

Translating Taste and Thought: A Revised Framework for Metaphor Translation in Chinese Food Documentaries

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the translation of metaphors in the Chinese culinary documentary *A Bite of China* (Season 1, Episodes 1 and 2), focusing on how culturally rich metaphors are rendered in English subtitles. Employing Peter Newmark's (1988) well-established translation procedures framework, including literal translation, substitution, paraphrase, and omission, the study systematically analyzed 90 metaphorical expressions identified using the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije University (MIPVU). While Newmark's procedures remain foundational in guiding subtitle translation, the analysis revealed the emergence of additional, context-sensitive strategies tailored for audiovisual and cross-cultural demands. These newly identified procedures i.e. cultural approximation, metaphor-to-sense translation, visual reinforcement, and explication address the challenges posed by the multimodal and culturally embedded nature of the source text. The findings highlight the dynamic interplay between traditional and innovative translation methods, emphasizing the translator's role in balancing fidelity to source imagery with viewer accessibility. This study proposes a revised typology of metaphor translation procedures for audio visual translation, reaffirming the importance of cultural salience, audience cognition, and semiotic coherence. The results contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of audiovisual translation, offering subtitlers actionable strategies for handling metaphorically dense and culturally specific content in global media.

Keywords: metaphor translation, audiovisual translation(AVT), subtitling strategies, Newmark's translation procedures, *A Bite of China*

INTRODUCTION

Metaphor plays a critical role in shaping cultural narratives, particularly in audiovisual texts that seek to evoke sensory and emotional resonance. In Chinese gastronomic documentaries such as *A Bite of China*, metaphors are not merely rhetorical flourishes; they serve as culturally embedded conceptual tools that bridge food, history, geography, and identity. Translating these metaphors from Chinese into English presents unique challenges, as it requires balancing semantic fidelity with cross-cultural accessibility. Previous studies have explored metaphor translation strategies in various contexts, including

literary and audiovisual texts (Newmark, 1988; Shuttleworth & Cowie, 2014). Foundational work by Newmark (1988) remains central to understanding classical metaphor translation procedures, while cognitive linguistic theories introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 2003) have profoundly influenced contemporary approaches by emphasizing the conceptual nature of metaphors. Additionally, Bassnett (2002) highlights the cultural challenges that translators face when rendering metaphors across languages, highlighting the importance of cultural competence. More recently, St. André's (2010) edited volume has expanded the theoretical landscape by positioning metaphor as a core concept in translation studies. Empirical studies by Blixt (2022) and He, Shuttleworth, and Wang (2022) further advance the field by applying cognitive and linguistic frameworks to

specific language pairs and genres. Building on this rich scholarly foundation, Abdullah (2014, 2021, 2023, 2024) has examined metaphor translation procedures that extend beyond classical taxonomies, particularly in audiovisual and technical domains.

The translation of metaphors in audiovisual contexts presents a persistent and multifaceted challenge within translation studies, particularly when the source text (ST) is deeply embedded with cultural specificity and the translation process is constrained by multimodal factors such as time, space, and visual imagery. Chinese food documentaries, exemplified by *A Bite of China* offer an interesting case study for these challenges. The series is renowned for its rich use of culinary metaphors that intertwine poetic language, historical references, and gastronomic symbolism, creating a text that is as much cultural narrative as it is documentary. Translating these metaphors for an international audience requires not only linguistic precision but also cultural sensitivity and semiotic flexibility to preserve the original's intended meaning (Marais, 2023). This study builds on previous research in metaphor translation (Newmark, 1988; Abdullah, Cai, & Mohamed, 2024; Elqubaisi, Abdullah, & Haroon, 2023; Abdullah, Mahadi, & Shafie, 2021; Abdullah, 2014) by focusing on the subtitling of *A Bite of China*, Season 1, Episodes 1 and 2. A total of 102 metaphorical expressions were identified, coded, and analyzed according to their source and target domains, types of metaphors, and translation strategies used. Newmark's (1988) traditional metaphor translation procedures provide a foundation for this analysis, particularly his categorization of strategies such as retention, substitution, and omission.

