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UDK 81'255.4:81'42

REALIA AND LACUNAE AS LINGUOCULTURAL FEATURES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Abstract. This study explores the linguocultural features of national identity with a focus on realia and lacunae as key units of cultural representation. Realia are defined as culturally bound words and expressions denoting unique objects, traditions, and phenomena, while lacunae are conceptual gaps that emerge in intercultural communication due to the absence of equivalent terms. Using a qualitative linguocultural and comparative approach, the research identifies, classifies, and interprets these units, while analyzing strategies employed in their transfer across languages.

Keywords: linguoculturology, national identity, realia, lacunae, translation, cultural specificity

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РЕАЛИИ И ЛАКУНЫ КАК ЛИНГВОКУЛЬТУРНЫЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ

Аннотация. В данном исследовании рассматриваются лингвокультурные особенности национальной идентичности с акцентом на реалии и лакуны как ключевые единицы культурного представления. Реалии определяются как культурно обусловленные слова и выражения, обозначающие уникальные предметы, традиции и явления, тогда как лакуны понимаются как концептуальные пробелы, возникающие в межкультурной коммуникации вследствие отсутствия эквивалентных терминов.

Ключевые слова: лингвокультурология, национальная идентичность, реалии, лакуны, перевод, культурная специфика

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REALIYA VA LAKUNALAR

MILLIYLIKNING LINGVOMADANIY XUSUSIYATLARI SIFATIDA

Annotatsiya. Ushbu tadqiqot milliy identiklikning lingvomadaniy xususiyatlarini, xususan, madaniy ifodaning asosiy birliklari sifatida realiya va lakunalarga e'tibor qaratgan holda o'rganadi. Realialar o'ziga xos buyumlar, an'analar va hodisalarni ifodalovchi madaniy jihatdan bog'liq so'z va iboralarning sifatida talqin qilinadi, lakunalar esa ekvivalent atamalar yo'qligi sababli madaniyatlararo muloqotda paydo bo'ladigan tushuncha bo'shliqlari sifatida izohlanadi.

Kalitso'zlar: lingvomadaniyatshunoslik, milliy identiklik, realiya, lakuna, tarjima, madaniy xoslik

Introduction

Language is not only a means of communication but also a mirror of national culture and identity. Words, expressions, and concepts often carry cultural meanings that go beyond their direct denotation, reflecting the worldview, traditions, and values of a people. In this respect, linguocultural units serve as important markers of national identity, connecting linguistic form with cultural content. Among such units, *realia* - lexical items that denote culturally specific objects, phenomena, or institutions and *lacunae* - semantic gaps that appear in cross-cultural communication due to the absence of equivalent concepts play a central role in revealing the uniqueness of a nation's linguistic and cultural heritage.

The study of *realia* and *lacunae* is of particular importance in translation and intercultural communication. Translators often face challenges when transferring culturally bound elements from one language into another, since direct equivalents may not exist or may not fully convey the same cultural significance. In this sense, *realia* and *lacunae* embody the intersection of language, culture, and national identity, offering valuable insights into how cultural meanings are encoded, transmitted, and sometimes lost in translation. Examining these units thus

contributes not only to linguistics but also to cultural studies, translation studies, and intercultural communication.

Literature Review

The relationship between language and culture has been extensively studied in linguistics, cultural studies, and translation studies. Early works by Humboldt and Sapir–Whorf emphasized the role of language in shaping worldview and cultural identity. Later, scholars such as Vereshchagin and Kostomarov (1990) introduced the concept of linguoculturology as a field that explores the inseparable link between linguistic forms and cultural meanings. Within this framework, realia are viewed as linguistic markers that reflect the material and spiritual culture of a nation. Researchers including Vlahov and Florin (1980) argued that realia carry ethnographic significance, representing cultural-specific items that often resist direct translation. Their studies highlighted that realia not only function as lexical units but also as cultural signs, encapsulating traditions, beliefs, and values of a particular community.

