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 Callara, Alejandro Luis\* (*Dipartimento di Ingegneria dell'Informazione, Univ. of Pisa*); Morelli, Maria Sole (*Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna (Pisa)*); Cauzzo, Simone (*Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, Institute of Life Science*); Giannoni, Alberto (*Fondazione Gabriele Monasterio, Pisa*); Hartwig, Valentina (*Univ. of Pisa*); Montanaro, Domenico (*Fondazione Toscana "G. Monasterio", National Research Council, P*); Landini, Luigi (*Univ. of Pisa*); Passino, Claudio (*Fondazione Gabriele Monasterio, Pisa*); Emdin, Michele (*Fondazione Gabriele Monasterio, Pisa*); Vanello, Nicola (*Univ. of Pisa*)
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 Rodríguez-González, Victor (*Biomedical Engineering Group, University of Valladolid*); Poza, Jesus\* (*University of Valladolid*); Núñez, Pablo (*University of Valladolid*); Gomez, Carlos (*University of Valladolid*); Garcia, Maria (*University of Valladolid*); Shigihara, Yoshihito (*Precision Medicine Center, Hokuto Hospital*); Hoshi, Hideyuki (*Precision Medicine Center, Hokuto Hospital*); Santamaría, Eduardo (*University of Valladolid*); Homero, Roberto (*University of Valladolid*)
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- 18:00-19:30 FrPOS-09.8  
**Three-Dimensional Distorted Born Iterative Method Enhanced by Breast Boundary Extraction for Microwave Mammography**  
 Noritake, Kazuki (*University of Electro-Communications*); Kidera, Shouhei\* (*University of Electro-Communications*)

# Towards Automatic Artifact Rejection in Resting-State MEG Recordings: Evaluating the Performance of the SOUND Algorithm

Víctor Rodríguez-González, Jesús Poza, *IEEE Senior Member*, Pablo Núñez, Carlos Gómez, *IEEE Senior Member*, María García, *IEEE Senior Member*, Yoshihito Shigihara, Hideyuki Hoshi, Eduardo Santamaría-Vázquez, Roberto Hornero, *IEEE Senior Member*

**Abstract**—In this study, a new automated noise rejection algorithm, the **S**ource-estimate-Utilizing **N**oise-Discarding algorithm (**SOUND**), was evaluated on magnetoencephalographic (MEG) resting-state signals in order to select its optimal configuration parameters. Different values of the epoch length and the regularization parameter  $\lambda_0$  were assessed in three scenarios with ascending noise levels. Results show that it is possible to remarkably improve the Signal-to-Noise Ratio, without overly altering the signal of interest. An optimal  $\lambda_0$  value of 0.1 was obtained. However, the epoch length should be adapted to the specific problem. In conclusion, our results suggest that the SOUND algorithm is an appropriate and useful tool to be applied in a preprocessing pipeline for MEG resting-state signals.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Magnetoencephalography (MEG) is an electrophysiological brain imaging method, which records magnetic signals generated by neurons at the scalp level. MEG has a high economic cost, but provides low invasivity and high temporal and spatial resolution [1]. This offers advantages over other brain imaging techniques like electroencephalography, functional magnetic resonance imaging and positron emission tomography, which suffer from low spatial resolution, low temporal resolution and high invasivity level, respectively [1].

MEG can be used in clinical environments to detect cerebral injuries or tumors, to study cognitive processes in fetuses and newborns, or to localize foci on epileptic patients, among others [2]. MEG is also widely used in research scenarios related to many neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer [3], schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder [4].

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There are two main types of MEG recordings: (i) evoked responses, which measure the brain response to a certain motor, sensory or cognitive event; and (ii) resting-state, where the brain activity is recorded when an explicit task is not being performed [1].

In both cases, in order to perform an effective analysis, a preprocessing of the MEG signals has to be applied. This process should reduce the presence of noise from different sources in the cortical signals. For this purpose, different methods can be applied, like filtering, umbralization, independent component analysis or source space projection [5], [6], [7]. However, some of these procedures are not purely objective and suffer from a great dependence on the criteria of the professional who performs the analyses [6], [7].

