



**An-Najah National University  
Faculty Of Humanities**

**Department of English language and Literature**

## **Challenges in translating Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle**

**Written by:**

**Sarah Antar**

**Ghalia Masri**

**Rawan Alamieh**

**Submitted to:**

**Dr. Ekrema Shehab**

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## **Abstract:**

This paper deals with some challenges encountered while translating Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* into Arabic. To highlight these difficulties, several examples were taken from the story and classified into: syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and cultural problems. All these examples were thoroughly analyzed and discussed.

The study revealed that to overcome the problems encountered, a translator should scrutinize the context of situations and offer communicative translation to produce equivalent translation in terms of meaning and literary style.

## Introduction

According to Hassan (2011:1) “Translation plays an important role in bridging the gaps between the different cultures and nations. Literary translation in particular helps these different nations reach a universal culture on a common ground”.

Translation is a process where art and creativity meet. It's not just the act of changing words from one language to another; neither a transformation that happens from one language to another only. Translation is actually much more than that. It's now an activity of massive importance internationally. It's a wide field of study and a way of communication among different people and cultures. Especially, if it's literary translation, it would certainly link language, culture and literature all together. Since language and literature work as a mirror that reflects nations' cultures.

In fact, literary translation is an artistic device that is used to translate artistic works such as: books, articles, stories, prose, poetry, and other types. This actually means, that literary translation doesn't require a person who is bilingual only; it requires a lot of skill, talent, flexibility and creativity. It's the translation that works beyond words; it's the one that conveys the feelings, emotions and thoughts of nations and cultures globally.

“ What truly distinguishes translation is that it takes place in the context of the relations between two cultures, two worlds of thought and perception" (Delisle, Mares 1988, 74).

In this reflection paper we are presenting the syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and cultural challenges that we have encountered during translating Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* into Arabic. This short story presents the revolutionary experience in America through its characters. In this story, Irving conveys the changes of government during the American Revolution Period, and the matter of living with a nagging wife. The story talks about a Dutch villager lives in the Kaatskill mountains, he ran away from his wife and fell asleep in the mountains for 20 years. After the American Revolutionary War at the time of the elections, he awakened and was shocked by the changes that happened to his country and people, but pleasant for knowing that his wife died, and surprised by seeing another Rip Van winkle, who is his son. Actually, the

relationship between Rip Van Winkle and his wife Dame can be matched to the similar relationship between England and the colonies at that time. The short story's major theme is the revolutionary war, and how much America and Americans have changed after it.

## **The Literature Review**

Since the human race learned different languages and various ways of speech, translation has become an important device of communication. In fact, translation has been an incredible effective tool in linking different languages, cultures, and notions together. Moreover, translation has brought people together, and helped reducing the gaps between them and their cultures. Literary translation in particular helps in presenting the multicultural side easily through artistic works such as: Novels, short stories, poems and many others .

Translation in general has many interpretations and definitions. Mostly, it's the act of translating, or changing something from one form to another, and from one language into another. Internationally, scholars have defined it differently. According to Catford (1965:1) " Translation is an operation performed on languages: a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another. Clearly, then, any theory of translation must draw upon a theory of language- a general linguistic theory ".

According to Guerra (2012: 23) in a research paper entitled as Translating culture: problems, strategies and practical realities. She declares that achieving a kind of balance in translation is the best solution. Since the message behind the text, language and style are really important to be conveyed in literary translation. Moreover, Guerra says that besides applying translation techniques, such as: literal translation, adaptation, equivalence, description, and others; the students who translate should be given more freedom when translating, especially when translating cultural items. Therefore, they can adjust the source language culture and style to the target language culture and style as well .

As for Nida, he sees the whole process of translation completely different. He actually sees it as a "scientific subject" saying that: " the transference of a message from one language to another is a valid subject for scientific description." (Nida, 1964, p.3). While Lefevere declares that: " translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text." (Lefevere,1992, 2004a, p.xii)

Literary translation works as the mirror that reflects how various languages, cultures and literatures may meet or separate. Therefore, the translator must be aware of both cultures and languages structure and linguistic system, in terms of syntactic, semantics, pragmatics and others. As Hassan mentioned in the previous quotation pragmatic plays such an important rule in translation and should be given an extra attention .

