

Subtitling Versus Dubbing: An OTX Case-Study Report to the UK Film Council

Research objectives

- OTX Research carried out a short exit poll survey on Saturday 13 March 2010 on behalf of the UK Film Council and Momentum Pictures for the film *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.
- The survey was completed by audience members in three UK cinemas: Curzon Mayfair London, Odeon Printworks Manchester and Vue Hull.
- In London only the subtitled version of the film was shown. In Hull only the dubbed version was shown, and in Manchester both the subtitled and dubbed versions of the film were shown, with both prints polled.
- In total 229 cinema-goers responded across the three locations.
- The aim of the study was to help us better understand the appeal and playability of the subtitled versus the dubbed version of the movie, in order to find out:
 1. What type of cinema-goer prefers subtitling and which prefers dubbing?
 2. How many noticed the format of the film?
 3. When did they decide to watch the subtitled/dubbed version of the film?
 4. How do their reactions to the two versions of the film differ in terms of their rating of the film and their rating of the subtitled/dubbed format?
 5. How did being offered a choice between the two formats (in Manchester) affect their reaction to the film?

Executive Summary

Audience Profile

- The dubbed version attracted more mainstream cinema-goers who are more likely to have recently seen films such as *Avatar* and *Alice in Wonderland* in the cinema. The subtitled audience (especially in London) shows a stronger preference for foreign/art-house films such as *A Prophet* and *A Single Man*.
- Furthermore those who saw the subtitled version were significantly more likely (65% vs. 34% for dubbed) to watch foreign films 'a lot' or 'occasionally'.
- A greater proportion of the subtitled audience (22% vs. 4% for dubbed) had planned more than a week in advance that they would watch that version of the film. The dubbed audience, therefore, were more spontaneous in their decision, with a higher number deciding the day before that they would watch the film – perhaps unsurprising given their lower frequency of readership and awareness of the book which the film is based on.

Awareness of each version

- Possibly as a result of their more advanced planning (as well as their greater knowledge about the film and its Swedish origin), those who saw the subtitled version were significantly more likely to be aware of the format than those who chose to see the dubbed version.
- Prior to the film starting, over half (58%) of the Manchester audience were aware they had the choice of either version of the film, with no difference in the awareness of this choice between those seeing the subtitled or dubbed version.

Playability and Word of Mouth

- Those seeing the subtitled version of the film were significantly more likely (45% vs. 26%) to rate the film 'excellent' than those seeing the dubbed print. It is notable, however, that ratings were higher for the dubbed audience in Manchester (where they had the choice of format) than for those in Hull (where they had no choice).
- The subtitled audience was also more likely (71% vs. 53% for dubbed) to spread positive WOM about the film. Again the dubbed audience in Hull had the lowest recommendation scores, resting just below the OTX norm.
- The over 35s (especially female ones), readers of the book and fans of foreign films reacted most positively to the film in terms of rating and recommendation across both versions.

Format Ratings and Perceptions

- In line with skews in playability, those who saw the subtitled version were significantly more likely to feel the format they saw added to their interest to see the film. They were also more likely to say the subtitles added to their enjoyment, whereas a fair 28% of the dubbed audience said the dubbing detracted from their enjoyment of the movie.
- The subtitled audience was generally satisfied with the format (over three-quarters rating them excellent or very good); especially females who showed little interest for a dubbed version.
- The dubbing was rated somewhat lower (especially in Hull) than the subtitled, although over half still rated it excellent/good. When prompted with descriptors, around one in six (16%) mentioned that the dubbing was low quality, suggesting some were disappointed with it.
- Consequently, close to half of those watching the dubbed version would have preferred to see the subtitled version – whereas at most 14% of the subtitled audience would have preferred seeing the dubbed version (*see table below*).

	London sub.	Manc. sub.	Manc. dubbed	Hull dubbed
The subtitles / dubbing was fine	61%	79%	36%	13%
I would have preferred it to be (other version)	0%	14%	41%	50%
I was expecting English-speaking actors	6%	0%	9%	25%

**blue highlighting denotes data is significantly higher at 90% confidence*

- Despite these criticisms, 40% thought the dubbing was better than in other foreign movies they have seen, with the rest mostly saying it was as good rather than worse.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- That the dubbed version attracted a more mainstream audience than subtitled suggests using subtitled and dubbed prints for future foreign releases has the potential to attract a wider range of cinema-goers.
- While it could be said that the weaker ratings for the dubbed version were owed to the sample who saw it being less familiar with foreign fare, some of these respondents wished they had seen the subtitled version and criticized the quality of the dubbing. The fact that the dubbed version of the film did bring in a markedly different audience to the subtitled format, however, suggests this format is more effective at attracting a more mainstream audience.
- The stronger ratings of the film in Manchester suggest that giving cinema-goers choice is key. While it may not be feasible to secure multiple screens to show both the subtitled and dubbed versions at the same cinema across multiple cities, offering each version at different sites within a defined catchment area and communicating this could attract wider audiences.