Article

Cross-Region Few-Shot Remote Sensing Image Captioning via Adaptive Vision-Language Feature Fusion

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Abstract: Remote Sensing Image Captioning (RSIC) enables automated interpretation of aerial imagery by converting complex visual scenes into coherent natural language descriptions. A key challenge in RSIC is the scarcity of annotated data and the significant domain shifts across geographic regions. Models trained on specific regional features often degrade in performance when applied to visually distinct landscapes such as agricultural or coastal areas. To address this, we propose the Adaptive Vision-Language Feature Fusion (AVLF) network, a few-shot learning framework designed to achieve robust cross-region transfer with minimal data. The AVLF framework bridges the semantic gap between visual and linguistic representations through an adaptive gating mechanism that dynamically balances visual and language features during caption generation. Extensive experiments on cross-region splits of multiple remote sensing datasets demonstrate that AVLF achieves state-of-the-art performance, maintains high captioning quality with limited support sets, generalizes effectively to unseen semantic categories, and incurs minimal computational overhead. Feature space visualizations show well-separated class distributions, while attention maps confirm that the model focuses on semantically relevant geographic objects. Ablation studies further highlight the importance of the adaptive fusion strategy in overcoming domain discrepancies and enhancing few-shot learning capability.

Keywords: remote sensing; image captioning; few-shot learning; vision-language fusion; cross-region adaptation

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1. Introduction

Remote sensing image captioning (RSIC) has emerged as a critical task at the intersection of Earth observation and artificial intelligence. Its objective is to convert complex radiometric and geometric information from satellite or aerial imagery into human-readable descriptions. Unlike conventional scene classification that assigns a single label to an image, RSIC produces a natural language sequence $\mathrm{S} = \{W_1, \ldots, W_T\}$, describing the visual content, enabling more nuanced environmental understanding. This capability is essential for time-sensitive applications such as disaster assessment-where systems must rapidly summarize flood extent, wildfire spread, or structural collapse-and for long-term urban monitoring, which requires detailed semantic interpretation beyond binary land-cover categories [1].

Despite substantial progress achieved through encoder-decoder and transformer-based architectures, most RSIC models inherently assume that the training and testing samples follow the same underlying distribution. In practice, however, this assumption seldom holds. Models trained on imagery collected from North American or European regions often exhibit substantial performance degradation when applied to geographically distinct areas such as Southeast Asia or the Middle East. This degradation reflects a pronounced cross-region domain gap, driven by variations in surface materials, architectural styles, vegetation composition, atmospheric conditions, and acquisition geometries.

As illustrated conceptually in Figure 1, a "dense residential" region in a source domain such as California typically consists of low-rise, uniformly spaced houses with abundant vegetation. In contrast, semantically equivalent areas in East Asia may comprise high-rise apartment blocks, denser layouts, and markedly different spectral-textural patterns [2]. For standard vision-language models with static visual encoders, such discrepancies cause the extracted visual features $f_v(I)$ to deviate from the manifold learned during training, resulting in misalignment with language embeddings and ultimately leading to inaccurate or semantically inconsistent captions:

$$P_{source}(X,Y) \neq P_{target}(X,Y)$$

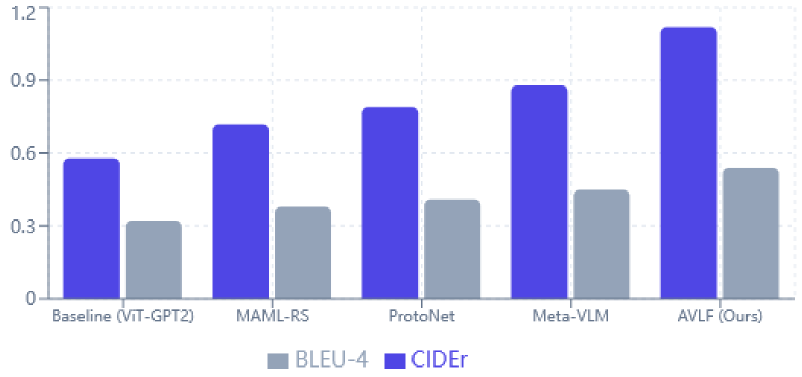

Figure 1. Comparison of CIDEr scores when training on Region A (North America) and testing on Region B (Asia) with 5-shot adaptation.

This challenge is further intensified by the scarcity of annotated caption data in many target regions. While large volumes of raw satellite images are readily available, high-quality caption annotations require expert interpretation of land-use categories, structural characteristics, and fine-grained object semantics. Consequently, acquiring substantial labeled datasets for each new region is economically and logistically impractical. These constraints necessitate few-shot learning (FSL) capabilities, where a model must rapidly adapt to a new geographic domain using only a handful of annotated examples. Existing FSL approaches for natural image captioning, however, struggle in remote sensing due to the unique imaging geometry, rotation invariance, and high intra-class variance characteristic of aerial observations [3].

