

Past and future needs for multimedia translation in catalan

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In this article we will briefly review the presence of Catalan in the area of dubbing from its beginnings, which were cut short by the Franco regime's prohibition of the use of Catalan, and we will indicate the dates on which decisions were made that could have improved the sought-after linguistic and political standardisation goals. We will then continue with an argued proposal that the translation of audiovisual productions into Catalan should also be present in areas where, at the moment, it has had difficulty finding its place, as in the case of video games. We will conclude with a reflection on the right of Catalan speakers to access video-on-demand (VoD) platforms in this language. These considerations, despite their focus on Catalan, may be extended to other languages in a similar socio-political situation.

Dubbing in Catalan. Important dates and areas of implementation

Dubbing in Catalan began almost at the same time as dubbing itself. The advent of sound cinema obliged Hollywood to find strategies to bring their productions to multilingual Europe. The technological limitations at the time did not make this an easy task. From the very outset, they opted for the translation of subtitles and dubbing. Subtitling meant overcoming many technical difficulties and it was not the most ideal solution either, considering that a large part of the population was illiterate. In 1930, Edwin Hopkins invented dubbing. The musical *Rio Rita* (1929), by Luther Reed, was the first film dubbed in Spanish, in a language model that at that time was known as "neutral Spanish", with the aim of reaching all Spanish-speaking countries. The premiere of the dubbed film was scheduled for April 1930, in the Tivoli cinema in Barcelona, but was eventually screened with subtitles due to problems with the sound equipment (Montero, 2017). A few years later, in 1933, dubbing into Catalan began with the film *Bric-à-brac et compagnie*, which was translated as *Draps i ferro vell* (Rags and Old Iron). This production can still be found on the Internet. The quality of the dubbing is very decent and the linguistic choice very successful. However, it would be many years before we would see films dubbed into Catalan again. *The Elephant Man*, by David Lynch, was the first film to be broadcast in Catalan in the cinemas of Catalonia after the dictatorship. Immediately afterwards, on 16 July 1981, El País newspaper said:

After the success of *The Elephant Man* in its Catalan version, which attracted three times more people than the Spanish version, both versions shown simultaneously in two cinemas in the city, the Department of Culture of the Generalitat is now preparing another dubbing of this kind for commercial films.

The initial project of the cinema services of the Department of Culture was to promote, once every three months, the dubbing of a film of great commercial appeal in Catalan, until such time that the distributors themselves assume this task, considering the positive commercial results obtained.

In any case, one swallow does not make a summer. After the success that was predicted with this dubbing, the situation today is very different.

In 1983, TV3 started operating. *Alba Zulú* was the first film the channel broadcasted dubbed into Catalan. The database of the language portal of Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals (Catalan Audiovisual Corporation) (<http://esadir.cat/>)

filmoteca) currently contains 12,765 films that have been dubbed into Catalan and broadcast by Televisió de Catalunya or shown in cinemas.

Two of the most relevant titles that reflect the type of media that Televisió de Catalunya wanted to become are *Dallas*, which they began broadcasting in 1983, and *Bola de drac* (Dragon Ball) which became an emblematic series for children and young people after it was first broadcast in 1990. In the 1980s, the central Catalan dialect was decided on to the detriment of other dialects. At the same time, it was decided to use the lowest registers. One example is the famous phrase "Sue Ellen, ets un pendó." (https://www.ara.cat/media/Sue-Ellen-pendo-frase-JR_0_816518487.html), (which translates into English as "Sue Ellen, you're a libertine", a lighter term than that actually used: 'slut'), heard in an episode of *Dallas* and which continues to appear in the press as a paradigm of the linguistic choice of TV3. If *Dallas* represented an effort to bring Catalan television to all audiences, with *Bola de drac* the young people's and children's channel became the reference channel for Catalan youth. Other series that became legendary for a specific age group were also dubbed. Behind this was the desire to build loyalty for productions in Catalan among a young age group in the hope that they would choose audiovisual productions in Catalan throughout their lives. Later on, we will return to the idea of building loyalty among this young audience and discuss some of the reasons why it has not been possible to get them to associate Catalan with audiovisual productions.