According to a case study of EFI Saudi students done in 2015 in Shaqra university by Khalifa. There are two basic reasons that stand behind translating English texts into Arabic or vice versa. These reasons are: the variety of the language families, since each language belong to a different family origin. As Arabic belongs to semantic languages, and English is actually a Germanic language. The second reason standing behind translation problems according to this study is the poor knowledge of English grammar. The researcher recommends developing students' knowledge of English grammar, and how to apply in properly in the context. Also, holding a comparative analysis course of both languages can help in reducing the gaps caused by the above problems in translation .

In fact, translation is not an easy task, it needs a lot of effort, talent and skill. So the translator can face the cultural and linguistic challenges and try to solve them .

## **Methodology**

The mission of our graduation project is translating *Rip Van Winkle* into Arabic, which is a short story written by Washington Irving, an American short story writer, essayist, biographer, historian, and diplomat of the early 19th century. In addition, we are writing a reflection paper about the challenges of translating this literary work.

Washington Irving used imagery in his story to enable the reader to visualize the things he described. He also used symbolism and a little of irony to make fun of his character. His language is stuffed and his words are complicated, therefore, the translation of this story requires a high level of management.

The story consists of 18 pages. We translated it and wrote about the problems we encountered. These problems are categorized into linguistic problems that are syntactic, semantic and pragmatic.

In addition, problems due to the cultural gap between English and Arabic were discussed. The problems were solved by using different strategies of translation: Equivalence, Description, Adaptation, Arabization, and Footnotes.

## **Discussion**

Each translator aims to convey the message of the text with keeping the style of the original text, though it is impossible sometimes since what works for the source language may not work for the target language. Therefore, translators, in this case, encounter problems that they have to deal with to achieve a translation that reflects the target language culture and style.

The discussion deals with the challenges of translating Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle*. These problems undergo two categories: linguistic related to semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic problems and cultural difficulties.

### **5.1. Syntactic difficulties:**

Syntax is defined by Miller (2002: 12) , as " the branch of linguistics that studies the way words are put together to build phrases, the way phrases are put together to build clauses or bigger phrases, and the way clauses are put together to build sentences”.

Syntax is the way in which words are put together to form phrases, clauses or sentences. The fact that languages differ from each other caused syntactic problems when translating sentences from one language to another. It is the case when translating a text from English into Arabic since English is a Germanic language relates to the Indo-European mother language, while Arabic is an Afro-Asiatic Semitic language; consequently, the translator will have to deal with a number of syntactic challenges that relate to the world order.

### 5.1.1. Word order:

Since languages belong to different origins, each have its own grammatical structure as it is the case in English and Arabic. English sentence structure is nominal that consists of the subject, verb, then the object follows. While Arabic sentence order is verb, subject, and then the object. Therefore, translators have to deal with this difference in word order when translating from English to Arabic as it is the case in these examples:

1. "The opinion of this junto were completely controlled by Nicholas Vedder"

It does not make sense to say " رأي هذه الزمرة كان تماماً مسيطر عليه من قبل "so this sentence needs management. In terms of word order, firstly, the verb is fronted to the beginning of the sentence. Secondly, it needs to be changed from English passive voice into Arabic active voice and make the subject next to the verb in order to fit the Arabic structure. Finally, changing the object place from the beginning of the English sentence to the end of the Arabic one to become "كان نيكولاس فيدر مسيطر تماماً على آراء هذه الزمرة"

2. "Rip's heart died away at hearing of these sad changes"

In translating this sentence, the verb is fronted, then it is followed by the subject and the complement to sound Arabic: "انفطر قلب ريب لسماعه هذه التغييرات المؤلمه"

Another difference in the structure of the sentences between English and Arabic is that, in English the adjective comes before the noun phrase, while in Arabic it comes after as the following examples:

1. "a large rickety wooden building"

If this sentence is translated literally at the same order of the source language, it will not work to say "كبير متداع خشبي مبنى" it is even not understood, so the right translation is "مبنى خشبي كبير متداع"

2. "long grizzled beard" is translated into: "ذقنٌ طويلةٌ شهباء"

3. "his keen eyes and sharp hat" is translated into: "عيناه التآقتين وقبعته الحادة"

## 5.2. Semantic Problems:

Semantics is defined by Richmond H. Thomason (1996) as “the study of the meaning of linguistic expressions”. Lexical-semantic problems can be resolved by consulting dictionaries, glossaries and experts. These problems include Homonyms, polysemy and contextual synonyms.

