



# Rethinking classical translation models in audiovisual translation: evidence from metaphor translation in chinese documentary subtitling

*Repensando os modelos clássicos de tradução na tradução audiovisual: evidências da tradução de metáforas na legendagem de documentário chinês*

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**Resumo:** Este estudo avalia a aplicabilidade dos Modelos Clássicos de Tradução (MCTs), especificamente os procedimentos de Newmark (1988) e os modelos direto e oblíquo de Vinay e Darbelnet (1995), na Tradução Audiovisual (TAV). Ao analisar 50 expressões metafóricas do documentário chinês *A Bite of China*, a pesquisa identifica uma inadequação sistêmica nos MCTs. Seu foco monosemiótico na equivalência textual não leva em consideração pistas multimodais, coerência intersemiótica e restrições técnicas de legendagem. Os resultados revelam que 64% das metáforas foram simplificadas ou neutralizadas, impulsionadas pela "ancoragem visual" e pela "desmetaforização por restrições". Embora os MCTs descrevam com sucesso as mudanças linguísticas, eles não explicam os fatores cognitivos e multimodais subjacentes. Para abordar essas lacunas, o estudo propõe um Modelo Analítico Híbrido que integra a Teoria da Metáfora Conceitual (TMC), os procedimentos clássicos e a estrutura ECR de Pedersen (2011). Esta abordagem multidimensional demonstra que a tradução de metáforas na legendagem é um ato de reconstrução intercultural, necessário devido à interação entre os canais verbal, visual e auditivo. O estudo oferece intervenções teóricas para a pedagogia da tradução e insights práticos para a legendagem de conteúdo multimodal culturalmente complexo.

**Palavras-chave:** Tradução de metáforas. Tradução audiovisual (TAV). Modelo analítico híbrido. Coerência intersemiótica. Teoria da metáfora conceitual (TMC).

**Abstract:** This study evaluates the applicability of Classical Translation Models (CTMs) specifically Newmark's (1988) procedures and Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) direct and oblique models within Audiovisual Translation (AVT). By analyzing 50 metaphorical expressions from the Chinese documentary *A Bite of China*, the research identifies a systemic inadequacy in CTMs. Their monosemiotic focus on textual equivalence does not take into account multimodal cues, intersemiotic coherence and technical constraints of subtitling. The results reveal that 64% of metaphors were simplified or neutralized, driven by "visual anchoring" and "restriction-driven demetaphorization". Although CTMs successfully describe linguistic changes, they do not explain the underlying cognitive and multimodal factors. To address these gaps, the study proposes a Hybrid Analytical Model that integrates Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), classical procedures and Pedersen's (2011) ECR structure. This multidimensional approach demonstrates that metaphor translation in subtitling is an act of intercultural reconstruction, necessary due to the interaction between verbal, visual and auditory channels. The study offers theoretical interventions for translation pedagogy and practical insights for culturally complex multimodal content subtitling.

monosemiotic focus on textual equivalence fails to account for multimodal cues, intersemiotic coherence, and technical subtitling constraints. The findings reveal that 64% of metaphors were simplified or neutralized, driven by "visual anchoring" and "constraint-driven demetaphorization". While CTMs successfully describe linguistic shifts, they fail to explain the cognitive and multimodal drivers behind them. To address these gaps, the study proposes a Hybrid Analytical Model integrating Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), classical procedures, and Pedersen's (2011) ECR framework. This multidimensional approach demonstrates that metaphor translation in subtitling is an act of cross-cultural reconstruction necessitated by the interplay of verbal, visual, and auditory channels. The study offers theoretical interventions for translation pedagogy and practical insights for subtitling culturally dense multimodal content.

**Keywords:** Metaphor translation. Audiovisual translation (AVT). Hybrid Analytical Model. Intersemiotic coherence. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT).

## Introdução

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Metaphor functions as a fundamental cognitive and rhetorical mechanism through which complex cultural and humanistic meanings are articulated. In audiovisual media, metaphorical meaning is intensified by the interaction of multiple semiotic channels—verbal narration, visual imagery, and sound working together to generate layered emotional and cognitive effects. In Chinese culinary documentaries such as *A Bite of China* (ABOC), metaphors extend beyond stylistic ornamentation; they operate as cultural vehicles that interweave gastronomy with history, geography, collective memory, and regional identity. In ABOC, metaphor is rarely monosemiotic; rather, it is reinforced, specified, or even constructed through the multimodal interplay of Mandarin narration, music, and visual framing.

The English translation of such culturally dense metaphors presents a complex challenge. Subtitle translators must negotiate a persistent tension between preserving conceptual meaning, ensuring cross-cultural accessibility, and complying with the strict temporal and spatial constraints of subtitling. While classical translation models (CTMs), particularly those proposed by Newmark (1988) and Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995), provide foundational procedures for handling figurative language, they are grounded in a monosemiotic, text-to-text paradigm of equivalence. Such frameworks are increasingly insufficient for audiovisual translation (AVT), where meaning emerges intersemiotically from the synchronized interaction of narration, visuals, and sound.

Studies have examined metaphor translation strategies across literary, ecological, and audiovisual contexts, drawing upon the foundational

guidance of Newmark (1988) and Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995). Empirical research, including Schmidt (2016) and Cai, Abdullah, and Ibrahim (2024), has specifically addressed metaphor application in audiovisual contexts, demonstrating the importance of maintaining conceptual correspondence and cognitive resonance with target audiences. Further work by Cai, Abdullah, and Pariyanto (2025) continues this trajectory, highlighting that metaphor translation research often remains anchored in models of functional equivalence developed for literary discourse. While these studies establish valuable insights into metaphor retention and adaptation, they also reveal a critical tension: in audiovisual media translation, translators must balance conceptual fidelity with audience comprehension while expressing meaning efficiently within the limited spatial and temporal boundaries of subtitles.

Classical translation models, exemplified by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995) and Newmark (1988), established systematic procedures for translating metaphor and figurative language, emphasizing equivalence and prescriptive strategies. However, translation studies scholarship increasingly highlights their inadequacy in multimodal contexts, where meaning arises from the interplay of verbal, visual, and auditory channels. Pedersen (2017) argues that subtitled metaphors require strategies sensitive to timing, screen space, and audience processing dimensions largely absent from traditional frameworks. Similarly, Saridaki (2021) critiques Vinay and Darbelnet's model for conceptual ambiguity and insufficient attention to textual holism and functional dynamics.

