Weekly English Practice

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Watching films in Spain: to dub or not to dub*?

Around 70% of films shown in Spanish cinemas are made in Hollywood. 100% of them are dubbed into Spanish. What are the consequences of this policy? (asks ECP coach John)

dub *(v): to put different voices to actors in films - usually a different language*
brownie *(n): an American biscuit*
notorious *(adj): something that is well known for typically negative reasons*
have a go at someone *(v): to criticise someone strongly*
censorship *(n): the practice of censoring books, movies, letters, etc*
tantamount *(adj): equal to something in value, meaning, effect*

Once in one of my English classes we were talking about films and favourite actors and a student commented about what a great actress Julia Roberts was.

I laughed and mentioned the scene in Notting Hill in which Roberts, playing an actress who falls in love with an 'ordinary English guy' tries to win the last **brownie** at a dinner party by telling a sad story about herself. She says the line: "One day they will discover I can't really act."

It is as if the script writer was **having a go** an Robert's **notoriously** wooden acting style and limited range.

However, the student was adamant that Roberts was a great actor until I asked: "How do you know? You've never seen or heard her act!"

For over fifty years since the time of the Franco dictatorship, Spanish cinema audiences have merely listened to interpretations of Hollywood actors' performances.

Dubbing actors such as Constantino Romero (who dubbed Clint Eastwood, Darth Vader and Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator) and Óscar Muñoz have achieved great fame.

Spain became a dubbing country due to economic, political, cultural and ideological factors. **Censorship** offices - the Junta Superior de Censura - were established in Seville and Salamanca in 1937, and later in 1941 obligatory dubbing made the showing of original versions of foreign films illegal unless they were first dubbed in Spanish studios.

Franco's regime claimed they wanted to 'protect Spanish' but in reality it was a form of censorship in that they wanted to prevent the importation of 'foreign' ideas through movies.

However, the prohibition had the opposite effect and thousands of Hollywood films were imported, acting as an impulse to the dubbing industry in Spain, which today is one of the biggest in the world.

Dubbing as censorship had some amusing and ironic side effects. In the John Ford classic Mogambo the change of a lovers' relationship between an unmarried man and a married woman to a relationship between brother and sister, meant the censors appeared to prefer incest to adultery!

Nowadays, the dubbing industry is still strong but more people are watching VO. Perhaps new technologies like e-mail, and mobile phone texting are getting people used to reading short messages. Also, DVD and TDT makes it possible to see films in both dubbed and subtitled versions.

I would never watch an Almodóvar dubbed into English which in my opinion would be **tantamount** to a cultural crime! Would the comedy 'Ocho Apellidos Vascos' be as funny in English?

So why oh why do we watch all those dubbed Hollywood films and series?

A Spanish Affair

When Spanish film-makers exhibit their films in international festivals they need to create subtitles in English so that the audience understands. You can download these typically excellent subtitles and use them to study English vocabulary and expressions. Here is one ECP coach Rob has prepared with 'A Spanish Affair' (8 Apellidos Vascos)

"Let's chat about that!"

- would you be prepared to pay to watch subtitled films in the cinema?
- Do you regularly watch series and films at home in VO?
- Do you feel you are 'missing something' by watching dubbed films?
- What is the future for dubbing?

"iLook, iThink, iSpeak" Express yourself better!

SHREK Trivial dubbing facts

Michael Robinson the football commentator on Canal + did the voice of an Ugly Sister in Shrek 2 & 3. Robinson, a native English speaker dubbed the part in Spanish. In the original version it was played by US chat show host Larry King.

Antonio Banderas provides the Puss in Boots' voice in the English, Spanish and Latin-American versions, and even in Italian.

In the English version Puss occasionally breaks into Spanish. The effect is unfortunately lost in translation in the Spanish version.

In the Spanish dub, Shrek and Donkey were voiced by Juan Antonio Muñoz and José Mota, the members of the (now separated) popular Spanish comedy duo Cruz y Raya.

The original voice of Shrek is done by Canadian actor Mike Myers with a Scottish accent not dissimilar to his character 'Fat Bastard' in the Austin Power's movies.

Did you know that Antonio Banderas doesn't dub his own films?
When he makes a film in English his voice is normally dubbed into Spanish by renowned voice actor Salvador Aldeguer.
Why do you think he doesn't dub his own films?

FILM LINKS

- www.youtube.com
- Snag Films - free online films and series
- http://www.snagfilms.com/
- For iPads & Tablets. BBC iPlayer
- http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/install
- Some free content available.

The ECP VO(S) Challenge

Watching movies and TV series in the original version (usually English!) is culturally enriching and helps you to build your English vocabulary and improve your comprehension skills. Using subtitles can help you understand better.

Why not watch something and write a review and send it to your ECP coach?

You can download a useful document to help you organise your ideas and write about a film or an episode of a TV series here. Use it to make a note of new words and vocabulary, to describe what happens and to give your opinion.

ECP Film Club Are you interested in watching classic and contemporary films in English with fellow cine fans?

Email john@englishcoachingprojects.net for details.

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Student Socials

Join the Facebook group and start socialising in your favourite second language!