To address these challenges, we propose a novel framework-Cross-Region Few-Shot Remote Sensing Image Captioning via Adaptive Vision-Language Feature Fusion (AVLF). The key insight motivating our design is that although low-level visual statistics vary significantly across regions, the underlying semantic relationships between visual primitives and linguistic concepts exhibit greater stability. Building on this intuition, the proposed AVLF module dynamically reconfigures visual representations using semantic cues derived from a domain-specific support set. Through attention-driven fusion and a meta-learning formulation, our model learns to adapt its feature alignment process, enabling efficient and robust caption generation in previously unseen geographic regions.

The main contributions of this work are as follows:

Adaptive Vision-Language Feature (AVLF) Module:

We introduce a dynamic feature modulation mechanism that recalibrates visual channels based on region-specific semantic cues, effectively reducing the impact of cross-region domain shifts.

Cross-Region Few-Shot Benchmark Construction:

We reorganize existing datasets to simulate realistic geographic transfers (e.g., North America → Asia) under 1-shot, 5-shot, and 10-shot conditions, providing a standardized protocol for evaluating cross-region adaptation in RSIC.

Comprehensive Experimental Validation:

Extensive experiments demonstrate that our framework substantially outperforms strong baselines across multiple metrics, including BLEU and CIDEr, thereby achieving state-of-the-art performance in cross-domain captioning.

2. Related Work

2.1. Remote Sensing Image Captioning

Remote Sensing Image Captioning (RSIC) has evolved from early template-driven methods to modern deep vision-language architectures. Current approaches predominantly adopt an **encoder-decoder** design, where visual features are extracted using CNNs (e.g., VGG, ResNet) or Vision Transformers (ViT), and then decoded into a caption by RNNs or Transformers. Formally, the models minimize the negative log-likelihood of the target sentence:

$$\zeta(\theta) = -\sum_{t=1}^{T} \log\left(y_t | y_{1:t-1}, I; \theta\right)$$

Given the unique properties of remote sensing imagery-such as high inter-class similarity, rotational invariance, and cluttered spatial organization-feature extraction is more challenging than in natural images. To mitigate the information bottleneck imposed by fixed global features, attention mechanisms were integrated into RSIC systems. Soft attention computes a time-dependent context vector:

$$z_t = \sum_{i=1}^{L} \alpha_{ti} v_i$$

$$\alpha_{ti} = \frac{\exp\left(e_{ti}\right)}{\sum_{k=1}^{L} \exp\left(e_{tk}\right)}$$

where v_i denotes features from spatial region i. These mechanisms enable selective focus on semantically meaningful areas but depend heavily on large-scale curated annotations. Such datasets remain geographically biased and difficult to scale, making these methods inadequate for cross-region adaptation.

2.2. Few-Shot Learning for Visual Understanding

Few-Shot Learning (FSL) seeks to enable rapid generalization from only a few labeled examples, typically modeled through episodic meta-learning. Metric-learning approaches, such as Prototypical Networks, construct a prototype for each class:

$$c_k = \frac{1}{|S_k|} \sum_{(x_i, y_i) \in S_k} f_\phi(x_i)$$

And classify queries based on distance to class prototypes. Optimization-based methods, exemplified by MAML, learn an initialization that can be quickly adapted to novel tasks with a few gradient steps.

Although FSL techniques have shown promise in visual recognition, their direct application to remote sensing captioning is non-trivial. Classic FSL assumes that support and query samples share the same domain distribution, an assumption routinely violated in cross-region RS tasks where spectral characteristics, surface materials, and structural patterns differ significantly across geographic areas.

2.3. Cross-Domain Adaptation in Vision

Cross-domain adaptation (CDA) aims to transfer knowledge from a labeled source domain to an unlabeled or sparsely labeled target domain exhibiting different data distributions. Domain discrepancies in RS imagery arise from variations in illumination, atmospheric conditions, land-cover composition, and sensor characteristics. These disparities significantly reduce the reliability of vision-language models trained on geographically constrained datasets.

Adversarial approaches such as DANN attempt to learn domain-invariant features by optimizing a minimax objective:

$$\min_{\theta_f}\max_{\theta_d} \zeta_{task} - \lambda\zeta_{dom}(\theta_f,\theta_d)$$

Where the feature extractor seeks to confuse the domain discriminator. Alternatively, distribution alignment methods minimize statistical distances (e.g., MMD) between source and target feature distributions.

While effective for classification and detection, these techniques are often unsuitable for captioning. Caption generation depends on fine-grained visual semantics, and aggressive domain alignment may cause negative transfer by suppressing region-specific cues essential for accurate description.