In AVT contexts, subtitles must achieve intersemiotic coherence rather than purely linguistic equivalence. Classical models lack the explanatory capacity to account for multimodal reinforcement, visual anchoring, constraint-driven demetaphorization, or cultural-functional adaptation. Although metaphor has long occupied a central position in translation studies, research addressing metaphor within AVT remains comparatively underdeveloped in its theoretical integration of cognitive, linguistic, and multimodal dimensions. There remains a need for a context-sensitive analytical framework capable of bridging abstract conceptual mapping and the practical realities of screen translation.

This study addresses that gap by examining 50 metaphorical expressions from *A Bite of China* (Season 1, Episode 1). It investigates how Newmark's (1988) and Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) frameworks account for metaphor translation in subtitling and evaluates their systemic limitations in multimodal contexts. The research pursues two primary objectives:

#### 4 ■ RETHINKING CLASSICAL TRANSLATION MODELS IN AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION: EVIDENCE FROM METAPHOR TRANSLATION IN CHINESE DOCUMENTARY SUBTITLING

1. To identify the structural limitations of classical translation models in handling culturally embedded and multimodally constructed metaphors in AVT.
2. To propose a Hybrid Multimodal Analytical Framework that integrates conceptual metaphor theory, classical translation procedures, and audiovisual constraints to better explain metaphor transformation in subtitles.

By grounding the analysis in authentic subtitling data, this study extends previous research within this PhD programme and advances ongoing debates concerning equivalence, multimodality, and cross-cultural reconstruction in audiovisual translation. It argues that metaphor translation in AVT cannot be adequately understood through textual equivalence alone but requires a multidimensional model that accounts for cognitive mapping, multimodal interaction, and the technical constraints of the screen.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *2.1. Audiovisual Translation (AVT) and Subtitling Constraints*

Translation functions as a bridge facilitating intercultural communication. In audiovisual translation (AVT), however, this mediation becomes considerably more complex, as translators must navigate not only linguistic and cultural differences but also technological and structural constraints (Zou, 2025). Subtitling, in particular, operates under strict temporal and spatial limitations. As Díaz Cintas (2014) demonstrates, restricted screen space, character-per-line norms, and reading speed constraints significantly limit the amount of information that can be conveyed. Consequently, condensation, omission, and reformulation are not optional strategies but structural necessities.

These constraints reshape the translator's decision-making process. Subtitle translators must prioritize readability, synchronization, and viewer processing speed while preserving communicative intent. Research has shown that culturally loaded materials pose particular challenges within these limitations. Studies examining subtitle translation of cultural artefacts (Chai, 2022; Saputra, 2022; Leksananda, 2023) demonstrate that strategies such as omission, substitution, and recombination frequently emerge as responses to temporal compression and multimodal pressure rather than purely linguistic considerations.

Recent work within this research trajectory (Cai, Abdullah & Ibrahim, 2024; Cai, Abdullah & Pariyanto, 2025) further confirms that subtitling

constraints significantly affect the preservation of metaphorical and cultural nuance. These findings suggest that metaphor translation in AVT cannot be explained solely through classical equivalence-based models, as audiovisual meaning is shaped simultaneously by linguistic transformation and multimodal context.

## *2.2 Conceptualising Metaphor in Audiovisual Translation*

Metaphor is widely recognized as a fundamental cognitive mechanism structuring human thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Rather than being merely decorative language, metaphor operates through conceptual mappings between source and target domains. Abdullah (2014, 2021) extends this perspective by demonstrating that metaphor translation involves negotiation across linguistic, cultural, and contextual dimensions. In audiovisual media, metaphor extends beyond verbal expression. Forceville (2008) argues that metaphors can be constructed visually, aurally, or multimodally, requiring coordinated interpretation across semiotic channels. Gambier (2018) further emphasizes that AVT constitutes a multimodal communicative act in which subtitles interact dynamically with sound and image. Consequently, metaphor translation in AVT must account for intersemiotic interaction rather than treating subtitles as isolated textual units.

Pederen (2015, 2025) identifies metaphor as particularly challenging in subtitling due to cultural specificity and processing constraints. Mutiyara (2022) similarly demonstrates that metaphor intensity in subtitles directly affects the preservation of poetic and emotional expression. Despite these advances, much existing research continues to focus on metaphor equivalence at a textual or literary level, without fully integrating cognitive mapping, multimodal anchoring, and subtitle constraints into a unified analytical framework. As illustrated in Figure 1, conceptual metaphor (source–target mapping) functions as the cognitive core of meaning construction, while verbal, visual, and auditory semiotic modes interact dynamically to reinforce, redistribute, or partially substitute metaphorical content. This interdependency challenges monosemiotic translation paradigms and foregrounds the need to analyse subtitle translation as an intersemiotic process rather than a purely linguistic transfer. The model draws upon multimodal semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) and Jakobson's (1959) notion of intersemiotic translation, situating audiovisual metaphor within a cross-modal interpretive framework.

