

ata

The Changing Scene
in World Languages

AMERICAN TRANSLATORS ASSOCIATION
SCHOLARLY MONOGRAPH *Series*

Volume IX 1997

OFFPRINT

JOHN BENJAMINS PUBLISHING COMPANY

This is an offprint from:

Marian B. Labrum (ed.)

The Changing Scene in World Languages

John Benjamins Publishing Company

Amsterdam/Philadelphia

1997

(Published as Vol. IX of the American Translators Association Scholarly
Monograph Series)

ISSN 0890-4111 / ISBN 90 272 3184 2 (Eur) / 1-55619-628-8 (USA)

© Copyright 1997 – John Benjamins Publishing Company

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, photoprint, microfilm or any
other means, without written permission from the publisher.

Spanish Film Translation: Ideology, Censorship and the Supremacy of the National Language

M^a DEL CAMINO GUTIÉRREZ LANZA

University of León, Spain

Introduction

The question of immediacy in the distribution of messages through the visual channel tends to arouse the deep concern of the authorities. To prevent the circulation of ideas that are contrary to the nation's interest, restrictive measures are taken through official channels. The purpose of this paper is to examine the importance of the ministerial guidelines that affected the free translation and distribution of films during Franco's dictatorship in Spain (1939-1975). The mandatory use of the native language (Spanish) under the pressure of politics and ideology not only had an effect on the particular film translation strategy of the period but also continues to determine the preference of the movie audience in Spanish for dubbing.

Film Translation and the Spanish Audience

The script is one of the main components that shapes film product, together with the non-verbal messages, which are transmitted mainly through the visual channel (iconic signals) or the auditive channel (music, noise, etc.). In the communicative process which is established between the sender and the receiver of a film, the message, the complete whole, is broadcast thanks to a number of these signals. Image is relevant because of its significant narrative potential and so is

dialogue, although, depending on the film, one could be placed in a more prominent position than the other. At the final stage of development, the film reveals itself as a finished product and one that is likely to be watched any number of times by an audience that cannot be chosen in advance.

In general terms film translation depends on a number of restrictions and circumstances imposed by the medium (cinema, television). This is what has come to be known as "constrained translation". When dealing with film translation we also have to take into account the more specific question of synchrony, as well as the technical constraints which the manipulation of films or fragments of films implies. Mayoral, Kelly and Gallardo (1988: 359) put forward the following types of synchrony that have to do with the translation of the original script:

Synchrony of time: agreement in time of different signals which communicate a unit of information,

spatial synchrony: the signals occupy neither more nor less space than that which corresponds to them,

content synchrony: the meanings transmitted by different signals contradict neither each other nor the whole message,

phonetic synchrony: synchrony of sound signals of spoken dialogue with the visible speech movements on the screen,

character synchrony: the harmony between the image of the character and his or her voice and words.

Cinema and television translation can be approached in at least two different ways: dubbing and subtitling. It is not our main interest here to discuss the advantages or disadvantages of either one, but only to point out the nature of the constraints that both set upon the translation of a film text. While subtitling is mainly conditioned by the synchrony of time and the spatial and content synchrony, dubbing also must take into account the phonetic and character synchrony. Dubbing is recognized as a much slower, more expensive and complicated technique when compared to subtitling. According to Minchinton (1987: 279) "dubbing is much more expensive and time-consuming than subtitling." However, many countries prefer dubbing the original text of the films they import, contradicting the tendency of some other countries where the majority of the population understands the original language. Nir (1984: 82) states that "the use of subtitles for translating imported films is widespread in countries with a relatively small population that do not understand the source language, such as Holland, Belgium and Scandinavia".

The audience in Spain is at present one of the least tolerant when it comes to watching subtitled films. Moreover, it is one of the most demanding as far as the

dubbing process (especially the phonetic synchrony) is concerned.¹ This is not only determined by such matters as the difficulty in understanding the original language or even the problems for some sectors of the target audience to follow the written text on the screen. In the words of Bengi (1991: 422), “non-film levels such as the (in)visible hand of patronage, film poetics and ideology in the target system do also have an enormous effect in the production of a translated film”. Lefevere also refers to patronage as the means to control the writing or, at least, the distribution of literature in particular. His view is also valid for our present discussion when he states that patronage “can be exerted by persons (...) and also by groups of persons, a religious body, a political party, a social class, a royal court, publishers, and, last but not least, the media, both newspapers and magazines and larger television corporations” (1992: 15).