### 5.2.1. Homonymy

Homonymy is a semantic phenomenon referring to "lexical items which have the same form but differ in meaning" (Crystal 1991: 167). Homonymous words are challenging in the process of translation as Enani (2000:30) commented:

“Homonymy is a big problem for most Arab translators in particular. This is probably due to the possibility that most Arabs are taught at school that all words should be traced back to a simple stem consisting of three or four letters. This mistaken view is adopted in most Arabic dictionaries”.

Therefore, a translator of texts from English to Arabic should pay much attention to homonymic words to get the correct meaning which is usually determined by the context. The followings are examples of homonyms we encountered during translation:

1. "A half-starved dog that looked like Wolf was skulking about it. Rip called him by name, but the **cur** snarled, showed his teeth, and passed on"

The word **cur** is homonyms, it has two meanings :an inferior dog

(شخصٌ خسيسٌ أو لئيم), according to the context which talks about a dog, the only translation that makes sense is (كلبٌ ضال).

2. " For a long while he used to console himself, when driven from home, by frequenting a kind of perpetual club of the **sages**, philosophers, and other idle personages of the village ..."

Another homonymous word in the text is **sages**; it has two unrelated meanings: a kind of herb (الميرمية), a wise man, or philosopher (حكيم). The correct translation according to the context of the word is (الحكماء)

### 5.2.2. Polysemy

Refers to "a lexical item which has a range of different meanings" (Crystal 1991: 267). The followings are examples of polysemy from the text:

I. " The rocks presented a high, **impenetrable** wall, over which the torrent came tumbling in a sheet of feathery foam, and fell into a broad, deep basin, black from the shadows of the surrounding forest."

The word impenetrable is polysemous Adjective because it has so many related meanings such as: (لا سبيل إلى فهمه)، (غامض)، (عديم الإحساس)، and (غير قابل للاختراق أو الفتح). In this context, we translated it into a door which is impossible to pass through or enter: (غير قابل للاختراق) it also means "impossible to understand"; both definitions can fit and make the rocks represent both a literal and figurative wall to Rip.

II. The author used the word **foot** many times in the story with different meanings each time:

1. "At the **foot** of these fairy mountains the traveler may have seen the light smoke curling up from a village, whose shingle roofs gleam among the trees...". The word foot of the mountain is translated into (سفح الجبل)
2. "He found his beard had grown a **foot** long! " The word foot here means a unit of measurement, it's translated into (قدم)
3. "They crowded round him, eyeing him from head to **foot** with great curiosity". The word foot here is a body origin ,and it's translated into (أخمص قدميه)

### 5.2.3. Synonymy

Synonymy is a kind of semantic relation among words. Technically, it occurs when two or more linguistic forms are used to substitute one another in any context in which their common meaning is not affected denotatively or connotatively.

I. The title of Washington Irving's story "Rip Van Winkle" has three Synonyms:

1. A person oblivious to social changes.
2. A person who sleeps a lot.
3. The title character in a story by Washington Irving about a man who sleeps for 20 years and doesn't recognize the world when he awakens. However; this meaning is the suitable one for the story.

II. "Wolf would wag his tail, look wistfully in his master's face; and if dogs can feel pity, I verily believe he reciprocated the **sentiment** with all his heart."

The word sentiment can be translated into feeling (الشُّعُور), affection (العاطفة), and emotion (الأحاسيس), all of them are Synonyms that carry almost the same meaning; The best translation is (العواطف والأحاسيس).

III. " The great error in Rip's composition was an insuperable **aversion** to all kinds of profitable labor. "

The word aversion has many synonyms: hate (كُره), distaste (نُفور), and unpleasantness (بُغض). Choosing any of them will not change the word's meaning since all of them almost mean the same.

