

Guidelines for quality subtitling in Norway

Subtitles – a series of captions, each visible for a few seconds on the screen – render the contents of an original work that would otherwise be inaccessible or incomprehensible to a given audience. The following guidelines define the standard for high quality subtitling of foreign languages in Norway. The guidelines have been developed and approved by representatives of broadcasters, subtitling agencies, the Norwegian Association of Audiovisual Translators (NAViO) and The Language Council of Norway.

A – The Linguistic Aspect

Grammar and orthography

The subtitles must be written in grammatically correct Norwegian, in accordance with The Language Council's official spelling rules.

Idiomatic language

The subtitles must be written in an idiomatically correct language that suits the film or programme's character and the target audience. Words from the source language can be used if it is natural for a particular programme or sequence. The subtitler may make up a new word, but should preferably confer with The Language Council to see whether a suitable word exists. If there is no suitable word in use, The Language Council would like to be informed about good solutions. Swearing is perceived as stronger in writing than in speech, and even stronger on screen.

Dialogue

When two people speak in the same caption, each person is given one line, with a hyphen inserted at the beginning of each line. Rather than long sentences that stretch across several captions, shorter sentences are recommended.



Italics

Italics are normally used for voice-over commentary (unless the majority of the film or programme is voiced over); to indicate distortion and/or show that the speaker is off screen; and to emphasise a particular word.

Signs

When a sign, poster or similar needs translating, the subtitle should be centred. The subtitle's exposure time should correspond to the time the original text is displayed on the screen. Only relevant text is subtitled.

B – The Translational Aspect

Translation

The subtitler must provide an apt translation of the dialogue in the film or programme. In general, if a Norwegian term exists the subtitler should not use source language words. The translation should reflect the meaning of what is being said as well as aspects such as style and tone.

Not like this:

Like this:



The manager wants us to brainstorm.

Terminology

In films or programmes which contain technical terminology, the subtitler must use the correct technical terms. Terms that are series-specific should be coordinated across all episodes.

Fact checking

All facts must be double-checked. This includes correct spelling of names, using Norwegian titles and forms of address where they exist, transcription of foreign alphabets, and numbers such as amounts, dates, length, weight, etc.

C – The Technical Aspect

Exposure times

The text must be exposed long enough for the viewer to be able to read it as well as enjoy the film or programme. The main rule is that a one-line caption should be exposed for at least 3 seconds, while a two-line caption should be exposed for at least 6 seconds. The reading speed is lower for children.

The recommended minimum length for very short captions is 2 seconds. No blocks are to be exposed for less than 1 second. The upper limit is approximately 7 seconds, depending on the complexity of the text and the target audience.

Cueing

Speech and subtitle appearance should coincide, unless there is a shot change less than 12 frames away. In that case the subtitle should appear at the shot change.

The subtitle should exit at a shot change if possible. Short blocks may be extended across a shot change if necessary, but should then remain on screen for one second after the shot change. No subtitle should override a scene change.

Placement

Subtitles are placed at the bottom of the screen, either left-aligned or centred. In Norway, the tradition is to align regular captions to the left and keep metric verse such as poems and songs centred.

Captions should not conceal names, titles and relevant information that is superimposed, but if it does, this information should be italicized on a third line above the translation.



If captions must be raised, they should not be raised more than absolutely necessary.



Readability

In Norway, the text is traditionally white, set on a grey, transparent background.

Caption layout

Grammatical units are kept together. When a sentence spans over multiple captions, it should be segmented at clause or phrase boundaries, for instance after a comma or before a subordinate clause. Line breaks should occur between linguistically coherent points, such as before conjugations or subjugations (*and, to, or, but, that, which* etc).

The upper line should ideally be shorter than the lower line.

Not like this:



But like this:



Condensing

Condensing of content is an important part of the Norwegian subtitling tradition, allowing viewers to be able to enjoy the visual content of the film or program and not spend all their time reading subtitles. Caption readability and sufficient exposure time are more essential than including every word or detail in the translation.



*- Okay, Mr. Conroy, can you tell me your location?
- I don't know. I'm in a coffin, I don't know where. Please help me, I'm scared.*