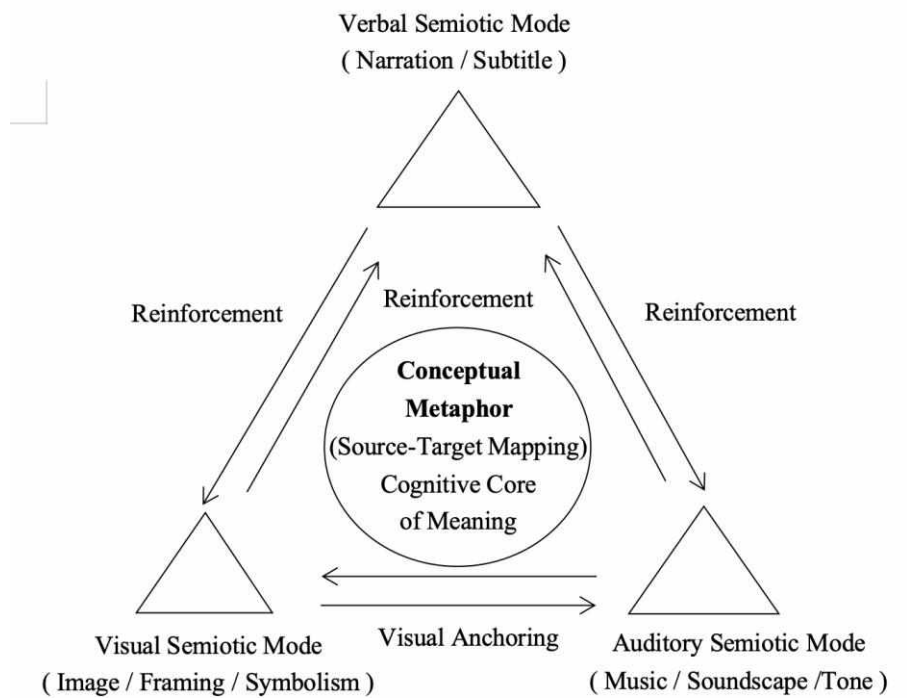


Figure 1: Intersemiotic Construction of Metaphor in Audiovisual Discourse

### 2.3 Classical Translation Models in AVT: Strengths and Limitations

Classical translation models, particularly those proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995) and Newmark (1988), provide systematic procedures for translating figurative language. Their strategies such as equivalence, adaptation, modulation, and paraphrase remain foundational in translation pedagogy and practice. However, these models were developed within a monomodal paradigm oriented toward written texts. While they effectively describe linguistic transformations, they lack mechanisms for accounting for multimodal interaction, visual anchoring, or constraint-driven demetaphorization in AVT. As Forceville (2008) and Gambier (2018) note, audiovisual meaning emerges from coordinated semiotic channels, not from text alone.

Shuttleworth (2017) critiques Newmark's model for rigidity and limited functional flexibility, while Saridaki (2021) highlights conceptual ambiguities and insufficient attention to holistic textual dynamics. In subtitling contexts, where metaphor may be visually reinforced or partially substituted by imagery, classical models can describe procedural choices

but cannot fully explain their multimodal motivation. This theoretical gap necessitates an expanded analytical approach one capable of integrating cognitive mapping, linguistic procedures, and audiovisual constraints into a cohesive framework. To conceptualize this intersemiotic interaction, Figure 1 models metaphor in audiovisual discourse as a multimodal construct emerging from the dynamic coordination of verbal, visual, and auditory semiotic modes.

#### *2.4 The Hybrid Analytical Model for Metaphor Translation in AVT*

To address the documented limitations of classical translation models in multimodal contexts, this study proposes a Hybrid Intersemiotic Analytical Model (see Figure 2). Rather than functioning as a linear workflow, the model integrates three complementary and dynamically interacting dimensions: cognitive, linguistic-operational, and audiovisual-functional. At the cognitive level, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) provides the foundational analytical lens for identifying underlying source–target domain mappings. This dimension ensures that metaphor translation is guided by conceptual structure rather than surface linguistic form. By foregrounding conceptual mapping, the model distinguishes between metaphors that require preservation, adaptation, or transformation based on their cognitive motivation.

At the linguistic-operational level, classical translation procedures particularly those proposed by Newmark (1988) and Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995) serve as systematic tools for handling metaphorical transformation. These procedures (e.g., literal transfer, modulation, adaptation, paraphrase, or replacement) provide operational clarity while remaining situated within the broader cognitive framework established by CMT. In this model, classical strategies are retained not as sufficient explanatory mechanisms, but as procedural instruments operating within multimodal constraints. At the audiovisual-functional level, Pedersen's (2011) ECR framework is incorporated to account for subtitle-specific constraints, cultural specificity, visual anchoring, and intersemiotic compensation. This dimension evaluates how temporal compression, spatial limitations, and multimodal reinforcement influence the final translation outcome. Here, metaphor translation is assessed not solely in terms of equivalence, but in terms of intersemiotic coherence and functional adequacy within audiovisual discourse.

Figure 2 presents this hybrid intersemiotic structure as an integrated analytical model in which conceptual mapping operates as the cognitive core, classical procedures function as operational mechanisms, and audiovisual constraints regulate the transformation process. The three dimensions interact dynamically rather than sequentially, reflecting the complexity of subtitle translation where cognitive, linguistic, and multimodal factors continuously shape one another. By integrating these dimensions, the proposed framework moves beyond monosemiotic equivalence and offers a multidimensional account of metaphor translation in audiovisual environments. It positions metaphor translation not as a text-to-text transfer, but as an intersemiotic negotiation shaped by conceptual structure, procedural choice, and multimodal constraint.

Unlike previous studies that apply cognitive theory, classical procedures, or AVT strategies independently, the present model integrates these dimensions within a single analytical architecture. Its contribution lies not in proposing new translation procedures, but in reconceptualizing metaphor translation as an intersemiotic negotiation shaped simultaneously by conceptual mapping, procedural choice, and audiovisual constraint. This integrative perspective provides a structured yet flexible framework for analysing metaphor transformation in contemporary multimodal media.

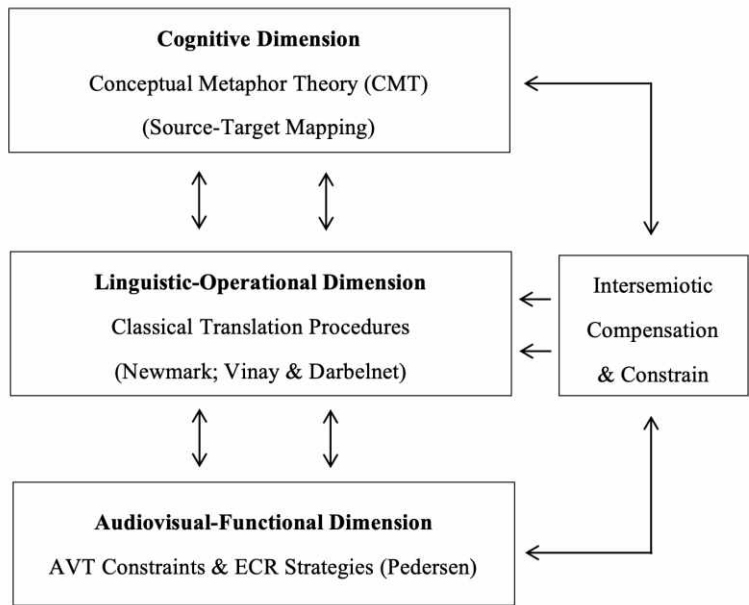


Figure 2: A Hybrid Intersemiotic Analytical Model for Metaphor Translation in Audiovisual Discourse

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. *Research Design*

This study adopts a qualitative corpus-based case study design centred on the comparative analysis of metaphor translation in audiovisual subtitling. The analytical framework is deductively structured around the proposed Hybrid Intersemiotic Analytical Model (see Figure 2), which integrates cognitive, linguistic-operational, and audiovisual-functional dimensions.

