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Application Number: 17592143 Document Date: 02/03/2022

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Samsung v. Techiya
IPR2024-01003
Exhibit 1004

Doc code: IDS
Doc description: Information Disclosure Statement (IDS) Filed

PTO/SB/08a (02-18)
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INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (**Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)**		
	Application Number	
	Filing Date	
	First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
	Art Unit	OPAP
	Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

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Examiner Initial*	Cite No	Patent Number	Kind Code[1]	Issue Date	Name of Patentee or Applicant of cited Document	Pages,Columns,Lines where Relevant Passages or Relevant Figures Appear
	1	6804638		2004-10-12	Fiedler; Mark	
	2	6163508		2000-12-19	Kim et al.	
	3	6400652		2002-06-04	Goldberg et al.	
	4	7433714		2008-10-07	Howard et al.	
	5	7562020		2009-06-14	Le et al.	
	6	9135797		2015-09-15	Couper et al.	
	7	9123343		2015-09-01	Kurki-Suonio	
	8	7756285		2010-07-13	Sjursen et al.	

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	9	5903868		1999-05-11	Yuen et al.	
	10	3876843		1975-04-08	Moen	
	11	5208867		1993-05-04	Stites, III	
	12	6226389		2001-05-01	Lemelson et al.	
	13	8493204		2013-07-23	Wong et al.	
	14	6661901		2003-12-09	Svean et al.	
	15	7430299		2008-09-30	Armstrong et al.	
	16	6567524		2003-05-20	Svean et al.	
	17	7107109		2006-09-12	Nathan et al.	
	18	4947440		1990-08-07	Bateman et al.	
	19	9037458		2015-05-19	Park et al.	

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	20	4054749		1977-10-18	Suzuki et al.	
	21	6298323		2001-10-02	Kaemmerer	
	22	6804643		2004-10-12	Kiss	
	23	6163338		2000-12-19	Johnson et al.	
	24	6748238		2004-06-08	Lau	
	25	6021325		2000-02-01	Hall	
	26	8750295		2014-06-10	Liron	
	27	7920557		2011-04-05	Moote	
	28	7158933		2007-01-02	Balan; Radu Victor	
	29	8611560		2013-12-17	Goldstein; Steven Wayne	

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	1	20030165246		2003-09-04	Kvaloy et al.	
	2	20050288057		2005-12-29	Lai et al.	
	3	20060195322		2006-08-31	Broussard et al.	
	4	20070043563		2007-02-22	Comerford et al.	
	5	20010046304		2001-11-29	Rast	
	6	20070189544		2007-08-16	Rosenberg	
	7	20060092043		2006-05-04	Lagassey	
	8	20020106091		2002-08-08	Furst et al.	
	9	20040109668		2004-06-10	Stuckman	
	10	20020118798		2002-08-29	Langhart et al.	

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	11	20040042103		2004-03-04	Mayer	
	12	20030161097		2003-08-28	Le et al.	
	13	20160104452		2016-04-14	Guan et al.	
	14	20040203351		2004-10-14	Shearer et al.	
	15	20080165988		2008-07-10	Terlizzi et al.	
	16	20070291953		2007-12-20	Ngia et al.	
	17	20110096939		2011-04-28	Ichimura	
	18	20060067551		2006-03-30	Cartwright et al.	
	19	20090024234		2009-01-22	Archibald	
	20	20090010456		2009-01-08	Goldstein et al.	
	21	20070086600		2007-04-19	Boesen	

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	22	20040190737		2004-09-30	Kuhnel et al.	
	23	20040196992		2004-10-07	Ryan	
	24	20050123146		2005-06-09	Voix et al.	
	25	20040125965		2004-07-01	Alberth Jr., et al.	
	26	20060083395		2006-04-20	Allen et al.	
	27	20110264447		2011-10-27	Visser et al.	
	28	20100296668		2010-11-25	Lee et al.	
	29	20110293103		2011-12-01	Park et al.	
	30	20100061564		2010-03-11	Clemow et al.	
	31	20050058313		2005-03-17	Victorian, Thomas A.	
	32	20140122092		2019-03-19	Goldstein; Steven Wayne	

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	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

	33	20090286515		2009-05-05	Othmer; Konstantin		
	34	20060173563		2006-08-03	Borovitski; Michael D.		
	35	20090076821		2009-03-19	Brenner; Vadim		

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Examiner Initial*	Cite No	Foreign Document Number[3]	Country Code[2] i	Kind Code[4]	Publication Date	Name of Patentee or Applicant of cited Document	Pages,Columns,Lines where Relevant Passages or Relevant Figures Appear	T[5]
	1	EP1519625	EP	A2		Victorian		
	2	2006037156	WO	A1		Mejia et al.		

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Examiner Initials*	Cite No	Include name of the author (in CAPITAL LETTERS), title of the article (when appropriate), title of the item (book, magazine, journal, serial, symposium, catalog, etc), date, pages(s), volume-issue number(s), publisher, city and/or country where published.	T[5]
	1	Olwal, A. and Feiner S. Interaction Techniques Using Prosodic Features of Speech and Audio Localization. Proceedings of IUI 2005 (International Conference on Intelligent User Interfaces), San Diego, CA, Jan 9-12, 2005, p. 284-286.	
	2	Bernard Widrow, John R. Glover Jr., John M. McCool, John Kaunitz, Charles S. Williams, Robert H. Hearn, James R. Zeidler, Eugene Dong Jr, and Robert C. Goodlin, Adaptive Noise Cancelling: Principles and Applications, PROCEEDINGS OF THE IEEE, VOL. 63, NO. 12, DECEMBER 1975	

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	3	Mauro Dentino, John M. McCool, and Bernard Widrow, Adaptive Filtering in the Frequency Domain, PROCEEDINGS OF THE IEEE, VOL. 66, NO. 12, DECEMBER 1978	

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[1] See Kind Codes of USPTO Patent Documents at www.USPTO.GOV or MPEP 901.04. [2] Enter office that issued the document, by the two-letter code (WIPO Standard ST.3). [3] For Japanese patent documents, the indication of the year of the reign of the Emperor must precede the serial number of the patent document. [4] Kind of document by the appropriate symbols as indicated on the document under WIPO Standard ST.16 if possible. [5] Applicant is to place a check mark here if English language translation is attached.

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

Please see 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98 to make the appropriate selection(s):

That each item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was first cited in any communication from a foreign patent office in a counterpart foreign application not more than three months prior to the filing of the information disclosure statement. See 37 CFR 1.97(e)(1).

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Signature	/John P. Keady/	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	2022-01-11
Name/Print	John P. Keady	Registration Number	56389

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6. A record in this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to another federal agency for purposes of National Security review (35 U.S.C. 181) and for review pursuant to the Atomic Energy Act (42 U.S.C. 218(c)).

7. A record from this system of records may be disclosed, as a routine use, to the Administrator, General Services, or his/her designee, during an inspection of records conducted by GSA as part of that agency's responsibility to recommend improvements in records management practices and programs, under authority of 44 U.S.C. 2904 and 2906. Such disclosure shall be made in accordance with the GSA regulations governing inspection of records for this purpose, and any other relevant (i.e., GSA or Commerce) directive. Such disclosure shall not be used to make determinations about individuals.

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Application Number	
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First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
Art Unit	OPAP
Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

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Examiner Initial*	Cite No	Patent Number	Kind Code[1]	Issue Date	Name of Patentee or Applicant of cited Document	Pages,Columns,Lines where Relevant Passages or Relevant Figures Appear
	1	6359993		2002-03-19	Brimhall	
	2	7072482		2006-07-04	Van Doorn et al.	
	3	7778434		2010-08-17	Juneau et al.	
	4	5524056		1996-06-04	Killion et al.	
	5	6415034		2002-07-02	Hietanen	
	6	8014553		2011-09-06	Radivojevic et al.	
	7	4088849		1978-05-09	Usami et al.	
	8	7209569		2007-04-24	Boesen	

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	9	6754359		2004-06-22	Svean et al.	
	10	6021207		2000-02-01	Puthuff et al.	
	11	5267321		1993-11-30	Langberg	
	12	RE38351		2003-12-16	Iseberg et al.	
	13	7477756		2009-01-13	Wickstrom et al.	
	14	7450730		2008-11-11	Bertg et al.	
	15	6567524		2003-05-20	Svean et al.	
	16	6728385		2004-04-27	Kvaloy et al.	

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	1	20030165246		2003-09-04	Kvaloy et al.	

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	2	20080037801		2008-02-14	Alves et al.		
	3	20060204014		2006-09-14	Isenberg et al.		
	4	20050078838		2005-04-14	Simon		

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Application Number	
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First Named Inventor	GOLDSTEIN, Steven Wayne
Art Unit	
Examiner Name	unknown
Attorney Docket Number	CONT-16987396

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Examiner Initial*	Cite No	Patent Number	Kind Code[1]	Issue Date	Name of Patentee or Applicant of cited Document	Pages,Columns,Lines where Relevant Passages or Relevant Figures Appear
	1	8577052		2013-11-05	Michael W. Silber, et al.	
	2	5541359		1996-07-30	Young-Man Lee	
	3	5774567		1998-06-30	Lawrence F. Heyl	
	4	7421084		2008-09-02	Christopher Michael Jubien, et al.	
	5	7903826		2011-03-08	Johan Boersma	
	6	7986802		2011-07-26	Carl R. Ziller	
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	8	10361673		2019-07-23	Takeo Matsukawa	

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	Application Number	
	Filing Date	2021-05-17
	First Named Inventor	GOLDSTEIN, Steven Wayne
	Art Unit	
	Examiner Name	unknown
	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-16987396

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Examiner Initial*	Cite No	Publication Number	Kind Code[1]	Publication Date	Name of Patentee or Applicant of cited Document	Pages,Columns,Lines where Relevant Passages or Relevant Figures Appear
	1	20050207597		2005-09-22	Takahisa Kageyama	
	2	20030035551		2003-02-20	John Light, et al.	
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Name/Print	John P. Keady	Registration Number	56389

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Application Number	
Filing Date	
First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
Art Unit	
Examiner Name	Unknown
Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

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Examiner Initial*	Cite No	Patent Number	Kind Code[1]	Issue Date	Name of Patentee or Applicant of cited Document	Pages,Columns,Lines where Relevant Passages or Relevant Figures Appear
	1	8638239		2014-01-28	Cases; Fabien et al.	
	2	6226389		2001-05-01	Lemelson et al.	
	3	8514100		2013-08-20	Yamashita; Youji	
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	Examiner Name	Unknown
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	9	6023517		2000-02-08	Ishige; Ryuuichi	

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	1	20170124847		2017-05-04	Sigh, LLC	
	2	20060253282		2006-11-09	Gerhard Uwe Schmidt et al.	
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	Art Unit	
	Examiner Name	Unknown
	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

	9	20060262938		2006-11-23	Gauger; Daniel M.	
	10	20110069845		2011-03-24	Cohen; Alexander J.	
	11	20080240458		2008-10-02	Goldstein; Steven W	

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Signature	/John P. Keady/	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	2020-08-07
Name/Print	John P. Keady	Registration Number	56389

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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

APPLICATION NO.	:	UNKNOW	CONFIRMATION NO. Unknown
APPLICATION OF	:	Steven Wayne Goldstein	
DATE FILED	:		
EXAMINER	:	UNKNOWN	
TC/A.U.	:	UNKNOWN	
DOCKET	:	CONT-17321892	
TITLE	:	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION	

TRANSMITTAL

Commissioner for Patents
P. O. Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

Date: February 3, 2022

Sir:

Please find attached documents for the filing of a continuation of 17/321,892.

Prosecution Note: Applicant has established, via a 37 CFR 1.131 declaration in the parent application U.S. Pat. App. No. 16987396, that the current Inventor of the present application, has to such character and weight, established reduction to practice or conception at least to the effective filing date (i.e., priority) of Goldstein (US Patent Pub. 2016/0249128, U.S. Pat. App. No. 15/144,741) of 18 Nov. 2006.

Should the Examiner have any questions, the Examiner is respectfully requested to contact the undersigned representative at the telephone number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,

TECHIYA LLC

/John P. Keady/

John P. Keady
Ph.D. (Physics), Ph.D.(Comp. Sci.)
Assistant General Counsel: Intellectual Property and Chief Technical Officer
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Tel: 571-606-1291

METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION(S)

[0001] This is a continuation of and claims priority to U.S. Patent Application No. 17/321,892, filed 17 May 2021, which is a continuation of and claims priority to U.S. Patent Application No. 16/987,396, filed 7 Aug. 2020, which is a continuation of and claims priority to U.S. Patent Application No. 16/669,490, filed 30 Oct. 2019, which is a continuation of and claims priority to U.S. Patent Application No. 16/193,568, filed 16 Nov. 2018, now U.S. Patent No. 10,535,334, which is a continuation of and claims priority to U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 14/574,589, filed on December 18, 2014, now U.S. Patent No. 10,134,377, which claims priority to and is a continuation of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 12/017,878, filed on January 22, 2008, now U.S. Patent No. 8,917,894, which claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/885,917, filed on January 22, 2007, all of which are herein incorporated by reference in their entireties.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates to a device that monitors sound directed to an occluded ear, and more particularly, though not exclusively, to an earpiece and method of operating an earpiece that detects acute sounds and allows the acute sounds to be reproduced in an ear canal of the occluded ear.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Since the advent of industrialization over two centuries ago, the human auditory system has been increasingly stressed to tolerate high noise levels to which it had hitherto been unexposed. Recently, human knowledge of the causes of hearing damage have been researched intensively and models for predicting hearing loss have been developed and verified with empirical data from decades of scientific research. Yet it can be strongly argued that the danger of permanent hearing damage is more present in our daily lives than ever, and that sound levels from personal audio systems in particular (i.e. from portable audio devices), live sound events, and the urban environment are a ubiquitous threat to healthy auditory functioning across the global population.

[0004] Environmental noise is constantly presented in industrialized societies given the ubiquity of external sound intrusions. Examples include people talking on their cell phones, blaring music in health clubs, or the constant hum of air conditioning systems in schools and office buildings.

Excess noise exposure can also induce auditory fatigue, possibly comprising a person's listening abilities. On a daily basis, people are exposed to various environmental sounds and noises within their environment, such as the sounds from traffic, construction, and industry.

[0005] To combat the undesired cacophony of annoying sounds, people are arming themselves with portable audio playback devices to drown out intrusive noise. The majority of devices providing the person with audio content do so using insert (or in-ear) earbuds. These earbuds deliver sound directly to the ear canal at high sound levels over the background noise even though the earbuds generally provide little to no ambient sound isolation. Moreover, when people wear earbuds (or headphones) to listen to music, or engage in a call using a telephone, they can effectively impair their auditory judgment and their ability to discriminate between sounds. With such devices, the person is immersed in the audio experience and generally less likely to hear warning sounds within their environment. In some cases, the user may even tum up the volume to hear their personal audio over environmental noises. It also puts them at high sound exposure risk which can potentially cause long term hearing damage.

[0006] With earbuds, personal audio reproduction levels can reach in excess of 100 dB. This is enough to exceed recommended daily sound exposure levels in less than a minute and to cause permanent acoustic trauma. Furthermore, rising population densities have continually increased sound levels in society. According to researchers, 40% of the European community is continuously exposed to transportation noise of 55 dBA and 20% are exposed to greater than 65 dBA. This level of 65 dBA is considered by the World Health Organization to be intrusive or annoying, and as mentioned, can lead to users of personal audio devices increasing reproduction levels to compensate for ambient noise.

[0007] A need therefore exists for enhancing the user's ability to listen in the environment without harming his or her hearing faculties.

SUMMARY

[0008] Embodiments in accordance with the present invention provide a method and device for acute sound detection and reproduction.

[0009] In a first embodiment, an earpiece can include an Ambient Sound Microphone (ASM) to capture ambient sound, at least one Ear Canal Receiver (ECR) to deliver audio to an ear canal; and a processor

operatively coupled to the ASM and the at least one ECR. The processor can monitor a change in the ambient sound level to detect an acute sound from the change. The acute sound can be reproduced within the ear canal via the ECR responsive to detecting the acute sound.

[0010] The processor can pass (transmit) sound from the ASM directly to the ECR to produce sound within the ear canal at a same sound pressure level (SPL) as the acute sound measured at an entrance to the ear canal. In one arrangement, the processor can maintain an approximately constant ratio between an audio content level (ACL) and an internal ambient sound level (iASL) measured within the ear canal. In one arrangement, the processor can measure an external ambient sound level (xASL) of the ambient sound with the ASM and subtract an attenuation level of the earpiece from the xASL to estimate the internal ambient sound level (iASL) within the ear canal.

[0011] The earpiece can further include an Ear Canal Microphone (ECM) to measure an ear canal sound level (ECL) within the ear canal. In this configuration, the processor can estimate the internal ambient sound level (iASL) within the ear canal by subtracting an estimated audio content sound level (ACL) from the ECL. For instance, the processor can measure a voltage level of the audio content sent to the ECR, and apply a transfer function of the ECR to convert the voltage level to the ACL. The processor can be located external to the earpiece on a portable computing device.

[0012] In a second embodiment, an earpiece can comprise an Ambient Sound Microphone (ASM) to capture ambient sound, at least one Ear Canal Receiver (ECR) to deliver audio to an ear canal, an audio interface operatively coupled to the processor to receive audio content, and a processor operatively coupled to the ASM and the at least one ECR. The processor can monitor a change in the ambient sound level to detect an acute sound from the change, adjust an audio content level (ACL) of the audio content delivered to the ear canal, and reproduce the acute sound within the ear canal via the ECR responsive to detecting the acute sound and based on the ACL.

[0013] The audio interface can receive the audio content from at least one among a portable music player, a cell phone, and a portable communication device. During operation, the processor can maintain an approximately constant ratio between an audio content level (ACL) and an internal ambient sound level (iASL) measured within the ear canal. In one arrangement, the processor can mute the audio content and pass the acute sound to the ECR for reproducing the acute sound within the ear canal. In another arrangement, the processor can amplify the acute sound with respect to the audio content level (ACL).

[0014] In a third embodiment, a method for acute sound detection and reproduction can include the steps of measuring an ambient sound level (xASL) of ambient sound external to an ear canal at least partially occluded by the earpiece, monitoring a change in the xASL for detecting an acute sound, and reproducing the acute sound within the ear canal responsive to detecting the acute sound. The reproducing can include enhancing the acute sound over the ambient sound. The step of reproducing can produce sound within the ear canal at a same sound pressure level (SPL) as the acute sound measured at an entrance to the ear canal.

[0015] The method can further include receiving audio content from an audio interface that is directed to the ear canal, and maintaining an approximately constant ratio between a level of the audio content (ACL) and a level of an internal ambient sound level (iASL) measured within the ear canal. The ACL can be determined by measuring a voltage level of the audio content sent to the ECR, and applying a transfer function of the ECR to convert the voltage level to the ACL. The method can further include measuring an Ear Canal Level (ECL) within the ear canal, and subtracting the ACL from the ECL to estimate the iASL. The iASL can be estimated by subtracting an attenuation level of the earpiece from the xASL.

[0016] In a fourth embodiment, a method for acute sound detection and reproduction suitable for use with an earpiece can include the steps of measuring an external ambient sound level (xASL) in an ear canal at least partially occluded by the earpiece, monitoring a change in the xASL for detecting an acute sound, estimating a proximity of the acute sound, and reproducing the acute sound within the ear canal responsive to detecting the acute sound based on the proximity. The step of estimating a proximity can include performing a cross correlation analysis between at least two microphones, identifying a peak in the cross correlation and an associated time lag, and determining the direction from the associated time lag. The method can further include identifying whether the acute sound is a vocal signal produced by a user operating the earpiece or a sound source external from the user.

[0017] In a fifth embodiment, a method for acute sound detection and reproduction suitable for use with an earpiece can include measuring an external ambient sound level (xASL) due to ambient sound outside of an ear canal at least partially occluded by the earpiece, measuring an internal ambient sound level (iASL) due to residual ambient sound within the ear canal at least partially occluded by the earpiece, monitoring a high frequency change between the xASL and the iASL with respect to a low frequency change between the xASL and the iASL for detecting an acute sound, and reproducing the xASL within the ear canal responsive to detecting the high frequency change. The method can further include determining a proximity of a sound source producing the acute sound.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0018] FIG. 1 is a pictorial diagram of an earpiece in accordance with an exemplary embodiment;

[0019] FIG. 2 is a block diagram of the earpiece in accordance with an exemplary embodiment;

[0020] FIG. 3 is a flowchart of a method for acute sound detection in accordance with an exemplary embodiment;

[0021] FIG. 4 is a more detailed approach to the method of FIG. 3 in accordance with an exemplary embodiment;

[0022] FIG. 5 is a flowchart of a method for acute sound source proximity in accordance with an exemplary embodiment;

[0023] FIG. 6 is a flowchart of a method for binaural analysis in accordance with an exemplary embodiment;

[0024] FIG. 7 is a flowchart of a method for logic control in accordance with an exemplary embodiment;

[0025] FIG. 8 is a flowchart of a method for estimating background noise level in accordance with an exemplary embodiment;

[0026] FIG. 9 is a flowchart of a method for maintaining constant audio content level (ACL) to internal ambient sound level (iASL) in accordance with an exemplary embodiment; and

[0027] FIG. 10 is a flowchart of a method for adjusting audio content gain in accordance with an exemplary embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0028] The following description of at least one exemplary embodiment is merely illustrative in nature and is in no way intended to limit the invention, its application, or uses.

[0029] Processes, techniques, apparatus, and materials as known by one of ordinary skill in the relevant art may not be discussed in detail but are intended to be part of the enabling description where appropriate, for example the fabrication and use of transducers. Additionally in at least one exemplary embodiment the sampling rate of the transducers can be varied to pick up pulses of sound, for example less than 50 milliseconds.

[0030] In all of the examples illustrated and discussed herein, any specific values, for example the sound pressure level change, should be interpreted to be illustrative only and non-limiting. Thus, other examples of the exemplary embodiments could have different values.

[0031] Note that similar reference numerals and letters refer to similar items in the following figures, and thus once an item is defined in one figure, it may not be discussed for following figures.

[0032] Note that herein when referring to correcting or preventing an error or damage (e.g., hearing damage), a reduction of the damage or error and/or a correction of the damage or error are intended.

[0033] At least one exemplary embodiment of the invention is directed to an earpiece for ambient sound monitoring and warning detection. Reference is made to FIG. 1 in which an earpiece device, generally indicated as earpiece 100, is constructed in accordance with at least one exemplary embodiment of the invention. As illustrated, earpiece 100 depicts an electro- acoustical assembly 113 for an in-the-ear acoustic assembly, as it would typically be placed in the ear canal 131 of a user 135. The earpiece 100 can be an in the ear earpiece, behind the ear earpiece, receiver in the ear, open-fit device, or any other suitable earpiece type. The earpiece 100 can be partially or fully occluded in the ear canal, and is suitable for use with users having healthy or abnormal auditory functioning.

