

## Shifting from Formal to Dynamic Equivalence in Raheem's *Murder of the Bookseller*: A Descriptive Qualitative Study

**Lect. Nadia Odah Sultan**

**Asst. Lect. Lamya Rasheed Al-Ali**

**Department of Translation / College of Arts / University of Basrah**

### Abstract

Translating cultural and figurative expressions necessitates deep awareness of both the source and target cultures, therefore facilitating cross-communication and fostering mutual understanding across various communities. The objective of this research is to analyze the dynamic equivalence of cultural expressions and terminologies in translation of the Iraqi novel *Murder of the Bookseller*. It seeks to identify and categorize various cultural phrases and terms within the text, employing theory outlined by Nida in 2001 to examine the specific forms of equivalence used in translation. The research approach adopted in this investigation relies on a descriptive qualitative analysis that provides thorough insights into the analyzed data. The findings reveal that translating cultural expressions in the novel can be classified into two clear-cut groups: dynamic equivalence and formal correspondence, indicating that dynamic equivalence, a key principle in translation theory, emerges as a pragmatic and efficient approach to be considered the most appropriate and authentic for accurately conveying the core concepts of the original text.

**Keywords:** Dynamic equivalence, formal correspondence, cultural expressions, figurative expressions.

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## التحول من التكافؤ الشكلي إلى التكافؤ الديناميكي في رواية رحيم مقتل بائع الكتب: دراسة وصفية نوعية

المدرس نادية عودة سلطان

المدرس المساعد لمياء رشيد العلي

قسم الترجمة/كلية الآداب/جامعة البصرة

### المستخلص

تتطلب ترجمة التعبيرات الثقافية والمجازية وعياً عميقاً بكل من ثقافتها المصدر والهدف، وبالتالي تسهيل التواصل وتعزيز التفاهم المتبادل بين المجتمعات على اختلافها. يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل التكافؤ الديناميكي للتعبيرات والمصطلحات الثقافية في ترجمة الرواية العراقية "مقتل بائع الكتب". ويسعى إلى تحديد وتصنيف العبارات والمصطلحات الثقافية المختلفة داخل النص وذلك باستخدام النظرية التي أسس لها نايدا في عام ٢٠٠١ لدراسة الشكل المحدد للتكافؤ المستخدم في الترجمة. يعتمد هذا البحث على منهجية التحليل النوعي الوصفي الذي يعطي رؤى شاملة للبيانات قيد الدراسة. تكشف النتائج بأن ترجمة التعبيرات الثقافية في الرواية يمكن تصنيفها إلى مجموعتين واضحتين: التكافؤ الديناميكي والتناظر الشكلي، مما يشير إلى أن التكافؤ الديناميكي، كمبدأ أساسي في نظرية الترجمة، يبرز بوصفه منهجاً عملياً وفعالاً كونه الأكثر ملاءمة وأصالة لنقل المفاهيم الأساسية للنص الأصلي بدقة.

كلمات مفتاحية: التكافؤ الديناميكي، التناظر الشكلي، التعبيرات الثقافية، التعبيرات المجازية.

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### Introduction

Since language is an integral component of culture, various social origins among languages present a translation challenge. According to Nida (2001), language is inseparable from its culture, and meaning always has some bearing on the culture to which they belong. The cultural context of the phrase in both the source and target languages must be considered when translating terms from one language into another. Many languages now have versions of the most famous works of literature. Therefore, a translator must correctly convey the message of the source language (SL). Baker (1992) stated that the expression in the source language may convey an idea that is completely unfamiliar to the target culture. The concept in question might be either abstract or concrete, including religious beliefs, societal customs, or even culinary categories. These are commonly known as 'culture-specific concepts'. Baker believed these concepts may cause problems when selecting an appropriate equivalence. The interaction between two cultures resulted in what is commonly referred to as 'equivalence'. Ensuring the transmission of messages from a sender to a receiver is essential in all communications. Equivalence serves as a means of comprehending the various meanings within a culture, fostering mutual understanding within the society regarding these variations. When trying to comprehend the meaning of a term from another language, everyone seeks the most suitable equivalent that may be easily understood. Pym (2018) argues that while equivalence has been widely employed in defining translation, there is a scarcity of authors who have really provided a definition for equivalence itself. Baker (2004) claimed that the concept of equivalence, regardless of its specific definition, refers to the state of being identical or the same. No matter what the nature of the entities that constitute the two ends of the equivalency relation, such as meaning, effect, function, etc., the underlying premise is that if they are equivalent, their connection is characterized by 'sameness' (Baker, 2004). Accordingly, equivalence is a measure used by experts to determine if a message or meaning can be effectively communicated in the target language. For Catford (1965), if a translation does not prioritize equivalence as a standard for evaluating the outcomes of a translation, then there are no restrictions on the translation, and any outcomes can be considered true. Gorjan (1970:201) stated that "Translators can strive to come as close to the original as possible, but they never can or will achieve complete identity in their translations". The main focus of a translator is to accurately convey the content and spirit