Another important date is 5 April 1989, when the Federación de Organismos de Radio y Televisión Autonómicos (FORTA) (Federation of Autonomous Radio and Television Organisations) was created. This represented a step forward for Televisió de Catalunya in terms of being able to compete economically in the purchase of audiovisual productions.

In 2005, the Servei Català del Doblatge (Catalan Dubbing Service) was created. According to the Corporació de Ràdio i Televisió Catalana (Catalan Radio and Television Corporation), this service was aimed at bringing dubbing, through DVD, to the small screen. However, the technology became obsolete and so the service lasted only a few years:

The service will allow the Catalan version to be seen in the second stage of the commercial exploitation of films, on DVD, before reaching the small screen, and a situation of normality is created in a market that is becoming increasingly important (<https://www.ccma.cat/tv3/La-CCRTV-posa-en-marxa-el-Servei-Catala-del-Doblatge/noticia-arxiu/188058347/>)

Since the appearance of Televisió de Catalunya and the resumption of dubbing in Catalan, many of the dreams about Catalan usage in the media have been dashed.

During these years we hoped to achieve a common space for communication in Catalan, where the language would become strong and would be shared by speakers of the different dialects. However, we still have fragmentation of Catalan-language television channels, as the programming does not extend beyond the autonomous community itself. We committed to dubbing when offering third-party programming, but not subtitling, and now we find ourselves with new audiences, with young people who have a better knowledge of foreign languages and have different tastes, influenced probably by their activities on the Internet (they play video games and follow and become YouTubers and influencers, etc.). These new profiles of autonomous viewers have different language and content needs, as well as access to a virtual world full of opportunities that satisfy their audiovisual desires.

We believed that the language model needs to include a common standard language and, at the same time, create credibility, so that audiences could watch Catalan language programmes fluently. Again, the reality is different. Viewers prefer programmes created originally in Catalan because they feel that more familiar expressions are used, which have not always been sanctioned by the Catalan Language Academy. In any case, the dubbing language model has also been incorporating new registers as they are sanctioned by the Institute of Catalan Studies.

It was decided to focus on programmes to attract audiences through third-party productions. We have already mentioned *Bola de drac*, but other youth programmes were also very successful, such as *Shin Chan*. Now we have to rely on self-produced series such as *Merlí* and *Les noies de l'hoquei*, with many viewers in Catalonia, to be able to find Catalan on video-on-demand platforms such as Netflix.

There have been some unexpected changes in people's tastes, but the audiovisual market has also evolved in a way that has left the administrations largely on the sidelines. We do not have a homogeneous group of young people in terms of the use of Catalan, since this group now masters more languages than ever before. There have been increasing efforts to teach them English. In addition, they live in families that use other languages apart from Catalan and Spanish since, at the beginning of the 21st CENTURY, Catalonia received new groups of immigrants with knowledge of very different languages. It should be noted that the consumption of

entertainment has displaced conventional channels, and young people in particular are looking for new formats such as *YouTubers* and video games.

Lange (2012) already pointed out that the challenge for broadcasters would be in being able to broadcast, simultaneously and coherently, to all three screens (TV, computer and mobile) and to promote, in parallel, classic programmes and catalogues that would allow video on demand. This paradigm shift has indeed taken place since, according to Caballero and Jariod (2017), from 2010 to 2015 video on demand grew by 172% in Europe. Since December 2014, Televisió de Catalunya has been offering the *3alacarta* service, "which allows users to watch many of Televisió de Catalunya's programmes on the Internet, at any time, and with the best image quality, as well as its own live productions on its channels, through broadband connections" (<https://www.ccma.cat/324/3alacarta-el-nou-servei-que-permet-veure-des-dinternet-els-videos-de-tvc/noticia/81415/>). Note, however, that virtually all its programmes are self-produced, so dubbing is beyond this offer.

