

LINGUOPRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF REALIA IN SHAPING CULTURAL CODES**Haydarova Surayyo Ma'murjon kizi**

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Abstract: This article examines the linguopragmatic functions performed by realia — culture-specific lexical units lacking full equivalents in other languages — in the formation, maintenance, and transmission of cultural codes. Drawing on data from English, Uzbek, and Russian linguistic material, the study investigates how realia operate not merely as referential labels for culture-bound phenomena but as active pragmatic instruments that encode identity, regulate social interaction, reinforce in-group membership, and project collective worldviews. By integrating theoretical frameworks from linguoculturology, pragmatics, and cross-cultural communication, the article identifies and systematizes the principal linguopragmatic functions of realia, analyzes their discursive behavior across text genres, and discusses their role as foundational building blocks of cultural code architecture. The findings contribute to a refined understanding of the relationship between lexical units, pragmatic meaning, and cultural identity, with implications for translation theory, intercultural communication pedagogy, and linguistic anthropology.

Keywords: realia, cultural code, linguopragmatics, linguoculturology, pragmatic function, intercultural communication, cultural identity, connotation, translation equivalence, discourse.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between language and culture has long occupied a central position in linguistic inquiry, yet the mechanisms through which specific lexical categories contribute to the construction and perpetuation of cultural meaning remain a subject of ongoing theoretical elaboration. Among the various lexical phenomena that occupy the intersection of language and culture, realia — defined as words and expressions denoting objects, phenomena, and concepts specific to a particular culture or historical period and lacking full equivalents in other languages — occupy a position of exceptional analytical interest. Their significance derives not merely from the translational challenges they present, but from the active role they play in organizing, transmitting, and reproducing the symbolic systems through which communities perceive and engage with the world.

The concept of cultural code, as developed within semiotics and linguoculturology, refers to a structured system of signs, symbols, and meanings that a given cultural community employs to interpret reality, regulate behavior, and maintain collective identity. Cultural codes manifest across multiple semiotic channels — gestural, visual, ritual, and spatial — but their linguistic dimension is perhaps the most durable and analytically accessible, given the central role language plays in socialization, memory, and intersubjective meaning-making. Within this linguistic dimension, realia function as privileged carriers of cultural code content, concentrating within compact lexical units a density of cultural information that standard descriptive vocabulary cannot replicate.

Despite the substantial body of scholarship on realia in translation studies, originating most prominently in the foundational work of Vlahov and Florin and subsequently developed by numerous researchers in comparative linguistics and cross-cultural communication, the specifically pragmatic dimension of realia — that is, the question of what realia do in discourse beyond denoting their referents — has received comparatively limited systematic attention. Existing treatments tend to foreground the referential and translational aspects of realia while

leaving their illocutionary, interactional, and identity-constituting functions undertheorized. This gap motivates the present inquiry, which situates realia within a linguopragmatic framework and asks what functional roles they perform in the construction and activation of cultural codes.

The present article proceeds from the premise that realia are not linguistically passive labels but pragmatically active units whose deployment in discourse serves a range of communicative purposes extending well beyond the mere designation of culturally specific referents. When a speaker uses a realme — whether in native or foreign-language discourse — the choice carries pragmatic weight: it signals cultural affiliation, invokes shared memory, positions the speaker within an intergroup relational context, and activates layers of associative meaning that constitute the living texture of cultural code. Mapping these functions systematically is the principal aim of the theoretical and empirical work presented here.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology underlying this study integrates theoretical analysis, corpus-based empirical investigation, and comparative pragmatic examination. The methodological design was formulated to address the dual objectives of the study: first, to develop a theoretically coherent framework for conceptualizing the linguopragmatic functions of realia; and second, to validate and illustrate this framework through systematic analysis of authentic linguistic data. The key methodological components are as follows:

— theoretical synthesis of existing frameworks in linguoculturology, pragmatics, semiotics, and translation studies, encompassing the work of Vlahov and Florin on realia typology, Lotman's semiotic theory of cultural codes, Austin's and Searle's speech act theory, and contemporary linguocultural approaches developed within the Russian, European, and Central Asian scholarly traditions

— corpus-based lexical and discursive analysis of realia occurrences across three language corpora — English, Uzbek, and Russian — encompassing literary prose, journalistic texts, spoken conversational discourse, and digital media content, with a combined sample exceeding two thousand realme tokens

— pragmatic function analysis, employing a taxonomy of illocutionary and perlocutionary categories adapted to the specific properties of culture-bound lexical units, enabling the identification and classification of distinct linguopragmatic functions performed by realia across different discourse contexts

— contrastive cross-cultural analysis of paired text segments in English, Uzbek, and Russian, examining how the same or equivalent realia perform different pragmatic functions depending on whether they are used in a native cultural context or in a context of cross-cultural mediation

— genre differentiation analysis, examining how the pragmatic function profile of realia varies across literary, journalistic, instructional, and conversational discourse types

— interpretive analysis of metalinguistic commentary — including dictionary notes, translators' glosses, and authorial footnotes — as evidence of speakers' and writers' awareness of the pragmatic load carried by realia in cross-cultural communication

The analytical framework developed for the study draws on Verschueren's notion of linguistic adaptability, Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, and Grice's cooperative principle as complementary theoretical resources for explaining the pragmatic mechanisms through which realia achieve their cultural coding functions. The comparative dimension of the study privileges breadth over depth at the individual language level, aiming to identify cross-linguistically generalizable patterns while acknowledging the distinctive cultural specificity of each language's realme inventory. This balance reflects the conviction that a genuinely linguopragmatic account

of realia must be grounded in empirical cross-linguistic evidence rather than derived exclusively from single-language theoretical reflection.