of the original text. Translation involves more than simply converting words and phrases from one language into another; it does go beyond the linguistic boundaries. This study seeks to understand the challenges and potential pitfalls of translating culturally specific texts while also evaluating the effectiveness of the chosen strategies in preserving the artistic merit and literary significance of the original work as follows:

1. Examining dynamic equivalence versus formal correspondence: This research aims to investigate the two main translation methods, namely dynamic equivalence and formal correspondence, to determine which one is more suitable for translating the Arabic/Iraqi novel *Murder of the Bookseller* into English.
2. Identifying translation methods for culturally specific expressions: The research examines the specific methods used by the translator to deal with culturally specific expressions in the aforementioned novel; particularly the dynamic equivalence.
3. Evaluating effectiveness: The research evaluates the effectiveness of these methods in conveying cultural details and intended meanings of the original text.

The current research is part of *Murder of the Bookseller* book translation project (currently in process), which aims to provide a translated text that reflects the cultural meanings and connotations of the original text as accurately and transparently as possible. In this context, the translators, Sultan and Al-Ali, assume that dynamic equivalent outperforms formal correspondence, where the emphasis is on conveying functional and cultural meanings rather than on strict linguistic morphological structure. This hypothesis is supported by numerous examples taken from the original text and the proposed translation. In contrast, applying the translation formal correspondence would have resulted in a rigid and culturally inappropriate text being conveyed, which might mislead the reader or reduce his or her understanding of the original meaning.

## **2. Theoretical Framework: The Two Poles of Dynamic Equivalence and Formal Correspondence**

Translating involves reproducing the source language message in the receptor language, aiming to achieve the closest natural equivalent in terms of both meaning and style. According to Nida and Taber (1969), the translation should strive for a high degree of equivalence of response, as failure to achieve this would mean that the purpose of the translation has not been fulfilled.

Nida classified equivalence into two primary types: formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence. Formal correspondence, also known as source-oriented equivalence, directs attention on the message itself. According to Tan (1989), Nida stressed the need of ensuring that the receptor language message closely aligns with the various components of the source language. Translators in formal correspondence aim to provide translations that closely adhere to the form and substance of the original language, while also conveying the intended meaning accurately. Formal correspondence communications in the receptor language culture are constantly compared to messages in the source language culture to establish the norm of accuracy and consistency. Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, aims to generate a message in the target language that closely resembles the natural expression in the source language. Nida (1989) recognized that every aspect related to the linguistic text of a receptor is significant, including its form. He states that the form and content of a text are inseparable since the form itself conveys a substantial amount of meaning. Nida and Taber (1969) further clarified that the dynamic equivalence approach stresses the dynamic relationship between the messages in the source language and the target language, rather than solely focusing on their compatibility. The aim is to ensure that the messages in the target language are essentially identical to those in the original source language, including the intended meaning. Dynamic equivalence, in this sense, strives to enhance the authenticity of communication by establishing a connection between the recipient's culture and its relevance within the recipient's cultural context. The two poles of formal corresponding and dynamic equivalence may go back to ancient times, however with other names. According to their study, Al Ali and Majid (2015) argued that a literal translation will weaken and change the attractiveness of the original language. They argued that literal translation, which could be matched to formal corresponding in one way or another, would "alter the charm" of a language, and if someone tried to translate a literary work directly, then the translation product would sound ridiculous and difficult to be articulated. In this sense, translation goes beyond just understanding languages, and the various strategies that have emerged can be divided into two main categories. For Sultan (2022), translation includes choosing the foreign text that will be translated and developing a way to overcome any obstacle that the translator may encounter. On the one hand, translation can engage with the values that directly dominate target language readers, adopting a traditional approach to the foreign text,

