

# TRANSLATING LOVE METAPHORS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN IN LOVE AND ITS VIETNAMESE TRANSLATION

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**Abstract:** *Metaphor plays a key role in expressing love in modernist literature, where emotional experience is conveyed through figurative language. Women in Love (1920) by D. H. Lawrence is rich in love metaphors that reflect psychological depth and cultural views of intimacy. This study investigates how these metaphors are rendered in two Vietnamese translations: Nguoi dan ba dang yeu (Ho Anh Quang, 2011) and Buoì sang cuoi cung (Phan Le Thanh, 2000). Employing a mixed methods approach grounded in conceptual metaphor theory, the analysis combines qualitative comparison with quantitative frequency data to examine translation strategies and their effects. The findings show clear differences in approach, with one translation favoring metaphor preservation and the other relying more on paraphrase for cultural accessibility. The study highlights the importance of balancing semantic fidelity and cultural sensitivity in translating literary metaphors.*

**Key words:** *Translating, love metaphors, comparative study, Women in Love, Vietnamese.*

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## 1. Introduction

Metaphor is a key tool for conceptualizing and expressing love, encoding psychological states, cultural values, and interpersonal dynamics. Modernist literature, with its focus on inner experience, often uses metaphor to depict complex, conflicted relationships. D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920) exemplifies this through dense love metaphors that portray love as dynamic, sometimes destructive, shaped by desire and existential struggle. Translating such metaphors requires balancing linguistic form, conceptual meaning, and cultural interpretation.

Existing studies on metaphor translation often focus on theory or isolated examples, with limited attention to emotionally charged love metaphors across multiple translations, especially English - Vietnamese. Qualitative approaches dominate, leaving a gap for systematic, quantitative comparison.

This study compares love metaphors in *Women in Love* and two Vietnamese translations: *Nguoi dan ba dang yeu* and *Buoì sang cuoi cung*. It examines how metaphors are conceptualized and rendered, and what translation strategies affect meaning and emotional tone. Using a mixed methods approach grounded in conceptual metaphor theory, the study combines qualitative analysis with quantitative frequency data to reveal patterns and translator tendencies, offering insights into how metaphor translation mediates emotional meaning in cross-cultural literary contexts.

## 2. Literature review

Metaphor is widely recognized as a cognitive and cultural phenomenon rather than merely

a stylistic device. Conceptual metaphor theory provides a foundational framework for analyzing love metaphors, which are grounded in embodied experience yet shaped by cultural values (Kövecses, Gibbs). Translation studies emphasize that transferring metaphors involves negotiation of conceptual, emotional, and ideological meaning rather than simple lexical substitution. Vietnamese scholarship has documented culturally specific love metaphors reflecting collectivist and moral perspectives, but largely focuses on classification rather than translation. Comparative analyses of multiple Vietnamese translations of the same literary text remain scarce, highlighting a research gap addressed by this study.

## 3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative dominant, text-based comparative design to examine how love metaphors in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920) are translated into Vietnamese in *Buoì sang cuoi cung* and *Nguoi dan ba dang yeu*. Using close reading and systematic ST - TT1 - TT2 comparison, the analysis focuses on how metaphorical meaning and emotional effects are preserved, modified, or recontextualized. Each source metaphor and its two Vietnamese renderings constitute one unit of analysis.

Grounded in conceptual metaphor theory, love-related metaphors are identified and categorized by source domains. Translation strategies are classified as preservation, transformation, demetaphorization, substitution, or omission, and evaluated in terms of their impact on conceptual coherence and emotional tone.

Data collection proceeded in stages. Thematically relevant sections of the novel were selected,

producing 242 initial metaphor candidates, which were refined to 81 aligned items after applying strict inclusion criteria. Analysis combined qualitative interpretation with descriptive quantitative analysis of strategy frequency, allowing systematic comparison without inferential claims.