[0034] Earpiece 100 includes an Ambient Sound Microphone (ASM) Ill to capture ambient sound, an Ear Canal Receiver (ECR) 125 to deliver audio to an ear canal 131, and an Ear Canal Microphone (ECM) 123 to assess a sound exposure 1evel within the ear canal. The earpiece 100 can partially or fully occlude the ear canal 131 to provide various degrees of acoustic isolation. The assembly is designed to be inserted into the user's ear canal 131, and to form an acoustic seal with the walls 129 of the ear canal at a location 127 between the entrance 117 to the ear canal and the tympanic membrane (or ear drum) 133. Such a seal is typically achieved by means of a soft and compliant housing of assembly 113. Such a seal is pertinent to the performance of the system in that it creates a closed cavity 131 of approximately

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5 cc between the in-ear assembly 113 and the tympanic membrane 133. As a result of this seal, the ECR (speaker) 125 is able to generate a full range bass response when reproducing sounds for the user. This seal also serves to significantly reduce the sound pressure level at the user's eardrum 133 resulting from the sound field at the entrance to the ear canal. This seal is also the basis for the sound isolating performance of the electro-acoustic assembly 113.

[0035] Located adjacent to the ECR 125, is the ECM 123, which is acoustically coupled to the (closed) ear canal cavity 131. One of its functions is that of measuring the sound pressure level in the ear canal cavity 131 as a part of testing the hearing acuity of the user as well as confirming the integrity of the acoustic seal and the working condition of itself and the ECR. The ASM 111 is housed in an assembly 113 and monitors sound pressure at the entrance to the occluded or partially occluded ear canal. All transducers shown can receive or transmit audio signals to a processor 121 that undertakes audio signal processing and provides a transceiver for audio via the wired or wireless communication path 119.

[0036] Referring to FIG. 2, a block diagram of the earpiece 100 in accordance with an exemplary embodiment is shown. As illustrated, the earpiece 100 can include a processor 206 operatively coupled to the ASM 111, ECR 125, and ECM 123 via one or more Analog to Digital Converters (ADC) 202 and Digital to Analog Converters (DAC) 203. The processor 206 can monitor the ambient sound captured by the ASM 111 for acute sounds in the environment, such as an abrupt high energy sound corresponding to the on-set of a warning sound (e.g., bell, emergency vehicle, security system, etc.), siren (e.g., police car, ambulance, etc.), voice (e.g., "help", "stop", "police", etc.), or specific noise type (e.g., breaking glass, gunshot, etc.). The processor 206 can utilize computing technologies such as a microprocessor, Application Specific Integrated Chip (ASIC), and/or digital signal processor (DSP) with associated storage memory 208 such as Flash, ROM, RAM, SRAM, DRAM or other like technologies for controlling operations of the earpiece device 100. The memory 208 can store program instructions for execution on the processor 206 as well as captured audio processing data.

[0037] The earpiece 100 can include an audio interface 212 operatively coupled to the processor 206 to receive audio content, for example from a media player or cell phone, and deliver the audio content to the processor 206. The processor 206 responsive to detecting acute sounds can adjust the audio content and pass the acute sounds directly to the ear canal. For instance, the processor can lower a volume of the audio content responsive to detecting an acute sound for transmitting the acute sound to the ear canal. The processor 206 can also actively monitor the sound exposure level inside the

ear canal and adjust the audio to within a safe and subjectively optimized listening level range.

[0038] The earpiece 100 can further include a transceiver 204 that can support singly or in combination any number of wireless access technologies including without limitation Bluetooth.TM., Wireless Fidelity (WiFi), Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access (WiMAX), and/or other short or long range communication protocols. The transceiver 204 can also provide support for dynamic downloading over-the-air to the earpiece 100. It should be noted also that next generation access technologies can also be applied to the present disclosure.

[0039] The power supply 210 can utilize common power management technologies such as replaceable batteries, supply regulation technologies, and charging system technologies for supplying energy to the components of the earpiece 100 and to facilitate portable applications. A motor (not shown) can be a single supply motor driver coupled to the power supply 210 to improve sensory input via haptic vibration. As an example, the processor 206 can direct the motor to vibrate responsive to an action, such as a detection of a warning sound or an incoming voice call.

[0040] The earpiece 100 can further represent a single operational device or a family of devices configured in a master-slave arrangement, for example, a mobile device and an earpiece. In the latter embodiment, the components of the earpiece 100 can be reused in different form factors for the master and slave devices.

[0041] FIG. 3 is a flowchart of a method 300 for acute sound detection and reproduction in accordance with an exemplary embodiment. The method 300 can be practiced with more or less than the number of steps shown and is not limited to the order shown. To describe the method 300, reference will be made to components of FIG. 2, although it is understood that the method 300 can be implemented in any other manner using other suitable components. The method 300 can be implemented in a single earpiece, a pair of earpieces, headphones, or other suitable headset audio delivery devices.

[0042] The method 300 can start in a state wherein the earpiece 100 has been inserted and powered on. As shown in step 302, the earpiece 100 can monitor the environment for ambient sounds received at the ASM 111. Ambient sounds correspond to sounds within the environment such as the sound of traffic noise, street noise, conversation babble, or any other acoustic sound. Ambient sounds can also correspond to industrial sounds present in an industrial setting, such as factory noise, lifting vehicles, automobiles, and robots to name a few.

[0043] Although the earpiece 100 when inserted in the ear can partially occlude the ear canal, the earpiece 100 may not completely attenuate the ambient sound. During the monitoring of ambient sounds in the environment, the earpiece 100 also monitors ear canal levels via the ECM 123 as shown in step 304. The passive aspect of the physical earpiece 100, due to the mechanical and sealing properties, can provide upwards of a 22-26 dB noise reduction. However, portions of ambient sounds higher than 26 dB can still pass through the earpiece 100 into the ear canal. For instance, high energy low frequency sounds are not completely attenuated. Accordingly, residual sound may be resident in the ear canal and heard by the user.

[0044] Sound within the ear canal 131 can also be provided via the audio interface 212. The audio interface 212 can receive the audio content from at least one among a portable music player, a cell phone, and a portable communication device. The audio interface 212 responsive to user input can direct sound to the ECR 125. For instance, a user can elect to play music through the earpiece 100 which can be audibly presented to the ear canal 131 for listening. The user can also elect to receive voice communications (e.g., cell phone, voice mail, messaging) via the earpiece 100. For instance, the user can receive audio content for voice mail or a phone call directed to the ear canal via the ECR 125. As shown in step 304, the earpiece 100 can monitor ear canal levels due to ambient sound and user selected sound via the ECM 123.

[0045] If at step 306, audio is playing (e.g., music, cell phone, etc.), the earpiece 100 adjusts a sound level of the audio based on the ambient sound to maintain a constant signal to noise ratio with respect to the ear canal level at step 308. For instance, the processor 206 can selectively amplify or attenuate audio content received from the audio interface 212 before it is delivered to the ECR 125. The processor 206 estimates a background noise level from the ambient sound received at the ASM 111, and adjusts the audio level of delivered audio content (e.g., music, cell phone audio) to maintain a constant signal (e.g., audio content) to noise level (e.g., ambient sound). By way of example, if the background noise level increases due to traffic sounds, the earpiece 100 automatically increases the volume of the audio content. Similarly, if the background noise level decreases, the earpiece 100 automatically decreases the volume of the audio content. The processor 206 can track variations on the ambient sound level to adjust the audio content level.

[0046] If at step 310, an acute sound is detected within the ambient sound, the earpiece 100 activates "sound pass-through" to reproduce the ambient sound in the ear canal by way of the ECR 125. The processor 206 permits the ambient sound to pass through the ECR 125 to the ear canal 131 directly for

example by replicating the ambient sound external to the ear canal within the ear canal. This is important if the acute sound corresponds to an on-set for a warning sound such as a bell, a car, or an object. In such regard, the ambient sound containing the acute sound is presented directly to the ear canal in an original form. Although, the earpiece 100 inherently provides attenuation due to the physical and mechanical aspects of the earpiece and its sealing properties, the processor 206 can reproduce the ambient sound within the ear canal 131 at an original amplitude level and frequency content to provide "transparency". For instance, the processor 206 measures and applies a transfer function of the ear canal to the passed ambient sound signal to provide an accurate reproduction of the ambient sound within the ear canal.

[0047] In one embodiment, the earpiece 100 looks for temporal and spectral characteristics in the ambient sound for detecting acute sounds. For instance, as will be explained ahead, the processor 206 looks for an abrupt change in the Sound Pressure Level (SPL) of an ambient sound across a small time period. The processor 206 can also detect abrupt magnitude changes across frequency sub-bands (e.g. filter-bank, FFT, etc.). Notably, the processor 206 can search for on-sets (e.g., fast rising amplitude wave-front) of an acute sound or other abrupt feature characteristics without initially attempting to initially identify or recognize the sound source. That is, the processor 206 is actively listening for a presence of acute sounds before identifying the type of sound source.

[0048] Even though the earplug inherently provides a certain attenuation level (e.g., noise reduction rating), the processor 206 in view of the ear canal level (ECL) and ambient sound level (ASL) can reproduce the ambient sound within the ear canal to allow the user to make an informed decision with regard to the acute sound. The ECL corresponds to all sounds within the ear canal and includes the internal ambient sound level (iASL) resulting from residual ambient sounds through the earpiece and the audio content level (ACL) resulting from the audio delivered via the audio interface 212. Briefly, xASL is the external ambient sound external to the ear canal and the earpiece (e.g., ambient sound outside the ear canal). iASL is the residual ambient sound that remains internal in the ear canal. The following equations describe the relationship among terms:

$$iASL=xASL-NRR \quad (EQ\ 1)$$

$$iASL=ECL-ACL \quad (EQ\ 2)$$

[0049] As EQ 1 shows, the iASL is the difference between the external ambient sound (xASL) and the attenuation of the earpiece (Noise Reduction Rating) due to the physical and sealing properties of the earpiece. The processor 206 can measure an external ambient sound level (xASL) of the ambient

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sound with the ASM 111 and subtracts an attenuation level of the earpiece (NRR) from the xASL to estimate the internal ambient sound level (iASL) within the ear canal.

[0050] EQ 2 is an alternate, or supplemental, method for calculating the iASL as the difference between the ECL and the Audio Content Level (ACL). By way of the ECM 123, the processor 206 can estimate an internal ambient sound level (iASL) within the ear canal by subtracting the estimated audio content sound level (ACL) from the ECL. The processor 206 measures a voltage level of the audio content sent to the ECR 125, and applies a transfer function of the ECR 125 to convert the voltage level to the ACL.

[0051] The processor 206 evaluates the equations above to pass sound from the ASM 111 directly to the ECR 125 to produce sound within the ear canal at a same sound pressure level (SPL) and frequency representation as the acute sound measured at an entrance to the ear canal. Further, the processor 206 can maintain an approximately constant ratio between an audio content level (ACL) and an internal ambient sound level (iASL) measured within the ear canal.

[0052] At step 314, the earpiece 100 can estimate a proximity of the acute sound. For instance, as will be shown ahead, the processor 206 can perform a correlation analysis on at least two microphones to determine whether the sound source is internal (e.g., the user) or external (e.g., an object other than the user). At step 316, the earpiece 100 determines whether it is the user's voice that generates the acute sound when the user speaks, or whether it is an external sound such as a vehicle approaching the user. If at step 316, the processor 206 determines that the acute sound is a result of the user speaking, the processor 206 does not activate a pass-through mode, since this is not considered an external warning sound. The pass-through mode permits ambient sound detected at the ASM 111 to be transmitted directly to the ear canal. If however, the acute sound corresponds to an external sound source, such as an on-set of a warning sound, the earpiece at step 318 activates "sound pass-through" to reproduce the ambient sound in the ear canal by way of the ECR 125. The earpiece 100 can also present an audible notification to the user indicating that an external sound source generating the acute sound has been detected. The method 300 can proceed back to step 302 to continually monitor for acute sounds in the environment.

[0053] FIG. 4 is a detailed approach to the method 400 of FIG. 3 for an Acute-Sound Pass- Through System (ACPTS) in accordance with an exemplary embodiment. The method 400 can be practiced with more or less than the number of steps shown and is not limited to the order shown. To describe the method 400, reference will be made to components of FIG. 2, although it is understood that the method 400 can be implemented in any other manner using other suitable components. The method 400 can be

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implemented in a single earpiece, a pair of earpieces, headphones, or other suitable headset audio delivery devices.

[0054] At step 402, the earpiece 100 captures ambient sound signals from the ASM 111. At step 404, the processor 206 applies analog and discrete time signal processing to condition and compensate the ambient sound signal for the ASM 111 transducer. At step 406, the processor 206 estimates a background noise level (BNL) as will be discussed ahead. At step 408, the processor 206 identifies at least one peak in a data buffer storing a portion of the ambient sound signal. The processor 206 at step 410 gets a level of the peak (e.g., dBV). Block 412 presents a method for warning signal detection (e.g. car horns, klaxons). When a warning signal is detected at step 416, the processor 206 invokes at step 418 a pass-through mode whereby the ASM signal is reproduced with the ECR 125. Upon activating pass-through mode, the processor 206 can perform a safe level check at step 452. If a warning signal is not detected, the method 400 proceeds to step 420.

[0055] At step 420, the processor 206 subtracts the estimated BNL from an SPL of the ambient sound signal to produce signal "A". A high energy level transient signal is indicative of an acute sound. At step 422, a frequency dependent threshold is retrieved at step 424, and subtracted from signal "A", as shown in step 422 to produce signal "B". At step 426, the processor 206 determines if signal "B" is positive. If not, the processor 206 performs a hysterisis to determine if the acute sound has already been detected. If not, the processor at step 428 determines if an SPL of the ambient sound is greater than a signal "C" (e.g. threshold). If the SPL is greater than signal "C", the earpiece generates a user generated sound at step 434. The signal "C" is used to ensure that the SPL between the signal and background noise is positive and greater than a predetermined amount. For instance, a low SPL threshold (e.g., "C" 40 dB) can be used as shown in step 430, although it can adapt to different environmental conditions. The low SPL threshold provides an absolute measure to the SPL difference. At step 436, a proximity of a sound source generating the acute sound can be estimated as will be discussed ahead. The method 400 can continue to step 432.

[0056] Briefly, if a transient, high-level sound (or acute sound) is detected in the ambient sound signal (ASM input signal), then it is converted to a level, and its magnitude compared with the BNL is calculated. The magnitude of this resulting difference (signal "A") is compared with the threshold (see step 422). If the value is positive, and the level of the transient is greater than a predefined threshold (see step 428), the processor 206 invokes the optional Source Proximity Detector at step 436, which determines if the acute sound was created by the User's voice (i.e., a user generated sound). If a user-generated sound is NOT detected, then Pass-through operation at step 438 is invoked, whereby the

ambient sound signal is reproduced with the ECR 125. If the difference signal at step 428 is not positive, or the level of the identified transient is too low, then the hysteresis is invoked at step 432. The processor 206 decides if the pass-through was recently used at step 440 (e.g. in the last 10 ms). If pass-through mode was recently activated, then processor 206 invokes the pass-through system at step 438; otherwise there is no pass-through of the ASM signal to the ECR as shown at step 442. Upon activating pass-through mode, the processor 206 can perform a safe level check at step 452.

[0057] FIG. 5 is a flowchart of a method 500 for acute sound source proximity. The method 500 can be practiced with more or less than the number of steps shown and is not limited to the order shown. To describe the method 500, reference will be made to components of FIG. 2, although it is understood that the method 500 can be implemented in any other manner using other suitable components. The method 500 can be implemented in a single earpiece, a pair of earpieces, headphones, or other suitable headset audio delivery device.

[0058] Briefly, FIG. 5 describes a method 500 for Source Proximity Detection (SPD) to determine if the Acute sound detected was created by the User's voice operating the earpiece 100. The SPD method 500 uses as its inputs the external ambient sound signals from left and right electro-acoustic earpiece 100 assemblies (e.g., a headphone). In some embodiments the SPD method 500 employs Ear Canal Microphone (ECM) signals from left and right earpiece 100 assemblies placed on left and right ears respectively. The processor 206 performs an electronic cross-correlation between the external ambient sound signals to determine a Pass-through or Non Pass-through operating mode. In the described embodiment whereby the cross-correlation of both the ASM and ECM signals is involved, a pass-through mode is invoked when the cross- correlation analysis for both the left and right earpiece 100 assemblies return a "Pass-through" operating mode, as determined by a logical AND unit.

[0059] For instance, at step 502 a left ASM signal from a left headset incorporating the earpiece 100 assembles is received. Simultaneously, at step 504 a right ASM signal from a right headset is received. At step 510, the processor 206 performs a binaural cross correlation on the left ASM signal and the right ASM signal to evaluate a pass through mode 516. At step 506 a left ECM signal from the left headset is received. At step 508, a right ECM signal from the right headset is received. At step 514, the processor 206 performs a binaural cross correlation on the left ECM signal and the right ECM signal to evaluate a pass through mode 518. A pass through mode 524 is invoked if both the ASM and ECM cross correlation analysis are the same as determined in step 520. A safe level check can be performed by processor 206 at step 522.

[0060] FIG. 6 is a flowchart of a method 600 for binaural analysis. The method 600 can be

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practiced with more or less than the number of steps shown and is not limited to the order shown. To describe the method 600, reference will be made to components of FIG. 2, although it is understood that the method 600 can be implemented in any other manner using other suitable components. The method 600 can be implemented in a single earpiece, a pair of earpieces, headphones, or other suitable headset audio delivery devices.

[0061] Briefly, FIG. 6 describes a component of the SPD method 500 wherein a cross-correlation of two input audio signals 602 and 604 (e.g., left and right ASM signals) is calculated. The input signals may first be weighted using a frequency-dependent filter (e.g. an FIR-type filter) using filter coefficients 606 and filtering networks 608 and 610. Alternatively, an interchannel cross- correlation calculated with function 612 can return a frequency-dependent correlation such as a coherence function. The absolute maximum peak of a calculated cross-correlation 614 can be subtracted from a mean (or RMS) 616 correlation, with subtractor 622, and compared 628 with a predefined threshold 626, to determine if the peak is significantly greater than the average correlation (i.e. a test for peakedness). Alternatively, the maxima of the peak may simply be compared with the threshold 628 without the subtraction process 622. If the lag-time of the peak 618 is at approximately lag-sample 0, then the sound source is determined, at step 624, as being on the interaural axis-indicative of User-generated speech, and a no-pass through mode is returned 630 (a further function described in FIG. 7 may be used to confirm that the sound source originates in the User-head, rather than external to the user- and further confirming that the acute sound is a User-generated voice sound). The logical AND unit 632 activates the pass- through mode 636 if both criteria in the decision units 628 and 624 confirm that the absolute maxima of the peak is above a predefined threshold 626, AND the lag of the peak is NOT at approximately lag sample zero. A safe level check may be performed by processor 206 at step 634.

[0062] FIG. 7 is a flowchart of a method 700 for logic control. The method 700 can be practiced with more or less than the number of steps shown and is not limited to the order shown. To describe the method 700, reference will be made to components of FIG. 2, although it is understood that the method 700 can be implemented in any other manner using other suitable components. The method 700 can be implemented in a single earpiece, a pair of earpieces, headphones, or other suitable headset audio delivery devices.

[0063] Briefly, FIG. 7 describes a further component of the SPD method 500, which is optional to confirm that the acute sound source is from a location indicative of user-generated speech; i.e. inside the head. Method steps 702-712 are similar to Method steps 502-514 of FIG. 5. The cross- correlations of step 710 and 712 provide a time-lag of the maximum absolute peak for a pair of input signals; the ASM and ECM signals for the same headset (e.g. the ASM and ECM for the left headset). At step 714 a left

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lag of a peak of the left cross correlation is determined, and simultaneously, a right lag of a peak of the right cross correlation is determined at step 718. If a lag of a respective peak is greater than zero--this indicates that the sound arrived at the ECM signal before the ASM signal. Decision step 716 determines if the lag is greater than zero for both the left and right headsets- and activates the pass-through mode 722 if so. A safe level check may be performed by processor 206 at step 720.

[0064] FIG. 8 is a flowchart of a method 800 for estimating background sound level. The method 800 can be practiced with more or less than the number of steps shown and is not limited to the order shown. To describe the method 800, reference will be made to components of FIG. 2, although it is understood that the method 800 can be implemented in any other manner using other suitable components. The method 800 can be implemented in a single earpiece, a pair of earpieces, headphones, or other suitable headset audio delivery devices.

[0065] Briefly, method 800 receives as its input 802 either or both the ASM signal from ASM 111 and a signal from the ECM 123. An audio buffer 804 of the input audio signal is accumulated (e.g. 10 ms of data), which is then processed by squaring step 806 to obtain the temporal envelope. The envelope is smoothed (e.g. an FIR-type low-pass digital filter) at step 808 using a smoothing window 810 stored in data memory (e.g. a Hanning or Hamming shaped window). At step 812, transient peaks in the input buffer can be identified and removed to determine a "steady-state" Background Noise Level (BNL). At step 814 an average BNL 816 can be obtained (similar to, or the same as, the RMS) that is frequency dependent or a single value averaged over all frequencies. If the ECM 123 is used to determine the BNL, then decision step 818 adjusts the ambient BNL estimation to provide an equivalent ear-canal BNL SPL, by deducting an Earpiece Noise Reduction Rating 828 from the BNL estimate 826. Alternatively, if the ECM 123 is used, then the Audio Content SPL level (ACL) 822 of any reproduced Audio Content 820 is deducted from the ECM level at step 824. The updated BNL estimate is then converted to a Sound Pressure Level (SPL) equivalent 832 (i.e. substantially equal to the SPL at the ear-drum in which the earphone device is inserted) by taking into account the sensitivity (e.g. measured in V per dB) of either the ASM 111 or ECM 123 at steps 830 and 834 respectively. The resulting BNL SPL is then combined at step 842 with the previous BNL estimate 840, by averaging 838 a weighted previous BNL (weighted with coefficient 836), to give a new ear-canal BNL 844.

[0066] FIG. 9 is a flowchart of a method 900 for maintaining constant audio content level (ACL) to internal ambient sound level (iASL). The method 900 can be practiced with more or less than the number of steps shown and is not limited to the order shown. To describe the method 900, reference will be made

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to components of FIG. 2, although it is understood that the method 900 can be implemented in any other manner using other suitable components. The method 900 can be implemented in a single earpiece, a pair of earpieces, headphones, or other suitable headset audio delivery devices.

[0067] Briefly, FIG. 9 describes a method 900 for Constant Signal-to-Noise Ratio (CSNRS). At step 904 an input signal is captured from the ASM 111 and processed at step 910 (e.g. ADC, EQ, gain). Similarly, at step 906 an input signal from the ECM 123 is captured and processed at step 912. The method 900 also receives as input an Audio Content signal 902, e.g. a music audio signal from a portable Media Player or mobile-phone, which is processed with an analog and digital signal processing system as shown in step 908. An Audio Content Level (ACL) is determined at step 914 based on an earpiece sensitivity from step 916, and returns a dBV value.

[0068] In one exemplary embodiment, method 900 calculates a RMS value over a window (e.g. the last 100 ms). The RMS value can then be first weighted with a first weighting coefficient and then averaged with a weighted previous level estimate. The ACL is converted to an equivalent SPL value (ACL), which may use either a look-up-table or algorithm to calculate the ear-canal SPL of the signal if it was reproduced with the ECR 125. To calculate the equivalent ear canal SPL, the sensitivity of the ear canal receiver can be factored in during processing.

