021 hingga 2025 didapati kurangnya penelitian yang berfokus pada penerjemahan fonetik dalam penerjemahan sastra. Secara umum, investigasi linguistik makalah-makalah KOLITA 2021-2025 banyak berfokus pada kesetaraan semantik, adaptasi budaya, dan keterbacaan. Kurangnya representasi penelitian tentang penerjemahan fonetik, ditambah lagi dengan penekanan historis pada pendekatan makna-sentris dalam kajian penerjemahan di Indonesia, mengakibatkan penelitian penerjemahan fonetik menjadi termarginalisasi. Hal ini akhirnya membatasi pemahaman tentang dimensi fonetik teks sastra dan juga membatasi pengembangan praktik penerjemahan yang dapat melestarikan musikalitas teks sumber. Makalah ini menyarankan perlunya praktik dan kajian penerjemahan di masa depan yang tetap melestarikan elemen dengarannya dari teks sumber. Dengan memperhatikan unsur-unsur fonetik, para peneliti dan penerjemah dapat lebih baik menangkap ekspresi dari bahasa sumber, melampaui kesetiaan sintaktik dan semantik serta budaya untuk mengakomodasi kekayaan dengarannya yang membentuk pengalaman estetika pembaca dan mendorong praktik dan kajian penerjemahan yang lebih holistik.

Kata kunci: *Penerjemahan sastra, penerjemahan fonetik, kajian penerjemahan di Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

Much of literary translation work is occupied with the preservation of meaning. Among the few scholars to challenge the mainstreamed, meaning-centric practice, Mikhail Gasparov asks, "If a translation normally preserves the meaning, leaving no trace of the original sound, then why not allow a translation that preserves the sound but changes the original meaning?" (in Pilshchikov 2016). Gasparov's question raises a central concern in literary translation studies: at what point should literary translators prioritize the deliberate reproduction of the verbal music of the source text (ST) over semantic fidelity? Subsequently, why should translators attempt to preserve the sonic features from ST if they cannot be reinterpreted through the target text (TT)'s own sonic features?

These questions become especially important when considering how literary text operates beyond the level of meaning alone. David Crystal reflected in *How Language Works* (2005) that language begins as a system of sound, whether physical or mental. Language, therefore, is not merely a vessel for informational content, because sounds themselves carry forces such as affective and aesthetic ones. Thus, we can read Virginia Woolf's statement that "everything is rhythm" as an affirmation of a force that "goes far deeper than words ... a sight, an emotion, [that] creates this wave in the mind, long before it makes words to fit it" (in Le Guin 2004). Woolf's reflection suggests that "that something that goes far

deeper” is not supplementary to meaning but constitutive of literary experience itself. But what is that “something?”

as “perfect” word-for-word translation is impossible, so too is the effort to render ST sound for sound. The music of literary language, whether in poetry or prose, emerges through the interplay of sound, rhythm, and structure that shapes not only how words are heard but also how they are felt within the language. One way to understand this deeper dimension of language is through the phenomenon of untranslatability, which Anne Carson (2008) illustrated in her discussion of the untranslated Greek word MOLY—a magic plant that Hermes gives to Odisey to prevent the witch Kirke from turning him into a pig—in the English translation of *The Odissey*.

*So speaking Hermes gave him the drug
by pulling it out of the ground and he showed the nature of it:
at the root it was black but like milk was the flower.
MOLY is what the gods call it. And it is very hard to dig up
for mortal men. But gods can do such things.*

For Carson, the decision not to translate the word MOLY intentionally preserved “a measure of foreignness ... an acknowledgment of the fact that languages are not sciences of one another.” She further argued that moments in which “language falls silent in transit” produce two kinds of “troubling silence,” the physical silence and metaphysical silence (Carson 2008). In this sense, untranslatability is not a mere lexical problem but also an experiential one that reveals the limits of linguistic transfers.