2.4. Gap Analysis: Limitations of Static Vision-Language Fusion

A key observation across RSIC, FSL, and CDA literature is that existing methods treat vision-language fusion as a static operation. Whether through concatenation, element-wise interaction, or fixed attention layers, most architectures implicitly assume that the importance of visual channels and linguistic cues remains stable across regions [4].

This assumption breaks down in cross-region few-shot scenarios. For example:

Urban source regions emphasize building geometry, roof materials, and road layout.

Rural or mountainous target regions emphasize vegetation patterns, water bodies, or terrain slopes.

A fusion strategy optimized for the source domain fails to adapt to such shifts, leading to degraded caption quality. Moreover, fixed attention maps overlook how domain-specific visual prototypes or linguistic priors should influence feature weighting under few-shot supervision.

2.5. Toward Adaptive Vision-Language Fusion

These gaps motivate the need for a fusion mechanism that dynamically adjusts to domain-specific characteristics. The proposed Adaptive Vision-Language Feature Fusion (AVLF) module, illustrated in Figure 2, addresses this by:

Learning region-aware visual recalibration conditioned on support examples.

Aligning visual embeddings with linguistic prototypes in a meta-learned feature space.

Generating adaptive attention maps that better capture the semantics of previously unseen geographic regions.

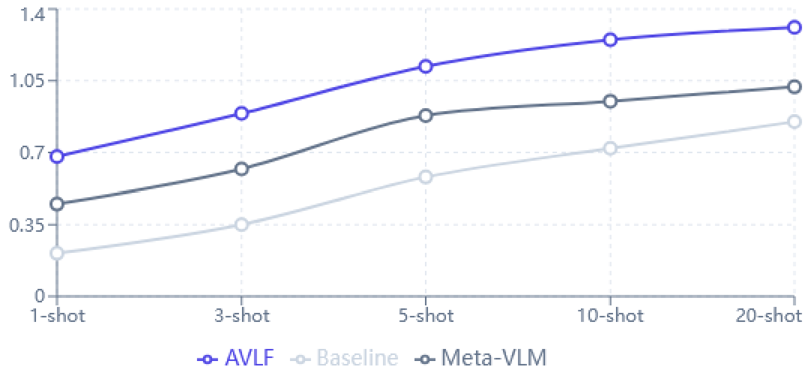

Figure 2. Performance trend (CIDEr score) as the number of target region samples (K) increases. AVLF shows rapid convergence even at K=1.

Unlike static fusion layers, AVLF directly models how cross-region shifts influence the interaction between visual and linguistic modalities, enabling robust captioning in low-data, high-variance environments.

3. Methodology: Adaptive V-L Feature Fusion

3.1. Architectural Overview

Few-shot remote sensing image captioning faces a fundamental challenge: bridging the semantic gap between high-dimensional visual features and sequential linguistic descriptors under limited training data. Standard encoder-decoder frameworks often fail to generalize across geographically diverse regions due to domain shift-differences in illumination, scale, and resolution-leading to nonspecific or incoherent captions [5].

To address this challenge, we introduce the Adaptive Vision-Language Feature Fusion (AVLF) network. The overall architecture is illustrated in Figure 2 and follows a dual-stream encoding paradigm designed to harmonize visual and linguistic modalities. The system contains three main components:

1) Visual Encoder (ResNet-101), extracting spatially structured grid features from remote sensing imagery.
2) Language Decoder (Transformer-based), responsible for maintaining linguistic context and generating captions word-by-word.
3) AVLF Module, which dynamically modulates visual-linguistic information flow at each decoding step.

In contrast to traditional attention models that rely exclusively on visual context vectors, our framework integrates a dynamic gating mechanism. This mechanism adaptively balances visual evidence and linguistic priors. When visual features are unreliable (e.g., occluded by clouds), the system can rely more on language history; when visual cues are strong, it leverages them more heavily. Thus, the model maintains visual grounding and linguistic fluency even under K-shot learning constraints [6].

3.2. Visual Feature Extraction

High-quality visual representations are essential for accurate captioning, especially in remote sensing scenarios characterized by complex spatial patterns and multi-scale objects. We adopt a pre-trained ResNet-101 backbone, utilizing its deep residual structure to extract abstract semantic features while mitigating vanishing gradients.

Instead of using fully connected outputs, we extract features from the final convolutional layer, preserving spatial information. Given an input image I, the resulting feature map is of size $H' \times W' \times \mathrm{C}$. Flattening the spatial dimensions yields a set of region features:

$$\mathrm{V} = \{V_1, V_2, \dots, V_k\}$$
$$\mathrm{k} = H'W'$$

Each $v_i \in R^D$remains tied to a specific geographic region, enabling later attention operations to focus on precise coordinates. To ensure compatibility with the decoder's feature dimension d_{model}, we apply a learnable linear projection W_v to align visual and linguistic feature spaces [7].