[0069] At step 922 the BNL is estimated using inputs from either or both the ASM signal at step 902, and/or the ECM signal at step 906. The BNL may be adjusted by the earpiece noise reduction rating 924. These signals are selected using the BNL input switch at step 918, which may be controlled automatically or with a specific user-generated manual operation at step 926. The Ear-Canal SNR is calculated at step 920 by differencing the ACL from step 914 and the BNL from step 922 and the resulting SNR 930 is passed to the method step 932 for AGC coefficient calculation. The AGC coefficient calculation 932 calculates gains for the Audio Content signal and ASM signal from the Automatic Gain Control steps 928 and 936 (for the Audio Content and ASM signals, respectively). AGC coefficient calculation 932 may use a default preferred SNR 938 or a user- preferred SNR 934 in its calculation. After the ASM signal and Audio content signal have been processed by the AGCs 928 and 936, the two signals are mixed at step 940.

[0070] At step 942, a safe-level check determines if the resulting mixed signal is too high, if it were reproduced with the ECR 125 as shown in block 944. The safe-level check can use information regarding the user's listening history to determine if the user's sound exposure is such that it may cause a temporary or a permanent hearing threshold shift. If such high levels are measured, then the safe-level check reduces the signal level of the mixed signals via a feedback path to step 940. The resulting audio

signal generated after step 942 is then reproduced with the ECR 125.

[0071] FIG. 10 is a flowchart of a method 950 for maintaining a constant signal to noise ratio based on automatic gain control (AGC). The method 950 can be practiced with more or less than the number of steps shown and is not limited to the order shown. To describe the method 950, reference will be made to components of FIG. 2, although it is understood that the method 950 can be implemented in any other manner using other suitable components. The method 950 can be implemented in a single earpiece, a pair of earpieces, headphones, or other suitable headset audio delivery devices.

[0072] Method 950 describes calculation of AGC coefficients. The method 950 receives as its inputs an Ear Canal SNR 952 and a target SNR 960 to provide a SNR mismatch 958. The target SNR 964 is chosen from a pre-defined SNR 954, sorted in computer memory or a manually defined SNR 956. At step 958, a difference is calculated between the actual ear-canal SNR and the target SNR to produce the mismatch 962. The mismatch level 962 is smoothed over time at step 968, which uses a previous mismatch 970 that is weighted using single or multiple weighting coefficients 966, to give a new time-smoothed SNR mismatch 974. Depending on the magnitude of this mismatch, various operating modes 972, 978 can be invoked, for example, as described by the AGC decision module 976 (step 932 in FIG. 9).

[0073] While the present invention has been described with reference to exemplary embodiments, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited to the disclosed exemplary embodiments. The scope of the following claims is to be accorded the broadest interpretation so as to encompass all modifications, equivalent structures and functions of the relevant exemplary embodiments. Thus, the description of the invention is merely exemplary in nature and, thus, variations that do not depart from the gist of the invention are intended to be within the scope of the exemplary embodiments of the present invention. Such variations are not to be regarded as a departure from the spirit and scope of the present invention.

ABSTRACT

Earpieces and methods for acute sound detection and reproduction are provided. A method can include measuring an external ambient sound level (xASL), monitoring a change in the xASL for detecting an acute sound, estimating a proximity of the acute sound, and upon detecting the acute sound and its proximity, reproducing the acute sound within an ear canal, where the ear canal is at least partially occluded by an earpiece. Other embodiments are disclosed.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A wearable device that can control ambient passthrough in an earpiece comprising:

a display;

a first memory that stores instructions; and

a processor configured to execute the instructions to perform operations, the operations comprising:

communicatively connecting to an earpiece, wherein the earpiece includes a first microphone, a second microphone, a speaker, a second memory and an earpiece processor;

sending a mixing value to the earpiece; and

sending an audio content signal to the earpiece, wherein the earpiece processor is configured to mix an ambient sound signal with the audio content signal based upon the mixing value.

2. The wearable device according to claim 1, wherein the earpiece processor is configured to calculate a noise level based upon a first microphone signal from the first microphone and vary the mixing ratio based upon the noise level.

3. The wearable device according to claim 1, wherein the earpiece processor is configured to generate the ambient sound signal from a first microphone signal from the first microphone.

4. The wearable device according to claim 1 further including a user interface.

5. The wearable device according to claim 1, wherein the earpiece processor is configured to apply an ambient gain to a first microphone signal from the first microphone to generate an ambient sound signal.

6. A wearable device that can control ambient sound passthrough comprising:

a first microphone configured to measure a first acoustic environment to generate a first microphone signal;

a second microphone configured to be positioned closer to a user's ear canal than the first microphone when the device is worn, where the second microphone is configured to generate a second microphone signal;

a speaker;

a memory that stores instructions; and

a processor configured to execute the instructions to perform operations, the operations comprising:

receiving an audio content signal;

modifying the audio content signal to generate a modified audio content signal;

modifying the first microphone signal to generate a modified first microphone signal;

modifying the second microphone signal to generate a modified second microphone signal;

generating an ambient sound signal from at least one of the modified first microphone signal, the modified second microphone signal or a combination of both;

detecting an acute sound by analyzing at least one of the modified first microphone signal, the modified second microphone signal or both, and if an acute sound is detected, determining whether the acute sound is a user's voice;

generating a mixed signal by mixing the ambient sound signal with the modified audio content signal, and if a user's voice is detected modifying the modified audio content signal before forming the mixed signal; and

sending the mixed signal to the speaker.

7. The wearable device according to claim 6, wherein the operations further comprise:

determining if the acute sound is a user's voice by analyzing the temporal and spectral characteristics of at least one of the modified first microphone signal, the modified second microphone signal or a combination.

8. The wearable device according to claim 7, wherein the operations further comprise:

generating a noise signal from at least one of the modified first microphone signal, the modified second microphone signal, or both.

generating a noise reduction signal.

9. The wearable device according to claim 8, wherein the operations further comprise:

mixing the noise reduction signal with the mixed signal to generate a new mixed signal, and sending the new mixed signal to the speaker instead of the mixed signal.

10. The wearable device according to claim 9, wherein the operations further comprise:

sending a modified ambient signal to the speaker instead of the new mixed signal if the user's voice is detected.

11. The wearable device according to claim 7, wherein the operations further comprise:

sending a modified ambient signal to the speaker instead of the mixed signal if the user's voice is detected.

12. The wearable device according to claim 7, wherein the operations further comprise:

detecting whether the acute sound is at least one of a warning sound, siren, voice, specific noise type, or a combination, by analyzing the spectrum of at least one of the modified first microphone signal, the modified second microphone signal, the modified ambient sound signal, or a combination.

13. The wearable device according to claim 12, wherein the operations further comprise:

decreasing a volume of the modified audio content signal when a warning or siren is detected.

14. The wearable device according to claim 6, wherein the operations further comprise:

decreasing a volume of the modified audio content signal when a user's voice is detected.

15. The wearable device according to claim 12, where the operations further comprise:

sending a notification signal to the speaker if the acute sound is a warning sound or siren.

16. The wearable device according to claim 15, wherein the warning sound is at least one of a bell , an emergency vehicle , the sound of a security system or a combination.

17. The wearable device according to claim 12, wherein if an alarm is detected it is at least one of a police siren, an ambulance siren, a car honking or a combination.

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Address			
City		State	Zip
Country			
Telephone		Email	

Assignee Name and Address:

Staton Techiya LLC. 16193 Bridlewood Circle, Delray Beach, FL 33445

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SIGNATURE of Assignee of Record

The individual whose signature and title is supplied below is authorized to act on behalf of the assignee

Signature	[signature]	Date	8-14-17
Name	DANIEL C - STATON	Telephone	513-404-0099
Title	MANAGING MEMBER		

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DECLARATION (37 CFR 1.63) FOR UTILITY OR DESIGN APPLICATION USING AN APPLICATION DATA SHEET (37 CFR 1.76)

Title of Invention	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION

As the below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

This declaration is directed to:

- [■] The attached application, or
- [ ] United States application or PCT international application number _____ filed on _____.

The above-identified application was made or authorized to be made by me.

I believe that I am the original inventor or an original joint inventor of a claimed invention in the application.

I hereby acknowledge that any willful false statement made in this declaration is punishable under 18 U.S.C. 1001 by fine or imprisonment of not more than five (5) years, or both.

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LEGAL NAME OF INVENTOR

Inventor: _____ Date (Optional): 12/10/14

Signature: Marc Andre Boillot

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LEGAL NAME OF INVENTOR

Inventor: J. Usher Date (Optional): 11 Dec 2014

Signature: John Usher

Note: An application data sheet (PTO/SB/14 or equivalent), including naming the entire inventive entity, must accompany this form or must have been previously filed. Use an additional PTO/AIA/01 form for each additional inventor.

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LEGAL NAME OF INVENTOR

Inventor: Steven Wayne Goldstein Date (Optional) :_____

Signature: /Steven Wayne Goldstein/

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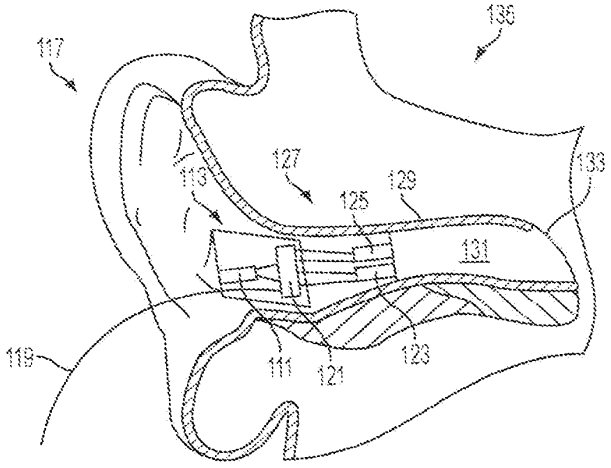

136
117
113
127
125
129
133
131
118
111
121
123

FIG. 1

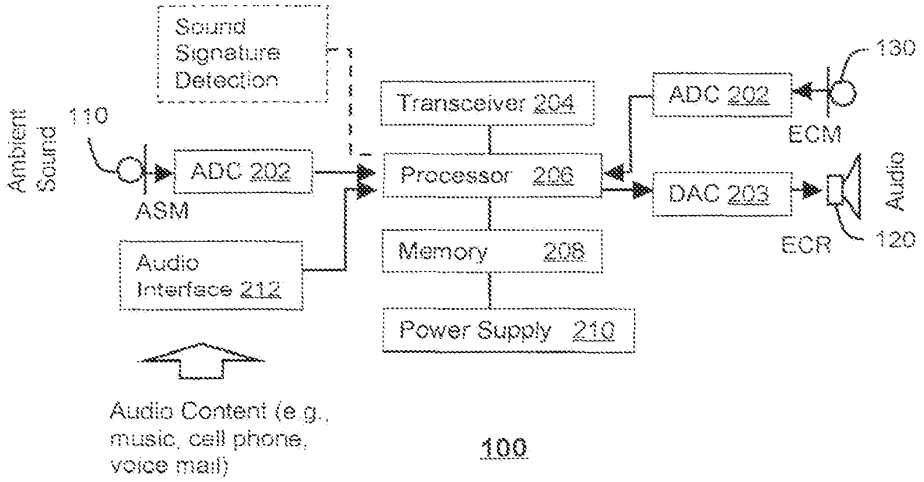

Sound Signature Detection
Transceiver 204
ADC 202
130
ECM
Ambient Sound
110
ADC 202
Processor 206
DAC 203
Audio
ASM
Memory 208
ECR
120
Audio Interface 212
Power Supply 210
Audio Content (e.g., music, call phone, voice mail)
100

FIG. 2

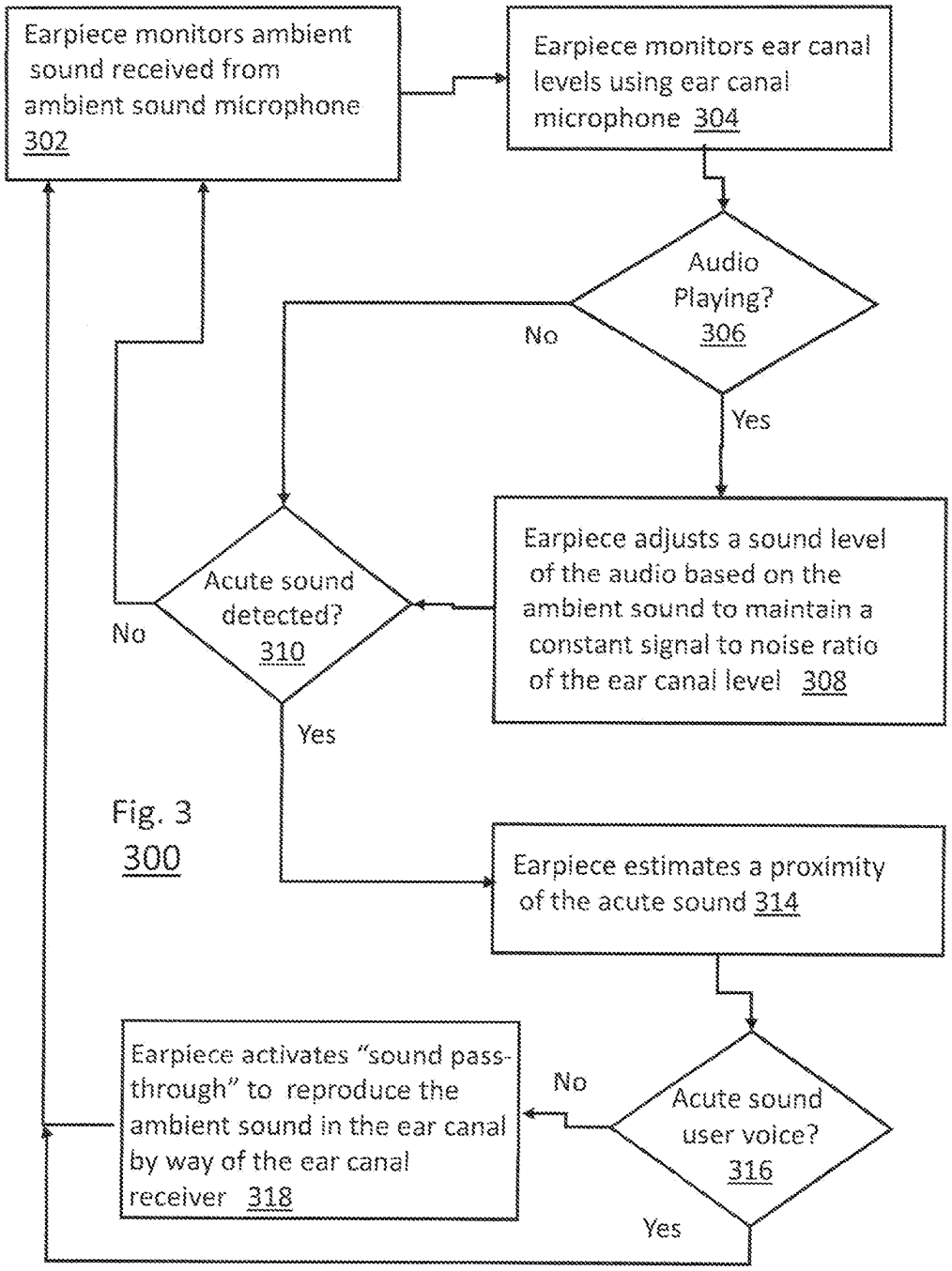

Earpiece monitors ambient sound received from ambient sound microphone 302
Earpiece monitors ear canal levels using ear canal microphone 304
Audio Playing? 306
No
Yes
Earpiece adjusts a sound level of the audio based on the ambient sound to maintain a constant signal to noise ratio of the ear canal level 308
Acute sound detected? 310
No
Yes
Earpiece estimates a proximity of the acute sound 314
Acute sound user voice? 316
No
Yes
Earpiece activates "sound pass-through" to reproduce the ambient sound in the ear canal by way of the ear canal receiver 318

Fig. 3
300

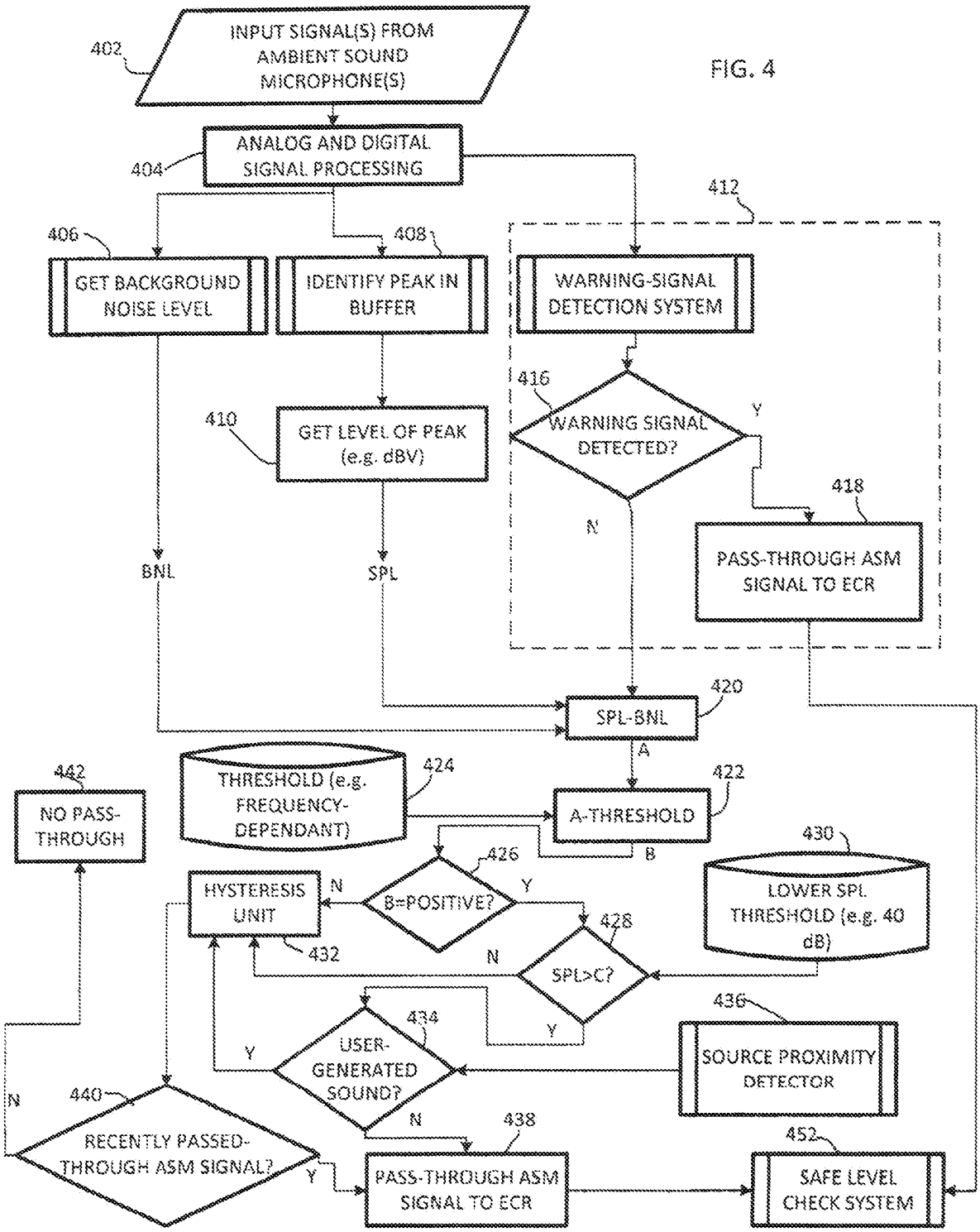
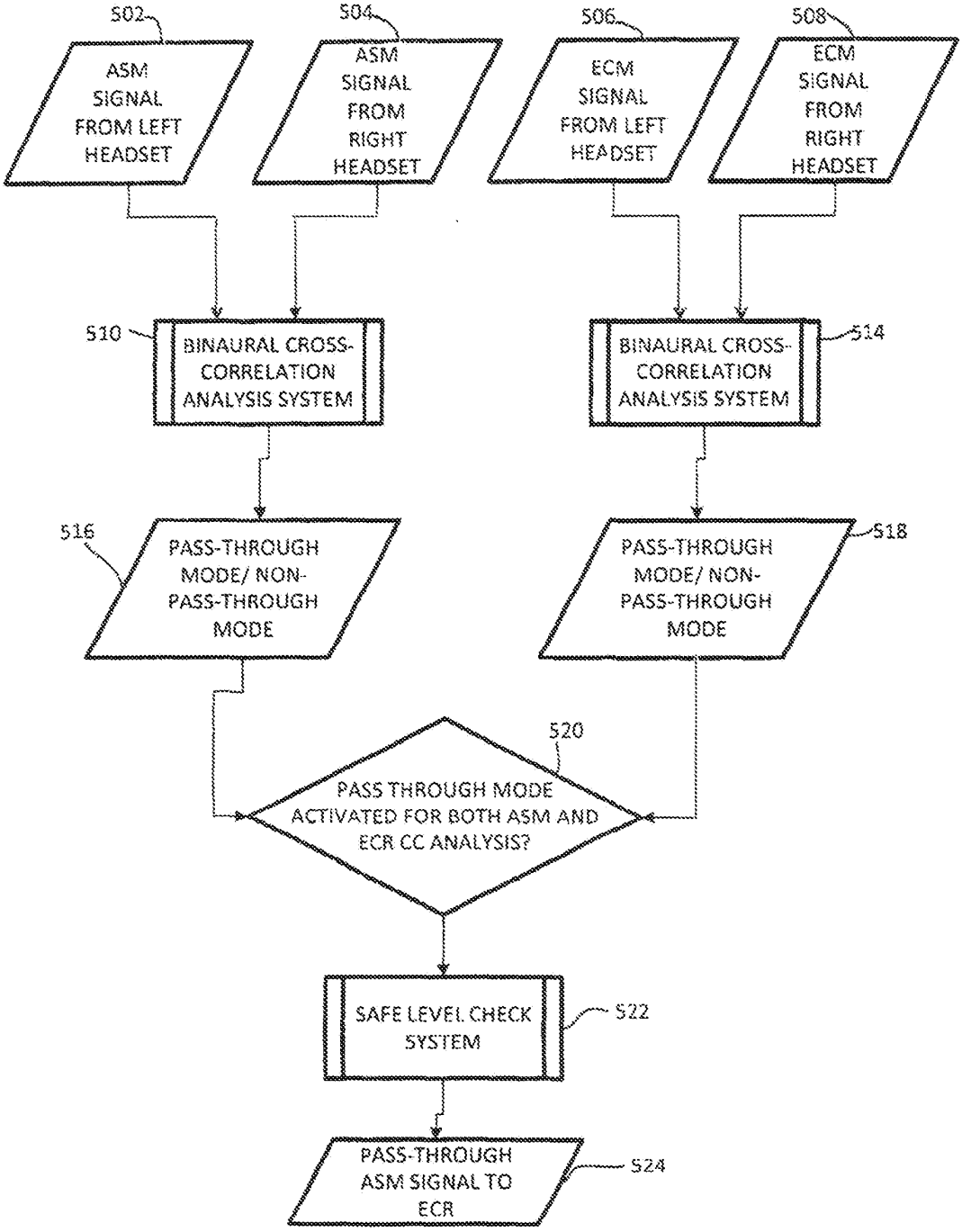