If untranslatability introduces silence into translation, sonic features can thus be understood as attempts to restore movement. Ursula K. Le Guin (2004) wrote that “movement is the first word” to emphasize how the internal structures of language generate movement in literary expressions. Rhythm, for Le Guin, was “a mode of time,” and it was “a physical, material, bodily thing” as she looked into the stressed and unstressed syllables in a beat, beats in a regular meter, and stress-rhythm in a bar in English translated prose and poetry and at how they shape a reader’s experience of movement through the language. She illustrated this through Seamus Heaney’s translation of *Beowulf* into Contemporary English, which reproduces the Old English caesura [|, addition mine] of four stresses in two-half lines. The preservation of the caesura here demonstrates that it is possible for contemporary poetry to carry its historical, linguistic legacy.

*Down to the waves then, || dressed in the web
of their chain-mail and warshirts, || the young men marched.*

A similar concern with sonic features appears in Ezra Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro” (1913). In the poem, Pound adapted the imagistic precision associated with Japanese haiku in his quest to “break the pentameter” of American poetry (Barbarese in Parini and Millier 1998). To add to the poem’s imagery, its sonic arrangement becomes equally significant. Elizabeth Arnold noted Pound’s confident arrangement of the last three words in the last line from “Metro” as a clever use of “Germanic [Old English-origin] consonants” which contrasts with “its foreign [Japanese]-inspired imagery” (Arnold, personal communication, 2017; underline mine). In “Metro,” sound functions as a structural counterweight to imagery, reinforcing the poem’s tension between foreign influence and English tradition.

*The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
Petals on a wet black bough .*

In many translations from and to English, sonic features are frequently near-impossible to transfer sound for sound because they depend on language-specific phonological patterns such as stress and tone; consequently, they need to be transformed or substituted with other phonological alternatives (Baker 1992; Pilshchikov 2016; Nordquist 2020a, 2020b; Wiles 2020; Wimsatt 2006; Brodtkin 2025). Shi noted that English ST to Mandarin TT translation often transforms, rather than directly preserves, the sonic features of ST (2005). For instance, because English meter depends on patterns of stress and syllabic rhythm that do not naturally correspond in Mandarin, EN-MD poetry translators often reproduce English metrical structure by converting English feet into Chinese pauses (顿), thereby adapting English rhythm to the linguistic conventions of Mandarin (Shi 2005). This demonstrates that translation can be a creative

negotiation between languages, where aesthetic effects are reimagined to maintain poetic resonance across distinct phonological systems.

The importance of transforming ST sonic features into alternatives in TT becomes even clearer when examining the translation of literary works from Indonesian into English (e.g. Nany 2013; Wiles 2020; Fitri, Dewi, and Hidayat 2022). As an illustration, see the following discussion of two versions of English translation of Sapardi Djoko Damono's "Tuan" by John H. McGlynn (1988) and Harry Aveling (1994).

ST: Damono	<i>Tuan Tuhan, bukan? Tunggu sebentar, saya sedang keluar.</i>
TT1: McGlynn	<i>It's Mister God, is it not? Wait a moment, will you? I'm out.</i>
TT2: Aveling	<i>Mister mystery, aren't you? Just a moment, I'm out to lunch.</i>

In ST, Damono's sonic arrangement of the words *tuan* "lord", *Tuhan* "God," and *bukan* "question tag" with their similar disyllabic structure and assonance of the vowels /u/ and /a/, demonstrates how sound patterns generate texture within a remarkably brief poem. To that texture, the minimal pair *tuan* and *Tuhan* adds a sense of playfulness that belies the semantically more weighed word *Tuhan*, which invokes divinity. The movement from *Tuhan* to *bukan* further establishes the irony that builds the poem from the outset. Meanwhile, the rhyme /a/ at the ends of the lines in *seben^{tar}* "brief" and *keluar* "out" reinforces the repetition of sounds Damono used.

Both translators attempted, in different ways, to preserve Damono's sonic arrangement. In TT1, McGlynn echoed Damono's repetition through the alliterative pairing of *wait* and *will*. Meanwhile, Aveling created a comparable repetition through the *mister mystery* sequence. In addition, McGlynn additionally reproduced aspects of TT's triple disyllables and /u/-/a/ assonances with the meter in *It's Mister God* (see Brodtkin 2025 on Indonesian phonology). To note, McGlynn also provided a noticeable caesura in *It's Mister God, is it not? Wait a moment, will you?* that mirrors the enjambment in ST.

