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INTERMEDIAL REFERENCES ACROSS DIFFERENT SEMIOTIC CODES OF SCIENCE FICTION DISCOURSE

The article examines realia as cultural matrices that shape meaning-making processes within an intermedial space where literary text, cinematography, and strategic video games interact as components of a unified semiotic system. It is demonstrated that, under conditions of code blending, meanings remain in constant motion, while realia function as stabilizing elements that ensure the recognizability and coherence of the fictional world. The study emphasizes that realia denote technical artifacts, political and religious institutions, symbolic images, geographical landscapes, and other culturally significant concepts, and that their referential load is crucial for constructing science-fictional universes. The research shows that science fiction emerges as a multidimensional literary phenomenon that encompasses various subgeneric models and performs a heuristic function by fostering reflection on the limits of knowledge, technological progress, and potential trajectories of civilizational development. Within the genre, realia possess multiple functions: cognitive (transmission of scientific and technological concepts), aesthetic (creation of atmosphere and stylistic markers), communicative (facilitating interaction between author and recipient), and conceptual (representing the ideological framework of the work). Their semantics vary depending on the subgenre – cyberpunk, space opera, utopia, dystopia, or alternative history – which determines the degree of their interpretative prominence. Special attention is given to the intermedial transformation of realia through the example of Frank Herbert’s *Dune* universe, which demonstrates a high adaptive potential: the verbal codes of the novel acquire new forms in films, comics, and video games, where audiovisual, interactive, and procedural mechanics activate semiotic perception in different ways. The study refines the principles of realia classification – semantic, chronological, and territorial approaches – which enable the systematization of realia and provide insights into their functioning in intercultural contexts and translation. The intermedial analysis makes it possible to identify patterns of adaptation of fictional cultural codes and to deepen the understanding of how science fiction represents alternative realities in contemporary multimodal discourse.

Keywords: intermedial landscape; semiotic code; media-format references; procedural semiotics; cultural matrices.

1 INTRODUCTION

Problem statement. In contemporary Humanities, particularly within intermedial studies, the optics is being devoted to how different forms of art, media formats, and cultural narratives interact. This interest arises from both technological shifts that are transforming modes of producing and consuming information, and from changes in the very nature of artistic communication, which increasingly gravitate toward intermediality and hybridity. These processes manifest most vividly in

the genre of science fiction, which, owing to its flexible structure, openness to experimentation, and capacity to incorporate heterogeneous discourses (technological, scientific, political, religious, etc.), has become an ideal arena for the implementation of intermedial strategies. Within this genre, cultural realia – specific signs designating culturally marked objects, phenomena, or institutions – function as intermedial references, as they facilitate transitions between media discourses, genres, and modes of representation.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Intermediality as a phenomenon began to receive systematic scholarly attention in Western European humanities at the end of the twentieth century. According to H. Savchuk, the term intermediality entered academic circulation in the twentieth century when D. Higgins employed the word *intermedia* to describe the fusion of several artistic forms (Савчук, 2019, p. 16). Etymologically, the concept derives from the Latin *inter* (“between”) and *medium* (“middle,” “mediator”), and therefore literally denotes “between media” or “transition across media.” It refers to a specific type of communication in which one medium of expression (for example, textual) refers to another (visual, auditory, cinematic, etc.). In this sense, it resonates with the concepts of intertextuality and synthesis of the arts, but is more sharply focused on media platforms and technologies of representation.

In Ukrainian scholarly discourse, the term “intermediality” has undergone a profound conceptualization. H. Polishchuk and B. Stasiuk, for instance, define it as a phenomenon that “crosses the boundaries of various forms of art,” emphasizing its transgressive character (Поліщук & Стасюк, 2023, p. 113). I. Chaiun, in turn, interprets intermediality as a key feature of contemporary culture, embodying interactions among media, artistic forms, and modes of communication that foster the emergence of new aesthetic structures and meanings, and which are of particular relevance to cultural studies, art history, literary studies, and media theory (Чаюн, 2025, p. 189).

