

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



- where the accent is on you!

Many voiceover providers subcontract translation; language quality is often an issue, damaging your message and image.

As a **professional language company** however, **translation** is our **core business**. So as well as professional voices and studios and pro engineering, you also have excellent **proofread translation** by **qualified professional mother-tongue translators** that's carefully "fitted" to video runtimes for a polished product that is **accurate, convincing**, and very **cost-effective**.



Call free on **0800 783 4678**

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Note: this guide is aimed at training or informational videos – we don't handle TV shows, ads, or films, they're best left to specialists...

English is one of the most compact and lazy languages. That has implications for foreign language voiceover... something 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. *We'd like that to be from us, but that's up to you...*

Tell me more ...

English is a very economical language - word usage is lazy and relies on context to make sense. English assumes the listener understands, without worrying whether words agree in gender and number, or similar linguistic stuff. Most languages aren't like that - for example, we say "black" for both "black bull" and "black cows", but in French we'd have "noir" and "noires". Other languages also tend to be [longer](#) - a little (like Polish, typically 5-6% more words), or a lot (like Arabic, French and Urdu, which can easily be 30% longer). That isn't the translator "bulking it up" - grammar structure's the key driver, and well-written Spanish for example is a lot longer than nicely styled English.

Some languages also lack an in-language equivalent for an English word, so description is used - which of course is longer.

The net effect is that unless your foreign language voiceover script is [carefully and cleverly translated](#), length often causes problems. *Fitting a "direct" Urdu translation of an English script to existing runtime typically requires a 30% faster read.*

Even where the source English is calm and measured, speaking 30% faster is hard (try it!) - if the English is already quite fast, fitting becomes very difficult or impossible. You'll certainly run into time and cost overruns in recording, and will probably also get unsatisfactory product.

Remember too that the voiceover must match the English [section-by-section](#) to match the video - you can't simply accumulate overrun and add a bit more video at the end! It's sometimes possible to re-edit simple video around the recording, but that's more expense and delay.

With [skilled professional translation](#) and a little planning you can avoid all this and obtain voiced-over product as professional as your original. As **highly-experienced translation providers** who ALSO provide professional foreign language voiceover we're exceptionally able to help.

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. Make the video as you would for a pure English market, translate the script, and schedule recording. Let's see what happens next.

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

*Trying to fit the pacey English timings Maria's reading **really fast** – but she's stumbling, needing retakes. And she's getting stressed, stumbling more, getting emotional... 10 minutes in, the product already sounds **rushed**.*

*But some parts just CANNOT fit... So they're edited on-the-fly, costing more time... and since neither talent nor director knows what's important, **key message content** gets cut. And Maria's a great voice, but she's **no** translator, and her edits add **bad translation** to your woes.*

*All this takes time – your session's **overrunning**, and you're paying **extra fees** for talent and studio... And now you've run into someone else's session, so you have to come back later – but Maria's away for the next 2 weeks...*

*3 weeks later **AT LAST** you're done, and you deliver - but it sounds frantic, stuff's missing, there are translation errors, it's weeks late, the client's a VERY unhappy bunny indeed **AND** you're way over budget...*

Wow, that was scary - but familiar... and so...?

Proper preparation means you'll spend less and get more. Here's a few key things to consider.

1. **Don't** make the video too **pacey** – it's not always possible to keep translation short so think how the speech would sound 20% faster, as that may be what a foreign voice has to do!
2. **Do** try to make sure **everyone** - especially non-professionals - **speaks calmly and clearly**. It's great having a well-paced interviewer but if the interviewees talk *really really fast* you'll still have big problems.
3. **Do** make sure there are **clear breaks between speakers**; while your ear can distinguish two different adjacent - or overlapping - speakers, this is difficult to voice (especially using a single talent).
4. **Do** try to leave "**headroom**" between spoken sections, particularly voicing into longer languages - this provides a safety net for overrun of longer translations that cannot fit the English.
5. **Do** tidy transcripts before translation. Unscripted Joe or Jane Public often repeats, I mean repeats, themselves, or starts then changes mid-senten - or just - you know – may sort of, like add in kind of

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unnecessary oh what was it now, tip of my tongue, oh yes, words. They'll also say simple things in complicated ways.

There are 3 good reasons to tidy up transcripts. Firstly, **cost** - why pay to translate these unwanted words? Secondly, **finish** - words equal time, so by cutting them out you free 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 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 is simple editing. Most scripts say things in long-winded ways, are ambiguous, and – particularly in transcribed “live” interview – contain repetition and mis-speaks. These aren't just unnecessary words which add to translation cost - ambiguity makes translation errors more likely. 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-life example from a previous 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 length, most languages can fit without a problem and any small increase in pace still needed is achievable without the “Minnie Mouse” effect.

But **don't** just look at wordcount – many languages *combine words*, so fewer doesn't always mean easier recording – it's 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 example (among many) is Somali, where even short words can be multisyllabic and apparently innocuous scripts can be recipes for disaster.

The second is translation itself. 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 could shorten the source script a bit, careless and verbose translation can undo your efforts. Our translators are **experienced in voiceover** – they know the importance of minimising syllables.

Sometimes all this still isn’t enough and if the video’s just too pacey or the translation unavoidably long you can fall back on **digital studio technology** such as **de-breathing** - which can save a surprising amount - or if absolutely necessary just a touch of **time-compression**. While both can help salvage a troublesome project, they’re no substitute for one that’s 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? 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 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 info@3ls.uk - we’ll be happy to help!



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Testimonials

Here's just a few of the kind words we've had from 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



- where the accent is on you!

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



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