The study addresses two primary research questions:

- (a) In what ways do classical translation models demonstrate explanatory limitations when applied to metaphor in audiovisual subtitling?
- (b) How does an integrated intersemiotic model provide a more comprehensive account of metaphor transformation in multimodal contexts?

Rather than testing translation equivalence in isolation, the design systematically examines how conceptual mapping, procedural translation choice, and audiovisual constraints interact in shaping subtitle outcomes.

#### 3.2 *Corpus Selection and Data Collection*

The corpus consists of the first episode, “Nature’s Gift,” from Season 1 of *A Bite of China* (2012), produced by CCTV. This documentary was selected due to its high density of culturally embedded metaphor and its deliberate integration of narration, imagery, and sound design. The study examines both the original Mandarin subtitles (ST) and their officially released English subtitles (TT). The episode provides a culturally rich and multimodally complex dataset suitable for investigating the interaction between conceptual metaphor, classical translation procedures, and audiovisual constraint. A total of 50 metaphorical expressions were identified for analysis. These instances form the analytical dataset for applying the hybrid model.

#### 3.3 *Operationalising the Hybrid Intersemiotic Analytical Model*

The Hybrid Analytical Model was implemented through three sequential yet interrelated analytical stages: cognitive identification, linguistic-

operational analysis, and audiovisual-functional evaluation. The following subsections detail the operational procedures.

3.3.1 Cognitive Identification of Metaphors in the Source Text

The first analytical stage focused on identifying metaphorical expressions in the Mandarin source subtitles. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) was employed to determine the underlying source–target domain mappings structuring each metaphor. The identification process followed a structured analytical sequence grounded in domain comparison and contextual interpretation. Figure 3 illustrates the source–target domain identification procedure applied to each potential metaphorical expression.

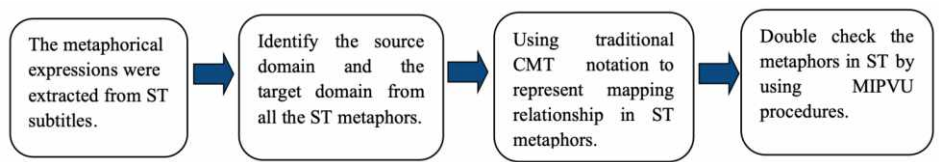


Figure 3: Source and Target Domain Identification

As shown in Figure 3, the procedure begins with lexical unit identification, followed by contextual meaning analysis and comparison with more basic meanings. Where cross-domain mapping was established, the expression was classified as metaphorical. This stage ensures that metaphor identification is conceptually grounded rather than impressionistic. To enhance methodological transparency and replicability, metaphor identification was further verified using the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU) developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). The structured steps of this procedure are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije University (MIPVU) developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007)

| ST<br>Metaphors                 | STEP 1<br>Lexical Unit<br>Identification | STEP 2<br>Establish<br>Contextual<br>Meaning                                                    | STEP3<br>Determine Basic<br>Meaning<br>(by using<br>Modern Chinese<br>Dictionary)                                                                    | STEP4<br>Compare Meanings                                                                                                                                                                                                      | STEP 5<br>Confirmation if metaphors used in the sentences                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. 千燥而温<br>暖的风浩<br>浩荡荡地<br>吹上半年 | “浩浩荡<br>荡”adverb                         | Describes<br>"strong<br>wind,<br>blowing<br>widely",<br>means<br>"strong<br>wind, long<br>time" | Refers to the rapid<br>flow of water and<br>its majestic<br>momentum, often<br>used to describe<br>"grand scenes"<br>such as the army<br>and troops. | From "an army<br>marching" or "a<br>flood rolling in" →<br>describing "the size<br>of the wind"<br>Cross-domain<br>Mapping : Wind<br>(natural<br>phenomenon) →<br>Team/Water flow<br>(human<br>behavior/natural<br>phenomenon) | Yes, the word "浩浩荡荡" is an indirect metaphor because:<br><br>Using the sense of movement and scale of "team/water flow" to<br>describe "wind"<br><br>Therefore, "浩浩荡荡" is an Indirect metaphor. |

Table 1. outlines the systematic criteria used to distinguish metaphorical from literal usage. The incorporation of MIPVU strengthens analytical reliability by providing explicit decision-making guidelines for metaphor recognition within the subtitle corpus. In addition to linguistic identification, this stage included a preliminary multimodal observation noting whether metaphors were visually or aurally reinforced in the audiovisual sequence. This multimodal tagging informed subsequent analytical stages.

### 3.3.2 Linguistic-Operational Analysis: Classical Translation Procedures

Following cognitive identification, each metaphor's translation into English subtitles was analysed using classical translation procedures drawn from Newmark (1988) and Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995). This stage examined whether metaphors were retained literally, paraphrased, adapted, modulated, replaced, generalised, or omitted. Rather than treating these procedures as exhaustive explanatory tools, this stage evaluates how classical categories describe linguistic transformation and where they fail to account for multimodal or constraint-driven motivations. Subtitle-specific constraints including temporal compression, spatial limitation, and stylistic coherence (Kuo, 2017) were considered in interpreting procedural choices.

### 3.3.3 Audiovisual-Functional Evaluation: ECR and Intersemiotic Constraint Analysis

The third analytical dimension incorporated Pedersen's (2011) ECR (Extralinguistic Cultural References) framework to assess how metaphor

translation responds to cultural specificity and audiovisual constraint. Each translated metaphor was classified according to ECR strategies: Retention, Specification, Direct Translation, Generalisation, Substitution, Omission, and Official Equivalence. Beyond classification, each case was evaluated for functional adequacy within the audiovisual environment. Particular attention was given to instances where conceptual mapping, cultural resonance, or metaphorical intensity was weakened or neutralised in the target subtitle. Such cases were interpreted as functional mismatches, revealing the limitations of classical procedural models when confronted with multimodal and temporal constraints. Table 2 presents a representative case of functional mismatch identified in the corpus.

