Study on the practices and legislative environment of language in the cinema in different European countries, Quebec and Catalonia.

January 2010

SUMMARY

PLATAFORMA PER LA LLENGUA

www.plataforma-llengua.cat

The study we have prepared on practices and legislation in other countries relating to the translation of films for the cinema coincided with the drafting and approval of the **Cinema Draft Bill of Catalonia**, which makes it obligatory for film companies to offer half of the copies of their films in Catalan (with some exceptions)[1]. One of our purposes is therefore to provide new data in order to asses the Cinema Bill beyond the Catalonian scenario, comparing the situation in our country to that of other countries with comparable official languages or officially multilingual countries.

The influence of European totalitarian regimes on the cinema

With the advent of talking movies, companies in the cinema world made major investments to implement translation strategies, depending on the sociolinguistic composition and existing freedoms in each country. In many cases, 20th-Century European totalitarian governments imposed the modality and the translation language of films as a form of social control and ideological manipulation (the precedent was a law by Mussolini's regime, in 1930, which rendered it obligatory for films to be dubbed into Italian). However, the Spanish State took this ideological control measure even further: Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975) also imposed this type of censorship in the cinema as an **effective strategy of domestic cultural and language repression**

> *Order of April 23, 1941*
>
> *"No films may be shown in cinemas in a language other than Spanish" (art.8)*

This prohibition of Catalan lasted for 34 years, in a period of growth and consolidation of the cinema industry and dubbing in our country.

Democracy and languages

The transition to democracy and capitalism of most European states that had been under totalitarian regimes entails the creation of measures to re-establish the use of their own and official languages (as in the case of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania). Cinema practices in other democratic countries with comparable languages show a normal and widespread use of these languages (such as Quebec, Switzerland and

[1] For further information see the Cinema Draft Bill of Catalonia, refer to: http://www.gencat.cat/acordsdegovern/20100112/03.htm

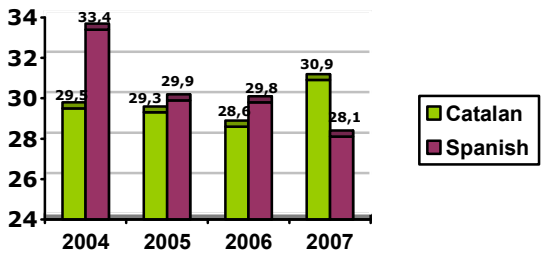
Denmark). However, in the case of the Spanish State, the citizens of the Catalan-speaking territory (one third of the State's population) continue to fight against blatant discrimination despite the advent of democracy 30 years ago.

"Catalan in the cinema: an Impossible Mission?"

Out of 854,906 showings in Catalonia in 2007 (according to official data), Catalan-version films (original, dubbed or subtitled) accounted for less than 3%.[2] And they were shown very often in cinemas and at times which were less competitive than those for the Spanish version.

Despite this highly restricted offer, cinema in Catalan has a very high potential demand which is far from being properly covered. For example, in 2007 the average number of spectators at for each film showing in Catalan was higher than at the equivalent showing in Spanish:

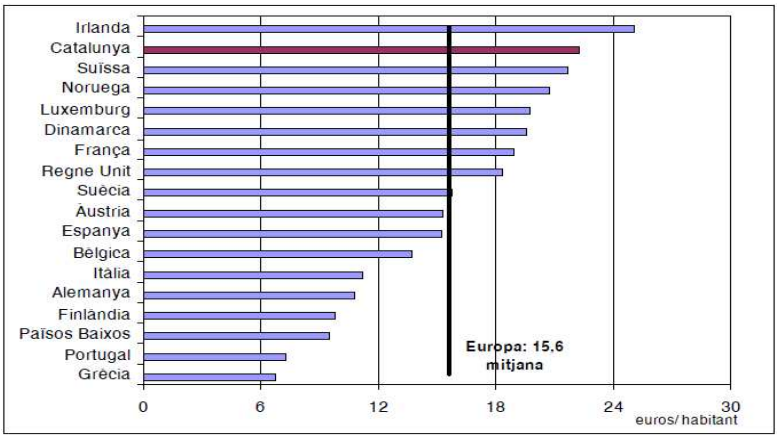
Average spectators per showing Catalonia 2007 (absolute numbers)



Source: Institut Català de les Indústries Culturals

As for film company turnover, the market in Catalonia is one of the most important in Europe (the second in takings):

Cinema takings per inhabitant in Europe, 2004



Source: the *10 anys de cinema report. Cinema a Catalunya i Europa. 1994-2004*, prepared in 2007 by the Department of Culture of the Government of Catalonia.

[2] The updated figures of the study for 2009 have hardly changed: 97.1% of the films screened in Catalonia were dubbed or subtitled in Spanish, whereas only 2.9% were dubbed or subtitled in Catalan (Government of Catalonia, 2010)

Practices of film companies in different countries

If we compare the status of Catalan in the cinema both to languages with the same or fewer speakers and to multilingual territories, we can see that it is a unique exception with regard to countries with a democratic tradition in Europe.