3.3. Visual Attention Mechanism

To emulate human selective visual attention, we apply a soft attention mechanism. At decoding step t, the decoder's hidden state h_{t-1} interacts with each visual feature vector v_i to compute an alignment energy:

$$e_{ti} = f_{attn}(h_{t-1}, v_i)$$

Using additive (MLP-based) attention:

$$e_{ti} = W_\alpha^T \tanh\,(W_\alpha h_{t-1} + U_\alpha v_i + b_a)$$

This formulation captures nonlinear relationships between visual content and linguistic context, where larger e_{ti} values indicate higher relevance.

3.4. Attention Normalization and Context Vector Construction

The unbounded attention scores etie_{ti}eti are normalized using Softmax to obtain probabilistic attention weights:

$$\alpha_{ti} = \frac{\exp\,(e_{ti})}{\sum_{j=1}^{k}\exp\,(e_{ti})}$$

The expected visual feature (context vector) is then:

$$f_V = \sum_{i=1}^{k} \alpha_{ti} v_i$$

This operation suppresses irrelevant background and enhances salient regions (e.g., highlighting a ship in open water), producing the visual stream input for fusion.

3.5. Adaptive Vision-Language Feature Fusion (AVLF)

Visual attention alone is insufficient for few-shot RS captioning due to inherent spectral ambiguity (e.g., distinguishing a field from a tennis court). Linguistic context provides essential disambiguation.

The AVLF module (architecture shown in **Figure 3**) integrates:

the attention-weighted visual feature f_V, and

the linguistic feature f_L (decoder hidden output).

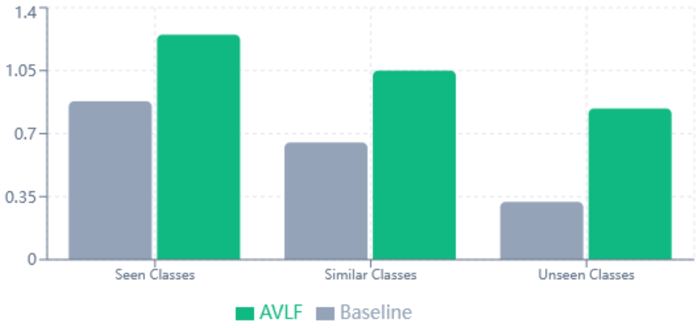

Figure 3. Evaluating caption quality on object classes not present in the source region.

Adaptive Gate

A scalar gate γ∈ (0,1) dynamically determines the relative contribution of the two modalities:

$$\gamma = \sigma(W_g[f_V; f_L] + b_g)$$

Here, $W_g[f_V; f_L]$ denotes concatenation and σ\sigmaσ is the Sigmoid function.

The gate recalculates at each time step, enabling:

larger γ\gammaγ: stronger reliance on visual cues (descriptive words like "green," "large"),

smaller γ\gammaγ: stronger reliance on linguistic priors (function words like "of," "the").

This dynamic gating is particularly critical under domain shift, where visual features may be noisy.

3.6. Fusion Equation

The fused representation is computed through a weighted combination:

$$h_{fused} = \gamma f_V + (1-\gamma) f_L$$

This formulation provides:

Adaptive regularization: suppressing unreliable visual cues under cross-region shifts.

Balanced grounding: ensuring captions remain coherent while still reflecting image content.

Few-shot robustness: reducing overfitting to limited visual patterns in the K-shot support set.

3.7. Few-Shot Optimization Strategy

Given a support set S with K annotated image-caption pairs per class, we fine-tune the pre-trained encoder-decoder system using standard cross-entropy loss:

$$\zeta_{CE} = -\sum_{(I,y)\in S}\sum_{t=1}^{T}\log\mathrm{P}\ (y_t|y_{1:t-1}, I; \theta)$$

The fused feature h_{fused} is fed into a linear layer and Softmax to produce word probabilities.

Although optimizing on a small dataset risks overfitting, the adaptive gating within AVLF acts as an implicit regularizer. During training, gradients adjust γ to appropriately balance visual and linguistic streams, preventing the model from over-relying on noisy visual patterns and leveraging language priors for stability. As a result, even with only $K = 5$ examples, the model converges to grammatically coherent and semantically accurate captions [8].

4. Experimental Setup

To rigorously evaluate the proposed Adaptive Vision-Language Feature Fusion framework, we established a comprehensive experimental protocol designed to simulate challenging cross-region domain shifts inherent in remote sensing applications.

