

Hermeneutic Strategies in Globalized Translation

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Abstract. This article explores how literary translators dismantle or preserve imagery when they carry metaphor across languages in an era of accelerated global exchange. Drawing on hermeneutic philosophy and current descriptive studies, it shows that metaphorical meaning is rarely “carried over” intact; instead, translators practise selective metaphorical reframing – a spectrum of interventions that replace, unfold, or silence figurative images to keep narrative horizons open for new readers. Bringing together case analyses from Arabic-to-English, English-to-Uzbek and Kurdish-to-English translation, the discussion demonstrates that reframing is governed by the translator’s historical pre-understanding and by the cultural affordances of the target polysystem. Implications are offered for training, ethics and digital tools.

Key words: hermeneutics; metaphor translation; selective reframing; imagery; globalisation; Uzbek studies; cognitive metaphor; literary mediation.

Introduction

Globalised publication networks promise literary proximity, yet the figurative density of fiction often resists unmediated circulation. Recent market reports show that the most-translated books in 2024–2025 come from nineteen source languages, but fewer than one-third preserve their original imagery unchanged as judged by reviewers and paratextual commentary. Hermeneutic theory re-reads such mediation not as loss but as *Bildung* – a formative dialogue between text and interpreter. Translational hermeneutics therefore asks not *whether* imagery survives but *how* it is re-created in the target horizon. In practice, this recreation frequently takes the form of *selective metaphorical reframing*: translators lighten, substitute or amplify metaphors so that new readers can participate imaginatively without forfeiting narrative coherence (Kazemi & Sanei, 2020).

Seen through Gadamer’s hermeneutic circle, every act of metaphor translation begins with the translator’s historically situated *pre-understanding* and ends with a fusion of horizons that is never final but always open to further dialogue (Abduganieva, 2025). This openness is intensified by globalisation, where translations circulate amid varied ideologies, marketing frames and algorithmic recommender systems. The translator’s task, then, is double: to keep the poem or novel intelligible across cultures and to prevent the global marketplace from flattening its local semantic textures.

Main Discussion

Empirical research supplies three intersecting perspectives. First, cognitive-linguistic work on cross-language metaphor confirms that conceptual mappings such as *TIME IS MONEY* or *LIFE IS A JOURNEY* do not transfer symmetrically even in closely related languages; gaps widen in Uzbek–English pairs where morphological and pragmatic cues diverge (Gayvullayeva, 2025). Second, hermeneutic case studies show that translators of Arabic poetry into English systematically “dismantle” layered images by splitting them into sequential similes or by inserting explicatory lexis – a move that Lahiani (2022) calls *responsive recreation*. Third, narrative-theoretical studies of

reframing (Baker, 2006) document how selective appropriation and labelling re-orient readers toward unfamiliar moral landscapes; Amedi & Al-Rubai'i's Kurdish corpus proves that such strategies dominate both literary and didactic genres.

Synthesising these strands, we can map five recurrent hermeneutic manoeuvres used to handle fictional imagery. (1) **Metaphor-to-Metaphor Substitution** retains figurative status but replaces source imagery with culturally resonant counterparts – e.g., rendering “*a cedar heart*” as “*qalbi sandal*” in Uzbek, invoking local arboreal symbolism. (2) **Metaphor-to-Simile Conversion** breaks dense images into comparative clauses, a tactic favoured by English translators of Soviet Uzbek prose to preserve poetic rhythm (Inomjonova & Batirova, 2024). (3) **Discursive Amplification** adds brief glosses that unfold submerged connotations; this can be seen in the 2023 Bahdini Kurdish translations where ideologically loaded metaphors about land are glossed to foreground political stakes. (4) **Symbolic Relocation** moves imagery from one semantic field to another – translating “*city of mirrors*” not literally but as “*lugar de ecos*” (“place of echoes”) in Spanish editions to evoke sonic rather than optical resonance. (5) **Strategic Silencing** omits metaphors whose force cannot be recovered without exhaustive commentary, sometimes compensating later with newly introduced figurative clusters; Lei's NLP-assisted poetry experiments note that machine suggestions often prompt such deletions, which human post-editors then balance with alternative imagery.

These manoeuvres are not arbitrary. They obey two hermeneutic constraints. The *inner constraint* is fidelity to the text's semantic potential: even when a metaphor is dropped, the translator strives to preserve the *effect* of estrangement or symbolism. The *outer constraint* is the receiving culture's genre convention and ideological climate: translators working in multilingual Uzbekistan retain more mystical plant imagery when translating from English fantasy than when rendering realist novels for school curricula, where clarity norms dominate.

Case material clarifies the dynamics. In Laihani's comparison of ten English versions of Labīd's pre-Islamic poem, literal renderings of the desert mirror (“*the mirage is a polished silver shield*”) fail to evoke the poem's existential tone; translations that recast the line as “*the horizon shone like burnished steel*” achieved higher aesthetic acceptability among Arabic-speaking judges because they reframed metaphor into a dynamic simile while retaining metallic luminosity. By contrast, Gayvullayeva's analysis of contemporary Uzbek novels found that translators often neutralised metaphors of economic ambition (“climbing the corporate ladder”) by substituting proverbs about perseverance, thus aligning Western capitalist imagery with local moral values.

Technological mediation complicates the picture. Transformer-based models excel at literal transfer but frequently mis-render deep imagery, amplifying the need for human reframing. Lei's 2025 study shows that chapter-level MT improves BLEU yet still mistranslates 42 % of imagist metaphors, prompting post-editors to invoke one of the five strategies outlined above. Such findings support the argument that hermeneutic competence – not raw bilingualism – remains the translator's unique value-add in the age of generative AI.

Pedagogically, selective metaphorical reframing can be taught through “contrastive scene-folding” exercises where students rewrite a metaphor three times: once literally, once domesticated, once in symbolic relocation. In Uzbek translator-training programmes, this task has encouraged emerging translators to articulate why certain images resonate or fail within their readership's cognitive environment. Ethical guidelines should likewise recognise reframing as a legitimate, accountable intervention rather than a betrayal of the source, provided that paratext or discourse context signals the shift.

Conclusion

Hermeneutic strategies in globalised translation are best understood not as defensive tactics against “untranslatability” but as creative acts that keep literary imagery circulating under new semantic skies. Selective metaphorical reframing – substantiated by studies in Arabic, Uzbek and Kurdish contexts – illustrates how translators negotiate between fidelity and intelligibility, guided by pre-understanding, cultural pragmatics and evolving reader expectations. As machine translation extends the reach of fiction yet stumbles over figurative density, the translator's interpretive agency becomes

more – not less – indispensable. Training regimes that foreground hermeneutic reflection, alongside cognitive-linguistic insight, will better equip translators to dismantle and rebuild imagery responsibly, ensuring that the world’s stories remain both rooted and shareable in our interconnected literary commons.

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