Table 2. Example of functional mismatch in A Bite of China

|    | Chinese Metaphors (ST) | English Metaphors (TT) | Back Translation                                                                         | CMT mapping          | Multimodal profiling                                                                                       | Classic Translation Model | ECR strategy | Limitation          | Evaluation                                                                                     |
|----|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 19 | 笋取出来要盖好土，就地利用自然。       | Covered with earth     | After picking up the bamboo shoots, cover the rest with dirt, <b>make use of nature.</b> | NATURE IS A GUARDIAN | The action of the person carefully covering the bamboo shoots with soil after picking them in the picture. | deletion                  | omission     | visual compensation | Metaphorical expressions were removed from the subtitles and replaced with visual supplements. |

In this example, the metaphorical expression “make use of nature” in the source text is omitted in the target subtitle. The omission weakens the conceptual mapping and illustrates how audiovisual constraints may override metaphor retention. This case demonstrates the explanatory limits of monosemiotic translation frameworks when applied to multimodal discourse. This stage explicitly integrates intersemiotic factors by assessing how visual anchoring, auditory reinforcement, and subtitle timing influence translation outcomes. By situating procedural choices within multimodal interaction, the analysis moves beyond textual equivalence toward functional evaluation in context. The hybrid analytical model was operationalised through a structured but non-linear analytical procedure reflecting the interaction of its three theoretical dimensions.

3.4 Reliability and Analytical Validity

To ensure coding reliability, 15% of the dataset (8 out of 50 metaphor instances) was independently coded by the researcher and an experienced

Chinese–English audiovisual subtitler. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion, resulting in an inter-coder agreement coefficient exceeding 0.85. Analytical validity was reinforced through cross-dimensional triangulation. Each metaphor instance was examined across cognitive, linguistic-operational, and audiovisual-functional dimensions. This layered validation ensures that interpretations reflect multimodal communicative function rather than isolated textual equivalence.

All analyses were situated within multimodal discourse interaction, incorporating image, sound, and subtitle synchronisation, consistent with multimodal semiotic theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) and audiovisual translation scholarship (Pérez-González, 2014). This study adopts a qualitative, corpus-based, case study approach focusing on the comparative analysis of subtitle translation strategies. The methodology is primarily deductive, systematically applying the proposed hybrid analytical model (see Figure 2) to the selected corpus to answer the central research questions:

- (a) Why do classical translation models struggle to explain metaphors in audiovisual translation?
- (b) How can a hybrid analytical model illuminate these metaphors more effectively?

## IV RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 4.1. *The Distributions of Metaphor Translation in A Bite of China*

A total of 50 metaphorical expressions identified in the subtitles of *A Bite of China* (Season 1, Episode 1) were analyzed to examine how metaphor is managed within audiovisual translation. The distribution of translation outcomes is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Distribution of metaphor translation outcomes in subtitling**

| Translation Outcome                                  | Frequency(n=50) | Percentage |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Metaphor Retained (Literal/<br>Substituted metaphor) | 18              | 36%        |
| Metaphor Weakened<br>(Paraphrase/ Modulation)        | 20              | 40%        |
| Metaphor Omitted                                     | 12              | 24%        |

As shown in Table 3, 36% of metaphors were retained in literal or substituted form, while 40% were weakened through paraphrase or modulation, and 24% were omitted entirely. Taken together, 64% of metaphors underwent weakening or omission. This distribution reveals a marked tendency toward demetaphorisation in the subtitled version. Rather than preserving metaphorical density, the translation frequently prioritises readability and the efficient allocation of limited subtitle display time. In several instances, metaphorical meaning appears to be redistributed to visual or auditory channels, suggesting multimodal compensation rather than straightforward textual loss. These findings provide initial empirical evidence that metaphor transformation in audiovisual translation cannot be fully explained through classical equivalence-based procedures alone.

4.2 Systemic Limitations of Classical Translation Models

To examine the explanatory scope of classical translation frameworks, cases of metaphor transformation were categorised according to four recurring limitation types. The distribution is presented in Table 4. The results show a relatively even distribution across four categories: multimodal compensation (28%), constraint-driven demetaphorisation (26%), visual anchoring constraint (24%), and cultural-functional mismatch (22%). The balanced distribution suggests that the limitations of classical translation models in audiovisual contexts are systemic rather than incidental. Metaphor transformation emerges not from a single dominant factor but from the interaction of multimodal reinforcement, subtitle compression, and cross-cultural interpretive shifts. In sum, these findings demonstrate that classical translation models adequately categorise

linguistic procedures but do not account for the multimodal and cognitive motivations underlying those procedures.

Table 4. Distribution of Limitation Types Identified in Classical Models

| Limitations                                             | Frequency(n=50) | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Multimodal compensation<br>(visual/audio replacement)   | 14              | 28%        |
| Constraint-driven<br>de-metaphorization<br>(time/space) | 13              | 26%        |
| Visual anchoring constraint                             | 12              | 24%        |
| Cultural–functional mismatch                            | 11              | 22%        |

### 4.3 Distribution of Translation Outcomes across Conceptual Domains

Figure 4. illustrates how translation outcomes vary across four conceptual domains identified in the corpus: Nature, Food, Human, and Emotion.

