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**Evolution of the TV News
in France**

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Evolution of the TV News in France

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Abstract

Today, in France, the structure of a television news report (which lasts usually less than 1 '45) responds to several formal rules. It makes an easier understanding and thereby the impact of the subject while maintaining a certain “ethics”. Since the 29th June 1949 several technicals (r)evolutions and daily practice have influenced the structure of subjects and their implementation. A first step - from 1949 to early 80s - gave a similar structure to the structure that we know today. Indeed, the advent of synchronous sound at the beginning of the 1960s and the rapid disappearance of the film photography in the late 1970s radically changed the shape of the subjects. A second period, from 1980 to today tends to reduce the time between the moment when the videos are shooting and their broadcasting through transmission of rushes or reports directly from the place of shooting.

The talk describes these developments and their impact on the form and on the working-out of the TV-news.

Keywords : TV news, news reporting, technical change

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The origins of TV news in France

In France, despite a few tests from 1946 with the « *téléjournal* » (Brochand, 1994), the 29th June 1949 is held as the date of the first TV news (the first throughout the world for Pierre SABBAGH, his promoter and presenter¹). The first TV news took the form of the cinematographic news : a journalist (that the viewer does not see) comment the motion-pictures news (cf. Illustration).

The cinematographic news were weekly, the initially television news were tri-weekly and daily as soon as October 1950, then twice daily in November (Albert & Tudesq, 1986). To product television report, film crews shoot pictures, came back with the film that were developed “by hand”², and then edited. Comments, possibly completed with music, were not recorded and therefore live broadcast. This structure of diffusion explains the lack of complete available archives.

The time required for the development and the edition of the report allowed the journalists to stand back to write their comments. However, the comments seemed to be deliberately “minimalist”³. Journalists, outside the range of some type of subjects, had a “great freedom”⁴. According to Pierre Sabbagh, who confided to Daniel Bilalian in the *Antenne 2* television news report of the 27th June 1979 “Our comments at that time were of a such insolence, violence, virulence, which you do not have any idea... that we could not do today, it would be totally impossible, just depending on what you just said (Daniel Bilalian had mentioned the little number of television sets in 1949)⁵”, complementary to what Pierre Sabbagh said, he confided to Yves MOUROUSI in the 29th June 1979 television news report on the TF1 channel “The comments of De Caunes, of Dumayet and of Tchernia were unthinkable (...) to give you an example during a fashion show "Hey Pierre, if your wife came back home like that - It's Divorce" (...) we even invented characters. When we did not know... it was Mr Schwarzenberg. Mr. Schwarzenberg served absolutely everything, he won bike races, it was the first in mountain, he arrived at the Elysee (...) out there that had a will, a Madness I say, to inform. (...)” (Sabbagh, 1979). The apparent lack of seriousness may be perceived as making a college humor's television news report or a desecration of the news.

The subjects did not include interviews. Indeed, the shoot with synchronized sound could only be implemented after the marketing of the first lightweight cameras synchronized with a tape recorder in the middle of 1960s.

1Pierre Sabbagh in the TV show *les pionniers de la télévision* broadcast on Antenne 2 channel December 30, 1977 said “(...) French television had the first television news in the world, when I say television news, I do not mean (cinematographic and weekly) news, I want to say daily constructed TV news with journalists” (Ferraro et al., 1977)

2Operators treated the film directly without any automatic equipment (unlike what was done in motion picture laboratories). They achieved some chemical treatments in several baths (first developer, bleach, *clarification*), exposed the film to light (to reverse the negative), soaking the film in the second developer then finally in the fixative bath before rinsing and drying the film.

3« We tried to hunt the verb and then we're back to the verb, of course » (Sabbagh, 1979)

4At this time, politics news was forbidden in television news. Michel WAKHEVITCH, one of the first television reporter of picture said “There were essentially matters of general information and sports. There were topics that can not hardly ever touched, it was political subjects.”(Boulay, 1979).

5There were 297 television reported late 1949 (Brochand, 1994)., the first television transmitter outside Paris worked in Lille April 7, 1951,(Albert & Tudesq, 1986) the next in Strasbourg and Lyon in 1953 (Thué, 2003)

Interviews and synchronized sound

The heavy shooting in synchronized sound reserving this process to feature films. It prevented the interviews during the light shooting of the television reports. Indeed, until the early 1950s, synchronized sound shooting involved the use of 35mm cameras - particularly heavy and costly - connected to a sound recording system located in a truck. In this context, it was easier to make a duplex live broadcast to interview someone. By the early 1950s, the advent of portable tape recorders such as “Nagra” allowed to use light equipment for recording sound coupled with some models of 16mm camera for shooting (Villeval, 2000). Thus, German television broadcast a documentary on the Belgian Congo in 1954 with elements of synchronized sounds (Steinle, 2000).