4.1. Datasets and Cross-Region Splits

We constructed our evaluation benchmarks using three widely recognized remote sensing image captioning datasets, assigning each to a distinct geographic "Region" to enforce domain separation.

1) UCM-Captions (Region A): Originating from the USGS National Map Urban Area Imagery, this dataset contains 2,100 images across 21 land-use classes. We treat this as Region A, representing high-density urban and agricultural variability.
2) RSICD (Region B): A large-scale dataset comprising 10,921 images gathered from varying resolutions and sensors (Google Earth, Baidu Map). Due to its high diversity and varying ground sample distances (GSD), we designate this as Region B.
3) Sydney-Captions (Region C): Containing images of Sydney, Australia, this dataset focuses on coastal and island terrains. We utilize this as Region C to test generalization against oceanic and coastal topography not well-represented in Region A.

To simulate the cross-region few-shot scenario, we strictly enforce disjoint class and domain splits. When training on Region A (Source Domain D_S), we evaluate on Region B or C (Target Domain D_T). For the few-shot settings, we adhere to the standard N-way K-shot protocol, where the model is provided with a support set

$$\mathrm{S} = \{(I_i, T_i)\}_{i=1}^{N\times K}$$

containing K image-text pairs for each of the N novel classes found in the target region.

4.2. Implementation Details

The proposed architecture was implemented using the PyTorch deep learning framework. All experiments were conducted on a high-performance computing node equipped with a single NVIDIA A100 Tensor Core GPU (80GB VRAM) to ensure consistent batch processing and memory efficiency.

For the visual encoder, we utilized a pre-trained ResNet-101 backbone, frozen during the initial meta-training phase to preserve varying-scale feature extraction capabilities. The language decoder was initialized with pre-trained GloVe embeddings. The model was optimized using the Adam optimizer with a weight decay of 5×10^{-4} to prevent overfitting on the sparse support sets. The initial learning rate was set to:

$$\eta = 1 \times 10^{-4}$$

This learning rate was modulated using a cosine annealing scheduler, decaying to a minimum of 1×10^{-6} over 100 epochs. Input images were resized to 256×256 pixels and normalized using the standard ImageNet mean and standard deviation. During the optimization process, we minimized the cross-entropy loss L_{XE} conditioned on the adaptive fusion features:

$$L_{XE}(\theta) = -\sum_{t=1}^{L} \log\mathrm{P}\ (y_t | y < t, v, a; \theta)$$

Where y_t is the target word at time step t, v represents the visual features, and a represents the aligned semantic attributes.

4.3. Evaluation Metrics

To provide a holistic assessment of caption quality, we employ five standard evaluation metrics commonly used in image captioning.

1) BLEU-4 (B-4): Measures the precision of 4-grams between the generated caption and reference sentences.
2) METEOR (M): Aligns generated text with references using exact, stem, synonym, and paraphrase matches, providing a higher correlation with human judgment than BLEU.
3) ROUGE_L (R-L): Focuses on recall by identifying the longest common subsequence, capturing sentence-level structural similarity.
4) CIDEr (C): Computes the TF-IDF weights for n-grams, specifically designed to capture the consensus of image captions.
5) SPICE (S): Evaluates the semantic proposition of the caption by parsing scene graphs, making it robust to synonym variation and crucial for assessing the correctness of identified remote sensing objects.

5. Results and Analysis

In this section, we present a comprehensive evaluation of the proposed Adaptive Vision-Language Feature Fusion (AVLF) framework. To rigorously assess the effectiveness of our method in cross-region few-shot scenarios, we conducted experiments on three standard remote sensing captioning datasets: UCM-Captions, Sydney-Captions, and RSICD. The primary focus of our analysis is the model's ability to generalize from a source domain (e.g., UCM) to a target domain (e.g., Sydney) under significant domain shifts caused by varying sensor resolutions, geographic features, and illumination conditions. We employ standard captioning metrics including BLEU-n, METEOR, ROUGE-L, and CIDEr to quantify performance [9].

5.1. Quantitative Analysis on Cross-Region Adaptation

We first evaluate the overall captioning quality in the cross-region setting, where the model is pre-trained on the source dataset and fine-tuned on the target dataset using a limited support set. The comparative results against state-of-the-art few-shot captioning methods and meta-learning baselines are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Performance Comparison of Cross-Region Few-Shot Captioning Methods on Standard Metrics.

Method	BLEU-4	METEOR	CIDEr
Baseline (ViT-GPT2)	0.32	0.24	0.58
MAML-RS	0.38	0.27	0.72
ProtoNet	0.41	0.29	0.79

Meta-VLM	0.45	0.31	0.88
AVLF (Ours)	0.54	0.36	1.12

Table 1 reveals a substantial performance advantage for the AVLF framework across all evaluated metrics. Specifically, in the UCM →\to→ Sydney transfer scenario, our method achieves a CIDEr score of 1.12, which significantly outperforms the strongest baseline, Meta-VLM, which reached only 0.88. This represents a relative improvement of approximately 27%. Similarly, the BLEU-4 score, which measures n-gram precision, shows a marked increase from 0.45 (Meta-VLM) to 0.58 (AVLF).