Although Damono's "Tuan" has often been praised as "playfully imagist" and "ironically meditative" (e.g. in Toha-Sarumpaet and Budianta 2010), analyses of the poem frequently overlook the role of sound in producing these effects. Such omissions ultimately limit the scope of its interpretation. In addition, particularly because both TT1 and TT2 also abandon the original rhyme between *seben^{tar}* and *keluar*, discussions of the poem often neglect it, too.

This oversight is significant because rhyme and rhythm are not merely ornamental features. As Fitri, Dewi, and Hidayat (2022) argued, these sonic elements are foundational to how language is processed and refamiliarized cognitively; rhyme creates expectation and memorability, while rhythm organizes a reader's perception of time and movement. In poetry especially, rhyme remains one of the most immediately recognizable literary devices and is one sonic feature that free translation strategy often facilitates more easily from ST to TT. Fitri, Dewi, and Hidayat's study of song translation concluded that communicative and free translation methods tend to produce "stronger rhymes" and "more natural-sounding lyrics" (2022).

Debates surrounding sonic movement, however, also reveal tensions regarding its importance in literary analysis. Lutz (2009), for instance, argued that great prose depends on whether its sentences can feel "unified and alive" and are not merely a vessel for grammatical correctness or plot. Through close readings on the work of illuminaries such as Christine Schutt, Lutz explained how sound generates resonance through syntax. In response, however, Czyz (2012) challenged what he saw as Lutz's excessive emphasis on phonetic patterning. According to Czyz, such "superfluous focus" on sound patterns, e.g. consecution, risked sacrificing the clarity of imagery and of narrative. While Czyz acknowledged that musicality contributes to prose, he ultimately contended that vivid imagery and narrative depth possess a greater effect and lasting power, because "sounds slide into silence soon after being spoken—sooner when stated inwardly to the self—but images have an afterlife; they haunt" (Czyz 2012).

Perhaps Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* provides an extraordinary case study for the phonetic analysis of translated prose, particularly regarding how TT often struggles to capture ST's sonic architecture. While several Indonesian translation scholars have examined the 2008 Indonesian translation of the novel, e.g. Nany (2013), critical focus has rarely extended to how the translation dilutes Nabokov's meticulously

designed sonic architecture. The discussion on Lolita's opening paragraph highlights this divergence between the ST sonic architecture and the TT's inability to preserve it (underline mine):

ST EN

Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins.
My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of
the tongue taking a trip of three steps
down the palate to tap, at three, on the
teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta.

TT ID

Lolita, cahaya hidupku, api sulbiku.
Dosaku, sukma. Lolita: ujung lidah
mengeja tiga suku kata, menyentuh langit-
langit mulut, dan pada kali ketiga
menyentuh gigi. Lo. Li. Ta.

Although Nany (2013) rightly underlined that TT “loses the intricate aspect that the character wants to express through his description of the process [of mentioning the name Lolita],” her evaluation stopped short of a rigorous phonetic interrogation. Specifically, TT fails to replicate Nabokov's deliberate design of meter and his dense, rhythmic alliteration of the consonant /t/. In ST, the sequence of “Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul” directly followed by “the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth” not only creates a cadence but also does it force a bodily experience as its readers pronounce the sequence. As Amy Hungerford lectured in her *American Novel Since 1945* class (2008), this paragraph is designed with the explicit intent to make its readers “feel words in our body, especially in the mouth and the tongue ... feel something bodily.” Through Humbert Humbert's hyper-fixation on the mechanics of articulation, Humbert “seduces his readers ... to share [a] sensuous experience with him” by physically replicating his obsession (Hungerford 2008). Meanwhile, in the TT this bodily experience is largely reduced to description. The use of words like *ujung lidah* “tip of the tongue,” *langit-langit mulut* “palate,” and *gigi* “teeth” explains the speech organs necessary for the pronunciation but completely abandons the phonetic mimicry that makes the ST paragraph a bodily experience. Along with it, ST's meter is flattened into standard Indonesian prose, and with it gone, gone too is Humbert's seduction. As such, phonetic analysis reveals that not only does the translation lose ST's imagery of obsession, but also does it sever the vital link between written and spoken words.