However this practice was not established before the 1960s for the french television news. Indeed, several drawbacks still prevent the widespread use of synchronous sound for television news reports (and therefore the possibility of having to insert interviews). The need to have a cable connecting the camera to tape to ensure a perfect synchronization of video and audio tape was not a real problem¹. On the other side, at the time, synchronized 16mm cameras were bulky. Thus the vast majority of materials and equipments used for the TV news consisted of very noisy “amateur camera”².

The camera Éclair 16 NPR³ said to be “*autosilencieuse*”⁴ invented by André Coutant for ORTF presented to the public in 1963 only weighed 6kg (Bourdon, 1997) (Wikipedia, 2012) and have a quartz oscillator⁵. Thus, the use of this camera, coupled to a suitable recorder, perfectly allowed to enslave the speed of the cameras and the speed of the tape recorders. The shots synchronous without “one's hands tied”⁶, or without noise camera with portable equipment are emerging in the news topics. Thus, gradually, television news report edited interviews (until then reserved for duplex or guests on the board of television news).

Until the early 1970s, it is possible to see together two kinds of topics. First, one as it was in fact since 1949, with comments and music, another one with subjects exclusively composed of interviews with no plan of illustration (see figure 2).

In the 1970s, when the reporting team came back, the film was developed. Meanwhile the soundtrack is transferred onto a tape of the same size as the film (one meter of picture film corresponds precisely to one meter of sound film). Once the film developed, the editor, shot by shot (at all levels that the editor wishes to use), synchronizes picture film and sound film (clap identifiable through both visual and auditory). The chief reporter then directs the editor that uses the cutter and the scotch tape to make connections. The journalist then records his comment that, ultimately, will be mixed by sound engineer with the soundtracks of mounting to a single tape.

1The first Electronic News Gatherings (ENG) consisted in a videocassette recorder and a camera connected by a cable. The video reporting units are today the camcoders.

2Dixit a report about the 20h television news of *France 2* to the 50th birthday of french television news: “we shoot on 16mm film with amateur camera” (Tchernia, 1999)

3Noiseless Portable Reflex (Portable camera with an SLR and a target noise level minimized)

4Self soundless

5The cameras with quartz oscillator are cameras whose motor is controlled by this oscillator which specifically guaranteed a constant frame rate (24 fps – frames per second film – for motion pictures, 25 fps for European televisions or 29,97 fps for U.S.A.). Synchronized tape recorders, them record a signal at a precise frequency that allows the reader to read the tape at the same speed as the recording.

6The wire between the camera and the tapes-recorder

These steps are illustrated in figure 3. If the delay before the broadcast is too short, the journalist comments the report in live, during the broadcast.

If the duration given to the edition operation permits it, the soundscapes are included along with interviews and comments. It is interesting to note that today like yesterday the trim level is depending on the report editing delay. Jeremy Nicey indicated for television news of December 27, 2004 - about the treatment of Indonesian tsunami of late 2004 – “The delay also allowed to improve the report in question, although essential elements were identical” (Nacey, 2008).

Given the different manipulations of the media, the journalist writer has often plenty of time to the final structuring of the report and the preparation of the comments related to it (except when working on shooting of an another report during the development and mounting of the subject¹).

When the reports were “silent”, there was a significant detachment between subject and viewers. The speech of journalists played a prominent part. The emergence of the interviews give credibility to the speech of report. Now, often the interview serves as a foil for comments and analysis from journalists. Moreover, the use of ambient sounds accentuates the credibility of the pictures: “Making sounds is only one practical to keep up. They are often useful for making soft trim and for accentuating the strength of key scenes.” (Besse & Desormaux, 2011).

This practice has become widespread and definitely imposed with the use of the ENG (Electronic News Gathering). Today, one could not imagine listening to an interview with a tennis player, illustrated by excerpts from his last game, without hearing the sounds made by the knocks and bounces of the ball.

