

Normalization

In brief



 SPA [Normalización](#) DEU [Normalisierung](#)

other names

Standardization, conservatism, centralization, domestication, generalization, deculturalization

Normalization is the best suited term in this context as all of the concepts involved and discussed in the following have in common that they describe the relationship between language, translation and the norms of a certain culture.

abstract

Normalization has different meanings in translation studies. It may refer to a process of standardization that languages go through and where translations often have a leading role, to the standardization of texts, to the preparation of language for machine translation, to a translation strategy where translators try to integrate their translations into the target culture or to a frequency effect observed in translation corpora.

When it is understood as the standardization of a language, normalization describes cases where influential translators (e.g., Martin Luther) translated in a vernacular which was at their time not used as a literary language. Translations helped to standardize these vernaculars and to establish them as a means for normal communication.

When understood as the standardization of texts, normalization refers to a process where companies or national/international organizations define norms for terminology and other linguistic features of texts of a certain domain. Translators are confronted with these norms when translating. These norms often lead to a higher unification and a higher quality.

Normalization, understood as the preparation of text for machine translation, means that text which contains non-standard features such as orthographical variation or unusual abbreviations needs to be corrected before machine translation proceeds, to ensure an effective processing.


Normalization, as a translation strategy, describes the choice of translators to adapt their translation to target language rules. This strategy is also labelled domestication, fluent translation or centralization.

Globally, the term normalization is mostly used to refer to a frequency effect observed in comparable corpora. Normalization is then defined as the exaggeration of the target language norms in translations, compared to original texts in the target language (that is, the translation is more normal than original texts in the target language). This phenomenon becomes visible in the extensive use of linguistic features in translations which are typical for the specific target language. This frequency effect has been investigated in several corpus studies; it has been observed on different linguistic levels and in different language pairs. Several attempts have been made in order to find causes for normalization as a frequency effect, especially cognitive sources.

record

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Entry



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Introduction

The term normalization has been used to describe different concepts in translation studies (TS) which either deal with the standardization of languages and texts where translations play a major role, or with the standardization of translations according to the target language norms.

Normalization may refer to:

- the standardization of a language as a normal means of communication
- the preparation of language for machine translation
- the standardization of texts
- a translation strategy

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Normalization as the standardization of a language

Normalization may refer to the standardization of a language. Different examples show that translations sometimes play a major role in these processes. On the one hand, highly influential persons at a certain period promoted translations or translated by themselves in a rather marginal vernacular of the time. Due to their influence, their translations were largely accepted and favourably received by the people of that time. And this led then to the normalization of these vernaculars as a language for everyday use and especially also for literary purposes. Examples of these influential translators are Alfred the Great of Wessex (Robinson 1997; Smyth 1995), Alfonso X the Wise (Kabatek 2008; Schieben 2008) and Martin Luther (Haile 1980). On the other hand, not only single influential translators led to the normalization of languages. For some languages, the translations done by many translators over a longer period of time helped to create a rich vocabulary in those languages by introducing new words and satisfying the need for literature. Cases in which not only single translators, but translations in general played an important role for the normalization process are modern Hebrew (Branchadell [2003](#); Toury 2002) and Galician (Milán-Varela [1999](#), 2000).

Alfred the Great of Wessex

[Alfred the Great](#) (849-899) was crowned king of [Wessex](#) in 871 and is above all known for his successful battles against the Danes, preventing them to conquer all England. But Alfred also eagerly promoted knowledge and learning. He was convinced that the decline in learning and education of the English people was the cause for the Viking raids. He therefore insisted that every wealthy young man in England should learn to read and write. To further promote knowledge and education, Alfred learned Latin and translated several texts from the late antiquity into Old English. Examples of his translations are the [Consolation of Philosophy](#) by Boethius and the [Soliloquies](#) by Augustine of Hippo. Alfred's education policy –and, especially, his translations– played a major role in the normalization of [Old English](#) (Robinson 1997; Smyth 1995).