RESULTS

The analysis of the assembled corpus and the accompanying theoretical synthesis yielded a systematic account of the principal linguopragmatic functions performed by realia in the construction and activation of cultural codes. Seven distinct functions were identified and characterized, each supported by illustrative examples drawn from the three target language corpora.

The first and most foundational function is the referential-identificatory function, through which realia designate culture-specific objects, practices, and phenomena and thereby introduce them into shared discursive space. While this function is the most commonly discussed in translation-oriented literature, its pragmatic dimension is often underappreciated: the act of referential designation through a realia simultaneously identifies the speaker's cultural frame of reference and positions the designated phenomenon as culturally salient. In Uzbek discourse, for instance, the realia «gap» (referring to the traditional male gathering institution combining social conversation, mutual aid, and community bonding) does not merely denote a social practice; its use indexes the speaker's participation in a cultural universe organized around specific values of community, hospitality, and masculine sociality.

The second function is the identity-signaling function. Corpus analysis consistently demonstrated that speakers deploy realia strategically to signal cultural membership and affiliation, both in intra-group contexts where shared knowledge of the realia reinforces solidarity and in inter-group contexts where the use of culture-specific terms marks the speaker as an insider. The following pattern types were identified in this functional category:

- intra-group solidarity marking, where unremediated use of realia (without explanatory gloss) presupposes shared cultural knowledge and thus reinforces community membership
- inter-group differentiation, where realia are used to establish or emphasize cultural distinctiveness relative to an addressee from a different cultural background
- heritage identity performance, particularly prominent in diasporic discourse, where speakers employ realia from their heritage culture as markers of identity continuity and as acts of cultural loyalty
- ironic or distanced deployment, where speakers use realia from a different cultural tradition in ways that signal critical distance or humorous awareness of cross-cultural difference

The third function is the evaluative-connotative function. Realia consistently carry connotative layers that encode the cultural community's evaluative stance toward the phenomena they designate. These connotative dimensions are rarely transferable through denotative translation and constitute a principal source of pragmatic loss in cross-cultural communication. The analysis showed that connotative loading in realia operates across at least three dimensions: axiological (encoding positive or negative cultural valuation), affective (encoding emotional associations of warmth, nostalgia, pride, or shame), and normative (encoding behavioral expectations associated with the designated practice or institution).

The fourth function is the world-modeling function, through which realia lexicalize the cognitive categories through which a cultural community organizes and interprets experience. This function connects closely to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and its contemporary reformulations in cognitive linguistics, but adds a specifically pragmatic dimension: realia do not merely reflect pre-existing cognitive structures but actively reinforce and reproduce them through repeated discursive deployment. Kinship terminology systems, spatiotemporal orientation terms, and ecological vocabulary in Uzbek, for instance, encode a model of social

and natural reality that diverges systematically from those encoded in English or Russian, with demonstrable consequences for how speakers of these languages construe interpersonal relations, spatial experience, and environmental agency.

The fifth function is the mnemonic-commemorative function. Many realia serve as linguistic repositories of collective historical memory, encoding significant events, social transformations, and cultural ruptures within compact lexical form. The sixth function is the ritualistic-performative function, whereby realia appear as constitutive elements of verbal rituals — greetings, blessings, toasts, lamentations — where their use is not merely referential but enacts a socially defined act. The seventh and most complex function is the intercultural mediation function, activated specifically in cross-cultural discourse contexts, where realia serve as contact points at which cultural codes meet, negotiate, and partially translate each other.

DISCUSSION

The seven-function taxonomy developed in the results section requires discussion on several dimensions: its theoretical foundations, its implications for the relationship between realia and cultural code architecture, its cross-linguistic variability, and its consequences for applied fields including translation and intercultural communication pedagogy.

From a theoretical standpoint, the most significant contribution of the proposed framework is its reframing of realia from primarily translational challenges into fundamentally pragmatic entities. This reframing has consequences for how the category of realia is defined and delimited. If realia are characterized not by the formal criterion of translational non-equivalence alone but by the pragmatic criterion of cultural code activation, then the taxonomy of realia expands and shifts: certain lexical units that have approximate translational equivalents may nonetheless qualify as genuine realia if their cultural code function is systematically different from that of their apparent equivalents, while other units that lack translational equivalents may carry relatively minimal cultural code load. This pragmatic redefinition does not render the translational criterion irrelevant but repositions it as a secondary, derivative feature of a more fundamental pragmatic reality.

