The adaptation of legal Culture-Specific References in cross-cultural rewriting: the case of legal drama

Legal drama is the media fiction genre dealing with the professions of lawyers, judges and police and with law enforcement, including solving mysterious crimes or civil litigations. As such, it is a form of FASP (Fiction à Substrat Professionnel, ‘Fiction with Professional Background’, Petit 1999) and plays an outstanding role in language learning (Isani 2006a, 2006b; Villez 2005) and in the popularization of legal-specific contents and terminology for the non-expert audience (Laudisio 2016).

Against this background, this study sets out to analyse samples from two corpora, made up of the original scripts in English and the Italian fan-made translations of three legal dramas. Drawing on Venuti’s (1995) distinction between ‘foreignizing’ and ‘domesticating’ approaches and some classifications of the translation strategies in audiovisual products (Pedersen 2007; Ranzato 2013), the focus is placed on the translation of Culture-Specific References (CSR) connected to the US legal system and their translation into Italian.

The results show a tendency to substitute CSRs with references drawn from the Target Culture (TC), which sometimes disregard the lack of equivalence between the source text, in favour of a domesticated and ‘ready-made’ translation of legal terminology. These results open the way to further reflections on the reasons behind the translators’ choices, among which the intention to neutralize the knowledge and cultural gap for a non-expert, non-American audience.