Alfred the Great.
Source: [Wikimedia.](#)

Alfonso X the Wise

The Castilian King [Alfonso X the Wise](#) reigned from 1252 to 1284. He was already known and admired during his lifetime for his intelligence and wisdom. This was, above all, due to his promotion of learning and knowledge in many domains at his court. This included history, science, law and literature. For example, until he reached the throne, Castilian legal texts had mostly been in Latin. Alfonso promoted the translation of legal texts into Castilian, an important step for the normalization of a language that would evolve into modern Spanish. Not only Latin legal texts were translated into Castilian. At the [Toledo School of Translators](#), Arabic texts, especially in the scientific domain, were translated into Castilian – and often from Castilian into Latin –, and played an important role for the normalization process (Kabatek 2008; Schieben 2008).

Martin Luther



The Church reformer [Martin Luther](#) was born in 1483 in Eisleben and died in 1546. He did not only initiate the Protestant Reformation by criticizing the commercialization of indulgences by the Catholic Church in his 95 theses. Martin Luther also played an important role in the normalization of German. He translated the [Bible](#) differently, and contrary to former translations into German, as he tried to translate it like a literary text. His version was soon purchased by almost every household in Germany and was read on a daily basis. This led to the normalization of Luther's German dialect as modern standard German (Haile 1980).

Modern Hebrew

Normalization has also been used to describe the revival of a language. This is the case of modern [Hebrew](#). For many centuries, Hebrew was hardly used as an everyday language but mostly only as the language of the Torah. But Hebrew became again a means of normal communication with the national Jewish movement and the foundation of the state of Israel. The normalization of modern Hebrew was above all promoted by the education of children in schools. But

Martin Luther.
[Wikimedia.](#)

translations helped in this normalization process as they enriched, for example, the vocabulary of Hebrew by introducing loan words. Translations thus helped to prepare Hebrew for becoming again a normal means of communication (Toury 2002; Branchadell [2003](#)):

Even the uninitiated forerunners of the Haskalah in the second half of the 18th century could see that there was virtually no chance of catching up with the ‘civilized’ world without a major investment in translation. Translating was not only an obvious way of producing texts quickly and in quantity, which is one important way of demonstrating the potentials of a new cultural paradigm, even its very existence. It was also a convenient means of experimenting with issues that were thought worthy of treatment in Hebrew by virtue of their association with an established culture of high prestige.

(Toury 2002: XX)

Galician

For many centuries and especially under the regime of Francisco Franco, Galician played only a marginal role and survived only as an everyday language. This changed however, when in 1983 Galicia became an autonomous region (*Comunidade Autónoma*) of Spain. Together with Spanish, Galician became an official language in the region. Some years later, the law for the normalization of Galician (*Lei de Normalización Lingüística*) was adopted by the [Galician authorities](#) as well as by the Spanish government. This law promotes the use Galician in all domains. Steps to achieve this goal included the use of Galician by authorities as well as in the administration. Galician became a subject in school and Galician TV and radio stations were founded. Another important part of these politics was the promotion of Galician via translations: Books in Galician were needed and the gap was quickly filled with translations. They were to play a major part in the normalization of the language. This was, however, only partly successful. Although translations of children’s books were widely used at schools, translations for adult readers had less success. Galician adults preferred to read in Spanish which they had been doing all their lives and was perfectly understandable to them and the Galician translations were therefore not very successful (Millán-Varela [1999](#), 2000). Paradoxically, Galician literature flourished under King Alfonso X the Wise, the normalizer of Spanish, who preferred Galician to write his own literary work, the *Canticles of Holy Mary*.

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¶ Normalization as preparation of language for machine translation

Normalization may refer to the pre-processing of language for machine translation. This preprocessing is necessary when the language of the texts to be translated contains unusual features which might cause problems for the application. These unusual features might be due to a special kind of text type, such as SMS (Aw, Min, Pohkhim *et al.* [2005](#)). These text types might contain features uncommon in written language, such as ungrammatical structures, ellipses or non-standard acronyms. But the unusual features might also be due to a certain variation in the language, especially in the spelling, which may cause problems (Jaber, Tonelli & Delmonte 2011). In order to deal with these problems, the language can be corrected or normalized by unifying spelling and correcting grammatical structures. The text can then be translated by a MT system just as

normal text, without changing the statistical language model (see also Lembersky, Ordan & Wintner [2011](#)) used by this system. According to Jaber, Tonelli & Delmonte (2011: 71):

Normalization is a common issue to many languages in the world such as Arabic, Chinese and Japanese, which share the same problem of orthographic variation. Normalization is necessary to allow word forms to be checked against a lexicon where standardized orthography has been used.