O. Vorobiova, R. Savchuk, and L. Taranenko refine the concept further by relating it to the broader category of intersemioticity. While intersemioticity encompasses any relations between signs of different categories (e.g., between verbal signs and elements of painting or music), intermediality is understood as a specific case of such relations. It is based not only on the material difference of signs but also on their references toward distinct perceptual channels. Proceeding from R. Jakobson’s assertion that perceptibility is the key feature of the sign, authors classify signs according to human sensory systems – auditory, visual, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory. Accordingly, media as carriers and transmitters of information are defined by their orientation toward a particular channel of perception. Thus, intermediality designates relations between signs addressed to different perceptual systems and, simultaneously, between texts generated on their basis. O. Vorobiova, R. Savchuk, and L. Taranenko stress that all intermedial relations are intersemiotic, yet not all intersemiotic relations are intermedial, as there are cases of interaction between heterogeneous signs that nonetheless rely on the same channel of perception (Воробійова et al., 2024, p. 12-13). Intersemioticity, therefore, functions as a general category, whereas intermediality constitutes its narrower and more specific manifestation.

As M. McLuhan aptly observed, every new medium introduces not only a novel form but also a new “scale”, a new dimension of experience, altering the very structure of perception: “the medium is the message” (as cited in Чаюн, 2025, p. 16). This perspective enables an understanding of intermediality not merely as an artistic or cultural practice but as a cognitive model in which meanings actively circulate across channels, genres, and formats.

Within this framework, realia – traditionally regarded as markers of ethnocultural specificity – acquire the status of intermedial references, i.e., cultural signs that operate across media discourses, migrating from literary texts into film, video games, comics, animation, merchandising, and beyond. In doing so, they act as mediators both between cultures and between media forms, shaping multilayered cultural codes.

In science fiction, realia thus transcend the boundaries of a single text or art form, transforming into cultural memes and representational matrices. They not only signify the world of the “Other” but also function as instruments of meaning-making within the intermedial field. Their mobility determines their capacity for transformation and hybridization – an aspect of particular importance in

the glocalized information environment, where contexts intersect and meanings remain in constant flux.

The purpose of the article. The purpose of this article is to investigate the role of cultural realia as meaning-producing matrices within the intermedial landscape of contemporary science-fiction discourse. Special attention is devoted to their capacity to function as intermedial references that enable transitions across semiotic systems and media platforms, including literature, film, comics, and video games. By situating realia at the intersection of ethnocultural representation and multimodal transformation, the study seeks to demonstrate how they mediate the circulation of meanings, contribute to the construction of fictional worlds, and shape the mechanisms through which science fiction generates alternative realities in a glocalized cultural space.

2 METHODS

The research employs an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates approaches from literary studies, media studies, semiotics, and cultural analysis. Central to the research is the method of intermedial analysis, which makes it possible to trace the transformations of signs and cultural realia as they migrate across different media formats. The methodological framework was grounded in the collective monograph by O. Vorobyova, R. Savchuk, and L. Taranenko, *Preface. Intermediality in Philological Studies: A Fashionable Trend or a New Paradigm?* In: O. Vorobyova, R. Savchuk, L. Taranenko (eds.), *Interdisciplinary Horizons of Intermediality: Linguistics – Literary Studies – Translation Studies: A Collective Monograph*. Kyiv: Publishing House “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy”, 2024. In this work, the authors examine issues of cultural transfer, the phenomenon of intermediality within the sphere of mass communication, cross-disciplinary comparative studies, as well as ekphrasis as a significant form of interartistic interaction.

To achieve the aims of the study, a comprehensive methodological framework was applied, combining general scientific and specialized linguistic methods. Induction and deduction were employed to formulate the theoretical foundations of the research: inductive reasoning was used to identify recurring patterns in the representation of realia across literary, cinematic, and video game media, while deductive reasoning enabled the verification of these patterns within specific textual and audiovisual fragments. Analysis and synthesis supported the decomposition of complex semiotic structures and the subsequent integration of findings into coherent conclusions regarding the intermedial behavior of realia.