In order to develop a fully automated preprocessing algorithm, a quantitative way of rejecting noise is required. This would allow an objective and professional-independent noise rejection process [8], [9]. This issue has been addressed by many research groups, which have developed different automated processes for noise rejection [8], [9], [10], [11]. In this paper, we have assessed the **S**ource-estimate-Utilizing **N**oise-Discarding (**SOUND**) algorithm due to its outperformance over other preprocessing techniques and its ease of use [8]. The SOUND algorithm provides a fully automated artifact rejection method. It uses the source-level signals to cross-validate the information between sensors. The algorithm has been previously tested with evoked responses [8], but not with resting-state signals. Hence, this paper focused on evaluating the algorithm with the latter. Moreover, we wanted to determine the optimal parameter values to establish a fully automated pipeline of applying SOUND on MEG resting-state recordings.

## II. SUBJECTS AND MEG RECORDINGS

The sample consisted of 3 subjects: 2 male (aged 83 and 85 years) and 1 female (aged 94 years). The corresponding MEG recordings were inspected by a specialist and classified in three scenarios with ascending noise levels (low, medium, and high) showing different types of artifacts (cardiac, ocular, movement, etc.).

The Ethical Committee of the Hokuto Hospital (Obihiro, Japan) approved the study according to the Code of Ethics of the World Medical Association (Declaration of Helsinki).

MEG recordings were obtained using a 160-channel axial gradiometer MEG system (Yokogawa-KIT, Yokogawa Elec-

tric) at the Hokuto Hospital, Obihiro, Japan. MEG activity was recorded at a sampling rate of 1000 Hz. Subjects were asked to keep their eyes closed and to remain still and awake during MEG acquisition. To prevent somnolence, MEG activity was monitored in real time. Eighty seconds of resting-state MEG activity were selected for each subject.

### III. METHODS

#### A. The SOUND Algorithm

The SOUND algorithm is a Wiener estimator that minimizes the mean-squared error in the estimated clean signal [8]. SOUND uses anatomical information of the head from a forward model to make a cross-validation of the information in different sensors. Thereby, noise and artifacts can be identified and removed from the signal of interest [8].

The signal measured by sensor  $S$  at  $T$  time points,  $\mathbf{Y}$ , can be written as [8]:

$$\mathbf{Y} = \bar{\mathbf{Y}} + \mathbf{N} = \mathbf{L}\mathbf{J} + \mathbf{N}, \quad (1)$$

being  $\mathbf{Y}$  the measured data,  $\bar{\mathbf{Y}}$  the noiseless data,  $\mathbf{N}$  the noise,  $\mathbf{L}$  the leadfield matrix, and  $\mathbf{J}$  the clean source-level data.

To estimate  $\bar{\mathbf{Y}}$  from  $\mathbf{Y}$ , a clean estimation of the noiseless source-level signal,  $\mathbf{J}$ , is needed. For this task, the noise covariance matrix,  $\Sigma$ , is needed. If we consider the noise to be uncorrelated across sensors,  $\Sigma$  becomes a diagonal matrix  $\Sigma = \text{diag}(\sigma_1, \sigma_2, \dots, \sigma_s)$  [8]. Thus, it can be calculated by estimating the noise signal,  $\sigma_s$ , in each sensor as [8]:

$$\sigma_s = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{t=1}^T y_{s,t} - \mathbf{1}_s \bar{\mathbf{j}}_{\cdot,t}}{T}}, \quad (2)$$

where  $y_{s,t}$  is the signal measured by the sensor  $s$  in the instant  $t$ ,  $\mathbf{1}_s$  is the row  $s$  of the leadfield matrix, and  $\bar{\mathbf{j}}_{\cdot,t}$  is the source-level signal in the time instant  $t$ .

SOUND estimates the noise iteratively [8]:

- 1) Re-reference the data to a sensor with a low noise level, producing an initial  $\Sigma$  estimate.
- 2) Estimate  $\sigma_s$  in all sensors and update the  $\Sigma$  value.
- 3) Repeat step 2 until the convergence of  $\Sigma$ .

With the final  $\Sigma$  estimation, the clean source-level signal estimation  $\hat{\mathbf{J}}$ , and thus the estimated denoised sensor-level signal  $\hat{\mathbf{Y}}$  can be reconstructed [8].

In short, SOUND uses the multidimensional nature of the data and anatomical information to estimate the reliability of the sensors, cleaning the data accordingly [8].

#### B. Configuration of SOUND parameters

To apply SOUND properly, a leadfield matrix is needed for the transformation between scalp and source level. The computations of the leadfield matrices was accomplished using the MEAW Toolbox, developed by Yoshihito Shigihara and Hideyuki Hoshi [12]. Additionally, to construct the leadfield matrix, a MNI152 template was used.