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¶ Normalization as the standardization of texts

Normalization may refer to the standardization of texts in a certain domain. Language for special purposes has to meet certain criteria and norms to make specialized communication smoother and more efficient. The norms for terminology and other aspects of texts in a certain domain might be defined by a company but also by an international ([ISO](#) and [CEN](#)) or national organization ([DIN](#) for Germany, [AENOR](#) for Spain). This standardization concerns also translators when they have to translate these texts. The translator has to respect these norms and choose the linguistic output for his translation accordingly. The normalization or standardization of text types has several advantages; for example, a higher reliability of the translation. It also leads to a unified terminology, to a more economic activity, and finally to a higher quality of the translation (Gómez & Pinto [2002](#)).

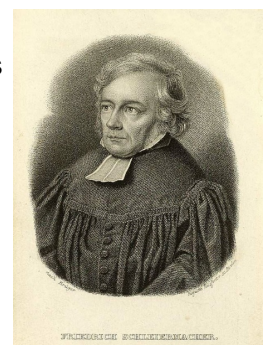
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¶ Normalization as a translation strategy

The term *normalization* has been used to refer to a translation strategy where translators try to adapt the language of his/her translation to the norms and culture of the target language (e.g., Ramos 2009; Mazur & Chmiel [2016](#); see also the section on normalization as a frequency effect for a similar approach focusing on translated language and not on translators).

Although not always explicitly labelled *normalization*, this translation strategy has been described and discussed by many translation studies scholars on a theoretical basis (e.g., Schleiermacher 1813; Toury 1980; Newmark 1988; Venuti 1992).

Schleiermacher (1813; see also Bellos 2013 for the labelling of Schleiermacher's second method as *normalization*) describes for example in his essay *On the Different Methods of Translating (Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens)* that there are only two possible methods to translate a text. Either the translator tries to bring the reader to the author and therefore foreignizes the language of his translation or he brings the author's culture to the reader by adapting the language of the translation to the norms of the target culture. In his essay, Schleiermacher advocates however the former method. According to him, a language can only grow and develop if it is exposed to other cultures it can learn from.



**Friedrich
Schleiermacher.**

Source: [Wikimedia](#).

Toury (1980) was one of the first to use the term *norm* and to talk about the tendency of translators to normalize their translations. He said that translators often use

conventional clichéd items in their translations instead of items close to the source language. According to Toury, a motive for this translation strategy would be the translators' fear of being considered incorrect or opaque.

Mazur & Chmiel (2016) refer for example to the theoretical discussion of translation strategies by Newmark (1988) when using the term *normalization*. They base their concept on Newmark's category of *functional equivalence*. According to Newmark, translators often neutralize cultural words in order to adapt them to the target language. He also refers to this strategy as *generalization* or *deculturalization*.

Also Venuti (1992) writes about the translation strategies to either make the source language visible or invisible, and thus to adapt the language of the translation to the target language norms. According to Venuti, a translation is generally viewed to be a good translation if the reader cannot discover that it is a translation and not an original text in the target language. To achieve this goal and to make the text fluent, the translator normalizes different linguistic aspects: Odd syntactic structures are, for example, replaced by more linear structures, and unidiomatic constructions are corrected. Venuti criticizes this domesticating or fluent strategy. He argues that, on the one hand, it leads to the invisibility and thus devaluation and economic exploitation of translators and, on the other, it prevents a real cultural exchange between the target text reader and the source culture which could be initiated by a translation reflecting the source language.

On an empirical level, normalization as a translation strategy has for example been investigated on audiovisual translation (voice over, Mazur & Chmiel 2016; subtitling, Ramos 2009) and in literary translation (Ramos 2009). According to Schleiermacher (1813: 229):

But what paths are open to the true translator, one who would bring those two utterly unconnected people together, the source-language author and the target-language reader – and would aid the latter, without banishing him from the sphere of the target language, in attaining as accurate and thorough and understanding and enjoyment of the former? I believe there are only two. The translator either (1) disturbs the writer as little as possible and moves the reader in his direction, or (2) disturbs the reader as little as possible and moves the writer in his direction.