INPUT SIGNAL(S) FROM AMBIENT SOUND MICROPHONE(S)
402
ANALOG AND DIGITAL SIGNAL PROCESSING
404
406
GET BACKGROUND NOISE LEVEL
408
IDENTIFY PEAK IN BUFFER
412
WARNING-SIGNAL DETECTION SYSTEM
416
WARNING SIGNAL DETECTED?
Y
N
418
PASS-THROUGH ASM SIGNAL TO ECR
410
GET LEVEL OF PEAK (e.g. dBV)
BNL
SPL
420
SPL-BNL
A
B
422
A-THRESHOLD
424
THRESHOLD (e.g. FREQUENCY-DEPENDANT)
442
NO PASS-THROUGH
426
B=POSITIVE?
HYSTERESIS UNIT
432
428
SPL>C?
430
LOWER SPL THRESHOLD (e.g. 40 dB)
434
USER-GENERATED SOUND?
436
SOURCE PROXIMITY DETECTOR
440
RECENTLY PASSED-THROUGH ASM SIGNAL?
438
PASS-THROUGH ASM SIGNAL TO ECR
452
SAFE LEVEL CHECK SYSTEM

FIG. 4

FIG. 5


502
ASM SIGNAL FROM LEFT HEADSET
504
ASM SIGNAL FROM RIGHT HEADSET
506
ECM SIGNAL FROM LEFT HEADSET
508
ECM SIGNAL FROM RIGHT HEADSET
510
BINAURAL CROSS-CORRELATION ANALYSIS SYSTEM
514
BINAURAL CROSS-CORRELATION ANALYSIS SYSTEM
516
PASS-THROUGH MODE/ NON-PASS-THROUGH MODE
518
PASS-THROUGH MODE/ NON-PASS-THROUGH MODE
520
PASS THROUGH MODE ACTIVATED FOR BOTH ASM AND ECR CC ANALYSIS?
SAFE LEVEL CHECK SYSTEM
522
PASS-THROUGH ASM SIGNAL TO ECR
524

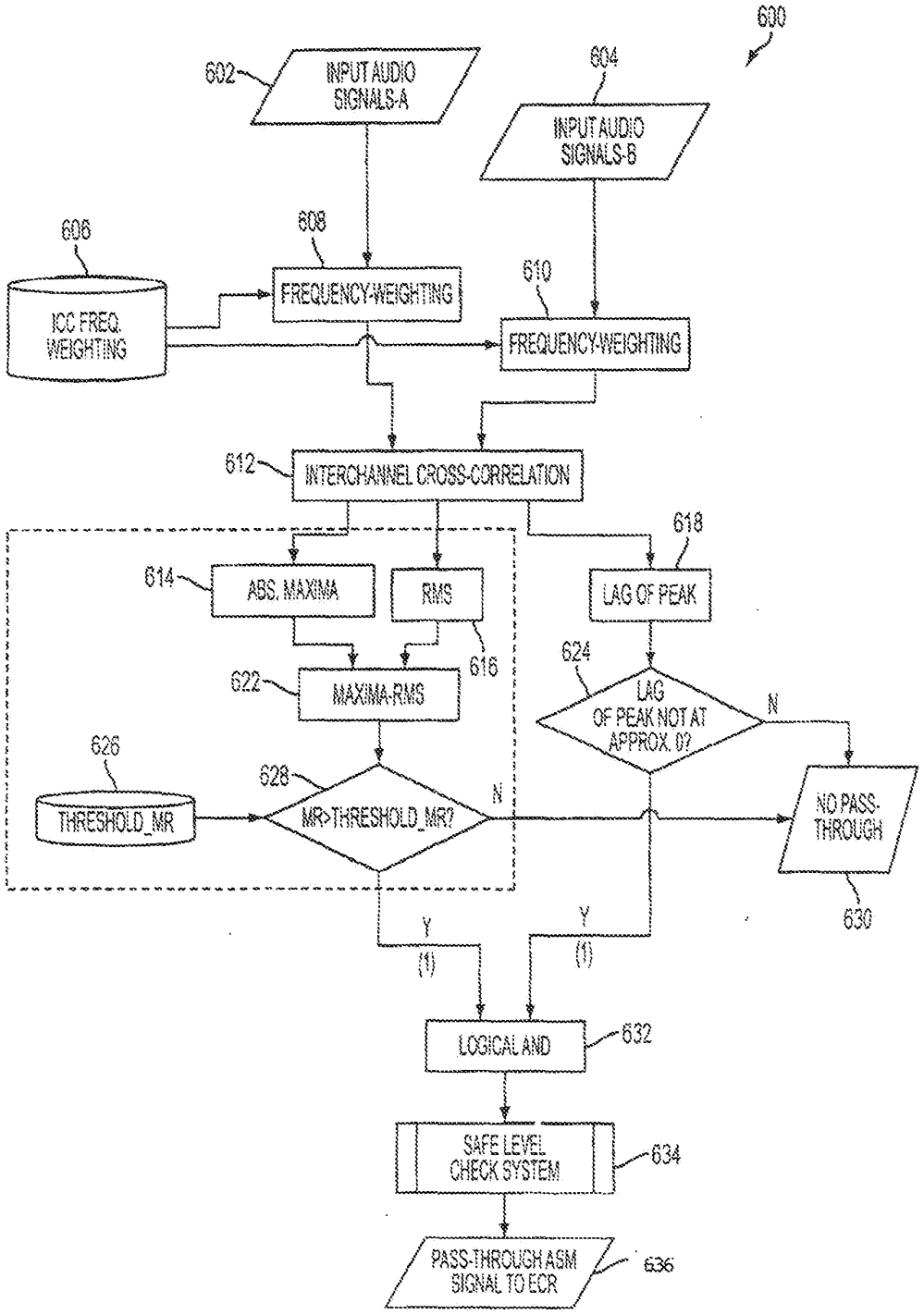
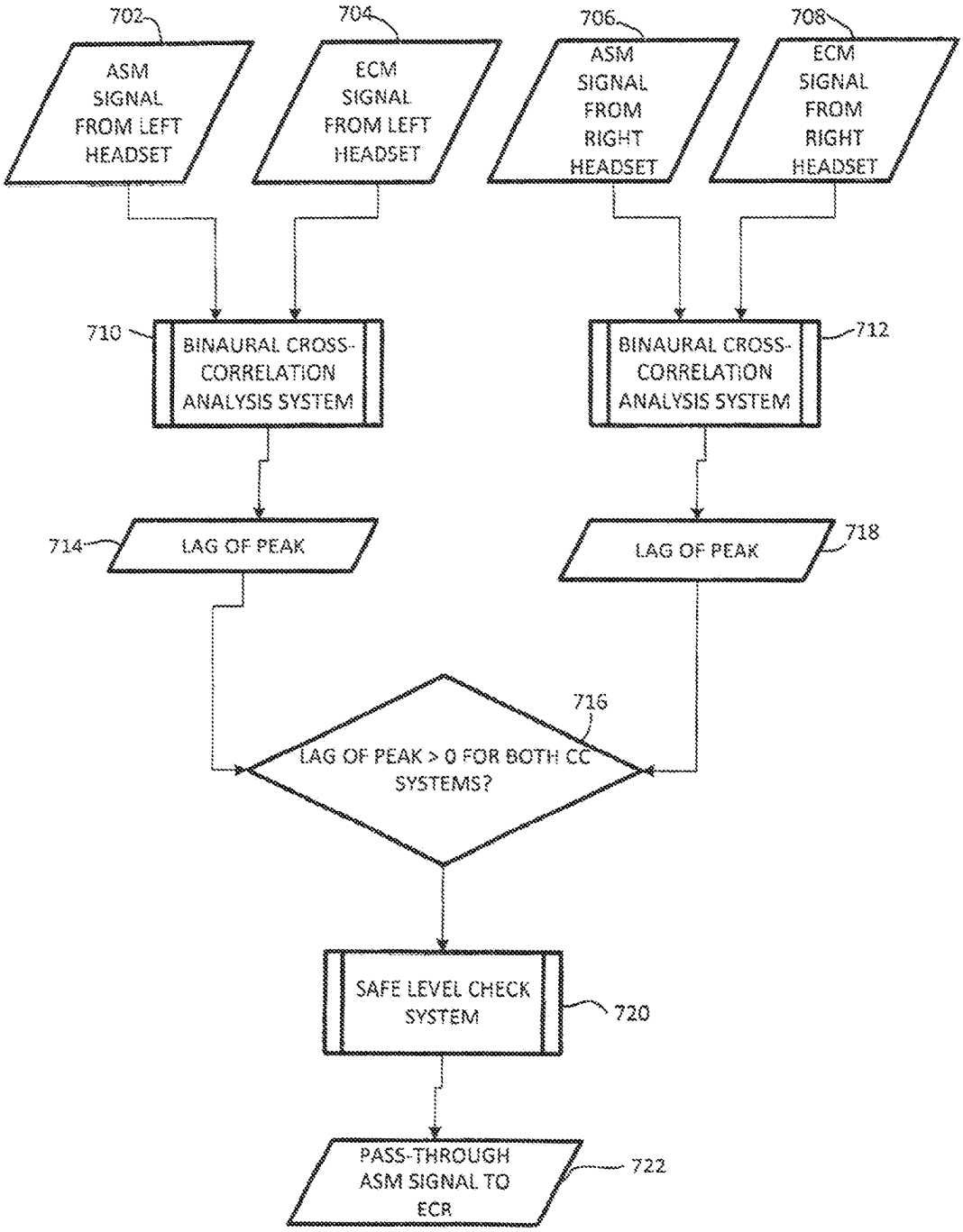

600
602
INPUT AUDIO SIGNALS-A
604
INPUT AUDIO SIGNALS-B
606
ICC FREQ. WEIGHTING
608
FREQUENCY-WEIGHTING
610
FREQUENCY-WEIGHTING
612
INTERCHANNEL CROSS-CORRELATION
614
ABS. MAXIMA
RMS
616
618
LAG OF PEAK
622
MAXIMA-RMS
624
LAG OF PEAK NOT AT APPROX. 0?
N
626
THRESHOLD_MR
628
MR>THRESHOLD_MR?
N
NO PASS-THROUGH
630
Y
(1)
Y
(1)
LOGICAL AND
632
SAFE LEVEL CHECK SYSTEM
634
PASS-THROUGH ASM SIGNAL TO ECR
636

FIG. 6

FIG. 7


702
ASM SIGNAL FROM LEFT HEADSET
704
ECM SIGNAL FROM LEFT HEADSET
706
ASM SIGNAL FROM RIGHT HEADSET
708
ECM SIGNAL FROM RIGHT HEADSET
710
BINAURAL CROSS-CORRELATION ANALYSIS SYSTEM
712
BINAURAL CROSS-CORRELATION ANALYSIS SYSTEM
714
LAG OF PEAK
718
LAG OF PEAK
716
LAG OF PEAK > 0 FOR BOTH CC SYSTEMS?
SAFE LEVEL CHECK SYSTEM
720
PASS-THROUGH ASM SIGNAL TO ECR
722

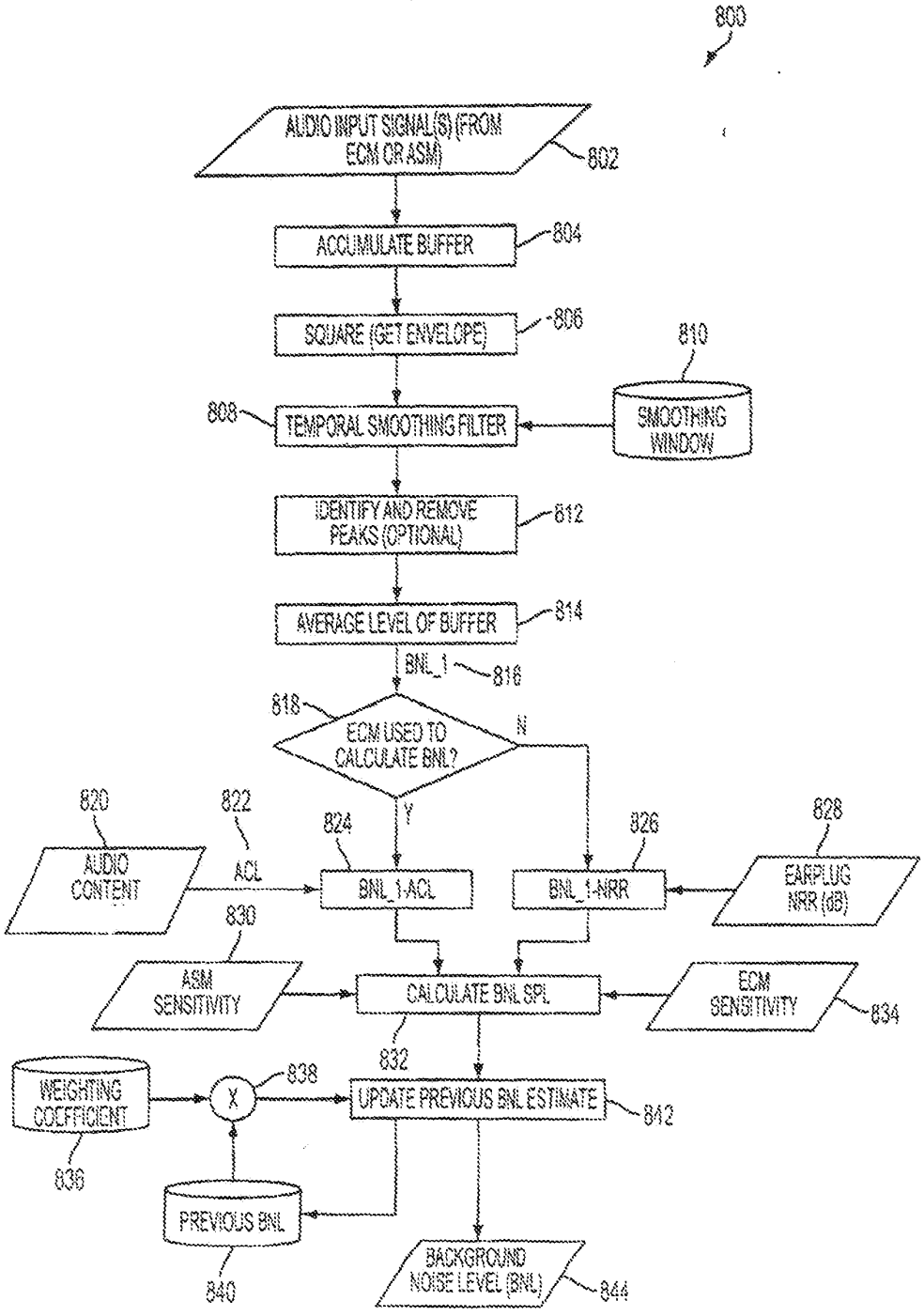

800
AUDIO INPUT SIGNAL(S) (FROM ECM OR ASM)
802
ACCUMULATE BUFFER
804
SQUARE (GET ENVELOPE)
806
810
SMOOTHING WINDOW
808
TEMPORAL SMOOTHING FILTER
IDENTIFY AND REMOVE PEAKS (OPTIONAL)
812
AVERAGE LEVEL OF BUFFER
814
BNL_1
816
818
ECM USED TO CALCULATE BNL?
N
Y
820
AUDIO CONTENT
822
ACL
824
BNL_1-ACL
826
BNL_1-NRR
828
EARPLUG NRR (dB)
830
ASM SENSITIVITY
CALCULATE BNL SPL
ECM SENSITIVITY
834
832
WEIGHTING COEFFICIENT
X
838
UPDATE PREVIOUS BNL ESTIMATE
842
836
PREVIOUS BNL
840
BACKGROUND NOISE LEVEL (BNL)
844

FIG. 8

FIG. 9

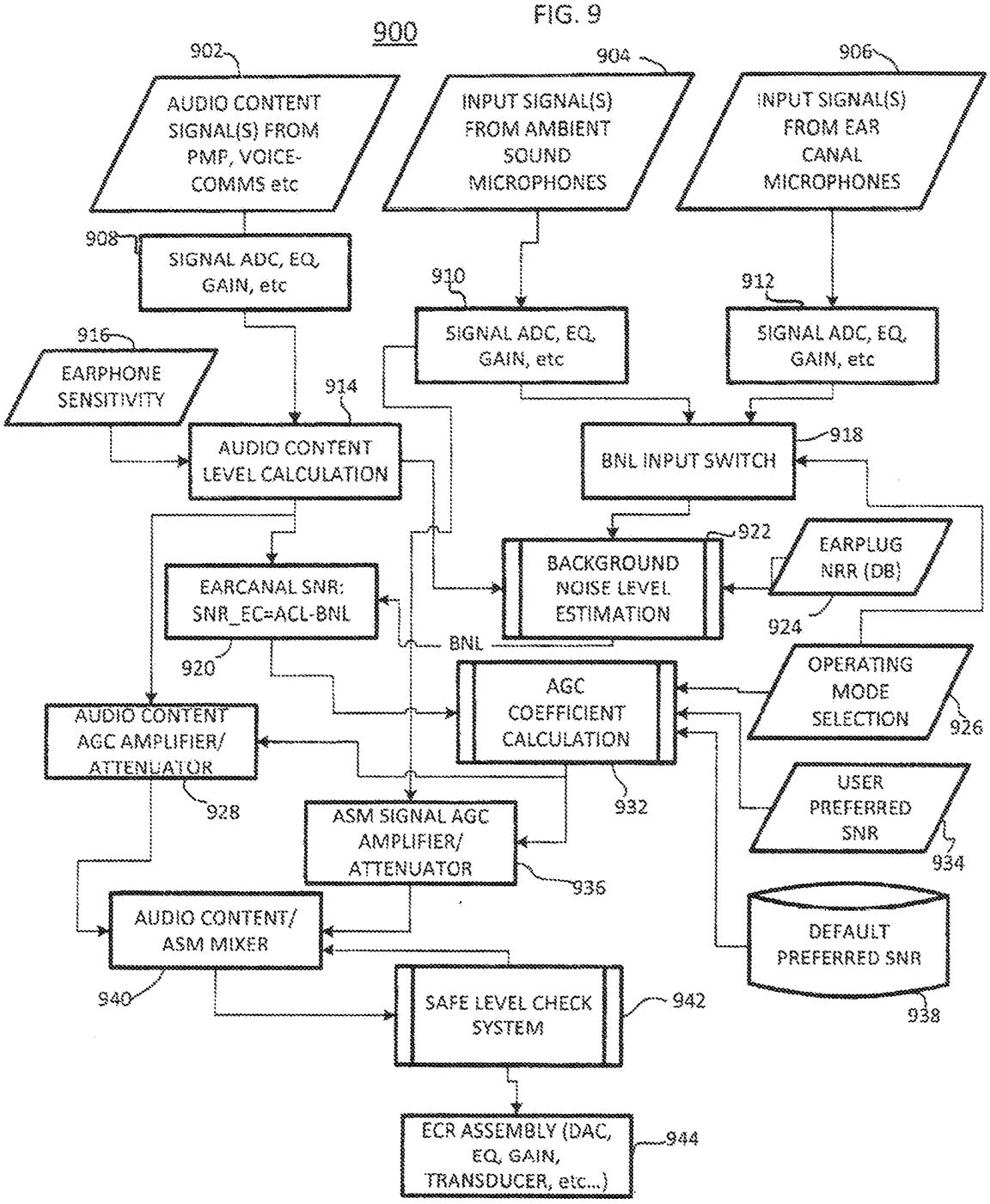
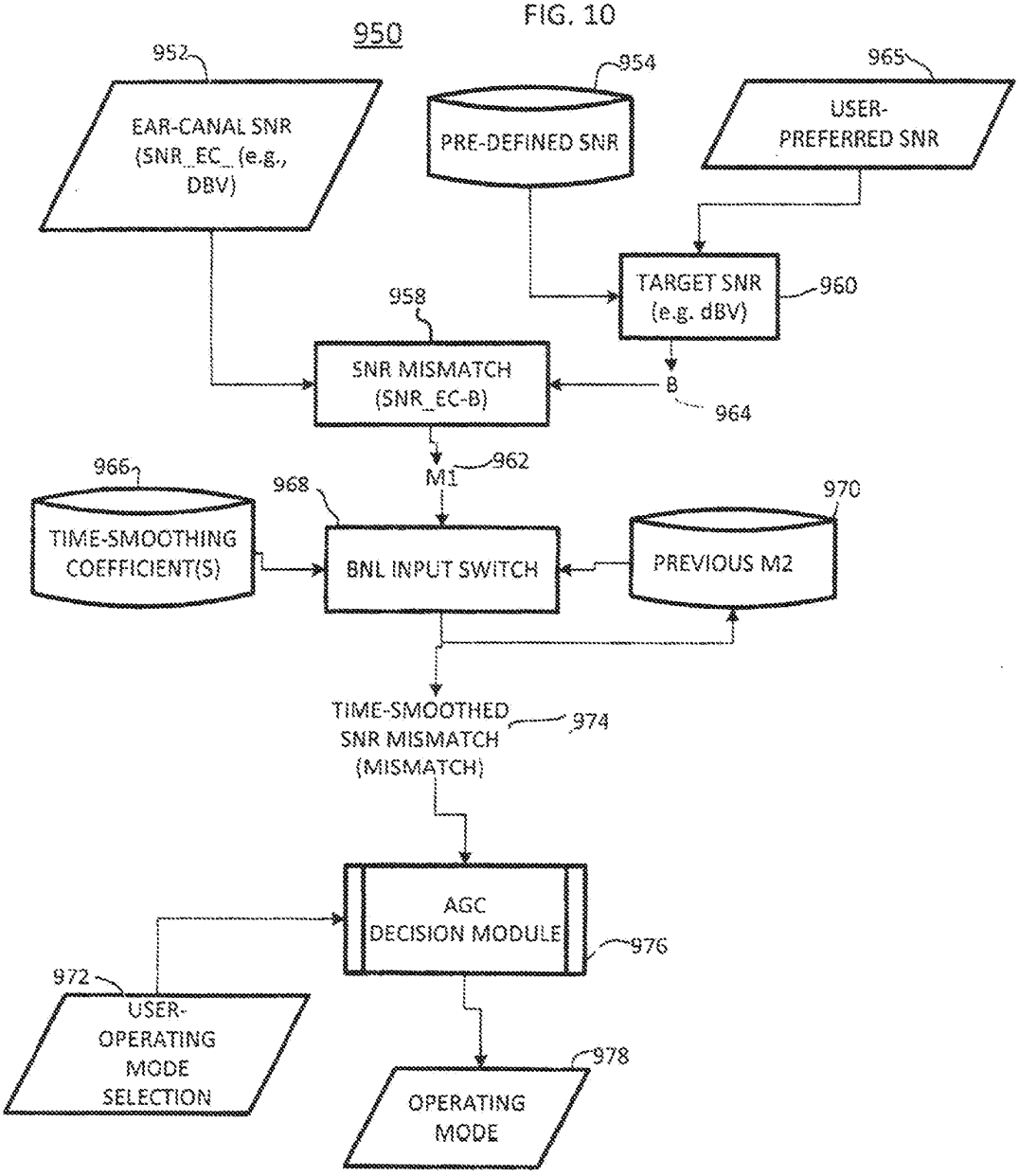