At the same time, the presence of fiction on the channels offering Catalan is very limited. According to Besalú (2017), in 2015 fiction had a presence of 23.5% on TV3 and 25.1% on 8TV. These figures leave very little margin for dubbing, and even less still considering the increasing number of own productions, as we will see below. This is all at a time when the consumption of audiovisual content has been transformed and we have gone from "what are they doing now" to "what do I want to see now" (Domènech 2017).

If we contrast this data with the origin of the productions, according to Besalú (2017, 153):

the productions broadcast by Catalan television channels and their weight in the programming in 2015 (...), TV3 was the channel in which exclusively Catalan productions had the greatest presence (81.5%), followed by Canal 33, Esport 3, 8tv and, lastly, Super3, according to data from the CAC (...). The Super3 channel was, in fact, the one with the most airtime devoted to US and other countries' programmes, especially Japan, due to its intensive offer of children's animation. 8TV, in turn, was the channel that devoted the largest proportion of time to programmes made in the rest of Spain (13.2%), while Catalan programmes accounted for less than half of the broadcasting time.

At the same time, productions that could be dubbed have decreased drastically. If we take into account that third-party productions are not offered as part of

Televisió de Catalunya's on-demand service, dubbing is carried out and cannot be reused unless the same product is rebroadcast by Televisió de Catalunya or some other channel.

For a more complete view, we would like to contrast this decline in dubbing on conventional television with dubbing on the internet:

Figure 1. Vidal Villoria (2017)

Use of Internet services during the last month in Catalonia (2016)

	Total population	14 to 19 years	20 to 24 years	25 to 34 years	35 to 44 years	45 to 54 years	55 to 64 years	65 years and above
Instant messaging	95.1	97.0	97.5	97.5	96.9	94.3	93.0	89.7
Information search	88.8	93.3	92.2	93.2	91.1	88.1	84.0	80.5
Email	79.3	83.6	89.1	85.1	82.4	78.5	72.4	66.8
Video viewing	72.7	87.2	87.9	83.0	77.2	68.8	59.2	54.5
Social networks	61.9	81.0	82.5	74.8	65.5	55.4	47.1	42.2
Mobile apps	61.5	72.3	74.4	68.0	64.6	58.6	53.2	47.8
Reading current news	55.4	53.0	59.8	59.6	57.8	56.1	50.5	49.0
Listening to music	38.0	56.5	58.3	52.4	40.1	30.7	23.3	20.9
Banking transactions	32.5	19.6	29.6	36.4	37.6	35.5	30.5	25.3
Film/series viewing	32.4	45.1	50.1	42.1	35.0	26.7	19.6	20.3

Source: own elaboration based on data from EGM Baròmetre Catalunya (2016).
Note: the survey base is users who have used the Internet during the previous month

This figure confirms that viewers of all ages choose "what to watch", although there are twice as many viewers aged between 14 and 19 years of age than those over 65 who watch series and films. It is worth noting that the 14-19 age group makes greater use of this possibility, 13% above the average.

The first video-on-demand platform in Spain was Netflix, on 20 October 2015. HBO arrived in November 2016, a service capable of competing with Netflix, unlike FORTA's public television channels.

Currently, only La Xarxa, formed by 29 local television channels and 135 local radio stations, has started to broadcast on Movistar's channel 150 and, since May 2017, Betevé has also had a Movistar Plus channel.

If the objective is for the Catalan language to have a stable place in the non-digital audiovisual world, there is a complicated road ahead. It is becoming increasingly difficult to guarantee its presence in the new access environments and with audiences that have a freedom of action like never before. It is evident that minority languages, without the cushion of a state, clearly need to receive sufficient subsidies. But where should these subsidies go? Let us not forget that resources are limited. How can we predict which allocations will provide the maximum benefits in terms of audiences?

Figures for change

As we have seen, we are in a new environment that conditions access to audiovisual products and in which new administrative measures are needed to promote the use of Catalan. Production and distribution companies are still reluctant to dub in Catalan, despite the regulations that should make this obligatory (Law 1/1998, of 7 January, on Linguistic Policy; Law 7/1983, of 18 April, on Linguistic Normalisation; Law 20/2010, of 7 July, on Catalan Cinema). However, televisions are no longer the only screen for accessing the audiovisual world and increasingly more viewers are looking for different language options apart from dubbing, to access programmes.