Reliability was ensured through trilingual alignment tables, a code book, and an audit trail. AI tools were used only for preliminary screening and alignment; all analytical judgments were theory driven and researcher controlled.

#### 4. Findings

##### 4.1. Major conceptual domains of love metaphors

Metaphors surrounding Love in *Women in Love* arise from a group of interconnected conceptual areas under the triad of intensity, embodiment and instability. These domains, under the last dataset (M01 - M81), are not distinct categories, but rather, they are interchangeable frames that Lawrence employs to structure emotions, conflict and intimacy. As they are the most important areas, there are fire, force, light/ darkness, storms/ water, illness/ pain, not to mention other earthly and celestial schemas that organize relational experience. In these metaphorical areas, there is a rather distinct conceptual climate in which love is no longer an emotion, but a condition, an active state that is volatile, corporeal and ethical.

Examples including M09 (love/attraction is fire) M11 (passion is a fire) suggest flamand hatred describes affection as an intensity that burns, and as a fire that can rage and become uncontrollable. With fire, we can describe the dual nature of passion. It radiates heat and focus, and fires as, and can also destroy. In these narratives, the 'heat' that represents desire, also represents the same things as the nature of passion suggests rage, anger, and emotional exhaustion. This illustrates how the passion also represents the dual nature of relational attachment.

Another of the most common domains describes love as a force it constitutes outside oneself and, as in M16 (love is a magnetic force)/ in M21 (attraction/ love is a physical force). These metaphor that indicate the imposition of pull and attraction, and describes intimacy as an involuntary state that compels pull. Moreover, the force domains suggests an imbalance, that attraction isn't closeness in a mutual manner, and that it includes pressure, resistance and even an involuntary giving up as dominance. This aligns love to physical laws and seeks to highlight the absence of emotional agency and desire and the inevitability that accompanies such an absence confirming the same.

Metaphors connoting light (e.g. M60 love is light/divine energy; M65 love is light vs. darkness) encapsulate emotions within the moral and

existential lexicon. Intimacy, in this context, sits within wider evaluative parameters, wherein light embodies positivity and the qualities of revelation, transcendence, and salvation, and where darkness stands for negativity and the qualities of threat, obscurity, and death. The binary is not solely ornamental; it places love at the intersection of deeper existential meaning, truth, and the essence of spiritual risk. The light/darkness domain also provides a prism through which to express subtle shifts of emotional clarity instances in which characters in the narrative "see," and self aware moments in which they are paralyzed by fear, doubt, or moral stasis.

At the same time, Lawrence draws upon storms/ water and illness/pain to further enhance the love lived experience on the sensory and psychological level. M01 (emotional crisis in love is a drowning/ storm) and M03 (absence/anxiety in love is a physical ailment) are examples of metaphors that portray relational distress as overwhelming and out of control, and, respectively, as being physically and emotionally incapacitated. These domains anchor love in the body: one experiences anxiety sickness, drowning in crises, and one is physically vulnerable in pain. The mappings that do this from the body strengthen the emotion in the narrative because visceral experiences that one knows are evoked and can be "felt," even if the experiences are outside the reader.

All of these imagination domains together increases the strength of the description of love as both renewing and disorienting. Love, for instance, can spark, shine, attract, lift, as well as ensnare, overwhelm, and cause pain. This imaginative background is indispensable to study how the two Vietnamese translations deal with and negotiate Lawrence's metaphors: whether they preserve, reshape, or soften the images, and how these choices affect the emotional and cultural impact of the translated texts.

##### 4.2. Translation strategies used in the two Vietnamese versions

This section examines the strategies of translation for the two Vietnamese versions with regards to the 162 coded items and the 81 items relating to each translation. A strategy was allocated to each token as per the definitions provided.

The distribution of strategies used in TT1 (NĐBĐY) and in TT2 (BSCC) is encapsulated in Table 1. The data reveal that both translators maintained most of Lawrence's metaphorical imaging. However, in contrast to TT1, which tended to intervene more through demetaphorization and substitution, TT2 used more direct reproductions.

