

Sound advice: setting the record straight on ADR

23 JUNE, 2016

There's more to capturing great ADR than technology, says Tristan Rose

Unintelligible dialogue hit the headlines again recently, with TV programmes being criticised for dialogue that was mumbled and hard to decipher.

It is a criticism we have heard before, and it enrages viewers and dramatically affects audience figures. This is never what a production company or broadcaster wants to happen.

The challenges facing productions are numerous but when it comes to dialogue; technical issues on set and changes in edit or storyline can all demand the need for a re-record. Coupled with reduced post budgets and complex talent availability, co-ordinating ADR ('automated dialogue replacement', or 'additional dialogue recording') can be no-mean feat.

Even with the best sound recordists and the latest sound reduction tools, on-set wind and rain machines, generators and environmental factors such as nearby motorways or overhead aircraft, can all cause sound problems. Boom mics can often jeopardise the composition of a shot, and lavalier mics can be affected by the actor's movement, resulting in rustling or muffling across the dialogue.

Like most other industries, production budgets have suffered cuts, resulting in compacted shoot schedules that add increased time pressure during filming.

This means that there is often little time for a scene to be re-shot for audio alone, so inevitably ADR is often the best and most cost effective way to capture audible yet realistic dialogue.

Fast forward to post-production and a new set of challenges await, which are often guided by the locking of episodes as well as talent and director availability. Actors can often feel reluctant when it comes to ADR – they have already given their performance and it is often hard to re-find that moment months later and in a completely different setting.

[For more on ADR, click here to read the 'Keeping the cast in sync' feature on p44-45 of the latest issue of Broadcast TECH](#)

I believe that it is not technology, but the performance of an actor that is the key to success in ADR. My focus is always on matching the pitch, vocal tone, and level of projection and to do that you must gain the actor's trust, working around them and tailoring your work to their needs.

My job is therefore to make them feel as comfortable and at-ease as possible. I go to great lengths to ensure it is as relaxing and enjoyable an experience as possible, even if I am asking them to throw themselves around on the floor to re-enact an epileptic fit.

Given how fundamental an actor's comfort and happiness is to ensuring a successful session, the emphasis on creating a positive working environment goes beyond the studio.

Our front-of-house team make a point of learning our clients likes and dislikes, whether it be serving the right herbal tea or quinoa salad to help make the actor feel at home. We open early and stay late to accommodate an actor's schedule, as well as link-up with studios around the world to ensure lines are recorded and mix/delivery deadlines are met. We'll do whatever we can to create the right vibe that will in turn invoke the best performance.

The best compliment I can ever receive for my ADR work is when no one notices it. So, when I watch the projects I have been involved with, on TV or at the cinema, I am happy to sit back and enjoy – knowing that I have helped a project through what can regularly be a demanding and stressful production process.

Tristan Rose is sound designer and ADR recordist at Grand Central Recording Studios