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Multilingual online courses: dubbing or subtitles?

When translating an online course, is it better to opt for dubbing or subtitles? What do you need to assess in order to make the best choice?

When translating an online course into other languages, you have two options:

- Dubbing the original audio track, i.e. replacing it with one recorded in the target language;
- Keep the original audio track by adding **subtitles** text to the course graphic.

Both options have advantages and limitations. In this article we will show you which elements you need to assess in order to choose the best solution for your needs.

Dubbing eLearning courses: pros and cons

When done well, **dubbing** (or voice over) gives eLearning courses a more professional tone and creates a **more engaging experience** where content takes centre stage. However, voice over recording is **more expensive** than subtitling and takes longer to complete. This is because it involves several professionals: translators, voice actors, audio and video editors. Moreover, finding local **voice-over professionals** may not be easy.

The main advantage of a dubbed eLearning course is that users can concentrate on the content without being distracted by the subtitle text. In addition, receiving instructions in one's native language **improves learning** and increases the likelihood of remembering new information over time.

Voice over is a great option when your course has a lot of text on the screen or when dialogue is involved, as it allows you to translate even **complex conversations** between several speakers, no matter how much they interrupt each other. Finally, with dubbing, you don't have to worry about the speed at which your audience is able to read, because all scripts will be reproduced by the voice actors.

However, depending on the languages translated, the duration of the recording may vary and this may affect the **synchronisation between audio and video**. Languages rarely use the same number of words to express concepts. The script may therefore expand or contract. To avoid this, it will be necessary to adapt the text so as to respect the same timing as the original video but without losing important information for the course. So remember: dubbing an online course is only effective if you can afford high quality services.

Subtitling eLearning courses: pros and cons

Subtitling is generally **less expensive** than voice-over and does not affect the original audio track of the course. Viewers can still hear the original voices and read the translation at the same time to facilitate understanding.

Subtitling also ensures **faster turnaround times** since, compared to dubbing, it requires fewer people and less technical knowledge to produce. Subtitles are therefore a cost-effective solution to have your online course available in several languages in a relatively short period of time.

Working with subtitles, however, means compromising the course design in terms of **screen space**. The translation is placed as text content at the bottom of the screen. This means that, in the case of courses with large amounts of text in the visual content, adding subtitles may distract students and make it difficult for them to read everything.

Finally, the choice of subtitles could prove to be wrong when the target audience does not feel comfortable receiving content in this form. In countries like Germany or Italy, for example, dubbing is the norm in cinema and television. For many of them,

subtitles could therefore slow down the **learning process** considerably.

Dubbing or subtitling: what to choose?

At this point, you might be asking yourself: is it better to opt for dubbing or subtitling? The answer is apparently trivial: it depends on your audience and your budget.

If your target audience is used to subtitling and you want to reduce costs, you can easily choose subtitling. On the contrary, if your audience has difficulties with subtitles, you should try to find voice-over solutions that make the learning process more effective for your audience. After all, that is the purpose of a course, isn't it?

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