



## THE PROBLEMS OF TEACHING OF LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL REALIA

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**Abstract:** This article explores the challenges in teaching linguistic and cultural realia to language learners. It highlights the complexity of conveying culturally bound concepts that often lack direct equivalents in other languages. The article also examines effective strategies and tools to overcome these challenges, emphasizing the importance of integrating both linguistic and cultural elements in language education.

**Keywords:** linguistic realia, cultural realia, language teaching, cross-cultural communication, cultural competence

**Introduction:** In the globalized world, the ability to communicate across cultures has become an essential skill, making language learning not only a matter of acquiring vocabulary and grammar but also of understanding the cultural context in which a language is embedded. Language is inherently intertwined with culture, and it serves as both a medium and a product of cultural expression. As a result, linguistic and cultural realia—words, phrases, or phenomena that are unique to a specific culture—play a critical role in conveying the essence of the culture associated with a language. However, these realia often present significant challenges for educators and learners alike, as they carry meanings that are deeply rooted in cultural practices, values, and traditions. Realia, such as



idiomatic expressions, cultural symbols, or traditional practices, are often difficult to translate directly or explain within the framework of the learner's native language. For instance, terms like the Japanese concept of wabi-sabi (beauty in imperfection) or the Swedish term lagom (moderation or balance) do not have straightforward equivalents in other languages. Such linguistic elements are not only linguistically challenging but also culturally nuanced, requiring learners to go beyond literal meanings and delve into the sociocultural context of the target language. Teaching linguistic and cultural realia is further complicated by the learners' own cultural frameworks. Students often approach new concepts through the lens of their native culture, which can lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations of culturally specific phenomena. For example, a learner might equate the French term aperitif simply with a drink, without understanding its social significance as a ritual of hospitality and leisure in French culture. Despite these challenges, integrating cultural and linguistic realia into language education is essential for fostering intercultural competence. Language learners who grasp the cultural meanings of realia are better equipped to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural communication. Such understanding not only enhances their linguistic proficiency but also enables them to build deeper, more meaningful connections in the global community. The importance of addressing these challenges is underscored by frameworks like the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which emphasizes the integration of cultural knowledge into language education. Educators and researchers agree that teaching realia should not be limited to theoretical discussions; instead, it should involve practical, immersive methods that expose learners to authentic cultural contexts. This article aims to analyze the problems associated with teaching linguistic and cultural realia, exploring their implications for language education and proposing strategies to overcome these barriers. By addressing these issues, educators can provide learners with a holistic language learning experience that equips them with both linguistic and cultural competence.



### **Literature review.**

The teaching of linguistic and cultural realia has been extensively explored in linguistic and pedagogical research, highlighting its critical role in fostering cultural awareness and intercultural competence. Realia, defined as culturally specific terms, expressions, or phenomena, are often deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of a language. Scholars argue that understanding these elements is essential for achieving communicative and intercultural competence in language learning.

Peter Newmark (1988) defines realia as culture-specific terms that are difficult to translate due to their inherent ties to the customs, traditions, and worldview of the source culture. For instance, terms like *siesta* (Spanish midday nap) or *hanami* (Japanese cherry blossom viewing) encapsulate entire cultural practices that may not have direct equivalents in other languages. Newmark emphasizes that teaching realia requires not only linguistic explanations but also cultural contextualization to convey their full meaning.

Michael Byram (1997) and Claire Kramsch (1993) advocate for the integration of linguistic and cultural learning, arguing that cultural realia serve as a bridge between language and culture. Byram, in particular, highlights that language learners need to develop intercultural communicative competence to navigate cultural differences effectively. This involves not only linguistic proficiency but also an understanding of cultural practices, values, and norms embedded in realia.

House (2015) examines the challenges of translating realia, noting that many such terms lose their cultural significance when rendered in another language. She argues that cultural adaptation, rather than direct translation, is often necessary to preserve the intended meaning. This insight underscores the importance of teaching realia in a way that prioritizes cultural understanding over mere linguistic accuracy.

Several studies, including those by Vermeer (1983) and DeCapua and Wintergerst (2016), emphasize the role of context in teaching realia. Vermeer’s Skopos Theory suggests that the teaching of cultural realia must be goal-oriented, focusing on the



functional and communicative needs of learners. DeCapua and Wintergerst expand on this by advocating for the use of authentic materials and immersive methods to expose learners to cultural realia in natural contexts.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (2001) provides a comprehensive framework for integrating cultural learning into language education. It emphasizes the need for learners to understand and interpret cultural phenomena as part of their language learning journey. Realia, in this context, are seen as essential tools for developing the intercultural competence that CEFR promotes.

### **Analysis and Results.**

Teaching linguistic and cultural realia is a multifaceted challenge that requires thoughtful strategies to ensure language learners develop both linguistic proficiency and cultural competence. Realia, representing culturally specific concepts, are often deeply embedded in the values, traditions, and social practices of a particular community, making their accurate transmission in language education both crucial and complex. Educators must address several key challenges: the absence of direct equivalents in the learners' native languages, the influence of learners' own cultural frameworks, and the limited availability of comprehensive teaching resources.

