

The Really Helpful Friendly Guide to Foreign Language Voiceover

from
Lifeline Language Services



- where the accent is on you!

We're a language company that does voice, *not* a voice company that offers translation. So you get the same professional talents, broadcast standard studios and pro engineering - but you ALSO get

- Qualified and professional mother-tongue translators experienced in translating for voice
- Translation edited and written efficiently to "fit" video runtimes for a smooth polished product
- 100% reviewed and accurate translation
- Over 150 languages from our trusted and established translators

In fact the only difference from our other translation is that this is also *professionally recorded!*



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This guide is aimed at voiceover of corporate or informational videos – we don't really handle TV shows or films, they're really best left to specialists...

English is one of the most compact and lazy languages. That has implications for foreign language voiceover... something that's easy (and expensive) to get wrong, but not hard to get right with a bit of thought and planning.

Whether you're making a video, or already have one you need to voice-over, there are ways to make life simpler and get a lower-cost, better-quality product. This guide aims to help video producers obtain the best possible foreign language voiceover. *While we'd like that to be from us, that's up to you...*

Tell me more ...

English is a very economical language - word usage is lazy and we rely on context to make sense. English tends to assume the listener understands without generally worrying about whether words agree in gender and number, or similar linguistic trifles.

Most other languages are more precise - for example, while we don't differentiate "black" between "black bull" and "black cows", in French we would have "noir" and "noires". Other languages also tend to be longer - maybe a little (like Polish, which is typically 5-6% more words), maybe a lot (like Arabic, French and Urdu, which can easily be 30% longer). That's not just the translator "bulking it up" - grammatical structure is the key driver, and well-written Spanish for example will be a lot longer than nicely styled English.

Another factor may be the absence of an in-language equivalent for an English word, so it gets described - which of course takes longer to voice.

The result is that unless your foreign language voiceover project is correctly planned and executed, the volume of speech will tend to cause problems. For example, to fit a "straight" Urdu translation of an English script to existing English video the Urdu voice will typically have to read 30% faster...

Even if the video is recorded initially at a "gentle" pace, speaking 30% faster is hard (try it!). If the English read is already "dynamic", this becomes extremely difficult and may be impossible.

You'll certainly run into cost overruns recording, and will probably also get unsatisfactory product.

Remember too that the voice over must match the English *section-by-section* - you can't just accumulate overrun and add a bit more video at the end! It may be possible to re-edit the video around the recording, but that's even more expense and delay...

With a little knowledge and planning you can avoid these issues and obtain voiced-over product as professional as your original, by preparing the source video and script for **easy, cost-effective**

and polished foreign language voiceover. As experienced translators as well as voiceover providers, employing over 3,500 professional mother-tongue linguists worldwide in 150+ languages, we're exceptionally placed to provide issue-free voiceover in the languages you need.

I'm listening...

OK - first, let's see how not to do it...

The commonest approach to foreign language voiceover – and the *costliest*, and *least likely* to produce decent product - is to *ignore* the issues. Simply make the video as you would for a purely English market, translate the existing transcript, and schedule recording... so **let's see what happens next.**

*Bright and early in the studio, here's Maria, the expensive foreign talent. But Maria's looking worried - her script's visibly **much longer** than the English, and she recognises the signs - she's been here before...*

*Trying to fit to the English timings Maria must read **really fast** – she's stumbling, needing more retakes. And she's getting stressed, so she stumbles more, becoming emotional... 10 minutes in, the product's already sounding **rushed**.*

*Worse, some parts just cannot fit... but must be recorded! So they're edited on-the-fly, costing more time... and since neither talent nor director understands the client's intent, in all innocence **key content gets cut**. And the talent's a great voice, but she's **not** a translator, so her edits add **bad translation** to your woes.*

*All this hassle takes time – now your session's **overrunning**, and you're paying **extra fees** for talent and studio... And, oh dear, you've run on to someone else's booked session, so yours gets kicked out and has to come back later – but the talent's unavailable for the next 2 weeks...*

*3 weeks later **AT LAST** you're done, and you deliver - but it sounds **frantic**, it's got **bits missing**, it has translation errors, it's weeks late, the client's not a happy bunny **at all** AND you're way over budget...*

Wow, that was scary - and yes, oh so familiar... and so...?

Preparation is the solution - with a properly-made video and a script that can be cleanly voiced-over, you'll **spend less** and **get more**. It's not rocket science... but here's a few key things to consider.

1. Don't make the video too **pacey** – you might want to sound dynamic, but also think how it would sound 20% faster, because that may be what a foreign voice has to do! Keep it **measured and unhurried**, leave **pauses**, and be dynamic in another way.

2. Do make sure **everyone** on-screen **speaks calmly and clearly** – it's great having a professional, well-paced narrator but if a key interviewee talks nineteen to the dozen you'll still have big problems. You need to make sure while filming the interview that they **s-l-o-w d-o-w-n**.

3. Do remember language voiceover will usually use **one or at most 2 voices**. If you have multiple voices, for example public interviews or discussion, make sure there are **clear breaks** between speakers; while your ear can readily distinguish two different adjacent - or even overlapping - voices, a single talent cannot physically voice this! **Overlapping or immediately-adjacent speakers = big no-no.**

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4. Do try to leave “headroom” between spoken sections, particularly for voicing into longer languages - this provides a safety net for longer translations that cannot fit the English. It’s a good idea to allow a little unvoiced video between spoken sections for the talent if necessary to overrun into.

