

***REALIA***

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Realia (*plural noun*) are words and expressions for culture-specific material things.

The word *realia* comes from medieval Latin, in which it originally meant “the real things”, i.e. material things, as opposed to abstract ones. The Bulgarian translators Vlahov and Florin, who were the first to carry out an in-depth study of realia considered that REALIA must not be confused with *terminology*, which is primarily used in the scientific literature, and usually only appears in other kinds of texts to serve a very specific stylistic purpose. Realia, on the other hand, are born in popular culture, and are increasingly found in very diverse kinds of texts. Fiction, in particular, is fond of realia for the exotic touch they bring.

There are different terms for references specific to a culture in linguistics. They are:

- “culture-bound elements” (Nedergaard-Larsen (1993)),
- “culture-specific items” (Aixela (1996)),
- “extralinguistic culture-bound references (ECR)” (Pedersen (2005 and 2007))

and Florin (1993) used “realia”.

According to Florin, REALIA give a source-cultural flavour to a text by expressing local and/or historical colour, and so realia do not have exact equivalents in other languages. As an example of realia, Florin mentions things like *samovars* and concepts like *samizdat*.

# *Classifications of realia*

Realia may be classified in several ways.

Florin classifies realia:

- thematically, according to the material or logical groups they belong to;
- geographically, according to the locations in which they are used;
- temporally, according to the historical period they belong to.

*The thematic category covers ethnographical realia, i.e. realia that belong to everyday life, work, art, religion, mythology, and folklore of a culture (e.g. First of May and Valentine Day), and social and territorial realia (e.g. state and canton – округ у Швейцарії).*



*The geographical category* includes realia that *belong* to one language only (*subcategories*: microlocal realia, local realia, national realia, regional realia and international realia) and realia *alien* to both languages (realia that do not belong either to the source or the target culture).

From the point of view of *time*,  
realia can be either *modern* or  
*historical*.

In Florin's classification the same realia could be categorised in different ways, depending on whether their thematic, geographic or temporal aspect is emphasised. For example, the Ukrainian *borsch* (traditional soup) as both ethnographical and national realia, belonging to history.



## TABLE 1

Classification of realia (Nedergaard-Larsen  
1993).

Extralinguistic culture-bound problem types

Geography etc	geography meteorology Biology	mountains, rivers weather, climate flora, fauna
	cultural geography	regions, towns roads, streets etc
History	Buildings	monuments, castles etc
	Events	wars, revolutions, flag days
	People	well-known historical persons
Society	industrial level (economy)	trade and industry energy supply etc
	social organisation	defence, judicial system police, prisons local and central authorities
	politics	state management, ministries electoral system, political parties politicians, political organisations
	social conditions	groups, subcultures living conditions, problems
	ways of life, customs	housing, transport, food, meals clothing, articles for everyday use family relations
Culture	Religion	churches, rituals, morals ministers, bishops religious holidays, saints
	Education	schools, colleges, universities lines of education, exams
	Media	TV, radio, newspapers, magazines
	culture, leisure activities	museums, works of art literature, authors theatres, cinemas, actors musicians, idols restaurants, hotels nightclubs, cafes sports, athletes

Nedergaard-Larsen's classification does not take into account personal names of fictional characters, different from historical and political figures.

Recently, Pedersen (2005, 2007) has studied proper names, including both non-fictional and fictional personal names, alongside with other types of realia. Similarly, for instance, Davies (2003) and Aixela (1996) deal with proper names, including not only geographical names (e.g. names of towns and streets) but also personal names, in their analyses of realia.

# TABLE 2

Names in the  
classification of realia.



## Geography (and cultural geogprahy)

place names, including names of countries and regions, names of towns, villages,

street names

names of buildings and man-made structures (other than historical buildings and

cultural sites)

## History

historical buildings, well-known historical figures

## Society

names of organisations and institutions, referring to, for instance, police and local

authorities

names of politicians

## Culture

names of works of art including book titles, names of artists, names of cultural

## Places

## Personal names

forenames and surnames

***Realia and  
ways of  
translating  
them***

To translate realia, various strategies exist : they range from phonetic transcription to translation of the overall meaning. Scholars offer one way of defining such solutions. According to the characterization, each of these can be placed between two extremes: **adequacy** (closeness to the original) and **acceptability** (making the word entirely consistent with the target culture).

