Translating Culture Specific References on Television

Offering an in-depth analysis of the translation of *Culture Specific References* in three interesting and original television series, Ranzato’s work uncovers key trends in Italian dubbing and contributes to documenting the evolution of this fascinating AVT modality. She provides an impressive amount of examples, beautifully argued and presented, in a monograph which will engage AVT researchers and translation scholars alike.

—Rocío Baños Piñero, Centre for Translation Studies, University College London, UK

*Translating Culture Specific References on Television* provides a model for investigating the problems posed by culture specific references in translation, drawing on case studies that explore the translational norms of contemporary Italian dubbing practices. This monograph makes a distinctive contribution to the study of audiovisual translation and culture specific references in its focus on dubbing, as opposed to subtitling, and on contemporary television series rather than cinema. Irene Ranzato’s research involves detailed analysis of three TV series dubbed into Italian, drawing on a corpus of 95 hours that includes nearly 3,000 CSR translations. Ranzato proposes a new taxonomy of strategies for the translation of CSRs and explores the sociocultural, pragmatic and ideological implications of audiovisual translation for the small screen.

Irene Ranzato is a researcher in English language and translation at Sapienza University of Rome, Italy. She holds a PhD in Translation Studies from Imperial College London, UK.
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11 **Translating Culture Specific References on Television**  
    The Case of Dubbing  
    Irene Ranzato
Translating Culture Specific References on Television
The Case of Dubbing

Irene Ranzato
# Contents

*List of Figures and Tables* vii  
*Abbreviations* ix  
*Acknowledgements* xi  
*Preface by Jorge Díaz Cintas* xiii  

1 Introduction 1  
2 Theoretical Framework 12  
3 Censorship and the Film Industry: A Historical Overview of Dubbing in Italy 28  
4 Culture Specific References 53  
5 “The Lesser-Known I Don’t Have a Dream Speech”: Cultural Humour in *Friends* 104  
6 “Follow the Yellow Brick Road”: Cultural Time and Place in *Life on Mars* 150  
7 Coffee Bars in Slumber Rooms: Culture Specific Death in *Six Feet Under* 187  
8 Conclusions 221  

*Appendix: Sample Pages From the Corpus* 231  
*Name Index* 237  
*General Index* 243
Figures and Tables

Figures
5.1 Distribution of CSRs in the analysed seasons of *Friends* 118
5.2 Translation strategies in *Friends* 119
5.3 Translation strategies in *Friends* Season 1 120
5.4 Translation strategies in *Friends* Season 2 120
5.5 Translation strategies in *Friends* Season 3 121
5.6 Translation strategies in *Friends* Season 5 121
5.7 Translation strategies in *Friends* Season 8 122
5.8 Translation strategies in *Friends* Season 10 122
6.1 Distribution of CSRs in the two seasons of *Life on Mars* 154
6.2 Translation strategies used in *Life on Mars* 172
6.3 Translation strategies used in *Life on Mars* Season 1 182
6.4 Translation strategies used in *Life on Mars* Season 2 183
7.1 Distribution of CSRs in the analysed seasons of *Six Feet Under* 190
7.2 Translation strategies used in *Six Feet Under* 191
7.3 Translation strategies used in *Six Feet Under* Season 1 192
7.4 Translation strategies used in *Six Feet Under* Season 3 193
8.1 Distribution per category through the three series 222
8.2 Translation strategies: comparative overview of the three series 225

Tables
4.1 Classification of CSRs 64
5.1 *Friends’s* viewers 106
5.2 ‘Respectful’ vs. ‘manipulative’ strategies 141
5.3 Types of references in *Friends* 143
6.1 Types of references in *Life on Mars* 155
6.2 Deleted excerpts in *Life on Mars* Season 1 166
6.3 Deleted excerpts in *Life on Mars* Season 2 166
7.1 *Six Feet Under’s* viewership 189
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AVT</td>
<td>audiovisual translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>culture specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>culture specific reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>source audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>source culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL</td>
<td>source language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>source text</td>
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<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>target audience</td>
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<td>TL</td>
<td>target language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TT</td>
<td>target text</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The acknowledgements page is always a great opportunity: remembering those who helped and especially those who did not help shape the course of one’s research is tempting. However, not wishing to write a book within the book, which would necessarily take me back to my first endeavours, when encouraged by my mother’s passions, I translated the first chapters of Alcott’s *Little Women* from Italian into English (sic), I will content myself with thanking those who helped me specifically to write this volume.

I would like to thank Professor Jorge Díaz Cintas for being at the right place (and the right place is always London) at the right time and for crucially broadening my horizons, both intellectually and professionally. More to the point, this book is the result of extended discussions, advice, encouragement, and clarifications that Jorge copiously bestowed on me. I thank him especially for helping me define the concepts of asynchronous references, for showing me the infinite benefits of a method and, last but not least, for conceiving this book’s preface on the Nile, something very few scholars can boast of, I think.

My deepest thanks to Professor Frederic Chaume for his charming, unassuming way of being a scholar of the highest level and for his precious advice. He knows how to show you the other side of the coin, lighting up some unexpected corners. This book, in this form, I owe to him, too.

I would like to thank my mentor and friend (more friend than mentor), Professor Donatella Montini, for helping me steer the wheel decidedly in the right direction, for her invaluable support in these extraordinary but difficult years, and for being a great scholar and a great human being.

My thanks to Professor Maria Pavesi for her advice and support. Her work on film dialogue has always been an inspiration, thus her appreciation is invaluable.

Thank you to Rocío Baños Piñero, a great expert on dubbing translation, for her intelligent insights and for her generosity.

I dedicate this book to the artist Bruno Lisi, by whose side it was written.
Preface

A lot has been written about audiovisual translation in recent years, propelling the field from the peripheral margins to centre stage in translation studies and gaining it the accolade of being the fastest-growing strand in our academic discipline. This well-deserved visibility has been mainly due to the proliferation and distribution of audiovisual materials in our society, the burgeoning of dedicated events and conferences, the publication of numerous articles and special volumes, as well as the development of undergraduate and postgraduate modules. Audiovisual translation has finally and decisively come of age in academia.

Encompassing a vast array of professional practices, such as dubbing, subtitling, voice-over, narration, subtitling for the deaf and the hard of hearing, and audio description for the blind and the visually impaired amongst others, audiovisual translation has been around for nearly as long as cinema itself. Of these, dubbing and subtitling are credited to have been the first to make appearances in the industry following the invention of the talkies in the late 1920s. And yet, despite this long tradition, research into dubbing has been modest to say the least. Even now that the output of articles and books is most healthy, interest in dubbing remains stubbornly low, particularly when compared with its sibling subtitling, which has known an unprecedented and exponential growth in the last couple of decades, or with the newer accessibility modes, which have also blossomed in scholarly exchanges.

This exciting volume has the potential of reversing this trend by raising the visibility of dubbing and promoting its study from a variegated perspective. Focussing on the world’s perhaps most popular and watched genre, TV series, this monograph constitutes one of the first sustained, rigorous treatments of the dubbing of culture specific references; a subject that has widely been recognised by scholars as being one of the most problematic in translation studies, not only in the case of dubbing but also in other areas such as literary and drama translation. The analysis is conducted on a corpus of popular television fiction shows—Friends, Life on Mars and Six Feet Under—which is not only sufficiently large to draw meaningful
conclusions but also diverse in terms of genre, content, language usage and expected target audiences.

In addition to providing a much-needed model for the investigation of the challenges encountered by translators when dealing with the translation of culture specific references, the book also offers, and successfully exploits, a most fruitful taxonomy of translational strategies that proves instrumental in teasing out some of the recurrent tendencies prevalent in contemporary dubbing practices.

Far from being restricted to micro-level textual analysis, it broadens its research scope by exploring the sociocultural, pragmatic, technical and ideological implications that typify the professional practice of dubbing for the small screen. Of special interest is the emphasis placed on the creative synergies established between the translators and the dubbing adaptors or dialogue writers. In an academic landscape in which descriptive studies have exerted such a strong grip on research conducted in translation studies, and especially on audiovisual translation, one of the most refreshing upsides of this book is the author’s willingness to embark not only on a quantitative analysis of the data but also on a qualitative excursus to try and understand the translators’ behaviour, given the cultural environment in which they operate, as well as the reasons behind the final choices heard on screen.

Written in an accessible and engaging prose, Translating Culture Specific References on Television: The Case of Dubbing does not only present the readers with a solid and systematic analysis into this vibrant professional and academic field, but it also offers invaluable guidance for those interested in further research. An informative and stimulating read for students, academics and professionals alike, whether they are already involved or simply keen to enter the dubbing world, this book promises to trigger a renewed interest in dubbing and contribute to its firm consolidation as a worthy academic endeavour. It’s a must-have in any personal, departmental or company bookshelf.

