How Do I Say *Realia* in English?

On a Once 'Cyrillic' Translatological Problem

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Abstract & Keywords

English:

The present paper deals with both linguistic and extralinguistic provisos determining the successful rendition of so-termed 'realia' as featuring complexly and conspicuously not only in various translated texts, but also in modern translatological discourse. The emphasis is, therefore, placed on clarifying the nature and compass of this fundamental phenomenon as well as on highlighting how its current interpretations developed. The authors suggest an alternative (and highly practical) classification of *realia*, based on the dichotomy '*realodesignatum* : *realonym*' and allowing for what they see as four basic *realia*-forming patterns, namely *realodesignatum* paralleled by *realonym*, *realonym* unparalleled by *realodesignatum*, *realodesignatum* unparalleled by *realonym*, and *realodesignatum* coincident with *realonym*. Consistent with this typology, rubrics such as '*realia* proper', 'quasi *realia*', 'latent *realia*', and 'performative *realia*' are singled out, discussed and meticulously illustrated. It is maintained that, depending on the preference of either 'domestication' or 'foreignization' strategy, possible ways of their rendition may vary, resulting, among other things, in the omission or preservation of certain types of *realia*, but what seems indispensable to a high-quality piece of translation is observance and not distortion of the original meaning and its connotations as embodied, among other things, in the phenomenon on hand. The results obtained can serve the purpose of furthering the study of *realia* themselves as well as that of rendering them into other languages.

Keywords: realodesignatum, realia, realonym, realia proper, quasi realia, performative realia, latent realia

Introduction

For historical reasons, the notion of *realia*[1], as is largely the case with the more nuts-and-bolts concepts of translation studies generally speaking, emerged and became common mostly in ex-Warsaw Pact countries during the Cold War and, to a lesser degree, post-Cold War eras, a possible explanation being the specific 'translational barrier' separating realities and ideologies that lay behind words in, for example, English and Russian to a far greater extent than those in, say, English and French. However, despite occasional exaggerated but not altogether unfounded instances of the sort, which were traditionally singled out under the rubric of 'Sovietisms' and now mostly belong to the past, there remain good grounds for retaining the concept in the present-day allegedly globalized world. In order to explain why, it seems worthwhile to give a brief overview of its emergence and coverage.

Theoretical background

As has been stated above, the notion on hand originated and became established in what might, in a non-evaluative way, be called 'Cyrillic scholarship'. It is believed that for the first time the term '*realia*' (*реалии*) was employed by Andrey Fedorov in his work 'On Literary Translation' way back in 1941. However, both in the early paper and in all four editions of his gradually evolving magnum opus on translation theory, the last version published in 1983, the father of the terminological unit consistently stuck to the phrasing of 'words denoting *realia*' (Fedorov, 1953: 136–145; 1958: 154–169; 1968: 175–192; 1983: 145–157), thus obviously interpreting its content as extralinguistic in character, expounded *de re* and not *de dicto*. Despite its customary correctness and etymological accuracy, such usage of the term — unhandy for its bulkiness and seemingly non-philological in essence — almost immediately saw extension. And so, already in 1952, Lev Sobolev put forth the following definition: 'The term "*realia*" designates specifically national words and locutions from everyday life which have no equivalents in the mode of life and, consequently, in languages of other peoples' (Sobolev, 1952: 281) by means of which considerably weakening not only the etymological acceptability of the term (for the root *real* definitely has to do with something more tangible than a word or locution), but also its practical applicability in those cases when grave disparities in meaning weren't followed by corresponding linguistic discrepancies[2]. And yet, needless to say, it is precisely in the latter interpretation that the term survives till today, having acquired prevalent currency.

Another challenge to Fedorov's understanding of what *realia* were about came from linguistics, at the time firmly structuralist, and, in particular, the then booming purview of linguistic geography (*lingvostranovedenie*). From the standpoint of the former, the notion lacked *lingual* clarity and so had to be rethought in terms of more convenient language phenomena such as loanwords and all sorts of 'exotic vocabulary', alienisms, barbarisms, and localisms included. As Lidiya Sapogova put it, 'in the most general sense, *realia* can be defined as a type of borrowings which, preserving maximum similarity to foreign words, functions in the target language to denote specific notions and phenomena of alien reality[3]' (Sapogova, 1978: 71–79). Whereas the latter, facing the highly practical task of teaching Russian to foreigners, readily grasped at the new notion, but rather disfigured it in the process. As viewed by linguistic geographers, *realia*, in fact, were any words or locutions charged with so-termed 'background information' (Vereshchagin and Kostomarov, 1976; 1980), which, on the one hand, caused unjustified expansion of the concept and, on the other hand, bred further confusion by finally rendering facultative the meaning of *tangibility* enshrined in the term's etymology. Thus, what originated as a notion of translation theory and *not* linguistics in the proper sense became, as is often the case with borderline concepts, subject to so much accommodation that R. Zorivchak was forced to remind: 'When viewing *realia*, certain researchers … ignore the factor of binary comparison. According to their assertions, all lexemes designating nationally specific objects are *realia*. And yet, in actual fact, the notion of '*realia*' as employed in translation theory emerges only in the course of comparing languages and, correspondingly, cultures. Outside this comparison realia cannot exist[4]' (Zorivchak, 1989: 56).