The study has two main aims, i.e first, to describe current practices in metaphor translation within this genre, building on Newmark's (1988) foundational framework of metaphor translation procedures; and second, to propose an improved framework of translation strategies that better address the audiovisual and cultural complexities found in such texts. While Newmark's taxonomy provides essential categories such as retention, substitution, and omission, this study aims to extend beyond these traditional classifications by introducing identifiable new procedures. This approach not only addresses the limitations of traditional metaphor translation taxonomies but also introduces innovative strategies that enhance the accessibility and cultural resonance of metaphors in subtitled documentaries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualising Metaphor in Translation

Prepare Metaphor has been recognized as a fundamental cognitive and linguistic phenomenon shaping human thought and communication. The seminal work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) reframed metaphor as a conceptual mechanism that maps abstract ideas onto concrete experiences, influencing language, perception, and culture. This cognitive linguistic perspective underpins the understanding that effective metaphor translation requires preserving these underlying conceptual mappings and cultural resonance, rather than merely performing literal word-for-word substitutions.

Building on this foundation, Abdullah (2014, 2021) provides critical empirical insights into the complexities of metaphor translation, particularly in technical contexts. Abdullah's research reveals that metaphor translation is a dynamic, context-sensitive process involving negotiation between linguistic structures, cultural norms, and multimodal constraints. She identifies flexible strategies such as paraphrase, cultural approximation, omission, and creative metaphor invention, which translators employ to maintain semantic clarity and cultural resonance. Abdullah's emphasis on cultural resonance and viewer cognition directly supports this study's aim to refine metaphor translation procedures tailored to audio visual documentary subtitling.

Translation Strategies and Frameworks

The theoretical landscape of translation strategies offers valuable tools for analysing metaphor translation. Vinay and Darbelnet's (1958/1995) influential model distinguish between direct translation methods (borrowing, calque, literal translation) and oblique methods (transposition, modulation, equivalence, adaptation). Their concepts of equivalence and adaptation are particularly pertinent to metaphor translation, as they allow for replacing culturally specific metaphors with functionally analogous expressions in the target language. This

aligns closely with Abdullah's notion of cultural approximation and emphasises the need for flexible, audience-aware translation strategies.

Similarly, Traditional strategies for metaphor translation, as outlined by Newmark (1988), include reproduction (retaining the metaphor in the target language), paraphrase or explanation (rendering the metaphor in plain sense), substitution (using a culturally equivalent metaphor), and omission (removing the metaphor). These procedures have long been foundational in the field, but their limitations become apparent when dealing with metaphors that are deeply rooted in specific cultural or genre contexts. However, recent academic work, including the findings presented here, and Shuttleworth (2017), critiques the rigidity of Newmark's categories, advocating for extensions that accommodate the multimodal and intercultural demands of audiovisual translation. Emergent strategies such as metaphor-to- sense translation, visual reinforcement, and explication better reflect the practical realities faced by subtitlers working with culturally dense metaphors.

Cultural and Sociolinguistic Dimensions

Translation is not merely a linguistic exercise but a cultural negotiation. Katan (2009) emphasizes that metaphors carry ideological and identity-laden meanings, requiring translators to act as cultural mediators. This sociocultural lens reinforces the importance of cultural competence and audience awareness in metaphor translation, particularly in audio visual media where the interplay between verbal and visual modes shapes meaning. In this context, translators face a delicate balancing act. Fidelity to source imagery means striving to stay true to the original metaphor's meaning, style, and cultural richness, aiming for the target audience to experience the text as the original audience did. This preserves the author's intent and the unique cultural flavour embedded in the metaphor. However, strict fidelity alone can render a translation difficult to understand or less engaging for viewers from a different cultural or linguistic background, as cultural references or idioms may be opaque or meaningless.