Jorge Díaz Cintas
London, April 2015
7 Coffee Bars in Slumber Rooms
Culture Specific Death in
Six Feet Under

INTRODUCTION: SIX FEET UNDER

From June 2001 to August 2005, the American channel HBO broadcast the five seasons of Six Feet Under, a drama series created by Alan Ball, at the time an already-established cinema scriptwriter. The series, which tackles morally compelling themes and is strongly tinged with black humour, has been unanimously considered one of the best TV shows of all time as well as having one of the best final episodes of all time (Bettridge 2009; Cericola 2005; Poniewozik 2007; Wilson 2009). The media impact created by Six Feet Under was outstanding. It was the first drama series commissioned by HBO after The Sopranos (David Chase 1999–2007), and like its predecessor, it broke new ground in the field of television series. It is—and it was conceived as being—auteur television. Its bonds with the sociocultural context of the period in which it was produced should not be overlooked:

Six Feet Under, premiering only months before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, chimed in with an elegiac cultural zeitgeist obsessed with mortality. Arguably, American culture has long been obsessed with death—with guns, violence, and killing. But September 11 ushered in a period of national introspection, a questioning of the fragility of our lives and how well we live them [. . .]. No television series better captured this cultural mournfulness than Six Feet Under—the finality of death and what it means for the living. (Akass and McCabe 2005: 75)

Death is in fact the main theme of the series which centres on the life of a family of undertakers, the Fishers, and on the complex relationships between Ruth, the mother, who in the first episode becomes the widow of Nathaniel senior, and her three children: David, Nate and Claire.

Although killed in an accident in the pilot episode, Nathaniel senior is an important character, making what could be defined as Shakespearian appearances to his children after his death in several episodes in the course of the whole series. His widow, Ruth, is a tormented but affectionate mother; she has grown up to repress her emotions, which sometimes surge
out of control in unexpected outbursts. She struggles hard to understand herself, her feelings, her sexuality, and her own relationship with the rest of the family.

The three Fisher children, in spite of being multifaceted, complex characters, each offer their creator the perfect means to delve into contemporary, sensitive social and personal issues. Nate (Nathaniel Junior), the eldest son, has the vocation of a free spirit and struggles hard with his commitment issues, both in his love relationships and in his job at the funeral home, a paternal legacy he has tried in vain to run away from. David is a tormented homosexual who stubbornly soldiers on in a family business he does not particularly like. One of the main themes of the series is how he learns to come out into the open and live his sentimental life with freedom and contentment. Claire, the youngest and only daughter, is an intelligent, aggressive and vulnerable girl who tries to come to terms with her variation of the heavy family burden through sentimental and sexual relationships, experiments with drugs and artistic explorations.

Many other characters join the Fishers along the way. Among these, the most important are Federico and Brenda, who are present in most of the episodes. Federico is a Latin American employee (and later partner) of the Fisher company. A skillful makeup artist with a real passion for his job of making corpses presentable for funeral viewings, Federico is a family man with traditional values. At the same time, his intelligence and sensitivity help him overcome his hesitations and prejudices and open up to the wayward lives of the Fishers. Federico offers an insight into the specificities of a culture within a culture, that of the Latino communities in the United States.

Brenda, Nate’s girlfriend and later wife, is the character in Six Feet Under who is probably most responsible for the sophisticated register of some of its dialogue: in perennial conflict with her own dysfunctional family, Brenda has inherited an intellectual, sarcastic, detached outlook on life and relationships from her parents (a couple of somewhat irritating psychoanalysts), which is in sharp contrast with her boyfriend’s more uncomplicated approach.

The sum of these contrasting personalities living unusual but profoundly realistic lives adds up to a show which is at the same time funny, deep, intelligent, moving and painfully true.

HBO broadcast Six Feet Under in its much-vaunted 9 p.m. time slot. It averaged a very good viewership, although numbers decreased steadily after the second season in spite of constantly good reviews. Table 7.1 below shows the figures per year in millions of viewers, although single episodes often reached much higher rates, such as the series finale which peaked at 3.9 million, eclipsing the network’s previous best, which was the fourth season debut of Six Feet Under in June 2004 (Carter 2002, 2004; Fitzgerald 2003; Pasha 2005; “‘Six Feet Under’ Finale Draws Viewers” 2005).

In Italy, the national private channel Italia 1 broadcast the first three seasons, after 11 pm, from 2004 to 2008. After a long break of three years, the satellite pay TV channel Cult repeated the first seasons and
broadcast the two last, as yet unaired, seasons in 2008. *Six Feet Under* did well for its time slot at the beginning on Italia 1, with 1,274,000 viewers watching the first episode of the first season and 848,000 the second (“Ascolti: Bonolis il più visto in prima serata” 2004). Audience numbers, however, rapidly decreased, and in 2008, the number of people watching *Six Feet Under* on the 21st of November was only 458,000 (www.telesimo.it/news/2008/ascolti-17-23-novembre-2008.html).

Luca Intoppa and Antonella Damigelli were the authors of the Italian dialogues, the latter for Season 3, and Fabrizio Temperini was the dubbing director.

Despite the recent repeats on television and a fair amount of publicity, the series has never become mainstream, and it is unknown to a large portion of the Italian general public. It is, in fact, a cult show, like the name of the pay TV channel which broadcast it.

Seasons 1 and 3 of the five seasons have been analysed, which makes a total of 26 episodes, each of them of 60 minutes (approximately 1,560 minutes of programme). Given the nature of the problems the Fishers have to cope with and the corpses that they have to sew up and make up on a daily basis to make them presentable at open-casket funeral viewings, I considered this programme a potentially problematic one in terms of translation, not least because of the sexual and gender-related issues which had never before been tackled in this upfront way in any Italian fiction programme, original or translated.

In other words, this show was chosen as a part of the corpus because ideological issues might be expected to come up, issues which would shape the analysis of the data in partly different ways in comparison to the other two cases. In particular, the strong emphasis put on death and the openly gay themes the series deals with have been preliminarily considered sensitive points to be investigated carefully.

### ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

In the following sections, the translation strategies used in the Italian dubbed adaptation are discussed on the basis of the taxonomy of strategies discussed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Viewers in millions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>between 7 and 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in Chapter 4, which become more qualitatively meaningful if studied in relation to the classification of the categories of CSRs also discussed in the same chapter. Further reflections on the nature of the references follow, which include one of the main points of interest in this series, namely the handling of the cultural elements whose transfer into Italian were most at risk: death and death-related subjects.

**Culture Specific References in the Original Version**

*Six Feet Under* includes a total number of 688 CSRs, 322 of which were found in the first season and 366 in the third season. The graphic in Figure 7.1 shows the respective percentages.

Unlike the former case studies, the number of occurrences in the later season is higher (53 percent) than in the first (47 percent), exceeding it by 6 percent. However, there is a diegetic reason for this increase: Nate’s first wife, Lisa, is reported missing at one point in Season 3, and while Nate, the rest of the family and the police are looking for her, many place names

![Figure 7.1 Distribution of CSRs in the analysed seasons of Six Feet Under](image)
(cities, towns, roads, etc.) are mentioned in their search for her possible whereabouts.

Regardless of the distribution in the two seasons, the data that can be evinced from the number of CSRs is that the density in their occurrence (44 percent) is slightly lower than in *Life on Mars* (45 percent) and much lower than in *Friends* (58.5 percent): that would indicate that this show relied less on CSRs for the creation of its dialogue than the other two shows, especially *Friends*.

**Translation Strategies**

The following is an analysis of the strategies used by Italian adapters to translate the CSRs contained in *Six Feet Under*. The graph in Figure 7.2 shows an overall breakdown of the 709 instances of translation strategies which have been implemented in the Italian version in relation to CSRs in Series 1 and 3.

The graph confirms the preponderance of the strategies of loan, elimination and official translation, as in the previous case studies. On the other
hand, it is also evident that the strategy of official translation has been implemented frequently by the adapters of this series, exceeding by one point the percentage of elimination. The rest of the strategies follow more or less the usual trend, but it should be noted that substitution offers the lowest rate of all three series as it has been chosen in only 3 percent of cases (compared to the 8 and 4 percent, respectively, of Friends and Life on Mars). A first assessment could be that the more creative strategies, including substitution, which require a search for imaginative solutions, have been neglected in favour of easier solutions such as loan, elimination and official translation.

In the case of Six Feet Under, however, it is also useful to take a look at the graphs in Figures 7.3 and 7.4 relative to the two seasons which have been analysed as they show a major discrepancy: in the third season, loan doubles its incidence in comparison to the first season, at the expense of most of the other strategies, notably elimination, explicitation and, to a lesser degree, official translation and generalisation. The reason for this difference may be very simple. As already mentioned, in the third season there are several occasions in which characters include SC references in their lines,
in the form of place names, mostly North American areas and towns, more than large cities. When Lisa, Nate’s wife, is reported missing, her family joins the police in trying to find her, studying maps and asking questions which include place names. These names, as we observed in Chapter 4, are customarily transferred as loans unless an official translation exists, which is usually the case for bigger cities and countries.