Spanish Film Translation (1936-1975): Cultural Patronage

Silent films became a thing of the past in Spain in 1932. Shortly afterwards, with the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in Spain, film production was cut down to the release of simple documentaries, which at the time made it possible for some foreign directors -such as Hemingway, Malraux, Cartier and John Dos Passos- to secure themselves a place among the most extraordinary film producers. Around 1939, when the Civil War in Spain ended, the film industry of Spain acquired a new spirit. It was the Government that decided to introduce a number of preventive measures that were to become guidelines for the revision and censorship of all the films which were to be shown on the movie screens in Spain.

All these key issues will be more specifically dealt with in the following pages of this article. What should be established at the very outset is the great importance that the authorities of Spain attributed to the strong influence of film distribution on society. To illustrate the truth of this we consider it very relevant to reproduce an extract of the Orden published in the *Spanish Official Bulletin (Boletín Oficial del Estado: B.O.E.)*, on March 27, 1937:

En la labor de regeneración de costumbres que se realiza por el nuevo Estado no puede desatenderse la que afecta a los espectáculos públicos, que tanta influencia tienen en la vida y costumbres de los pueblos, y siendo uno de los de mayor divulgación e influencia, sobre todo en los momentos presentes, el cinematógrafo, exige la vigilancia precisa para que se desenvuelva dentro de las normas

patrióticas, de cultura y de moralidad que en el mismo deben de imperar, y a ello, sin dificultar el funcionamiento de estos Centros, armonizando todos los intereses que representa, tiende la presente Orden.

In 1940 we witness the appearance of the *Departamento Nacional de Cine* (National Film Department) and the *Sindicato Nacional del Espectáculo* (National Entertainment Shows Union). In 1945 the *Círculo de Escritores Cinematográficos, C.E.C.* (Circle of Film Writers) was established in Madrid. The *Instituto de Investigaciones y Experiencias Cinematográficas* (Institute for Film Experiment and Research), founded in 1947, would become the *Escuela Oficial de Cinematografía, E.O.C.* (Official Film School) in 1960. Added to that, the novelty of film festivals such as the ones held in San Sebastián and Valladolid attracted the interest of the foreign audience to the film industry of Spain. At the same time, it also introduced Spain to a long list of foreign titles, some of which won prizes at various of the above mentioned festivals.

From 1950 onwards the cinema came up against the ever-increasing competence of television. If we compare it with the rest of the mass media, television has the advantage of being able to combine images and sound with live coverage and reports. This is one of the reasons why the many ways in which information can be manipulated in the press and on the radio are largely overridden by the new possibilities offered by television. The quick transmission of the information reduces the viewers' own capacity for response, critical analysis and personal points of view. The second new power at the disposal of television broadcasting is the presence of the speaker. He is the only one with the privilege to send out the message, which constitutes the main difference between face-to-face conversation and the discourse that we receive through the media. In the second type of discourse there is no interaction between the speaker and the message recipient, therefore, the alternance that turns the speaker into the listener and vice versa is lost. On the other hand, this type of discourse draws a fine line between the producers and the interpreters of discourse, who play quite a passive role as mere consumers of messages. Another major difference between both types of discourse is that in face-to-face interaction, the speaker is aware of the fact that his language must be adapted to his interlocutors' needs and particular characteristics. In fact, he has to keep adjusting it according to the direction taken by dialogue and the intervention of the other participants. However, the discourse broadcasted by the media is always designed to satisfy the needs of a collective and uniform audience whose identity is on many occasions totally unknown.

Because the speaker (either the original author of the text or the translator) cannot produce his texts without a particular recipient in mind, he may very often resort to what Norman Fairclough (1991: 49) has called the "ideal subject". On receiving the message, the huge mass of recipients must take the place of this ideal subject that the speaker had in mind when he was producing the text itself. This kind of relationship thus established between the producer of the message and the recipient is unusual: "we can say that producers exercise power over consumers in that they have sole producing rights and can therefore determine what is included and excluded, how events are represented and (...) even the subject positions of their audiences" (Fairclough, 1991: 50). The value of one single text transmitted in such a way would be merely symbolic. Nevertheless, if the same strategies are used once and again, then the cumulative effect will exert a noticeable persuasive influence on the audience.

