Design Course

Lip Sync in Animation
Making the Character Talk
by
Prof. Phani Tetali and Samidha Gunjal
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:
http://www.dsource.in/course/lip-sync-animation

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Introduction

As children we all loved watching cartoons. Remember our favorite characters like Mickey, Donald and Goofy? This list is endless! We loved the way they acted, danced, talked and walked. They all had distinct styles and voice. Remember, the way Donald Duck used to talk? It was so funny!

In a way animation can be defined as the moving and talking images of a character. Do you know how these images talk?

This process of synchronizing the sound to the character is known as ‘Lip Sync’. Which can actually make your character come alive!
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Process

Process of Lip Sync in animation includes:

a. Dialogue
b. Mouth Charts
c. Things to Remember

Dialogue:
- This process starts with recording the dialogue first, using a sound recorder.
- After analyzing, it is broken down into individual phonetic syllables.
- The numbers of frames required for each syllable is counted and written down in the exposure sheet.

Mouth Charts:
Then mouth shapes are drawn according to the phonetic syllable.
For example: Closed mouth to the wide-open mouth.
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Animators usually refer to their own mouth shapes and expressions, using a mirror.

Things to Remember:
• While animating a dialogue, pay attention to the sound they make and not the individual letters.
• Assign mouth shapes according to the phonetic vocals otherwise the animation will have a chattering effect.
Example

To show how lip sync is done, let us animate this small poem written by Grace Andreacchi- ‘Mother’s Roses’.

MOTHER’S ROSE:
A red rose
A white rose
A red rose
A white rose
A red rose
A white rose
That’s all!
---- By Grace Andreacchi

A small girl who is reciting this poem was created for this. (Images of the character)
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Recording the Dialogue

Once the character is finalized, the dialogues are recorded on the sound recorder and transferred to the comput-
er.

• Pitch of the recorded sound is changed to make it more cartoony and childlike.
Analyzing the Dialogue

The sound track is then broken down into ‘Phonemes’ or ‘Phonetic syllables’.

Phoneme is the sound produced while uttering the word. Combination of phonemes forms a word. It is a basic unit of any language.
(Reference: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoneme)

The Images of sound track are divided into phonemes.

Number of frames required for each syllable is counted and written down in the exposure sheet.
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Mouth Chart

- Based on the phonemes in the sound track, mouth shapes for the character are drawn.
- Use a mirror to take reference for mouth shapes and expressions while drawing.

Here are some mouth shapes for the character:

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**Storyboard**

- Rough storyboarding is done to know how the character is going to act out the poem.
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Line Drawing Animation

- Rough line drawings and key poses are drawn on the timeline with sound.
- After rough animation is done, we get a fair idea about the head movements of the character.
- In this animation, the character is tilting her head on either side while acting out the poem.

A Red Rose,
A White Rose,
A Red Rose,
A White Rose,
A Red Rose,
A White Rose,
That's All...!!!

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Drawing Mouth Shapes

- Mouth shapes are drawn according to the sound breakdown done in exposure sheet.
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3.4.4. Things to Remember
   Important things to remember while drawing the Mouth Shapes:
   - Anticipation
   - Sound delay
   - Expressions and exaggeration
   - Check the synchronization

   Anticipation:
   This is a basic principle of animation, which makes it more realistic and believable. Anticipation is used to prepare the audience for the upcoming action. Keeping anticipation in mind, we open the mouth of the character before it starts speaking.

   Sound Delay:
   Though mouth shapes are already assigned in the exposure sheet based on phonetic syllables, we need to consider sound delay also. If you carefully observe in a mirror while speaking, when we say AAA... the mouth opens but you actually hear the sound after fraction of seconds' delay. That is why few mouth shapes start one or two frames before the actual sound is heard.

   Expressions and Exaggeration:
   While doing lip sync, we have to consider the expressions and angles of the face. To create a dramatic effect in the acting of the character, we need to exaggerate the expressions in some frames.

   For example, while saying 'mother’s roses', the girl character in the video opens her mouth wide open and tilts her face a little backwards.

   Front face  Face tilted upwards  Upward tilt
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Considering all conditions mentioned above, sometimes we need to adjust the timings for the mouth shapes while drawing. In this way all mouth shapes from closed or open and extreme poses are drawn.

**Check the Synchronization:**
While doing this, keep checking the animation by playing it forward and then backwards with sound. Add in-between mouth shapes only if needed, otherwise drawing too many in-between frames will give a chattering effect.

Once all the mouth shapes are drawn with sync, clean up and coloring of all the drawings is done. The animation with lip sync is done!
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Summary

Try lip sync animation on your own!

- Design a character you wish to do lip sync for.
- Record your favorite dialogue.
- Break it down into its phonetic syllables.
- Count the number of frames required to utter a specific syllable, and mark them in exposure sheet.
- Design a character suitable to deliver the dialogue.
- Complete the line drawing animation and draw mouth shapes as marked in exposure sheet.
- Do not forget to consider sound delay, anticipation, expression and exaggeration.
- Check the accuracy of sync by playing it forward and backwards.
- Complete the cleanup of the drawings and color them.
- And your own animation with lip sync is ready!
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