



THE ART AND CHALLENGE OF TRANSLATING REALIA ACROSS LANGUAGES

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19338341>

Keywords: Realia, non-equivalent vocabulary, cultural gap, functional substitution, linguistic fingerprints, target audience, national specificity, cultural gap, transference, cultural equivalent, naturalization, componential analysis, couplet, classifier, deletion and accepted standard translation.

This article explores the art and challenge of translating "realia"—words that describe objects, customs, and natural features unique to a specific culture. By analyzing the theories of Vlahov, Florin, Barkhudarov, Newmark, and Salomov, the study explains why these words create gaps between languages. The article highlights that translating realia is not just about changing words, but about finding ways to share a society's history, environment, and traditions with a foreign audience.

Translation of realia requires deep understanding of both source and target cultures. During translation processes translators need to find strategies to make the translation understandable in the target language where no equivalent of the culturally specific words can be found. Even if a translator has enough amount of knowledge in both languages, it can be challenging to translate realia which requires time to figure out which translation could be acceptable for target audience. That is the reason why several linguists and translators worked on realia. Each of them gave varied definition and categorized it differently.

Russian and foreign scientists studying the problem of translation of realia, used different terms for their designations, such as, non-equivalent vocabulary, barbarisms, exoticisms, localisms, ethnographisms and some others, give various definitions.¹

Bulgarian scholars Florin and Vlahov define realia as a special category of means of expression, which includes words and phrases that name objects that are characteristic of life, life, culture and history of one people and foreign to another² Vlahov and Florin see realia as markers of boundary. Their main point is that these words create the unique flavor and history of a specific group of people. L.S Barkhudarov gave a definition to realia in his monograph called "Language and Translation". In the monograph he explained realia as "words denoting objects, concepts and situations that do not exist in the practical experience of people speaking a different language"³ The definition highlights the challenge of translating realia. According to Burkhanov's definition realia is not just words but linguistic fingerprints of a society. When these words and concepts lack a direct equivalent in the target language, they may create cultural gap between two languages and societies, which requires more than just a literal substitution. Translators cannot simply swap one word to another since the object or social concept has no footprint in the target audience reality. According to Uzbek linguist Gaybulla Salomov, however, "By national specificity, it is meant the material condition of the people, their

¹ Mirjalilova Madina Jamshid qizi. The notion of Realia and its classification in linguo-culturology. -Texas: Journal of Multidisciplinary. 2022, -P.203

² Kulmamatova Aziza Dustmamatovna. Realia as carriers of national and historical overtones. — Toshkent: ВЕСТНИК НАУКИ И ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ, 2020, -P.86

³ L.S Barkhudarov 'Language and Translation. — Moscow: International relations press, 1975.P.95



spiritual way of life, nature, forests, mountains, steppes, water, land, sky, as well as their legends and myths, history and religion, literature and art, and other special things as depicted in the literary work. Clothing, customs, traditions, currency units, and so on are also included in the components of national specificity." ⁴ As he says these words are not just about objects or history, but also about nature itself, Gaybulla Salomov takes the widest view. He includes things like the mountains, the rivers, the weather, and even the local myth and religions. To him, these words are part of the whole environment. A translator cannot simply separate people from the land they live on or stories they believe.

As a solution translators may use certain strategies to make concepts, phrases and culturally specific words more understandable to the target audience.

Peter Newmark counts those approaches to translate realia. Translation procedures: Transference, Cultural equivalent, Neutralisation (i.e. functional or descriptive equivalent) (4) Literal translation (5) Label (6) Naturalisation (7) Componential analysis (8) Deletion (of redundant stretches of language in non-authoritative texts, especially metaphors) (9) Couplet (10) Accepted standard translation (11) Paraphrase, gloss, notes, etc. (12) Classifier.⁵ Peter Newmark provides a practical set of strategies to bridge the gap between cultures when words are tied to specific local realities. Each method serves a specific purpose for handling translation of realia.

Transference is the most direct approach where a translator keeps the original word exactly as it is because of the cultural value it carries. For instance, keeping the word "sushi" or the word "atlas" in a text preserves the authentic identity of specific food or fabric. The cultural equivalent is used when a translator replaces specific cultural item from the original language with a local one that fills similar role. A pertinent example of this can be using the word "bread" to translate the Uzbek realia "patir". While their shapes and flavors are different, they both serve as an essential daily staple in both cultures, making the concept easier for foreign reader to understand. Another approach is neutralization, which removes a culture-specific name in favor of a functional description that explains what the item actually is or does. In contrast, literal translation follows a word-for-word method, where the translator converts the phrase directly into the target language. When encountering brand-new concepts—particularly regarding organizations or technical terms without an existing equivalent—a label is often used as a temporary translation. For instance, the brand names, such as, "*Pepsi*" or "*Chanel*" are kept as original in many languages. If a translator decides to keep a culture-specific term but "morphs" it to fit the spelling and pronunciation rules of the target language, the process is known as naturalization.

When a single word in the target language cannot capture the full essence of a term, componential analysis allows the translator to break the word down into its basic units of meaning. Conversely, deletion may be used to remove unnecessary words that might confuse the reader, a tactic frequently applied to metaphors that do not translate well literally. To ensure the reader is never misled, a couplet may be employed. This combines two strategies at once, typically by mixing transference with an explanatory note.

⁴ E.Ochilov. Tarjima nazariyasi va amaliyoti. —Toshkent: Toshkent Davlat Sharqshunoslik instituti, 2012- P.70.

⁵ Peter Newmark. A Textbook of Translation. —Shanghai: Shakhai Foreign language education press, 1988-P.94



In many cases, an accepted standard translation is preferred, utilizing a version of a word that has already been agreed upon by the public, even if it isn't the most technically accurate option. For terms that are too complex for a simple swap, translators turn to paraphrasing, glosses, or notes. A paraphrase rewords the concept to maintain a natural flow, while a gloss provides extra information immediately following the word. Similarly, a note offers further definition or explanation, but unlike a gloss, it is placed outside the main body of the text. Finally, a classifier can be used to add a general descriptive word to a specific name, providing necessary context and clarity for the target audience. For example, adding the word mountain just after the word "Everest" can help readers understand Everest is a mountain.

In summary, translating realia is a delicate art that requires more than just swapping words. As scholars like Vlahov and Florin argue, these terms are unique boundary markers of a culture's history, while Barkhudarov describes them as "linguistic fingerprints" that cannot be easily copied. G.Salomov further shows that realia include everything from a nation's nature to its myths, making them deeply rooted in their original soil. To bridge these gaps, translators use the practical strategies provided by Newmark, such as finding cultural equivalents, naturalizing words, or adding context through glosses and notes. Whether the goal is to keep the original flavor or make the text easier to read, these methods ensure that a society's unique identity is truly understood. Ultimately, these techniques allow a translator to share the spirit of one culture with a foreign audience in a natural and clear way.

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