This is where cultural accessibility becomes crucial. Wang (2023) implies that metaphors are usually shaped by a particular culture. Wang adds, metaphors are culturally embedded and cannot be translated without adjusting for cultural frames and background knowledge. Translators must adapt or explain metaphors so that they resonate with the new audience's cultural knowledge and expectations, given that conceptual metaphors themselves exhibit cross-cultural and within-culture variation. Tao (2024) emphasizes that due to the differences in conceptual metaphors in different cultures, successful metaphor translation requires translators to reconstruct their meanings according to the conceptual patterns of the target culture. The process often involves semantic transformation and cultural adaptation, where metaphors are modified to align with the cognitive and cultural frameworks of the target language and culture. As noted by Zhang (2023), it is particularly important to understand the relevant cultural nature when translating metaphors, especially when dealing with metaphors embedded in a unique culture, which require semantic and cultural reconstruction when translating. This highlights the significance of sociocultural context in the production and interpretation of metaphorical expressions. At the same time, translators must consider viewer cognition, especially when translating metaphors in audiovisual content, for audience cognition and time constraints. This involve simplifying, paraphrasing, or replacing metaphors with culturally equivalent expressions that convey the same emotional and conceptual impact. (Shintemirova, 2023) Therefore, balancing fidelity to source imagery with cultural accessibility and viewer cognition is essential. This means finding a middle ground: preserving the original metaphor's essence and cultural significance while making it understandable, relevant, and impactful for the target audience. Zhang (2025) argues that due to the huge differences in rooted cultural traditions and ways of thinking, translating metaphors from English directly into Chinese in a literal translation will cause the metaphor to lose its own meaning. This study echoes this view, highlighting the necessity of balancing fidelity to source imagery with cultural accessibility and viewer cognition.

Broader Theoretical Perspectives in Translation Studies

Beyond metaphor-specific frameworks, it is essential to situate this study within broader translation theory. Lawrence Venuti (1995) foregrounds the cultural and political dimensions of translation, emphasizing translator visibility and power dynamics, which are critical when subtitling culturally rich metaphors that risk

domestication. Susan Bassnett (2002) and Mona Baker (1992, 2011) explore how translation mediates language, culture, and ideology, offering discourse analytical tools useful for metaphor translation in audiovisual texts.

Anthony Pym (2010) highlights the ethical role of translators as cultural mediators, aligning with the need to balance fidelity and accessibility. Similarly, Christiane Nord's (1997) functionalist approach frames translation as purposeful communication, advocating adaptation to target audiences without compromising source intent. Jeremy Munday (2008) provides comprehensive theoretical overviews emphasizing translator agency and context, crucial for audiovisual translation's multimodal constraints.

Furthermore, Basil Hatim and Jeremy Munday (2004) integrate discourse and genre analysis, enabling nuanced understanding of metaphors within specific textual and cultural genres such as culinary documentaries. Theo Hermans (2007) contributes a historical and sociological perspective, emphasizing evolving translation norms that inform the dynamic negotiation observed in metaphor translation. Together, these perspectives enrich the theoretical foundation, situating metaphor translation within a multidisciplinary framework that addresses linguistic, cultural, ethical, and functional dimensions.

Multimodal and Audiovisual Challenges

Chinese food documentaries like *A Bite of China* present unique multimodal challenges for metaphor translation. The dense layering of culinary metaphors, visual imagery, and cultural symbolism demands innovative translation procedures that extend beyond traditional taxonomies. Moreover, the translation of culturally rich dish names, a salient feature of Chinese culinary discourse, involves both linguistic and cultural translation strategies. Dish names often encapsulate metaphorical references to history, mythology, or natural imagery, making their translation a delicate task of cultural mediation and semantic preservation. Techniques such as cultural borrowing combined with explanatory annotation have been proposed to address these challenges. (Cai, Abdullah & Mohamed, 2024)

Audiovisual translation (AVT) introduces additional complexity to metaphor translation, as metaphors must be rendered intelligible within strict temporal and spatial constraints, often in the presence of competing visual and auditory stimuli. Scholars such as Gambier (2006) argue that audiovisual translation requires harmonizing verbal and visual semiotic modes to achieve immediate and culturally coherent comprehension. This necessitates translation strategies that are both semantically accurate and culturally coherent, while also accommodating the multimodal nature of the medium.

Compared with literal translation, metaphorical translation will add a certain degree of cognitive burden to the brain, especially when dealing with subtitle translation work that is limited by time and space. This puts higher demands on translators, that is, the reasonable conversion of metaphors can effectively reduce the cognitive burden of the audience, so that the source language information can be effectively processed quickly and accurately (Liu et al., 2024).