Alongside realia, the concept of lacunae has also attracted scholarly attention. Sorokin and Markovina (1981) developed the theory of lacunae to describe the absence of equivalent concepts across languages, which creates difficulties in intercultural communication and translation. Scholars note that lacunae are not merely lexical gaps but also cultural voids that highlight the uniqueness of national identity. In translation studies, Newmark (1988) and Venuti (1995) discussed strategies for dealing with cultural untranslatability, including adaptation, descriptive translation, and domestication versus foreignization. Contemporary research builds on these foundations, emphasizing the importance of preserving cultural specificity while ensuring comprehensibility in translation. Thus, the study of realia and lacunae continues to be a vital area for understanding how national identity is expressed and negotiated in intercultural contexts.

Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative linguocultural approach, aiming to examine how realia and lacunae function as carriers of national identity within

language and translation. The study employs methods of descriptive analysis, comparative analysis, and classification, focusing on the identification, categorization, and interpretation of culturally specific units. Realia were understood as words or expressions denoting unique objects, phenomena, or traditions of a particular culture, while lacunae were treated as gaps or missing equivalents in intercultural communication.

The process of analysis consisted of three stages. First, authentic language materials such as literary texts, media discourse, and academic sources were reviewed to identify examples of realia and lacunae. Second, these examples were classified into categories according to their thematic and functional characteristics (e.g., ethnographic, socio-political, everyday life). Third, the strategies of transferring these units into another language were studied using established frameworks from translation studies (Newmark, 1988; Venuti, 1995), with particular attention to domestication, foreignization, descriptive translation, and adaptation. The findings were then interpreted in terms of their effectiveness in reflecting or transforming national identity in cross-cultural contexts.

Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed that realia play a significant role in reflecting material and spiritual aspects of national culture. These units often included references to food, clothing, rituals, traditional instruments, and socio-political institutions that are unique to a particular society. Their translation demonstrated varying degrees of cultural preservation. In some cases, realia were transferred directly into the target language through transliteration or borrowing, which helped maintain cultural specificity but occasionally reduced accessibility for foreign readers. In other cases, translators applied descriptive or adaptive strategies, ensuring comprehension but at the cost of cultural authenticity. These findings confirm earlier observations by Vlachov and Florin (1980) that realia function not only as lexical items but also as cultural signs requiring careful treatment in translation. Realia are words and expressions that denote objects, phenomena, or concepts

specific to the culture, history, or everyday life of a particular people. They often do not have exact equivalents in another language and reflect national identity.

Examples of Realia

1. Uzbek Realia

“Do‘ppi” – a traditional Uzbek skullcap.

“Navruz” – the spring festival marking the Persian New Year, celebrated widely in Central Asia.

“Palov/Osh” – the national dish of Uzbekistan.

“Kumush belbog‘” – a silver belt, often worn as part of traditional attire.

“Mahalla” – a neighborhood community institution unique to Uzbek social life.

2. English / Western Realia

“Thanksgiving” – a traditional American holiday with no direct equivalent in other cultures.

“Pub” – a cultural institution in the UK, different from just a “bar.”

“Oxford” / “Cambridge” – not only universities but symbols of British academic culture.

3. Japanese Realia

“Kimono” – a traditional Japanese garment.

“Sakura” – cherry blossoms, symbolizing beauty and impermanence.

“Tatami” – straw mats used in traditional Japanese houses.

4. Russian Realia

“Samovar” – a traditional Russian tea-making device.

“Dacha” – a country house or summer cottage.

“Banya” – a Russian bathhouse, different from a sauna.

These words are usually kept untranslated (transliteration + explanation) in literary translation, because translating them literally (e.g., “pilaf” for palov) may not fully convey the cultural meaning.

