REALIA

Realia are words and expressions for culture-specific items.

As realia carry a very local overtone, they often represent a challenge for translators. They cannot be confused with terminology, as it is mainly used in scientific literature to designate things that pertain to the scientific sphere, and usually appears in other kinds of texts to serve a very specific stylistic purpose.

Realia, instead, are born in popular culture, and are increasingly found in very diverse kinds of texts. One of its main purposes is to convey an exotic touch (fiction).

Realia are of three types:

Geography

- **physical geography**: pampa, fjord, mistral, steppe, tornado, tsunami
- **geographic objects tied to man's activity**: polder
- **endemic species**: kiwi, koala, sequoia

Ethnography

- **everyday life:** paprika, spaghetti, empanada, sauna, kimono, etc.
- **work**: carabinieri, concierge, machete, trade unions, etc.
- **art and culture**: tarantella, banjo, gong, commedia, allegro, Santa Claus, vampire, murals, launeddas, etc.
- **ethnic characterizations**: cockney, gringo, yankee
- **measures and money**: mile, kilometer, lira, peseta, talent, etc.

Politics and society

- **administrative divisions:** region, province, county, department, state, bidonville, arrondissement, souk, promenade…
- **organs andfunctions:** agora, forum, duma, senate, chancellor, tzar, pharaoh, ayatollah, etc.
- **political and social life**: peronist, Ku Klux Klan, partigiani, lobbying, lord, untouchables, samurai, etc.
- **military**: cohort, phalanx, marines

How should we translate REALIA?

To translate realia, various strategies are possible: they range from phonetic transcription to the translation of the overall meaning. Toury classifies them in different degrees ranging from **adequacy** (closeness to the original)
to **acceptability** (making the word entirely consistent with the target culture):

- Transcription or transliteration of the word, letter by letter or character by character (when the original word is written in a different alphabet).
- Transcription according to the TL pronunciation rules. For instance, the Hindi word *Kašmir* becomes *cachemire* in French.
- Creation of a new word or calque, such as the English *flea market* inspired by the French *marché aux puces*
- Creation of a new word, analogous to the original one, but which has a more local sound & appearance, e.g. *muezzin* from the Arabic *mu'adhdhin*
- Use of a different but related word from the SL, pretending it is the original word. For instance, the Italian word *cappuccino* is

often translated into English as *latte*, which in Italian means "milk".

- Making the meaning explicit, such as *Jewish temple* for *synagogue*
- Replacement of the word with a similar, local one, such as the French *art nouveau* (literally "new art") for *Jugendstil*
- Replacement of the word with one that is more generic or international, such as *red wine* for *Beaujolais*
- Addition of an adjective to help the reader identify the origin of realia, as in *the Argentine pampa*
- Translation of the overall meaning. For example, the English sentence *Does the National Health Service cover this drug?* could become, in an American context, *Is this drug expensive?*

The choice among these possibilities depends on several elements:

- text
- addition of exoticism: do we want it?
- adequacy is preferred to acceptability when the aim is to avoid the ambiguity that can arise from the use of more culturally neutral translations
- realia importance & familiarity
- not all languages are equally open to "foreignisms", and speakers of that language may not be familiar with realia.
- reader

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