Interpretation can not only retain the cultural characteristics of the source language when dealing with metaphors rooted in the source language culture, but also effectively enable readers to understand the interpretation through the target language. (Li, 2024) Due to differences in cultural background, thinking patterns, and language usage habits, metaphors can be treated as "implicit cultural codes" when dealing with translation procedures. Cultural fit can make up for the distortions and cultural barriers caused by improper metaphor translation to the greatest extent (Zou, Fuller & Wang, 2025). In addition, subtitles also use creative strategies such as cultural approximation to better map metaphors to the target subtitles (Pedersen, 2017); and when dealing with metaphors in the source language that may be misunderstood, it is necessary to translate or interpret metaphors into meaning (Shintemirova, 2023; Sahari, 2024). At the same time, in order to enhance emotional resonance with the audience, creative metaphors usually need to be reasonably transformed by paraphrasing or replacing metaphorical expressions (Kapsaskis, 2024). Previous empirical studies demonstrate that subtitles often employ creative strategies such as cultural approximation, metaphor-to-sense translation, and explication to negotiate these complexities effectively.

Research Framework

This study constructs a comprehensive research framework to examine the translation of metaphors in the Chinese food documentary series “A Bite of China” (Season 1, Episodes 1 and 2). This framework integrates conceptual theories of metaphor, classical translation models, and audiovisual translation principles, thus providing a multi-dimensional approach that fully considers the linguistic and cultural complexities of metaphor translation in subtitled media. As seen in Figure 2.

