

BEST PRACTICES GUIDE 02: VOICE REPLACEMENT & AUDIO RECORDING

Lip-Sync

The replacement of an original voice track on a video or film in synchronization with lip movement.

UN-Style Voice-Over

A voice-over in which the original language can still be heard underneath the foreign language voice track.

Off-Camera Narration

Any voice track on a film or video for which the speaker is not visible.



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Localizing Audio-Visual Products

Localizing media products implies replacing spoken and written language. This can be done with subtitling (See **Best Practices Guide 03: Subtitling**) or voice replacement or a combination of the two.

Knowing the country for which a foreign language audio-visual product is destined is critical. For example, French is spoken in Canada and in France, but with distinct differences in accent, pronunciation and vocabulary. The aversion for linguistic peculiarities is mutual in the case of these two countries. The issue of regionalism is much more pronounced when it comes to a language such as Spanish, which is spoken in over 22 countries.

Languages which require specification of the destination country include French, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese. Although the German spoken in Switzerland and Austria can vary considerably from standard German in terms of dialect, audiences in these countries are accustomed to hearing and understanding standard German, while the opposite is much less often the case.

Translation for Voice-Over and Dubbing

Approaches to translation of scripts for voice replacement vary depending on whether the speaker is on-camera or off-camera. In off-camera narrations, as the name implies, the speaker cannot be seen at all. Here the matter of voice replacement is a straight forward substitution of the English speaker's voice with that of a foreign language narrator.

Given the expansion any text undergoes in translation, it is perhaps appropriate to speak of adaptation of scripts rather than verbatim translation. In effect, when a translator sets about to convert a video script to a foreign language, the effort is more akin to writing the script in the foreign language than to translation. Extraneous adjectives and articles, repetitive product references, etc. are often dropped for the sake of timing. In short, the adaptation for video or multimedia will use the source text as a template for content, not to create a word-for-word rendition of the original.

Bilingual Recording Directors

Also known as monitors, or production supervisors, these experts—who are native speakers of the target language—provide oversight and quality control during the recording in several ways:

- Auditing the recording with respect to the client's needs and concerns
- Providing instructions with respect to delivery, interpretation, intonation, voice quality, pronunciation, pace and timing

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*Helmut Otto Schleicher
President
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*Merek R. Press
Supervisor
Jaros, Baum, Bolles
Consulting Engineers*



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- Scrutinizing the recording for slurred or mispronounced words, hesitations, lisps, omissions and any other glitches
- Assisting the engineers in detecting clipped word fragments, changes in audio levels, etc.
- Implementation of script changes.

The importance of bilingual directors in recording sessions cannot be overstated. Even the most expert talent needs advice at times, and no single person, in particular the speaker, should be left to evaluate his or her own reading. No matter how well a script was prepared or how expertly it is read, it is almost inevitable that some changes worth documenting will be made in the recording studio. Here in particular, the second opinion is crucial. The monitor's function is a valuable insurance policy, helping to generate a consensus of opinion.

On-Camera Narration

On-camera narration can be accomplished in two ways: 1) outright voice replacement through **lip-sync dubbing** (see below); or 2) **UN-style voice-over**. In the latter, no attempt is made to “fool” the viewer into believing that the speaker is speaking any language other than the one they really are. UN-style voice-over is commonly used in news and documentary productions e.g. when a politician or other notable person is interviewed with the assistance of an interpreter. The interviewee will speak in his/her native language for a few seconds. Then, the level of the voice will drop, and the voice of the narrator is brought up and made prominent, while the “authentic” voice remains low, but still audible. The foreign language phrases can be timed to end with the source language, or for dramatic effect, before or after the source language sound track under consideration of the visual material.

This technique is of particular value when the character of the source voice is important, for example in documentaries, where every concession must be made to authenticity. UN-style voice replacement is also very effective in testimonial or interview situations with on-camera subjects, where the veracity of the message is documented by the original quality of the original voice track.

Lip-Sync Dubbing

We all probably know what lip sync is from seeing examples of it in B grade movies, where lip movements and words do match at all. The goal of this voice replacement technique is of course to make it look like the persons who were originally speaking English or any other language are really speaking French or Chinese. As most of you already know or suspect, there is no such thing as perfection when it comes to lip sync.

Looping

For feature films, lip sync dubbing is accomplished using a technique called looping or Automatic Dialogue Replacement (ADR). Unless you have a feature film budget, it is highly unlikely you will want to spend the money necessary for this type of work.

