

Poorly Timed Campaigns: Versions, Dubbing, Subtitles

The Spanish film press has started a campaign against the dubbing of foreign language films into Spanish. This has reached such alarming proportions at times that after begging the Government of the Republic to intervene, there have even been calls for economic protection for the Spanish cinema and certain amounts suggested – some smaller, some larger, depending on the claimant – that our economy might be able to supply.

This campaign, like almost all that are undertaken by those in our cinematographic circles, seems to us poorly thought out and inopportune. Before starting such a campaign and taking it to these lengths, we might have considered its origins and causes. It's absurd and unacceptable to make so much of a falsely sentimental patriotism in order to cover up unachieved goals and personal failures.

In the face of good cinema, which is international, it's completely idiotic to adopt such narrow and myopic attitudes. But it's even more idiotic to try and fight the internationalism of good films by hiding behind a worn out romanticism that barely conceals unsatisfied personal ambitions.

Let's be more specific.

This campaign started a few months after Paramount stopped making Spanish-language versions of its films and then announced – officiously – that it would dub ten films for the next season.

The same actors who performed – we have to call what they did something – in the Spanish version films were the first to protest. Threatened with losing the chance at a new contract, they protested only because they thought that “dubbing” took less time than acting in a film and also paid less. This was damaging to their personal interests, and so with the same slavishness that earlier had led them to praise everything that came out of Paramount – directors, actors, films, studios, electricians, projects – they are now fighting against a technique being used by Paramount without even thinking about the pros and cons of it or what its use might mean.

The press campaign was born out of these rumors that were going around cinema and theater circles in Spain. It's strange to see how the same newspapers and journalists (*ABC, Liberal, Herald*) that for two years now have been cheering on those who thought up, directed, and acted in those absurd movies that tarnished our screens, are the same ones who have decided to make a fuss to cover up the fears caused by the unfulfilled expectations and excessive praise of what came before. This confirms for us our long held opinion that when it comes to the cinema, one need not scratch the surface much to uncover the real reasons behind all the controversies.

We are opposed to versions, opposed to dubbing, opposed to subtitles... Nevertheless, of all these plagues that have befallen the new cinema, we believe that versions are the most undesirable. Between a film that is completely translated, in both its audio and visual elements, and a film that only has its dialogue translated, we prefer the dialogue translation because this one retains more of the original elements of the film. It will always be worse to pretend that Imperio Argentina or Juan de Landa, for

example, can truly duplicate roles played by Clara Bow or Wallace Beery, than it would be to have mediocre actors match their Spanish voices to those of the American actors.

We would certainly prefer that there was less and better dialogue in films and that this little be translated by few and well written titles. But not all spectators think as we do. The public still likes to celebrate the “magic” of the cinema, still likes to feel the emotion of long, theatrical speeches, still cannot control its tears at the sighs and sad confessions of mothers and unhappy brides...

For this reason we cannot demand that the commercial studios eliminate versions or dubbing or reduce the number of superimposed titles. They would tell us that *their* public goes to enjoy *their* movies or to suffer along with *their* characters. They would add that no one else in the world thinks as we do, and this, for a producer, editor, or businessman, would weigh on their consciences.

Nevertheless, we can ask of all those who are yelling, a little more calm, attention, and thought on the subject. In earlier seasons they praised those who produced these versions that have brought us nothing but a wretched cinema – that is called Spanish – and the belief – foreign – that in Spain no one is interested in the cinema and that we don’t even know how to make these simple version films. This year they have changed tactics, given the failures of the press and of what before was excessively praised, and now they are fighting against a technique that might be unnatural and illogical, but is at least capable of making good films understandable to the masses. Next year, having ruled out dubbing, they’ll turn against subtitles. The following year, having wasted our time yelling and praising without thought or reason, we’ll have to close our cinemas for a shortage of foreign films and a total lack of national films. We spend so much time praising and fighting the others that we forget to acquire the necessary means of starting an even modest production of our own!

Juan Piqueras, Nuestro Cinema, number 1, June 1932, 7-9.