### 5.3. Pragmatic problems

Pragmatics is the study of certain aspects of the human communication and through speech. In addition, It is the study of speech applied in actual situations. Pragmatics looks beyond the surface meaning, or the literal one. It is a study that goes much deep inside and deals with the implied and deep meanings of the words.

According to Leech (1983), pragmatics is the way speakers and writers accomplish goals as social actors who do not just need to get things done but must attend to their interpersonal relationships with other participants at the same time. Such definition refers to investing in language learning. In fact, Pragmatics demonstrates that language is a way of communication, therefore it's a way of life, by which speakers express themselves, talk to others, and to actually know how we as speakers should talk to each other, so we can understand one another. I see Pragmatics to language as the salt to food; if there is no salt then where is

the pleasure in eating? Without salt the food would probably be tasteless, and so language without Pragmatics; there will be very little if not zero understanding of the meaning and intention.

Pragmatics actually has some major speech expertises such as: using the language at different levels and aspects to achieve various aims. For example: using special structure of words when informing, requesting, apologizing and..etc. Another skill is changing the speech due to situation, receiver, or even place and time. For example: Motherese' language (baby talk). It's the talk of the mother directed to her child. It's a language in itself, by which the mother talks to her child with different attitude, intonation.. etc. It's completely different from adults' speech. Another case is a coach of a football team in a match, and what words, instructions, and signs he would give to the team. The previous two are two different cases with two different situations, that I think they need two different way of speech. In Rip Van Winkle there is a very obvious example of this. It's the difference between Rip's speech with Dame Van Winkle, and his other way of speech with his dog Wolf. A third speech skill is taking different roles in communications, and turns in conversations.

The relationship between Pragmatics and translation is a one that can't be denied or separated especially literary translation. Because it is a translation of culture before literature

When the source language and the target language have different pragmatic systems and principles Pragmatic problems appear. Idioms and the use of them is one of the most important problems that the translators face.

Examples of pragmatic issues encountered during translating Irving's Rip Van Winkle:

1. "put their tongues in their cheeks" translated as "وبعضهم كان يظن أنه يلقي :  
"دعابة Since " tongue in cheek " means telling a joke but in a serious way, describing what it means in the source language and then adapting it into the target language is the best solution .

2. "A troop of strange children ran at his heels" translated as:

"وقد تجمهر حوله جيش من الاطفال الغرباء"

In this example, the translation technique used here is adaptation. Actually, the phrase will sound odd in Arabic "ركضوا إلى رجليه".

٣. "equipped in a pair of his father's cast-off galligaskins, which he had much ado to hold up with one hand, as a fine lady does her train in bad weather." Interpreted as: "مُرْتَدِيّاً سروال والده القصير الفضفاض الذي كان يُحدث ضجة كبيرة عندما يرفعه للأعلى بيدٍ واحدة كما تفعل سيدهُ جميلة بذيل فستانها في طقس سيء بحركة لا جدوى منها كمن ينفخ في قربة مقطوعة."

The above statement implies that Rip's son activity of holding up his father's old galligaskins is a superfluous act. Besides, the author uses imagery here, when he brings the readers to visualize the image of the lady ; holding the train of her dress in a similar movement. He also uses irony, making fun of the characters and the whole situation. The translation technique used here is adaptation. Since the situation is not really understandable in Arabic, an adaptation of the situation to a similar equivalent one in the target language is a proper solution .

٤. "His son Rip, an urchin begotten in his own likeness, promised to inherit the habits, with the old clothes of his father".

Because Arabic language has a similar expression of the same context, literal translation is used here as the suitable strategy. It is translated as :

"ابنه ( ريب ) كان عفريتاً صغيراً يتصرف على هواه وكأنه قطع وعداً أن يرث عادات والده وثيابه المهترئة "

## 5.4. Cultural Problems

Wendell Pierce once said about culture: "Culture is the intersection of people and life itself. It is how we deal with life, love, death, birth, disappointment... all of that is expressed in culture".