The administrations have been modifying the subsidies allocated for dubbing in Catalan, as we can see in Figure 2 below. According to the 2017 Language Policy Report (<https://llengua.gencat.cat/web/.content/documents/informepl/arxius/IPL-2017.pdf>) subsidies for dubbing were allocated as follows:

- **TVC dubbed 958 hours of programming into Catalan:**
 - 479 hours of animation
 - 479 hours of film
 - 157 hours of series
 - 115 hours of documentaries

Figure 2. Language Policy Report (2017)

- **TVC transferred 1,306,36 dubbed hours to other television service providers:**
 - 686.03 hours to Filmin
 - 305.50 hours to B3
 - 114.09 hours to Selecta Vision
 - 109.05 hours to TD8
 - 51.36 hours to MPS
 - 28.35 hours to Betevé
 - 6.12 hours to Reel One
 - 3.32 hours to Era Cinematográfica
 - 2.14 hours to Adremalynmedia

If we analyse these data, we see that animation is the heading that received the most money; i.e. the funds were mainly allocated to young viewers, probably with the former hope that they would become loyal viewers of productions in Catalan, although we have seen that it is young people who consume the most video on demand.

Another consideration that should be highlighted in Figure 2 is the fact that the dubbed hours, which were part of Televisió de Catalunya's programming, are being rerun and subsequently transferred to be broadcasted on other channels.

It is worth noting the more than 600 hours that were transferred to Filmin (<https://www.filmin.cat>), a platform that describes itself as "the only catalogue of films and series in Catalan." Indeed, according to the 2017 Language Policy Report, Filmin began broadcasting in June of that year with more than 1,000 films and 200 episodes of series that audiences could watch in the original version with Catalan subtitles and/or dubbed in Catalan. To place these figures in a broader context, according to Caballero and Jarrod (2017), the Filmin platform offered only 5.20% of Catalan titles in 2017; that is, 364 of the 6,999 in its catalogue, and Yomvi (Movistar) renewed the agreement with the Department of Culture on 29 May 2014, with the anticipation of offering a total of 610 titles with subtitles in Catalan, including films and seasons of series, in exchange for an annual subsidy of 85,000 euros (VilaWeb.cat, 11-7-2016) by the end of 2017.

To place the scope of the budget heading for dubbing in relation to other areas of culture, the following table from the 2017 Linguistic Policy Report can help us:

Figure 3. 2017 Language Policy Report

Calls	
Subsidies for dubbing and subtitling in Catalan of feature films premiering in cinemas	2,091,155.09 €
Subsidies for dubbing and subtitling in Catalan of feature films running in cinemas following their premiere, and for subtitling series in Catalan	1,000,000.00 €
Subsidies for incorporating the Catalan language into technology products	100,000.00 €
Subsidies for projects by non-profit private entities for promoting the Catalan language in Catalonia	375,000.00 €
Subsidies for translating literary and non-literary works into Catalan	300,000.00 €
Subsidies for promoting the knowledge and use of Occitan, Aranese in the Val d'Aran	55,000.00 €

Several observations can be made from this table.

If we compare the figures for dubbing and subtitling with the figures for translation into Catalan of literary and non-literary works, in 2017 the Directorate-General for Language Policy (DGPL) allocated ten times more budget to dubbing and subtitling than to the translation of literary and non-literary works.

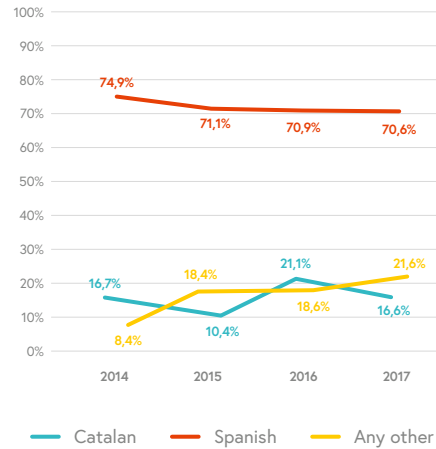
Moreover, it appears that owing to the autonomy of the aforementioned viewers, and because of which subtitling has an increasing rate of implementation, even in the area of calls for subsidies and grants for the promotion of knowledge and use of the Catalan language, dubbing and subtitling are no longer treated separately. In 2017, the Directorate-General for Language Policy, according to the 2017 Language Policy Report, supported the dubbing of 115 feature films and the subtitling of 505 episodes from 71 seasons of series and 542 short films. Specifically, Movistar Plus received subsidies for 256 films and 434 episodes from 60 seasons of fiction series – 16 more than in 2016.