In the following subsections, the most relevant instances for each category will be analysed. The emphasis, even more than with the other series, is on elimination, which proves also in this case to be the most interesting strategy in that it is the one which best allows the creation of hypotheses and offers insights into the trends and possible motivations of the adapters.

**Loan**

As it has been already mentioned, this strategy accounts for almost half of the occurrences (47 percent) and has been used by the adapters, in the vast majority of cases, to transfer place names, following a well-established
policy and tradition in Italian translation. In a limited number of instances loan was used for popular proper names, film and song titles, and for brand names of products which are not distributed in Italy (such as medications). The following Example 7.1 is worth commenting on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXAMPLE 7.1: SEASON 1 EPISODE 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONTEXT: David, a practising Episcopalian, is talking to a friendly priest outside the church where he once used to go with his mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FATHER JACK: David, so glad to see you here. It’s always nice when someone comes back to the fold.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID: Oh, I’ve been going to church. I’ve just been going to a different church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FATHER JACK: Really? Which one?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID: St. Stephen’s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FATHER JACK: In the Palisades?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID: No, St. Stephen’s in West Hollywood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITALIAN ADAPTATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PADRE JACK: David, mi fa piacere rivederti. E’ bello quando una pecora torna all’ovile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID: Grazie, ma non è che ho smesso di praticare. Andavo solo in un’altra chiesa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PADRE JACK: Ah be’, in quale?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID: A Santo Stefano.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PADRE JACK: Quella sulla scogliera?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID: No, Santo Stefano a West Hollywood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACK-TRANSLATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FATHER JACK: David, I’m pleased to see you again. It’s nice when a sheep comes back to the fold.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID: Thanks, but it’s not that I stopped practising. I just went to another church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FATHER JACK: Oh well, which one?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID: St. Stephen’s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FATHER JACK: The one on the cliff?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID: No, St. Stephen’s in West Hollywood.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is an example of an adaptation which fails to have the same impact on the TA as it has on the SA. West Hollywood is a town near Los Angeles which is well-known, in the USA, for its social justice legislation. It was, among other records, the first city to create same-sex domestic partnership registration and various related benefits for its residents. As a result, according to a 2002 demographic analysis (http://www.weho.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=623), 41 percent of the city’s population is made up of gay or bisexual men. Father Jack’s facial reaction to David’s words in the scene reveals that he is well aware of the implied meaning of his change of church—a meaning that would not have been perceived by the vast majority of Italians for whom the name of West Hollywood, transferred with a loan, would only evoke cinema-related images. This same CSR appears in
one other instance which will be analysed in Example 7.6. In this, as in the following instance, one could argue that the adaptation reveals a lack of awareness of gay-related themes. More broadly speaking, it reveals an ignorance of some aspects of the SC which have not been widely exported.

**Official Translation**

Official translation has been used in this series slightly more often than in the case studies formerly analysed, exceeding elimination by one point with an occurrence of 19 percent. Although this strategy frequently involves an effort of research by the adapters, in the case of *Six Feet Under* this procedure was implemented, in the vast majority of cases, to translate place names and nationalities (34 percent) and currency, mainly ‘dollars’ (27 percent). As already stressed, place names and currency terms are customarily and traditionally transferred by either a loan or an official translation, so their incidence does not shed any particular new light on adapters’ behaviour. Allusions to works of fiction are the only other relevant category translated by using this strategy (15 percent).

**Calque**

Calque in *Six Feet Under* has been seldom implemented (2 percent of occurrences, 17 times) and has been used mostly to give unofficial, literal translations of titles and quotations from books, films or songs, such as, for instance, the Italian literal translation of a song by Madonna; the literal translation of a quote from a speech by George Bush; the name of a church (as in Example 7.1); and a quote from a book by Carlos Castaneda.

**Hypernym**

Generalisation by hypernym has been chosen in 8 percent of cases. Whether to avoid mentioning brand names (e.g., Egg McMuffin translated with *panino* [sandwich]) or using names of famous people or characters (e.g., Umpa Lumpas, from the 1971 film by Mel Stuart, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, translated with *ometti* [little men]), generalisation tends to result in a sort of impoverishment, as the next example more clearly demonstrates:

**EXAMPLE 7.2: SEASON 1 EPISODE 1**

**CONTEXT:** Claire has asked her brother David if she really has to be present at the family Christmas dinner as she would really like to be somewhere else.

**ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE**

CLAIRE: There are some really excellent parties I could be going to.
DAVID: Claire, this is one of the few times a year we’re all together.
CLAIRE: Alright, alright. Don’t get all Pat Robertson on me. I’ll be there. I just . . . I have to drop some stuff off at a friend’s house before I head over. Okay? Bye. *(Hangs up.)* Fuckin’ Boy Scout.
### Explicitation

With 3 percent of the total, the strategy of explicitation proves to be more frequently used in *Six Feet Under* than in any of the former case studies. However, the analysis shows that all of the occurrences are relative to the disambiguation of place names, that is, ‘Los Angeles’ for ‘LA’ or ‘Las Vegas’ for ‘Vegas’, thus the use of this strategy is not creative but conservative in the sense that it replicates a well-trodden formula customarily implemented by audiovisual translators.

### Substitution

Chosen only in 3 percent of cases, this represents the lowest percentage for the strategy of substitution in the whole corpus (8 and 4 percent of cases in *Friends* and *Life on Mars*, respectively). In addition, the substitutions found in *Six Feet Under* are not particularly creative, as in all 20 cases they are used to replace SC references or intercultural references with better-known but not particularly inventive elements: blues composer WC is substituted with classical composer Debussy; *The Munsters* TV series (A. Burns and C. Hayward, 1964–1966) becomes *The Addams Family* series (C. Addams,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITALIAN ADAPTATION</th>
<th>BACK-TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CLAIRE: Mi hanno invitato a un casino di feste da sballo.</td>
<td>CLAIRE: I’ve been invited to a hell of a lot of stone crazy parties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID: Claire aspetta, la famiglia ormai si riunisce solo a Natale.</td>
<td>DAVID: Claire, wait, the family now gets together only at Christmas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLAIRE: Va bene, va bene, non farmi la predica anche tu, ci vengo. Solo, dammi una mezz’ora, devo passare da un amico a prendere un po’ di cose. Ciao. Ma quant’è patetico.</td>
<td>CLAIRE: Alright, alright, <em>don’t you preach to me</em> too, I’ll come. Only give me half an hour, I have to pass by a friend’s to get some things. Bye. <em>How pathetic he is.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The specific reference to a preacher, Pat Robertson, who undoubtedly conjures up a web of associations among the SA—both political and religious, as he is a media mogul known for his right-wing connections—is impoverished in the Italian version by the generic reference to preaching. A vivid original reference accompanied by an emphatic swear word (‘fuckin’ Boy Scout’), which closes Claire’s last line, has also been diluted into a generic line of sarcastic depreciation: *ma quant’è patetico* [how pathetic he is].
1964–1966); and actress Salma Hayek is substituted with singer Britney Spears. Two cases are worth commenting on and are both contained in the following example:

**EXAMPLE 7.3: SEASON 1 EPISODE 5**

**CONTEXT:** In this funny episode, Claire decided to steal a foot off one of the bodies his brothers were working on for perfectly logical reasons that she explains here to her mother.

**ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE**

CLAIRE: I don’t need help! Why is everyone acting like I’m in the *Trenchcoat Mafia*?
RUTH: You stole a foot! A human foot!
CLAIRE: Okay, you wanna know why? Because some guy who totally scamme me into having sex with him because I thought he actually cared about me—he told the entire school that I sucked his toes, and then when I confronted him about it, he showed entirely no remorse, so when I saw Nate drop the foot on the floor, I just grabbed it, just to get back at that asshole, okay? It wasn’t premeditated. I’m not Jeffrey Dahmer. I don’t get off on hacked-up body parts.

**ITALIAN ADAPTATION**

CLAIRE: Ma non mi serve il tuo aiuto! Vi comportate come se fossi nel mirino della mafia!
RUTH: Hai rubato un piede! Il piede di un cadavere!
CLAIRE: D’accordo, vuoi sapere perché? Perché ho conosciuto un ragazzo, mi ha quasi convinta a fare sesso con lui, sembrava che gli interessasse qualcosa di me, poi ha raccontato a tutta la scuola che gli ho succhiato l’alluce e quando gliel’ho rinfacciato non gli è fregato niente. Poi Nate ha fatto cadere i pezzi di quell’uomo e io ho preso il piede per fargliela pagare a quello stronzo. Non è stato premeditato. Non sono mica Frankenstein. Non vado a rubare i pezzi dei cadaveri.