Since cultural issues has to do with beliefs, art, rules, morals, habits, custom, religion and other things; any translator should be bicultural as well as bilingual, especially in literary translation. Because this translation of the cultural will reflect the way of how its people see the world. Literary translation is actually translating the feelings, emotions and thoughts beyond the words. There are some types and examples of

cultural issues, that need to be taken into consideration when translating. Such as, metaphors, collections, beliefs, cultural expressions as well as few others.

### 5.4.1. Idioms

According to Benner (2003):

"people use idioms to make their language richer and more colorful and to convey subtle shades of meaning or intention. Idioms are used often to replace a literal word or expression, and many times the idiom better describes the full nuance of meaning."

An idiom is an expression that can not be understood from the literal meaning of its words. It has a deep meaning of its own, that probably has nothing to do with the actual literal meaning of the words. According to Fernando(1996), idioms are divided into three categories are pure idioms, semi idioms, and literal idioms. In general, idioms are connected to culture. They have to do with people, place, period and many other things. Actually, some idioms are universal and others are bound to a certain culture, so the translator must be familiar with both languages. In addition, idioms are sometimes hard to translate; they actually form a big challenge to any translator. Some of the reasons why idioms are hard to translate are probably as follows; The meaning is not clear enough to the people of the other culture in the target language. There is no existence for an equivalent idiom or expression in their language.

In translating idioms several techniques can be applied, such as Description, Borrowing, Equivalence, Literal translation and so on.

The followings are example of idioms from *Rip Van Winkle*:

1. "A dog's life"

This idiom expresses the meaning of hard and miserable life.

It is transferred as: "حياة بائسة"

## 2. "A thirsty soul"

This is an expression of a drunkard, who drinks too much habitually.

It is translated as: "سكير"

## 3. "At length"

Meaning: finally, or after some time.

It is translated as: "بعد مضي بعض الوقت"

## 4. "She broke a blood-vessel"

Meaning: she cut her arteries. It is translated as: "انتحرت"

The technique applied in translating the first two idioms above is taking the meaning of the idiom as it is describe and translate it into the target language. Since I took the meaning of the idiom in the source language and described it in the target language. But in the third example, I used equivalence as a strategy for translating the idiom, so it makes more sense.

## **.2. Metaphors 5.**

A metaphor is a special literary device and cultural component, that relies completely on cultural practices and beliefs. Besides, it's an expression that characterizes a person or a thing by referring to something else that is supposed to have similar features; in order to convey a deep meaning.

Andrei Tarkovsky once said about metaphors and the metaphoric language:

“We can express our feelings regarding the world around us either by poetic or by descriptive means. I prefer to express myself metaphorically. Let me stress: metaphorically, not symbolically. A symbol contains within itself a definite meaning, certain intellectual formula, while metaphor is an image. An image possessing the same distinguishing features as the world it represents. An image — as opposed to a symbol — is indefinite in meaning. One cannot speak of the infinite world by applying tools that are definite and finite. We can analyse the formula that constitutes a symbol, while metaphor is a being-within-itself, it's a monomial. It falls apart at any attempt of touching it.”

In fact, translating metaphors has always been a controversial issue, which needs to be discussed very accurately. Actually, translation in general is a challenge, and when it comes to translating metaphors it becomes even more complex; since the linguistic and cultural differences between the two languages are many. Therefore, such translation requires experts. The following example will show the readers how translating metaphors varies from one culture to another. For example, if I say: she is an owl. This metaphor has two different connotations in the Arabic and English language. In the east, the owl is considered to be as a sign of misfortune, while in the west the same owl is considered to be as a sign of wisdom. This variance in translating the same metaphor is due to the disparity of two linguistic and cultural systems. In addition, to avoid mistakes in translating metaphors the intellectuals found a number of solutions, such as: substituting the metaphor into a similar one in the target language, or rewriting/ paraphrasing the metaphor.

Lakoff and Johnson confirmed that "a culture may be thought of as providing, among other things, a pool of available metaphors for making sense of reality"; "to live by a metaphor is to have your reality structured by that metaphor and to base your perceptions and actions upon that structuring of reality"(Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 12)

The followings are examples of metaphors from the story:

1."This, however, always provoked a fresh volley from his wife; so that he was fain to draw off his forces, and take to the outside of the house."  
Is translated as: " ومع ذلك كان هذا التصرف دائما ما يثير موجة غضب جديدة من زوجته تنحدر كوابل من الرصاص. لذلك كان يفضل أن ينفذ بجلده ويهرب خارج المنزل."