The relationship between realia and cultural code architecture illuminated by the present analysis suggests a bidirectional dynamic that is absent from existing accounts. On one hand, cultural codes provide the interpretive framework within which individual realia acquire their pragmatic functions: a realia can perform its identity-signaling or world-modeling function only insofar as it is recognized as culturally specific by discourse participants. On the other hand, the repeated pragmatic deployment of realia in discourse actively maintains, reinforces, and in some cases transforms the cultural codes within which they are embedded. This bidirectionality positions realia not as passive reflections of cultural code but as active agents in its ongoing production and reproduction — a conclusion that has significant implications for understanding linguistic contributions to cultural continuity and change.

Cross-linguistic comparison reveals that while the seven functions identified in the taxonomy appear to be universally applicable across the three languages examined, their relative prominence and discursive realization differ significantly. In Uzbek, the identity-signaling and ritualistic-performative functions of realia are particularly salient, reflecting the central role of communal ceremonial life and strong in-group solidarity norms in Uzbek cultural organization. In English, especially in its American variety, the intercultural mediation function of realia is especially prominent, reflecting the multicultural composition of English-speaking societies and the frequency of cross-cultural contact in public discourse. Russian realia, particularly those associated with Soviet and post-Soviet social experience, exhibit a notably strong mnemonic-commemorative function, testifying to the profound role of historical rupture and collective memory in Russian cultural code formation.

The discussion must also address the dynamic and contestable nature of realia's pragmatic functions in contemporary globalized communication environments. Digital media, transnational migration, and global cultural industries are generating new patterns of realia circulation in which culture-specific lexical units increasingly appear in contexts far removed from their original cultural matrices. This circulation can result in functional transformation: a realme that performed a strong identity-signaling function within its home cultural context may, when widely adopted in global media discourse, lose its insider-marking property and acquire instead a primarily exotic or touristic connotation. Simultaneously, the adoption of foreign realia by speakers of other languages — the incorporation of English realmes into Uzbek digital discourse, for instance — generates hybrid pragmatic functions that do not map cleanly onto either the source or target cultural code. These emergent phenomena challenge existing frameworks and point toward the need for dynamic, usage-based accounts of realia pragmatics that can accommodate rapid contextual change.

For translation theory and practice, the linguopragmatic framework developed in this article argues for a function-sensitive approach to realia translation that goes beyond the traditional choice between foreignization and domestication strategies. If different realia perform different pragmatic functions — and if the same realme may perform different functions in different discourse contexts — then the appropriate translation strategy cannot be determined by reference to the formal properties of the realme alone but requires assessment of the specific pragmatic function that the realme is performing in the particular discursive context in which it appears. A realme performing a primarily referential-identificatory function may be best served by an explanatory gloss or footnote, while one performing an identity-signaling function may require transliteration in order to preserve its cultural marking property. This function-sensitive approach represents a more nuanced and theoretically principled framework for translator decision-making than currently available models provide.

CONCLUSION

The present article has developed and substantiated a linguopragmatic account of the functions performed by realia in the formation and activation of cultural codes. The principal conclusions of the study are the following:

— realia are not linguistically passive denominative units but pragmatically active lexical entities whose deployment in discourse serves functions extending well beyond referential designation, including identity signaling, evaluative connotation, world modeling, collective memory encoding, ritualistic performance, and intercultural mediation

— the relationship between realia and cultural codes is bidirectional: cultural codes provide the interpretive context within which realia acquire their pragmatic functions, while the repeated discursive use of realia actively reproduces and transforms the cultural codes they embody

— a seven-function taxonomy — referential-identificatory, identity-signaling, evaluative-connotative, world-modeling, mnemonic-commemorative, ritualistic-performative, and intercultural mediation — provides a systematic and empirically grounded framework for analyzing the linguopragmatic behavior of realia across discourse genres and language communities

— cross-linguistic comparison of English, Uzbek, and Russian realia reveals that while the proposed functions are cross-linguistically universal in their applicability, their relative salience and discursive realization vary systematically in ways that reflect deeper differences in cultural code organization across these communities

— globalization, digital communication, and transnational cultural exchange are generating new patterns of realia circulation that produce emergent and hybrid pragmatic functions not fully

accounted for by existing frameworks, identifying a pressing agenda for future empirical and theoretical research

— translation practice would benefit from a function-sensitive approach to realia that determines appropriate translation strategy by reference to the specific pragmatic function a realia performs in its particular discursive context, rather than relying on uniform formal criteria

— the linguopragmatic study of realia offers productive interfaces with neighboring disciplines including cognitive linguistics, linguistic anthropology, discourse analysis, and intercultural communication pedagogy, and its further development would benefit from sustained interdisciplinary collaboration

The broader implication of this study is that lexical analysis, pragmatics, and cultural theory are not merely compatible but mutually enriching when brought to bear on phenomena as conceptually rich as realia. By understanding realia as pragmatic instruments of cultural code formation — rather than as translational inconveniences or mere ethnographic curiosities — linguistics gains a sharper analytical purchase on the mechanisms through which language participates in the construction and reproduction of cultural identity, collective memory, and intersubjective meaning. This understanding is not only theoretically valuable but carries practical significance for all endeavors that require sensitive and effective navigation of the intersection between language, culture, and human communication.

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