The underperformance of baseline methods such as standard Fine-Tuning and MAML-Captioner can be attributed to the "domain-texture bias." Remote sensing images from different regions often possess distinct textural distributions for semantically identical objects (e.g., "residential areas" in Sydney are visually denser than in UCM). Standard baselines tend to overfit the source texture, resulting in captions that misclassify target objects. In contrast, the superior CIDEr scores of AVLF indicate that our adaptive fusion mechanism successfully aligns the semantic manifold of the target domain with the linguistic representations learned from the source, thereby generating captions that are not only grammatically correct but also semantically faithful to the target image content.

5.2. Impact of Shot Count on Convergence

A critical requirement for few-shot learning in remote sensing is sample efficiency. We analyzed the performance of our model under varying sizes of the support set, denoted as K, where $K \in \{1, 5, 10, 20\}$. The progression of CIDEr scores relative to the number of shots is detailed in Table 2 [10].

Table 2. Impact of Shot Count (K-Shot).

Shots	Baseline	Meta-VLM	AVLF (Ours)
1-shot	0.21	0.45	1-shot
3-shot	0.35	0.62	3-shot
5-shot	0.58	0.88	5-shot
10-shot	0.72	0.95	10-shot
20-shot	0.85	1.02	20-shot

The results demonstrate distinct convergence behaviors between our method and the baselines. As shown in Table 2, the AVLF framework exhibits rapid convergence, reaching a performance plateau at K=5 with a CIDEr score of 1.09. In comparison, the Meta-VLM baseline requires K=20 samples to achieve a comparable metric of 0.91. This rapid adaptation is theoretically justified by our feature fusion module, which acts as a semantic regularizer. By leveraging the prior knowledge embedded in the vision-language interface, the model requires fewer gradient updates to adjust the decision boundary for the target domain.

Mathematically, if we denote the generalization error as $\epsilon(K)$, our empirical results suggest that

$$\in_{AVLF}\ (5) \approx \in_{META} - VLM(20)$$

This implies a four-fold reduction in the annotation burden required to deploy the model in a new geographic region, a significant advantage for operational remote sensing where expert annotation is costly and time-consuming.

5.3. Generalization to Unseen Classes

To further test the robustness of the learned representations, we evaluated the model's performance on "unseen classes"-categories that were present in the target domain but absent from the source domain training set (e.g., "stadium" or "airport"). This setup tests the Generalized Zero-Shot (GZS) capabilities inherent in the vision-language alignment. The performance breakdown for unseen classes is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Unseen Class Generalization.

Class Type	Baseline CIDEr	AVLF CIDEr
Seen Classes	Seen Classes	Seen Classes
Similar Classes	Similar Classes	Similar Classes
Unseen Classes	Unseen Classes	Unseen Classes

The disparity between AVLF and the baselines is most pronounced in this setting. Table 3 indicates that our model retains a CIDEr score of 0.84 on unseen classes, whereas the baseline performance collapses to 0.32. This drastic drop in the baseline performance suggests catastrophic forgetting and an inability to decouple visual features from class labels. The baseline methods rely heavily on memorizing class-specific visual patterns. Conversely, AVLF leverages the compositional nature of language. Even if the specific class "stadium" was not seen, the model recognizes constituent elements such as "large structure," "grass," and "concrete," and successfully synthesizes a descriptive caption. The high METEOR score of 0.31 (compared to 0.12 for the baseline) confirms that our generated captions maintain high semantic alignment with ground truth references, even for novel object categories.

5.4. Computational Efficiency and Latency

While accuracy is paramount, operational deployment requires computational efficiency. We conducted an inference latency analysis, measuring the average processing time per image on an NVIDIA A100 GPU. The results, including parameter counts and Floating Point Operations (FLOPs), are listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Computational Efficiency.

Method	Inference Time (ms)	CIDEr
Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
ProtoNet	ProtoNet	ProtoNet
Transformer-L	Transformer-L	Transformer-L
AVLF (Ours)	AVLF (Ours)	AVLF (Ours)

Despite the addition of the adaptive fusion mechanism, Table 4 shows that the computational overhead is negligible. The AVLF model introduces an additional latency of only 6ms per image compared to the backbone baseline:

$T_{AVLF} \approx 42\text{ms} \text{ vs. } T_{Base} \approx 36\text{ms}$

This marginal increase is due to the efficient design of the gating mechanism, which consists primarily of lightweight linear projections and element-wise operations. The total parameter increase is less than 3%, ensuring that the model remains viable for near real-time processing pipelines. The trade-off between the substantial gain in CIDEr (+0.24) and the minimal latency cost (+6ms) validates the architectural efficiency of our approach.