Despite suchlike rejoinders, the two approaches rather tended to blend. This was especially obvious in attempts to work up a classification of *realia*, by far the fullest of versions put forth by Sergey Vlakhov and Sider Florin. According to the Bulgarian

researchers, *realia* fell under a number of rubrics, all of them singled out basing on the following criteria: I. Material division II. Local division (depending on national and lingual attribution) III. Chronological division (in both synchronic and diachronic perspectives, following the principle of "familiarity") IV. Translational division (Vlakhov and Florin, 1980: 50). As is well obvious, the fourth criterion strikes the eye as non-congenerous with the others, thus suggesting that in translation theory a different approach is applied. That recital, however, was additionally equipped with a note making the point on hand still clearer: 'Perchance, from the standpoint of linguistics, it would be worthwhile to specifically single out the division of *realia* on the principle of assimilation, or familiarity, or prevalence. But since such categorization will hardly matter much for a practicing translator and in view of the relativity of delimitative criteria (as, in particular, the appearance of a unit in dictionaries) we chose to address this issue within the confines of chronological division, all the more so that assimilation of foreign *realia* is, once again, closely connected with the duration of their usage' (Vlakhov and Florin, 1980: 50–51). And so, while positioning themselves as theorists of *translation*, the authors not only accepted and widely used the dubious term 'linguistic *realia*,' but increased confusion rather than clarity by completely mixing up the 'linguistic' and 'translational' approaches to the matter and retaining the binary comparison of languages as, de facto, merely facultative. Just as Sapogova thought *realia* to be a type of borrowings, Vlakhov and Florin — a mirror reflection of such an attitude — insisted on the opposite: even well-assimilated loanwords might have their status of '*realia*' preserved, provided that they meet the rest of the requirements, thus further lengthening the already long and rather equivocal list of all sorts of *-isms* among the 'exotic vocabulary'.

Results and discussion

The present tedious if cursory account still seems necessary in order to show that, as the Bulgarian researchers put it, such categorization hardly mattered much to practicing translators and, consequently, all the theorizing was of little help when applied to particular translational tasks. To ascertain this, one only needs to consult three different translations into English of the two opening paragraphs in the famous novel 'The Master and Margarita[5]' by Mikhail Bulgakov.

The original reads:

В час жаркого весеннего заката на Патриарших прудах появилось двое граждан. Первый из них — приблизительно сорокалетний, одетый в серенькую летнюю пару, — был маленького роста, темноволос, упитан, лыс, свою приличную шляпу пирожком нес в руке, а аккуратно выбритое лицо его украшали сверхъестественных размеров очки в черной роговой оправе. Второй — плечистый, рыжеватый, вихрастый молодой человек в заломленной на затылок клетчатой кепке — был в ковбойке, жеваных белых брюках и черных тапочках.

Первый был не кто иной, как Михаил Александрович Берлиоз, редактор толстого художественного журнала и председатель правления одной из крупнейших московских литературных ассоциаций, сокращенно именуемой МАССОЛИТ, а молодой спутник его — поэт Иван Николаевич Понырев, пишущий под псевдонимом Бездомный» (Bulgakov, 1989: 334).

Apart from rather catchy *realia* such as *Патриарши пруды*, the two paragraphs feature at least three other units of the same kind which, as practice shows, do not as readily leap to the eye. The first of them concerns the editor's headwear. Questionable as it may sound, we are, nonetheless, convinced that it has *not* been translated either *accurately* or *adequately* in any of the three editions under analysis as well as in any other translation that we are familiar with[6]. To a speaker of Russian, the queerest thing about it is already the phrasing, '*шляпа пирожком*', for in modern times the latter word would only sound natural if used within the word-combination шапка *пирожком* or, a still more common way to put it, *шапка-пирожок* which usage is, consequently, registered in dictionaries (see, for instance, the 'Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language' by S. Ozhegov and N. Shvedova: '*(colloquial)* men's brimless [fur] hat with a lengthways concave top' (*мужская шапка без полей с продольно вдавленным верхом*), that is what in English would be called *ambassador hat*). It remains only to guess whether or not in Bulgakov's days, at least in colloquial usage, the word was also applied to *felt* hats of a particular style, but, if yes, one has good grounds to surmise what the hats must have looked like — most probably, they had a curled-up narrow brim and a middle-height crown with the proverbial lengthwise concavity, thus resembling what is called so today.

