

On the Proper Use of Sync Sound in Television News (Postprint)

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Abstract

Synchronous sound represents an important technique in television news reporting that can enhance the sense of presence and authenticity of television news. Its quality can, to some extent, directly influence the standard of news reporting. This paper investigates how to appropriately employ synchronous sound to enhance television news through two major aspects: existing problems in the current application of synchronous sound in television news and the techniques for its utilization.

Full Text

A Brief Discussion on the Proper Use of Synchronous Sound in Television News

Abstract: Synchronous sound is a crucial technique in television news reporting that enhances the sense of presence and authenticity. Its quality directly affects, to a considerable extent, the overall caliber of news production. This article examines how to appropriately employ synchronous sound to enrich television news by addressing both current problems in its application and practical techniques for its use.

Keywords: television news; synchronous sound; proper use

Synchronous sound in television news refers to ambient audio from news scenes or interview recordings captured simultaneously with video footage. As an essential component of television journalism, it works alongside narration and visuals to create indispensable audiovisual elements. When properly employed, synchronous sound not only prevents monotonous reporting techniques but also enhances the sense of immediacy, authenticity, and persuasive power of news stories while strengthening audience engagement and identification with the content. It can highlight central themes, amplify on-site atmosphere, develop

journalistic characters, enliven content, and maintain logical coherence throughout a report. Conversely, inappropriate use fails to provide the finishing touch and instead becomes superfluous, undermining news quality. Such occurrences remain common in television news production for various reasons.

1. Manifestations of Inappropriate Synchronous Sound Usage

First, failure to pre-select suitable interviewees results in unsmooth interviews and low-quality synchronous sound. Some subjects experience “camera fright,” becoming extremely nervous and speaking haltingly, which creates an awkward viewing experience. Such footage naturally fails to achieve desired results.

Second, preparing interview scripts in advance and conducting mock interviews undermines authenticity. Synchronous sound should be natural and fluid, with subjects appearing relaxed on camera. Some journalists have assistants hold prepared scripts behind them, prompting subjects to read verbatim. This produces subjects with fixed gazes, lacking eye contact and expressiveness. Discerning audiences can easily detect this fabrication, raising doubts about journalistic integrity and diminishing the social impact of the report, ultimately compromising program quality and brand reputation.

Third, excessively long interviews filled with empty clichés consume limited information space. Unedited footage makes reports verbose and sluggish, slowing news pacing. Lengthy segments of hollow speech neither highlight themes nor engage viewers, instead wasting valuable time that could convey substantive content.

Fourth, imbalanced discourse rights among subjects compromise objectivity. Authenticity is the lifeblood of journalism, and synchronous sound offers unique audiovisual advantages for achieving credibility. Journalists should collect perspectives from all relevant parties to present multi-angle facts, provide diverse viewpoints, and balance discourse power while demonstrating impartiality. However, some reports privilege one side—for instance, covering a summer training program featuring only student voices while omitting administrators and teachers. This skewed focus on student experiences neglects other stakeholders’ need to be heard, resulting in incomplete information, misleading audiences, and failing to foster proper public opinion guidance.

Fifth, synchronous sound that disconnects from context disrupts logical coherence. Synchronous sound serves not merely as a presentation technique but as an integral content component that should seamlessly integrate with narration to form a unified whole. Some reports introduce synchronous sound without thematic relevance, creating jarring, superfluous elements that fail to enrich content or highlight themes, instead disrupting logical flow.

Synchronous sound should not serve as mere ornamentation but should fulfill its unique potential through appropriate and skillful application, contributing

significantly to compelling news production. How, then, can journalists employ it effectively? The following sections explore practical methods addressing the aforementioned problems.

2. Planning Ahead: Selecting Appropriate Interviewees and Locations

As the adage goes, “preparation ensures success, while lack thereof invites failure.” Planning proves particularly critical for producing high-quality synchronous sound. Upon receiving an assignment or before heading to a scene, journalists should draft interview outlines based on news themes, clarifying whom to interview, how many subjects, what questions to ask, and what responses are needed. When selecting interviewees, journalists should contact relevant parties in advance, specifying requirements: subjects who understand facts, express themselves fluently, and demonstrate courage. If on-site subjects appear “coached” rather than speaking genuinely, journalists should encourage authentic responses or select alternatives immediately. This ensures synchronous sound meets authenticity requirements.

