

Subtitling vs Dubbing + List of preferred method per country



localization • translation • interpreting • consulting

Adapting multimedia content for another country is a complex procedure that involves a lot more than simply translating the language. One of the most important decisions one has to make is between subtitling and dubbing.

Subtitling is the process of providing a film, video or program with subtitles. Subtitles are derived from either a transcript or screenplay of the dialog or commentary in films, television programs or video games and are usually displayed at the bottom of the screen.

Dubbing, in filmmaking and video production, is a post-production process in which additional or supplementary recordings are “mixed” with original production sound to create the finished soundtrack.

Each method has its advantages and disadvantages.

Subtitling lets you listen to the original actors’ voices and allows for an extremely accurate translation. It renders the show accessible to viewers who are deaf and hard of hearing, people who cannot understand the spoken dialogue or who have accent recognition problems. Listening to the original language can also help you improve your language skills. By watching and listening to videos in English, foreigners are more likely to improve their ear for the language, their grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. In addition, it’s a lot less expensive.

Nevertheless, subtitles may distract you from the film action and some of the feeling may be lost when read in the written form.

On the other hand, dubbing a program means that the audience doesn’t have to read the text while watching the video. For many viewers, hearing the dialogue in their native language lets them focus on the action and immerse themselves in the media.

But, dubbing is a costly, time-consuming and difficult process. It evolves a lot more than just rendering the words into another language. Most of the time, editors try to synchronize what is being said to match the lip movements of the character. To do so, they often have to change the translation or the word order in the target language for a better fit.

There has been a lot of debate why some countries prefer to watch dubbed films rather than original films with subtitles. Some say that people with an interest in foreign cultures prefer subtitles, while dubbing is the pick for those with nationalist interests.

Another opinion is that the preference for dubbing or subtitles is indicative of the wealth of the country where the film is being shown, as dubbing is more frequently used in rich countries.

So, what should you take into consideration when thinking about adapting multimedia content for another country?

The genre and the purpose of the program. Is the program informative? Does it seek to entertain? For example, a documentary or corporate video might benefit more from the preciseness of subtitles, but many artistic productions would not welcome their use on screen.

The target country. Most countries have a preferred method of language adaptation. In Spain for example, almost all foreign-language material is dubbed, and this method is preferred over subtitling in most contexts. On the other hand, Greece has traditionally used subtitles in most multimedia content and the audience is accustomed to reading the subtitles while watching videos.

The budget. This can be the most important factor when deciding the preferred method. The cost for subtitling can be up to 15 times less than dubbing, so no matter what the other pros and cons are, this is an aspect that cannot be ignored.

To help you with your video localization task, we have composed a list of the preferred methods used per country and you can find it in the following pages.

Term definitions

Dubbing, in filmmaking, is the process of adding new dialogue or other sounds to the sound track of a motion picture that has already been shot. Dubbing is most familiar to audiences as a means of translating foreign-language films into the audience's language. When a foreign language is dubbed, the translation of the original dialogue is carefully matched to the lip movements of the actors in the film.

Subtitling is the process of providing a film, video or program with subtitles. Subtitles are derived from either a transcript or screenplay of the dialog or commentary in films, television programs or video games and are usually displayed at the bottom of the screen. They can either be a form of written translation of a dialog in a foreign language, or a written rendering of the dialog in the same language, with or without added information to help viewers who are deaf and hard of hearing to follow the dialog, or people who cannot understand the spoken dialogue or who have accent recognition problems.

Voice-over is a production technique where a voice—that is not part of the narrative—is used in a radio, television production, filmmaking, theatre, or other presentations. The voice-over may be spoken by someone who appears elsewhere in the production or by a specialist voice actor. It is pre-recorded and placed over the top of a film or video and commonly used in documentaries or news reports to explain information. In some countries though, a voice-over provided by a single artist is commonly used on television programs as a language localization technique, as an alternative to full dub localization.

List of preferred method used per country

Country	Subtitling	Dubbing	Dubbing only for children	Voice-over
Europe				
Albania	x		x	
Austria		x		
Belgium				
•French		x		
•Dutch		x		
•German		x		
•Flemish	x		x	
Bulgaria	x		x	x
Croatia	x		x	
Czech Republic		x		
Estonia	x		x	
France		x		
Georgia				x
Germany		x		
Greece	x		x	
Hungary		x		
Ireland	x		x	
Italy		x		
Latvia				x
Lithuania			x	x

Country	Subtitling	Dubbing	Dubbing only for children	Voice-over
Montenegro	x		x	
Netherlands	x		x	
Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden)	x		x	
Poland	x		x	x
Portugal	x		x	
Romania	x		x	
Russia				x
Serbia	x		x	
Slovakia		x		
Slovenia	x		x	
Spain		x		
Switzerland		x		
Turkey	x		x	
Ukraine				x
United Kingdom	x		x	
America				
United States and English-speaking Canada	x			
French-speaking Canada		x		

Country	Subtitling	Dubbing	Dubbing only for children	Voice-over
Spanish-speaking countries (except Mexico)		x		
Brazil		x		
Mexico	x		x	
Asia				
China		x		
Hong Kong	x (English and Mandarin)	x (all other languages)		
India		x		
Indonesia	x		x	
Japan	x		x	
Malaysia	x		x	
Mongolia	x			x
Pakistan		x		
Philippines		x		
Singapore	x			
South Korea		x		
Taiwan	x		x	
Thailand		x		
Vietnam	x		x	

Country	Subtitling	Dubbing	Dubbing only for children	Voice-over
Middle East				
Arabic speaking countries	x		x	
Iran		x		
Israel	x		x	
Jordan		x		
Lebanon		x		
Syria		x		
Africa				
Algeria		x (French)		
Arabic speaking countries	x		x	
Morocco		x (French)		
South Africa	x	x		
Oceania	x			

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