**BACK-TRANSLATION**

CLAIRE: But I don’t need your help! You’re acting as if I was the mafia’s target!
RUTH: You stole a foot! The foot of a corpse!
CLAIRE: Alright, do you want to know why? Because I met a boy. He almost convinced me to have sex with him. It seemed like he cared for me, then he told the whole school that I sucked his big toe, and when I held it against him, he couldn’t care less. Then Nate dropped that man’s pieces on the floor, and I took the foot to make that asshole pay for it. It wasn’t premeditated. I’m not Frankenstein. I don’t go around stealing corpses’ pieces.

This excerpt is interesting for various reasons. First of all, it contains two CSRs which in the original are both linked to topical subjects of American criminality. The first one refers to the 1999 Columbine High
School massacre. The two young killers who perpetrated the massacre of 13 school students belonged to a group which called themselves ‘the Trenchcoat Mafia’, but the name has no connection to the actual mafia. The name of this gang is now associated with acts of violence perpetrated by high school kids. Jeffrey Dahmer, better known in Italy as the ‘Milwaukee monster’ (il mostro di Milwaukee), was a serial killer who committed gruesome murders involving rapes, dismemberments, necrophilia and cannibalism. If the first element—which we can define an SC reference—was replaced in Italian by a direct and obvious reference to the real mafia, the second substitution is more interesting. The name of an infamous and only too real criminal (internationally known, but whose name is probably not immediately recognisable for most members of the TA) has been replaced by a literary reference to Frankenstein which dilutes the more gruesome (and sexual) impact of the original dialogue but is not out of place. It is also worth noting in this example a censoring, sanitising approach that is quite common in the first episodes of Six Feet Under: in the original text Claire was ‘scammed’ into having sex with the boy, thus they did have sex, while in Italian she was ‘almost’ convinced, and hence did not have sex.

**Compensation**

Although the compensation strategy has been used only once in this series, the dialogue excerpt which contains it is interesting because it involves not only linguistic but also non-verbal features:

**EXAMPLE 7.4: SEASON 1 EPISODE 2**

**CONTEXT:** Nate is mocking his brother David, whom he suspects of having had sex the night before.

**ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE**

NATE: *(speaking in a robot voice, similar to HAL in 2001: A Space Odyssey)* Morning, Dave. Aren’t those the same clothes you had on yesterday?

DAVID: Everything I own looks alike.

NATE: I sense you’re not being completely honest with me, Dave.

DAVID: Have you changed any since you were 14?

NATE: *(laughs)* Hey. I’m all for you getting laid, believe me. *(. . .)*

NATE *(always keeping the HAL voice)*: We are looking quite spiffy in that suit, Dave.

DAVID: That’s so clever. *You’re talking like the computer in the movie.* Wow, you’re funny.
The dialogue exchange between Nate and David revolves around Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). The allusion to Kubrick’s classic is quite subtle as in the original dialogue the film is only evoked by Nate’s voice and by the vague words spoken by David (“you’re talking like the computer in the movie”), who incidentally, shares the same name with the main character in Kubrick’s film. Although the adapters’ choice to eliminate Nate’s imitation of Hal’s voice seems to be quite arbitrary—it is an unmistakable way of speaking which would have been recognised at least by part of the TA—the connotative loss is balanced by an effective compensation: by manipulating the film title in David’s last line—*Grazie mille Mr 2001 Odissea nello strazio* [Thank you very much, Mr 2001 A Pain Odyssey]—the dialogue manages to achieve its goal of conferring sarcastic humour. The strategy that has been adopted is that of compensating the erasure of a paralinguistic feature (the tone of voice) by introducing a verbal play on a CSR. As a result, the nature of the joke changes completely from a joke containing a paralinguistic element to one based on word play with an allusion.6

However, the dialogue in this example is also notable for Nate’s reaction when he thinks that David is hiding a sexual encounter. His crude, amused remark, ‘I’m all for you getting laid’, in which no gender is indicated, is adapted into the paternalistic *Se c’è una donna faccio il tifo per te* [If there’s a woman, I’m all for you]. Although in this second episode Nate does not yet

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<tr>
<th>ITALIAN ADAPTATION</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NATE</strong> <em>(parla con voce normale):</em> Buon giorno, David. Che è successo, hai messo gli stessi vestiti di ieri?</td>
<td><strong>NATE</strong> <em>(speaks with a normal voice):</em> Good morning, David. What happened, are you wearing the same clothes as yesterday?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DAVID:</strong> Sono quelli del lavoro, tutti uguali.</td>
<td><strong>DAVID:</strong> They are work clothes; they’re all the same.</td>
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<td><strong>NATE:</strong> Strano ma sento che mi stai nascondendo qualcosa, David.</td>
<td><strong>NATE:</strong> Funny, but I feel you’re hiding something from me, David.</td>
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<td><strong>DAVID:</strong> Hai smesso di crescere quando avevi quattordici anni, vero?</td>
<td><strong>DAVID:</strong> You stopped growing up when you were 14, right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NATE:</strong> Se c’è una donna faccio il tifo per te. (. . .)</td>
<td><strong>NATE:</strong> If there’s a woman, I’m all for you. (. . .)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NATE</strong> <em>(parla normalmente):</em> Con quel completino sei un vero schiavino, David.</td>
<td><strong>NATE</strong> <em>(speaks normally):</em> With that little suit you’re a real knockout, David.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DAVID:</strong> Grazie mille Mr 2001 Odissea nello strazio. Non sei divertente.</td>
<td><strong>DAVID:</strong> Thank you very much, Mr 2001 A Pain Odyssey. You’re not funny.</td>
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</table>
know that his brother is homosexual, and thus he is probably thinking of a woman, the evident purpose of the adaptation is that of toning down the cruder sexual contents and, when it is the case, sanitising potentially sensitive themes by translating openly homosexual or ambiguous subjects and lexicon into the more accepted language of conventional heterosexuality. One of the means to achieve this end, as some of the following examples will show, is the elimination of CSRs.

**Elimination**

Elimination accounts for 18 percent of occurrences unevenly distributed between the two seasons: the 26 percent in the first season totals more than double the eliminations contained in the third (11 percent). If the increase of loans in the third season, analysed earlier, partly explains these divergent figures, another explanation may also be attempted: elimination can be an extremely manipulative strategy, and a decreasing number of occurrences in the later season might signify that the adapters found more reasons to introduce greater departures from the original in the first episodes, when a series normally endeavours to find its ideal target audience. By manipulating the text in this way, the adapters try to achieve a more general consensus that may entice a larger audience. The following analysis of some of the cases of elimination of CSRs may support this view.

In the next excerpt, the original dialogue exploits the Hollywood imagery and other visual motifs:

**EXAMPLE 7.5: SEASON 1 EPISODE 3**

**CONTEXT:** David and his boyfriend, Keith, are in a shop, choosing a ceiling fan.

**ORIGINA LM DIALOGUE**

DAVID: *(pointing to a ceiling fan)* What about that one?
KEITH: That’s a little too *Mayberry* for me. Something simple and clean, like the ones that hang in the deserted truck stop . . . and that handsome drifter blows into town.
DAVID: Of course. What about that one?
KEITH: Uh . . . Not bad. *I could see Ava Gardner* lying beneath it, plotting to *steal Clark Gable* away from Grace Kelly.

**ITALIAN ADAPTATION**

DAVID: *Quello lassù ti piace?*
KEITH: *Un po’ troppo country* per me. Voglio qualcosa di semplice, di lineare, come quelli dei bar che si vedono nei film, quando *il protagonista* fa il suo ingresso in città.

**BACK-TRANSLATION**

DAVID: *Do you like the one up there?*
KEITH: *A bit too country* for me. I want something simple and clean, like those in the bars you see in films, when *the protagonist* makes his entrance in town.
This example shows how the Italian translation neglects some of the typical (or stereotypical) features of gayspeak for what seems to be an inappropriate analysis of this particular idiolect. A whole gay imaginary is lost in translation. Not only are all the famous Hollywood names, and John Ford’s film *Mogambo* (1953), which is not quoted but evoked, eliminated from the Italian version, but the gay fantasy of the ‘handsome drifter’ becomes the neutral image of *il protagonista* [the protagonist]. Incidentally, the stylistic mention, in the original text, of ‘Mayberry’, from the title of an American TV series (*Mayberry R.F.D.*, B. Ross, 1968–1971) set in an idyllic country town, is translated into the less colourful ‘country’. The use of ‘country’ as an adjective, which is of common usage in Italian as a loan word, conveys the sense of ‘rustic’, which is implied in Mayberry, but not the atmosphere of a bucolic, small town, which is also part of the original sense.

Gayspeak features are also ignored in the translation of the next excerpt:

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**EXAMPLE 7.6: SEASON 1 EPISODE 8**

**CONTEXT:** David is furious because Federico did a job for another company, although he is a Fishers’ employee. Nate is trying to find reasons to excuse him.

**ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE**

NATE: Stop being such a **drama queen**.
DAVID: Stop acting like you’re honorary **mayor of West Hollywood** all of a sudden. He lied to our faces.

**ITALIAN ADAPTATION**

NATE: Non fare il **melodrammatico**.
DAVID: E tu non fare l’avvocato delle cause perse per difendere la carogna.