Everything that has been said so far makes us wonder whether this clandestine exercise of power reveals a wish to manipulate the audience's expectations. Generally speaking, power and ideologies try to use information in such a way that it brings pressure on people's opinion and response. Likewise, we cannot forget that mass audiences grow larger and larger by the minute and their potential influence cannot be ignored by the authorities. Generalizations are neither very appropriate nor very faithful to the truth, but experience and daily observation may sometimes reveal that most mass media are far from reaching that degree of neutrality which many claim to be so proud of. To illustrate the truth of this, one only must mention some newspaper headlines that were published in León on February 3rd and 4th, and on May 3rd, 1995 by the local newspaper *La Crónica 16 de León*:

- (1) *La televisión es el mejor medio para mentir sin ser cazado.*
'Television is the best medium for getting away with lies'.
- (2) *El estado de la nación: España en crisis. El control de la información.*
'The state of the nation: Spain in crisis. Information control'.
- (3) *Prensa en libertad, utopía lejana.*
'Free press, distant utopia'.

Power, whatever its nature, always tends to control and put great pressure on people's freedom of speech. It is not necessary for a country to be drenched in a dictatorship to witness examples like the ones I have quoted above. Under a dictatorial regime these strategies are used to neutralize potentially opposing reactions and to preserve the dominance-dependance relationship guarded by the

authorities. With regard to the matter under discussion, Sinova (1989: 15) states that one of the first measures that were taken by the rebel army in Spain in 1936 was the control of the mass media within the area they were dominating. In other words, according to Jacquard (1988), those whose job it is to bring other people to their point of view can make use of the mass media to spread their own opinions and try to persuade others to accept them. In this respect, deliberate and repeated attempts to take control of the latent influence of the mass media will never cease and will be aimed at the distribution of the regime's ideology. The group in power will analyze the facts from a totalitarian ideologic perspective and will disseminate the guided interpretation of the facts through the appropriate channels.

During Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975), the authorities that were responsible for artistic and cultural patronage (mainly governmental, military or religious organizations) would hide the foreign nature of imported films and suppress anything that could risk the security of the group in power. Therefore, dubbing is one indication that translation was not really a target-audience oriented activity, but one that would meet the needs of the people in favor of the maintenance of a particular *status quo*. At the same time, the dubbing of films meant the defiance of the supremacy of the national language and "its unchallenged political, economic and cultural power within the nation's boundaries" (Danan, 1991: 612).

Ministerial Guidelines on Spanish Film Censorship: A Brief Review

The purpose of our study has prompted us to read some ninety ministerial guidelines (órdenes) about censorship which were published in the B.O.E. between 1936 and 1975. A brief look at these official statements is enough to realize that the authorities were well aware of the influence that shows and public performances could exert on the audience. An example of the prescriptive censorship that was placed upon the translation of film scripts can be seen in the statement issued by the *Ministerio de Industria y Comercio* (Ministry of Industry and Commerce) (23/4/39):

Queda prohibida la proyección cinematográfica en otro idioma que no sea el español, salvo autorización que concederá el Ministerio de Industria y Comercio y siempre que las películas en

*cuestión hayan sido previamente dobladas. El doblaje deberá realizarse en estudios españoles que radiquen en el territorio nacional y por personal español.*³

The most significant fact of most of these statements is that they deal with issues which deal with the regulation of popular culture and public spectacles. The *Ministerio de Información y Turismo* (Ministry of Information and Tourism) turns out to be the main official body to promulgate all sorts of guidelines. It is very interesting to confirm that many introductions to the printed *Órdenes* stress the prevailing need for a strict control over the films which were shown at the cinema. This is the direct consequence of the evil effects that film release can produce on society. We would like to make this point graphically by reproducing a few paragraphs taken from these introductions:

1. *Orden* by the *Ministerio del Interior* (Ministry of the Interior) (2/11/38), published in the *B.O.E.* (5/11/38):

Siendo innegable la gran influencia que el cinematógrafo tiene en la difusión del pensamiento y en la educación de las masas, es indispensable que el Estado lo vigile en todos los órdenes en que haya riesgo de que se desvíe de su misión.