Similarly, the study of lacunae showed that cultural gaps remain one of the most challenging issues in intercultural communication. Many concepts embedded in national traditions, beliefs, or social practices did not have direct equivalents in

the target language. The absence of lexical counterparts often forced translators to choose between omission, generalization, or explanation, each carrying different implications for the transmission of national identity. In line with Sorokin and Markovina's (1981) theory, lacunae highlighted the uniqueness of cultural identity, serving as markers of difference between linguistic communities. The discussion also showed that successful translation of lacunae requires strategies that balance clarity with cultural preservation, echoing Venuti's (1995) argument on foreignization versus domestication. Scholars (e.g., Yu.S. Stepanov, V.V. Krasnykh, Sorokin) classify lacunae as "semantic gaps" in communication that appear when a word, concept, or cultural phenomenon exists in one language but is missing in another.

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1. By Language Scope

Intralingual Lacunae

Gaps within one language (between dialects, registers, or subcultures).

Example (Uzbek): "Do'ppi" is well-known in Uzbek, but some dialectal terms ("tahmon" – old word for belt) may be unknown in other regions.

Example (English): Legal or medical jargon (habeas corpus) may be unknown to non-specialists.

Interlingual Lacunae

Gaps between two languages in translation.

Example (Uzbek → English): "Mahalla" → no English equivalent; translated as "neighborhood community".

Example (English → Uzbek): "Pub" → no Uzbek equivalent; requires descriptive translation like "inglizlarga xos ichimlik uyi".

2. By Cultural Content

Ethnographic Lacunae

Objects and traditions absent in another culture.

Uzbek: “Palov/Osh” – not simply “pilaf”; it has ritual and symbolic meaning.

English: “Thanksgiving” – Uzbek has no equivalent holiday.

Everyday Life Lacunae

Daily habits and practices unique to a culture.

Uzbek: “Obi non” (sacred respect for bread).

English: “Privacy” – no one-word equivalent in Uzbek (shaxsiy hayot only partial).

Historical/Political Lacunae

Concepts tied to one nation’s history or system.

Russian: “Subbotnik” – voluntary Saturday work in Soviet times.

English: “Magna Carta” – historically unique, no equivalent in Uzbek.

Religious/Philosophical Lacunae

Unique concepts tied to belief systems.

Japanese: “Wabi-sabi” – beauty in imperfection, untranslatable into English.

Uzbek: “Navruz” – both cultural and spiritual holiday; no English counterpart.

3. By Degree of Translatability

Absolute Lacunae

No equivalent word and no direct descriptive possibility.

Example: Russian “тоска” (toska) – deep spiritual anguish (not “melancholy,” not “sadness”).

Relative Lacunae

Possible to translate partially, but meaning is not fully conveyed.

Example: Uzbek “Mahalla” → “community” or “neighborhood”, but it loses the cultural role of self-governance.

Example: English “Pub” → “bar”, but this ignores the cultural importance in British society.

4. By Source of Motivation

Unmotivated Lacunae

Coincidental absence of a word.

Example: English had no word for “Schadenfreude” → borrowed from German.

Motivated Lacunae

Due to absence of phenomenon in the culture.

Example: Uzbek has no word for “Halloween” → holiday not celebrated traditionally.

Example: English has no equivalent for Uzbek “Do‘ppi” → unique item of clothing.

Conclusion. The study demonstrated that realia and lacunae serve as crucial linguocultural units through which national identity is expressed, preserved, and transmitted across languages. Realia reflect the material and spiritual values of a nation, while lacunae highlight cultural gaps that reveal the uniqueness of one community in comparison with another. Their presence in language underscores the inseparable link between linguistic form and cultural meaning. At the same time, they pose significant challenges for translation, as strategies must balance cultural authenticity with accessibility for target audiences. By analyzing how realia and lacunae function in cross-cultural contexts, the research emphasizes the importance of linguocultural competence in translation and intercultural communication. Ultimately, preserving the integrity of these units contributes to deeper mutual understanding among cultures and supports the accurate representation of national identity on a global scale.

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