Among the possible prototypes of Berlioz, most of them personal enemies of Bulgakov, researchers mention the Soviet Russian poet Demian Bedny, one of the reasons being the distinctive headwear and the strange way of naming it: '...the *pirozhok* hat, characteristic of Bedny, is, in keeping with the season, transformed from a winter headpiece into a summer one (though summer headpieces aren't usually called in that way)' (Sokolov, 2006: 142–143). Whether this assumption is correct or not, one can hardly deny that at the time there existed conceptual antagonism between the old-time *hat* and a more democratic, 'proletarian' *cap* (Belobrovtseva and Kulyus, 2007: 145–146). If viewed from this vantage, the emphatically 'class-conscious' editor carrying a *hat* in his *hand* even on a particularly *hot* day when he is already prudently dressed in a *summer two-piece* suit might be seen as a poseur or *impostor* (first and foremost, a usurper of the literary position rightfully belonging to the Master[7]) which smacks of the author's tongue-in-cheek reference to himself, a confirmed hat-wearer in a country of nothing but caps (cf. from Chapter XXI of the novel: '...*а по тротуарам, как казалось сверху Маргарите, плыли реки кепок*') (Bulgakov, 1989: 561) and an owner of what looked very much like the headpiece in question (cf. Bulgakov's photo taken at the funeral of Vladimir Mayakovsky).

Whereas in translation one comes across a 'decorous pork-pie hat' (Bulgakov, 1992: 1) and two cases of 'fedora', either 'proper' (Bulgakov, 1997: 3) or 'respectable' (Bulgakov, 1997), not one of the variants able to be regarded as convincing. Despite the outer semantic similarity, the former means an altogether different thing. Originally a women's hat, the headpiece began to be worn by men in the early 20th century Britain and later flourished in the USA, remaining intermittently popular into the early 1970s. Its distinctive features include a stingy curled-up brim, thus making it seemingly suitable for the context, and a low flat crown with no lengthwise concavity, but with a characteristic crease running around the inside top edge. However, both at the time when the novel was written and throughout the decades when hats where in fashion, a pork-pie hat, for a *Soviet* citizen, remained a distinctively *Anglo-Saxon* item of headwear, definitely *not* 'decorous' for a man such as Berlioz. The fedora, instead, though typically creased lengthwise down the crown with two 'pinches' near the front on both sides, normally had rather broad brims, a comparatively high crown and, generally speaking, became truly fashionable only at the turn of the 1920–30s. Put on the fictional editor-in-chief living in Soviet Russia somewhere around 1929, the Year of the Great Turn, a fedora would have seemed newfangled rather than 'respectable' or 'proper,' to say nothing of the same 'ideologically alien' look about it which would, in a dozen years or so, be seen as 'kowtowing to the West' (compare with 'bourgeois belch' (*буржуазная отрыжка*) for 'necktie' as a more contemporaneous example of the same attitude). Besides, neither of the two hat styles corresponds to other attributes of Berlioz as mentioned in the scanty passages describing the character, a non-smoker and, very likely, tea-totaller speaking with occasional dated locutions (*«ну-с», «престранный»*) (Bulgakov, 1989: 342, 335) and taking an interest in – if not a liking to! (Bulgakov, 1989: 338) – the *highly conventional* foreigner. And yet it is only against *this* background that the

words 'proper' and 'respectable' really begin to make sense! The editor strives to bear a degree of resemblance to the pre-revolutionary *intelligentsia* (an *impostor* indeed!) and so the hat that suggests itself rather naturally in this context is a variety of the more conservative *homburg*, 'a man's felt hat having a narrow curled brim and a tapered crown with a lengthwise indentation' (Oxford dictionary).

The second translational difficulty is caused by the word *ковбойка*, a 'tartan shirt' in one case (Bulgakov, 1992: 1) and a 'cowboy shirt' in the two others (Bulgakov, 1997: 3; Bulgakov, 1997). It is worthwhile to admit it from the start that, despite the misleading borrowed root *cowboy*, we tend to perceive the lexeme as characteristically *Russian* and in doing so quite agree with Vlakhov and Florin (1980: 25) who, considering the same vocabulary unit, call it an example of 'assimilated' («*освоенных*») *realia*, thus ranking with, in their terminology, '[one's] own' and not 'alien' phenomena of the sort, which is the very reason why the latter variant of translation seems unacceptable. Whereas coming back to the binary opposition advocated by Zorivchak, it seems of interest to note that in this particular case it is not *lingual*, but solely *cultural* factors that are at work, *realia* being created 'with a careful eye to' foreign — in actual fact, non-existent or highly exaggerated — patterns (compare the existential shock caused by inevitable subsequent disillusionment which is so pointedly portrayed in the 2008 movie '*Stilyagi*' when provoked by the phrase «*В Америке нет* стиляг!» — "There are no *stilyagi* in America!").