**BACK-TRANSLATION**

NATE: Don’t be so **melodramatic**.
DAVID: And you, don’t act like the **lawyer of lost causes** to defend the rascal.

---

According to Hayes (1976/2006: 71), the richest features of social gayspeak are found in the lexicon, particularly in compound constructions. In this sense, the lexical item ‘queen’ is possibly the most widely employed stem word for building compounds used for a limitless series of images.
to describe sexual preferences (i.e., ‘size queen’), subculture types (‘queen of tarts’, a pimp for hustlers), to make fun of a man’s hobbies or interests (‘poker queen’ for someone who likes playing cards) or as an all-purpose term of derogation (‘Queen Mary’ for someone fat). Arguably, the elimination of the ‘queen’ compound in this dialogue reveals, even more than the conscious will to replace a gay connotation, the lack of an appropriate term in the TL. The relative poverty of the Italian gay lexicon as compared to the richness of the corresponding English terminology is a fact. The Italian culture has opened up to homosexual themes much more slowly than the Anglo-Saxon world. One of the first consequences of this state of affairs is that the language of homosexuals has long remained in Italy the language of a ghetto, and still today the relatively poor lexicon available is an objective obstacle even for the most unprejudiced translator. Sometimes, a poor translation might not be due necessarily to a tendency to conscious manipulation but simply to the lack of a lexical counterpart.

David’s original repartee in the above dialogue mentions the same town of West Hollywood (practically an area of Los Angeles) which appeared in an earlier example. On this occasion, the reference has been eliminated. By mentioning the ‘mayor of West Hollywood’, an area with a very large gay population, as noted earlier, David is reacting to a series of gay-friendly comments that Nate has been making for the whole episode, undoubtedly to show his brother, whom he has just discovered to be homosexual, his open-mindedness about the subject. Earlier on, Nate had in fact made this comment to David:

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<th>EXAMPLE 7.7: SEASON 1 EPISODE 8</th>
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<tr>
<td>CONTEXT: Nate is encouraging David as he realised there’s someone who clearly fancies him.</td>
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<tr>
<th>ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE</th>
<th>BACK-TRANSLATION</th>
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Although the content of the line does not change in its substance, the elimination of the CSR sensibly alters the effective lightness of tone. It is ironic that the sitcom Will & Grace (David Kohan, Max Mutchnick 1998–2006,
Coffee Bars in Slumber Rooms

USA)—a successful, 10-year-long series whose male main character is gay—was in fact never heavily manipulated nor censored in Italy.

Another feature that characterises Six Feet Under is its portrayal of intelligent, complex, multifaceted women. If Ruth (the mother) struggles hard, in the course of the five seasons, to come to terms with the conflict between her traditional, potentially conservative views and a more modern, open, liberal outlook that her children and her own innermost personality urge her to embrace, the women of the younger generation, notably Brenda—Nate’s girlfriend—and Claire—the Fishers’ youngest child—are outspoken, independent, strong personalities whose idiolects are characterised by the use of sophisticated, cultured references and allusions. Brenda, the daughter of two psychoanalysts, is more of an ironic intellectual, while Claire (in her late teens and a blossoming artist) is caustic, surly, and often aggressive. Their lines frequently include SC references specifically linked to a US reality and overt or covert allusions to works of art and literature that in some cases might be unfamiliar even to a portion of the SA. The next excerpt containing a classical cultural reference is a good illustration of this last type of eliminated CSRs:

**EXAMPLE 7.8: SEASON 1 EPISODE 10**

**CONTEXT:** Brenda is blaming her mother for her objectionable mothering skills.

**ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE**

BRENDA: It’s a wonder I’m even alive, considering the mothering skills you have! You’re like fucking Medea! You know what the really sick thing is, Mother? You have no idea what you’ve done to me.

**ITALIAN ADAPTATION**

BRENDA: Con una madre come te, è un miracolo che sia ancora viva. Tu pensi solo a... (non udibile)

**BACK-TRANSLATION**

BRENDA: With a mother like you, it’s a miracle I’m still alive. You only think of... (inaudible)

Brenda makes a citation from classical literature that her mother, a psychoanalyst, can understand immediately. The mythical Jason’s wife, who out of revenge against him, kills the children they had together, is for Brenda the perfect definition for the woman who tormented her and her brother during their childhood. In Italian the reference is eliminated, and the too-intellectual line is lost among ambient sounds and overlapping conversations, while the two characters are filmed in a long shot which facilitates the manipulative work of the adapters.

Claire’s lines, too, are remarkable for their intelligence and wit, often including popular or more high-end CSRs which, in both cases, contribute in the original text to elevate the tone of the discourse. Unfortunately, the
impact of Claire’s dialogues also suffers from repeated eliminations, as in the next excerpt:

EXAMPLE 7.9: SEASON 1 EPISODE 2

CONTEXT: Claire is protesting because she doesn’t want to miss a day of school to attend the opening of her father’s testament.

ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE

CLAIRE: Great, I have to miss another day of school? What am I, like some poor knocked-up Victorian waif who has to stay hidden from view?

ITALIAN ADAPTATION

CLAIRE: Cioè, devo perdere un altro giorno di scuola? Si può sapere che male ho fatto per essere condannata all’ergastolo in questa casa?

BACK-TRANSLATION

CLAIRE: What, shall I miss another day of school? Could you tell me what I did wrong to be sentenced to life imprisonment in this house?

If not an explicit literary quotation, still Claire’s words have a Dickensian flavour and are implicitly aimed at an audience which can relate, at least in general terms, to the condition of the poor in Victorian England. This educated allusion would be understood by a selected but not restricted part of the Italian audience, and it is indeed arguable whether a greater number of people would get the joke in the USA. None of these considerations affected the handling of the dialogue. The solution chosen by the adapters in fact eliminates Claire’s ironic reference, which associates poor Victorian women who could not get an education to her own situation, that of a girl prevented from going to school by her family. The replacement is a nondescript line referring to a life imprisonment, which is an exaggeration of Claire’s condition as she usually enjoys a great amount of freedom in her family.

In the next excerpt, an SC reference in the original lines gives an amusing twist to an otherwise generic comment:

EXAMPLE 7.10: SEASON 1 EPISODE 5

CONTEXT: Claire reproaches her mother for coming into her room without knocking on the door first.

ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE

CLAIRE (talking to the computer while playing a video game): Suck on that, you little fuck! (laughs, then notices RUTH) Hi, there’s this thing called ‘knocking’. It’s, like, protected in the first amendment.
ITALIAN ADAPTATION | BACK-TRANSLATION
---|---
CLAIRE: Adesso perché non ridi bastardo? Ciao. Di solito quando c’è una porta chiusa si bussa prima di entrare. IL RESTO DELLA FRASE È ELIMINATO. | CLAIRE: Now why don’t you laugh, you bastard? Hello. Usually when a door is closed, one knocks before coming in. THE REST OF THE PHRASE IS ELIMINATED.

In this case, as well as diluting the explicitly obscene language of the opening line, the adapters have taken advantage of the fact that part of the dialogue is recited off screen, thus enjoying the freedom of editing out what they must have perceived as a problematic line because of being very specific to the US legal system—and this, in spite of the fact that many American films have made the word ‘amendment’ (usually translated into Italian by a calque) familiar to the Italian audiences. Claire uses the reference to the ‘first amendment’—which regards, among other things, the freedom of speech and print—not very appropriately to make an ironic remark on her mother’s breaking into her room without knocking. Notwithstanding the potential knowledge of the term by the TA, the CSR was eliminated from the Italian adaptation by an editorial cut.

These are just a few examples including CSRs that show how these two characters’ idiolects in particular have been dramatically altered in translation and how the elimination of CSRs has played a fundamental part in this rewriting process: being deprived of many of their intellectual and educated remarks, which give substance to their reasonings, the two women often come across as a pair of somewhat annoying rebels without a cause.

Another textual area which counts a considerable number of eliminations is the realm of overt and covert allusions. Six Feet Under shares with many other contemporary fiction works the postmodern taste for quoting, elaborating, interweaving, and playing on allusions to other fictional works and characters. Along with the use of a number of loans and official translations, the tendency towards elimination of these types of CSRs is marked. The following example, which involves both a visual and a verbal allusion, is noteworthy:

**EXAMPLE 7.11: SEASON 1 EPISODE 8**

**CONTEXT:** In the death prologue of the eighth episode, a woman dies a horrible death while celebrating with her friends.

**ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE**

*Chloe stands up and sticks her head out of the sunroof. She rejoices in her newfound freedom.*

CHLOE: I’m king of the world! I’m king of the world! I’m king of the world!
At that moment, the limo passes a low-hanging traffic light on the side of the road, and her face is smashed in. Her friends are splashed with blood and scream in terror. The screen fades to white.