2. *Orden* by the *Ministerio de la Gobernación* (Ministry of Government) (24/8/39), published in the *B.O.E.* (2/9/39):

La extraordinaria difusión alcanzada por el cinematógrafo y su decisiva influencia en las costumbres, ideas y formación moral de la infancia, exigen, por parte del Estado, una acción tutelar que preserve a los niños de los estragos que en ella puede producir la exhibición de películas que, por diversas circunstancias, no resulten adecuadas para proyectarse entre la gran masa de espectadores que constituyen el público infantil.

3. *Orden* by the *Ministerio de Información y Turismo* (Ministry of Information and Tourism) (19/2/75), published in the *B.O.E.* (1/3/75):

La cinematografía, como medio de expresión cultural al servicio de la persona humana, debe gozar de la libertad inherente a toda creación artística, libertad que tiene por límite natural el respeto a los valores sociales compartidos y a cuya defensa el Estado viene

obligado por razones de bien común; ya que la cinematografía es asimismo un medio de comunicación de gran audiencia, dirigido, en consecuencia, a los sectores más diversos.

Por otra parte, el cine es en muchos casos testimonio vivo de la realidad, de donde se deriva un análisis crítico que no debe coartarse, pero que tampoco debe ir más allá de las justas limitaciones que impone el respeto a la intimidad y la dignidad de la persona humana y a los principios constitucionales del Estado.

The overall mood of this last *Orden* is somehow different. It abolishes the norms on censorship promulgated by the *Orden* on February 9th, 1963 to adapt them to modern 1975 Spain. The main and shared objective of the governmental provisions will be the creation of a number of official institutions which should be able to unify the criteria applied to film censorship. Therefore, the real target is the search for the maximum efficiency of the censorial apparatus. With this purpose in mind, on May 8th, 1937 the *B.O.E.* publishes the standards that were to be applied by the *Juntas de Censura Cinematográfica* (Film Censorship Boards), operating in Sevilla and La Coruña. The authorities are also prompted to ensure the proper fulfillment of such demands. On May 30th it is confirmed that the above-mentioned *Juntas* will be in charge of censorship but on June 3rd the *Delegación del Estado para Prensa y Propaganda* (Governmental Delegation for Press and Propaganda) will be appointed as the new body responsible for film censorship "con el fin de lograr la mayor eficiencia" ("in order to achieve maximum efficiency").

Likewise, on October 25th, 1937 the *Secretaría General de Su Excelencia El Jefe del Estado* (General Office of His Excellency The Head of State) announces that "la Delegación del Estado para Prensa y Propaganda dictará las disposiciones pertinentes para una mayor eficiencia y unidad en las normas de admisión, censura y distribución de películas" ("the State Delegation for Press and Propaganda will dictate the relevant guidelines for greater efficiency and union in the norms of admission, censorship and distribution of films"). The same *Secretaría General* would also publish on December 12th, 1937 the *Orden Circular*, which would create the *Junta Superior de Censura* (Principal Censorship Board). Apart from the enumeration of the members of the *Junta*, the *Orden* also demands that

todas las películas de argumento importadas, para su proyección en el territorio nacional, así como las producidas en el mismo, deberán ser sometidas al Gabinete de Censura de Sevilla. Las que tengan un carácter de propaganda social, política o religiosa, así como los Noticiarios, serán censuradas por la Junta Superior de Salamanca. Asimismo serán sometidas a ésta los guiones, argumentos, etc., y aquellas películas que se produzcan en el territorio liberado.

A few months later, on November 5th, 1938, we find in the *B.O.E.* the eighteen articles that describe the internal mechanism of the *Comisión de Censura Cinematográfica* (Commission for Film Censorship). In this way, these ministerial guidelines which were aiming at the unification of the censorial criteria would constantly follow one another. During the Civil War in Spain especially and in the first few years of Franco's dictatorship, we notice a special interest on the part of the Government to exert absolute control over every cultural manifestation. This interest becomes obvious after so many repeated attempts to state clearly the steps to be followed.

Another set of ministerial guidelines dealing with certain aspects of censorship are not about the application of the norms, but about the need for the young sectors of society to be protected against the danger of some of the opinions that can be present in films. Such opinions, it was held, could be very harmful to the shaping of these young minds, the future supporters of the regime (*B.O.E.* September 2th and 6th and December 16th, 1939).

