

The
Lifeline Language Services
Really Helpful Friendly Guide
to
Foreign Language Voiceover

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Please note that this guide is for voiceover of corporate or informational videos – we don't handle TV shows or films, these are best left to the specialists in that field...

English is one of the most compact languages on Earth. That has implications for foreign language voiceover... expensive to get wrong, but *easy to get right* with a bit of thought.

Whether you're making a video, or have one you need to voice-over, there are things you and we can do to make life *simpler* and get a *lower-cost, better-quality* product. Our aim here is to give you the information you need as a producer to obtain the best possible foreign language voiceover – preferably from us, but hey, it's a free world...

Yeah? So tell me more ...

While its compact nature makes English ambiguous (*example: how many ways do you see "a big orange box"? – answer at the end...*) it's very economical. As much of the sense is contextual, we assume the listener understands us without generally worrying whether words agree in gender and number (black bull, black cows... *le taureau noir, les vaches noires...*), or many other linguistic "fiddly bits" *that really matter elsewhere*.

Almost every other language is more precise, and longer - maybe a bit (like Polish, 5-6% more words), maybe a lot (like Arabic, Chinese and Urdu, which are easily 30% longer). Plus, on occasion there is no equivalent in-language word for an English word, and so a descriptive term is used; this takes longer to say. So, unless your foreign language voiceover project is correctly planned and executed, to fit an Urdu translation to an existing English read the poor Urdu voice has to read 30% quicker!

Even if the original voiceover is "normally" paced, speaking 30% faster is hard (try it!). If the read is already "dynamic", this gets very difficult and may be impossible. You'll certainly run into cost overruns at voiceover recording, and may have a thoroughly unsatisfactory product at the end.

Remember also that the voiceover has to match the English section-by-section - you can't just build-up a cumulative overrun and add a bit more video at the end! You **may** be able to re-edit the video, but that's even more expense and time...

With a little knowledge and planning you can avoid these issues and obtain voiced-over product as professional as your original. Our aim is to help you plan your projects for easy, cost-effective and polished foreign language voiceover. Experienced translators as well as voiceover providers, utilising over 3,500 professional mother-tongue linguists worldwide in 150+ languages, Lifeline Language Services are well placed to deliver professional voiceover in most languages.

OK, OK – what do we DO about it?

*Well, to start with, let's see how **not** to do it:*

The commonest approach – and the costliest, and most likely to produce poor product - is to **ignore** the issues. Simply make the video as you would for just an English audience, get the script translated, and get on with recording.

So, here we are in the studio, with an expensive talent and studio already charging you. But the talent's looking worried - your script's quite a bit longer than the English, and she's been here before... *let's see what happens next.*

- Trying to fit to the English timings the talent must read *fast* – she's stumbling, needing retakes and getting stressed. The product already sounds *rushed*.
- Some bits just won't fit... but they gotta record! So the script gets edited on-the-fly in the studio. Neither talent nor director knows client's intent, so *key content* may be lost (*we've heard of whole sections being chopped – 'oh, client'll never notice...'*). And like many talents, this one's a great voice, but not a translator, so the "edits" add *bad translation* to your woes.
- All this hassle adds *time* – your session's overrun, you're paying extra talent fees, studio fees, expenses... And, oh gosh, you've run into someone else's booked session, so you get kicked out and must return – but talent's away for 2 weeks. *Now you're delivering frantic, expensive, mis-translated product - and you're weeks late ...*

Been there, done that? The bottom line is, if you go in with a video and script combination that cannot be cleanly voiced-over within the runtime you'll spend more and get less. (*A recent client came to us because they'd had an Urdu voiceover rejected; their customer complained it sounded like "an Indian Minnie Mouse on steroids"...now there's an image!*)

OK wise guy, so what **should** we do?

Well, it's really not rocket science... if you're making a video to voice-over, keep in mind:

1. Don't be too pacey – you might want to sound dynamic, but also think how it would sound 30% faster, as that's what you'll be asking an Arabic talent to do! Use a *measured, unrushed pace*, and find another way to be dynamic.
2. Make sure all on-screen characters appreciate this – it's great having a professional, well-paced narrator but if another key character naturally speaks fast, unless you ensure during recording that they *s-l-o-w d-o-w-n* you'll still have big problems.
3. Do you have multiple voices, for example interviews? If so, remember voice-over will usually be by one or at most 2 voices. So, make sure there are *clear breaks* between speakers; while your ear can readily hear two English voices overlapping, a single voice can't physically record it. *Overlapping speakers = big no-no.*

4. Particularly for long languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Urdu or French, try to leave "headroom" between each spoken bit to accommodate the longer translation in case it won't fit to the English. A short run of unspoken picture between spoken sections lets the talent run slightly into that if necessary; the effect isn't noticeable, but voice over recording is much easier.
5. *Tidy up transcripts* pre-translation. An interviewee will often *er, hesitate or, or repeat themselves – I mean repeat themselves, er, twice, or - you know – put in, extra, like, words ...* Do you really want to pay for translation of that? More importantly, those are valuable seconds to save and allow a cool, relaxed voice over instead of a *rushed* one.