According to various dictionaries of Russian, *ковбойка* can be described as 'a checkered shirt with a turn-down collar, patch pockets, and, typically, lacing instead of buttons.' In dictionaries of English, however, the noun *cowboy shirt* (unlike, for instance, *cowboy boot*) is not registered. And yet, in actual usage, it does occur in the context of the so-termed *Western wear* as denoting a shirt elaborately decorated with piping and embroidery, typically having a contrasting yoke and, in some cases, edged with a fringe. Already googling the word in search for images may be enough to ascertain that the shirt in question doesn't have to be (and seldom happens to be) checkered, let alone possess the characteristic lacing (rather the opposite is true, it often has a pronounced placket, not infrequently of a different colour, with catchy buttons or snap fasteners). In view of that, it is no longer so out-of-place that the variant 'tartan shirt' begins to appear, preserving at least the more important semanteme of pattern**[8]** (in Russian-speaking post-Soviet countries, such shirts were popular in the 1990s, but, except in possible individual cases, were not known under the name of *ковбойка*). And yet it still seems unacceptable for two major reasons. On the one hand, the 'tartan' introduces Scottish connotations, absent in the original and objectionable in translation, and, on the other hand, it doesn't suit either the season or the weather.

The third case concerns the word combination «*толстый художественный журнал*», translated as 'highbrow literary magazine' (Bulgakov, 1992: 1), 'literary magazine' (Bulgakov, 1997: 3) (elsewhere also interchangeable with 'journal') (Bulgakov, 1997: 4), and 'fat literary journal' (Bulgakov, 1997) . While the rendition of «*художественный*» as 'literary' can cause no serious objections, the search for an equivalent of the component «*толстый*» presents considerable problems. When applied to the word *журнал*, the Russian adjective in question may mean not only its size (as in, for instance, *a* thick *magazine*), but also, figuratively and quite as frequently, a type of a periodical meant for the literati rather than a wide reading public (compare the slogan of the internet project «*Журнальный зал*» featuring the activities of Russian literary and humanitarian magazines: «*русский* толстый журнал *как эстетический феномен*»). In view of that, all the three versions of translation are fairly questionable. The closest to the original, correct in meaning if not in wording (for the periodical, no doubt, saw its policy as perfectly 'democratic' and 'revolutionary'), seems to be Michael Glenny's variant of 'highbrow' (to some extent compensated by 'journal' as employed by the rest of the translators), whereas the two others, despite the literal exactitude of the latter, fail to convey the connotations of the original.

And thus, coming back to theory, the above-performed analysis, as we see it, allows one to arrive at a most far-reaching conclusion: what makes it so hard to distinguish and adequately translate *realia* is precisely the overwhelming belief that they are both *notions* and *words*, whereas in actual fact the two *may* or *may not* coincide. A nationally specific meaning can be conveyed by what seems a perfect lexical equivalent (as in *ковбойка* : cowboy shirt; *шляпа пирожком* : pork-pie hat) and, vice versa, a nationally specific expression (as in *шляпа пирожком*, *толстый журнал*) can correspond (though sometimes explanatory interpolations may be necessary) to what is available also in other cultures but known under different names (*homburg*, *intellectual magazine*).

It should be noted that Fedorov's original conviction in the strictly *extralinguistic* nature of *realia*, despite its general rejection, was not completely lost on other theorists. For instance, still in 2004, Mykola Zarytskyi advocated the introduction of the term *realonym* to designate what the former somewhat bulkily called 'words denoting *realia*' (Zarytskyi, 2004: 97). Though realizing it that the broad usage of the term '*realia*,' as long and commonly accepted by the academic community, is hardly revertible, we, nevertheless, find it possible to clarify its span and meaning by *rethinking the approach to the classification* of such units and to this end introducing the technical notion of *realodesignatum* as a necessary counterpart to *realonym*, the correlation between the two following that between a referent and its exponent. Using both tools, it seems feasible to provide an exhaustive structural description of *realia* while observing the three most commonly advocated delimiting principles such as the binary comparison of languages / cultures, the national specificity of either the former or the latter (thus, to some extent, incorporating into our scope the understanding of the subject current in linguistic geography), and the etymologically conditioned meaning of tangibility.

In our opinion, the grouping of *realia* based on the dichotomy between *realodesignatum* and *realonym* can be executed following four basic patterns: *realodesignatum* paralleled by *realonym*, *realonym* unparalleled by *realodesignatum*, *realodesignatum* unparalleled by *realonym*, *realodesignatum* coincident with *realonym*. Consistent with this typology, it seems reasonable to single out rubrics such as, accordingly, *realia* **proper**, **quasi** *realia*, **latent** *realia*, and **performative** *realia*, some of them falling / blending into additional classes as shown in Table 1.
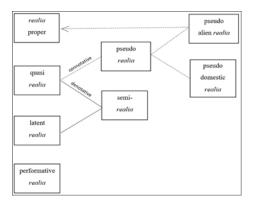
Table 1. Classification of *Realia*