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*Glen Graf
HP Corporate
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“Because I have complete confidence in InterNation, Inc., I have recommended your services to many professionals over the years and I intend to continue to do so.”

*Lisa A. Stancati
Gordon Altman Butowsky
Weitzen Shalov & Wein*



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In short, looping involves recording tiny snippets of speech at a time, a few words, syllables, or phrases at a time. A machine determines the amount of time for a given snippet of speech in the source language, and then generates “in” and “out” points for the foreign language being recorded following the frame accurate time code on the video track. Only when the recording fits within these “in” and “out” points is the next snippet of text recorded and synchronized to video. It is appropriately called looping because the machine just loops back to the beginning of each snippet if the time requirement is not met.

Looping requires special audio recording equipment and is, due to the many takes that are usually necessary, very time consuming and expensive. It is very easy to spend as much time and money as is available, because the effort to produce perfect voice replacement is a never ending quest: incremental improvements are always possible.

Translation for Lip-Sync Dubbing and Looping

Looping and lip-syncing also necessitate a special kind of translation. The target text may not be any longer or shorter than the original. Syllable counts must be the same in both languages, not just for entire sentences, but also within smaller phrases, long words and between pauses. The rhythm of delivery and pauses of the source script must be matched exactly in the target script. Words beginning with letters that necessitate obvious mouth movements such as O, A, M, P, S, T and R must be matched if at all possible to enhance the fit of text and image.

Lock-to-Picture Recording

Lock-to-picture recording is a popular technique that is in effect very similar to looping but which doesn’t require ADR equipment. Lock-to-picture recording for lip-sync involves recording an audio track that is “locked” or synchronized to the time code of the visual element.

Here the speaker typically sits in a recording booth and watches the video, hears the source language in one ear of his/her headset, and his/her own voice in the other. This allows the speaker to take both visual cues and audio cues, pacing themselves according to the rhythm and pace of the source language speaker. This technique can be very successful and cost-effective, although it will not produce the same level of quality as ADR. But given good directing/coaching and some acting on the part of the speaker, very convincing results are possible.

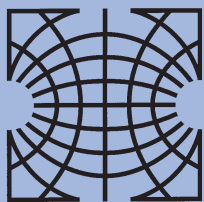
Intonation and delivery, pace, rhythm, pauses, gestures can be brought to life through the talents of the speaker. As with looping, lock-to-picture lip sync also allows precise editing of in and out points, but in larger segments of sentences or sentence fragments and portions. As a rule of thumb, and subject to the same criteria for voice-over recordings, two to five minutes of finished voice track will take about one hour in the recording booth.

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*Phred Nelson
Video Operations Manager
Charthouse International
Learning Corp.*

“I can say without exaggeration that the work prepared under (InterNation’s) supervision is virtually perfect, not having required correction or further revision...I would recommend your services to anyone with similar needs without hesitation.”

*Jean A. Campbell
Foreign Language Specialist
Shearman & Sterling*



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Economy vs. Quality

Voice replacement is an inherently costly procedure. It requires technical and linguistic expertise as well as acting talent. By following industry standard procedures and employing expert personnel and state-of-the-art technology, InterNation is able to produce outstanding results at reasonable prices.

In particular, InterNation offers a wide variety of highly trained voice actors speaking 37 different languages. (Go to www.internationalinc.com to hear samples of our talent.) Our voice actors are not simply people who speak a foreign language. They are trained actors who practice that art of speaking the way a musician practices an instrument. A qualified voice actor can complete a narration in a fraction of the time it takes an untrained speaker. Furthermore, the results of using an untrained actor for a voice recording usually result in noticeably inferior quality.

A conservative rule of thumb for estimating recording time for narration or UN-style voice-over should allot at least one hour of recording studio time for every 5 minutes of recorded voice track, while off-camera narration can be a little faster. The quality of the talent, the presence of proven studio procedures and appropriate audio technology, experienced engineers, experienced production direction and supervision and last but not least, a good script, all help to improve quality and reduce cost.

Beyond the actual time and effort of recording, in order to supply a good result, it is necessary to take time to clean up the voice track, equalize levels between different takes prior to mixing with music and sound effects, and then provide the mix itself if and when required.

InterNation, Inc. provides a full spectrum of foreign language services to a Fortune 1000 clientele. Services include translation, Web localization, electronic publishing, interpreting, subtitling and voice replacement for audio and video.

Our staff is dedicated to producing the highest quality work on time and on budget.

This guide is one of a series provided as a resource to current and prospective clients.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information.