and using it to support local norms, publishing trends, etc. On the other hand, translation can aim to revise the dominant by taking advantage of the marginal, recovering foreign texts that have been excluded due to local principles, restoring surviving values such as ancient translation texts and methods, as well as cultivating emerging values. Dynamic equivalence, accordingly, aims at generating a message in the target language that closely resembles the natural expression in the source language. Nida (1969) further clarified that the dynamic equivalence approach emphasizes the dynamic relationship between the source language (SL) and target language (TL) messages rather than just concentrating on their compatibility. The emphasis lies in ensuring that the relationship between messages in the SL is essentially equivalent to that in the TL, including the message itself. Generally, the objective of dynamic equivalence is to achieve complete naturalness of expression. Formal correspondence aims to replicate many formal components, including grammatical units, by translating nouns into nouns and verbs into verbs, while maintaining the integrity of phrases and sentences. It also ensures the preservation of all formal signs, like symbols of punctuation, paragraph breaks, and so on. For Hatim and Munday (2014), to maintain consistency in the use of words, it is crucial to accurately translate particular phrases from the source language to the target language without altering idiomatic expressions to imitate the meanings of these terms as closely as possible while maintaining a literal translation.

### 3. Murder of the Bookseller: Synopsis

This study seeks to determine the equivalence in the translation of cultural expressions found in Saad Muhammad Raheem's novel *Murder of the Bookseller*. Saad Muhammad Raheem (1957–2018) was an Iraqi novelist and writer of stories. He worked in teaching and journalism and wrote six short story collections, as well as several intellectual and critical books. He also published many novels, like: *Twilight of Karaki*, which won the Iraqi Fiction Creativity Award in 2000, *A Woman's Hymn: Twilight of the Sea*, *Murder of the Bookseller*, which was shortlisted for the Arab Booker Prize in 2017, and *Crazy Space*. He also published several books and studies, including *Restoring Marx*, and *The Intellectual Who Sticks His Nose in*. Two novels were later published after his death: *When the Jar Crashed* and *The Train to Hannah's House*. Raheem also won the Katara Prize for Arabic Novel in 2016 for his unpublished novel *Shadows of a Body... The Banks of Desire*. This novel was written by Saad Muhammad Raheem, an Iraqi

novelist (Nawaf, 2021), (Jaddoua & Hadi, 2019). As mentioned before, *Murder of the Bookseller* was first published in 2016 by Dar Sutour Publishing House in Baghdad and was shortlisted for the 2017 *Arab Booker Prize*. In this novel, Raheem strived to narrate the story of the arrival of an experienced journalist driven by curiosity Majid Baghdadi, to the city of Baqubah (60 km north of Baghdad) on an investigative mission extending for two months. Baghdadi was assigned to it by a wealthy and influential person who did not know his identity. The agreement required the journalist to write a book in which he would reveal the secrets of the life of a bookseller and painter named "Mahmoud Al-Marzouq," who was seventy years old, and the circumstances of his murder. The journalist, Baghdadi, established relations with the deceased's acquaintances and friends and find a notebook in which Al-Marzouq wrote down some of his diaries, which chronicle the city's life since the first day of the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. He then discovered letters between the bookseller and a French woman named "Janet," who served as an art model for painters, and with whom he had a personal relation: An intimate relationship that occurred when he was seeking refuge in Paris. From these sources, stories, and others, Al-Marzouq's character is revealed, and chapters of his exciting and unstable life appear, his relationships and friendships with women and men, his political experience in Iraq, then to Czechoslovakia, and his escape from there to France. However, the reason behind the murder remains ambiguous.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

This study is deemed descriptive qualitative research due to incorporating written descriptions to address the problem. Descriptive qualitative research often elucidates phenomena through written explanations. It prioritizes examining processes rather than the final output; in our case, it is the two poles: Dynamic Equivalence and Formal Correspondence. The methodological guidelines and a descriptive qualitative analysis approach were employed in this research to provide valuable insights into the challenges and complexities of translating culturally specific texts and to contribute to the ongoing debate about appropriate translation methods for literary works. The research methodology incorporates data analysis through which cultural elements in the text are presented and categorized. Such focus will be on the qualitative quotes, including their samples from both originals and translated texts. The text is then assessed and analyzed by determining the success of each translation method in terms of the rendering of meaning,

culture expression, and reader enjoyment. This is achieved by a two-pronged approach involving formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence just to understand the translator's stand and gauge how well the translation performed.