Several linguistic methods were implemented to examine realia in detail. Comparative analysis was applied to systematically juxtapose the representations of realia in Frank Herbert’s novel *Dune*, their audiovisual realization in Denis Villeneuve’s film adaptation (2021), and their interactive manifestation in the strategy video game *Dune: Spice Wars* (Shiro Games, 2022). This method made it possible to identify both preserved and transformed cultural codes across media formats. Distributional analysis was used to segment the texts and audiovisual scripts into functional units, enabling the identification of lexemes and symbolic elements that operate as realia within each medium. Contextual analysis further clarified how the surrounding narrative, visual framing, or gameplay situation influences the interpretation of realia and the strategies applied in their adaptation or translation into another medium. To reveal the internal semantic structure of realia, componential analysis was conducted, allowing the isolation of key semantic features that determine their cultural function in the fictional world. Classification analysis enabled the systematic grouping of realia according to thematic criteria – such as geography, political institutions, technology, or mythology – which facilitated the mapping of their distribution within the transmedia universe of *Dune*. Finally, cognitive-discursive analysis was used to explore how recipients perceive and interpret realia when engaging with different media. This method provided insight into the cognitive mechanisms that underlie the reconstruction of fictional cultural codes in literary reading, film viewing, and interactive gameplay, highlighting how media-specific modes of perception contribute to meaning-making in a multimodal context.

The materials of the study are drawn from three key sources that represent different semiotic

environments of the same fictional universe. The primary source is Herbert's *Dune* (1965), whose textual realia form the conceptual foundation for subsequent adaptations. The secondary source is Villeneuve's cinematic version, which expands the verbal code of the novel through multimodal resources – visual composition, sound design, costuming, and cinematographic techniques. The third source is the video game *Dune: Spice Wars*, which embodies Herbert's universe in an interactive format, translating realia into procedural mechanics and gameplay structures. Together, these materials enable a comprehensive analysis of intermedial references as cultural signs that function simultaneously in verbal, visual, and ludic dimensions.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Frank Herbert's novel *Dune* and its numerous film adaptations and game versions constitute exceptionally valuable material for analyzing intermedial references within the science fiction genre, particularly in the dimension of representing culturally significant realia. *Dune* is a canonical example of epic science fiction, combining elements of political drama, ecological parable, mystical fantasy, and futurist speculation. Its unique universe, inhabited by invented ethnic groups and characterized by complexly elaborated political and religious systems as well as technological artifacts, demands a comprehensive approach to the analysis of linguistic and visual signs as they are realized across diverse media formats.

In this regard, it is productive to consider not only the literary text as the primary source but also its cinematic embodiment (Denis Villeneuve's 2021 film *Dune*) and digital adaptation (the strategy video game *Dune: Spice Wars*). This makes it possible to trace how realia are transformed, reinterpreted, and reactivated through distinct semiotic resources: verbal (linguistic), cinematographic (audiovisual), and non-verbal (visual-gaming or procedural). Such an approach expands the field of intermedial analysis and contributes to identifying the regularities of representing fictional cultural codes within contemporary multimodal discourse. In the case of *Dune*, which has generated one of the most influential artistic universes in the science fiction genre, this becomes particularly relevant in view of the abundance of authorial neologisms, invented socio-political structures, and symbolic images that migrate from text to audiovisual and gaming forms, adapting to the affordances of each medium.

In Frank Herbert's *Dune*, verbal semiotic resources play a crucial role in constructing a coherent and credible image of an imagined world that is rendered highly multidimensional and deeply embedded in social, political, geographical, and cultural contexts. Within the verbal code, the realia of the novel can be categorized into three thematic groups: geographical, ethnographic, and socio-political. For example, geographical realia reflect the material conditions of the desert planet Arrakis, particularly its extreme arid environment. Such items include *sandcrawler* (Herbert, 2005), *sandsnorkel* (Herbert, 2005), *stilltent* (Herbert, 2005), and *stillsuit* (Herbert, 2005). Each denotes specific modes of adaptation to the scarcity of water and high temperatures. The *sandcrawler*, for instance, designates a machine that traverses the sandy surface while simultaneously symbolizing the integration of technology with the natural conditions of the planet. Formed from the lexemes *sand* and *crawler*, this realia encodes both the physical function of the object (crawling through sand) and its cultural significance as an element of the colonizers' survival infrastructure. Similarly, the *sandsnorkel* functions as a breathing apparatus used during sandstorms. Its lexical composition recalls the familiar device *snorkel*, yet in the new context it acquires a distinct, localized meaning. The realia *stilltent* and *stillsuit* embody desert survival strategies through the distillation of moisture from the environment and from the human body. Both terms linguistically fix the fusion of functionality (*distill*) with form (*tent*, *suit*), thereby underscoring the engineering ingenuity of Arrakis's inhabitants in sustaining existence under extreme conditions.