The Electronic News Gathering (ENG) and the current form

The appearance of ENG have revolutionized the practice of reporting. Indeed, direct recording of video and audio on a single transportable media (videocassette), simultaneously to the development of linear video editing systems², allowed to reduce considerably the delay between the return of the reporting team in the television station and the broadcasting of the subject. The ENG avoids the need to develop the film, to record the sound on a film, to synchronize picture-tape and sound-tape prior to edit them. There is no need for restricting manipulations (cut and paste the shots...). Therefore a subject can be broadcast less than 20 minutes after the arrival of the raw material of the report in the television station. Some U.S. television networks as the local channel KMOX-TV St. Louis (Missouri - USA) generalize the ENG in 1974 (York, 1987). French channels, attentive to a minimal technical quality³, began to use it from 1978, after the marketing of the U-MATIC H (commonly called BVU). This

¹The editing is then performed according to written instructions from the journalist

²The first VCRs sold from the late 1950s - Quadruplex from Ampex - the video signal recorded on magnetic tape reels of 2 inch wide. They could not be remotely controlled. The editing was impossible.

³The color TV channels in Europe (625 lines standard) broadcast frames of 576 active lines whose maximum horizontal resolution was 572 dots per active line. The videocassette tapes in the 1970s (registering on strips of 1” or 2” wide) were able to have such a resolution. VCRs ¾” U-MATIC marketed in early 1970 had a maximum resolution of around 300 points per active line (240 for VHS). VCRs BVU used by French channels in 1978 could record a signal with more than 350 points per active line (Bellaïche, 2011).

one is a “broadcast” system for videotape recording used. It uses in the ENG to shooting subjects of television news¹.

When the reporting team came back, the journalist-writer went into the editing room. He indicated his instructions to the editor while writing his commentary. This means that the writer has previously defined the script of the report. Then, the journalist records his comment. Ultimately, the latter has been mixed by sound engineer with the final video editing. Exceptionally, the journalist places his comments during the broadcast (just as in film shooting).

Overall, since the 1970s, a TV news consists of interviews and illustrations shots. The illustrations shots serve to support the comments and to support the visual introduction of interviews. The vast majority of reports begin and end with illustrations shots. This allows to introduce and conclude the matter, but above, when the comment begins slightly after the start (or finishes slightly before the end) of the subject, this allow a latitude for the transition between the report and the studio (and vice versa)²

And the digital was born...

Technical innovations that have emerged since the 1980s have not changed the structure of the television news reports. On the other side the workflow and its rhythm has changed.

The miniaturization of editing systems and of satellite transmitters, the use of digital video-communications have significantly reduced the time between the shooting and the broadcasting. Thus, from the late 1990s, the television reporters would make their report and send it after editing to the television channel “from any point on the globe”³. Today, an even lighter (and less expensive) equipment allows streaming via mobile phones. Each little channel “all info” can quickly send a journalist, alone, on the events, and broadcast pictures without requiring and hiring expensive broadcast equipments.

Previously, reporting teams shoot their pictures, went into a station equipped with wireless transmission systems (possibly after several hours trip). If the station was equipped with editing systems, the subject could be edited and transmitted, otherwise the useful rushes were transmitted. In France, FR3 (France 3 channel today) had some local offices of information commonly known as “black boxes”. Those offices broadcast the rushes to the regional station to be edited and included in television news. Another solution was to create a “campaign television studio” with materials transported by trucks and planes. This expensive solution is used on operations such as the bicycle “*tour de France*”.

1Some BVU videocassette recorder could drive with battery and weighed less than 10 kg

2During the broadcast of a live television news with a newscaster, this one introduce the report, an operator controls the reading of the report on the streaming server, another operator switches between the image of the studio and the image in the server and finally, the sound engineer switch too between the studio and the server. Although the team does the work as usual without problem, with the script-girl that acts as orchestrator, the “Frame accurate” for all switches are impossible. It should be noted, that when subjects were broadcast telecine (reporting on film) or by videotape, it was necessary to start reading the topic several seconds before the start of it. It caused an additional inaccuracy.

3A video computer file not required a real-time streaming unlike analog broadcasts that require so much bandwidth.