**5. Data Analysis** In this part of the research, the researchers tackle the translation problems by applying dynamic equivalence and formal correspondence methods for each excerpt taken from the novel. Two samples of translation are introduced in two columns for the same excerpt along with a third column to explain the chosen method which, in our case, shows the superiority of Dynamic over Formal correspondence. The aim is to demonstrate that translators could produce translations which not only consider a culture but also try to be precise, as well as promote cross-cultural communication and understanding.

Table (1)

**Comparison between Dynamic Equivalence and Formal Correspondence for some excerpts of *Murder of the Bookseller***

No.	Source Text + Page no.	Formal Correspondence	Dynamic Equivalence	Explanation
1	تبدو مسالمة، راكدة في هذه الساعة المبكرة (Page 5)	The city appears tranquil, immobile at this early hour.	The city seems peaceful, standing still at this early hour.	The dynamic equivalence option maintains the poetic and evocative quality of the original Arabic text while providing a more natural and engaging
				English expression. It conveys the mood and imagery effectively.
2	سيكون كتابا مميزا، كتاب العمر	It will be a distinct book, the book of age.	This book is going to be outstanding, the book of a lifetime	The dynamic equivalence choice makes the text more relatable and contemporary.



	(Page 7)			connecting with readers in a way that formal correspondence may not achieve.
3	غابة من الاسرار على الوصول اليها (Page 7)	A forest of secrets I have to reach.	Accessing this forest of secrets lies ahead of me.	The dynamic equivalence version maintains the mystery and anticipation suggested by the Arabic text while providing a more precise and more engaging expression in English.
4	قرب المدفأة النقطية المشتعلة وسط المكتب (Page 8)	Near the burning oil heater in the middle of the	Amidst the fiery glow of the office's oil heater.	The dynamic equivalent adds vividness and intensity to the description, enhancing
		office.		the reader's engagement with the scene.
5	لست على يقين فيما اذا كنت سأنجح (Page 8)	I'm not sure if I will succeed.	I harbor uncertainty about my prospects for success.	The dynamic equivalence option conveys the emotional depth and introspection of the speaker more effectively.
6	الحيرة تلفني حد الموت (Page 9)	Confusion envelops me to the edge of death.	I'm consumed by confusion, almost to the point of death.	The dynamic equivalent captures the intensity and emotional impact of the original Arabic text. It conveys the idea that confusion is overwhelming and potentially life-threatening.

7	شعنتني بنظرة ذات بريق ضاحك  (Page 8)	He embraced me with a bright laugh.	He embraced me with a gaze that held a joyful sparkle.	This dynamic translation conveys the emotional depth and the impact of the gaze more vividly, making it more engaging for readers.
8	عرفتك من النظرة الأولى  (Page 8)	I knew you at first sight.	In the very first glance, I	The dynamic equivalent adds depth and poetic essence.
9	ينظر بعينين لامعتين الى افق قصي لا يبين  (Page 8)	He looks with two gleaming eyes toward a distant horizon that is unclear.	He gazes at an undefined horizon in the far horizon with two gleaming eyes.	translation, conveying the idea of a profound connection in a more evocative way.
10	لم يكن من سبيل للاعتراض.  (Page 10)	There was no way to object.	There was no room for objections.	The dynamic equivalent simplifies the expression, making it more concise and accessible while retaining the original meaning.
11	أتمنى ان نغوص الى الجذور.  (Page 11)	I wish that we delve into the roots.	I hope we could delve deep into the origins.	The dynamic translation conveys the speaker's wish more naturally and engagingly.
12	يمضي كل منهما في حال سبيله.  (Page 11)	Each of them proceeds along	Each of them continues on	This dynamic translation preserves the