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<th>ITALIAN ADAPTATION</th>
<th>BACK-TRANSLATION</th>
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<tr>
<td>CHLOE: Sono la padrona del mondo!</td>
<td>CHLOE: I'm the master of the world!</td>
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The description included in the example, which tells of Chloe standing up on the car seat and sticking her head out of the rooftop, is fundamental to understand the visual impact of the scene. However, it is not wholly accurate. It should be added that as well as sticking her head out, Chloe is standing in such a way as to stick half of her body, from the waist up, out of the car: she makes a swaying movement which, aided by the words she utters—the now famous line “I’m king of the world!”—reminds audiences of the iconic scene from *Titanic* (James Cameron 1997) in which Leonardo DiCaprio similarly sways on the ship’s prow, his body blown by the wind in an image of joy and freedom. Unfortunately, the association is lost in Italian as Chloe’s words do not quote the film’s official literal translation: *Sono il re del mondo!*—words which are now embedded in the Italian culture as part of its transnational consciousness. Arguably, the Italian translation would force the viewer to a greater cognitive effort as he or she only has the images to recuperate the original reference. However, in this case the image without the words is not enough to help the audience associate the swaying woman to DiCaprio, thus the CSR can be considered irremediably lost.

Nevertheless, the film *Titanic* seems to be very much part of Italian contemporary culture, so much so that, as well as inspiring a substitution, it offers the inspiration for one of the few additions encountered in the series, as it will be seen in the next section.

**Creative Addition**
With six occurrences, creative addition accounts for 0.2 percent of the total percentage. Additions in this series appear to be positively integrated in the dialogue, as if the adapters’ creativity functioned best when given free rein. It is notable that five of the six added CSRs are allusions to popular films or TV programmes, showing how intertextual allusions are considered an important vehicle to capture the audience’s attention when the texts are familiar to the TC. One of the added allusions includes a line in which a boy refers to a mature lady as *signora in giallo* [lady in yellow], the official Italian translation of the title of the popular TV show *Murder, She Wrote* (Peter S. Fischer 1984–1996) with Angela Lansbury as a senior detective. Season 3 Episode 3 contains the same allusion to *Titanic* which disappeared from the episode mentioned in the former section: in a scene of sexual climax,
David does not exclaim in Italian the equivalent of ‘Oh my God!’, as in the original, but the phrase: *Sono il re del mondo!* [I’m king of the world!], which even without any visual encouragement is recognisable as an explicit quotation from *Titanic*. This phrase is unusual in Italian as an expression of joy and contentment and would not have been used if it did not allude to this film. In another Italian dialogue, David’s boyfriend, Keith, feels the need to explicitate that Viggo Mortensen acted in *Il signore degli anelli* (*The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Peter Jackson 2001, 2002, 2003), a comment, added off screen, which the original Keith did not consider necessary and which can also be considered a form of elaborate explicitation.

The next excerpt, too, contains an amplification of the original allusion by means of a creative addition:

**EXAMPLE 7.12: SEASON 3 EPISODE 7**

**CONTEXT:** Nate is always asking his relatives to keep an eye on his daughter for him, but this time Claire reacts with fury.

**ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE**

NATE: So how about it, can you watch Maya for me today? Twenty bucks.
CLAIRE: I can’t.
NATE: Well, why not?
CLAIRE: Russell and I are going to the art store.
NATE: Claire?
CLAIRE: Nate? You know this isn’t the matrix. The rest of us who don’t have babies, we’re real. Watch my baby; watch my baby. Jesus Christ.

**ITALIAN ADAPTATION**

NATE: Che fai, me la guardi tu Maya oggi? Venti dollari.
CLAIRE: Ah, non posso.
NATE: Perché no?
CLAIRE: Nate. Non siamo dentro Matrix. Quelli che non hanno figli sono persone vere come l’eletto.
CLAIRE: Guarda mia figlia, guarda mia figlia. E che cazzo.

**BACK-TRANSLATION**

NATE: What, will you watch Maya today? Twenty dollars.
CLAIRE: Ah, I can’t.
NATE: Why not?
CLAIRE: Nate. We’re not inside the Matrix. Those who don’t have children are real people, like The One.
CLAIRE: Watch my baby; watch my baby. What the fuck.

The Italian adaptation does not limit itself to keep, as a loan, the reference to the popular film *The Matrix* (Larry and Andy Wachowski 1999), whose plot is mostly set in a world which is not real but a sort of computer programme; it also adds a further reference to the same film, which is not present in the ST, by including *l’eletto* [the elected], ‘The One’ in the original film, who is the real human being chosen to liberate others from the tyranny of machines.
Coffee Bars in Slumber Rooms

However seldom resorted to, creative addition introduces in the few instances in which it is used an amused element of intertextual pleasure which suitably blends into the context.

Further Reflections on the Nature of the References

In the previous sections, a reflection has been presented on the nature of the references contained in *Six Feet Under* and the strategies implemented by the translators to deal with them. Undoubtedly, understanding the nature of the reference is crucial to gauge the reasons behind the various translational options. Given their importance in the characterisation of the series, the following sections focus on two different cultural and semantic fields which, in addition to the gay subjects and cultured references highlighted in the previous sections, have been severely manipulated in the translation process.

Sociopolitical Issues

Elements pertaining to US culture which have not previously travelled sufficiently, such as the cremation company Poseidon Society or the area of West Hollywood, did not make it to the TT. As already seen in the previous chapters, the category of SC elements is one of the most interesting ones to analyse from a translational perspective as they tend to highlight the subjective nature of CSRs: what belongs to the source culture and what can be considered to be intercultural are very much left to the personal knowledge of the translators and adapters and to their individual evaluations of the TA’s degree of permeability and receptivity towards foreign elements.

The transfer becomes more problematic when an SC reference is apparently intercultural because its name may coincide lexically but not semantically with similar concepts in the TL. Typical examples are political concepts or references to institutions or laws, which translators sometimes solve with a calque but which in this series have been mostly eliminated. As in the case of the reference to the ‘first amendment’ cited in Example 7.10, other references to US political concepts have not come through in the Italian adaptation. The following are two representative examples:

**EXAMPLE 7.13: SEASON 1 EPISODE 3**

**CONTEXT:** Nate, who was at first adamant in trying to convince his brother to sell their family business to a bigger company, has now changed his mind and decided that keeping it might be the right thing to do.

**ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE**

DAVID: We could still sell to Kroehner and both manage Fisher & Sons.
NATE: Yeah, but then we’re just spokesmodels working to make fat Republican stockholders richer. And Kroehner doesn’t give a shit about people. We care. We can help them through their grief. That’s what we do.
EXAMPLE 7.14: SEASON 1 EPISODE 33

CONTEXT: David—an actively practising religious man—is at a deacon’s meeting whose themes are same-sex marriages and parenthood.

ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE

WALTER: The Church rejects homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture.

DAVID: So, because of their random genetics, gay people should be denied any romantic or sexual love?

WALTER: That is liberal claptrap! It’s not genetics! It can be overcome!

ITALIAN ADAPTATION

DAVID: Ma possiamo andare avanti con la vendita e mantenere solo la gestione.

NATE: Sì, però finiremmo col diventare solo delle marionette che servirebbero soltanto a far ingrassare il ricco. E alla Kroehner non gliene frega niente delle persone. Strappiamo via la gente dai loro artigli.

WALTER: Ti rammento che la Chiesa definisce la pratica omosessuale come incompatibile con le Scritture.

DAVID: Così solo a causa di uno scherzo genetico i gay si dovrebbero privare dell’amore romantico o fisico.

WALTER: Ah, non ti riempire la bocca con tutti questi paroloni. Non si tratta di genetica. Un istinto, si può vincere.

WALTER: I remind you that the Church defines homosexual practice as incompatible with the Scriptures.

DAVID: Then only because of a genetic trick, gay people should deny themselves any romantic or physical love.

WALTER: Ah, don’t fill your mouth with all these big words. It’s not a question of genetics. An instinct can be overcome.

In these cases, not only the political references to Republicans and liberals have been eliminated in the Italian version, but the dialogues have also been completely rewritten. The lexical items ‘Republican’ and ‘liberal’ are often translated into Italian with what is apparently an official
References to the institutional life of a country may be difficult to transfer into another culture because they simply do not exist in the host community, but they tend to contribute even more than other elements to give substance to the dialogue exchanges and to make them sound natural on the lips of real people. Once again, the strategy of elimination appears to be the most favoured by translators as well as the most revealing, in line with the overarching simplification and banalisation of the dialogue which, in the case of this particular series, is typical of the whole adapted text.

In line with other important issues tackled by this series, the sociopolitical aspects which are so vividly depicted in the original dialogue are translated into generic comments which are simply not as realistic.