The number of iterations has to be large enough to allow the convergence of the algorithm [8]. Several tests were

performed, showing that 20 iterations are enough to converge in all the scenarios.

#### C. Evaluation of the algorithm performance

1) *Visual signal inspection*: In a first step, MEG signals were visually inspected to identify whether an artifact had been removed.

2) *Signal-to-Noise Ratio and Overcorrection Tradeoff*: In order to make a quantitative evaluation of the performance of SOUND, two parameters had to be optimized: the signal-to-noise ratio variation between trials ( $\Delta SNR$ ) and the overcorrection ( $OC$ ).  $\Delta SNR$  measures the quantity of noise rejected from the signal, whereas  $OC$  shows the amount of information (signal of interest) that has been removed along with the noise. A tradeoff between both parameters should be found.  $\Delta SNR$  is calculated as follows [8]:

$$\Delta SNR = \left\langle \frac{\frac{\|\hat{\mathbf{y}}_s^1\| - \|\mathbf{y}_s^1\|}{\|\hat{\mathbf{y}}_s^1\|}}{\frac{\|\mathbf{y}_s^1\|}{\|\mathbf{y}_s^1\|}} \times 100 \right\rangle, \quad (3)$$

where  $\mathbf{y}_s$  and  $\hat{\mathbf{y}}_s$  are the original and the denoised signals in sensor  $s$ , respectively,  $\|\cdot\|$  refers to the  $L_2$  norm, and  $\langle \cdot \rangle$  is the mean value [8]. The superscript <sup>1</sup> indicates that the signals have been filtered around the individual alpha frequency (IAF)  $\pm 2.5$  Hz (Hamming window, order 3000). The IAF was calculated as the median frequency of the power spectral density in the range of 4 to 15 Hz [13], [14]. The IAF  $\pm 2.5$  Hz band has been considered since it encloses the dominant activity during resting-state recordings [13], [14].

$OC$  was calculated as the absolute value of the correlation coefficient between the noiseless signal and the estimated noise [8]:

$$OC = \left\langle \frac{|\hat{\mathbf{y}}_s (\mathbf{y}_s - \hat{\mathbf{y}}_s)^T|}{\|\hat{\mathbf{y}}_s\|_2 \|\mathbf{y}_s - \hat{\mathbf{y}}_s\|_2} \right\rangle. \quad (4)$$

Additionally,  $\lambda_0$  is a regularization parameter that controls the balance between preserving the signal of interest and removing noise. More details about  $\lambda_0$  could be found in [8]. In order to objectively choose  $\lambda_0$ , a trade-off parameter,  $\kappa$ , was defined.  $\kappa$  has to be maximized to offer the optimal compromise between maximizing the  $\Delta SNR$  and minimizing the  $OC$ . The algorithm tradeoff was then calculated as follows:

$$\kappa = \frac{\Delta SNR^n}{OC^n}, \quad (5)$$

where the superscript <sup>n</sup> means that the values have been z-normalized.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Optimizing the epoch length

Lower values of the epoch length yield a greater  $\Delta SNR$  and slightly lower  $OC$ , as shown in Fig. 1. However, they also cause new artifacts due to edge effects. The number of emerged artifacts is related to the epoch length, which determines the number of epochs. Likewise, the artifact amplitude depends on the local power of each epoch. Consequently,

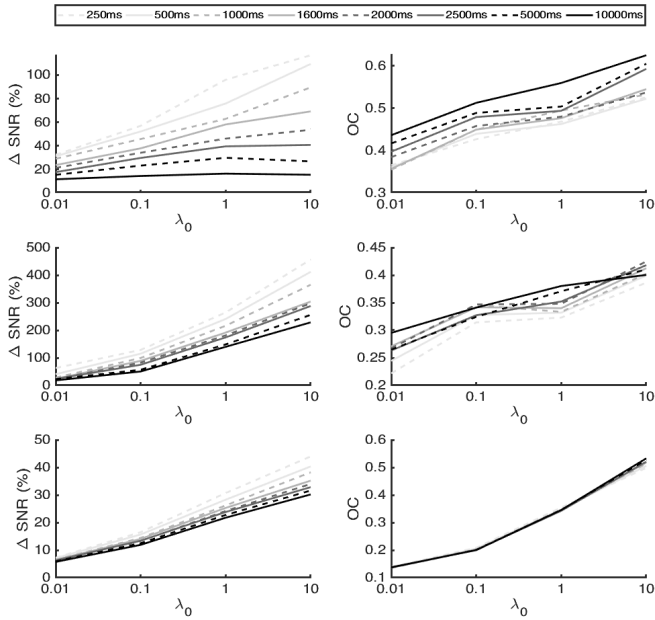


Fig. 1.  $\Delta SNR$  and  $OC$  values as a function of  $\lambda_0$  parameter and epoch length: the first row shows the high noise scenario, the second row the medium noise scenario, and the last row the low noise scenario.