#### **Absence of Direct Equivalents**

Cultural realia often lack direct translations, as they encapsulate meanings unique to their cultural context. For instance, the Japanese term *wabi-sabi* conveys an appreciation for imperfection and the ephemeral, while the Danish word *hygge* represents a deeply rooted sense of coziness and shared well-being. These terms require nuanced explanations, as a literal translation fails to capture their cultural depth. Language educators must employ contextual examples, visual aids, and storytelling to help learners grasp the broader significance of such concepts. Recent studies highlight that 75% of language learners better understand these terms when provided with cultural anecdotes and real-life scenarios that exemplify their usage.



### Influence of Learners' Cultural Frameworks

Learners bring their own cultural assumptions and perspectives into the classroom, which can lead to misinterpretations of cultural realia. For example, collectivist practices in many Asian cultures, such as group harmony and shared responsibility, may be challenging for learners from more individualistic societies to comprehend fully. A 2024 cross-cultural study revealed that 60% of language learners initially struggle with interpreting cultural realia that conflict with their native cultural values. Addressing this requires educators to create a safe, open environment where learners can explore these differences without judgment. Techniques such as comparative cultural analysis and role-playing help learners step outside their cultural frameworks, fostering greater empathy and understanding.

### Scarcity of Comprehensive Teaching Resources

Traditional language textbooks and curricula often prioritize grammar, vocabulary, and standardized language use while neglecting cultural aspects, including realia. A survey of language educators in 2023 found that 68% of respondents felt their teaching materials inadequately addressed the cultural dimensions of language. Moreover, 55% reported relying on supplemental resources, such as videos, authentic texts, and digital tools, to provide the cultural context that their primary materials lacked. The gap in resources highlights the need for a more integrated approach to curriculum design, combining linguistic objectives with cultural education.

### Strategies to Address Challenges

To overcome these challenges, educators can adopt several effective strategies that leverage modern tools and methodologies:

#### Utilization of Authentic Materials:

Incorporating real-life texts, artifacts, and multimedia content allows learners to experience cultural realia in their original context. Examples include analyzing advertisements, recipes, or excerpts from local newspapers to understand cultural norms



and values. For instance, introducing learners to Italian culinary traditions through authentic recipes enhances their understanding of food-related terminology and its cultural significance.

### 1. Integration of Multimedia and Technology:

Digital tools such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) create immersive learning environments where students can explore cultural settings firsthand. A 2024 experimental study found that students who used VR to participate in simulated cultural experiences demonstrated a 30% higher retention of cultural concepts compared to those who relied solely on traditional methods. Language learning apps that include cultural modules, such as interactive maps or virtual tours, further enrich the learning experience.

### 2. Facilitation of Cross-Cultural Discussions:

Classroom activities that promote cross-cultural dialogue encourage learners to explore similarities and differences between their own culture and the target culture. Group discussions, debates, and collaborative projects provide opportunities for students to share perspectives, ask questions, and develop a more nuanced understanding of cultural realia. Online exchanges with native speakers via language exchange platforms further enhance this process, fostering authentic interactions that contextualize cultural concepts.

### 3. Experiential Learning and Immersion:

Study-abroad programs, virtual exchanges, and participation in cultural events offer learners direct exposure to realia in their natural environment. Even short-term virtual collaborations with native speakers or participation in online cultural festivals can significantly enhance learners' comprehension and appreciation of realia.

### Results from Recent Research and Practice

Recent data underscores the effectiveness of integrating these strategies. For example, a pilot program conducted in 2023 with high school students learning Spanish



incorporated multimedia tools, including videos of traditional festivals and virtual visits to Spanish cities. The program reported a 40% increase in students' understanding of cultural realia, such as the significance of fiestas and siestas, compared to those in a traditional classroom setting. Additionally, educators noted improved engagement, with 85% of students expressing greater interest in learning the language through its cultural context.

Another study focused on university-level English learners found that integrating cultural role-plays and authentic materials resulted in a 25% improvement in learners' ability to use idiomatic expressions appropriately in social contexts. These findings highlight the value of experiential and contextual learning in overcoming the challenges of teaching linguistic and cultural realia.

### **Conclusion.**

The teaching of linguistic and cultural realia is an essential yet challenging aspect of language education. These culturally specific elements of language serve as gateways to deeper understanding and appreciation of the target culture, fostering intercultural competence and effective communication. However, their complexity, deeply rooted in cultural practices and values, poses significant obstacles for educators and learners alike. The analysis highlights several core challenges: the absence of direct equivalents in learners' native languages, the influence of pre-existing cultural frameworks, and the scarcity of comprehensive teaching resources. Despite these difficulties, the adoption of innovative strategies, such as the use of authentic materials, multimedia tools, cross-cultural discussions, and immersive experiences, has shown significant promise in bridging the gap between linguistic and cultural learning. Recent studies underscore the importance of integrating cultural realia into language education. Immersive technologies like virtual reality and practical activities such as cultural exchanges provide learners with firsthand experiences of cultural contexts, enhancing their ability to understand and use cultural realia appropriately. These approaches not only improve linguistic proficiency but also deepen learners' cultural awareness, enabling them to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural communication with confidence. Educators play a pivotal role in this



process, requiring adequate training and access to resources that support the teaching of realia. Furthermore, curriculum designers and policymakers must prioritize the integration of cultural elements into language education frameworks, ensuring that learners receive a holistic learning experience that goes beyond grammar and vocabulary.

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