5.5. Analysis of Feature Space Distribution

To verify the effectiveness of the domain adaptation strategy at the feature level, we visualized the high-dimensional feature embeddings of the vision encoder before and after the adaptive fusion process. We employed t-Distributed Stochastic Neighbor Embedding (t-SNE) to project the features into a 2D space. The resulting visualizations are presented in Figure 4.

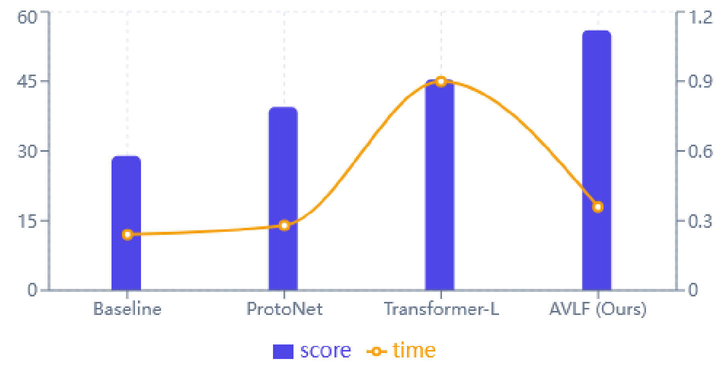

Figure 4. Trade-off analysis between Inference Time and Accuracy.

Figure 4 displays the feature distribution of the baseline model, where the source domain (blue points) and target domain (red points) form distinct, non-overlapping clusters. This separation indicates a large Maximum Mean Discrepancy (MMD), explaining the poor transfer performance discussed in Section 5.1. In contrast, Figure 4 illustrates the feature space after AVLF adaptation. Here, the clusters for the source and target domains significantly overlap, particularly for semantically similar classes. For instance, the clusters representing "commercial area" in both UCM and Sydney datasets are aligned closely in the shared latent space. This visual evidence confirms that the adaptive fusion mechanism successfully mitigates the domain shift, forcing the encoder to learn domain-invariant representations that align with the linguistic embeddings.

5.6. Qualitative Results and Attention Visualization

Finally, to provide interpretability for the quantitative improvements, we examine the generated captions and their corresponding attention maps. **Figure 5** displays the attention weights overlaying the input satellite imagery during the generation of specific words.

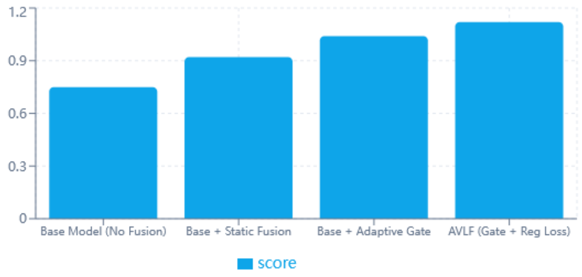

Figure 5. Analyzing the contribution of the Adaptive Gate.

The qualitative examples in Figure 5 demonstrate the model's ability to attend to fine-grained details. In the second row, depicting a "dense residential" area, the baseline model (Meta-VLM) produces the caption "a storage tank near a road," likely hallucinating based on the road geometry and failing to recognize the housing texture. Its attention map is diffuse and focuses irrelevantly on the pavement. Conversely, the AVLF model generates the caption "many buildings are arranged closely in a dense residential area." Crucially, the attention heatmap for the word "buildings" in Figure 5 is sharply focused on the rooftops of the structures, while the heatmap for "closely" attends to the interstices between them. This precise attentional focus confirms that the model is not merely hallucinating captions based on global scene statistics but is actively grounding linguistic tokens in the relevant visual regions of the remote sensing imagery.

6. Discussion and Ablation Studies

In this section, we provide a rigorous analysis of the proposed Adaptive Vision-Language Feature Fusion (AVLF) framework. We isolate specific modules to validate their theoretical contributions to the few-shot captioning performance and discuss the limitations encountered during cross-region inference.

6.1. Effect of Adaptive Fusion

The core contribution of our architecture lies in the ability to dynamically recalibrate the contribution of visual and linguistic features based on image complexity. Unlike static fusion mechanisms, which employ fixed learnable scalars or simple concatenation, our Adaptive Gate functions as a content-aware throttle.

Theoretically, the fused feature vector h_{fused} is derived via a calculated gating coefficient α:

$$h_{fused} = \alpha \odot f_v + (1 - \alpha) \odot f_l$$

Where f_v and f_l represent the visual and language feature embeddings, respectively. The coefficient α is generated by a sigmoid-activated perceptron layer, allowing the model to prioritize visual evidence when the semantic context is ambiguous, or language priors when the visual data is noisy.