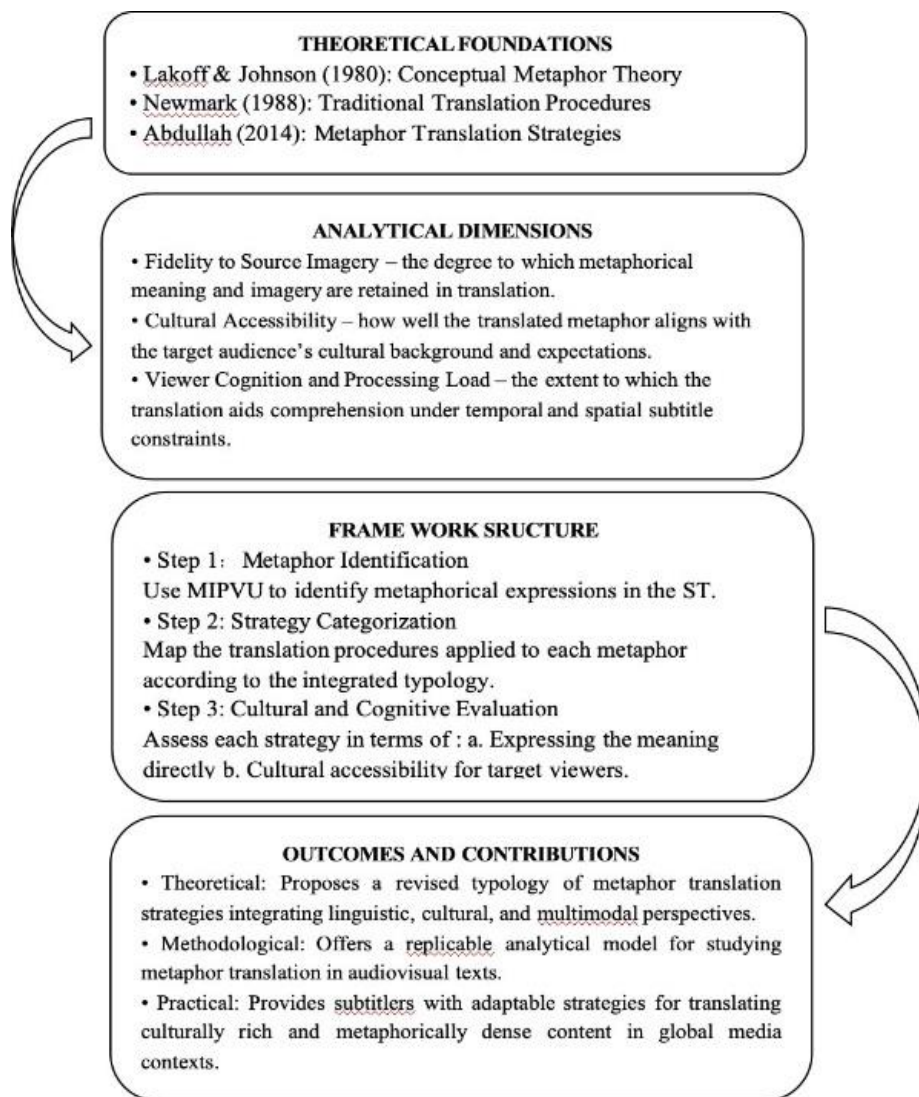


Fig. 1 Research Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative content analysis methodology, grounded in the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije University (MIPVU) developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007), to identify metaphorical expressions in A Bite of China. Two episodes from Season 1 (Episodes 1 and 2) The research design is grounded in the research framework outlined in the previous section, which integrates Peter Newmark’s (1988) translation procedures with emergent, context-sensitive strategies tailored for audiovisual translation.

Data Collection

The primary data consist of the original Mandarin dialogue and corresponding English subtitles from the first two episodes of *A Bite of China*. These episodes were selected due to their rich use of culturally specific and

metaphorically dense language related to Chinese culinary traditions. Full transcripts of both the source language (SL) and target language (TL) subtitles were compiled for detailed analysis.

Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded in several stages:

1. **Metaphor Identification:** Using the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije University (MIPVU) developed by Steen et al. (2010), metaphorical expressions were systematically identified in the source text transcripts.
2. **Categorization of Translation Procedures:** Each identified metaphor was then examined in the English subtitles and coded according to the expanded set of translation procedures defined in the research framework as depicted in Table This included both Newmark's traditional categories i.e. literal translation, substitution, paraphrase, omission and the newly proposed strategies, i.e. cultural approximation, metaphor-to-sense translation, visual reinforcement, and explication/annotation.
3. **Reliability Measures:** To ensure coding reliability, the metaphor identification and translation procedure coding were independently conducted by the researcher and a professional translator experienced in Chinese-English audiovisual subtitling. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus, yielding an intercoder reliability coefficient above 0.85.
4. **Interpretative Analysis:** Beyond quantitative coding, a qualitative interpretative analysis was conducted to assess the effectiveness, cultural appropriateness, and pragmatic constraints influencing the translation choices. This included consideration of multimodal elements such as on- screen visuals and temporal constraints inherent in

Ethical Considerations

All data used in this study are publicly available audiovisual materials. Proper citation and acknowledgment of the original creators were maintained throughout the research. The study adheres to ethical standards for academic research, ensuring transparency and respect for intellectual property.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Metaphor Frequency and Types

A total of 90 metaphors were identified in the source text (ST) of *A Bite of China* (Season 1, Episodes 1 and 2), including 57 stock, 15 original, 12 dead, and 6 cliché metaphors. In the English subtitles (TT), only 65 metaphors were preserved i.e. 44 stock, 11 original, 8 dead, and 2 cliché while the remaining 25 were either omitted or rendered literally (see Table 1 and Table 2). This disparity reflects the complex constraints inherent in audiovisual translation, where linguistic fidelity must be balanced against the temporal and spatial limitations of subtitling. Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and audiovisual translation scholarship (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021; Schäffner, 2004), it is evident that metaphors are not merely linguistic devices but cognitive and cultural constructs. Metaphors that carry dense cultural meaning or require extended cognitive engagement are particularly vulnerable to omission or demetaphorisation. Consequently, the translator's choices reveal a careful negotiation between preserving conceptual richness and ensuring the viewer can process the text efficiently.

TABLE I Distribution of Metaphor Types in the Source Text (ST) and Target Text (TT), Including ST Metaphors Not Translated in the TT

| Category | Total Number | Stock Metaphors | Original Metaphors | Dead Metaphors | Cliché Metaphors |
|----------------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Source Text (ST) Metaphors | 90 | 57 | 15 | 12 | 6 |
| Target Text (TT) Metaphors | 65 | 44 | 11 | 8 | 2 |

| | | | | | |
|--|----|----|---|---|---|
| ST Metaphors NOT Translated in the TT (i.e. deletion or converting metaphor to sense) | 25 | 13 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
|--|----|----|---|---|---|

Untranslated Metaphors and Their Relation to Translation Procedures

The analysis of *A Bite of China* found that 25 metaphors in the original Chinese were not translated in the English subtitles. This shows the difficult choice subtitlers must make between staying true to the original words and dealing with the limits of subtitle space and time. These untranslated metaphors help us understand how translators adjust their methods when facing real challenges.