900
902
AUDIO CONTENT SIGNAL(S) FROM PMP, VOICE-COMMS etc
904
INPUT SIGNAL(S) FROM AMBIENT SOUND MICROPHONES
906
INPUT SIGNAL(S) FROM EAR CANAL MICROPHONES
908
SIGNAL ADC, EQ, GAIN, etc
910
SIGNAL ADC, EQ, GAIN, etc
912
SIGNAL ADC, EQ, GAIN, etc
916
EARPHONE SENSITIVITY
914
AUDIO CONTENT LEVEL CALCULATION
BNL INPUT SWITCH
918
922
BACKGROUND NOISE LEVEL ESTIMATION
EARPLUG NRR (DB)
924
EARCANAL SNR: SNR_EC=ACL-BNL
920
BNL
OPERATING MODE SELECTION
926
AGC COEFFICIENT CALCULATION
AUDIO CONTENT AGC AMPLIFIER/ ATTENUATOR
928
932
USER PREFERRED SNR
934
ASM SIGNAL AGC AMPLIFIER/ ATTENUATOR
936
AUDIO CONTENT/ ASM MIXER
DEFAULT PREFERRED SNR
938
940
SAFE LEVEL CHECK SYSTEM
942
ECR ASSEMBLY (DAC, EQ, GAIN, TRANSDUCER, etc...)
944

FIG. 10


950
952
EAR-CANAL SNR (SNR_EC_ (e.g., DBV)
954
PRE-DEFINED SNR
965
USER-PREFERRED SNR
TARGET SNR (e.g. dBV)
960
958
SNR MISMATCH (SNR_EC-B)
B
964
M1
962
966
TIME-SMOOTHING COEFFICIENT(S)
968
BNL INPUT SWITCH
970
PREVIOUS M2
TIME-SMOOTHED SNR MISMATCH (MISMATCH)
974
AGC DECISION MODULE
976
972
USER-OPERATING MODE SELECTION
978
OPERATING MODE

Electronic Patent Application Fee Transmittal

Application Number:	
Filing Date:	
Title of Invention:	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION
First Named Inventor/Applicant Name:	Steven Wayne Goldstein
Filer:	John Patrick Keady
Attorney Docket Number:	CONT-17321892

Filed as Small Entity

Filing Fees for Utility under 35 USC 111(a)

Description	Fee Code	Quantity	Amount	Sub-Total in USD($)
Basic Filing:				
UTILITY FILING FEE (ELECTRONIC FILING)	4011	1	80	80
UTILITY SEARCH FEE	2111	1	350	350
UTILITY EXAMINATION FEE	2311	1	400	400
Pages:				
Claims:				
Miscellaneous-Filing:				
Petition:				
Patent-Appeals-and-Interference:				

Description	Fee Code	Quantity	Amount	Sub-Total in USD($)
Post-Allowance-and-Post-Issuance:				
Extension-of-Time:				
Miscellaneous:				
		Total in USD ($)		**830**

Electronic Acknowledgement Receipt	
EFS ID:	44912392
Application Number:	17592143
International Application Number:	
Confirmation Number:	3471
Title of Invention:	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION
First Named Inventor/Applicant Name:	Steven Wayne Goldstein
Customer Number:	150139
Filer:	John Patrick Keady
Filer Authorized By:	
Attorney Docket Number:	CONT-17321892
Receipt Date:	03-FEB-2022
Filing Date:	
Time Stamp:	16:19:31
Application Type:	Utility under 35 USC 111(a)

Payment information:

Submitted with Payment	yes
Payment Type	CARD
Payment was successfully received in RAM	$830
RAM confirmation Number	E202223G21140083
Deposit Account	
Authorized User	
The Director of the USPTO is hereby authorized to charge indicated fees and credit any overpayment as follows:	

File Listing:

Document Number	Document Description	File Name	File Size(Bytes)/ Message Digest	Multi Part /.zip	Pages (if appl.)
1	Application Data Sheet	WebADS.pdf	233249 329ee1edc538f945b6d4e12e15ee4354337a6e69	no	9
Warnings:					
Information:					
2	Information Disclosure Statement (IDS) Form (SB08)	CONT-17321892-ids-4.pdf	1036788 0a03bc9413206156ebd8d5f6ce5d41706b0567e1	no	10
Warnings:					
Information:					
3	Information Disclosure Statement (IDS) Form (SB08)	CONT-17321892-ids-3.pdf	1035092 2688ceadf546d53ae8bc372d8c9ed491123df15e	no	6
Warnings:					
Information:					
4	Information Disclosure Statement (IDS) Form (SB08)	CONT-17321892-ids-2.pdf	1041037 fc37cb9d93b34871f5b38768d7d2774a8e2ac497	no	5
Warnings:					
Information:					
A U.S. Publication Number Citation is required in the Information Disclosure Statement (IDS) form. You may remove the form to add the required data in order to correct the Informational Message or if you chose not to, the image of the form will be processed and be made available within the Image File Wrapper (IFW) system. However, no data will be extracted from this form. Any additional data such as Foreign Patent Documents or Non Patent Literature will be manually reviewed and keyed into USPTO systems.					
5	Information Disclosure Statement (IDS) Form (SB08)	CONT-17321892-ids-1.pdf	1038206 8f44c1c00f9de073758f0706497732dabf186983	no	6
Warnings:					
Information:					

6	Transmittal Letter	CONT-17321892_ltr.pdf	101726 18760e3ca8cca59b5647d3befa48704d5a533ec4	no	1
Warnings:					
Information:					
7	Specification	CONT-17321892_spec.pdf	226130 a0a134ace20b0a795a4fff56fb8c34c11d4c142a	no	17
Warnings:					
Information:					
8	Abstract	CONT-17321892_abstract.pdf	85130 1737c5263fcf42c7715347d82fce8927ca13552e	no	1
Warnings:					
Information:					
9	Claims	CONT-17321892_claims.pdf	131828 cc5134b6ef5b4c89fe4dc5e8946feca6062f8151	no	4
Warnings:					
Information:					
10	Power of Attorney	CONT-17321892-POA-Executed.PDF	70455 9d3afa5a708e2fb10c4b14a54f13a57914976f12	no	1
Warnings:					
Information:					
11	Oath or Declaration filed	CONT-17321892_oath.pdf	235475 23b096732c2817df3ca3c3daa96c31cd9f7bb54d	no	3
Warnings:					
Information:					
12	Drawings-other than black and white line drawings	CONT-17321892_figs.pdf	2496374 029aa3348d5d4633800d76b2105389107442cdad	no	9
Warnings:					
Information:					

13	Fee Worksheet (SB06)	fee-info.pdf	44116 46ece045f522d3f2c9f77dc331b1466fb54735b7	no	2
Warnings:					
Information:					
			Total Files Size (in bytes):	7775606	

This Acknowledgement Receipt evidences receipt on the noted date by the USPTO of the indicated documents, characterized by the applicant, and including page counts, where applicable. It serves as evidence of receipt similar to a Post Card, as described in MPEP 503.

New Applications Under 35 U.S.C. 111

If a new application is being filed and the application includes the necessary components for a filing date (see 37 CFR 1.53(b)-(d) and MPEP 506), a Filing Receipt (37 CFR 1.54) will be issued in due course and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the filing date of the application.

National Stage of an International Application under 35 U.S.C. 371

If a timely submission to enter the national stage of an international application is compliant with the conditions of 35 U.S.C. 371 and other applicable requirements a Form PCT/DO/EO/903 indicating acceptance of the application as a national stage submission under 35 U.S.C. 371 will be issued in addition to the Filing Receipt, in due course.

New International Application Filed with the USPTO as a Receiving Office

If a new international application is being filed and the international application includes the necessary components for an international filing date (see PCT Article 11 and MPEP 1810), a Notification of the International Application Number and of the International Filing Date (Form PCT/RO/105) will be issued in due course, subject to prescriptions concerning national security, and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the international filing date of the application.

Application Data Sheet 37 CFR 1.76	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892
	Application Number	
Title of Invention	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION	

The application data sheet is part of the provisional or nonprovisional application for which it is being submitted. The following form contains the bibliographic data arranged in a format specified by the United States Patent and Trademark Office as outlined in 37 CFR 1.76.
This document may be completed electronically and submitted to the Office in electronic format using the Electronic Filing System (EFS) or the document may be printed and included in a paper filed application.

Secrecy Order 37 CFR 5.2:

☐ Portions or all of the application associated with this Application Data Sheet may fall under a Secrecy Order pursuant to 37 CFR 5.2 (Paper filers only. Applications that fall under Secrecy Order may not be filed electronically.)

Inventor Information:

Inventor 1

Legal Name

Prefix	Given Name	Middle Name	Family Name	Suffix
	Steven	Wayne	Goldstein	

Residence Information (Select One) ◉ US Residency ○ Non US Residency ○ Active US Military Service

City	Delray Beach	State/Province	FL	Country of Residence [i]	US

Mailing Address of Inventor:

Address 1	16193 Bridlewood Circle		
Address 2			
City	Delray Beach	State/Province	FL
Postal Code	33445	Country [i]	US

Inventor 2

Legal Name

Prefix	Given Name	Middle Name	Family Name	Suffix
	John		Usher	

Residence Information (Select One) ○ US Residency ◉ Non US Residency ○ Active US Military Service

City	Beer	Country of Residence [i]	GB

Mailing Address of Inventor:

Address 1	1 Lion Villa Causeway		
Address 2			
City	Beer Devon, OT	State/Province	
Postal Code	EX123LB	Country [i]	GB

Inventor 3

Legal Name

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Application Data Sheet 37 CFR 1.76	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892
	Application Number	
Title of Invention	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION	

Prefix	**Given Name**	**Middle Name**	**Family Name**	**Suffix**
	Marc	Andre	Boillot	

Residence Information (Select One) (•) US Residency ( ) Non US Residency ( ) Active US Military Service

City	Plantation	**State/Province**	FL	**Country of Residence** i	US

Mailing Address of Inventor:

Address 1	9501 Jagged Creek Ct.		
Address 2			
City	Delray Beach	**State/Province**	FL
Postal Code	33446	**Country** i	US

All Inventors Must Be Listed - Additional Inventor Information blocks may be generated within this form by selecting the **Add** button. Add

Correspondence Information:

Enter either Customer Number or complete the Correspondence Information section below.
For further information see 37 CFR 1.33(a).

☐ **An Address is being provided for the correspondence Information of this application.**

Customer Number	150139		
Email Address	ip@akerman.com	Add Email	Remove Email

Application Information:

Title of the Invention	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION		
Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892	**Small Entity Status Claimed**	☒
Application Type	Nonprovisional		
Subject Matter	Utility		
Total Number of Drawing Sheets (if any)	9	**Suggested Figure for Publication (if any)**	9

Filing By Reference:

Only complete this section when filing an application by reference under 35 U.S.C. 111(c) and 37 CFR 1.57(a). Do not complete this section if application papers including a specification and any drawings are being filed. Any domestic benefit or foreign priority information must be provided in the appropriate section(s) below (i.e., "Domestic Benefit/National Stage Information" and "Foreign Priority Information").

For the purposes of a filing date under 37 CFR 1.53(b), the description and any drawings of the present application are replaced by this reference to the previously filed application, subject to conditions and requirements of 37 CFR 1.57(a).

Application number of the previously filed application	Filing date (YYYY-MM-DD)	Intellectual Property Authority or Country i

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Application Data Sheet 37 CFR 1.76	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892
	Application Number	
Title of Invention	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION	

Publication Information:

☐ Request Early Publication (Fee required at time of Request 37 CFR 1.219)

☐ **Request Not to Publish.** I hereby request that the attached application not be published under 35 U.S.C. 122(b) and certify that the invention disclosed in the attached application **has not and will not** be the subject of an application filed in another country, or under a multilateral international agreement, that requires publication at eighteen months after filing.

Representative Information:

Representative information should be provided for all practitioners having a power of attorney in the application. Providing this information in the Application Data Sheet does not constitute a power of attorney in the application (see 37 CFR 1.32).
Either enter Customer Number or complete the Representative Name section below. If both sections are completed the customer Number will be used for the Representative Information during processing.

Please Select One:	◉ Customer Number	○ US Patent Practitioner	○ Limited Recognition (37 CFR 11.9)
Customer Number			

Prefix	**Given Name**	Middle Name	**Family Name**	Suffix	Remove
Registration Number					

Prefix	**Given Name**	Middle Name	**Family Name**	Suffix	Remove
Registration Number					

Additional Representative Information blocks may be generated within this form by selecting the **Add** button.

Domestic Benefit/National Stage Information:

This section allows for the applicant to either claim benefit under 35 U.S.C. 119(e), 120, 121, 365(c), or 386(c) or indicate National Stage entry from a PCT application. Providing benefit claim information in the Application Data Sheet constitutes the specific reference required by 35 U.S.C. 119(e) or 120, and 37 CFR 1.78.
When referring to the current application, please leave the "Application Number" field blank.

Prior Application Status	Pending		Remove
Application Number	Continuity Type	Prior Application Number	Filing or 371(c) Date (YYYY-MM-DD)
	Continuation of	17321892	2021-05-17

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Application Data Sheet 37 CFR 1.76	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892
	Application Number	
Title of Invention	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION	

Prior Application Status	Patented			Remove	
Application Number	Continuity Type	Prior Application Number	Filing Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	Patent Number	Issue Date (YYYY-MM-DD)
17321892	Continuation of	16987396	2020-08-07	11244666	2022-02-08

Prior Application Status	Patented			Remove	
Application Number	Continuity Type	Prior Application Number	Filing Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	Patent Number	Issue Date (YYYY-MM-DD)
16987396	Continuation of	16669490	2019-10-30	10810989	2020-10-20

Prior Application Status	Patented			Remove	
Application Number	Continuity Type	Prior Application Number	Filing Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	Patent Number	Issue Date (YYYY-MM-DD)
16669490	Continuation of	16193568	2018-11-16	10535334	2020-01-14

Prior Application Status	Patented			Remove	
Application Number	Continuity Type	Prior Application Number	Filing Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	Patent Number	Issue Date (YYYY-MM-DD)
16193568	Continuation of	14574589	2014-12-18	10134377	2018-11-20

Prior Application Status	Patented			Remove	
Application Number	Continuity Type	Prior Application Number	Filing Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	Patent Number	Issue Date (YYYY-MM-DD)
14574589	Continuation of	12017878	2008-01-22	8917894	2014-12-23

Prior Application Status	Pending		Remove
Application Number	Continuity Type	Prior Application Number	Filing or 371(c) Date (YYYY-MM-DD)
12017878	Claims benefit of provisional	60885917	2007-01-22

Additional Domestic Benefit/National Stage Data may be generated within this form by selecting the **Add** button.

Foreign Priority Information:

This section allows for the applicant to claim priority to a foreign application. Providing this information in the application data sheet constitutes the claim for priority as required by 35 U.S.C. 119(b) and 37 CFR 1.55. When priority is claimed to a foreign application that is eligible for retrieval under the priority document exchange program (PDX) the information will be used by the Office to automatically attempt retrieval pursuant to 37 CFR 1.55(i)(1) and (2). Under the PDX program, applicant bears the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that a copy of the foreign application is received by the Office from the participating foreign intellectual property office, or a certified copy of the foreign priority application is filed, within the time period specified in 37 CFR 1.55(g)(1).

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Application Data Sheet 37 CFR 1.76	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892
	Application Number	
Title of Invention	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION	

Application Number	Country[i]	Filing Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	Access Code[i] (if applicable)

Additional Foreign Priority Data may be generated within this form by selecting the **Add** button.

Statement under 37 CFR 1.55 or 1.78 for AIA (First Inventor to File) Transition Applications

☐ This application (1) claims priority to or the benefit of an application filed before March 16, 2013 and (2) also contains, or contained at any time, a claim to a claimed invention that has an effective filing date on or after March 16, 2013.
NOTE: By providing this statement under 37 CFR 1.55 or 1.78, this application, with a filing date on or after March 16, 2013, will be examined under the first inventor to file provisions of the AIA.

PTO/AIA/14 (08-15)
Approved for use through 04/30/2017. OMB 0651-0032
U.S. Patent and Trademark Office; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
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Application Data Sheet 37 CFR 1.76	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892
	Application Number	
Title of Invention	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION	

Authorization or Opt-Out of Authorization to Permit Access:

When this Application Data Sheet is properly signed and filed with the application, applicant has provided written authority to permit a participating foreign intellectual property (IP) office access to the instant application-as-filed (see paragraph A in subsection 1 below) and the European Patent Office (EPO) access to any search results from the instant application (see paragraph B in subsection 1 below).

Should applicant choose not to provide an authorization identified in subsection 1 below, applicant **must opt-out** of the authorization by checking the corresponding box A or B or both in subsection 2 below.

NOTE: This section of the Application Data Sheet is **ONLY** reviewed and processed with the **INITIAL** filing of an application. After the initial filing of an application, an Application Data Sheet cannot be used to provide or rescind authorization for access by a foreign IP office(s). Instead, Form PTO/SB/39 or PTO/SB/69 must be used as appropriate.

1. Authorization to Permit Access by a Foreign Intellectual Property Office(s)

A. Priority Document Exchange (PDX) - Unless box A in subsection 2 (opt-out of authorization) is checked, the undersigned hereby **grants the USPTO authority** to provide the European Patent Office (EPO), the Japan Patent Office (JPO), the Korean Intellectual Property Office (KIPO), the State Intellectual Property Office of the People's Republic of China (SIPO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and any other foreign intellectual property office participating with the USPTO in a bilateral or multilateral priority document exchange agreement in which a foreign application claiming priority to the instant patent application is filed, access to: (1) the instant patent application-as-filed and its related bibliographic data, (2) any foreign or domestic application to which priority or benefit is claimed by the instant application and its related bibliographic data, and (3) the date of filing of this Authorization. See 37 CFR 1.14(h)(1).

B. Search Results from U.S. Application to EPO - Unless box B in subsection 2 (opt-out of authorization) is checked, the undersigned hereby **grants the USPTO authority** to provide the EPO access to the bibliographic data and search results from the instant patent application when a European patent application claiming priority to the instant patent application is filed. See 37 CFR 1.14(h)(2).

The applicant is reminded that the EPO's Rule 141(1) EPC (European Patent Convention) requires applicants to submit a copy of search results from the instant application without delay in a European patent application that claims priority to the instant application.

2. Opt-Out of Authorizations to Permit Access by a Foreign Intellectual Property Office(s)

☐ A. Applicant **DOES NOT** authorize the USPTO to permit a participating foreign IP office access to the instant application-as-filed. If this box is checked, the USPTO will not be providing a participating foreign IP office with any documents and information identified in subsection 1A above.

☐ B. Applicant **DOES NOT** authorize the USPTO to transmit to the EPO any search results from the instant patent application. If this box is checked, the USPTO will not be providing the EPO with search results from the instant application.

NOTE: Once the application has published or is otherwise publicly available, the USPTO may provide access to the application in accordance with 37 CFR 1.14.

PTO/AIA/14 (08-15)
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Application Data Sheet 37 CFR 1.76	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892
	Application Number	
Title of Invention	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION	

Applicant Information:

Providing assignment information in this section does not substitute for compliance with any requirement of part 3 of Title 37 of CFR to have an assignment recorded by the Office.

Applicant 1

If the applicant is the inventor (or the remaining joint inventor or inventors under 37 CFR 1.45), this section should not be completed. The information to be provided in this section is the name and address of the legal representative who is the applicant under 37 CFR 1.43; or the name and address of the assignee, person to whom the inventor is under an obligation to assign the invention, or person who otherwise shows sufficient proprietary interest in the matter who is the applicant under 37 CFR 1.46. If the applicant is an applicant under 37 CFR 1.46 (assignee, person to whom the inventor is obligated to assign, or person who otherwise shows sufficient proprietary interest) together with one or more joint inventors, then the joint inventor or inventors who are also the applicant should be identified in this section.

Clear

○ Assignee	○ Legal Representative under 35 U.S.C. 117	○ Joint Inventor
◉ Person to whom the inventor is obligated to assign.	○ Person who shows sufficient proprietary interest	

If applicant is the legal representative, indicate the authority to file the patent application, the inventor is:

Name of the Deceased or Legally Incapacitated Inventor:	

If the Applicant is an Organization check here. ☒

Organization Name	Staton Techiya LLC

Mailing Address Information For Applicant:

Address 1	9501 Jagged Creek Ct.		
Address 2			
City	Delray Beach	**State/Province**	FL
Country[i] US		Postal Code	33446
Phone Number		Fax Number	
Email Address	Daniel@techiya.co		

Additional Applicant Data may be generated within this form by selecting the Add button.

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Approved for use through 04/30/2017. OMB 0651-0032
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Application Data Sheet 37 CFR 1.76	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892
	Application Number	
Title of Invention	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION	

Assignee Information including Non-Applicant Assignee Information:

Providing assignment information in this section does not substitute for compliance with any requirement of part 3 of Title 37 of CFR to have an assignment recorded by the Office.

Assignee 1

Complete this section if assignee information, including non-applicant assignee information, is desired to be included on the patent application publication. An assignee-applicant identified in the "Applicant Information" section will appear on the patent application publication as an applicant. For an assignee-applicant, complete this section only if identification as an assignee is also desired on the patent application publication.

If the Assignee or Non-Applicant Assignee is an Organization check here. ☒

Organization Name	Staton Techiya LLC

Mailing Address Information For Assignee including Non-Applicant Assignee:

Address 1	9501 Jagged Creek Ct.		
Address 2			
City	Delray Beach	**State/Province**	FL
Country i	US	Postal Code	33446
Phone Number		Fax Number	
Email Address	Daniel@techiya.co		

Additional Assignee or Non-Applicant Assignee Data may be generated within this form by selecting the Add button.

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U.S. Patent and Trademark Office; U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
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Application Data Sheet 37 CFR 1.76	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892
	Application Number	
Title of Invention	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION	

Signature:

NOTE: This Application Data Sheet must be signed in accordance with 37 CFR 1.33(b). **However, if this Application Data Sheet is submitted with the INITIAL filing of the application and either box A or B is not checked in subsection 2 of the "Authorization or Opt-Out of Authorization to Permit Access" section, then this form must also be signed in accordance with 37 CFR 1.14(c).**

This Application Data Sheet **must** be signed by a patent practitioner if one or more of the applicants is a **juristic entity** (e. g., corporation or association). If the applicant is two or more joint inventors, this form must be signed by a patent practitioner, **all** joint inventors who are the applicant, or one or more joint inventor-applicants who have been given power of attorney (e.g., see USPTO Form PTO/AIA/81) on behalf of **all** joint inventor-applicants.

See 37 CFR 1.4(d) for the manner of making signatures and certifications.

Signature	/John P. Keady/			Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	
First Name	John	Last Name	Keady	Registration Number	56389

Additional Signature may be generated within this form by selecting the Add button.

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United States Patent and Trademark Office
Address: COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS
P.O. Box 1450
Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450
www.uspto.gov

APPLICATION NUMBER	FILING OR 371(C) DATE	FIRST NAMED APPLICANT	ATTY. DOCKET NO./TITLE
17/592,143	02/03/2022	Steven Wayne Goldstein	CONT-17321892

CONFIRMATION NO. 3471

150139
Akerman LLP
777 South Flagler Drive
Suite 1100 West Tower
West Palm Beach, FL 33401

FORMALITIES LETTER

OC000000131704653

Date Mailed: 02/09/2022

NOTICE TO FILE CORRECTED APPLICATION PAPERS

Filing Date Granted

An application number and filing date have been accorded to this application. The application is informal since it does not comply with the regulations for the reason(s) indicated below. Applicant is given **TWO MONTHS** from the date of this Notice within which to correct the informalities indicated below. Extensions of time may be obtained by filing a petition accompanied by the extension fee under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a).