By far the commonest among the above-listed types are *realia* **proper**, that is those possessing both a nationally specific meaning with a sufficient degree of tangibility and a particular lingual unit to convey it (for instance, *glengarry*, (Germ.) *Dirndl*, (Fr.) *camembert***[9]**). In the course of time, as the national coloration of suchlike notions is weakened or lost and corresponding lexemes are borrowed into other languages, certain samples of the group may cease to meet the standards of *realia* thus becoming semantically assimilated loanwords (for instance, *джинсы*, *хотдог*, *бейсболка* and so on). It is also with this group that certain culture-specific names, artifacts, customs, historic figures, events and so on have to be classified (that is to say archetypes of so-termed precedent phenomena), but *only* as used in the individual sense (e.g. *Jack the Ripper* — 'an unidentified murderer active in London in 1888') and not antonomastically (e.g. *Jack the Ripper* — 'serial killer'), for in the latter case their *realodesignata* cease to be nationally peculiar, thereby forcing such units out into the next class.

In case with **quasi** *realia* and other sub-classes comprising the rubric through the connotative branch, the national specificity of their *designata* is alleged rather than veritable and so such units *do* have functional, but not connotative equivalents (e.g. *croûton* — *гренок*, *сухарик*). The generic term, however, is reserved for those cases, when a certain instance of wording, normally intended to subdue an unacceptable impression (of straightforward unpretentiousness, lack of originality and so on) caused by a subject, happens to emerge *ad hoc*, acquires limited currency and is *not* or *not yet* accepted by a language system on the whole (apart from *шляпа пирожком*, which word-usage in unknown outside Bulgakov's text, a convincing if facetious illustration from among more recent items of the kind may be provided by the 'politically correct' attempt to rename *caffè Americano* as *Russiano*) ('Russiano' Coffee Joke Sparks Online Humour). However, in those instances when suchlike word-usage persists, gradually out-competing a corresponding established name, it may become adopted and acquire overwhelming currency, thus causing the emergence of **pseudo** *realia*. Examples of both the former and the latter may be found in the following extract from "Anna Karenina":

— Мне все равно. Мне лучше всего щи и каша; но ведь здесь этого нет.

— Каша а ля рюсс, прикажете? — сказал татарин, как няня над ребенком, нагибаясь над Левиным. [...]

— Ну, так дай ты нам, братец ты мой, устриц два, или мало — три десятка, суп с кореньями…

— Прентаньер, — подхватил татарин. Но Степан Аркадьич, видно, не хотел ему доставлять удовольствие называть по-французски кушанья.

— С кореньями, знаешь? Потом тюрбо под густым соусом, потом… ростбифу; да смотри, чтобы хорош был. Да каплунов, что ли, ну и консервов.

Татарин, вспомнив манеру Степана Аркадьича не называть кушанья по французской карте, не повторял за ним, но доставил себе удовольствие повторить весь заказ по карте: «Суп прентаньер, тюрбо сос Бомарше, пулар а лестрагон, маседуан де фрюи**[10]**… (Tolstoy, 1965: 39–40).

Viewing the original fragment in the light of the above-stated criteria, one cannot but arrive at the conclusion that *каша а ля рюсс* (most probably, 'buckwheat porridge') must be classified with quasi *realia* since, for one thing, outside menu a la carte such word-usage is not found and, for another thing, the ordinary French equivalent for the Russian *гречневая каша* is *la bouillie de sarrasin*. Whereas in case with *прентаньер* the issue is rather more complex, for the French word (originally, just as *porridge à la Russe*, a fancy name for what was and remains known in Russian as *майский суп*) was finally, unlike the former, borrowed into the language's lexis. A characteristic detail, however, is presented by the fact that the original formulation of *«суп с кореньями»* is rendered into English as 'clear soup with *vegetables*.' In view of climatic differences, certain ingredients of the French and Russian versions of the dish slightly differed, a characteristic feature of the latter recipe being various root crops, turnip among them, and that's what the client means by *коренья* (compare from Kuznetsov's dictionary: 'the underground and green parts of certain plants (*such as carrot, parsley, celery*) as used for food'). In the French *printanier/printanière*, instead, similar products are possible, but rather less common (compare from *Larousse*: '*un potage à base de* **légumes nouveaux** [the emphasis is ours. — A. Z., O. M., S. V.] *taillés menu*'), hence conditioning the appearance of 'vegetables' in order to adapt the scene to the perception of the Western reader. But since *the dinner takes place in winter* when (in the XIX century Russia!) the soup, at best, could only imitate the French *potage* (which is, probably, the reason why the client calls it *суп с кореньями* rather than *майский суп*), the waiter's wording is, in fact, *less* accurate — but, no doubt, far *more* 'classy' (mark the absence of any practical need in such a rendition and the Cyrillic spelling of the seemingly haute cuisine terminology).