With the completion and transmission of reports near the scene of report it is difficult for journalists to assess the event. Good knowledge of the subject, as well as checking sources are essential, even if the precipitation imposed on journalists by their editor in chief make them more difficult. In Article of *Télérama* weekly review, Cailletet Mary, Virginia Felix and Milo Oliver (2011) about news channels in France: “The demand for quickness, aided by a technology increasingly efficient, has undermined the verification. The current premiums. It is the religion of the news item of the "urgent need" and of the breaking news. The only safeguard is the quote, often scrupulous, of the information sources and almost the permanent employment of conditional.” This verification is not a new problem. The lack of distance with the pictures is a central problem. The “it's true, I saw it on TV” is one exemple. Ignacio Ramonet enhances – in *le monde diplomatique* – the potential and real drift of newscast about the mass graves of Timisoara (Ramonet, 1990). The problem is not the “aware” hoax, rather unusual, which is, primarily, a lack of morality. The report of television news should not be an “involuntary” accomplice of passing on false information (or information of propaganda), for lack of setback. The experience and professionalism are the safeguards. Patrick Charaudeau emphasizes that the “(television) rules of carefulness (...) have been imposed by a past full of blunders (Timisoara) and gagging (Gulf War)” (Charaudeau, 2001). According to Loïc de Mornay, reporter at France Television, CNN (the Cable News Network) does not release any information if it has not been confirmed by at least two different sources (De La Mornais, 2011).

Decrease of production costs, development of « reduced models »

The switchover to digital video – in the second half of the 1990s for television reports – has allowed the development of low cost solutions shooting and editing with a technical quality equivalent better than (or at least equivalent to) the analog broadcast equipment¹.

Similarly, with the appearance of standards derived from mass-market DV, some light and cheap camcorders were sold. These, not very ergonomic, can be used with discretion and in difficult situations with a high technical quality.

Also today, a computer bought from a local dealer with appropriate software can replace a linear video editing and edit a news item in high definition².

This economic context is one factor in the emergence of local television and news TV channels. It minimizes investment, but also the crew. A journalist can then product his video-report alone. He is then simultaneously cameraman, journalist, sound engineer in the shooting, journalist, editor and mixer during post-production. This “low cost” production leads to lower technical quality reports than large national channels (which continue to employ journalists, cameramen, editors and sound-mixers). In addition, some local channels (broadcast by TNT, cable networks or Web TV), the newscast chiefs are not necessarily journalists and do not know the constraints and requirements of the profession. This leads to deviations discussed above, the TV news

¹Betacam camcorders used by national channels cost about 45 000 € in the early 1980s (without introducing elements linked to inflation). The first digital camcorders used by those channels cost 20 000 €.

²A “cut” linear video editing, composed of two VCRs, an editing remote and audio and video devices cost about 80,000 €

thereby becoming more video institutional communication than TV news informations.

The virtual editing in the news

The marketing of nonlinear editing systems ¹(NLE) has improved the usability of editing systems. Thus, the use of NLE software can improve the “quality” and “complexity” of sequences.

These systems significantly reduce the time spent editing and thereby help to obtain the best sequences. When a version of a report is unsatisfactory (eg a report exceeds the expected duration) some quickly changes allow to reach the desired result. In contrast, in linear editing, for the same operation, it was necessary either to cut the end or to repeat the entire editing from the first plan to change. It is also possible to easily remove the hesitations of an interview (as it has always be practiced in radio since the advent of tape recorders), to reconstruct a sentence, or other precision operation. The nonlinear editing systems can easily change the structure of an assembly and journalists can be sticklers for the technical quality of editing.

Despite their convenience and their possibilities, non linear editing systems are widespread in national editing only when they were equipped with broadcast servers. Indeed, on the linear editing equipment, the editor records the selected shots one by one on the “master” tape. The editing is done after the recording of the final plan. In case of “race against time”, the subject may be broadcast as is, without prior mixing. If the editing was correctly prepared by journalist and if the editor is very effective, the report may come out of the editing room ten minutes after the return of the reporting team.

Initially, with NLE, a first step consisted to copy the useful rushes recorded in a videocassette of editing station (it takes a little less time than the editing time in linear system). Then, the editor worked on the report. It was possible – on the same workstation – to save the comment and to do a quick mix, but, at the end, it is necessary to copy the report on the broadcast support. The incompressible time between the arrival of the rushes and the broadcasting of the report could be too large. On the other side, today, the disappearance of the tapes and the emergence of broadcast servers in the newsroom has led to the end of linear editing equipments. Today, if the delay is too short, it is possible to edit the report without transfer by using the files of shots directly from the camera memory-sticks. Once the report is completed, the editing software generates the reports file directly on the streaming server (Even if, today, this operation requires a significant time in high definition).

