

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF LINGUACULTURAL AND REALIA

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Abstract

The study of linguacultural phenomena and realia has become a crucial field in modern linguistics, translation studies, and cultural anthropology. Realia, as culture-specific items, often reflect national traditions, social values, and unique worldviews encoded in language. Their analysis requires interdisciplinary methods that combine linguistics, cultural studies, and translation theory. This article explores methodological approaches to studying linguacultural units and realia, focusing on comparative, descriptive, and translation-based methods. It highlights the importance of considering both linguistic and extralinguistic contexts to achieve adequate cultural transfer in translation. The findings suggest that the integration of linguacultural analysis with cognitive and communicative approaches enhances understanding of how realia function in cross-cultural discourse.

Keywords: Linguacultural studies, realia, translation methodology, cultural transfer, equivalence, communicative approach, comparative linguistics.

Introduction

In the context of globalization and intercultural communication, the study of linguacultural phenomena and realia is becoming increasingly important. Realia—words and expressions denoting culturally specific objects, traditions, or institutions—often resist direct translation due to their deep cultural embeddedness. Their interpretation and adequate rendering in other languages is not only a linguistic challenge but also a cultural and cognitive one.

Linguacultural studies provide the theoretical foundation for understanding how language reflects culture and how cultural identity is preserved and transformed through discourse. According to Vlahov and Florin (1980), realia are “untranslatable elements” that necessitate specific strategies such as transcription, calque, descriptive translation, or adaptation. Peter Newmark

(1988) further emphasizes the category of “culture-bound terms” as central to translation theory, arguing that the translator must balance fidelity to the source culture with accessibility for the target audience.

Methodological approaches to studying realia can be classified into three broad categories:

Descriptive and Semasiological Approaches – focusing on the semantic fields and categorization of realia within a given language.

Comparative and Contrastive Approaches – analyzing the correspondences and differences between realia across languages and cultures.

Translation and Communicative Approaches – examining strategies of cultural transfer and their effectiveness in achieving communicative equivalence. By employing these methodologies, researchers can better understand how culture-specific elements are encoded in language, transmitted across linguistic boundaries, and reinterpreted in new cultural contexts.

Descriptive and Semasiological Approaches

One of the earliest methodological traditions in the study of realia is the **descriptive approach**, which focuses on defining and categorizing culture-specific items within the lexicon of a given language. This approach is rooted in **semasiology**, the study of meaning and semantic development of words. In this framework, realia are analyzed according to their etymology, morphological structure, and semantic fields.

For instance, the names of traditional Uzbek dishes such as plov, lag‘mon, or samsa carry not only culinary meanings but also cultural connotations associated with hospitality, celebration, and national identity. A purely descriptive analysis reveals their semantic features (e.g., ingredients, cooking methods), while also noting their role as culturally marked lexemes. However, the semasiological approach is often limited in scope because it focuses primarily on internal linguistic description without adequately addressing cross-cultural interpretation or translation. Nevertheless, it provides a necessary foundation for deeper linguistic and cultural analysis.

Comparative and Contrastive Approaches

A more advanced methodology is the **comparative approach**, which situates realia within a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural framework. Here, the goal is to analyze how culture-specific concepts are represented, or not represented, in another language.

For example, in Russian lexicography, Uzbek food names are often integrated relatively smoothly due to historical and geographical proximity, reflecting centuries of cultural interaction. Conversely, in English lexicography, the same items are typically treated as exotic elements, often requiring glosses, definitions, or descriptive explanations to ensure comprehension. This highlights the methodological significance of **contrastive linguistics**, which allows researchers to explore differences in cultural perception and lexical representation.

Comparative studies also reveal asymmetries in linguistic categorization. Some cultures possess highly specialized terms for food, clothing, or social rituals, while others use broader, more general descriptions. Such asymmetries underscore the importance of realia as indicators of cultural worldview encoded in language.

Translation and Communicative Approaches

The translation-oriented methodology represents the most practical and interdisciplinary approach to studying realia. It focuses on strategies of rendering culture-specific items from one language into another while preserving both meaning and cultural resonance.

Translation theorists such as Newmark (1988) and Vinay & Darbelnet (1995) classify strategies for dealing with realia into categories including transliteration, calque, descriptive translation, cultural substitution, and footnoting. The choice of strategy often depends on the communicative purpose of the translation, the target audience, and the genre of the text.

For instance, the Uzbek dish plov might be translated as plov (borrowing) in Russian texts, while in English contexts it may be rendered as pilaf (adaptation) or described as “a traditional Uzbek rice dish with meat and vegetables” (descriptive translation). Each strategy reflects different methodological priorities—preserving foreignness, ensuring accessibility, or maintaining cultural authenticity.

The communicative approach also emphasizes cultural transfer, i.e., how meaning is reconstructed in the target language to facilitate intercultural understanding. Adequate translation of realia thus requires not only linguistic competence but also linguacultural competence, where the translator must navigate between fidelity to the source culture and intelligibility for the target audience.

Conclusion

The study of linguacultural units and realia requires a complex methodological framework that integrates linguistic, cultural, and translational perspectives. Realia serve as markers of cultural identity and linguistic uniqueness, yet they often create difficulties in cross-cultural communication. By applying descriptive, comparative, and communicative methods, scholars and translators can more effectively analyze and interpret realia, ensuring not only linguistic accuracy but also cultural adequacy. This highlights the central role of linguacultural competence in intercultural communication and translation practice.

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