Example: cultural words

Mazur & Chmiel (2016) investigated normalization as a translation strategy in the use of cultural words in a voice-over translation of the American TV series *The West Wing* into Polish. The series is set in the White House and contains terms specific to the American culture. The authors of this study investigated the translation of these cultural words in a single episode of this series and classified the translation strategies according to several categories. In this context, Mazur & Chmiel define normalization of the cultural words as the replacement by neutral or culture-free terms. They found that most of the cultural words were translated according to the normalization strategy which meant that terms describing American administration or military aspects were replaced by culture-free words. Examples of normalization are shown below.

Original Language

Translated language

What's your *secret service* code name?

Jaki jest Twój *służbowy* pseudonim?

He was high when he was running the *Labor Department*.

Brał, kiedy był *ministrem*?

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¶ Normalization as a frequency effect

The term *normalization* is also used in order to refer to a frequency effect which can be observed in translation corpora. In this case, normalization does not refer to the choice of single translators and thus to a translation strategy or to phenomena observed in single texts (see also the section on normalization as a translation strategy). It refers to the general tendency of translations to follow target language norms and conventions more closely than original texts in this language. Baker (1996) first suggested this label for a category of her so-called translation universals.

Baker (1993, 1995, 1996) – inspired by Toury's (1980) theory on translation and especially his notion of norms – argued that translations should be seen as a special kind of text. Until that time, translations were primarily seen as the product of a single translation process and as an invalid part of the target language system which should, for example, be excluded from corpora. According to Baker, translations should, on the one hand, not only be seen in relation to the source text and, on the other, they should be regarded as a special part of the target language system: The language of translations should be investigated as different from the language of originals, but still part of the target language system. Baker suggested that the language of translations should therefore be investigated independently of the source language, and that it should be compared to texts originally produced in the target language. She proposed the use of comparable corpora for this purpose which contain original texts in a certain language and translations into this language. This was a new approach for a time when prescriptive studies and especially case studies on single texts were the norm in translation studies.

Baker suggested that in comparable corpora certain features should be observable which are universal to translated language and which do not depend on the source language (translation universals). She named the following categories, including a translation universal which she labels *normalization* (Baker 1996: 183):

- *Explicitation*: Translations tend to be more explicit than originals. They spell out more things and use less implicit messages. According to Baker, this can be observed in a more frequent use of the optional word *that* in translations which makes these texts more explicit.
- *Simplification*: Translations tend to be simpler than originals. According to Baker, this shows, for instance, in shorter sentences in translations.
- *Levelling Out*: Translations tend to show less linguistic variation than original texts. Baker suggests that a lower lexical density and a lower type-token ratio as hints of this translation universal.
- *Normalization/Conservatism*: Translations tend to show an exaggerated use of features which are typical for the target language. An example for normalization in corpora is according to Baker the use of more conventionalized punctuation.

Although it was not explicitly mentioned by Baker, her translation universal *normalization* is very similar to Toury's (1995) *law of growing standardization* (see also Pym 2008; Bernadini & Ferraresi 2011). Toury formulated two laws to describe translation, the *law of growing standardization* and the *law of interference*. The law of growing standardization states that in translations, source language structures are often rendered differently in order to fit target language rules (where changes would be compulsory) and conventions (where changes would be optional). This law is thus very similar to Baker's concept of normalization. According to Toury's law of interference, translations at the same time transfer structures and elements from the source language into the target text. This law has no equivalence in Baker's translation universals (see Teich 2003 for a translation universal category labelled *shining-through* used for frequency effects due to interference from the source text).

Baker's assumption that translation universals are not influenced by interference from the source language, as it had been suggested by Toury for example, has been criticized by many scholars (e.g., Pym 2008; Delaere & De Sutter 2013; Vandevoorde 2020). Baker (1996) herself states that the degree of normalization depends on the prestige of the source language, which is already an argument against the idea that translation universals can be found to the same degree in all translations into different languages alike and that they are not due to interference of the source language.

This is also supported by empirical studies showing that normalization depends on different factors and is not present in all translations. Factors which might determine whether normalization can be found in corpora are for example the language pair investigated in general (Delaere & de Sutter 2013; Capelle & Looock 2017), but also the prestige of the source language (Vintar & Hansen-Schirra 2005) and the register of the text (e.g. administrative texts vs. journalistic texts, Delaere & de Sutter 2013).