*Table 1. Distribution of translation strategies in the two Vietnamese versions (based on 81 metaphor*

items x 2 translations = 162 translation tokens)

Translation strategy	NĐBĐY/ TT1 (n = 81)	BSCC/ TT2 (N = 81)
1. Reproduction	59 (72.8%)	70 (86.4%)
2. Substitution	7 (8.6%)	NĐBĐY/ TT1 (n = 81) BSCC/ TT2 (N = 81)
3. Demetaphorization	11 (13.6%)	5 (6.2%)
4. Metaphor → Simile	1 (1.2%)	1 (1.2%)
5. Addition (extra imagery)	1 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)
6. Omission	1 (1.2%)	1 (1.2%)
7. Remetaphorization (slightly shifted)	1 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)

a) Reproduction as the dominant strategy

When it comes to reproduction as the leading strategy in both TTs, it constituted 59/81 tokens (72.8%) and 70/81 tokens (86.4%) in TT2. Thus, the tendency to preserve the source domain and figurative framing of the English original is extremely high.

When the source domains are fairly run of the mill or easily accessed within the Vietnamese figurative system, as is the case with the fire, force and LIGHT metaphors, there are more examples of the reproduction of the metaphors. For instance, in M09 (love/ attraction is fire) and M16 (love is magnetic force), both TT1 and TT2 preserve the figurative mapping and are able to articulate the images with the use of fully appropriate Vietnamese phrases.

b) Demetaphorization: higher in TT1 than in TT2

Demetaphorization is more realized in TT1 (11/81 tokens; 13.6%) than in TT2 (5 tokens out of 81; 6.2%). Here, the metaphorical expression is realized as a paraphrase, which is literal or more abstract, leading to a reduction of the visual images and resulting in what Loss is termed as the type of translation.

This is evident in M04 (impact of love/ attraction is an inoculation), which is a case of demetaphorization in both TTs, and M12 (a woman is a passive substance/ liquid) indicates the contrast whereby TT2 demetaphorizes, while TT1 introduces a shifted figurative rendering, which is termed (re) metaphorization.

c) Substitution: more frequent in TT1 than in TT2

In TT1, TT2 had 7 instances (8.6%) in comparison to TT2's 4 instances (4.9%). This strategy usually results in a Transformation type where the source metaphor is replaced with a different metaphor, which is evaluated to be more fluent, culturally relevant, and more salient in Vietnamese.

Two cases are M08 and M19, in which the translator substitute the original Vietnamese image metaphors and construct a different Vietnamese image figurative mapping while keeping the expressive nature of the passage.

d) Low frequency strategies and translator specific tendencies

Metaphor Simile appears once in every

translation (1.2%) and in M07 where the figurative effect is retained with the use of a simile. Omission also appears once in every translation (1.2%): TT2 omits a metaphor in M21 whereas TT1 omits metaphor in M72.

Two strategies are unique in TT1 – Addition (of more imagery) in M11 and Remetaphorization (of a different structure) in M12. Even though it is the least frequent (each is 1.2%) of the group, these examples still show that in TT1, there is an occasion of intensifying or shifting the metaphorical imagery, and not just stopping at the mere reproduction of the metaphor.

Overall, the results in Table 4.1 show there are, at least, two different types: TT2 has a more conservative and reproduction type profile, while TT1 has a more original and more intervention type profile, with demetaphorization and substitution, or with application of intervention strategies.

This does not mean TT1 consistently weakens figurativeness. Rather, TT1 shows more variation, with more imagery added, more typographical changes and some instances having more frequent demetaphorization.

TT2, in contrast, achieves a higher rate of direct metaphor retention, resulting in a more consistent preservation of the source text's metaphorical texture across the dataset.

At the same time, both translations show strong overall alignment with the source text, as indicated by the high reproduction rate in each version.