Conclusion

Surely there is a lesson to be learned from this brief review of the many ministerial guidelines that ultimately set conditions on the translator's performance. The fact that "translations are sometimes even required to exercise cultural criticism by their country's censorship" (Newmark, 1991: 170) is now understandable. The translator must almost set aside his own ability to translate, because translation no longer depends on his knowledge of the language or on his understanding of the cultural references. According to Field (1989: 151-152) both factors are significant in the translation of a text. The task of the translator is then oriented towards the standardization of the originals, following a restrictive and normative model which does not allow different renderings of the same source text.

The translator should adapt himself to the "system of popular conventions of 'what is known' and 'what is acceptable'" which Robyns (1989: 58 & 1990: 39) calls "doxa". According to Danan (1991: 611), in Spain "Franco also ruled against any non-dubbed version; then, he clearly favored dubbed versions" in an attempt to keep the supremacy of the national language as the expression of cultural, political and economic power. Therefore, it should not be surprising that movie audiences in Spain have become accustomed to the film-dubbing technique over the years. Bearing in mind that audiences are becoming larger and the general public does not tend to make an effort to read the subtitled text on the screen, it is not going to be easy to eradicate this a long-standing tradition in Spain.

NOTES

1. In relation to what is generally referred to as "synch" ("what he writes will look as if it were said"), an interesting comment on the different degrees of audience tolerance in several countries can be found in Rowe, 1960.

2. The Spanish Real Academia also "vio con profunda simpatía la campaña para el restablecimiento del uso público del idioma nacional, así como la defensa del señorío de la Lengua española, menoscabada por el empleo de rótulos en idioma extranjero" (*La Vanguardia Española*, 7/11/39). See Piastra, 1989: 345.

REFERENCES

- Bengi, Isin & Öner, Isik. 1991. "A case in film translations: Dub-translations of Indian films in Turkish for the Turkish audience at home (Turkey) and abroad (Germany)". In M. Jovanovic (ed), *XII FIT Congress. Translation, a Creative Profession*. Belgrado: Prevodilac, 422-428.
- Danan, Martine. 1991. "Dubbing as an expression of nationalism". *Meta* 36, 4: 606-614.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1991. *Language and Power*. Singapore: Longman.
- Field, Penelope. 1989. "The cultural background of the translator". In J.C. Santoyo & al. (eds), *Fidus Interpres. Actas de las Primeras Jornadas Nacionales de Historia de la Traducción* (vol. II). León: Universidad de León, 148-153.
- Jacquard, Roland. 1988. *La desinformación: una manipulación del poder*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe. [Tr. into Spanish by María Fraguas].
- Lefevere, André. 1992. *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. London: Routledge.
- Mayoral, Roberto; Kelly, Dorothy & Gallardo, Natividad. 1988. "Concept of constrained translation. Non-linguistic perspectives of translation". *Meta* 33, 3: 356-367.
- Minchinton, John. 1987. "Fitting titles". *Sight and Sound* 56: 279-282.

- Newmark, Peter. 1991. "Translation as an Instrument of Linguistic, Cultural and Literary Criticism". In P. Newmark, *About Translation*. Clevedon: Longdunn Press Ltd., 162-174.
- Nir, Raphael. 1984. "Linguistic and sociolinguistic problems in the translation of imported TV films in Israel". *The International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 48: 81-97.
- Piastra, Liliana. 1989. "La traducción cinematográfica". In J.C. Santoyo & al. (eds), *Fidus Interpres. Actas de las Primeras Jornadas Nacionales de Historia de la Traducción* (vol. II). León: Universidad de León, 344-352.
- Robyns, Clem. 1989. "Translation and Discursive Identity". In C. Robyns (ed). 1994, *Translation and the (Re)production of Culture. Selected Papers of the CERA Research Seminars in Translation Studies. 1989-1991*. Leuven: The CERA Chair for Translation, Communication and Cultures, 57-81.
- Robyns, Clem. 1990. "The Normative Model of Twentieth Century Belles Infidèles. Detective Novels in French Translation". *Target* 2, 1: 23-42.
- Rowe, Th.L. 1960. "The English Dubbing Text". *Babel* 6, 3: 116-120.
- Sinova, Justino. 1989. *La censura de prensa durante el franquismo (1936-1951)*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe.

Newspapers and Periodicals

- Boletín Oficial del Estado. 1936-1975.
- La Crónica 16 de León. 3/2/95, 4/2/95, 3/5/95.