The required item(s) identified below must be timely submitted to avoid abandonment:

- Replacement drawings in compliance with 37 CFR 1.84 and 37 CFR 1.121(d) are required. The drawings submitted are not acceptable because:
  - More than one figure is present and one or more figure appears to be unnumbered or misnumbered in comparison to the brief description of the figures. See Figure(s) 3. The figures must be labeled "Fig." with a consecutive Arabic numeral (1, 2, etc.) or an Arabic numeral and capital letter in the English alphabet (A, B, etc.) and correspond with a brief description having the same figure number. See 37 CFR 1.84(u)(1).
    (1) To correct the figure numbering, replacement figures must be submitted.
    (2) To add a brief description of an unnumbered figure, or correct the reference in the specification to the figures, a proper substitute specification in compliance with 37 CFR 1.121(b)(3) and 1.125, providing a brief description of each drawing figure presented, added or amended to correspond to the corrected numbering of the figures, must be submitted. See also 37 CFR 1.77(b)(9).

Applicant is cautioned that correction of the above items may cause the specification and drawings page count to exceed 100 pages. If the specification and drawings exceed 100 pages, applicant will need to submit the required application size fee.

Replies must be received in the USPTO within the set time period or must include a proper Certificate of Mailing or Transmission under 37 CFR 1.8 with a mailing or transmission date within the set time period. For more information and a suggested format, see Form PTO/SB/92 and MPEP 512.

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/fhadera/

PATENT APPLICATION FEE DETERMINATION RECORD

Substitute for Form PTO-875

Application or Docket Number: 17/592,143

APPLICATION AS FILED - PART I

FOR	(Column 1) NUMBER FILED	(Column 2) NUMBER EXTRA	SMALL ENTITY RATE($)	SMALL ENTITY FEE($)	OR	OTHER THAN SMALL ENTITY RATE($)	OTHER THAN SMALL ENTITY FEE($)
BASIC FEE (37 CFR 1.16(a), (b), or (c))	N/A	N/A	N/A	80		N/A	
SEARCH FEE (37 CFR 1.16(k), (i), or (m))	N/A	N/A	N/A	350		N/A	
EXAMINATION FEE (37 CFR 1.16(o), (p), or (q))	N/A	N/A	N/A	400		N/A	
TOTAL CLAIMS (37 CFR 1.16(i))	17 minus 20 =	*	x 50 =	0.00	OR		
INDEPENDENT CLAIMS (37 CFR 1.16(h))	2 minus 3 =	*	x 240 =	0.00			
APPLICATION SIZE FEE (37 CFR 1.16(s))	If the specification and drawings exceed 100 sheets of paper, the application size fee due is $310 ($155 for small entity) for each additional 50 sheets or fraction thereof. See 35 U.S.C. 41(a)(1)(G) and 37 CFR 1.16(s).			0.00			
MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIM PRESENT (37 CFR 1.16(j))				0.00			
* If the difference in column 1 is less than zero, enter "0" in column 2.			TOTAL	830		TOTAL	

APPLICATION AS AMENDED - PART II

		(Column 1) CLAIMS REMAINING AFTER AMENDMENT		(Column 2) HIGHEST NUMBER PREVIOUSLY PAID FOR	(Column 3) PRESENT EXTRA	SMALL ENTITY RATE($)	SMALL ENTITY ADDITIONAL FEE($)	OR	OTHER THAN SMALL ENTITY RATE($)	OTHER THAN SMALL ENTITY ADDITIONAL FEE($)
AMENDMENT A	Total (37 CFR 1.16(i))	*	Minus	**	=	x =		OR	x =	
	Independent (37 CFR 1.16(h))	*	Minus	***	=	x =		OR	x =	
	Application Size Fee (37 CFR 1.16(s))									
	FIRST PRESENTATION OF MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIM (37 CFR 1.16(j))							OR		
						TOTAL ADD'L FEE		OR	TOTAL ADD'L FEE	

		(Column 1) CLAIMS REMAINING AFTER AMENDMENT		(Column 2) HIGHEST NUMBER PREVIOUSLY PAID FOR	(Column 3) PRESENT EXTRA	RATE($)	ADDITIONAL FEE($)	OR	RATE($)	ADDITIONAL FEE($)
AMENDMENT B	Total (37 CFR 1.16(i))	*	Minus	**	=	x =		OR	x =	
	Independent (37 CFR 1.16(h))	*	Minus	***	=	x =		OR	x =	
	Application Size Fee (37 CFR 1.16(s))									
	FIRST PRESENTATION OF MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIM (37 CFR 1.16(j))							OR		
						TOTAL ADD'L FEE		OR	TOTAL ADD'L FEE	

* If the entry in column 1 is less than the entry in column 2, write "0" in column 3.

** If the "Highest Number Previously Paid For" IN THIS SPACE is less than 20, enter "20".

*** If the "Highest Number Previously Paid For" IN THIS SPACE is less than 3, enter "3".

The "Highest Number Previously Paid For" (Total or Independent) is the highest found in the appropriate box in column 1.

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APPLICATION NUMBER	FILING or 371(c) DATE	GRP ART UNIT	FIL FEE REC'D	ATTY.DOCKET.NO	TOT CLAIMS	IND CLAIMS
17/592,143	02/03/2022		830	CONT-17321892	17	2

CONFIRMATION NO. 3471

FILING RECEIPT

150139
Akerman LLP
777 South Flagler Drive
Suite 1100 West Tower
West Palm Beach, FL 33401

OC000000131704852

Date Mailed: 02/09/2022

Receipt is acknowledged of this non-provisional utility patent application. The application will be taken up for examination in due course. Applicant will be notified as to the results of the examination. Any correspondence concerning the application must include the following identification information: the U.S. APPLICATION NUMBER, FILING DATE, NAME OF FIRST INVENTOR, and TITLE OF INVENTION. Fees transmitted by check or draft are subject to collection.

Please verify the accuracy of the data presented on this receipt. If an error is noted on this Filing Receipt, please submit a written request for a corrected Filing Receipt, including a properly marked-up ADS showing the changes with strike-through for deletions and underlining for additions. If you received a "Notice to File Missing Parts" or other Notice requiring a response for this application, please submit any request for correction to this Filing Receipt with your reply to the Notice. When the USPTO processes the reply to the Notice, the USPTO will generate another Filing Receipt incorporating the requested corrections provided that the request is grantable.

Inventor(s)

Steven Wayne Goldstein, Delray Beach, FL;
John Usher, Beer, UNITED KINGDOM;
Marc Andre Boillot, Plantation, FL;

Applicant(s)

Staton Techiya LLC, Delray Beach, FL

Assignment For Published Patent Application

Staton Techiya LLC, Delray Beach, FL

Power of Attorney: The patent practitioners associated with Customer Number 150139

Domestic Priority data as claimed by applicant

This application is a CON of 17/321,892 05/17/2021
which is a CON of 16/987,396 08/07/2020 PAT 11244666
which is a CON of 16/669,490 10/30/2019 PAT 10810989
which is a CON of 16/193,568 11/16/2018 PAT 10535334
which is a CON of 14/574,589 12/18/2014 PAT 10134377
which is a CON of 12/017,878 01/22/2008 PAT 8917894
which claims benefit of 60/885,917 01/22/2007

Foreign Applications for which priority is claimed (You may be eligible to benefit from the **Patent Prosecution Highway** program at the USPTO. Please see http://www.uspto.gov for more information.) - None.
Foreign application information must be provided in an Application Data Sheet in order to constitute a claim to foreign priority. See 37 CFR 1.55 and 1.76.

Permission to Access Application via Priority Document Exchange: Yes

Permission to Access Search Results: Yes

Applicant may provide or rescind an authorization for access using Form PTO/SB/39 or Form PTO/SB/69 as appropriate.

If Required, Foreign Filing License Granted: 02/08/2022

The country code and number of your priority application, to be used for filing abroad under the Paris Convention, is **US 17/592,143**

Projected Publication Date: To Be Determined - pending completion of Corrected Papers

Non-Publication Request: No

Early Publication Request: No

**** SMALL ENTITY ****

Title

METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION

Preliminary Class

Statement under 37 CFR 1.55 or 1.78 for AIA (First Inventor to File) Transition Applications: No

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Since the rights granted by a U.S. patent extend only throughout the territory of the United States and have no effect in a foreign country, an inventor who wishes patent protection in another country must apply for a patent in a specific country or in regional patent offices. Applicants may wish to consider the filing of an international application under the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT). An international (PCT) application generally has the same effect as a regular national patent application in each PCT-member country. The PCT process **simplifies** the filing of patent applications on the same invention in member countries, but **does not result** in a grant of "an international patent" and does not eliminate the need of applicants to file additional documents and fees in countries where patent protection is desired.

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Title 35, United States Code, Section 184

Title 37, Code of Federal Regulations, 5.11 & 5.15

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Application Number: 17592143 Document Date: 04/11/2022

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APPLICATION NUMBER	FILING OR 371(C) DATE	FIRST NAMED APPLICANT	ATTY. DOCKET NO./TITLE
17/592,143	02/03/2022	Steven Wayne Goldstein	CONT-17321892

CONFIRMATION NO. 3471

150139
Akerman LLP
777 South Flagler Drive
Suite 1100 West Tower
West Palm Beach, FL 33401

FORMALITIES LETTER

OC000000131704653

Date Mailed: 02/09/2022

NOTICE TO FILE CORRECTED APPLICATION PAPERS

Filing Date Granted

An application number and filing date have been accorded to this application. The application is informal since it does not comply with the regulations for the reason(s) indicated below. Applicant is given **TWO MONTHS** from the date of this Notice within which to correct the informalities indicated below. Extensions of time may be obtained by filing a petition accompanied by the extension fee under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a).

The required item(s) identified below must be timely submitted to avoid abandonment:

- Replacement drawings in compliance with 37 CFR 1.84 and 37 CFR 1.121(d) are required. The drawings submitted are not acceptable because:
  - More than one figure is present and one or more figure appears to be unnumbered or misnumbered in comparison to the brief description of the figures. See Figure(s) 3. The figures must be labeled "Fig." with a consecutive Arabic numeral (1, 2, etc.) or an Arabic numeral and capital letter in the English alphabet (A, B, etc.) and correspond with a brief description having the same figure number. See 37 CFR 1.84(u)(1).
    (1) To correct the figure numbering, replacement figures must be submitted.
    (2) To add a brief description of an unnumbered figure, or correct the reference in the specification to the figures, a proper substitute specification in compliance with 37 CFR 1.121(b)(3) and 1.125, providing a brief description of each drawing figure presented, added or amended to correspond to the corrected numbering of the figures, must be submitted. See also 37 CFR 1.77(b)(9).

Applicant is cautioned that correction of the above items may cause the specification and drawings page count to exceed 100 pages. If the specification and drawings exceed 100 pages, applicant will need to submit the required application size fee.

Replies must be received in the USPTO within the set time period or must include a proper Certificate of Mailing or Transmission under 37 CFR 1.8 with a mailing or transmission date within the set time period. For more information and a suggested format, see Form PTO/SB/92 and MPEP 512.

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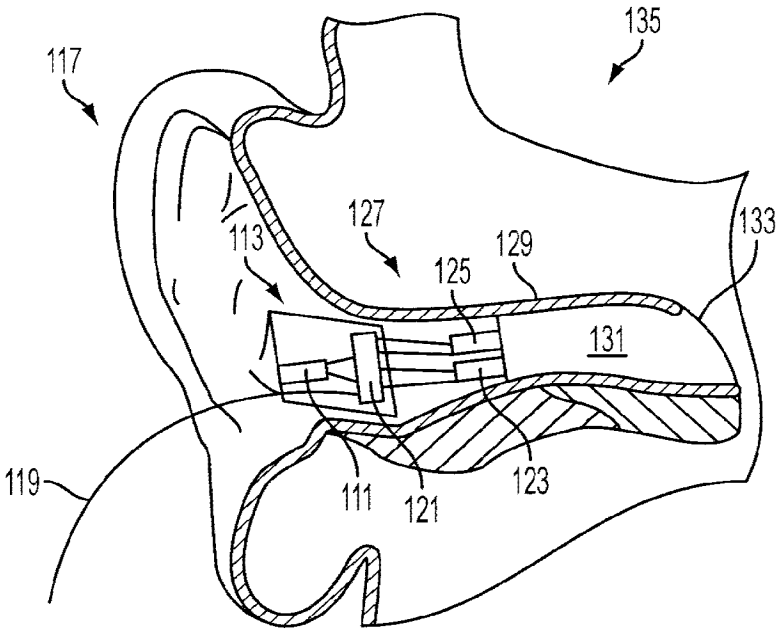

135
117
127
113
129
125
133
131
119
111
121
123

FIG. 1

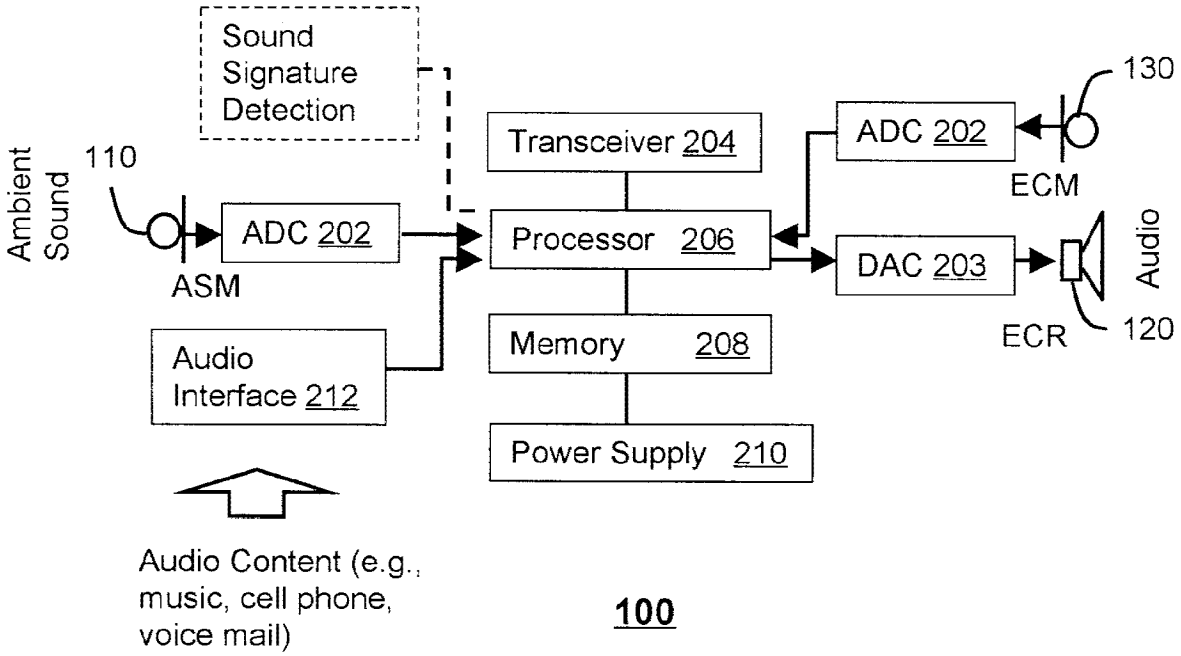
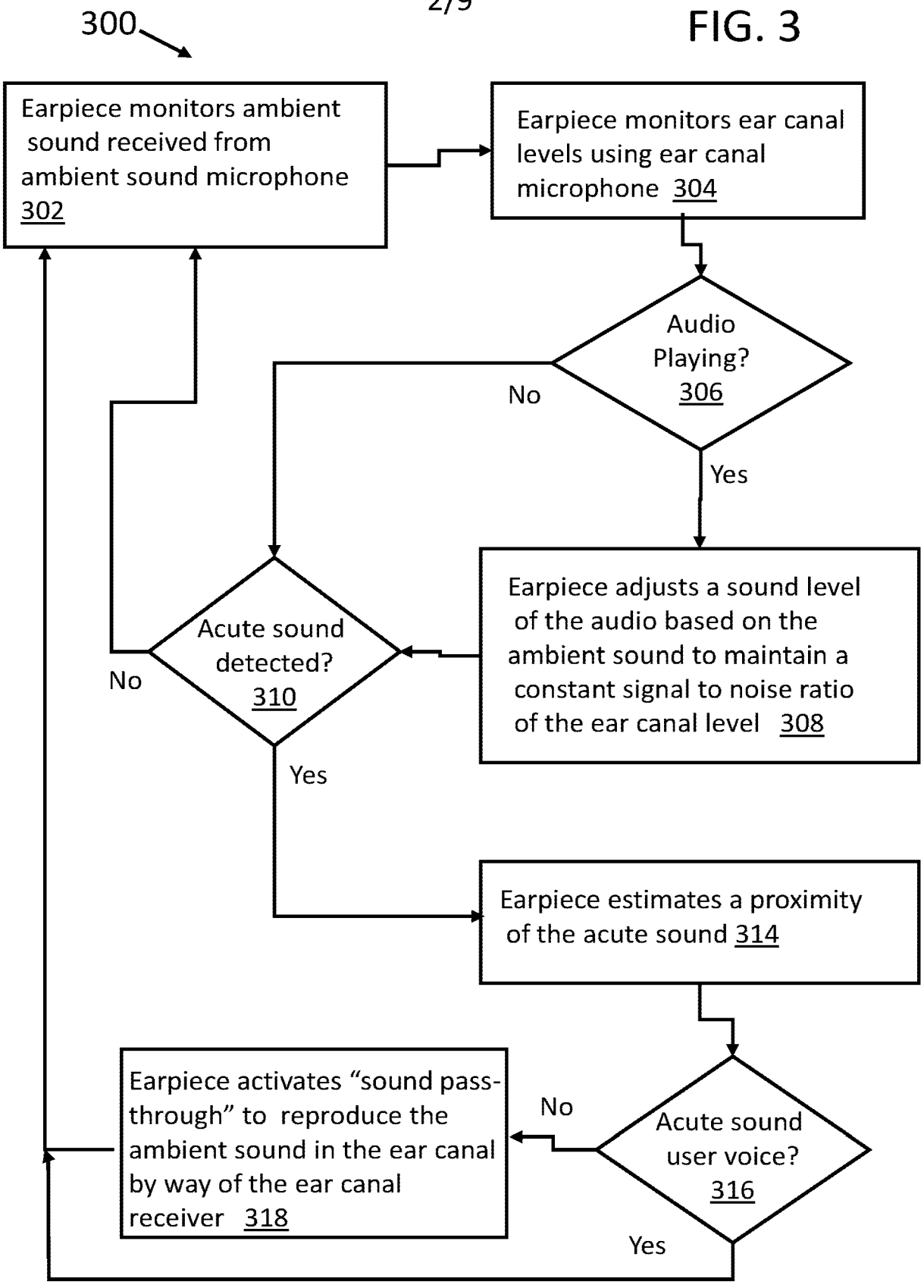

Sound Signature Detection
Ambient Sound
110
ASM
ADC 202
Transceiver 204
Processor 206
Memory 208
Power Supply 210
Audio Interface 212
ADC 202
130
ECM
DAC 203
Audio
ECR
120
Audio Content (e.g., music, cell phone, voice mail)
100

FIG. 2

FIG. 3


300
Earpiece monitors ambient sound received from ambient sound microphone 302
Earpiece monitors ear canal levels using ear canal microphone 304
Audio Playing? 306
No
Yes
Earpiece adjusts a sound level of the audio based on the ambient sound to maintain a constant signal to noise ratio of the ear canal level 308
Acute sound detected? 310
No
Yes
Earpiece estimates a proximity of the acute sound 314
Acute sound user voice? 316
No
Yes
Earpiece activates "sound pass-through" to reproduce the ambient sound in the ear canal by way of the ear canal receiver 318

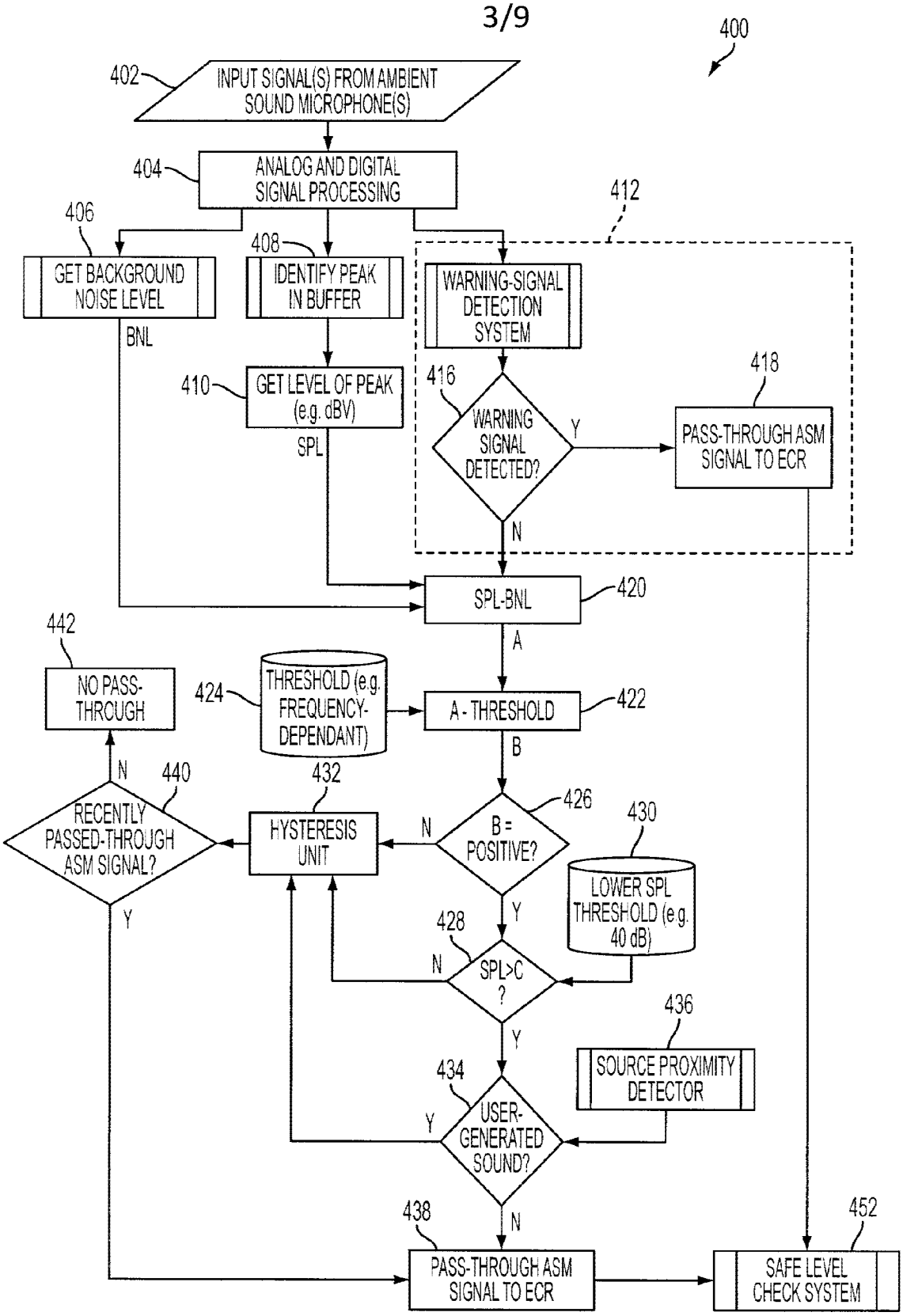

400
402
INPUT SIGNAL(S) FROM AMBIENT SOUND MICROPHONE(S)
404
ANALOG AND DIGITAL SIGNAL PROCESSING
406
GET BACKGROUND NOISE LEVEL
BNL
408
IDENTIFY PEAK IN BUFFER
410
GET LEVEL OF PEAK (e.g. dBV)
SPL
412
WARNING-SIGNAL DETECTION SYSTEM
416
WARNING SIGNAL DETECTED?
Y
N
418
PASS-THROUGH ASM SIGNAL TO ECR
420
SPL-BNL
A
422
A - THRESHOLD
424
THRESHOLD (e.g. FREQUENCY-DEPENDANT)
B
426
B = POSITIVE?
N
Y
430
LOWER SPL THRESHOLD (e.g. 40 dB)
428
SPL>C ?
N
Y
432
HYSTERESIS UNIT
440
RECENTLY PASSED-THROUGH ASM SIGNAL?
N
Y
442
NO PASS-THROUGH
434
USER-GENERATED SOUND?
Y
N
436
SOURCE PROXIMITY DETECTOR
438
PASS-THROUGH ASM SIGNAL TO ECR
452
SAFE LEVEL CHECK SYSTEM