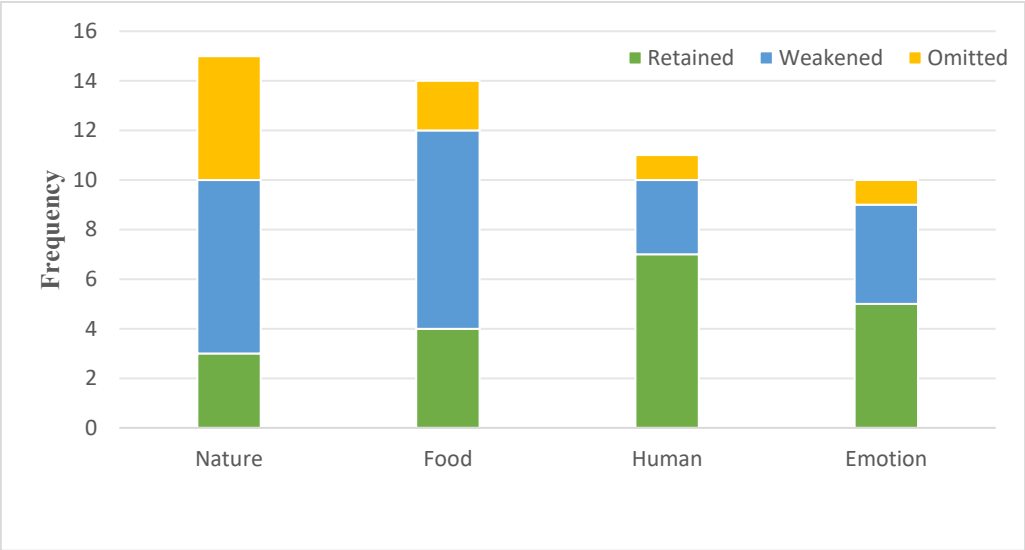


Figure 4. Distribution of Translation Outcomes across Conceptual Domains

Metaphors associated with Nature and Food display higher rates of weakening or omission. These domains frequently rely on culturally embedded imagery and environmental symbolism, which may not transfer directly across linguistic and cultural contexts. In several instances, metaphorical meaning is partially redistributed to visual imagery, allowing linguistic condensation without complete semantic loss. By contrast, metaphors relating to Human and Emotion demonstrate higher retention rates. These domains are grounded in embodied experiential schemas that are more cognitively accessible across cultures. Their relative stability suggests that metaphors rooted in shared human experience are less vulnerable to constraint-driven demetaphorisation. This domain-based variation confirms that translation outcomes are systematically shaped by conceptual structure, multimodal reinforcement, and subtitle constraints rather than by procedural preference alone.

4.4 Analytical Implications

The findings indicate that metaphor transformation in audiovisual translation is not simply a linguistic phenomenon but a complex intersemiotic one. While classical translation models remain useful for categorizing procedural shifts, they do not sufficiently explain the

cognitive and multimodal motivations underlying those shifts. Metaphor weakening and omission frequently occur in contexts where visual imagery performs the metaphorical function, subtitle space and timing restrict elaboration, or cultural specificity reduces cross-linguistic transferability. In such cases, translation decisions are driven less by semantic equivalence and more by the necessity to maintain audiovisual coherence and facilitate viewer processing within stringent temporal and spatial constraints. The redistribution of metaphorical meaning across verbal, visual, and auditory channels demonstrates that metaphor in AVT operates within a multimodal meaning-making system rather than as an isolated textual phenomenon as seen in the following examples.

Findings reveal that metaphors are frequently redistributed across images, sound and subtitles, leading to the weakness of metaphor function under visual anchoring and technical constraints (Forceville, 2012; Pedersen, 2015; Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021) Audience reception, cognitive processing, and cultural acceptance further motivate metaphor neutralization in subtitles, particularly in documentary and song translation contexts (Pérez-González, 2014; Gambier, 2018; Mutiyara & Jupply, 2022). Recent studies confirm that both human and machine subtitling systematically downscale metaphors to ensure readability and narrative coherence (Petronienė et al., 2021; Shintemirova, 2023).

Table 5. Failure of Classical Models in Audiovisual Translation

|                  |                                                                                     |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Example 12       |  |
| ST               | 为了延续自然的馈赠                                                                           |
| Back Translation | To continue obtaining the <u>gift</u> of nature.                                    |
| TT               | /                                                                                   |

While Newmark's (1988) procedures and Vinay & Darbelnet's (1958/1995) strategies accurately describe the language shifts occurring between the ST and TT, the underlying causes and consequences of these shifts are not fully presented due to the constraints of the audiovisual

context. As demonstrated in Table 5, the metaphorical expressions in ST are omitted in TT. Meanwhile, the documentary is showing scenes of villagers celebrating a grand matsutake harvest. Due to the full visual description of the metaphorical meaning in ST, to avoid repetitiveness of the same information and keep in synchronization with documentary, the metaphors omitted in TT. The explanation for omission is not fully explained in the classical translation model since the metaphor in AVT is also constrained by visual anchoring, spatial limitations, and cognitive-cultural equivalence.

4.4.1. Multimodel Compensation

Classical translation models struggle to predict whether or when, metaphors will be retained when translating from ST to TT. The hybrid analytical model finds that literal translation (Newmark, 1988) or direct translation (V&D) is most successful when supported by multimodal compensation. As shown in the example 1 :

|                  |                                                                                |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Example 1        |                                                                                |
| ST               | 干燥而温暖的风浩浩荡荡地吹上半年                                                               |
| Back Translation | The dry and warm wind blows <u>in full force and grandeur</u> for half a year. |
| TT               | Dry and warm winds rise on the land, blowing hard for the next six months.     |

In ST, the metaphor was identified by CMT (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) with the mapping "WIND IS AN ARMY", while in TT, this metaphor was paraphrased, weakening its meaning and replacing it with the ordinary adjective "hard." However, in hybrid analytical model, the interpretation did not appear alone but presented through multimodel compensation (Pedersen, 2011), both visually (the image “the grass being blown away by the wind”) and auditorily (the howling of the wind), thus compensating for the "grand" function in the source language. Therefore, the successful translation of this metaphor is inseparable from the effect of multimodel compensation.

|                         |                                                                                    |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Example 50</b>       |  |
| <b>ST</b>               | 对于海边的人来说， <u>更深的诱惑</u> 还在深海之中。                                                     |
| <b>Back Translation</b> | To the seaside residents, <u>a deeper temptation</u> is still deep down the ocean  |
| <b>TT</b>               | To the seaside residents, the deep ocean is much more attractive for hunting.      |

In example 50, CMT was used to identify the metaphor in ST: NATURE IS A SEDUCTRESS. It transformed the strongly metaphorical expression as "temptation" into normal adjective "attractive" by paraphrasing. The hybrid analytical model reveals that the addition of "for hunting" (Specification) acts as a visual supplementary explanation, linking the abstract concept of "attraction" to the concrete visual image of underwater view from the bottom of the sea. The vivid underwater scenery is used to highlight the metaphor "deeper temptation" in the source language.

In summary, when metaphors are weakened or disappear during translation, they can often be fully explained by multimodal compensation in AVT, visuals and sound effects as demonstrated in the examples above. It is a significant characteristic that distinguishes audiovisual translation from classical translation.