Another initiative that came to 76 cinemas in 2019, thanks to the agreement with exhibitors, is "Documentary of the Month". In 2017, 9 documentaries were subtitled and shown in 50 cinemas in Catalonia – 7 more than in 2016 – and were seen by 24,319 viewers in VOSC. These screenings are free of charge and, as the data reflects, this proposal is very well received.

Overall, viewing of audiovisual productions is very low:

Figure 4. 2017 Linguistic Language Policy Report

Language or languages of the last film you have watched on the internet, 2014-2017



Despite the subsidies, we continue to have very low numbers of viewers, since in the three-year period 2014-2017, in Catalonia, between 4.5 times and 3.3 times more audiovisual products were viewed in Spanish than in Catalan. With regard to films or series viewed on the Internet in 2017, according to the 2017 Linguistic Policy Report, 16.6% were in Catalan, 70.6% in Spanish and 21.6% in other languages. As the same report points out, "the consumption of content in Catalan and other languages is higher on the Internet than in the cinema: 5 percentage points in the case of Catalan and 10 in the case of other languages."

In this low-percentage set, according to Caballero and Jarrod (2017) the private project of Cinemes Texas, promoted by filmmaker Ventura Pons, has led to a large increase in viewers, although on the whole it is no more than a testimonial. Ventura Pons signed an agreement in 2015 with the Department of Culture of the Generalitat to subtitle 84 feature films a year. According to these same authors,

this initiative resulted in a 400% increase in viewers with respect to 2015, and 735% with respect to 2013.

According to data from the Statistical Institute of Catalonia (<https://www.idescat.cat/pub/aec/778>), in the table below we can observe the evolution of the number of viewers in Catalan at the cinema. We see a sharp decline in the absolute number of viewers and a clear inversion between the number of viewers who saw original films in Catalan or dubbed into Catalan in 2012 and the number of viewers of versions subtitled in Catalan in 2016:

Figure 5. Catalan-language films (2012-2016), audiences and box office takings by type of version

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Viewers	847,495	488,666	461,576	587,934	572,802
Original versions in Catalan	205,538	107,139	77,432	126,604	51,425
Dubbed in Catalan	635,855	370,992	360,021	443,721	388,034
Subtitled in Catalan	6,102	10,535	24,123	17,609	133,343

Despite the fact that we have a public that sees very little cinema in Catalan, according to Ferré (2017), and based on the omnibus survey of the CEO (Centre for Opinion Studies) in 2015, 22% of people expressed a preference for watching films in Catalan, whereas in the 2015-2016 biennium, cinema consumption in Catalan was only 5.2%. There is, therefore, a serious discrepancy between what the public wants to do and what they can do.

Young people, the future users of translation to Catalan?

We have previously said that young people are the age group to which the most hours of dubbing subsidies were dedicated. They are also the ones who consume the most video on demand and who have different preferences when it comes to using the Internet, since they play online and follow, for example, YouTubers and influencers.

According to Navarro et al. (2012), these were some of the trends they found in the focus group of young people from the interviews they conducted:

1. Among the under thirteen-year olds who participated in the focus group, the most consumed traditional media is television and they watch it in their leisure time. They watch cartoons, although they also like sports programming, such as thematic football channels. It is important to highlight the practice of zapping.
2. Regarding the consumption of video games, apparently there is some parental viewing control at home. Their parents/guardians ration their viewing in leisure time and after other extracurricular activities. Older children play more online games, with a preference for action and sports games, and younger children use a wider range of game consoles.
3. They listen to music online with Spotify, make online purchases, and some have game consoles. Finally, they have online and offline games and play complementary games when connected to a social network.