FIG. 4

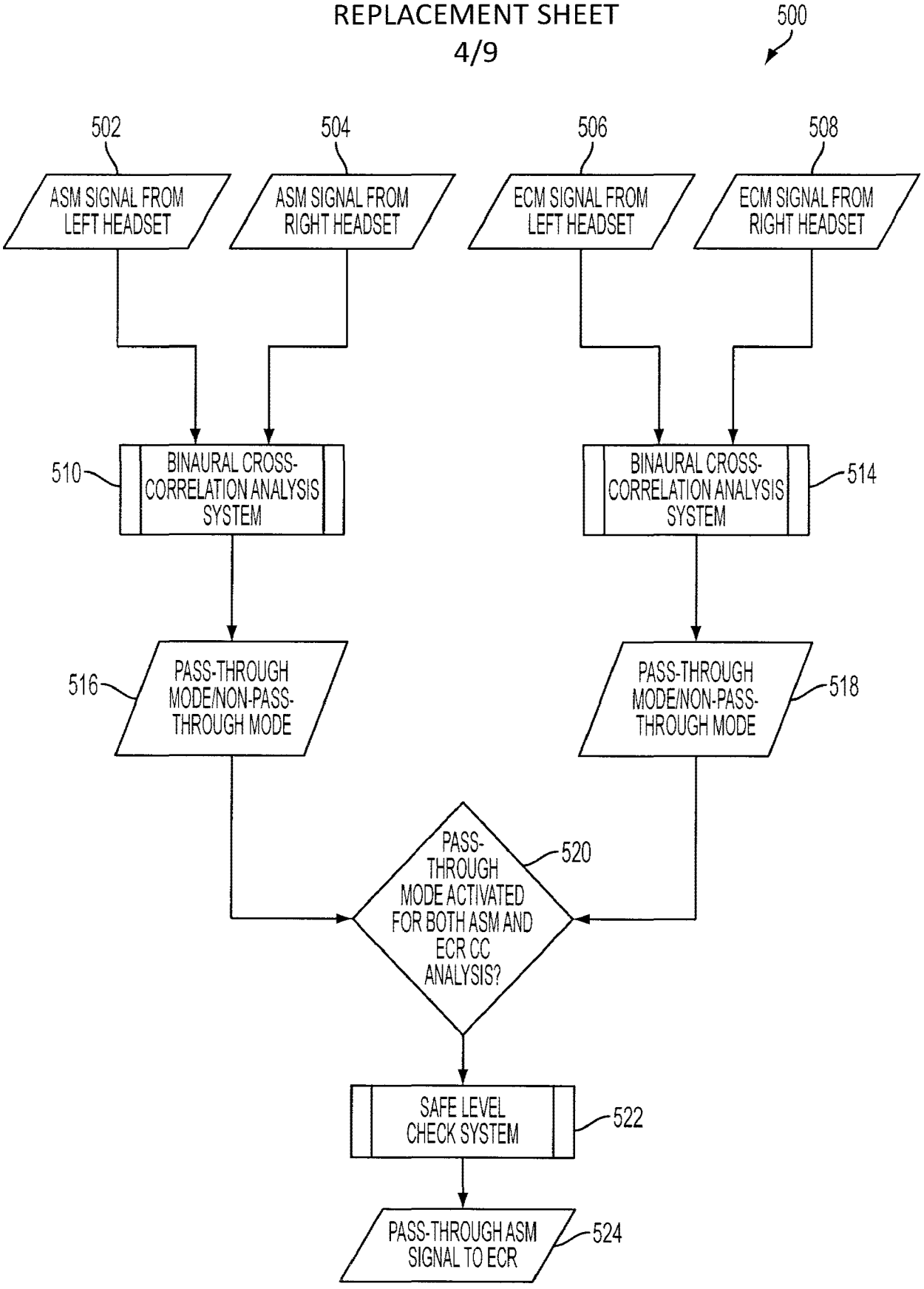

500
502
ASM SIGNAL FROM LEFT HEADSET
504
ASM SIGNAL FROM RIGHT HEADSET
506
ECM SIGNAL FROM LEFT HEADSET
508
ECM SIGNAL FROM RIGHT HEADSET
510
BINAURAL CROSS-CORRELATION ANALYSIS SYSTEM
514
BINAURAL CROSS-CORRELATION ANALYSIS SYSTEM
516
PASS-THROUGH MODE/NON-PASS-THROUGH MODE
518
PASS-THROUGH MODE/NON-PASS-THROUGH MODE
520
PASS-THROUGH MODE ACTIVATED FOR BOTH ASM AND ECR CC ANALYSIS?
522
SAFE LEVEL CHECK SYSTEM
524
PASS-THROUGH ASM SIGNAL TO ECR

FIG. 5

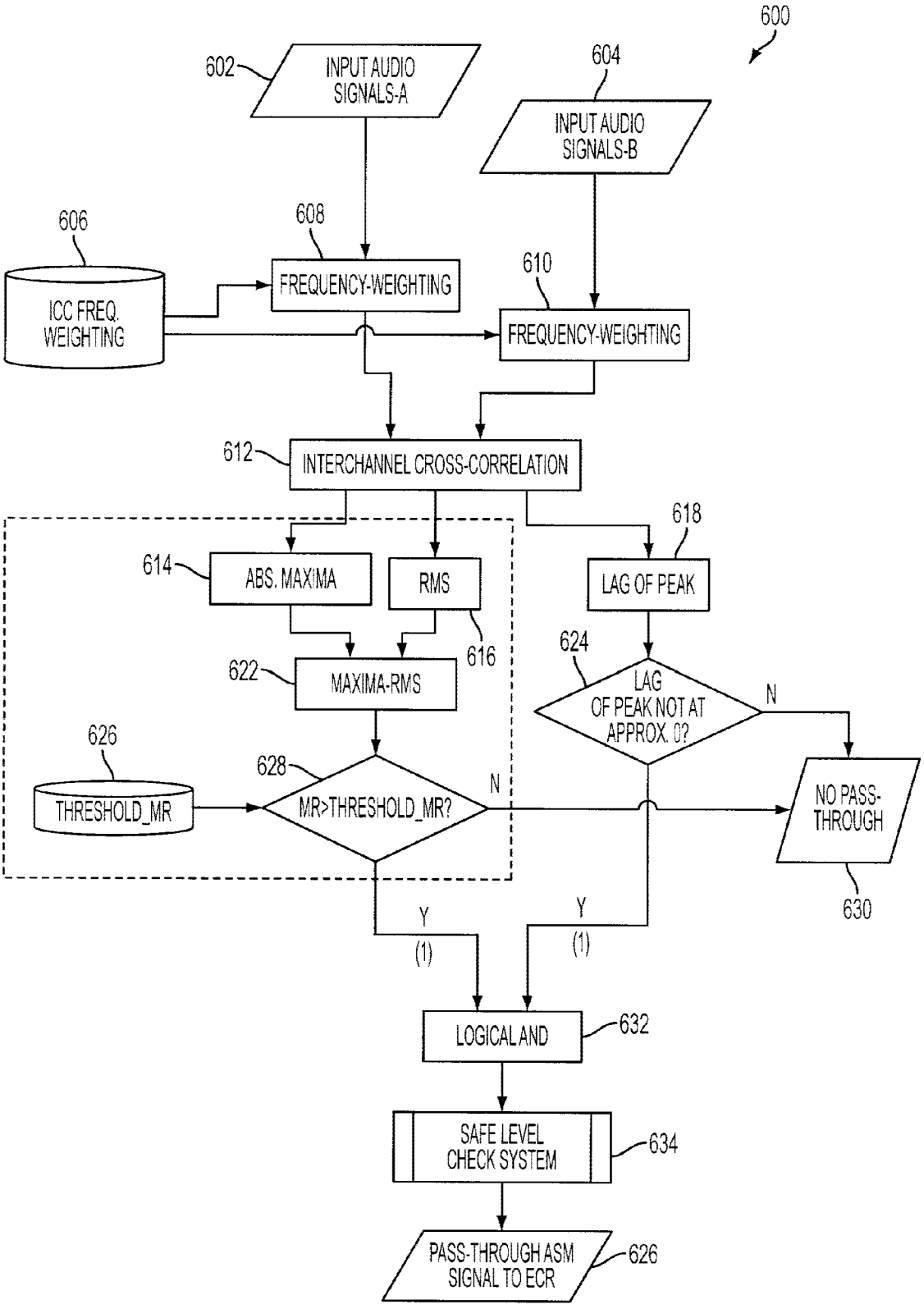

600
602
INPUT AUDIO SIGNALS-A
604
INPUT AUDIO SIGNALS-B
606
ICC FREQ. WEIGHTING
608
FREQUENCY-WEIGHTING
610
FREQUENCY-WEIGHTING
612
INTERCHANNEL CROSS-CORRELATION
614
ABS. MAXIMA
RMS
616
618
LAG OF PEAK
622
MAXIMA-RMS
624
LAG OF PEAK NOT AT APPROX. 0?
N
626
THRESHOLD_MR
628
MR>THRESHOLD_MR?
N
NO PASS-THROUGH
630
Y
(1)
Y
(1)
LOGICAL AND
632
SAFE LEVEL CHECK SYSTEM
634
PASS-THROUGH ASM SIGNAL TO ECR
626

FIG. 6

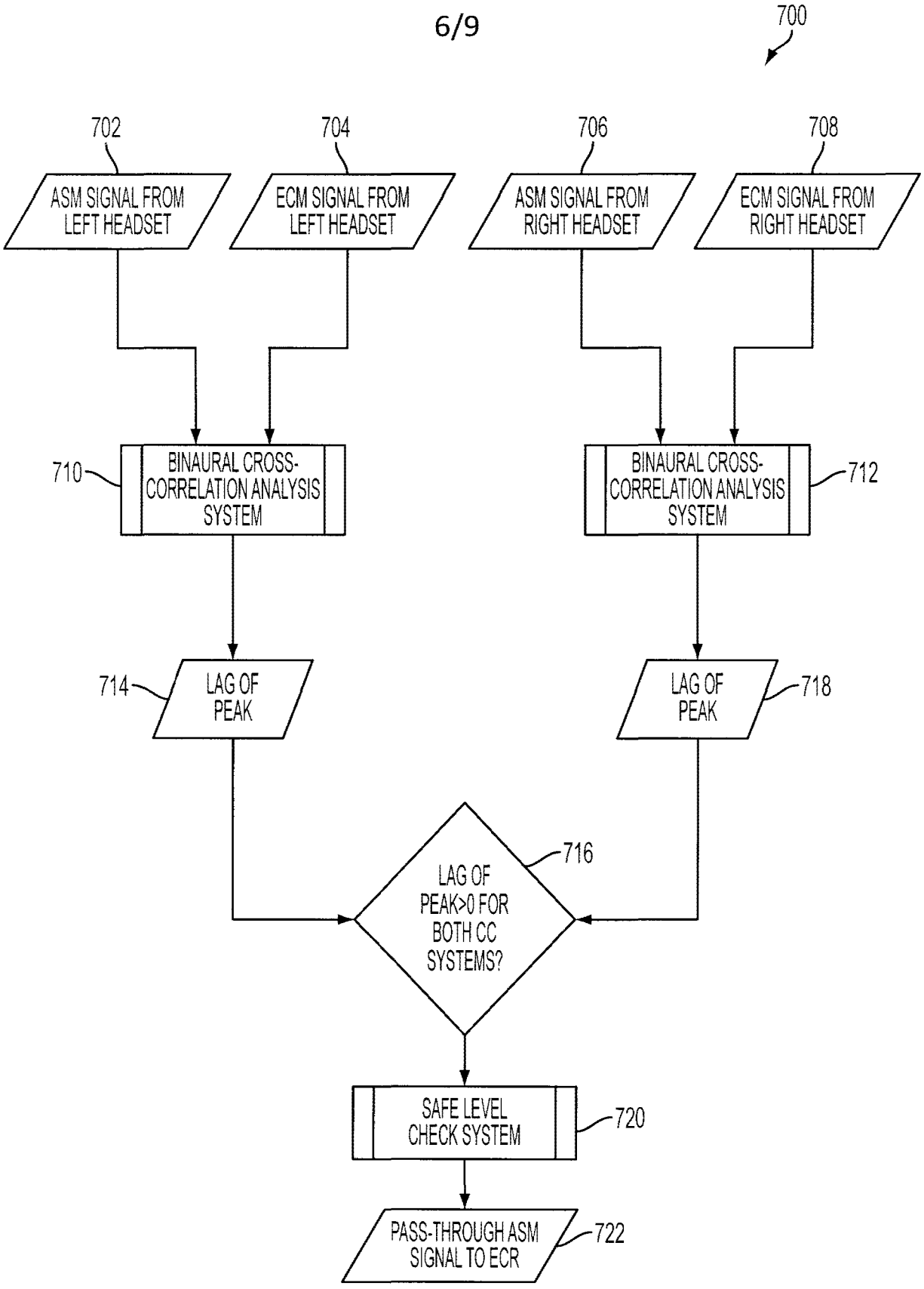

700
702
ASM SIGNAL FROM LEFT HEADSET
704
ECM SIGNAL FROM LEFT HEADSET
706
ASM SIGNAL FROM RIGHT HEADSET
708
ECM SIGNAL FROM RIGHT HEADSET
710
BINAURAL CROSS-CORRELATION ANALYSIS SYSTEM
712
BINAURAL CROSS-CORRELATION ANALYSIS SYSTEM
714
LAG OF PEAK
718
LAG OF PEAK
716
LAG OF PEAK>0 FOR BOTH CC SYSTEMS?
720
SAFE LEVEL CHECK SYSTEM
722
PASS-THROUGH ASM SIGNAL TO ECR

FIG. 7

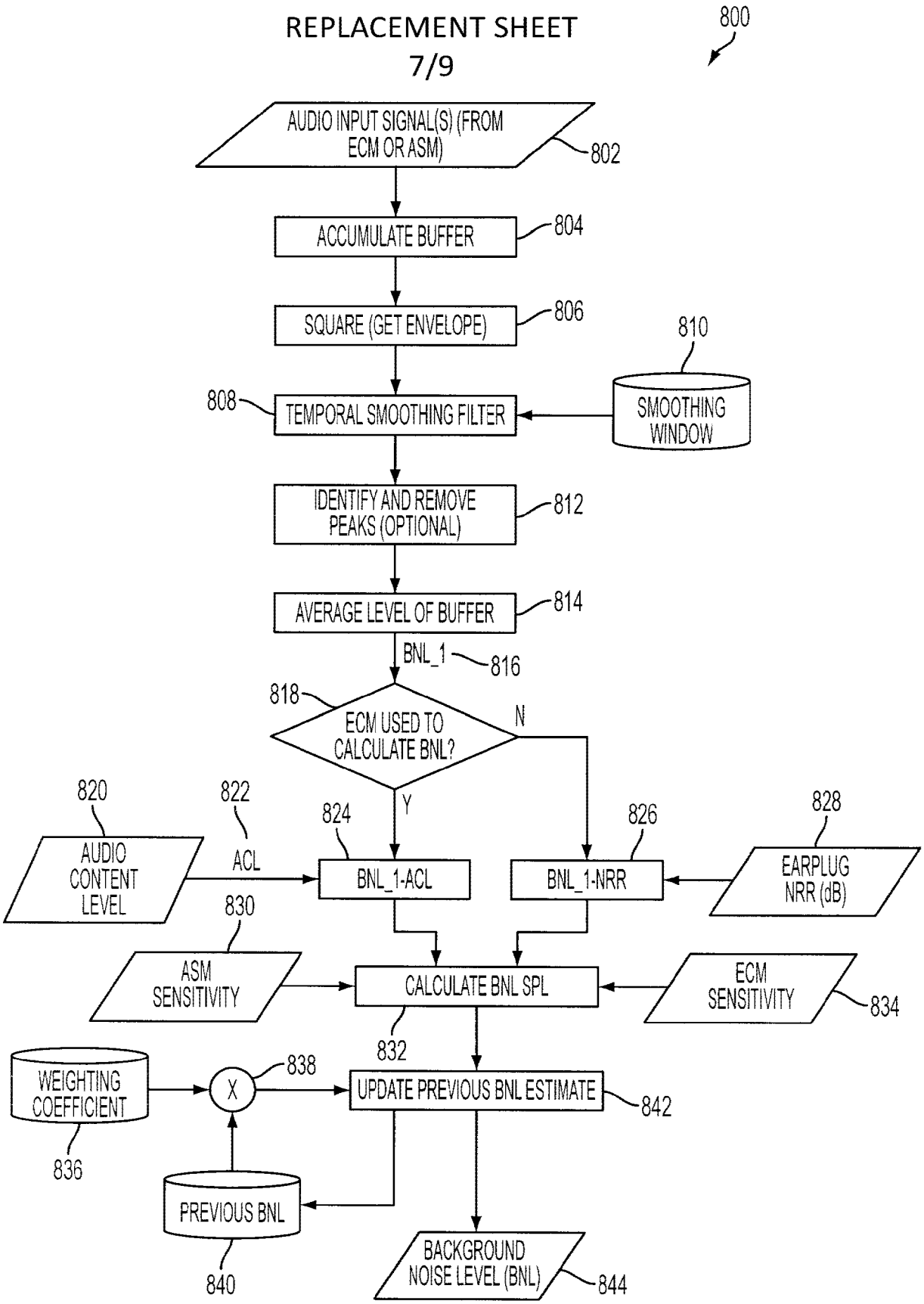

800
AUDIO INPUT SIGNAL(S) (FROM ECM OR ASM)
802
ACCUMULATE BUFFER
804
SQUARE (GET ENVELOPE)
806
810
SMOOTHING WINDOW
808
TEMPORAL SMOOTHING FILTER
IDENTIFY AND REMOVE PEAKS (OPTIONAL)
812
AVERAGE LEVEL OF BUFFER
814
BNL_1
816
818
ECM USED TO CALCULATE BNL?
N
Y
820
AUDIO CONTENT LEVEL
822
ACL
824
BNL_1-ACL
826
BNL_1-NRR
828
EARPLUG NRR (dB)
830
ASM SENSITIVITY
CALCULATE BNL SPL
ECM SENSITIVITY
834
832
WEIGHTING COEFFICIENT
838
X
UPDATE PREVIOUS BNL ESTIMATE
842
836
PREVIOUS BNL
840
BACKGROUND NOISE LEVEL (BNL)
844

FIG. 8

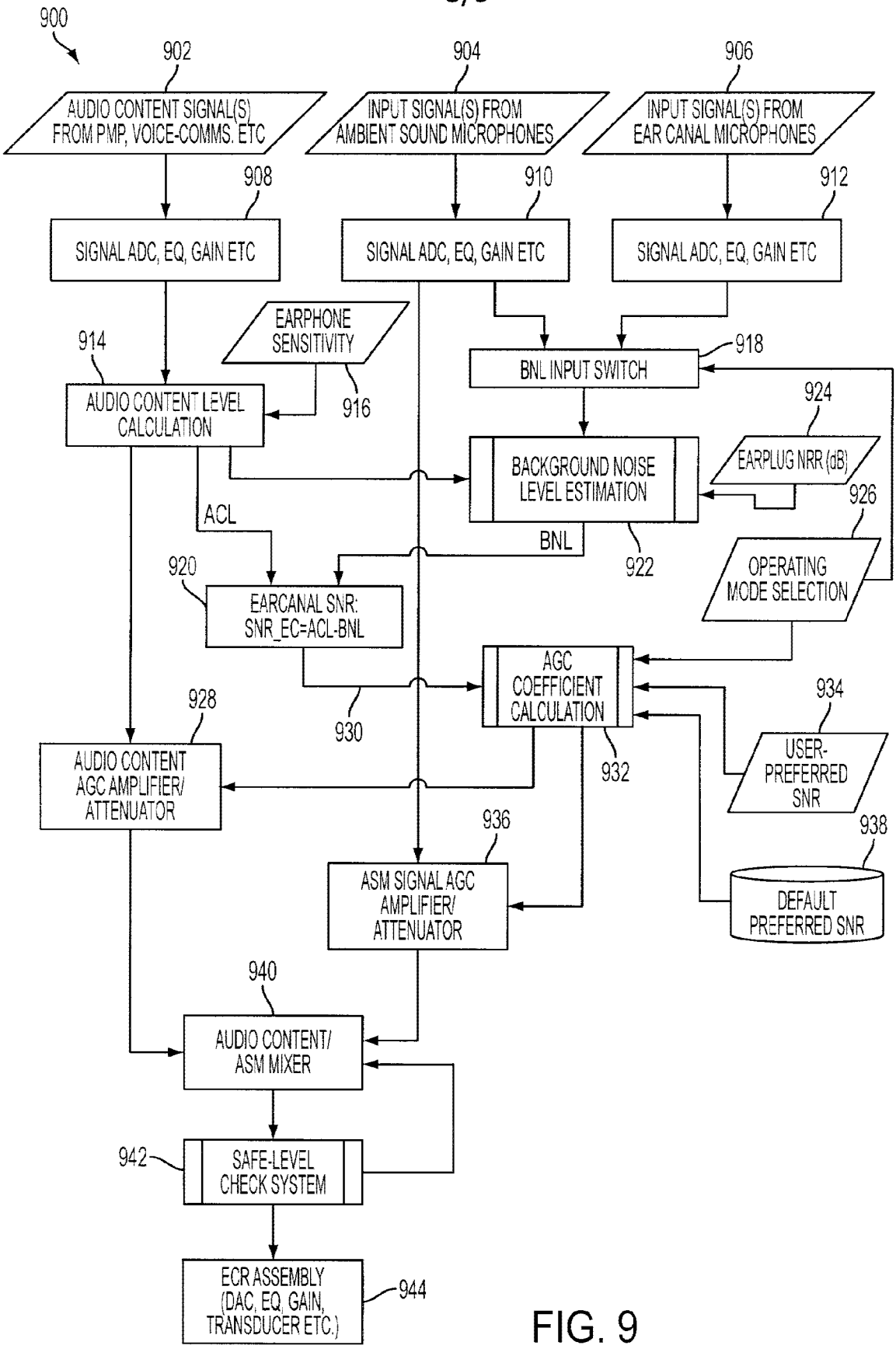

900
902
AUDIO CONTENT SIGNAL(S) FROM PMP, VOICE-COMMS. ETC
904
INPUT SIGNAL(S) FROM AMBIENT SOUND MICROPHONES
906
INPUT SIGNAL(S) FROM EAR CANAL MICROPHONES
908
SIGNAL ADC, EQ, GAIN ETC
910
SIGNAL ADC, EQ, GAIN ETC
912
SIGNAL ADC, EQ, GAIN ETC
914
AUDIO CONTENT LEVEL CALCULATION
EARPHONE SENSITIVITY
916
BNL INPUT SWITCH
918
924
EARPLUG NRR (dB)
BACKGROUND NOISE LEVEL ESTIMATION
926
ACL
BNL
922
920
EARCANAL SNR: SNR_EC=ACL-BNL
OPERATING MODE SELECTION
AGC COEFFICIENT CALCULATION
928
930
934
AUDIO CONTENT AGC AMPLIFIER/ ATTENUATOR
USER-PREFERRED SNR
932
936
938
ASM SIGNAL AGC AMPLIFIER/ ATTENUATOR
DEFAULT PREFERRED SNR
940
AUDIO CONTENT/ ASM MIXER
942
SAFE-LEVEL CHECK SYSTEM
ECR ASSEMBLY (DAC, EQ, GAIN, TRANSDUCER ETC.)
944