As the status of the source language in the target culture seems to play a role for the nature of translations, many researchers investigated translations on an empirical level, considering normalization as well as interference/shining-through effects, as suggested by Toury (Teich 2003; Vintar & Hansen-Schirra 2005; Bernadini & Ferraresi 2011). Baker's term, *normalization*, is however widely used although its understanding has changed from a universal feature of translations to a continuum between interference and standardization.

The fact that normalization cannot be found to the same degree in all translations and that it seems to be dependent on the source language leads also on a theoretical level to a critical view of the translation universal concept (Mauranen & Kujamäki 2004): The question whether there are features which are universal to translating is controversial. In the following, the term *frequency effect* instead of *translation universal* will be used when referring to normalization as a phenomenon observed on a quantitative scale in comparable corpora and which does not depend on the strategy of single translators. According to Baker (1996: 183):

'Normalisation' (or 'conservatism') is a tendency to exaggerate features of the target language and to conform to its typical patterns. This tendency is quite possibly influenced by the status of the source text and the source language, so that the higher the status of the source text and language, the less the tendency to normalise.

Defining the norm

If we want to investigate whether translations display normalization and whether the norms of the target culture are exaggerated, we first need to define the norm of the target language. Teich (2003) addresses this issue. Considering that the source language might also impact frequency effects observed in translations, she suggests that contrastive differences between the source and the target language have to be identified in order to define normal language use in the target language. However, languages show also a certain variation, especially prominent between different registers and domains. Hence, registers have to be taken into account: on the one hand, when defining the normal use of language within the target language; on the other, for the creation of corpora which are used to investigate normalization in translations (Bernardini & Ferraresi [2011](#)).

Explanations for normalization

Several researchers tried to find answers to the question of why we can find different frequency effects in translations than in original texts. Regarding normalization, three major theories have been proposed and they include the nature of translator training (Chesterman [2010](#)), risk avoidance of translators (Pym 2008; Delaere & De Sutter 2013) and cognitive processes occurring during translation (Halverson 2003, 2010, 2017; Hansen-Schirra 2017; Oster 2017).

According to Chesterman (2010), one explanation for translation universals is translator training. Translation students are trained to establish a good communication between the author of the source text and the reader of the target text. They are taught to take into account cultural differences they will be confronted with and they are taught the linguistic norms of the target cultures. In the case of normalization, it is thus possible that translators are trained to produce target texts which follow very closely the target language norms. This could then result in a general tendency of translations being closer to target language norms than original texts in the respective language.

Pym (2008; see also Delaere & De Sutter 2013) suggests that avoiding risks can lead to normalization. Translators need to take risks when translating because they will often have many translation options to choose from. All of these options might be correct, but translators can probably not always check for the best solution in reliable resources due to time constraints. When deciding to choose a certain solution, translators will thus try to minimize the risk they take. They will therefore go for the most 'normal' solution. By avoiding an unnatural language and using 'normal' solutions, translators thus follow the norms more closely. This will result in texts which are closer to the target language norms and conventions than original texts. According to Pym, this risk avoidance has also several levels. Depending on the prestige of the source culture, translators might adapt their risk-avoiding behaviour. If the source culture (or the source text/author) has for example a high prestige, a translator might take a higher risk which will then lead to less normalization. Another factor might be the difficulty of the text to translate. If a text is difficult to understand, the translator might choose to use the translation solution which includes the lowest risk, and which is closest to the norms of the target culture. This might thus be a factor for a higher degree of normalization of translations.

There have been several attempts to find cognitive sources of translation universals, and namely normalization. One of them is the gravitational pull hypothesis by Halverson (2003, 2010, 2017). According to this hypothesis, the representation of linguistic elements in the mind of translators and

the connections between these elements are responsible for frequency effects observed in translated text. The linguistic representations which play a role in this context can be divided into three categories: the source language representations (*gravitational pull*), the target language representations (*magnetism*), and the links between linguistic elements of both languages (*connectivity*). Halverson argues that prototypical representations in the target language exert a strong pull (magnetism). These prototypical structures are therefore preferably used during translation. This leads to their frequent use in translated text and thus to normalization.