TABLE 2 The 25 Source Text Metaphors (ST) Omitted or Not Rendered Metaphorically in the Target Text (TT)

| S1 E1 E2 | Chinese Metaphors (ST) | Back Translati on | Type of Metaph or (ST) | English Metaph ors (TT) | Type of Metapho r (TT) | Purpose of the ST Metaphor | Newmark' s Translatio n Procedur e s |
|----------------|-------------------------------|--|------------------------------|---|------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. | 干燥而温暖 的风浩浩荡 荡地吹上半 年 | The dry and warm wind blows in full force and grandeur for half a year | Original | dry and warm winds rise on the land, blowing hard for the next six months. | Not a metapho r | Aesthetic Personifica tion | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 2. | 松茸属于野 生菌中的贵 族。 | Matsutake is one of nobles in wild mushrooms | Stock | Matsuta ke is very expensi ve. | Not a metapho r | Connotativ e Personifica tion | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 3. | 主角本来应 该是春笋 | the protagonis t should have been spring bamboo shoots. | cliché | Original ly, the soup was cooked with Spring bamboo shoots. | Not a metapho r | Connotativ e Personifica tion | F. Deletion |
| 4. | 重头戏是 垮炖杂鱼 | Stewed Fishes is traditional opera involving much singing and action | Stock | The main dish is Stewed Fishes | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e Technical term | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 5. | 从一无所获 到一日千里 | from nothing to running thousands miles only in one day | Stock | Travelin g long distance s within one day | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e Idiom | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 6. | 为了延续自 然的馈赠。 | To continue obtaining the gifts of nature. | Stock | / | / | Connotativ e | F. Deletion |
| 7. | 笋取出来要 盖好土 , 就地利用 自然。 | After picking up the bamboo shoots, cover the rest with dirt, make use of nature. | Original | Covered with earth | Not a Metaph or | Aesthetic | F. Deletion |

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|--------------------------|--|----------|--|-----------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 8. | 松茸的香味浓烈袭人。 | The fragrance of the matsutake mushroom s sweeps over you. | Original | Matsuta ke has an intense scent. | Not a Metaph or | Aesthetic Personifica tion | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 9. | 他透过光看一下酸笋的成色。 | Under the lamp, he checks the grade of sour shoots. | Dead | Under the lamp, he checks the process of making sour bamboo shoots. | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e Technical term | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 10. | 北京的餐厅，后厨正在开始制作每天最叫座儿的招牌菜 | At a restaurant in Beijing with a standard TL chefs are making the signature dish which attracts a crowd everyday. | Stock | At a restaura nt in Beijing, chefs are making the most popular dish. | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e Technical term | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 11. | 吃鱼头是中国人的专利。 | Eating fish heads is a patent belongs to Chinese. | Original | Fish head dish is a favorite specialit y of Chinese people. | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e Technical term | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 12. | 水底的世界被整个地打捞了起来 | The underwater world was salvaged in its entirety | Original | The entire load of fish has been extracte d. | Not a Metaph or | Aesthetic hyperbole | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 13. | 被上天厚爱的人群又一次获得了馈赠！ | The people who are loved with great kindness by God have once again received a gift! | stock | The lucky locals | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e Personifica tion | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 14. | 这不是年年有余吗？ | Isn't it a saying every year with surplus? | Cliché | It represen ts a wish for an annual fortune. | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e proverb | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 15. | 隆重的晚宴中，鱼是绝对的主角儿 | In a grand dinner, fish is the absolute | Cliché | The fish is the main ingredie nt of all the | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e Technical item | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|------------------------------|--|----------|--|-----------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | o | protagonis t. | | dishes. | | | |
| 16. | 对于海边的人来说，更深的诱惑还在深海之中 | To the seaside residents, a deeper temptation is still deep down the ocean | Stock | To the seaside resident s, the deep ocean is much more attractiv e for hunting. | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 17. | 除夕夜阖家团圆吃饺子，是任何山珍海味所无法替代的年终盛宴 | Eating dumplings with the whole family on New Year's Eve is a year- end feast that cannot be replaced by any dainties from mountains or delicacies from the sea. | original | No matter what happens during the year dumplin gs on new year's eve cannot be replaced with any other delicacy | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e idiom | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 18. | 杂粮和小麦是餐桌上的主角 | Wheat and grainc are the protagonis ts on the table | cliché | Wheat and other types of grain are the staple foods | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e Technical term | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 19. | 牛肉汤的清与浊是检验牛肉面是否正宗的秘籍之一 | The clarity or turbidity of beef soup is one of the secret books to test whether beef noodles are authentic | Stock | the clarity of the soup used to make this beef and noodle dish is still a criterion for its authenti city | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 20. | 臊子面作为台前台后的最佳配角是绝不可少的 | As the best supporting actor both on and off stage, it is absolutely indispensa ble. | Stock | At such events Qishan sausa noodle is essential for perform ers and audienc e. | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 21. | 快节奏的生产和生活方式正使这个几千年来一直都具有礼 | The fast- paced productio n and lifestyle are turning this food, which has a temperam ent of | Stock | the fast pace of life seasonal foods are now availabl e all year round | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e Personifica tion | F. Deletion |