There are following  
*methods* of conveying the  
meaning of realia:

# 1. By Transcription or Transliteration Exclusively

These realia usually belong to genuine internationalisms and comprise social and political units of lexicon in the main (lord lady, mister, hryvnia etc)

e.g. “It’s a poor coloured woman’s place and you are a grand *gentleman* from Cape Town” – ця кімната для бідної кольорової жінки, а ти ж великий *джентельмен* з Кейптауна

- **2 By Transcription or Transliteration and Explication of Their Genuine Nationally Specific Meaning**
- In many cases the lingual form of realia conveyed through transcription or transliteration can not provide a full expression of its lexical meaning. Then an additional explication of its sense becomes necessary. It happens when the realia are introduced in the Target Language for the first time or when the realia are not yet known to the broad public of the Target Language readers. The explanation may be given either in the translated passage/speech flow, where the realia are based, or in a footnote – when a lengthy explication becomes necessary: e.g. They took her to the *Tower of London*. – Вони показали їй стародавню лондонську фортецю *Тауер*.
- He said that *Wall Street* and *Threadneedle Street* between them could stop the universe. – він сказав, що Волл-Стріт і Треднідл-Стріт 1удвох спроможні зупинити всесвіт
- 1 Треднідл-Стріт – вулиця в лондонському Сіті, де розташовані кілька головних банків Великобританії
- A number of restaurants and cafeterias in Kyiv specialize in varenyky (*dumplings*), kulish (a thick meal stew) and other dishes. – У Києві чимало ресторанів та кафетеріїв, що спеціалізуються на приготуванні *вареників*, *кулішу* та інших страв

- ▣ **3. By Descriptive Explaining/Explication Only**
- ▣ When the transcription/transliteration can not be helpful in expressing the sense of realia or when it might bring about an unnecessary ambiguity in the Target Language narration/text explications and explaining are used. No coffins were available, so they wrapped George in a blanket and in the *Union Jack* — У них не було готових домовин, тож вони замотали Джорджа у ковдру та у прапор Великої Британії

- **4. By Translation of Componential Parts and Additional Explication of Realia**
- The proper meaning of some realia can be faithfully rendered by way of regular translation of all or some of their componential parts and explication of the denotative meaning pertaining to the source language unit. Such and the like explanations can not, naturally, be made in the text of a translation, hence they are given usually in the footnotes, as in the following example: Well, I can tell you anything that is in an English *bluebook*, Harry' (O. Wilde) – «Ну, я тобі можу розповісти все, що написано в англійській 2«Синій книзі»
- 2 «Синя книга» – збірник документів, що видається з санкції парламенту Великої Британії в синіх палітурках
- When the lexical meaning of the realia is not so complex, it is usually explained in the Target Language text. The explanation then of course, is not always as exhaustive as it call Dc in a foot note. e g Keep you fingers crossed for me' (M Wilson) – Щоб мені була вдача, склади *навхрест* (*хрестиком*) пальці!



- ▣ **5. By Ways of Word-for-word or Loan Translation**
- ▣ A faithful translation of sense realia may be achieved either by way of word for-word translation or by way of loan translation. **A.** Translated word-for-word are the specific realia as first (second, third) reading перше (друге, третє) читання (офіційне внесення законопроекту в англійський парламент); secondary grammar school- середня граматична школа, **B.** The denotative meaning of many units of realia may be rendered by way of loan translating as well. e.g. Salvation Army (USA, Gr.Britain) – Армія порятунку орден Ярослава Мудрого – the Order of Yaroslav the Wise/ Yaroslav the Wise Order

- ▣ **6. Translation by Means of Semantic Analogies**
- ▣ There are some peculiar notions in both the languages. Consequently, similar/ analogous national notions in different languages may appear as a result of direct or indirect borrowings. e.g. the City/Town Board of Education – міський відділ освіти
- ▣ залік – preliminary/qualifying test/examination The choice of an appropriate analogy in the **Target Language** is greatly influenced by the national/cultural traditions e.g. пани – sirs/gentlemen, кобзар – minstrel