	(Page 13)	their path.	their individual journey.	idea of individuality and progression more effectively.
13	ضحكتي كانت مجلجلة اثاره انتباه الجالسين  (Page 38)	My laughter was loud and drew the attention of those seated.	My laughter was hearty and caught the attention of those around.	The dynamic equivalence choice maintains the liveliness and impact of the laughter, making it more relatable.
14	سيشون بعص على اذائك  (Page ٥1)	They will give you a hard time.	They are poised to challenge and test your mettle.	The most appropriate proverb is determined by the special circumstances and the message intended to be sent about punishment. So, dynamic is efficient here.
15	رايتني بحاجة الى تحريك اعضائي المتخشبة.  (Page ٥٦)	I saw myself in need of moving my rigid limbs.	I realized I needed to loosen up my stiffened limbs.	The dynamic translation clearly captures the speaker's self-awareness and the need for action.
16	لا تامل بقارب نجاه.  (Page 58)	Stop relying for a hope on a lifeboat.	Place not your trust in a waiting vessel of salvation.	The dynamic equivalent maintains the poetic quality of the original while making it more accessible.
17	الوجوم على وجهه.  (Page 58)	His face was gloomy.	Upon his visage, a somber shadow lay.	The dynamic translation enhances the description, emphasizing emotional depth and imagery.

18	كيف حالك؟ ماشي مع المواشي. (Page 58)	How are you? Going along with the cattle.	How are you? Traversing the path in tandem with the bovine horde.	The dynamic equivalent captures the humor and playfulness of the original Arabic phrase more effectively.
19	من أي مستنقع تنن للشر خرجوا؟ (Page 59)	From any swamp that stinks of evil, they came out?	Which stagnant swamp of evil did they emerge from?	The dynamic translation clarifies the question and maintains its poetic tone.
20	لخلط الحابل بالتابل (Page 59)	was in a mess.	A maelstrom of confusion engulfed everything.	This is a proverb which depends on the specific context and the nuances you wish to express regarding the challenge and the opponent. So dynamic equivalent is
				giving closer meaning to the original since this proverb highlights the negative emotional impact of confusion, suggesting it can lead to uncertainty.
21	كان علي ان اكبح جماح نفسي واصوغ جوابا مقنعا، قلت بنبرة واهنة لم الفلح في جعلها خالية من السخرية. (Page 10)	I had to restrain myself and compose a convincing response. I said with a subdued tone but failed to keep it free from mockery.	I struggled with emotions but managed to compose them into the striking answer. I sought to speak in a	The dynamic translation conveys the complexity of the speaker's emotions and response more effectively.

			subdued tone, but I could not help but be mocking.	
22	يرمقني بارتياب	He gazes at me with suspicion.	His skeptical gaze casts upon me.	The dynamic equivalent provides a more detailed and immersive description, conveying the intensity of
	(Page ٦٠)			suspicion.
23	يقتلون بسبب كلمة واحدة او زلة لسان.	They kill because of a single word or a slip of the tongue.	... swayed by the weight of a solitary word or the slightest slip of the tongue.	The dynamic equivalent emphasizes the gravity of the situation and the potential consequences more vividly.
	(Page 61)			
24	انه سياسي ماهر ودبلوماسي من البيضة.	A cunning politician and a diplomat from the egg.	A sly politician and a diplomat born from the same source.	The dynamic translation maintains the figurative language, making it more accessible and engaging.
	(Page 61)			
25	اخر جلسة سمر لي	The last late-night gathering for me.	My last late-night hangout.	The dynamic translation provides a more straightforward and relatable expression.
	(Page 61)			
26	سينترك فراغا كبيرا في حياتي... كان الصديق الوحيد	He will leave a big gap in my life. He was my only friend.	His absence will leave a huge void in my life. He was my one and only friend.	The dynamic equivalent conveys the emotional impact and significance of the friendship more effectively.
	(Page 61)			
27	يهز جسمه على	He shakes his	He sways his	The dynamic equivalent

	مهمل (Page 62)	body slowly.	body gently.	simplifies and clarifies the action, making it more accessible.
28	اعتقد أنك تتكلم عن مواجهة الشبوط في مواجهة الحيتان. (Page 62)	I believe you are speaking about the swordfish when facing the whales.	I think you are talking about the little sparrow against the hawk.	The dynamic translation provides a more precise and more natural expression of the idea.
29	مسكين مثير للشفقة (Page 67)	Poor, evoking compassion.	Poor soul, Pathetic.	The dynamic translation captures the emotional tone and empathy more effectively.
30	حر قاتل، حر اسود، حور سوريالي (Page 66)	Lethal heat, black heat, surreal heat.	Fierce Heat, Scorching Heat, Surreal Heat.	The dynamic equivalent maintains the vividness of the original while providing a more engaging and concise expression.