From 1) we see that television viewing is maintained among the youngest children, but who have a habit of zapping, which is probably shared with all groups. This data explains why Canal Club Super 3 (Ferré 2017) audiences have dropped, facing competition from Boing, Clan and the Disney Channel. This is further exacerbated by the fact that Channel 3XL, targeted at young people aged between 16 and 25, ceased broadcasting in 2012.

2) and 3) show us that young people are among the groups that play the most video games both online and offline. The data shown below reaffirms the fact that, although this is a growing sector worldwide, as well as in Catalonia, the efforts necessary to reinforce the use of Catalan are not being made. According to Contreras and Ribes (2017):

ICEC (Catalan Institute of Cultural Industries) data for 2015 show that 21.8% of the total Catalan population are players, of which 73.37% are men and 26.63% are women (...) By age, 30.63% of players are aged 14 to 19; followed by 22.50% of users aged 20 to 24. In third place are fans aged 25 to 34, who represent 20.33%, followed by players aged 35 to 44, with 12.88%. Further behind, with 7.91% and 3.62%, are older players aged 45 to 54 and 55 to 64, respectively. Users aged 65 and over are in last place, with 2.06%. This 21.8% of players make up a market that is sufficiently large as to motivate producers to create video games in Catalan.

If we want to know the possibilities of Catalan players to play games in Catalan, we see that there is a large gap, as was also the case in relation to access to movies and series.

You can consult the number of video games in Catalan on various platforms at <https://www.gaming.cat/webs-en-catala-sobre-videojocs/videojocs-en-catala/>. The presence of Catalan is purely residual, as there are 12 games for consoles and the rest up to 35 are for computer.

To situate the implantation of companies of this sector in Catalonia, we can say that the volume of business in video games has been increasing. According to Contreras and Ribes (2017), the increase in turnover of companies in this sector went from 70 million euros to 217 million euros between 2013 and 2016 and the number of workers has practically doubled in the same period (up from 983 workers in 1687).

However, this sector receives very few subsidies for translating into Catalan. For example, in 2017 the Directorate-General for Language Policy supported two video games in Catalan (*Stay* by Appnormals Team SL and *Etherborn* by Altered Matter Games SL). In other words, according to Contreras and Ribes (2017), "according to the report "Situation of video games and computer games in Catalan on the market", prepared by the Plataforma per la Llengua (Pro-Language Platform) (2015), the penetration of games in Catalan was 9%, far behind English (with a rate of 100%) and Spanish (with a penetration of 93%)." In an academic environment with "12 university centres in Catalonia and 3 in Valencia, where courses related to video game creation are taught, the Catalan language is only present in undergraduate studies, but not in postgraduate studies. This causes a lack of specific lexicon that is often transformed into low subsequent usage" (Contreras and Ribes, 2017).

Conclusions for the future

Since the introduction of video on demand, there has been an upward trend in viewers' choosing subtitles, mainly because the knowledge of English as the dominant language has increased, but also because the linguistic profile of speakers in Catalonia has changed and they can now access programming in the language they have learned at home, beyond Catalan and Spanish.

On video-on-demand platforms, Catalan does not naturally coexist. Companies do not dub or subtitle in Catalan (nor do distributors in Spain, despite the regulations that oblige them to do so). In this context, Catalan is merely residual and can be accessed if own productions made in Catalan are included on these platforms, or because some, such as Filmin, receive institutional support for subtitling in Catalan.

There had been some hope of building loyalty among young people in Catalan through children's television programming, but these young people not only have different profiles and tastes, as we have seen, but one of their preferred leisure activities is playing video games, and there are practically no games in Catalan. If we are truly convinced that upcoming generations will use Catalan in all areas, it will be necessary to create new policies for the translation of video games.

We must not forget that we Catalan speakers have linguistic rights that we must continue to claim, and we must demand that we be able to fulfil our wish to access multimedia production also in Catalan.

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