A still more pronounced example of pseudo *realia* can be provided by the word *поридж* as found in the text of Yu. Semyonov's novel "Expansion-III": «*Работал он запойно, диктовал по тридцать, а то и сорок страниц в день; после завтрака (поридж, ломтик сыра, грейпфрут, кофе) устраивался в кабинете, ходил по старому хорезмскому ковру, обсыпая себя сизым сигарным дымом…*») (Semenov, 1987). Despite the availability of a perfect equivalent (cf. the much famous line *«Овсянка, сэр!»* from Igor Maslennikov's screen version of 'The Hound of the Baskervilles'), the lexeme is introduced with the sole purpose of adding national specificity to the image, albeit no genuine *realodesignatum* stands behind it. And yet it is enough to google the word (now, normally, as *порридж*) in order to receive evidence that in modern Russian such usage becomes more and more common.

Pseudo *realia* are potentially further divisible into **pseudo domestic** and **pseudo alien**, the touchstone being the binary comparison of languages and cultures. Strictly speaking, *both the former and the latter belong to '[one's] own' realia* in the sense that they only emerge in a *source language* (either from native or borrowed lingual material), but their connotations drastically differ.

Pseudo domestic *realia* are intended to minimize external cultural influences and, in this way, they are typologically not dissimilar to what Einar Haugen called 'loan creations,' that is coinages independent of a foreign word, but created out of the desire to replace it (Khaugen, 1972: 344–382). A vivid example here may be provided by the words *cognac* and *brandy* when viewed in the triple context of French, English, and Russian. As Oxford dictionary puts it, *brandy* is 'a strong alcoholic spirit distilled from wine or fermented fruit juice,' whereas *cognac* means 'a high-quality brandy, strictly speaking that distilled in Cognac in western France,' and so within the English-French language pair the former must be classified with pseudo domestic *realia* (for, as is obvious from both definitions, the only difference between the two notions, apart from the rather ambiguous semanteme of 'high-quality,' is solely geographical). While in the context of the French-Russian language pair (compare the elegantly outspoken definition of the loanword *cognac > коньяк* in Ushakov's dictionary: 'vodka from grape juice') no similar phenomenon is necessarily supposed to appear and it is rather the English *brandy* that may, depending on whether or not a particular translator prefers the so-termed 'foreignization strategy,' appear in the target language alongside with the non-*realonym коньяк*,[11] in this case presenting an instance of **pseudo** *realia*. To give another example, the same concerns *whisky* and *whiskey* (as Collins Advanced Learner's dictionary rather straightforwardly puts it, 'whiskey is whisky that is made in Ireland or the United States'). In the strict sense, however, there *might* emerge a *significant* contextual difference between, for instance, '[*молдавский*]' *коньяк*, '[*армянский*]' *коньяк*, and '[*французский*]' *коньяк*, in which case the corresponding units should be classified with **latent** *realia* (see below).

Whereas a characteristic feature of **pseudo alien** *realia* is, on the contrary, subservience to foreign patterns, though either the 'borrowed plumes' themselves or the loanwords denoting them are largely fictitious or distorted beyond recognition. Apart from *ковбойка* mentioned earlier as illustration of the former possibility, of interest here is the *realonym блайзер*, current in the colloquial Russian of 1990s in the sense 'baseball cap' (the misunderstanding, probably, resulted from the contiguity with *blazer* — 'a coloured jacket worn by schoolchildren or sports players as part of a uniform'). In this case, however (cf. *бейсболка* above), its *realodesignatum* is indeed observed, and hence the potential linkage to *realia* proper (see Table I). Another example here can be provided by *морковь по-корейски*, a post-Soviet space dish, borrowed from Korean diaspora, but unknown in mainland Korea.

As concerns **latent** *realia*, their nature is determined by either absence or non-specified usage of terms denoting nationally peculiar tangible objects, which state of things results in speakers' referring to them by their generic rather than particular names. Depending on a context, such differences (in many cases, rather minor[12]) may or may not be crucial enough to cause misunderstanding, and yet in certain situations they indeed become relevant. A good example here can be provided by the lexeme *borscht* as used in Slavic languages of Eastern Europe, English, and Yiddish. In Slavic-English context, the 'Russian or Polish soup made with beetroot and usually served with sour cream' (Oxford dictionary), though so far remaining among *realia* proper, hardly preserves a strong charge of uniqueness and is probably doomed (just like *pizza, pasta* and so on) to become semantically assimilated. Whereas in either Slavic-Yiddish or Yiddish-English binary comparison, the word (esp. as a shorthand name for *peysakhdiker borsht* – 'Passover borscht') *may* reveal significant differences in its meaning. When adopted by East European Ashkenazi Jews from their Slavic neighbours, the dish, for one thing, modified its recipe so as to meet the dietary prescriptions of kashruth, whereby developing two strictly separate varieties: meat borscht and dairy borscht, to say nothing of the substitution of pork by beef brisket in the former. But also, for another thing, its vegetarian variety, a clear ruby-red broth, obtained by fermenting beetroot in brine (actually, a drink; cf. what is meant in Polish by *barszcz czysty*), became an essential meal during the Passover period. It is, probably, in view of this particular practice that the Yiddish word developed a figurative meaning of 'wine of inferior quality, vino' and became incorporated in the set expression *velveler far borsht* (lit. 'cheaper than borsht') — 'very cheap, dirt cheap'. And so, in the process of its importation into the Yiddish language, the corresponding Slavic lexeme saw considerable specialization of meaning (compare how the Ukrainian language reacted to the word's new and 'puzzling' semantic shades by the emergence of the colloquial phrase *гарячий, як єврейський борщ (у суботу)*, lit. 'as hot ('hot-tempered') as Jewish borscht (on Saturday),' its humorous effect based on similar culturally-conditioned peculiarities) (Zornytskyi, 2014: 153–161).