Sounds great, and of course we'll do so next time - but right now, I got an urgent sales video my client needs in Chinese...

Don't worry, there's still a lot we can do before you start racking up studio costs.

The first is **editing**. Most scripts aren't tightly written – they're often long-winded, may be ambiguous, and – particularly where people are interviewed "live", then transcribed – contain repetition and mis-speaks. There aren't only unnecessary words, but a real risk of mis-translation. Our editors re-work the script to reduced, clear content, often releasing sufficient space to eliminate language overrun issues as well as provide a clearer message. Here's a recent real-life example:

Before – wordcount 66	After – wordcount 54 (20% reduction)
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.	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.

By saving 20% of the space, most languages fit without a problem and the small pace increase that others need is achievable without the "Minnie Mouse" effect.

*By the way, don't just look at wordcount – many languages *combine* words, so fewer doesn't necessarily ease recording– it's really down to the number of *syllables*. Here's a German example - **Federkraftlichtbogenschweißen** – meaning arc welding with a spring-fed electrode (no, really!). So a single German word replaces 7 English - but there are only 2 less syllables, so the apparent 80% reduction is actually only 20%...*

This brings us to **translation** itself. Here again our experience and exceptional partner base counts for much. If you give your script to many translation agencies, you may get back something much longer than your original. Editing the source script pre-translation may free-up some headroom (as above), but if translation's too wordy all that's lost and

you'll still struggle. We use translators *experienced* in voiceover – they know the importance of keeping down both word and syllable count.

Lastly, if you're still up against it, **digital studio technology** offers easy de-breathing, which can salvage a surprising amount of run-time, and even – if absolutely necessary – apply just a touch of time-compression.

So, your Chinese sales video will be good to go!

Does it work? Well, here's what Anthony Caulfield of Phoenix Film & Television said:

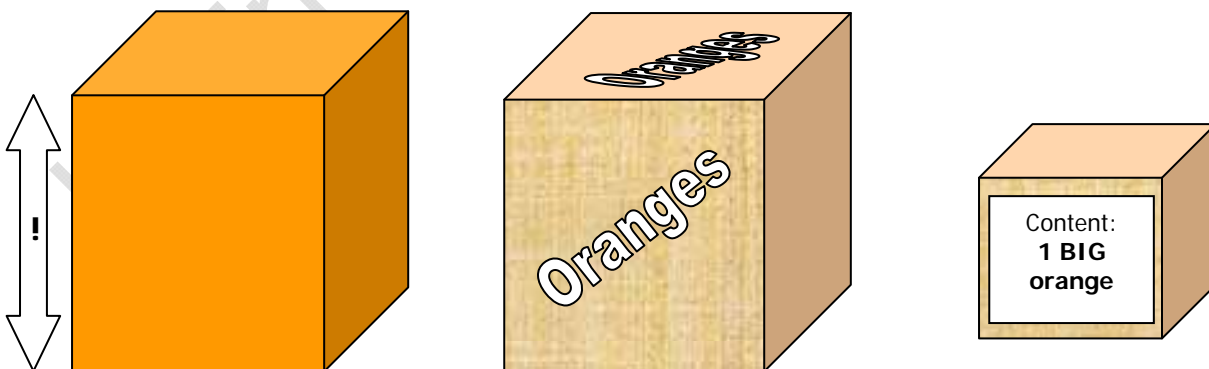
"Working in the Film and TV production industry means we are often asked to have voice-overs and language amendments applied to our productions. In over 8 years of business we had worked with many companies but it always seemed to be a field where we were getting let down. The classic one is in cost, 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 Life Line Language Services. Life Line Language Services not only delivered a completely first class service 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 also ahead of schedule. I have absolutely no hesitation in recommending their services!"

Thanks Anthony - what a great guy!

We hope you find this Guide useful in your future work, and look forward to working with you on your foreign language video voiceover projects. While we'd really like you to **make** the video doing all the good things above right from the **start**, we'd be equally pleased to assist with projects like the Chinese sales video above!

Call us on +44 1772 558858, or e-mail voiceover@lifelinelanguageservices.co.uk...

Oh, and the "big orange box"? We can think of 3, but there may be more...



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