

The Really Helpful Friendly Guide to Foreign Language Telephony IVR prompts from Lifeline Language Services



- where the accent is on you!

Most language companies can translate your IVR script. Few can help ensure it will actually work in your IVR model - **all too often, it won't.**

This Guide aims to offer a few pointers to successful foreign language IVR. Our qualified professional mother-tongue translators can advise on what your IVR needs, and provide translation - crafted to work properly - that's been fully reviewed for accuracy.

And when the script's good to go, we can professionally record the prompts for you. One stop, no hassle, cost-effectively.



Call free on **0800 783 4678**

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We don't develop IVR apps, but do work with developers to enable foreign language IVR solutions. If you've been tasked with developing a foreign language version of an English telephony IVR app, there's a lot to consider. The below should offer an idea of some key points to watch for – but it IS complicated and we strongly recommend involving professional language consultancy as early as possible.

English is one of the most compact languages on the planet. It's also one of the laziest – things don't have to "agree" with each other, unlike French, and word order is uncomplicated. It's easy to assume other languages are the same – but this just isn't the case... So, your English IVR system's up and running, with a script and model that builds phrases correctly. Now you need it in a foreign language...

Yep – how hard can it be?

Well... depends on the language. A few work pretty much like English and you may just have to translate your script. Your model may work straight off.

Others add complexity – for example in French the noun, verb and adjective agree in gender and number (black bull, black cows... le taureau **noir**, les vaches **noires**)... So, it's not only additional word forms, but also which to use, and when.

Many foreign languages change the sentence structure fundamentally – in German the verb is often at the end of the sentence, while in Indian languages the subject is usually at the beginning. This means that as well as additional word forms and agreements you may need to re-write your system's entire grammar model. After this things get really complicated, such as [Czech](#), [Finnish](#), or worse ...

There are other considerations too – how are [times and dates](#) said, for example? [Numbering](#) can also be very different to ours. [Verb forms and tenses](#) can be a huge issue. And how many [genders](#) need to agree? French has 2, but German 3...

Starting to see what you mean... any advice?

There are a few basics below that may help, but we'd very strongly recommend involving a [professional linguist](#) on Day 1. Make sure they understand exactly what you're trying to achieve - few translators have experience in IVR models and even fewer the systems understanding to help. But **please DON'T** just ask a translator to translate your English script – you'll almost certainly be faced with costly re-work and delay!

We've recorded a range of IVR models and advised engineers on their construction in non-English languages including Hindi and Polish, utilising the skills of over 3,500 qualified professional mother-tongue linguists worldwide in over 100 languages.

OK... you mentioned some basics?

Uh-huh - here's five simple ones:

1. Syntax. Is the language constructed like English? If you don't know, ASK someone who does - and do so *very early* in the project, you could save yourself a **lot** of pain...

2. Time and date. IVR uses times and dates a lot – like “e-mail received at...”. How are times and dates used in the language? Does it even use the same **calendar**? Lots of countries don't... Even if the **format** is “English”, **numbers** may take different agreements depending on the month or context.

3. Gender & numbers. He/she/it may all take different agreements, and so may “hes” and “shes”. “You” often has 2 or more forms. In some languages 2 “hes” agrees differently to 5 “hes”, or 10 ... Number systems need checking too, not everyone counts in **tens, hundreds, thousands**... You may need extra number forms too – French for example has male and female forms of “one” so “21”, “31” etc will probably need both “xxxx-et-un” and “xxxx-et-une”.

4. Prepositions. Things like “on”, “to”, “for” are easy in English, but in many languages two or more words exist for each so you'll need more than one (and the software logic to handle each in its context)

5. Agreements. Like the French “taureau **noir**, les vaches **noires**” example above. (Did you know: in some languages verbs *don't agree* in the **present** tense, but **DO** in the **past** tense?)

That's just the easy bit... With many languages, things get *much* more complex. Here's one of our translators describing Czech syntax: “*Flexible word order, with endings, and intonation, determining relationships within the sentence*”. There are no less than 7 **cases** in Polish and Czech, and **word endings** – including proper nouns - change depending on the noun case. Hence **Tony Blair** may appear as Tonyho Blaira, Tonymu Blairovi and more – these aren't preferences but **essential** grammar, without which meaning changes completely.

The bottom line: English lets you easily build complex sentences from simple blocks. In most languages it's MUCH more complicated, and you really need to involve a language professional at a very early stage.

We really hope you've found this Guide helpful. If you'd like assistance with foreign language IVR projects, 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."

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



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