

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/chi-0512130116dec13,1,1972639.story?coll=chi-business-hed&ctrack=1&cset=true>

Subtitles translate to new market

English-to-Spanish a hit with Latinos

By Kayce T. Ataiyero
Tribune staff reporter

December 13, 2005

When Ricardo Martinez goes to the movies, a good part of the dialogue is often lost in translation as he struggles with English.

But Martinez recently saw the sci-fi thriller "Aeon Flux" at an Englewood theater without missing an action-packed beat, thanks to Spanish subtitles.

"We can read and hear," Martinez, 27, a construction worker from Mexico who lives in Cicero, said in halting English. "I think it will help ... absolutely."

Catering to a growing Latino market with such blockbusters as "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire," this spring the Inner City Entertainment theater chain started adding Spanish subtitles at its Lawndale theater after learning that customers were traveling from Little Village to its Englewood movie house. With another chain increasingly pushing producers to offer more movies with Spanish subtitles for its theater in Carpentersville, the Chicago area is at the forefront of a burgeoning effort to lure Hispanics to the box office, industry officials say.

As they try to cash in on what is considered an attractive and growing niche market, theater owners hope to win over the Spanish-speaking audience with everything from first-run hits to specialty concessions and bilingual employees.

Although it is not known how many theaters nationwide offer Spanish subtitles, experts say only about a dozen screens show them regularly, mainly in Southern California and the Southwest. But as theaters struggle with declining attendance, the number nationwide is expected to grow, industry officials say.

At the ICE Theater at 2258 W. 62nd St. in Englewood, about 50 percent of the patrons are Hispanic.

"We noticed the changing demographics right away ... groups that contained grandmothers and grandfathers that might not speak as much English but who wanted to enjoy our theaters," said Venisha White-Johnson, marketing coordinator for the three-theater ICE chain. "We thought we could do more for our Spanish-speaking community and attract them to the theaters."

The theater often shows the same film on two screens, one with subtitles. The subtitled version typically accounts for about 40 percent of the film's box-office take at that theater. At other times, only the subtitled film is offered.