In case with **semi-***realia*, the character of the subclass is conditioned by the fact that the semantemes of their denotata are *extralinguistically* grouped in such a way as is not found in a language / culture employed for comparison, thereby generating national specificity. For instance, the French term *bureau de tabac* is *simultaneously* equivalent in Russian to both *табачный киоск* and *газетный киоск*; the coverage of the American English lexeme *drugstore* is the same as in the British English *chemist's* [*shop*] and *corner shop / convenience store* (the latter one a borrowed Americanism) if taken in the aggregate. What makes semi-*realia* akin to *both* quasi and latent *realia* is, on the one hand, the fact that they *do* have a denotational *realonym*, but it is not, as a rule, preserved in translation (as would be in, for the sake of argument, **драгстор*), and yet, on the other hand, their alleged equivalents not always convey the more important segments of their meaning[13].

And finally, by **performative** *realia* we mean words or, more commonly, expressions that have no direct equivalents within a pair of languages and either accompany or *substitute* (and thus *realonym=realodesignatum*) certain culture-specific gestures, thereby inseparably linked to the materiality of a corresponding extralinguistic act. For instance, *Накось выкуси! Зуб даю!* Up yours! I bite my thumb at you! Cross my heart [and hope to die]! (Fr.) *Mon œil! Ça me rase!* and so on.

Conclusions

And so, to conclude, it seems worthwhile to recapitulate that some *realia* can hardly be detected, let alone properly translated, unless by recognizing it that these are double-facet units consisting of their *designata*, *onomata*, or both (in the latter case the two may also coincide). In certain contexts, rather than searching for dictionary equivalents, it not infrequently proves necessary to undertake a deeper study of, first and foremost, a unit's *realodesignatum*, if any, thereby determining the former's typological character and, consequently, arriving at an acceptable variant of translation. Depending on the preference of either 'domestication' or 'foreignization' strategy, possible ways of rendition may vary, resulting, among other things, in the omission or preservation of certain types of *realia*, but what seems indispensable to a high-quality piece of translation is observance and not distortion of the original meaning and its connotations, embodied also in the phenomenon on hand.

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Notes

[1] As current practice of word-usage has it, the English language lacks a universal equivalent for what might be meant by the Russian реалии both on a large scale and in the narrow sense that interests us here. However, in view of the cognation between the two words, we, following Roksolana Zorivchak (1989: 56), preserve for the nonce this derivative of the late Latin realis – 'related to things' and, by way of semantic loan, ascribe to it the same meaning which is peculiar to its Russian counterpart.

[2] Even within one and the same language, as is the case with British and American English, examples of the sort are rather numerous. For instance, the word *coffee* as used by average speakers of the two presents a large set of peculiarities depending on which variant of the language is implied (compare, for one thing, how queer the perfectly natural American expression *mug*

of coffee would sound, should the latter component be taken in the British sense, or the term *caffè Americano* — though considerably modified in meaning if compared to its prototypal denotatum — which was calqued into a number of European languages, Russian among them). The difference seems no less considerable than that between, say, *kawa po polsku*, *Wienerkaffee*, *Türk kahvesi*, though in each case a certain national variant of the central lexeme ('coffee') can, by default, serve as a shorthand name for the corresponding narrower notion.

[3] As we see it, the translational practice of transcription / transliteration is indeed a way for foreign words to penetrate a language and, if under favourable conditions, to be assimilated by its lexis (compare *hamburger*, *Coca-Cola*). However, that can be applied to a much wider range of lexical units, not necessarily falling under the category of *realia* in the traditional sense (compare *OK*, *oops*, *bye-bye* as borrowed into quite a number of modern languages).

[4] Despite its general validity, the statement seems to us rather too categorical for, strictly speaking, an act of translation doesn't necessarily involve at least two languages. It seems conceivable that words, those denoting *realia* among them, can be 'translated' from one national/social dialect or variant of a language into another in which case the comparison of *cultures* turns out to be the sole determinant. Compare a more balanced view: 'A perfect command of a language as would allow unhindered enjoyment of the treasures of a foreign culture can, on the whole, hardly be achieved, even in theory. For that one needs to grow up in the source culture. An interesting illustration of the point was [presented by the fact] that the British Harry Potter needed "translation", that is adaptation, for American readers' (Ilyin, 2009: 410).