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|---|-------|---|-----------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | 仪节令气质的食物变成一种日常的主食 | etiquette and season food for thousands of years, into a daily staple. | | | | | |
| 22. | 在各种面食的制作手法上变 | They change patterns | Dead | they figure out | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e | E. Convertin g |
| | 换花样 | on the procedure s of making floured food. | | different ways of making floured food | | | metaphor to sense |
| 23. | 经验告诉老黄, 包上被子效果最好 | The experienc e told Huang to cove it with a quilt for it would works better. | Stock | Wang has also found that covering the vets with a quilt works even better | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e Personifica tion | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 24. | 这个举手之劳是一个知足享受的过程 | This lift a finger is a extremely enjoyable process | Dead | breakin g the bun into pieces is part of the enjoyme nt of this dish | Not a Metaph or | Connotativ e idiom | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |
| 25. | 对于面条的口感, 南方人和北方人的要求也有着天壤之别。 | When it comes to the taste of noodles, people in the south and the north have their special demand as different as sky and earth. | dead | people from the North and South have absolute ly different require ments. | Not a metapho r | Connotativ e idiom | E. Convertin g metaphor to sense |

Table 2. illustrates 25 metaphors, only identified in ST, that have not been translated into TT. The dominant procedure is "E. Converting metaphor to sense," which accounts for the vast majority of cases. Personification is a rhetorical device that allows the non-human subjects to be described as though they possess human-like emotions, actions, or traits. (Manu, H. O., 2025). It can be noticed that personification is wildly used in ST, for example, when facing translating the ST"松茸属于野生菌中的贵族" (literally, "Matsutake is one of the nobles in wild mushrooms"), the method the translator chose is to reduce this kind of figure of speech while translating into the economic sense: "Matsutake is very expensive." Besides, when dealing with some technical terms. like "酸笋的成色"(literally, "the grade of sour bamboo shoots"), explaining its real meaning was always the first choice to the translator, so the "grade" here was translated into the "process of making sour bamboo". In addition, Chinese idioms and proverbs are also translated in this way.

The secondary procedure employed is "F. Deletion," which is used in cases where the metaphor is considered superfluous or its meaning is contextually implied. For instance, the phrase "为了延续自然的馈赠" (literally,

"To continue obtaining the gifts of nature") is deleted entirely, as the concept of continuing a harvest is already evident from the context. To a certain extent, redundancy could be well avoided to some degree, thus it is much easier and franker for the audience to understand the meaning clearly.