Hansen-Schirra (2017) and Oster (2017) suggest that priming and mental control processes are responsible for shining-through and normalization phenomena in translations. According to this theory, the translator is primed by linguistic structures of the source text while reading. These linguistic structures will automatically activate formally corresponding structures in the target language due to the links between language representations in the bilingual mind. These target language structures are then chosen to produce the target text. Mental control processes can, however, lead to the filtering out of structures which are too close to the source language. Like Pym (2008), in this theory the degree of mental control might also depend on the level of prestige of the source language and thus the necessity to avoid interferences. Hansen-Schirra and Oster suggest however, contrary to Pym, that shining-through (or interference) is the norm and normalization is only achieved by the effort of mental control.

Example: anglicisms in Italian

Bernardini & Ferraresi (2011) investigated the use of anglicisms in Italian originals and translations on computing. They assumed that more anglicisms in translations into Italian than in Italian originals could be interpreted as interference, and a lower number of anglicisms could be interpreted as normalization. To investigate these assumptions, the authors set up a corpus of technical computing texts. Bernardini & Ferraresi chose software documentation texts (more specifically *Perl pods*, short tutorials explaining how to deal with programming problems which come with the programming language *Pearl*). This allowed them to thoroughly control their corpus for text type and domain. The corpus consisted of the original English pods, translations into Italian generated by the volunteer project [pod2it](#) and a reference corpus with comparable texts in Italian which were not translations.

The authors further identified the following types of anglicisms: overt [borrowings](#), adapted borrowings, semantic [loans](#) and morphosyntactic [calques](#) (such as the plural -s). The analysis of the use of these anglicisms in the corpus showed that they were more frequent in the original Italian texts than in the translations. The authors thus interpreted this difference in frequency as normalization. It has to be stressed that translations used in this study were part of a volunteer project and not necessarily produced by trained translators. In this case, normalization could therefore not be explained by the influence of the translators training. The findings can thus not be generalized to all technical translations from English to Italian but might be specific to the volunteers translating the pods.

Example: cognates in Slovene and in German

Vintar & Hansen-Schirra (2005) investigated the number of cognates (translation equivalents which share a similar form such as *system* in English and *System* in German) in Slovene and in German translations compared to original texts in these languages. The aims of this study were to

investigate (a) whether statistical differences could be observed between translations and original texts, thus indicating either normalization or shining-through, and (b) whether both languages showed the same patterns or there were differences in the use of cognates in Slovene and German. Vintar and Hansen-Schirra built up a parallel corpus containing German and Slovene translations of popular-scientific texts. To compare these translations, monolingual reference corpora were used ([COSMAS](#) for German and [FIDA](#) for Slovene). The analysis of these corpora showed that Slovene translations contained slightly less cognates than Slovene originals (thus indicating normalization) and German translations contained more cognates than German originals (indicating shining-through). This suggests that the target language may influence whether normalization or shining-through can be found.

Example: phrasal verbs in English

Phrasal verbs or verb-particle combinations are a typical feature of the English language (e.g., *cool down*, *throw up*, *run away*). Capelle & Loock (2017) investigated in a corpus study of fictional texts whether the source language of translations influences the number of phrasal verbs in translations, alters its number compared to English originals and thus leads to normalization or shining-through. As phrasal verbs are a very common feature in English, an overuse of these structures could be classified as normalization.

The authors compared translations from Romance languages and from Germanic languages into English. They hypothesized that the source language should have an influence on the number of phrasal verbs found in English if shining-through instead of normalization were predominant. As Germanic languages are more similar to English because they use a lot of particles and prefixes which are in their use similar to English phrasal verbs, Germanic translations should lead to more phrasal verbs than Romance languages which make less use of such structures. This could be interpreted as a prevalence of shining-through. To test for these assumptions, Capelle and Loock analysed the number of phrasal verbs for Germanic and Roman translations into English in the Translational English Corpus ([TEC](#)) and for original texts in English in the British National Corpus ([BNC](#)). The results of this study showed that translations from Romance languages into English contained indeed less phrasal verbs than translations from Germanic languages and English originals. The authors therefore argue that shining-through is predominant in these texts and that these results do not support the assumption that normalization is a translation universal which is (a) present in all translated text and (b) independent of the source language.

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Research potential

The concept of normalization is used in very different research areas of translation studies. Every research area listed in this contribution offers interesting research questions. Normalization is, however, most commonly used to refer to a frequency effect in translation corpora. Especially in this field of research, many relevant research gaps still exist. These include questions such as how universal frequency effects (namely, normalization) are, which factors influence them and, finally, which cognitive processes lead to these patterns in translations.

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