[5] As our current aim is not to go into textological subtleties, the original is quoted in the widespread edition prepared by Lidiya Yanovskaya, whereas the three translations, apart from the same reason of accessibility and wide distribution, are chosen on purpose to represent a *British* version (by Michael Glenny), an *American* version (by Diana Burgin and Katherine Tiernan O'Connor) and, in the third case, a more contemporary translation done in part by a *native speaker* (by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky).

[6] The only exception here is the Ukrainian translation by Mykola Bilorus, and yet its accuracy – «*респектабельного капелюха пиріжком*» (Bulgakov, 2006: 21) – can, among other things, be accounted for by the mere proximity of the two languages. Compare, however, '*seinen gediegenen Hut, der wie ein Brötchen aussah*' in the German translation by Thomas Reschke (Bulgakov, 2005: 11) where, as will be shown later, despite the ostensible verbatim accuracy, all major connotations of the original are lost. A still greater distortion may be found in the French translation by Claude Ligny: '*Quant à son chapeau, de qualité fort convenable, il le tenait froissé dans sa main comme un de ces beignets qu'on achète au coin des rues*' (Boulgakov, 2002: 5) in which the *type* of the headpiece is misinterpreted as the *manner* of holding it.

[7] Compare the same situation reversely mirrored in the latter's account of their meeting: «*…он спрашивал меня о том, кто я таков и откуда я взялся, давно ли пишу и почему обо мне ничего не было слышно раньше…*» (Bulgakov, 1989: 471) as well as many more instances of imposture in the novel (such as the false foreigner from the *Torgsin* Store, a spitting image of Berlioz: «*низенький, совершенно квадратный человек, бритый до синевы, в роговых очках, в новешенькой шляпе…*») (Bulgakov, 1989: 674).

[8] In view of the 'leitmotif structure' of the novel (Gasparov, 1978: 198–251), the character's *check* cap and *kovboyka* might be intended to echo the *checkered* jacket worn in the same chapter by as yet unnamed Koroviev.

[9] Unless specified otherwise, the language involved for the binary comparison is Russian.

[10] 'It's all the same to me. I should like cabbage soup and porridge better than anything; but, of course, there's nothing like that here.'

'*Porridge à la Russe*, your honor would like?' said the Tatar, bending down to Levin, like a nurse speaking to a child. […]

'Well, then, my friend, you give us two — or better say three — dozen oysters, clear soup with vegetables…'

'*Printanière*,' prompted the Tatar. But Stepan Arkadyevitch apparently did not care to allow him the satisfaction of giving the French names of the dishes.

'With vegetables in it, you know. Then turbot with thick sauce, then … roast beef; and mind it's good. Yes, and capons, perhaps, and then sweets.'

The Tatar, recollecting that it was Stepan Arkadyevitch's way not to call the dishes by the names in the French bill of fare, did not repeat them after him, but could not resist rehearsing the whole menu to himself according to the bill: — '*Soupe printanière*, *turbot*, *sauce Beaumarchais*, *poulard à l'estragon*, *macédoine de fruits* …' (Tolstoy, 1920).

[11] As, for instance, in the two translations from A. Conan Doyle who strongly favoured the lexeme, both of them published under a common cover of a popular edition: 'He was back in a moment, and I smelt a strong reek of *brandy* as he passed me' (Doyle, 2007: 239) — «*Вернулся он очень скоро, и когда проходил мимо меня, я почувствовал сильный запах* бренди» (Doyle, 1984: 190) as opposed to 'On the table lay two glasses, an empty *brandy*-bottle, and the remnants of a meal' (Doyle, 2007: 797) — «*На столе стояли два стакана, пустая бутылка из-под* коньяка *и остатки еды*» (Doyle, 1984: 239).

[12] Compare an episode from the 1988 movie 'Red Heat':

'Tea, please'

'In a glass with lemon. Right?'

'Yes.'

'I saw *Dr. Zhivago*' (Kleiner, 1988)

[13] When in his early teens, one of the authors of the present paper faced insurmountable difficulties trying to figure out why the characters of Harper Lee's 'To Kill a Mockingbird' (which he was reading in Russian) bought their Coca-Cola 'at a pharmacy': 'The more affluent chased their food with *drugstore* Coca-Cola in bulb-shaped soda glasses' (Lee, 1960) — «*А кто побогаче, запивал еду купленной* в аптеке *кока-колой в стаканчиках из-под содовой*» (Li, 1963). Since what makes a difference in the context is not *where* the drink was obtained but that is was *purchased* and not brought from home, the translators, for the sake of adequacy, could have rather used the variant 'store-bought' («*магазинной / покупной*»), thus utilizing the other part of the word's denotatum.