a compromise when choosing an optimal epoch length is needed. Using smaller epoch lengths increase the algorithm performance because it improves the assumption of noise stationarity. Nevertheless, the artifacts related to edge effects are not reflected in Fig. 1, due to the  $\Delta SNR$  estimation used [8]. Fig 2 shows an example of the aforementioned artifact caused by the edge effects. Additionally, these artifacts would not be removed because they appear after applying SOUND.

In conclusion, the epoch length should be adapted to the particular characteristics of the problem at hand. When using SOUND as a first stage in an automated pipeline, the selection of the epoch length should take into account the remaining stages of the method and the effect of the aforementioned artifacts on the signal.

### B. Optimizing $\lambda_0$

The dependence of the  $\Delta SNR$  and  $OC$  values as a function of  $\lambda_0$  and epoch length can be seen in Fig. 1. Both parameters increase their values with  $\lambda_0$  for all the assessed scenarios. The objective was to obtain a high  $\Delta SNR$ , while keeping the  $OC$  low; therefore a compromise between these two variables when choosing the  $\lambda_0$  parameter has to be found. An overly large  $\lambda_0$  value would lead to a large quantity of the signal of interest to be removed. On the other hand, if the value of  $\lambda_0$  is not high enough, the artifacts would not be removed at all.

Fig. 3 shows the  $\kappa$  values as a function of  $\lambda_0$ . The largest values of  $\kappa$  were obtained for  $\lambda_0=0.1$ . This value yielded the best compromise between maximizing the  $\Delta SNR$  and minimizing the  $OC$ . These results agree with the findings in the original SOUND paper [8].

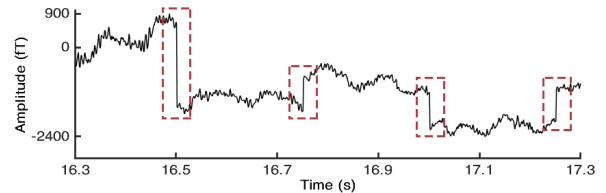


Fig. 2. Artifact caused by edge effects after applying SOUND with 250ms epoch length. Red boxes marks the aforementioned artifacts

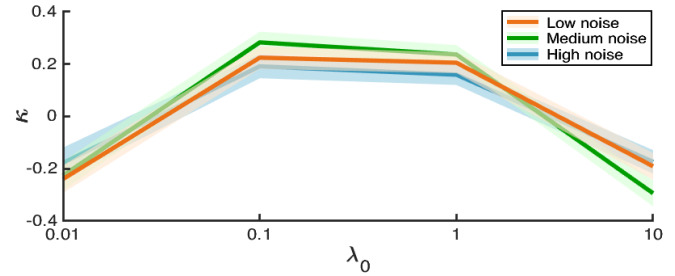


Fig. 3. Algorithm tradeoff  $\kappa$  as a function of  $\lambda_0$  parameter. The figure shows the mean and standard error of the algorithm tradeoff for the high (blue), medium (green) and low (orange) noise level scenarios.

### C. Assessing the performance of the algorithm

Table I shows  $\Delta SNR$  and  $OC$  values for the three studied scenarios.  $\Delta SNR$  values have been split between the channels where the signal-to-noise ratio increased or decreased.

These values show that, quantitatively, SOUND increases the signal-to-noise ratio from the resting-state MEG signals, while keeping the  $OC$  low. These results are in agreement with those obtained by Mutanen *et al.* [8], which support the use of SOUND with MEG resting-state recordings.

In Fig. 4 the noise rejection performed by SOUND is illustrated. This figure shows different types of artifacts, and how the SOUND algorithm can detect and remove them. Moreover, Fig 4 depicts the topography of the log-transformed power in the  $IAF \pm 2.5$  Hz band, before and after applying SOUND. After the application of the SOUND algorithm, alpha activity in posterior brain regions appears, which is typically observed in resting-state studies [13], [14].