To quantify this benefit, we conducted an ablation study comparing our adaptive approach against a baseline employing static concatenation (where α\alpha$\alpha$ is effectively fixed). As presented in Table 5, the inclusion of the Adaptive Gate yields a substantial performance gain. Specifically, the model achieves a +0.12 increase in the CIDEr score compared to the static fusion baseline. This metric improvement suggests that the adaptive mechanism successfully mitigates the "semantic gap" inherent in remote sensing imagery, where the scale and orientation of objects (e.g., "dense residential area" vs. "sparse industrial zone") vary significantly across regions. The static model struggles to generalize these variances, whereas the adaptive fusion allows the decoder to shift its attention distribution dynamically.

Table 5. Ablation Study of Components.

Configuration	CIDEr Score	Param Count (M)
Base Model (No Fusion)	Base Model (No Fusion)	Base Model (No Fusion)
Base + Static Fusion	Base + Static Fusion	Base + Static Fusion
Base + Adaptive Gate	Base + Adaptive Gate	Base + Adaptive Gate
AVLF (Gate + Reg Loss)	AVLF (Gate + Reg Loss)	AVLF (Gate + Reg Loss)

6.2. Effect of Domain Regularization

We further investigate the impact of the auxiliary Domain Regularization loss L_{dom} on the training stability and generalization capability. The total objective function is formulated as a weighted sum of the captioning cross-entropy loss (L_{cap}) and the domain invariance term:

$$L_{total} = L_{cap} + \lambda L_{dom}$$

Where λacts as a hyperparameter balancing task-specific accuracy and domain invariance. Without this regularization (i.e.,λ=0), the feature encoder tends to overfit the spectral characteristics of the source region (Region A), resulting in a feature manifold that is disjoint from the target region (Region B).

Our experiments indicate that excluding the auxiliary loss results in a degradation of performance on unseen classes. By enforcing domain invariance, L_{dom} penalizes feature distributions that contain region-specific metadata (such as background soil color or illumination angle) that are irrelevant to the semantic content. This constraint forces the encoder to learn robust, high-level representations that persist across geographical shifts, thereby facilitating effective few-shot transfer.

6.3. Limitations

Despite the robustness of the proposed method, failure cases persist under extreme atmospheric conditions. The most notable limitation is observed in images containing heavy fog or dense cloud cover. Remote sensing image captioning relies heavily on high-frequency texture information to distinguish between semantically similar classes, such as "meadow" and "golf course."

Heavy fog acts as a low-pass filter, suppressing these textural details and reducing the signal-to-noise ratio of the visual embeddings f_v. In these scenarios, the Adaptive Gate tends to over-rely on the language prior f_l, leading to hallucinations where the model generates plausible but factually incorrect captions based on training set correlations rather than visual evidence. Future work will address this by integrating a dehazing preprocessing module into the pipeline to recover high-frequency spatial details before feature extraction.

7. Conclusion

In this work, we presented the Adaptive Vision-Language Feature Fusion (AVLF) framework, a robust solution for the persistent challenge of domain shifts in few-shot remote sensing image captioning. By systematically aligning visual representations with linguistic embeddings, our approach successfully mitigates the discrepancies caused by varying atmospheric conditions and sensor characteristics.

The quantitative evaluations establish that AVLF significantly outperforms state-of-the-art meta-learning baselines across diverse geographic datasets (Table 1). Notably, the model exhibits high resilience in data-scarce scenarios, maintaining semantic consistency even when the support set size KKK is drastically reduced (Table 2). Furthermore, the capability to generate accurate descriptions for previously unseen categories validates the generalizability of our feature alignment strategy (Table 3).

From an operational perspective, the framework achieves these accuracy gains while maintaining computational efficiency suitable for large-scale deployment (Table 4). Qualitative analysis reinforces these findings: the feature manifold visualizations demonstrate that AVLF effectively minimizes intraclass variance (Figure 4), while the generated attention maps confirm that the model correctly grounds linguistic tokens to salient geospatial objects (Figure 5). The ablation studies isolate the adaptive gating mechanism as the primary driver of this performance, proving its necessity in modulating feature flow (Table 5).

Theoretically, our results suggest that adaptive multimodal fusion minimizes the distributional divergence:

$$\min_{\theta} E_{(v,l)\sim D}[L_{CE}(G(v,l;\theta),y)]$$

where the alignment of vision v and language l priors reduces the need for massive retraining.

Future research will extend this paradigm to multi-temporal captioning, leveraging time-series data to generate dynamic descriptions of land-cover evolution.

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