The low frequency of omission in both versions suggests that metaphor deletion is not a preferred solution in translating the selected excerpts.

4.3. Patterns of metaphor preservation, transformation and loss

This subsection examines the translation outcomes (types) across the 162 coded tokens, categorized as preservation, transformation, loss, and addition in accordance with the operational definitions.

Table 2. Distribution of translation types in the two Vietnamese versions (based on 81 metaphor items x 2 translations = 162 translation tokens)

Translation type	NĐBĐY/ TT1 (n = 81)	BSCC/ TT2 (N = 81)	Total (N = 162)
1. Preservation	59 (72.8%)	70 (86.4%)	129 (79.6%)
2. Transformation	9 (11.1%)	5 (6.2%)	14 (8.6%)
3. Loss	12 (14.8%)	6 (7.4)	18 (11.1%)
4. Addition	1 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)

a) Preservation as the dominant translation type

In both TTs, the most dominant translation outcome is Preservation, although in TT2 it is substantially more pronounced than in TT1, as the figures indicate 59/81 (72.8%) in TT1 to 70/81 (86.4%) in TT2. This is in line with the

high occurrences of Reproduction, preserving metaphorical mapping is the by default outcome at both translators' ends.

For metaphors with source domains of Vietnamese figuration, with a high degree of familiarity, e.g., fire, force, light preservation is particularly stable. Consider, for instance, attraction as a compelling pull in both translations for M16 (love is magnetic force); here, the figurative construal is preserved.

b) Transformation: limited, and slightly more frequent in TT1

In TT1, Transformations accounted for 9/81 tokens (11.1%) and in Tt2, for 5/81 tokens (6.2%). Transformation arise more often than not from Substitution, Metaphor → Simile or Remetaphorization, where in the metaphorical effect is maintained but the mapping is either changed or expressed in a different figuration.

In M07, for instance, both translators' transformations of the metaphor as an explicit simile (Metaphor → Simile) are acknowledged. Another instance is M08 or M19, where the outcome of substitution is a Vietnamese metaphor that is culturally and stylistically congruent but diverges from the original source domain framing.

c) Loss: higher in TT1 than in TT2

Loss is more common in TT1 (12/81 tokens; 14.8%) than in TT2 (6/81 tokens; 7.4%). This pattern is largely associated with demetaphorization, and to a lesser extent omission, where metaphorical imagery is removed and the expression is shifted toward a more concrete or abstract wording.

For example, M04 is demetaphorized in both translation, which weakens the original medical inoculation imagery. In M21, TT2 removes the metaphorical segment, whereas TT1 retains the intended meaning more fully. Despite this difference, both cases are classified as Loss because the metaphorical mapping is reduced or eliminated.

d) Addition: rare and translator specific

Addition occurs only once (1/81 tokens; 1.2%) and appears exclusively in TT1 (M11). In this case, TT1 intensifies the imagery by adding detail to enrich the figurative expression, while TT1 opts for a demetaphorized rendering.

Overall, both Vietnamese versions preserve a substantial proportion of Lawrence's metaphors. TTs shows a clearer tendency to maintain a more direct rendering with fewer interventions. Although TT1 remains largely preservative, it demonstrates a more balanced distribution of changes and losses, reflecting more frequent shifts in strategy such as substitution and demetaphorization.

## 5. Discussion

5.1. *Cultural and emotional implications of translation choices*

The findings reveal clear contrasts in how the two Vietnamese translations mediate the cultural and emotional dimensions of Lawrence's love metaphors. While both versions largely preserve metaphorical expressions, TT2 (BSCC) consistently retains full conceptual mappings, whereas TT1 (NĐBĐY) more frequently employs demetaphorization and substitution. As a result, TT2 sustains higher emotional intensity and modernist ambiguity through coherent metaphor clusters (e.g., fire, force, light), whereas TT1 prioritizes readability and cultural accessibility, reducing figurative density and softening psychological complexity. These differences lead to distinct emotional and interpretive effects in the Vietnamese texts.