Among the ethnographic realia that reflect the culture, rituals, and national traditions of the inhabitants of the fictional universe are *crysknife* (Herbert, 2005) and *Fremen* (Herbert, 2005). The *crysknife* is a ritual weapon modeled on the real-world artifact *kris*, the Javanese dagger with an asymmetrical blade and sacral meaning in Southeast Asian culture. By reconstructing this cultural

element, Frank Herbert adapts it to the mythopoetics of his own universe, combining sacred significance with utilitarian narrative function. This represents an instance of transferring an authentic cultural practice into a fictional world through word-formation hybridity (*crys* + *knife*), where *crys* connotes the exotic, while *knife* anchors the term in the familiar. The ethnonym *Fremen*, derived from *free* and *men*, simultaneously designates the desert people and performs an ideological function by marking them as a symbol of resistance to colonial domination. In this way, the verbal sign encodes freedom as the central concept of their cultural identity.

Socio-political realia include terms that represent social hierarchies, political institutions, mechanisms of control, and forms of property. A vivid example is provided by *fief-complete* (Herbert, 2005), *quasi-fief* (Herbert, 2005), and *subfief* (Herbert, 2005), which describe varieties of feudal ownership within the interplanetary imperial order. The use of Latin prefixes *quasi-* and *sub-* indicates the degree of autonomy of each holding while simultaneously underscoring the complexity of *Dune*'s political system, which clearly parallels European medieval structures. Another example is *truthsayer*, denoting a figure or institution endowed with a monopoly on truth in judicial or political proceedings. The realia is formed by combining *truth* and *sayer*, thereby encoding the fusion of speech and truth as a political instrument. In addition, numerous technological objects – *pain amplifier* (Herbert, 2005), *shield generator* (Herbert, 2005), *harvester* (Herbert, 2005), *crusher* (Herbert, 2005), *condenser* (Herbert, 2005), *dew gatherer* (Herbert, 2005) – also function as socio-political elements. They denote material objects while simultaneously fixing modes of labor organization, defense, control, and resource exploitation, which constitute the economic foundations of the *Dune* universe.

By contrast, in Denis Villeneuve's 2021 cinematic adaptation of *Dune*, the verbal semiotic resources of the literary text are expanded through a wide range of cinematographic means that operate as visual, auditory, and audiovisual instruments for actualizing the realia of the imagined world. Screen interpretation conveys the meanings fixed in the verbal original while amplifying the communicative and pragmatic potential of these units through the multisensory engagement of the viewer with the film's fictional universe. Each group of realia is mediated through a complex system of cinematic signs functioning within the semiotic field of the film.

Geographical realia associated with the planet Arrakis are primarily communicated through visual coding. The desert landscapes, which dominate the film's visual composition, are constructed using panoramic shots that emphasize scale, immensity, and the menacing monotony of the environment. The color palette is deliberately restricted to yellows, sands, and ochres, underscoring the hostility and exhaustion of the planet as a space of existence (Spaihts et al., n.d.). In this way, the desert itself becomes an active semiotic component, encoding both the topographical and conceptual reality of the *Dune* universe, where the environment emerges as a decisive factor in shaping culture, technologies, and human behavior.

