Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) & Norms — Explanatory Handout with Real Text Examples

Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) examines translation **as it is practiced in real life**, not as it "should" be. Toury argues that translation decisions follow **norms**—shared expectations in a culture that shape how translators behave.

Norms influence:

- what gets translated
- how translators approach a text
- and which linguistic choices they make.

What Is a Translation Norm?

A **norm** is a cultural expectation about what counts as an "acceptable" or "appropriate" translation. It is not a strict rule but also not a personal preference. It is a **pattern** that many translators follow because their culture, editors, publishers, and training guide them in that direction.

Toury's Norm System (+ Real Examples)

1️⃣ Initial Norms — Translator's Overall Orientation

Core question: Do I follow the Source Text or the Target Culture?

A. Adequacy (Source-Oriented)

Translators keep the structure, imagery, and stylistic features of the original.

💬 **ST (literary English):**
"The night was a silent witness to her sorrow."

➡ **Adequacy-oriented TT (Turkish):**
"Gece, onun kederinin sessiz bir şahidiydi."

- Metaphor preserved
- Poetic structure preserved
- High-literary tone kept
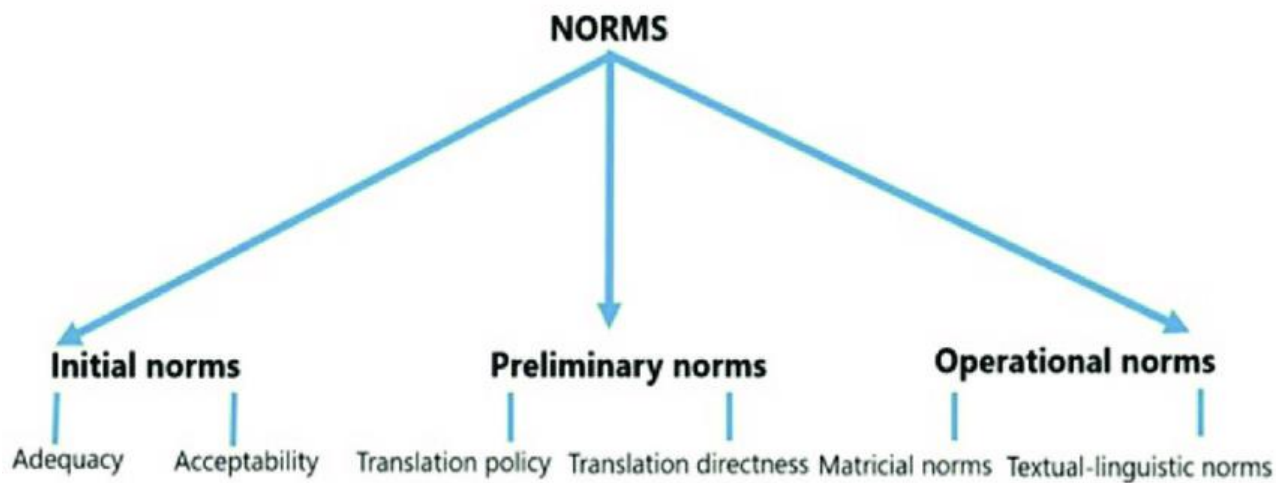
B. Acceptability (Target-Oriented)

The translation is reshaped to sound natural in the target language.

➡ **Acceptability-oriented TT (Turkish):**
"Gece, onun üzüntüsünü sessizce izliyordu."

- More idiomatic
- Feels like an original Turkish sentence
- Metaphor softened for naturalness
- **Preliminary Norms — Decisions *Before* Translating**
- **A. Translation Policy**
- What kinds of texts does a culture choose to translate?

- **Example:**
Turkey translates many **English bestsellers** but fewer **Indonesian novels**.
This is not about language difficulty—it reflects **market norms**, **publisher preferences**, and **cultural interest**.
- Another example:
Some countries translate **children's literature** more actively than philosophical works.
- **B. Directness of Translation**
- Is indirect translation allowed?
- **Example of Indirect Translation:**
Russian → English → Turkish
(Frequently happens with Scandinavian or Asian languages.)
- **Concrete Example:**
The Turkish edition of *The Little Prince* was historically translated from **the English version**, not French—the original ST.
This shows indirect translation was culturally accepted at that time.

- 3 **Operational Norms — Decisions Inside the Translation**
- **A. Matricial Norms (Structure-Level Decisions)**
- Control how the TT is shaped.
- **Example 1 — Omission**
- **ST:**
"He spoke slowly, pausing after every word, as if choosing each one with pain."
- ➡ **TT (omitting detail):**
"Ağır konuşuyordu, kelimelerini seçerek."
- The emotional nuance *"with pain"* is omitted → culturally accepted for brevity.
- **Example 2 — Paragraph Splitting**
- **ST:** Long, dense paragraph
    - ➡ **TT:** Split into 2–3 paragraphs in Turkish to match readability norms.

- **B. Textual-Linguistic Norms (Word, Grammar, Style Choices)**
- Shaped by target-language expectations.
- **Example 1 — Idiomatic Expressions**
- **ST (English):**
"I'm broke."
- ➡ **Literal but unnatural TT:**
"Ben kırığım." ❌
- ➡ **Norm-following TT:**
"Beş kuruşum yok." ✔ (culturally equivalent expression)
- **Example 2 — Formality Shift**
- **ST:**
"Could you possibly send me the document?"
- ➡ **Acceptable TT (formal Turkish norm):**
"Belgeyi iletmeniz mümkün müdür?"
- ➡ **Adequate/literal TT:**
"Bana belgeyi göndermeniz mümkün olur mu?"
- Both correct → different norms.

NORMS

- **Initial norms**
  - Adequacy
  - Acceptability
- **Preliminary norms**
  - Translation policy
  - Translation directness
- **Operational norms**
  - Matricial norms
  - Textual-linguistic norms

Final Takeaway

Norms shape **every translation decision**, from choosing the book to how each sentence is written. Understanding norms helps future translators:

- justify choices
- recognize patterns
- produce culturally appropriate and professionally valued translations

This one-page guide gives the foundation needed for deeper DTS analysis.