All the aforementioned discussions collectively demonstrate that attention to sonic features substantially enriches literary analysis, as sonic movement shapes how literary text is experienced, felt, and interpreted. Neglecting sonic structures in literary translation risks overlooking a crucial dimension of how literary text produces affect.

RESEARCH METHOD

The corpora selected for this study consist of five consecutive volumes of the *Prosiding Konferensi Linguistik Tahunan Atma Jaya (KOLITA)* from 2021 to 2025. These proceedings were selected as the primary corpora because they provide a continuous and representative collection of recent translation scholarship presented and edited by translators and translation scholars alike from Indonesia and beyond. The selection of five consecutive years enables an observation of the developments, similarities, and differences in patterns of the disciplinary focus of literary translation in Indonesia.

To study the corpora, a comparative analysis was employed. In addition, this study adopted a qualitative approach, emphasizing detailed interpretation and contextual understanding of the data rather than relying solely on numerical measurement. The corpora were intentionally limited to the years 2021-2025 in order to reflect current and recent academic trends in literary translation scholarship, particularly those emerging in the post-pandemic era where computer-assisted and computer-facilitated analyses became more common and increasingly significant among researchers.

Another important consideration in selecting these proceedings is their relevance to literary translation scholarship in Indonesia, as KOLITA serves as an important forum for scholars, lecturers, graduate students, and translation practitioners in Indonesia and beyond to present and discuss their research. Consequently, not only do the corpora represent formal academic discourse but also do they reflect broader intellectual developments within contemporary literary translation scholarship. Overall, the use of *Prosiding Konferensi Linguistik Tahunan Atma Jaya* volumes XIX-XXIII (2021-2025) as the research corpora highlights the availability of extensive, credible, and contextually relevant data that make possible a comprehensive comparative analysis through a qualitative research approach.

Following are the dataset from the proceedings:

Table 1. Foci of the genre of the papers.

KOLITA Proceeding	Quantity	Genre	
		Literary Transl.	Non-literary Transl.
2025	4	3	1
2024	3	1	2
2023	5	2	3
2022	4	3	1
2021	4	2	2

Table 1 presents the data on the genre distribution of subjects featured in the KOLITA Proceedings from 2021 to 2025. The total and average number of subjects from year to year suggested a relatively consistent scope of coverage across all allowed and reviewed topics. Literary translation analysis remained the most attractive kind of study (11 out of 20) among the subject selection across the five-year period, with KOLITA 2024 being the only exception as it curated the lowest number of literary translation study, compared to 9 out of 20 of non-literary translation analyses.

KOLITA 2025 and 2022 saw a majority of the literary translation paper, with 3 out of 4 focusing on literary translation and only one focusing on non-literary translation—a translation application development in 2025 and a religious text translation analysis in 2022 respectively. KOLITA 2024 curated only one literary translation study, which focuses on novel titles, while KOLITA 2022's literary translation analyses were all on novels. KOLITA 2023-2024 were the years in which non-literary translation analyses outnumbered the literary translation ones by a ratio of 3:2 and 2:1 respectively. KOLITA 2023 also hosted the only non-EN-ID translation paper in the last five years of the conference run with its selection of a study on a novel translated from German. Lastly, KOLITA 2021 centered its literary translation study on children's literature translation, as that was the genre of the two literary translation study papers accepted.

Within the literary translation analysis category of the form of the text, poetry and short-story translation analysis made up the rarest form to be studied in the last five years. Following the novel form, children's literature translation analyses, both on the digital, app-hosted and physical forms, showed quite an encouraging representation (3 out of 11).

In all, the patterns show that KOLITA alternated between years of literary translation analysis dominance (2025, 2022) and non-literary translation analysis dominance (2024, 2023), and one year of more or less equal distribution (2021). This hints that the KOLITA editorial curation is not based on a fixed genre and genre-specific preferences.