Use of official languages comparable to Catalan in the dubbing/subtitling of foreign films

Official language	State	Number of speakers*	Widespread use of the official local language in dubbed/subtitled films in the cinema
Czech	Czech Republic	9,900,000	**Yes**
Hungarian	Hungary	9,500,000	**Yes**
Greek	Greece	9,500,000	**Yes**
Catalan	Spain	9,100,000	**No**
Swedish	Sweden	7,700,000	**Yes**
Bulgarian	Bulgaria	6,200,000	**Yes**
Danish	Denmark	5,000,000	**Yes**
Finnish	Finland	4,900,000	**Yes**
Slovakian	Slovakia	4,600,000	**Yes**
Norwegian	Norway	4,400,000	**Yes**
Lithuanian	Lithuania	2,900,000	**Yes**
Slovenian	Slovenia	1,700,000	**Yes**
Latvian	Latvia	1,400,000	**Yes**
Esthonian	Estonia	930,000	**Yes**
Icelandic	Iceland	270,000	**Yes**

Source: Prepared in-house from the data of *El català, llengua d'Europa*, published by the Government of Catalonia (2007); the information contained in annexes I-VI of the *Study on dubbing and subtitling needs and practices in the European Audiovisual Industry* by Media Consulting Group-Peacefulfish, November 2007, and answers given to the Pro-Language Platform by the ministries of culture or education of different countries.
*Figures rounded off

Multilingual practices in the translation of foreign films in countries with official multilingualism

State	Language Areas	Majority modality and language uses	Widespread use of the local and official language in the cinema
Finland	Finnish multilingual municipalities	Subtitled in Finnish/Film dubbing in Finnish in children's films	**Yes**
	Swedish multilingual municipalities and bilingual municipalities (majority Swedish or majority Finnish)	Bilingual subtitling in Finnish-Swedish/Film dubbing in Finnish and in Swedish for children's films	**Yes**
Belgium*	Dutch language Region (Flemish community)	Subtitling in Dutch	**Yes**
	French Language Region (Valonne community)	Film dubbing in French	**Yes**
	Bilingual region of the capital of Brussels	Bilingual subtitling Dutch-French	**Yes**

Switzerland	German-speaking Cantons	Subtitling in German	**Yes**
	German- and French-speaking Cantons	Dubbing in French/Subtitling in German	**Yes**
	French-speaking Cantons	Dubbing in French	**Yes**
	Italian-speaking Cantons	Dubbing in Italian	**Yes**
	Canton of the German, Italian and Romansh-speaking Grisons	Subtitling in German/Dubbing in Italian	**Yes***
Spain	Catalan-speaking territories (Valencian Community, Balearic Islands, Western Strip and the Principality of Catalonia)	Dubbing in Spanish	**No**

Source: Prepared in-house from the data of *El català, llengua d'Europa*, published by the Government of Catalonia (2007); the information contained in annexes I-VI of the *Study on dubbing and subtitling needs and practices in the European Audiovisual Industry* by Media Consulting Group-Peacefulfish, November 2007 and answers given to the Pro-Language Platform by the ministries of culture or education of different countries.

***Note:** We only consider languages comparable to Catalan in numbers of speakers, and therefore Romansh in Switzerland or German in Belgium are excluded from our analysis on language uses in the cinema (for further information see the chapter on "Methodological Notes" of the study).

Legislation and institutional support in language uses in the cinema in different countries

Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Quebec (Canada), Switzerland and Finland have measures in place to guarantee the use of their languages in the translation of movie films. For example:

Quebec

Licences may be granted to foreign films in other languages if at least the same number of copies dubbed in French are screened, on the condition that the latter are available for screening at the same time as the versions in other languages (…) In the case of subtitled films, licences will only be granted when the subtitles are in French (art. 23 of *la Loi sur le Cinéma du 1983*, updated in December 2007)

Finland

The competent authorities must ensure that the film is suitably subtitled in the official languages of Finland for the distribution of films. When more than one copy of the film is distributed, the copies must always be made in Finnish and Swedish. (*Finnish Film Foundation,* an organisation reporting to the Ministry of Culture of Finland; 2009*)*

In **the Spanish State,** the only state measure for providing coverage for Catalan in the cinema is a source of grants for promoting official languages other than Spanish

The allowance received by each Autonomous Community will not be more than 50% of the total aid received by audiovisual companies residing in the Community from the Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales in the preceding year (*Sixth Additional Disposition* of *Law 55/2007, on the Cinema*)

Therefore, this law only establishes partial economic aid (not more than 50% of the grants received in the previous year) which, moreover, leaves out film companies that operate in Catalonia but are officially based outside it (for example, in Madrid,

where companies such as Warner Bros or Sony Pictures have their registered offices).

If we compare this to practices in other multilingual countries or with languages comparable to Catalan, Spain's support is clearly different, providing only for partial economic aid, and based on rather unrepresentative criteria, far from establishing an efficient policy that would guarantee comprehensive access to films in Catalan.

Conclusions

1. In Spain, the status of Catalan in the cinema since Franco's dictatorship until the present day has remained stagnated, and the use of the rights and the freedom to watch films in the cinema in this language is still extremely precarious (only 3% of films in cinema theatres are in Catalan).

2. In no other democratic context in Europe with an official language comparable to Catalan, which has 9 million potential spectators, is the official language not used to dub or subtitle the majority of films for the cinema. Catalan is the only exception.

3. Moreover, many countries have legislation that obliges film companies to use the local language in the translation of films screened in the territory where these languages are official. The cases located in this study are Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Quebec (Canada), Switzerland and Finland.

4. The new law the Government of Catalonia wishes to enact is therefore not establishing any precedent, but quite the opposite: in democratic countries, legislating on language use in the cinema or implementing policies to guarantee the general presence of the official language, in the case of languages such as Catalan, is the norm.

See the full study (Catalan version) at:

http://www.plataforma-llengua.cat/media/assets/1538/Estudi_cinema_des09.pdf

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