Ethnographic realia, particularly those relating to Fremen culture, are represented through clothing, rituals, domestic objects, and distinctive sounds, including language. The *stillsuit*, one of the central material symbols of Fremen culture, receives material embodiment as a meticulously crafted costume. Its functionality and symbolism are conveyed through close-up shots that highlight the texture of the fabric, the system of tubes and filters, and the dynamic movement of the actor's body within the suit. This cinematic representation, reinforced by character explanations and demonstrations in action, facilitates deeper audience immersion into the logic of desert life. Other ethnographic realia, such as the *crysknife*, Fremen ritual movements, their language, and bodily practices (such as minimizing bodily moisture loss), are visualized through symbolic direction: deliberate, concentrated gestures; significant glances; ritual choreography; and ritualized soundscapes (Spaihts et al., n.d.). Acoustic resources also hold significant semiotic potential, particularly Hans Zimmer's original score, which incorporates elements of throat singing, drum rhythms, and vocalizations that imitate the folklore of an invented culture while simultaneously evoking associations with real-world Bedouin or Arab traditions.

Socio-political realia in the film are represented both through spatial organization of the frame and through parallel editing, which correlate power, subordination, and political hierarchy. Such realia

as *fief-complete*, *subfief*, or *Landsraad* are verbalized in dialogues but acquire semiotic depth through material and visual markers – palatial architecture, clothing symbolism (the heraldry of House Atreides, House Harkonnen, etc.), and the spatial positioning of characters within the frame (Spaihts et al., n.d.). The director employs vertical compositional lines to visualize hierarchical structures: rulers are filmed from above or along the central axis of the frame, while subordinates appear at the bottom or along the periphery. In addition, linguistic intonation, voice timbre, body posture, and even the deliberate slowing of speech tempo during the articulation of political designations emphasize their significance within the film’s semantic structure. Equally important is the choreography of bodies and the regulation of movement: in scenes featuring imperial emissaries or members of the Bene Gesserit, gestures are excessively controlled, almost theatrical, thereby encoding authority and the ritualized nature of political interaction.

In the video game *Dune: Spice Wars* (Shiro Games, 2022), which combines real-time strategy and 4X gameplay, the realia of Herbert’s fictional universe are mediated through a multilayered system of nonverbal semiotic resources that represent the social, cultural, political, and ecological coordinates of the game world. Unlike in the cinematic format, where the reception of realia is primarily linear and contemplative, in the video game their semiotic perception is interactive and procedural, determined by the player’s actions, choices, and strategies. Consequently, the semiotic field of realia in the game is constructed as a dynamic structure in which the player both interprets signs and directly modifies them.

Geographical realia of Arrakis are represented through visual-sign systems integrated into the game interface, map topography, and environmental design. Each location – desert zones, rocky ridges, spice fields, or remnants of ancient technologies – is marked by distinctive graphic patterns, colors, and textures that signal its functional role. For instance, spice fields are characterized by a distinctive purple-orange hue and luminous effect, unequivocally codifying them as economic realia of Arrakis. Furthermore, the dynamic weather system, the occurrence of sandstorms, and the appearance of sandworms communicate ecological instability and the harsh limitations of life on the planet – functioning not only as gameplay mechanics but also as nonverbal messages about the cultural specificity of survival on Arrakis.

Ethnographic realia in *Dune: Spice Wars* are encoded through stylized representations in faction design, architecture, units, and accompanying sound signals. Each faction (Atreides, Harkonnens, Fremen, Smugglers, etc.) possesses a unique visual code: color palette, architectural style, weapon design, transport type, and even facial expressions and postures of characters. These elements, though not directly verbalized, serve as transparent markers of cultural indexing. The Fremen, for example, are represented by clay-and-sand architecture, mobile tactical squads, and the “desert advantage” mechanic, which nonverbally conveys their adaptation to harsh conditions and ecological synergy with the natural environment. In contrast, Atreides forces exhibit ordered structures, standardized uniforms, and architecture resembling Western fortifications, encoding them as a political power with imperial and bureaucratic traditions.

A distinct category is formed by socio-political realia expressed through abstract yet significant visual-functional elements. The *Landsraad* council, for instance, is represented as a voting interface in which factions influence political resolutions. While the resolutions themselves are verbal, their semiotic content is embedded in nonverbal logic: color codes (green for approval, red for opposition), influence scales, and icons of political capital require no verbal explanation, functioning as visual indices of in-game status. Within the procedural semiotics of the game, player participation in voting embodies the socio-political reality of the fictional world while also requiring players to experience it through action, thereby deepening immersion into the cultural-political mechanisms of Arrakis.