#### 4.4.2. Visual Anchor

Vinay & Darbelnet (1958/1995) treat translation as text-to-text transformation. However, the study found that metaphor translation in subtitles is often constrained by their corresponding images, subtitle selection depends on the image while simultaneously needing to keep synchronized with it to avoid cognitive inconsistency.

|                  |                                                                                    |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Example 41       |  |
| ST               | 水底的世界被整个打捞起来了。                                                                     |
| Back Translation | The <u>underwater world</u> was salvaged in its entirety.                          |
| TT               | The entire load of fish has been extracted.                                        |

In example 41, the metaphor was identified by CMT with the mapping "FISH IS A WORLD". In classical translation model, the paraphrase was adopted to replace the metaphor in ST with "entire load of fish" for linguistic simplification. However, the hybrid analytical model revealed that the contraindication was a visual anchor. The image was showing a whole view of a fishing net full of fish. The literal translation ("the underwater world") conflicted with the visual presentation of the "a fishing net full of fish" distracting the viewer. Therefore, it explains why a simple literal translation is acceptable only when visually supported. In this case, it demonstrates the inadequacy of classical translation models in explaining the compromises made in AVT under the influence of visual anchors.

|                  |                                                                                           |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Example 19       |       |
| ST               | 笋取出来要盖好土，就地利用自然。                                                                          |
| Back Translation | After picking up the bamboo shoots, cover the rest with dirt, <u>make use of nature</u> . |
| TT               | Covered with earth                                                                        |

In example 19, the metaphor was identified by CMT with the mapping "NATURE IS A TOOL." In classical translation mode, the metaphor in the source language is omitted by using Newmark's translation strategy, implying a loss of meaning. However, in hybrid analytical model, the meaning is not lost but largely transferred to the visual channel, because

visual anchor bears the task of information transmission: the image shows that farmers are filling in the pit after harvesting bamboo shoots. Classical translation models failed to explain the omission as multimodal compensation.

In summary, one of the most significant limitations of classical translation models in AVT lies in visual anchoring. Metaphors in ST can sometimes be omitted or substituted, depending on the images. Unlike classical translation models, hybrid translation goes beyond the literal interpretation of metaphors, prioritizing visuals and supplementing with short subtitles to maximize the audience's ability to receive and understand information quickly.

#### 4.4.3. Constraint-Driven Demetaphorization

Subtitling is constrained by reading speed, spatial limits, and synchronisation (Pedersen, 2011), which classical models merely consider. In classical translation models, Newmark or Vinay & Darbelnet strive to find semantic equivalents, driven by linguistic considerations. However, in AVT, translators must consider multiple factors, aiming to achieve maximum information density within a short timeframe at a specific reading speed. This goal is often limited by the inherent constraints of the subtitles themselves.

|                         |                                                                                     |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Example 8</b>        |  |
| <b>ST</b>               | <u>重头戏是垮炖杂鱼</u>                                                                     |
| <b>Back Translation</b> | Stewed Fishes is <u>traditional opera involving much singing and action</u>         |
| <b>TT</b>               | The main dish is Stewed Fishes.                                                     |

In Example 8, the translator employs Newmark's 'paraphrase' to convey the metaphor's meaning. However, a purely linguistic analysis overlooks the strict temporal constraints. The CMT mapping 'THE MEAL IS A TRADITIONAL OPERA' carries a heavy cultural load that requires significant cognitive processing. Given the 2-3 second subtitle duration, it is difficult for the audience to instantly map 'opera' to 'food.'

Consequently, the ECR strategy of 'specification' is adopted, sacrificing the metaphorical image to prioritize readability and synchronization.

|                  |                                                                                    |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Example 4        |  |
| ST               | 主角本来应该是春笋。                                                                         |
| Back Translation | The <u>protagonist</u> should have been spring bamboo shoots.                      |
| TT               | The soup was cooked with Spring bamboo shoots.                                     |

Example 4 illustrates Vinay & Darbelnet’s translation strategy ‘modulation.’ The metaphor in ST was identified by CMT with the mapping: INGREDIENT IS A PROTAGONIST. The hybrid analytical model reveals that the translation strategy is driven by spatial constraints; the translator prioritizes the functional role of the ingredient while sacrificing its rhetorical imagery to fit the subtitle limitations

In summary, classical translation models fail to explain why metaphors in subtitles must be omitted, or rather, they can only consider the reasons from a linguistic or semantic perspective. However, in hybrid analytical model, the reason for de-metaphorization is constraint-driven, primarily due to constraints of time and space.

4.4.4. Insufficient Explanation of Cultural Functional Equivalence

Translation is not merely about converting source language into the target language; it also involves the interaction between the cultures corresponding to different languages. Many metaphors carry profound, specific cultural connotations (e.g., food culture, humanistic characteristics, idioms, proverbs, etc.). Classical translation models provide appropriate adaptive or equivalent translation strategies based on the metaphorical expressions of the source language. However, when interpreting culturally embedded metaphors, classical translation models cannot explain why or how metaphors in the source language need to be substituted in AVT. The stage of CMT in the hybrid analytical model is instrumental in explaining the reason behind ‘modulation’ (V&D) or ‘adaptation’ (Newmark). The findings indicate that when cognitive

mappings in the source domain (Chinese) and target domain (English) diverge, metaphors are often neutralized, even where direct linguistic translation is technically feasible.

|                         |                                                                                    |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Example 3</b>        |  |
| <b>ST</b>               | 松茸属于野生菌中的 <u>贵族</u> 。                                                              |
| <b>Back Translation</b> | Matsutake is the <u>noble</u> in wild mushrooms                                    |
| <b>TT</b>               | Matsutake is very expensive.                                                       |

In Example 3, Newmark's 'paraphrase' categorizes the linguistic shift but fails to explain the motivation behind it. In the hybrid analytical model, metaphor was identified by CMT with the mapping FOOD IS AN ARISTOCRAT. The metaphor 'aristocrat' in Chinese context contains high value and status, symbolizing higher prices. While mapping food onto a strict social hierarchy in English risks creating an unexpected comedic effect inappropriate with the documentary genre. Consequently, by adopting 'specification' form ECR strategies, extracting the metaphor's core value (price) rather than retaining the image, thereby prioritizing the target audience's cognitive acceptance.

|                         |                                                                                     |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Example 20</b>       |  |
| <b>ST</b>               | 松茸的香味 <u>浓烈袭人</u> 。                                                                 |
| <b>Back Translation</b> | The fragrance of the matsutake mushrooms <u>sweeps over you</u> .                   |
| <b>TT</b>               | Matsutake has an intense scent.                                                     |

In example 20, the translator employs "modulation" from Vinay & Darbelnet, shifting from the abstract to the concrete. In the hybrid analytical model, metaphor is identified by CMT with the mapping SMELL IS AN AGGRESSOR. The metaphor "袭人"(literally 'to attack people') in the source language is a common literary metaphor for description of

overwhelming fragrance. While in the target language, descriptions of smells typically favor neutral verbs like "drift" or "fill," rarely using aggressive terms like "attack" or "sweep over." Consequently, the translation neutralizes the metaphor's aggression, transforming it into the descriptive word "intense," emphasizing the sensory experience.