5. Do tidy up transcripts before translation. Unscripted Joe or Jane Public will tend to repeat themselves, *I mean repeat themselves, or say things twice, or - oh you know – may sort of, like* add in unnecessary *oh what was it now, oh yes,* words. They’ll also tend to say simple things in complicated ways... There are **3 good reasons** to tidy up transcripts. Firstly, **cost** - why pay to translate these unnecessary words? Secondly, **finish** - those words represent valuable time, and by cutting them you free-up space for a relaxed, confident voice over instead of a rushed one. Thirdly, **clarity** - if you’re making the effort to voice-over a message, you want it clear and easily understood. Removing surplus waffle makes it much easier for the audience.

Sounds great, I’ll ensure we do all that next time - but *right now*, I have this corporate video my client wants in Chinese yesterday...

Don’t worry, there’s a lot we can do before you start racking up studio costs!

The **first** thing is simple **editing**. Most scripts aren’t tightly written - they say things in long-winded ways, are ambiguous, and – particularly where people are interviewed “live” then transcribed – contain repetition and mis-speaks. These aren’t only unnecessary words which cost you extra to translate - ambiguity presents very real risk of translation errors. Our editors will revise the script down to reduced, clear content, often releasing sufficient space to eliminate language overrun issues while at the same time providing a clearer message. Here’s a real example from a past job:

Before – wordcount 66:

XXXX is a specialist manufacturer of medium to heavy capital plant supplying the material handling industries around the world. With more than 50 years experience in the design, manufacture and refurbishment of machines backed by a network of agents and renowned after-sales service, XXXX is experienced in supplying quality equipment anywhere in the world and has already produced over 3000 machines and exported to 52 countries.

After – wordcount 54 (20% reduction)

XXXX is a specialist manufacturer of medium to heavy capital plant for material handling worldwide. With over 50 years experience in machine design, manufacture and refurbishment, a network of agents, and renowned after-sales service, XXXX is experienced in the global supply of quality equipment. Over 3000 machines have been built, exported to 52 countries.

In saving 20% of the space, most languages can fit without a problem and the small increase in pace others may still need is now achievable without the “Minnie Mouse” effect.

Beware however of looking solely at **wordcount** – many languages combine words, so fewer doesn't necessarily ease recording – it's really down to **syllables**. Here's a German example - *Federkraftlichtbogenschweißen* – meaning *arc welding using a spring-fed electrode*. Here a single German word replaces 7 English - *but there's only 3 less syllables, so the apparent 85% reduction is actually only 27%...* Another pitfall (among many) is Somali, where even short words are often multisyllabic and an apparently innocuous script can be a recipe for disaster.

The **second** factor is **translation** itself. Simply give your script to many translation agencies, and you'll get back something much longer than your original - by the way, *you haven't chosen one that charges on **target** wordcount have you?* Even if you were able to edit the source script down a bit, if it's translated carelessly and verbosely you can still struggle. Our translators are **experienced in voiceover** – they know the importance of keeping down both syllable and word count.

Sometimes however all this still isn't enough, and if the video's just too pacey or the translation unavoidably long you can still fall back on digital studio technology such as **de-breathing**, which can save a surprising amount, and even – if absolutely necessary – just a touch of **time-compression**. While both can help salvage a troublesome project, they're no substitute for a properly planned and made one, effectively edited and translated intelligently.

So, your Chinese sales video will be good to go - on-time and without breaking the bank!

Does it work? Well, here's what one client said:

"Working in the Film and TV production industry means we're often asked to have voice-overs ... applied to our productions. In over 8 years of business we had worked with many companies but it always seemed to be a field where we were getting let down. The classic one is in cost, you simply want to explain fully what a job entails, be quoted and then have the job carried out so that when we go back to our client they have exactly what has been promised for the price that has been promised. This always seemed to be a problem in the past with our previous suppliers, simply because they were out sourcing so much, until that is we came across Lifeline Language Services. Lifeline Language Services not only delivered a completely first class product along with friendly customer service and support before and after the job was completed, but were a complete one-stop shop. They supplied the artists, the translations and recording services. Our material was recorded not just on time but ahead of schedule. I have absolutely no hesitation in recommending their services!"

Thanks! - and what a great guy!

We really hope you've found this Guide helpful! If you need foreign language voiceover for your corporate or information videos, just give us a call on 0800 783 4678 or drop a line to voiceover@lifelinelanguageservices.co.uk - we'll be happy to help!

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Testimonials

Here's just a few of the many kind words we've had from some of our translation clients:

"Lifeline has continually earned our trust and respect, and always demonstrated a remarkable work ethic... their attention to detail with our scripting in many different language translations has helped serve our customers well."

GM Voices



"We have found Lifeline Language Services to be friendly, fast and efficient. They stick to our tight deadlines, and deliver a quality result on time and to budget. The translations are accurate and the voiceover standard excellent!"

Hallmark Productions

"Resolution Television places great importance on the right voice-over... we have always been impressed with the prompt, professional and efficient translation and voice-over service we receive [...] and we can guarantee our clients are always pleased too!"

Resolution Television

"Lifeline Language Services not only delivered a completely first class service along with friendly customer service and support before and after the job ... but were a complete one-stop shop"

Phoenix File & Television

"The completed translations have been very well received by our clients and the technical accuracy has always been excellent. I would have absolutely no hesitation in recommending Lifeline Language Services."

RRC Training

User-friendly professional, qualified and quality-assured
language voiceover

from

Lifeline Language Services



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Lifeline also provides a full range of complementary language services including TRANSLATION, INTERPRETING, TRANSCRIPTION, TYPESETTING, and SUBTITLING.