**Visual and Verbal References to Death**

The opening credits and the way in which each episode’s opening scene is constructed are meant to attract the audience’s attention to the main theme of the programme from the very beginning. A haunting soundtrack reinforces the impact of the montage of images which include: a black bird crossing the blue sky; two people’s holding hands suddenly unclasping; the close-up of the naked feet of a corpse with the morgue’s habitual toe tag, whilst the rest of the body is covered with a white sheet; a single wheel on a linoleum floor, which the viewers soon discover to belong to a stretcher wheeling off a dead body along a corridor; the head of a dead woman with her eye in extreme close-up being gently made up; someone in a black suit opening the back door of a hearse with a coffin inside; a tombstone; the open hearse with the sun reflected on its window; two framed photographs of people; the claws of a black crow; glimpses of a coffin being carried off in the cemetery; a close shot of a crow’s head; and the name of the creator of the series, Alan Ball, inscribed on a tombstone. A fade to white is used to usher in the first scene of every episode, which usually shows new characters dying unforeseen, grotesque, and disturbing deaths described in all their crudity. An inscription with the name and the years of birth and death is then followed by a fade to white. This is the customary prologue to every episode whose plot revolves primarily around the lives of the various members of the Fisher family and, marginally, around the stories of the dead people and their mourning relatives who have taken the decision to resort to the services of the Fishers’ funeral home.

This detailed description is meant to highlight how images, before any dialogue is spoken, draw the audience into a world which is quintessentially North American, bound to US culture and to its specific customs. Many members of the Italian audience, watching these opening scenes, may experience mild culture shock. One of the reasons is that, contrary to what might
be popular belief—according to which Italian funeral customs are usually depicted in foreign films in their most folkloric, traditional, mainly rural and outdated colours—death in urban Italy is a taboo subject and a taboo word which is not to be openly discussed. In AVT, more specifically, this is also proven by the fact that if a film is not a thriller, the words morte [death] and morto [dead] in titles tend to be almost always omitted, substituted by distributors with an Italian euphemism or left untranslated in English. The Italian Disney Buena Vista company has it as a mandatory, written rule for adapters, that the words related to death are never to be translated literally but should be translated with euphemistic synonyms like “he or she has gone” or “he or she is no longer here”.

The feeling of cultural estrangement on the part of the TA grows after the realisation that not only are these scenes related to death but that some of them refer to a different kind of death. They reveal the striking differences in death-related customs between the SC and the TC. Some of these iconic images are the toe tag and—especially—the corpse being prepared to be made to look as good or even better than it looked when the person was alive. Toe tags are not normally used in Italian morgues, and open-casket vigils in the form of parties that require the corpse to be specially made up are usually reserved in Italy to state or celebrities’ funerals, and even then they are extremely rare. It is true that some more traditional, mainly rural and old-fashioned communities still maintain traditions in which death and dead people are more openly displayed, but that is not the case in modern, urban societies in which loved ones, once deceased, are rapidly hidden from view.

Of course, decades of exposure to US films have made the Italian audiences accustomed to all these unfamiliar traditions—including the one of giving chatty parties after the funeral—but the fact remains that an objective resistance has to be overcome when the theme of death, described in its many facets, so openly proclaims to be the main focus of a television series.

In the following example, it is not so much the blatant manipulation of the homosexual content of the original, which I have discussed elsewhere (Ranzato 2012: 378–379), that caught my attention in relation to the present analysis, but the reference to a custom which is truly culture specific:

**EXAMPLE 7.15: SEASON 1 EPISODE 1 (PILOT)**

**CONTEXT:** Ruth is talking about her husband’s new purchase to her son David, a homosexual young man who, in this pilot episode, has not yet come out.

**ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE**

RUTH: I think your father is having some sort of midlife crisis.

DAVID: It would have made so much more sense to invest in re-paneling for the chapel or adding coffee bars to the slumber rooms.
The reference to objects so mundane and recreational as coffee bars, set in a solemn and grave place as a ‘slumber room’ (the viewing room in a funeral home), cannot be more distant from the TA’s mentality. Translated literally into Italian, this line has the potential of stirring surprised reactions from the audience, and it is evidence of how inconsistent the whole dubbing process can be. It is indeed surprising that a translation that proves to be so manipulative only two lines after—suppressing as it does an explicit reference to a man’s homosexuality—decides to keep such an exotic element as coffee bars in slumber rooms virtually unaltered by the use of a literal translation.

As can be expected, many dialogue exchanges in *Six Feet Under* include CSRs in relation to death subjects, some of which have already been analysed. When the references are made to very popular elements, they serve the purpose of rendering the image which is evoked more realistic by anchoring it to the everyday world in all its crudity. In the case of more sophisticated allusions, the quote is often used to make the reference sarcastically cultivated. The analysis of the corpus has shown that the reaction of the Italian adapters, with few exceptions, is generally that of
manipulating death-related references to make them less unpalatable, as in the following example:

**EXAMPLE 7.16: SEASON 1 EPISODE 4**

**CONTEXT:** David and Nate are discussing the possibility that a big chain of funeral homes will swallow up their small family business.

**ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE**

DAVID: They sell cremations. Cheap cremations. Now for a fraction of what we charge, you can now dump off the relative you never really liked anyway at the Torch Mart across the street.

**ITALIAN ADAPTATION**

DAVID: Lì faranno solo cremazioni a buon mercato, non più di un decimo della nostra tariffa, credo. Per dirla in due parole è come se andassi a comprare una cremazione in un supermercato.

**BACK-TRANSLATION**

DAVID: They’ll be doing only cheap cremations there, not more than a tenth of our fee, I think. To say it in just a few words, it’s as if you went to a supermarket to buy a cremation.

David is making a pun on Walmart, the international corporation of department stores which he compares to the big funeral home chain company that intends to buy a building across the street from them to create a crematorium (to which David alludes by using the term ‘torch’, in the sense of torching corpses). This image can be considered to be far too graphic and crude for a culture, such as the Italian culture, which has a problem in talking freely about death and which—as a Catholic country—looks upon cremation with suspicion. In this example, the key term in the original excerpt, the one which gives the line its sardonic impact, is the phonetic wordplay on the CSR (Walmart/torch mart). Its elimination serves only to soften the image, although the concept remains more or less the same.

The next example contains the allusion to a literary character which is quite familiar to the Anglo-Saxon world:

**EXAMPLE 7.17: SERIES 1 EPISODE 3**

**CONTEXT:** Nate has gone to the morgue to recover the body of a dead person.

**ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE**

ATTENDANT: He’s like in a lot of pieces.
NATE: **Humpty Dumpty**, I know.
Humpty Dumpty is a character in an English children’s limerick, an egg which at the end of the story breaks into pieces. It also figures famously in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* (1871/2007). People in Italy are not very familiar with Humpty Dumpty as it is a character known mainly to lovers of English literature, so a literal reference in this case would have risked not being understood by most of the audience. Nonetheless, there is an attempt at compensation in the Italian adaptation by the introduction of the substantive ‘puzzle’ in the attendant’s line. By referring to a puzzle, the translation maintains some of its original flavour, although the effect of the English is more grotesque and incisive because Nate associates the image of a dismembered corpse to a lovable character from the world of childhood. Again, the reality of death is transferred to the Italian screen with images of lesser impact.

The same way to describe the bad shape of a corpse by resorting to a CSR is solved in the next excerpt with a substitution:

**EXAMPLE 7.18: SEASON 1 EPISODE 8**

**CONTEXT:** The ghost of a dead person on whose corpse the Fishers are working on haunts David and appears to him in unforeseen occasions.

**ORIGINAL FILM DIALOGUE**

While DAVID works on MARC, MARC’s ghost appears behind DAVID. His face is battered and bruised, but he is smiling and jovial.

MARC: Oh, God, I look like something Chef Boyardee makes!

**ITALIAN ADAPTATION**

MARC: Ma tu guarda, non ti sembro una specie di quadro di Picasso?

**BACK-TRANSLATION**

MARC: Just look at me. Don’t I look like a sort of Picasso painting?

The substitution of an implicit cooking recipe—Boyardee is a popular chef of Italian origin—with an explicit Picasso painting is not out of place as the latter has the power of evoking subjects who have all their features dislocated. Thus the substitution found here is that of an SC reference (Boyardee’s recipes are not known outside the USA) with one from a third culture,
Spanish, although admittedly very international. However, once again, by using a CSR in the original which has to do with food and the material aspect of death, the impact on the SA is arguably more disturbing than that made on the TA by conjuring up the image of an abstract, cubist painting.

In addition, the dialogue quoted in Example 7.3 shows—this time through substitution—the way in which the Italian adaptation has dealt with potentially disturbing contents related to the gruesome details of death. On this occasion, the name of the macabre serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer has been replaced by that of the iconic fictional character of Frankenstein, the only instance in which a literary reference is not eliminated but introduced in the adapted text.

These are just a few examples illustrating the strategies used by Italian adapters to present the subject of death in a different light than the usually more graphic descriptions found in the ST, which often resorts to CSRs to produce a more realistic and effective message.