5.2. *Cross version comparison in relation to the research questions*

Addressing the research questions, the comparison of 81 metaphor instances shows that metaphor reproduction is the dominant strategy in both translations, though more consistently in TT2 (86.4%) than in TT1 (72.8%). TT1 displays greater strategic diversity, with higher rates of demetaphorization and substitution, indicating a stronger tendency toward restructuring and cultural adaptation. Correspondingly, TT2 preserves more metaphors with fewer losses, while TT1 shows higher levels of transformation and omission. These patterns confirm that TT2 adopts a more source oriented approach, whereas TT1 favors an adaptive, target oriented orientation.

5.3. *Reflections on the theoretical framework and previous studies*

Overall, the findings support conceptual metaphor theory in demonstrating that many love metaphors grounded in embodied experience are cognitively transferable across languages. However, the systematic differences between the two translations indicate that cognitive accessibility alone does not determine translation outcomes. Translators must also negotiate figurative density, ambiguity, and stylistic norms. The contrast between TT2's reproduction focused strategy and TT1's interventionist approach reinforces the view of metaphor translation as interpretive rewriting, where conceptual continuity is shaped by translational purpose, cultural context, and literary convention.

## 6. Conclusion

This study explored how love metaphors in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* are rendered in two Vietnamese translations, with attention to translation strategies and their effects on metaphorical meaning and emotional tone. Using a mixed methods approach, the research shows that Lawrence's love metaphors, grounded in domains such as fire, force, and war, are central to the novel's emotional and modernist character.

The two Vietnamese translations differ in how these metaphors are handled: some are preserved to retain figurative density and emotional intensity, while others are paraphrased or reduced to improve readability and cultural accessibility. These differences highlight the influence of translator agency and cultural norms on metaphor translation.

Overall, the findings confirm that translating love metaphors is an interpretive process that requires balancing conceptual fidelity with clarity for target readers. Although limited in scope, the study underscores the importance of metaphor in literary translation and supports the use of conceptually grounded, mixed method approaches in translation research ■

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## Nghiên cứu so sánh đối chiếu về ẩn dụ tình yêu qua tác phẩm *women in love* và các bản dịch Tiếng Việt

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**Tóm tắt:** Ẩn dụ đóng vai trò then chốt trong việc thể hiện tình yêu trong văn học hiện đại, nơi trải nghiệm cảm xúc được truyền tải chủ yếu qua ngôn ngữ hình tượng. *Women in Love* (1920) của D. H. Lawrence giàu ẩn dụ tình yêu, phản ánh chiều sâu tâm lý và những quan niệm văn hóa về sự thân mật. Nghiên cứu này khảo sát cách các ẩn dụ này được chuyển dịch trong hai bản tiếng Việt: *Ngoài đàn ba đang yêu* (Ho Anh Quang, 2011) và *Buổi sáng cuối cùng* (Phan Lê Thanh, 2000). Áp dụng phương pháp hỗn hợp dựa trên lý thuyết ẩn dụ ý niệm, nghiên cứu kết hợp phân tích định tính với thống kê định lượng để làm rõ các chiến lược dịch và tác động của chúng. Kết quả cho thấy có sự khác biệt rõ rệt trong cách tiếp cận: một bản dịch ưu tiên bảo toàn ẩn dụ, giữ nguyên cường độ cảm xúc, trong khi bản còn lại sử dụng diễn giải và thay thế để tăng tính dễ tiếp nhận về mặt văn hóa. Nghiên cứu nhấn mạnh tầm quan trọng của việc cân bằng giữa trung thành về ý nghĩa và nhạy cảm với chuẩn mực văn hóa trong dịch thuật ẩn dụ văn học.

**Từ khóa:** Chuyển dịch, ẩn dụ tình yêu, nghiên cứu so sánh, *Women in Love*, tiếng Việt.