Overall, it could be concluded that some kinds of figures of speech used as often in ST are converted into literal, non- metaphorical statements in TT, such as figurative expressions, personification, and even some idioms and proverbs, due to the huge gap in different cultural backgrounds. As directly influenced by Confucianism, the Chinese are more likely to be introverted and obscure, the same as its expression and even their audiovisual work. Compared to a direct statement, a large number of speech figures will be chosen to modify the expression to be more implicit instead of being straightforward. Hence, for a subtitle translator, the strategies for translating these metaphors in ST are converting them into sense to make sure the audience can understand easily first. Also, it reveals that when facing challenges in translating cross-culture audiovisual texts, it would be better to convert ST metaphors into sense then just delete them all so as to pass the core information of subtitle efficiently.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how metaphorical expressions in *A Bite of China* were translated into English subtitles, with a focus on the challenges arising from cultural specificity and the audiovisual nature of the medium. The findings reflect both the translator's strategies and the constraints they face during the subtitling process.

Balancing Original Meaning and Audience Comprehension

One of the most noticeable trends observed in the data is that many metaphors in the source text (ST) were translated into more direct, non-metaphorical expressions in the target text (TT). This approach, which can be described as metaphor-to- sense conversion, shows that translators tend to prioritise clarity for the audience over maintaining the original figurative form. This choice becomes necessary especially in subtitle translation, where space and time are limited. Although the metaphorical beauty of the original may be reduced, the core message can still be effectively delivered. This finding supports the idea that metaphor translation should consider the cognitive load of the viewers and the context of viewing. Similarly, some metaphors were completely omitted. In most of these cases, the information carried by the metaphor could be understood from the visuals or the narrative context. This suggests that deletion is not necessarily a failure of translation but a strategy to avoid redundancy and maintain fluency for the viewers. It reflects the practical thinking of subtitlers who need to adapt meaning under time pressure.

The Cultural Role of Metaphor and Translation Strategies

The results also show that many metaphors in Chinese carry cultural references that are not easily understood by international audiences. For instance, idioms, proverbs, and personifications often contain deep cultural connotations. In such cases, translators either change the metaphor into a more general expression or choose a culturally neutral equivalent. This supports the view that metaphors are closely tied to cultural knowledge, and direct translation may cause misunderstanding if the target audience lacks the same background. A common strategy found in the data is cultural

approximation. This means replacing a metaphor with an expression that may not have the same form but has a similar function or emotional effect in the target language. This method helps preserve the communicative purpose of the metaphor while making it easier for viewers to understand. In many cases, the translator must find a compromise between keeping the cultural identity of the original text and ensuring that the subtitles are accessible to international audiences.

Limitations of Traditional Frameworks and Emerging Approaches

Although this study uses Newmark's (1988) model as a reference point, the data shows that some strategies used by subtitlers do not fit neatly into his categories. For example, visual reinforcement where images on screen help explain the meaning of a metaphor or short annotation in the subtitle line are not discussed in classical translation

frameworks. These methods are more relevant to audiovisual translation and show that translation strategies must adapt to multimodal contexts.

Practical Implications for Translators

The findings in this study can offer suggestions for subtitle translators. First, translators should be aware of the metaphor's cultural meaning and whether it can be understood by the target audience. When the metaphor is too culturally specific, it may be better to simplify it or explain the meaning in another way. Second, translators should take into account the visual elements in the documentary, which can sometimes help communicate the meaning of the metaphor even if it is not fully translated. Third, in translator training programmes, more attention should be given to metaphor translation in audiovisual contexts, as this requires different strategies from literary or technical translation.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore how metaphorical expressions in the Chinese documentary *A Bite of China* are translated into English subtitles, especially under the constraints of audiovisual media and cultural differences. The analysis of 90 metaphorical expressions showed that while many conventional strategies remain in use, translators increasingly rely on flexible and pragmatic approaches. Converting metaphor to sense appeared as the most frequently adopted method, suggesting that translators often prioritise clarity and accessibility over preserving the metaphorical structure, especially when the original metaphor might be too culture-bound or difficult to understand within the subtitle's limited space. At the same time, certain metaphorical elements—particularly those involving poetic language, idioms, and personification—were omitted or adapted, reflecting a need to simplify complex imagery for international audiences without entirely losing its original meaning.

Overall, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of metaphor translation in audiovisual texts and provide practical implications for subtitle translators, trainers, and scholars. For future research, it is suggested to examine audience reception of different translation strategies, or to apply similar frameworks to other genres, such as animated films or intercultural advertisements, to further expand the scope and applicability of metaphor translation studies in AVT.

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