The author used the word "volley" which is usually used in tennis or volleyball. It means to kick the ball. Also, it is used here as a metaphor to describe Dame's anger/ screaming as if it is a flow of bullets moving towards him. In this metaphor I used two techniques in translation, which are equivalence and adaptation. In the phrase " a fresh volley" Translated as " موجة غضب جديدة من زوجته تنحدر كوابل من الرصاص".

We used equivalence and adaptation, in which we described the situation by adding a new meaning/ situation to it. This is also called situational equivalence. In the sentence " he was fain to draw off his forces."

We used the strategy of translating the sentence into its equivalence in Arabic; using the equivalent metaphor "نفذ بجلده"

2. "he had got his neck out of the yoke of matrimony."

Is translated as: "حرر رقبتة من العبودية المفروضة عليه نتيجة الزواج"

Equivalence is used here as a solution. In fact, the author is pointing to British colonization in America, and how they finally got rid of it.

In Arabic it's very common to say: "تحرير الرقاب"  
"حرر رقبة"

3. "he sneaked about with a gallows air"

Is translated as: "يدخل متسللا كمن يتأرجح على حبل مشنقة باتجاه الريح"

4. "and a sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with constant use". Is translated as: "و لسانها الحاد كأداة ذات حدين تزداد حدة كلما زاد استخدامها"

Paraphrasing is the solution used in both of the above metaphors.

5. "petticoat government"

This metaphor is often used to describe a government ruled by women, or a strong dominant one. Although, the literal meaning of "petticoat" is a women skirt. It is translated here as: "الحكومة المسيطرة"

So the metaphor is translated to its implied meaning, and then paraphrased.

#### 4.1 Other cultural issues:

1. Names and historical figures/ places/ incidents:

For instance: Hudson, Kaatskill, Appalachian family, George the Third, Flemish, Stony Point, Antony's Nose and *Hendrick Hudson* .

These words are translated using Arabisation, and footnotes which define what they are.

2. Costumes and clothing, such as:

Doublets, breeches, Jerkins, cocked-hat and sugar-loaf hat.

These words are translated as they are described. Also, adding footnotes defining them is enough for the reader to understand the full meaning.

For example, doublet is translated as "سترة ضيقة"

٣. Games and items, such as:

Nine-pins and marbles.

I translated nine-pins as it's described and shown in the pictures I saw about it. It's translated as "لعبة التسع خشبات/قناني". While, marbels/ shooting marbels is translated to it's equivalent gams in Arabic, which is "بنانير"

## **Conclusion**

This research was about the difficulties we encountered while translating Washington Irving's story Rip Van winkle. These difficulties are semantic-lexical problems(i.e. hyponymy, polysemy and synonymy), syntactic problems(i.e. word order), pragmatic and cultural problems(i.e. idioms, metaphors and other cultural issues)

The semantic problems here need much readings on semantics and etymology so as the translator can overcome them. Most of these problems are not clear-cut ones. So, they may drag the inexperienced translator to mistranslate and, hence, miscommunicate. The syntactic problems requires enough knowledge about the sentence's structure of the source language and the target language.

Culture differences cause many problems that should be given much attention. If the translation is intended to attain any kind of intelligibility and accuracy. Even if the TT is linguistically correct, cultural mistranslations would distort the whole effort of the translator in case he is not concerned with the cultural background where the text under translation was produced. Idioms and metaphors and culture-bound words are among the most grave problems that may cause complete intelligibility if not taken into account. In this paper, the techniques used in solving pragmatic and cultural problems are equivalence, description, adaptation, Arabization, and others.

## Recommendation

For future researches, we recommend students who want to translate *Rip Van Winkle* or any other works for Washington Irving to be aware of the style and language. Since Irving uses a sophisticated language and a style rich of imagery and symbolism. Furthermore, they also must have a strong background of both languages and cultures.

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