Equally significant is the representation of such symbolic realia as *spice* and *Shai-Hulud* (sandworms). Spice, as the central economic and cultural realia of the franchise, acquires complex semiotic layering: visually it shimmers on the sand; procedurally it is harvested by specialized machines; acoustically, its extraction is accompanied by distinctive mechanical sounds reminiscent of both sand friction and humming. Similarly, *Shai-Hulud* are introduced through auditory warnings, vibration effects, visual distortions of sand, and the panic of units – transforming their appearance

into a dramatic semiotic act.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Thus, the study has identified the role of realia both as representative ethno-cultural matrices and as intermedial references within the science-fiction discourse, particularly exemplified by Frank Herbert's *Dune* universe. It has been demonstrated that the literary text possesses a high potential for multimodal transformation and adaptation across diverse media formats, including films, comics, and video games. The verbal signs of the original novel, which encode fictional cultural, geographical, and socio-political realia, acquire renewed expression through the audiovisual resources of film and the visual-ludic mechanics of video games. Each medium activates semiotic resources in a distinct way while simultaneously preserving the core of the fictional world and its key concepts. Such an intermedial dialogue makes it possible to trace the regularities of adapting invented cultural codes and to deepen our understanding of how science fiction represents alternative realities within contemporary multimodal discourse.

Future studies could examine how realia are adapted across different science-fiction universes and media formats, exploring the retention and transformation of cultural, geographical, and socio-political elements. Research may also investigate audience reception across perceptual channels and the cross-cultural migration of invented cultural codes, deepening our understanding of science fiction's role in shaping multimodal and intermedial discourse.

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Ірина Волощук, Анна Лавренчук. Інтермедіальні референції в різних семіотичних кодах науково фантастичного дискурсу. У статті розглядаються реалії як культурні матриці, що формують смислові конструкти в інтермедіальному просторі, де художній текст, кінематографія та стратегічна відеогра взаємодіють у межах єдиної семіотичної системи. Показано, що в умовах змішування кодів смисли перебувають у постійній динаміці, а реалії виконують роль стабілізуючих елементів, які забезпечують впізнаваність і цілісність художнього світу. Акцентовано, що реалії номінують технічні артефакти, політичні та релігійні інституції, символічні образи, географічні ландшафти та інші культурно значущі поняття, а їхнє референційне навантаження стає ключовим для побудови фантастичних універсумів. У ході дослідження доведено, що наукова фантастика як жанр постає багатовимірним літературним феноменом, що поєднує різні піджанрові моделі й виконує евристичну функцію – сприяє осмисленню меж пізнання, технологічного розвитку та потенційних векторів еволюції цивілізації. Реалії в її межах мають багатофункціональний характер: когнітивний (передавання науково-технічних концептів), естетичний (створення атмосфери та стилістичних маркерів), комунікативний (налагодження діалогу між автором і реципієнтом) та концептуальний (репрезентація ідейної парадигми твору). Їхня семантика варіюється відповідно до піджанру – кіберпанку, космоопери, утопії, антиутопії чи альтернативної історії, – що визначає ступінь їхньої інтерпретативної актуалізації. Особливу увагу приділено інтермедіальній трансформації реалій на матеріалі всесвіту «Дюни» Ф. Герберта, який демонструє високий адаптаційний потенціал: вербальні коди роману знаходять нове втілення у фільмах, коміксах і відеоіграх, де аудіовізуальні, інтерактивні та процедурні механіки по-різному активізують семіотичне сприйняття. Уточнено принципи класифікації реалій – семантичний, хронологічний і територіальний підходи – що дозволяє систематизувати їх і визначити особливості функціонування у міжкультурному просторі та перекладі. Інтермедіальний аналіз дає змогу виявити закономірності адаптації вигаданих культурних кодів і глибше зрозуміти, як наукова фантастика репрезентує альтернативні реальності в сучасному мультимодальному дискурсі.

Ключові слова: інтермедіальний ландшафт; семіотичний код; медіаформатні референції; процедура семіотика.

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