

The Neglected Significance of Script as a Factor in Translation

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Rather than a mechanical or transparent transcription devoid of meaning, the written form of texts can function as a peritext that writers, translators or publishers manipulate to communicate a particular interpretation or illocutionary force. The script community of East Asia, where digraphia and polyorthography have long been common, highlights practices that embody textuality and problematize the phonocentric premise of alphabet languages, on which much translation theorizing is based. The role of script goes far beyond the visual aspects particularly evident in calligraphy, concrete poetry and typography, presenting translation challenges as well as expressive potential that enables and exploits interplay among scripts, sounds and meaning. Orthographical choices result in different nuances for ostensibly the same word, participating in meaning-making as a rhetorical, affective, aesthetic, ludic, creative, metalinguistic, cognitive, defamiliarizing or transgressive device. Influenced by extralinguistic factors, script differentiation in turn fulfils sociological and ideological functions. Although the focus here is on East Asian languages, the significance of script in translation has wider application, even to monoscriptal languages. It is important, however, not to exaggerate script materiality or essentialize script differences.