Regarding location, journalists should choose settings relevant to subjects’ lives or the news event itself. Placing individuals in familiar environments helps them relax while enriching visuals with authentic atmosphere. Generally, outdoor settings prove preferable to indoor ones, and interviewing subjects while they work—without disrupting their activities—produces better results than static interviews. For government officials, standing naturally creates greater audience rapport than formal desk-bound postures.

Additionally, to enhance immediacy and authenticity, journalists must plan ambient sound recording. To capture high-quality audio, they should understand event contexts beforehand. Reporters and videographers require thorough communication and consensus on what sounds to record and how to record them, checking equipment, selecting optimal angles and positions while eliminating interference with audio and lighting. For instance, they might ask servers to move quietly or adjust lighting for adequate illumination, or position themselves closest to the action to capture ideal synchronous sound. A prime example is the award-winning news brief “Dongguan’s ‘Four-Party Networking’ Initiative Streamlines Three-Day Process to Twenty Minutes” by Dongguan Radio and Television Station, which won second prize at the 23rd China News Awards. The piece skillfully incorporated two ambient sounds: the collective lever-pulling at the platform launch and a brief address by then Politburo member and Guangdong Party Secretary Wang Yang. This concise report demonstrates how strategic planning and strong on-site control can significantly enhance news quality. The quality of synchronous sound directly affects news standards, and emphasizing planning with appropriate interviewee and location selection enables journalists to achieve maximum efficiency.

3. Mastering Interview Techniques to Help Subjects Relax and Speak Naturally

Journalists encounter subjects who are not always poised and articulate during impromptu or scheduled interviews. Unfamiliarity with cameras can induce anxiety, causing disorganized speech, unclear thinking, stammering, fidgeting, and uncomfortable expressions. To elicit desired information, journalists must employ appropriate techniques to help subjects speak naturally. Reporters and videographers should coordinate seamlessly. When subjects struggle with microphones or cameras, reporters can hold the microphone out of sight, adopting a casual conversational approach that gradually transitions to the topic before subtly extending the microphone for recording while videographers maintain continuous operation. This captures interviews in a focused yet relaxed state.

When subjects struggle for content, reporters can provide gentle guidance. For instance, during a Teacher's Day street interview, a willing subject couldn't recall memorable teacher acts. By sharing moving stories about teachers, the journalist triggered the subject's own memories, enabling a smooth, natural response. Journalists should also help subjects overcome stage fright by encouraging them to abandon scripts and chat casually about the topic, or interview them while they engage in familiar activities to avoid awkward silences. When responses yield unexpected insights, journalists should prompt elaboration. Timely, specific encouragement helps subjects relax and builds confidence. Regardless of challenges, journalists must never show impatience or compromise professional standards. Consistently demonstrating humanistic care, patience, and friendliness leaves positive impressions and lays groundwork for future interviews.

4. Balancing Voice Rights to Demonstrate Objective and Impartial Stance

Although journalists do not directly voice opinions, they express stances through factual reporting and allocation of discourse rights among stakeholders. To produce credible, objective journalism, reporters must consider the broader picture, weighing all relevant perspectives and ensuring balanced representation through synchronous sound. No party should be omitted to avoid bias. For event coverage, this means including organizers, participants, and observers. For policy implementation stories, both official statements and public voices matter. For negative news exercising supervisory functions, perspectives from those involved, bystanders, experts, and political representatives should be included. Some reports must also consider gender, age, and demographic balance, as television audiences are diverse and news should convey universal values concerning broad public interests.

5. Selecting Synchronous Sound to Maximize Its Effectiveness

The value of synchronous sound is self-evident. In television news, it should provide the finishing touch with crisp precision. Otherwise, verbose, bland, and noncommittal speech not only slows news pacing but also diminishes production quality. When selecting synchronous sound, journalists must discard empty platitudes, exaggerations, and performative statements, instead choosing audio that maximizes immediacy, authenticity, thematic relevance, clarity, character portrayal, local flavor, and audience interest. Since synchronous sound offers rich audiovisual content, it should not duplicate narration. An individual's synchronous sound should appear no more than twice, with each clip lasting only several seconds to a dozen seconds—longer segments become tedious. Indeed, a vivid synchronous sound clip can transform an ordinary news story into something compelling.

As an integral news component, synchronous sound's content, perspectives, and on-site information must integrate with narration through transitional sentences that ensure smooth contextual flow and maintain rigorous logical structure. In essence, enlivening television news depends on appropriate synchronous sound usage, which has become a metric for journalistic competence. Mastering its skillful application serves as a powerful “weapon” for elevating news production standards.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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