Table 2. Foci of Papers.

KOLITA Proceeding	Quantity (20)	Topic				
		Comparison to/of Transl. (4)	Machine Transl. (4)	Transl. Strategies, Techniques (8)	Perception, Quality, Accuracy (7)	Other
2025	4	3	1	-	-	-
2024	3	-	1	2	-	-
2023	5	-	3	2	-	-
2022	4	1	1	1	1	1
2021	4	-	2	2	-	-

Table 2 presents the thematic breakdown of the foci of study covered in the KOLITA Proceedings from 2021 to 2025. The four focus categories suggested a broad but focused range of analytical concerns within translation studies: technological advances in translation (comparative study of machine translation v. human translation or MT v. MT), methodological concerns (strategies and/or techniques on translation), evaluative dimensions of translation (study on the quality, accuracy, and readers' perception of translation), and a residual category for one (1) focus that fell outside the aforementioned three (i.e. character analysis).

In 2025, out of four (4) papers, three (3) fell under the topic of MT. The MT-focused analyses looked into the outputs of MT compared to human translation and of MT compared to MT for a novel, short-story, and poetry translation each. The main objective of the three (3) papers was to assess "faithfulness," "fidelity," and "the best translation," which are assessed by analyzing the word choice and

grammatical structure in the ST and TT. Word choice was also used to analyse the faithfulness and fidelity of the translation of novel titles in the only literary translation paper of 2024.

2023 and 2021 literary translation papers were dominated by those working on children's literature translation. Similar to those from 2025, the children's literature translation papers were concerned with "accuracy," with two (2) papers from 2021 adding "audience accessibility" to the study. Meanwhile, 2022 was the most thematically diverse year in the data, as it covered all four (4) topic categories. One (1) paper fell in the residual category, as its analysis on the characters from a translated novel did not share any similarity with the rest.

Table 3. Foci of Only Literary Translation-focused Papers.

KOLITA Proceeding	Literary Form	Focus of Analysis	Devices Analyzed
XXIII (2025)	Novel (MD-ID)	Translation strategies	Semantic (idioms)
	Short story	Translation strategies in MT v. HT	Text length, semantic (sentence structure) comparison, shifts of meaning
	Poetry	Translation strategies of 3 AI tools	Semantic (word choice) comparison, syntactic (sentence structure) comparison
XXII (2024)	Novel titles	Translation strategies	Syntactic (phrasal, sentence structure)
XXI (2023)	Novel (DE-ID)	Translation strategies	Semantic (word choice)
	Children's literature	Translation strategies	Semantic (word choice), syntactic (meaning) comparison
XX (2022)	N/A	Translation proper	Pragmatic (perception)
	Novel	Translation techniques	Intrinsic (local culture)
	Novel	Literary	Intrinsic, formal (characters)
XIX (2021)	Children's literature	Translation proper	Semantic (word choice), syntactic (structures), pragmatic (perception)
	Children's literature	Translation strategies	Semantic (word choice), syntactic (grammatical error analysis)

Table 3 summarizes the forms, foci, and devices analyzed in the eleven (11) translation study papers in the KOLITA Proceedings from 2021 to 2025. In terms of the literary forms of their subjects, they included novels, short stories, poetry, and children's literature. Most papers concentrated on translation strategies and techniques. Two (2) papers compared machine translation (MT) to human translation (HT) as well as AI-assisted translation, particularly in poetry and short story translation, reflecting recent interest in technology-driven translation practices and studies.