## 6. Discussion

The research currently being conducted is part of an ongoing book translation project of the novel *Murder of the Bookseller*. The main objective, as mentioned above, is to produce a translated work that accurately and transparently reflects the meanings and cultural implications of the original text. Translators, Sultan and Al-Ali, assume that dynamic equivalent is better than formal correspondence in this particular context, where the emphasis is on conveying cultural and functional meanings rather than strictly adhering to linguistic morphological structure. Translation from Arabic to English, however, is characterized by many unique challenges which emerge due to the undeniable differences between the two languages. The theme of this research deals with the numerous and serious problems that translators might face and possible solution techniques for dealing with them. For example, it can be noticed from the above table that Arabic has a rich vocabulary of figurative language as it incorporates idioms,

metaphors, and proverbs. The correct translation of the idioms requires the understanding of the cultural background and choosing the English equivalent that preserves the original's intended meaning. Whilst jokes and sarcasm normally rely on details that are not obvious to people, translating them is a lot harder compared to more straightforward things to say. Therefore, translators must analyze the target audience carefully and tone down the humor or sarcasm accordingly to bring them to agreement with cultural norms and ensure comprehension. While aiming to ensure that language translation is as accurate and culturally relevant as possible to address issues of cross-cultural communication and understanding between Arabic and English, translators should address and overcome these challenges. In the present research, the purpose of dynamic equivalence was set because it aims to serve as supplement to the literal translation of the original text so that it could achieve the best natural form and flow of sentences in the target language. This stimulates the readable and pleasant nature of the material for the audience that the material is targeting. The strict insistence on the form of the original document is quite evident in the case of formal equivalency as this leads to translations that sound rigid and lack smoothness in the sentence structure that is obvious in the Formal Correspondence column in Table (1). Taking into account the cultural gaps between the source and the target audience, dynamic equivalence allows the translator to produce the translation. The translator can make language changes that would result in the message being culturally sensitive and the audience finding what is being said to be understandable, the core of which is basically transmitted without loss. Formal correspondence will usually avoid cultural empathy, thus the translation which is not culturally sensitive or accurate will come out. Besides the fact that dynamic equivalence concentrates on the meaning and not the wordings of the original text, the reader's reaction in the target language should also be taken into consideration. This makes the delivery of the intended message to the target audience possible and, if compared to the original message, the message read will be consistent with the desired meaning. On the contrary, the formal correspondence tends to follow the exact structure and the wording of the original text with the so-called translations that might be hard to get along with.

### **7. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Nida's concrete version equivalence model, which is rule-guided, has proved that the model is still applicable in all practical situations involving translation. Translation is an interaction between languages and cultures and there is no exact theory that can be used to solve all its difficulties. Translators must be very careful when selecting the techniques that really attract the audience's attention and build their understanding. In this research, it is found that the translators resort to describe cultural concepts in terms of their objective meaning as well as their cultural context (the dynamic method) when translating cultural elements. Formal correspondence conserves faithfulness to the source language, however, dynamic equivalence bridges the gap between the two for the sake of understanding. Utilizing dynamic equivalence while translating Arabic literature into other languages provides an authentic and an exciting expression of the work putting the inputs of the target audience into consideration. The process fulfills the objective of preserving all literary and emotional characteristics while reaching a penetrated readership. Through this approach, it becomes easy to express culture in a way that is natural, communicate subtle cultural details, and be flexible. Despite all these biases, it is still crucial to be aware of them to strive both accuracy and quality still, as final products of the translation. A possible recommendation for further endeavors could involve analyzing dynamic equivalence and formal correspondence in various translation directions and cultural contexts, i.e., summarizing the parallels and differences among languages and studying the application of dynamic equivalence and formal correspondence to the translation of the written documents of specialized nature, such as legal documents, medical records, and technical manuals.

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