**CONCLUSIONS: DISMANTLING THE GAY IMAGINARY**

*Six Feet Under* dealt with sensitive issues in a way which was unprecedented for a television series broadcast in Italy on a public channel. As stated in the introduction of this chapter, this show has been included in the corpus because ideological issues might be expected to come up in the analysis. Subjects related to death and homosexuality, in particular, had never been so openly displayed and delved into on any television show before. It was thus a matter of particular interest for me to try to detect the presence of any possible overt and covert manipulative and censoring practices in the Italian dubbing which might tend to euphemise, dilute or alter homosexual content and change the words of homosexuality in the first place as well as other sensitive issues that have been highlighted in the examples already illustrated. As has been foregrounded, a manipulative policy in the adaptation of this series is indeed a fact, and the analysis has shown how the particular nature of certain CSRs and their handling in translation play a significant part in shaping the form and content of the Italian dialogue.

The adaptation of *Six Feet Under* shows how the two concepts of manipulation and censorship, discussed in Chapter 3, are sometimes separated by a very thin line. It is difficult not to interpret some of the cases illustrated—and many more which have not been included in the present work because they involve linguistic rather than culture specific features—as expressions of a conscious policy suggested or influenced by the patronage that be and aimed at edulcorating and ultimately eliminating sensitive references. The nature of these references is usually embedded in sexuality but also original contents which might disturb viewers because of their striking distance from the TC are the target of this policy, for example those related to death. Only examples in which the translation of CSRs
played an important role in shaping and remodelling the form and substance of the Italian dialogue have been included in this chapter, but they are enough to give the measure of the translating policy. Many more instances could be given to illustrate a censoring attitude that is more evident in the first season of the series. As discussed in the case of Friends, television series need time to adjust and find their own target audience in the original as well as in their translated reincarnation. This has also been the case with Six Feet Under, whose Italian adaptation, with time, partly evolved to reflect more closely the reality of its main themes and its crude and sophisticated language. This adjustment seems to be proven by the radical increase in the usage of the loan strategy in the third season (58.5 percent compared with 33 percent in the first season) and the decrease of eliminations (11 percent in the third season compared with the 26 percent in the first).

Issues related to the demographic of the potential target audience and the time of broadcast seem to be at the heart of some translation strategies. In this sense, pilot episodes and first seasons in general, as well as programmes broadcast in prime time, tend to be more censored than others, probably because they have yet to build an audience and, in the interest of the broadcasters, that audience has to be as large as possible from the very beginning. The much lower percentage in the use of the strategy of elimination in the third series compared to the first one seems to point in this direction: once the prospective target audience has been established, there is space for more latitude, which in the cases analysed means the freedom to be more literal and closer to the original than constrained by the assumed norms of the TL and TC.

Nonetheless, in the whole of its five seasons, the Italian rewriting never fails to convey the feeling that the purpose of the Italian adapters has been to produce a more reassuring programme, one that would lose its more sophisticated features and would dilute the more ‘dangerous’ contents. The result is that of a series rewritten with the intention to be made more palatable to the TA than it was to the original audience, which entails sacrificing some of the most intelligent dialogue exchanges by means of eliminating crucial cultural references. Overall, this is a rather sad outcome for one of the most acclaimed examples of auteur television.

It is my contention that one of the most telling areas that displays the Italian adapters’ attitude towards this series is their bold, censoring handling of contents and words related to homosexuality. It is much more than just a matter of sanitisation: it is the purposeful dismantling of a network of associations which in the original text overtly relate to a gay imaginary. In the worst cases, homosexuality is not even acknowledged, and it is translated into a heterosexual and normalising lexicon through substitutions and eliminations.

The original Six Feet Under is notable for its clarity of intent. The series is clearly aimed at cultivated, liberal-minded viewers and does not make compromises to attract a more general audience. It does not pretend to be
what it cannot be, that is, a mainstream product. The authors of the Italian version seemed to have been unsure of what was the best course of action to take, and although the series slowly tried to adjust to its intended TA by keeping more literal to the original, there is ample evidence that the translators did their best not to miss any opportunity to appeal to a more general, broader public.

NOTES

1. Ball had already won an Academy Award for the screenplay of the 1999 acclaimed film by Sam Mendes, American Beauty.
2. HBO, a US pay TV channel, is known for programming and producing pioneering fiction series—including Sex and The City (Darren Star 1998–2004), The Sopranos (David Chase, 1999–2007), The Wire (David Simon 2002–2008), In Treatment (developed by Rodrigo Garcia, 2008–2010); True Detective (Nic Pizzolatto, 2014–in production)—as well as influential drama films and miniseries—such as Angels in America (Mike Nichols 2003). It is considered one of the main sites for what has come to be known as quality TV, and its productions are regarded as having a distinctive, cutting-edge style (Feuer 2007; McCabe and Akass 2007; Edgerton and Jones 2009; Leverette et al. 2008).
3. All the publicity created for Six Feet Under (trailers, adverts, etc.) shows the emphasis placed on the creative genius behind the show, Alan Ball.
4. This series has been analysed for its contents and language specifically related to homosexuality in Ranzato (2012, 2015) and for its handling of allusions in Ranzato (2014). It has also been explored by Bucaria (2006) for the translation into Italian of its humorous features.
5. As it has already been noted, the total number of strategies varies from the number of CSRs because some strategies involve the introduction of new elements not present in the original text.
6. I am following Martínez Sierra’s (2008: 153) classification of jokes. Zabalbeascoa (2005: 187), on whose own classification Martínez Sierra based his study, included these jokes in the larger category of chistes dependientes de la lengua (jokes depending on language).
7. Gayspeak is a word coined by Hayes (1976/2006: 64) who argues that homosexuals are America’s largest subculture and that they have their own way of speaking of which he identifies a number of linguistic features. One of them is the development of an important cluster of images from stage and film: “Famous Hollywood stars of the thirties and forties figure importantly, especially if the roles they play are campy or treat of tragic love”. For an analysis of gayspeak and gay subjects in AVT, see Ranzato (2012).
8. The words ‘gay’, ‘transgender’, ‘coming out’ and ‘drag queen’, are now words recognisable by most Italian people, but they are just about the only words of homosexual jargon to have entered mainstream language. In the case of the English language, as early as 1941, Legman (1941/2006: 19) included 146 terms in his American glossary which contained “only words and phrases current in American slang, argot, and colloquial speech since the First World War, and particularly during the period between 1930 and 1940”. According to the author, the glossary was far from exhaustive, though it was part of a longer list of 329 terms—the selection being words which were used exclusively by homosexuals. A great number of these words are now part of standard English or are slang words used also by the general public. The Italian
lexicon of homosexuality lacks the inventiveness of English, shies away from
neologisms and prefers to resort to borrowing.
9. If the term ‘Republican’ is generally identified with conservative politics and
‘liberal’ with more progressive positions in US culture, very different, some-
times opposite, associations are triggered by the words ‘repubblicano’ and
‘liberale’ in Italy due to historical reasons which cannot be explored here.
10. Incidentally, Nate himself describes with approval one of these Italian mourn-
ing traditions when, in the pilot episode, he recalls a scene he witnessed on a
little volcanic island off the coast of Sicily.
11. Dubbing adapter Serena Paccagnella kindly forwarded an internal sheet
of “compliance guidelines” from Disney, which asks dubbing adapters to
avoid: “any type of four-letter words; expressions like figo/fico [cool; but the
obscene, original meaning of the slang word is linked to female genitals] and
derivatives; casino/i [mess; but literally ‘whore-house’] and derivatives; swear-
ing and cursing; insults or unrespectful expressions; jokes on priests, on the
Church, and exclamations like Oh Dio [Oh God], Oh Madon naughty etc.; insults
or offensive words like scemo [stupid], cretino [moron], deficiente [half-wit],
handicappato [handicapped] (. . . always remember that even if they are com-
mon expressions, Disney is extremely careful not to hurt the sensibilities of
those people who might be suffering from those particular conditions: for
example, in the case of the word handicappato, someone who really has a
handicap, etc . . .); careful with the use of racist terms; never refer to well-
known brands: Coca-cola, McDonald’s, Sony, Fiorucci, Playstation, cigarette
brands, building companies, clothing brands etc. (covert publicity); avoid the
word morto/a [ dead]” (“Disney compliance guidelines”, my translation). The
same avoidance of sensitive terms, including death-related words, is true not
only for Disney but also for other types of cartoons (Parini 2012: 325–337).
12. However, times change, and the fact that this character featured prominently
in the Dreamworks animation film Puss in Boots (Il gatto con gli stivali, Chris
Miller 2011) may probably have an impact on people’s awareness of this
character.
13. The more specifically gay series Queer as Folk (Russell T. Davies 1999–2000,
UK) was cancelled after much controversy, before ever being aired, by the pub-
lic channel La7, considered one of the most progressive in Italy. It was later
broadcast in 2002, in the late evening/night, by the pay TV channel Gay TV.
Its slightly more sanitised American version (Ron Cowen and Daniel Lipman
2000–2005) was broadcast in 2006–2007 by the pay TV channel Jimmy.
14. See section on Translation Strategies, however, for a diegetic reason which can
partly explain this data.

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Coffee Bars in Slumber Rooms

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