TABLE I  
 $\Delta SNR$  AND  $OC$  VALUES OBTAINED FOR THE DIFFERENT NOISE LEVEL SCENARIOS UNDER STUDY

	SCENARIOS		
	High noise	Medium noise	Low noise
	Value	Value	Value
$\Delta SNR$ (%)	36.9 (160)	87.0 (160)	14.0 (160)
$\Delta SNR \uparrow$ (%)	51.5 (152)	176.6 (149)	25.8 (137)
$\Delta SNR \downarrow$ (%)	-3.1 (8)	-6.7 (11)	-3.9 (23)
$OC$	0.46 (160)	0.33 (160)	0.20 (160)

$\Delta SNR$ ,  $\Delta SNR \uparrow$ , and  $\Delta SNR \downarrow$  represent respectively all, improved, and worsened channels after applying SOUND. The values in brackets show the number of channels in each category

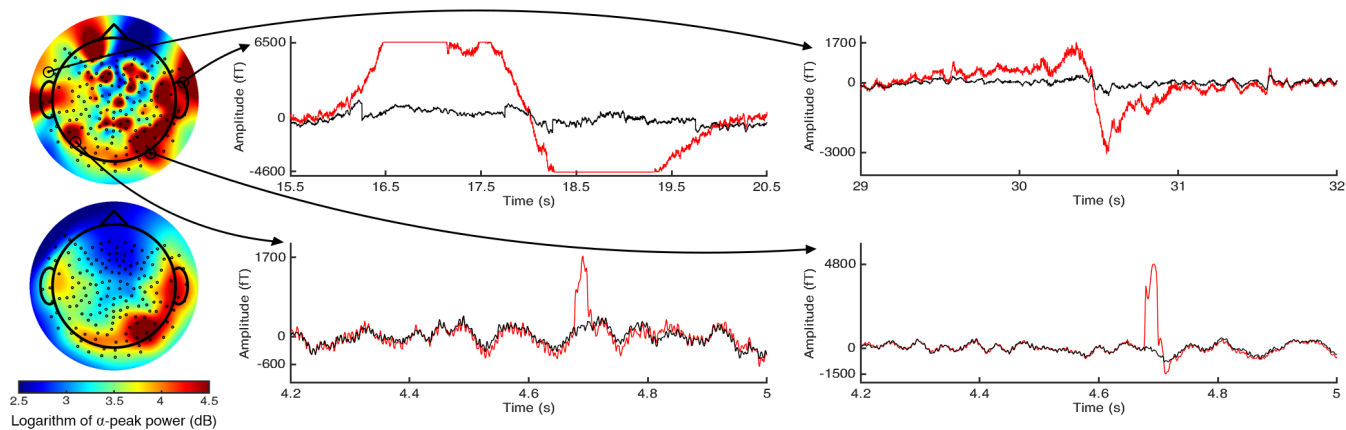


Fig. 4. Left column shows the topography of the log-transformed power for the band centered on the individual alpha peak ( $IAF \pm 2.5$  Hz), before (upper row) and after (lower row) applying SOUND. Central and right columns show different types of noise artifacts that the algorithm has been able to remove. The red curves show the noisy MEG signals, while the black curves show the reconstructed signals.

#### D. Limitations and future lines

Several limitations of this study should be pointed out. Firstly, the SOUND algorithm was evaluated in three MEG recordings with different noise levels. Future studies should include a larger database. No synthetic signals were used although they could provide higher accuracy when measuring the performance of SOUND. However, generating synthetic real-wise signals is not straightforward and requires further research. The high computational cost associated with the SOUND algorithm has prevented us from studying a large range of  $\lambda_0$  and epoch length values. Future studies would be aimed at analyzing additional values of these parameters.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

The SOUND algorithm has been assessed on MEG resting-state signals. Our results suggest that the SOUND algorithm is an appropriate method to be included in a fully automated preprocessing protocol of MEG resting-state signals.

Our results also indicate that a  $\lambda_0 = 0.1$  value offers an optimal balance between maximizing the *SNR* in the reconstructed signal, while keeping the overcorrection as low as possible. On the other hand, it has not been possible to establish an optimal value of epoch length, suggesting that it should be adapted to each specific problem.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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