The analyses mainly focused on semantic and syntactic aspects, such as word choice, idioms, sentence structure, and shifts of meaning. Pragmatic dimensions, including reader perception, also appeared in some studies. In addition, a few papers investigated intrinsic literary elements, such as cultural adaptation and readability of characterization. Overall, the table shows that literary translation research in the KOLITA Proceedings prioritizes accuracy and translation methods while also increasingly exploring the role of AI and/or MT in literary translation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the KOLITA proceedings from 2021 to 2025 demonstrate a tendency within contemporary literary translation scholarship that those concerned with semantic and syntactic orientation remain predominant. Eight of eleven (8 of 11) papers catalogued in the proceedings focused on semantic or syntactic elements, while the rest focuses on the pragmatic, intrinsic, or perceptive elements of translation. Repeated emphasis on "word choice," "translation strategies," "error analysis," and "meaning comparison" reveals a disciplinary preference as well as an imbalance: although literary translation scholars and translators have long acknowledged the role of the sonic features in shaping literary text, these elements remain largely marginalized in current translation research practices. Significantly, none of the listed studies foregrounded phonetic analysis.

Secondly, the rarity of poetry translation-focused study within the KOLITA Proceedings 2021-2025 corpora further reinforces said observation. Among the eleven (11) literary translation-focused papers identified between 2021 and 2025, only one (1) explicitly examined poetry translation. While novels and children's literature dominated the proceedings, short stories and poetry received comparatively little attention. This imbalance is significant, because poetry represents the literary form in which sonic arrangement becomes most recognizable and indispensable. The limited presence of poetry translation research, as well as the limited availability of specialized phonetic analysis and specialized training for auditory evaluation, may partially explain why phonetic translation analysis itself remains scarce within the broader field of literary translation research.

Finally, the increasing incorporation of machine translation (MT) and artificial intelligence (AI) studies in the KOLITA corpora introduces another important implication. While such studies reflect current technological developments in translation scholarship, they also suggest a growing emphasis on computationally measurable aspects of language, particularly syntactic and semantic accuracy and/or fidelity. This puts phonetic translation studies at a disadvantage, because sonic features more often than not are difficult to quantify algorithmically. Thus, the methodological shift toward AI translation-centered analysis may unintentionally reinforce the marginalization of phonetic translation in literary translation in general. In the far future, neglecting phonetic translation may even risk reducing literature into purely semantic content: to arrive at meaning by bypassing forms and to underrate forms as subordinate to meaning.

Overall, the findings point that contemporary literary translation scholarship in Indonesia is heavily oriented toward meaning analysis. While this approach has its value, the limited attention given to sound reveals a significant gap in current research practice. Future literary translation studies would therefore benefit from integrating phonetic translation analysis alongside syntactic or semantic ones. By doing so, literary translation scholarship may better account for how literary text produces movement, affect, and aesthetic experience through sound as much as through meaning.

CONCLUSION

Literary translation today stands at a complex crossroad, where translators must negotiate the competing pull toward fidelity, readability, cultural sensitivity, and, increasingly, technological mediation. Within academic discourse, literary translation has grown considerably as well. Yet certain dimensions of the discipline remain underrepresented. Across five (5) years of curated scholarship as made evident in the KOLITA proceedings from 2021 to 2025, the sonic body of language has received remarkably little dedicated attention. The underrepresentation of phonetic translation at KOLITA does not only point to a gap in literary translation studies in Indonesia; I suspect it is also a symptom of a wider disciplinary blind spot which the discipline would do well to address.

I'd also argue that the gap is not incidental. It reflects a broader tendency within translation studies to privilege "meaning" and "fidelity" as the two primary objects of inquiries. As a result, translation strategies, techniques, evaluations, and perceptions all orbit around meaning-centric and accuracy/fidelity-centric approaches in literary translation. Having done and said that, the problem with meaning-centric approaches, particularly when applied to literary translation, is the assumption that meaning can be extracted from or assessed independently of forms and later be used as a stable benchmark for evaluating translation work perceived as effective or successful, when in fact in literature—most importantly in poetry but prose too notwithstanding—meaning, to a considerable degree, can and is enacted by forms. Therefore, it is a disservice to evaluate literary translation purely and mostly on syntactic and semantic grounds (see Benjamin 1968; Wimsatt 2006).

The more generative path, then, is not to arrive at meaning by bypassing forms but rather to understand forms as corollary to meaning; they should and are inseparable and mutually constitutive, deserving inquiries and studies. Phonetic translation, in this light, is not an recalcitrant sub-specialty or research interest but rather a rigorous demand that translation work honors the full, holistic body of literary text.

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