Prospects

Journalists took advantage of technical developments to maximize the necessary responsiveness bound to follow closely the news and to make his intention credible. Thus the form – then the trim level – of news-report have evolved based on the appearance of different technologies. However, the entire structure and shape of the newscast itself has evolved. For example, the proportion of reports in television news has steadily increased with decreasing the time between shooting and potential

¹The rushes, transferred on a hard disk, are editing with an editing software.

broadcasting - about 30% in 1981, 50% in 1986 (Florenson, Brugiere, & Martinet, 1987) and over 60% today.

Conversely, the presence of analysts and specialists in the television studio decreases. There is a general increase in the proportion of the testimony of witnesses, "the real life". At best, in television reports, the comments of the journalist analyze as objectively as possible an event. The editing structure of the interviews should allow a good understanding of the situation. The critical analyze leaves the studio to take place (possibly) in television-reports with recorded testimony.

The current research aim to study more precisely the evolution of newscast but also the consequences of technical developments on the structure and the global perception of the television news.

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Illustration 1. Structure of television news report – broadcast june 29, 1949

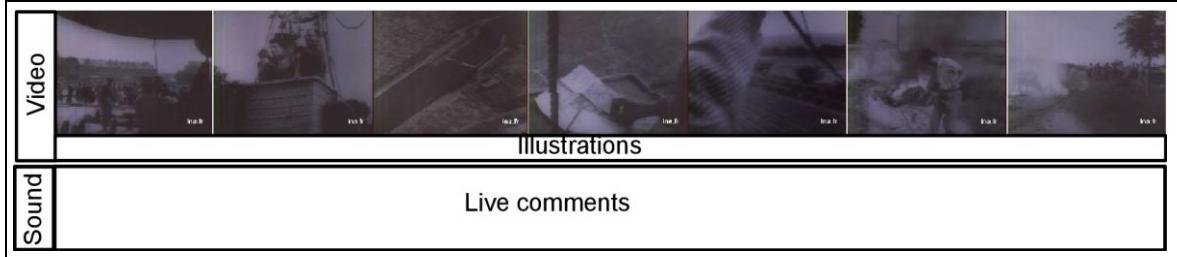


Illustration 2. Pictures of a report – broadcast march 1, 1972¹



Illustration 3. Workflow of news reports with film shooting and synchronous sound

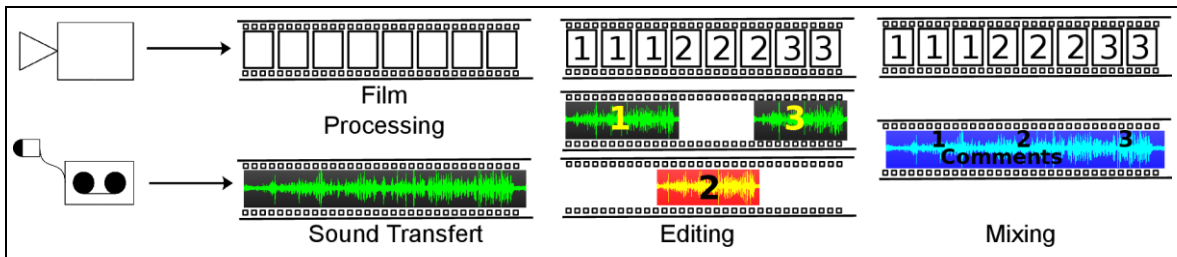
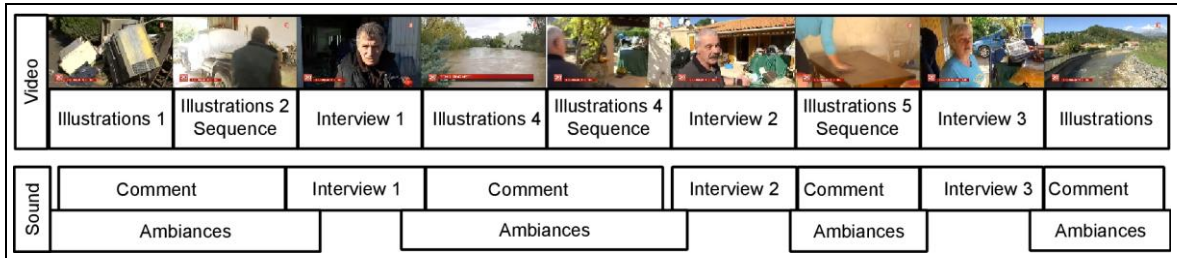


Illustration 4. Structure of a newscast report – France 2 chanel november 10, 2011



¹Screenshot done on the ina.fr site with the authorization of INA (INA 1972).