In conclusion, classical translation models fall short in explaining the logic behind cultural adaptation, particularly regarding culturally embedded metaphors. Conversely, the hybrid analytical model, grounded in CMT, explains the reasons for "modulation" in translating metaphors, which are driven not merely by linguistic fluency, but by the necessity to resolve cognitive divergence between the ST and TT. Overall, classical translation models often prove inadequate as they fail to explain the interaction of visual, auditory, and verbal elements in AVT. The proposed hybrid analytical model effectively addresses these limitations by integrating three stages (see Figure 2) into a multidimensional framework. Unlike classical approaches, focusing on text-to-text translation, this model incorporates multimodal elements, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of the complex transformations required to achieve functional equivalence in subtitling.

## V DISCUSSION

The analysis of 50 metaphorical expressions from the Chinese documentary *A Bite of China* (episode 1, season 1) reveals several important instances regarding the translation of metaphors in an audiovisual domain, especially when viewed through the proposed hybrid model integrating conceptual metaphor theory, multimodal profiling, and cross-cultural reconstruction.

### 5.1 Interaction between Metaphors and Multimodal Profiling

The proposed hybrid analytical model reveals that many metaphors in AVT are composed of both visual and auditory elements. When visual elements are abundant, linguistic metaphors are typically simplified or omitted (e.g., Indicating the changing of the seasons by transitions of scenes.) This corroborates Forceville's (2008) argument that audiovisual context redistributes metaphorical load across different modalities, potentially reducing the need for metaphorical language in subtitles. However, it does not apply to all situations, especially when images and sounds do not supply the metaphorical concept enough, linguistic metaphors are retained to serve a necessary explanatory function, such

as with invisible processes like 'breathing' or 'fermentation' in the documentary.

### *5.2 Metaphorical Downgrading in Subtitles*

In this study, metaphors involving natural forces, local beliefs, and dietary values were often downgraded and replaced with less descriptive expressions in TT. (e.g., the metaphor "vast army" in ST to describe the strength of the wind was simplified to "hard" in TT) When the metaphorical expressions in subtitles are universal (e.g., "skyrocket") or visually reinforced by the image, they were retained in TT. Besides, Chinese idioms, proverbs, and sayings are largely downgraded due to audience comprehension. These findings highlight the contradiction between metaphor retention and spatial-temporal constraints. Hence, metaphorical downgrading can effectively shorten subtitles, keeping them synchronized with the documentary, corroborating Pedersen's (2015:167) observation that "many oral features, such as pauses, repetitions, false starts, etc. that are very common to spoken discourse, get 'cleansed' to adapt to the code of written language"

### *5.3 Cross-Cultural Reconstruction*

This findings reveal that translators tend to avoid literal translation when handling metaphors which are deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture (e.g., the metaphor "绝招"/literally "ancestral trick" in ST is substituted with the noun "recipe" in TT to aid understanding.) Simultaneously, for improving reading flow, translators occasionally add target-oriented metaphors. (e.g., while the subtitles in ST are: "there are salt wells around sand stones", a metaphor "home" is used, demonstrating a distributional pattern in TT. This metaphor is introduced to suit English idiomatic expressions, even though such conceptual mapping is rarely found in the Chinese context. These strategies indicate that when translating culturally embedded metaphors, cross-cultural accessibility is usually a priority for translators, rather than original image retention. Although the metaphorical meaning is often weakened, the translation still manages to retain its intended message (e.g., the "gift" of nature). These adjustments support the argument that documentary translation requires more aggressive cultural adaptation than fiction (Zou, 2025).

## **VI CONCLUSION**

This research constructs a hybrid analytical framework by integrating Conceptual Metaphor Theory, classical translation strategies (Newmark, 1988; Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958/1995), and ECR (Extralinguistic Cultural References) strategies (Pedersen, 2011). Through an analysis of 50 metaphors from *A Bite of China* (Season 1, Episode 1), the findings highlight that classical translation models are inadequate for fully addressing the complexities of metaphors in Audiovisual Translation (AVT), especially due to the unique challenges posed by multimodal interaction, spatial-temporal constraints, and cultural specificity.

The research demonstrates that while classical translation models (e.g., modulation, paraphrase, adaptation), are still useful in translating metaphors from linguistic perspectives, they lack the power for explaining why metaphors are omitted or substituted in subtitling. The metaphorical expressions are conveyed through visual, auditory and linguistic channels in subtitling. The research illustrates that factors like visual anchoring and spatial-temporal constraints directly lead to omission or demetaphorization, which classical translation models failed to give an adequately explanation. Consequently, the disappearance of metaphors in subtitles may not stem from translation loss but rather from the compensatory role played by audiovisual elements (image, sound), especially “when a metaphor is visualised, the verbal audio and the non-verbal visual channels interact very closely.” (Pedersen, 2015:162).

Additionally, the study identifies cultural and cognitive factors as crucial part in metaphor translation. To bridge gaps in understanding, metaphors deeply rooted in Chinese culture are often neutralized to suit the target audience (e.g., changing the abstract expression of 'noble' to the value of 'expensive'). This aligns with Lakoff's (1987, p. 312) definition of translation as cross-linguistic 'mapping'. CMT here, serves as an explanatory tool, giving the support for the metaphor substitutions: the differences between source and target cultural mapping requires modulation. Therefore, metaphor translation in AVT is merely a linguistic transformation but a process of cross-cultural reconstruction.

Ultimately, the Hybrid Analytical Model offers a multidimensional framework for metaphor translation in AVT. Through the integration of cognitive and multimodal dimensions, it addresses the specific challenges of subtitling, demonstrating that effective strategies must align with both audiovisual constraints and audience reception. Theoretically, the study addresses the limitations of classical models in AVT; practically, this research provides insights into handling metaphors in subtitles under technical constraints. Future research may apply this analytical

framework to other AVT genres, given that challenges like readability and cultural adaptation are universal.

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