FIG. 9

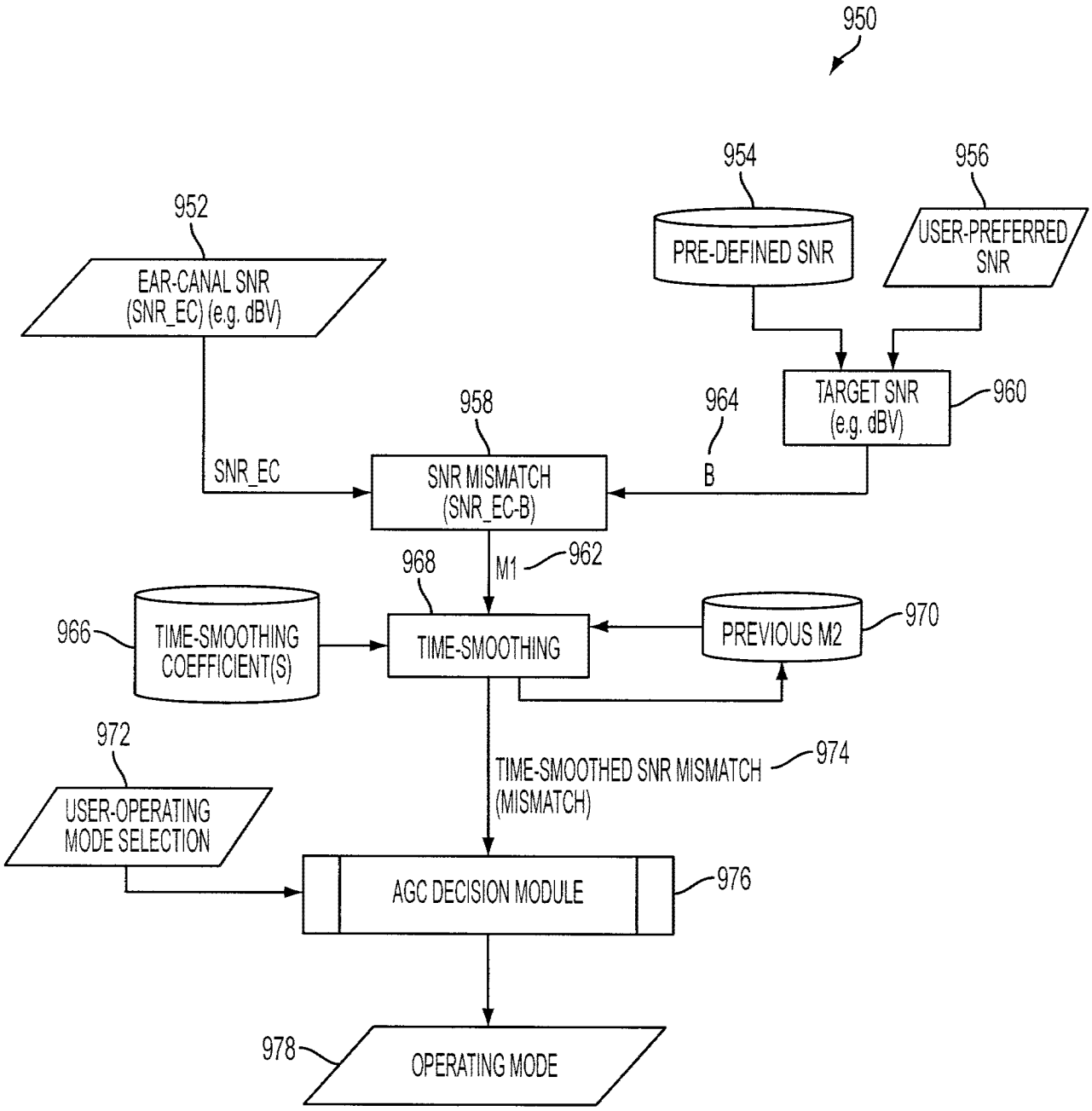

950
954
956
952
PRE-DEFINED SNR
USER-PREFERRED SNR
EAR-CANAL SNR (SNR_EC) (e.g. dBV)
TARGET SNR (e.g. dBV)
960
958
964
SNR_EC
SNR MISMATCH (SNR_EC-B)
B
968
M1
962
966
TIME-SMOOTHING COEFFICIENT(S)
TIME-SMOOTHING
PREVIOUS M2
970
972
TIME-SMOOTHED SNR MISMATCH (MISMATCH)
974
USER-OPERATING MODE SELECTION
AGC DECISION MODULE
976
978
OPERATING MODE

FIG. 10

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

APPLICATION NO.	:	17/592,143	CONFIRMATION NO. 3471
APPLICATION OF	:	Steven Wayne Goldstein	
DATE FILED	:	3 Feb. 2022	
EXAMINER	:	UNKNOWN	
TC/A.U.	:	UNKNOWN	
DOCKET	:	CONT-17321892	
TITLE	:	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION	

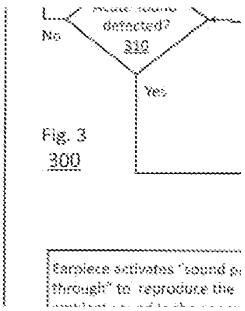
Response to Notice to File Corrected Application Papers

Commissioner for Patents
P. O. Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

Date: April 11, 2022

Sir:

The Notice to File Corrected Application Papers of 9 Feb 2022, stated "… More than one figure is present and one or more figure appears to be unnumbered or misnumbered in comparison to the brief description of the figures. See Figure(s) 3. The figures must be labeled "Fig." with a consecutive Arabic numeral (1, 2, etc.)…" Applicant notes that originally filed Fig. 3 includes a label, see below.



Applicant in the interest of expedited prosecution moved the existing label so that it is easier to see for Figure 3. A set of replacement sheets is herein submitted for sheets 1-9. No new matter has been submitted.

Should the Examiner believe that anything further is necessary, the Examiner is respectfully requested to contact the undersigned representative at the telephone number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,
TECHIYA LLC

Date: April 11, 2022

/John P. Keady/
John P. Keady, Ph.D (Physics), Ph.D (Comp. Sci)
Assistant General Counsel: Intellectual Property
and Chief Technical Officer
Staton Techiya LLC
Reg. No. 56,389
571-606-1291

Electronic Acknowledgement Receipt

EFS ID:	45449052
Application Number:	17592143
International Application Number:	
Confirmation Number:	3471
Title of Invention:	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION
First Named Inventor/Applicant Name:	Steven Wayne Goldstein
Customer Number:	150139
Filer:	John Patrick Keady
Filer Authorized By:	
Attorney Docket Number:	CONT-17321892
Receipt Date:	11-APR-2022
Filing Date:	03-FEB-2022
Time Stamp:	23:05:20
Application Type:	Utility under 35 USC 111(a)

Payment information:

Submitted with Payment	no

File Listing:

Document Number	Document Description	File Name	File Size(Bytes)/ Message Digest	Multi Part /.zip	Pages (if appl.)
1	Applicant Response to Pre-Exam Formalities Notice	11472-27-5-Notice-to-File-Corrected-Application-Papers.pdf	76912 3fd76bd5db4d107bb2b2948d15ffac930be9fac1	no	2

Warnings:

Information:					
2	Drawings-other than black and white line drawings	17592143_Replacement-Drawings.pdf	461267 96cb00c692c1f4cbe6feb7c3e37fe0ba04e142b7	no	9
Warnings:					
Information:					
3	Transmittal Letter	17592143-transmittal-ltr.pdf	146419 f1262623fe2459b349dfd870b300b355a95de138	no	2
Warnings:					
Information:					
		Total Files Size (in bytes):	684598		

This Acknowledgement Receipt evidences receipt on the noted date by the USPTO of the indicated documents, characterized by the applicant, and including page counts, where applicable. It serves as evidence of receipt similar to a Post Card, as described in MPEP 503.

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If a new application is being filed and the application includes the necessary components for a filing date (see 37 CFR 1.53(b)-(d) and MPEP 506), a Filing Receipt (37 CFR 1.54) will be issued in due course and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the filing date of the application.

National Stage of an International Application under 35 U.S.C. 371

If a timely submission to enter the national stage of an international application is compliant with the conditions of 35 U.S.C. 371 and other applicable requirements a Form PCT/DO/EO/903 indicating acceptance of the application as a national stage submission under 35 U.S.C. 371 will be issued in addition to the Filing Receipt, in due course.

New International Application Filed with the USPTO as a Receiving Office

If a new international application is being filed and the international application includes the necessary components for an international filing date (see PCT Article 11 and MPEP 1810), a Notification of the International Application Number and of the International Filing Date (Form PCT/RO/105) will be issued in due course, subject to prescriptions concerning national security, and the date shown on this Acknowledgement Receipt will establish the international filing date of the application.

PATENT APPLICATION FEE DETERMINATION RECORD

Substitute for Form PTO-875

Application or Docket Number: 17/592,143

APPLICATION AS FILED - PART I

FOR	(Column 1) NUMBER FILED	(Column 2) NUMBER EXTRA	SMALL ENTITY RATE($)	SMALL ENTITY FEE($)	OR	OTHER THAN SMALL ENTITY RATE($)	OTHER THAN SMALL ENTITY FEE($)
BASIC FEE (37 CFR 1.16(a), (b), or (c))	N/A	N/A	N/A	80		N/A	
SEARCH FEE (37 CFR 1.16(k), (i), or (m))	N/A	N/A	N/A	350		N/A	
EXAMINATION FEE (37 CFR 1.16(o), (p), or (q))	N/A	N/A	N/A	400		N/A	
TOTAL CLAIMS (37 CFR 1.16(i))	17 minus 20 =	*	x 50 =	0.00	OR		
INDEPENDENT CLAIMS (37 CFR 1.16(h))	2 minus 3 =	*	x 240 =	0.00			
APPLICATION SIZE FEE (37 CFR 1.16(s))	If the specification and drawings exceed 100 sheets of paper, the application size fee due is $310 ($155 for small entity) for each additional 50 sheets or fraction thereof. See 35 U.S.C. 41(a)(1)(G) and 37 CFR 1.16(s).			0.00			
MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIM PRESENT (37 CFR 1.16(j))				0.00			
* If the difference in column 1 is less than zero, enter "0" in column 2.			TOTAL	830		TOTAL	

APPLICATION AS AMENDED - PART II

		(Column 1) CLAIMS REMAINING AFTER AMENDMENT		(Column 2) HIGHEST NUMBER PREVIOUSLY PAID FOR	(Column 3) PRESENT EXTRA	SMALL ENTITY RATE($)	SMALL ENTITY ADDITIONAL FEE($)	OR	OTHER THAN SMALL ENTITY RATE($)	OTHER THAN SMALL ENTITY ADDITIONAL FEE($)
AMENDMENT A	Total (37 CFR 1.16(i))	*	Minus	**	=	x =		OR	x =	
	Independent (37 CFR 1.16(h))	*	Minus	***	=	x =		OR	x =	
	Application Size Fee (37 CFR 1.16(s))									
	FIRST PRESENTATION OF MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIM (37 CFR 1.16(j))							OR		
						TOTAL ADD'L FEE		OR	TOTAL ADD'L FEE	

		(Column 1) CLAIMS REMAINING AFTER AMENDMENT		(Column 2) HIGHEST NUMBER PREVIOUSLY PAID FOR	(Column 3) PRESENT EXTRA	RATE($)	ADDITIONAL FEE($)	OR	RATE($)	ADDITIONAL FEE($)
AMENDMENT B	Total (37 CFR 1.16(i))	*	Minus	**	=	x =		OR	x =	
	Independent (37 CFR 1.16(h))	*	Minus	***	=	x =		OR	x =	
	Application Size Fee (37 CFR 1.16(s))									
	FIRST PRESENTATION OF MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIM (37 CFR 1.16(j))							OR		
						TOTAL ADD'L FEE		OR	TOTAL ADD'L FEE	

* If the entry in column 1 is less than the entry in column 2, write "0" in column 3.
** If the "Highest Number Previously Paid For" IN THIS SPACE is less than 20, enter "20".
*** If the "Highest Number Previously Paid For" IN THIS SPACE is less than 3, enter "3".
The "Highest Number Previously Paid For" (Total or Independent) is the highest found in the appropriate box in column 1.

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APPLICATION NUMBER	FILING or 371(c) DATE	GRP ART UNIT	FIL FEE REC'D	ATTY.DOCKET.NO	TOT CLAIMS	IND CLAIMS
17/592,143	02/03/2022		830	CONT-17321892	17	2

CONFIRMATION NO. 3471

UPDATED FILING RECEIPT

150139
Akerman LLP
777 South Flagler Drive
Suite 1100 West Tower
West Palm Beach, FL 33401

OC000000133122138

Date Mailed: 04/13/2022

Receipt is acknowledged of this non-provisional utility patent application. The application will be taken up for examination in due course. Applicant will be notified as to the results of the examination. Any correspondence concerning the application must include the following identification information: the U.S. APPLICATION NUMBER, FILING DATE, NAME OF FIRST INVENTOR, and TITLE OF INVENTION. Fees transmitted by check or draft are subject to collection.

Please verify the accuracy of the data presented on this receipt. If an error is noted on this Filing Receipt, please submit a written request for a corrected Filing Receipt, including a properly marked-up ADS showing the changes with strike-through for deletions and underlining for additions. If you received a "Notice to File Missing Parts" or other Notice requiring a response for this application, please submit any request for correction to this Filing Receipt with your reply to the Notice. When the USPTO processes the reply to the Notice, the USPTO will generate another Filing Receipt incorporating the requested corrections provided that the request is grantable.

Inventor(s)

Steven Wayne Goldstein, Delray Beach, FL;
John Usher, Beer, UNITED KINGDOM;
Marc Andre Boillot, Plantation, FL;

Applicant(s)

Staton Techiya LLC, Delray Beach, FL

Assignment For Published Patent Application

Staton Techiya LLC, Delray Beach, FL

Power of Attorney: The patent practitioners associated with Customer Number 150139

Domestic Priority data as claimed by applicant

This application is a CON of 17/321,892 05/17/2021
which is a CON of 16/987,396 08/07/2020 PAT 11244666
which is a CON of 16/669,490 10/30/2019 PAT 10810989
which is a CON of 16/193,568 11/16/2018 PAT 10535334
which is a CON of 14/574,589 12/18/2014 PAT 10134377
which is a CON of 12/017,878 01/22/2008 PAT 8917894
which claims benefit of 60/885,917 01/22/2007

Foreign Applications for which priority is claimed (You may be eligible to benefit from the **Patent Prosecution Highway** program at the USPTO. Please see http://www.uspto.gov for more information.) - None.
Foreign application information must be provided in an Application Data Sheet in order to constitute a claim to foreign priority. See 37 CFR 1.55 and 1.76.

Permission to Access Application via Priority Document Exchange: Yes

Permission to Access Search Results: Yes

Applicant may provide or rescind an authorization for access using Form PTO/SB/39 or Form PTO/SB/69 as appropriate.

If Required, Foreign Filing License Granted: 02/08/2022

The country code and number of your priority application, to be used for filing abroad under the Paris Convention, is **US 17/592,143**

Projected Publication Date: 07/21/2022

Non-Publication Request: No

Early Publication Request: No

**** SMALL ENTITY ****

Title

METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION

Preliminary Class

Statement under 37 CFR 1.55 or 1.78 for AIA (First Inventor to File) Transition Applications: No

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For information on preventing theft of your intellectual property (patents, trademarks and copyrights), you may wish to consult the U.S. Government website, http://www.stopfakes.gov. Part of a Department of Commerce initiative, this website includes self-help "toolkits" giving innovators guidance on how to protect intellectual property in specific countries such as China, Korea and Mexico. For questions regarding patent enforcement issues, applicants may call the U.S. Government hotline at 1-866-999-HALT (1-866-999-4258).

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INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT
(Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)

Application Number	17592143
Filing Date	2022-02-03
First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
Art Unit	OPAP
Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

U.S.PATENTS Remove

Examiner Initial*	Cite No	Patent Number	Kind Code[1]	Issue Date	Name of Patentee or Applicant of cited Document	Pages,Columns,Lines where Relevant Passages or Relevant Figures Appear
	1	6359993		2002-03-19	Brimhall	
	2	7072482		2006-07-04	Van Doorn et al.	
	3	7778434		2010-08-17	Juneau et al.	
	4	5524056		1996-06-04	Killion et al.	
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	6	8014553		2011-09-06	Radivojevic et al.	
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	8	7209569		2007-04-24	Boesen	

INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
	Application Number	17592143
	Filing Date	2022-02-03
	First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
	Art Unit	OPAP
	Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

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	10	6021207		2000-02-01	Puthuff et al.	
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INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
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	Filing Date	2022-02-03
	First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
	Art Unit	OPAP
	Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

	20	5933510		1999-08-03	Bryant	
	21	8086093		2011-12-27	Stuckman	
	22	7039585		2006-05-02	Wilmot	
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	28	8160261		2012-04-17	Schulein	
	29	6639987		2003-10-28	McIntosh	
	30	5923624		1999-07-13	Groeger	

INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
	Application Number	17592143
	Filing Date	2022-02-03
	First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
	Art Unit	OPAP
	Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

	31	8160273		2012-04-17	Visser	
	32	7464029		2008-12-09	Visser	
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	35	8718305		2014-05-06	Usher	
	36	8798278		2014-08-05	Isabelle	
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	40	8218784		2012-07-10	Schulein	
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INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
	Application Number	17592143
	Filing Date	2022-02-03
	First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
	Art Unit	OPAP
	Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

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	43	8401200		2013-03-19	Tiscareno	
	44	9196247		2015-11-24	Harada	
	45	7574917		2009-08-18	Von Dach	

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	1	20030165246		2003-09-04	Kvaloy et al.	
	2	20080037801		2008-02-14	Alves et al.	
	3	20060204014		2006-09-14	Isenberg et al.	
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	5	20070036377		2007-02-15	Stirnemann	

INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
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	Filing Date	2022-02-03
	First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
	Art Unit	OPAP
	Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

	6	20020165719		2002-11-07	Wang	
	7	20060140425		2006-06-29	Berg	
	8	20030152359		2003-08-14	Kim	
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	14	20040109579		2004-07-10	Izuchi	
	15	20060167687		2006-07-27	Kates	
	16	20060083390		2006-04-20	Kaderavek	

INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
	Application Number	17592143
	Filing Date	2022-02-03
	First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
	Art Unit	OPAP
	Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

	17	20050068171		2005-03-31	Kelliher	
	18	20050028212		2005-02-03	Laronne	
	19	20080145032		2008-06-19	Lindroos	
	20	20020098878		2002-07-25	Mooney	
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	22	20140023203		2014-01-23	Rotschild	
	23	20060188105		2006-08-24	Baskerville	
	24	20020076057		2002-06-20	Voix	
	25	20110116643		2011-05-19	Tiscareno	
	26	20150215701		2015-07-30	Usher	
	27	20140163976		2014-06-12	Park	

INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
	Application Number	17592143
	Filing Date	2022-02-03
	First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
	Art Unit	OPAP
	Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

	28	20080137873		2008-06-12	Goldstein		
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	30	20040086138		2004-05-06	Kuth		

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Examiner Initial*	Cite No	Foreign Document Number[3]	Country Code[2] i	Kind Code[4]	Publication Date	Name of Patentee or Applicant of cited Document	Pages,Columns,Lines where Relevant Passages or Relevant Figures Appear	T[5]
	1	2006054698	WO			Murata		
	2	EP1401240	EP			Jensen		
	3	2008050583	WO			Kitada		
	4	2007092660	WO			Moberly		
	5	2004114722	WO			Pedersen		
	6	EP1385324	EP			Pedersen		

INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
	Application Number	17592143
	Filing Date	2022-02-03
	First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
	Art Unit	OPAP
	Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

	7	2009023784	WO			Usher		
	8	2012097150	WO			Usher		

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Examiner Initials*	Cite No	Include name of the author (in CAPITAL LETTERS), title of the article (when appropriate), title of the item (book, magazine, journal, serial, symposium, catalog, etc), date, pages(s), volume-issue number(s), publisher, city and/or country where published.	T[5]
	1		

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INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
	Application Number	17592143
	Filing Date	2022-02-03
	First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
	Art Unit	OPAP
	Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

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Please see 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98 to make the appropriate selection(s):

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See attached certification statement.

The fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17 (p) has been submitted herewith.

☒ A certification statement is not submitted herewith.

SIGNATURE

A signature of the applicant or representative is required in accordance with CFR 1.33, 10.18. Please see CFR 1.4(d) for the form of the signature.

Signature	/John P. Keady/	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	2022-06-06
Name/Print	John P. Keady	Registration Number	56389

This collection of information is required by 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98. The information is required to obtain or retain a benefit by the public which is to file (and by the USPTO to process) an application. Confidentiality is governed by 35 U.S.C. 122 and 37 CFR 1.14. This collection is estimated to take 1 hour to complete, including gathering, preparing and submitting the completed application form to the USPTO. Time will vary depending upon the individual case. Any comments on the amount of time you require to complete this form and/or suggestions for reducing this burden, should be sent to the Chief Information Officer, U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, U.S. Department of Commerce, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450. DO NOT SEND FEES OR COMPLETED FORMS TO THIS ADDRESS. **SEND TO: Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450.**

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Art Unit	OPAP
Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

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	1	6804638		2004-10-12	Fiedler; Mark	
	2	6163508		2000-12-19	Kim et al.	
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	1	EP1519625	EP	A2		Victorian		
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	3	JPH0877468	JP			Keizaburo		

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	4	JPH10162283	JP			Masahiro			

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	1	Olwal, A. and Feiner S. Interaction Techniques Using Prosodic Features of Speech and Audio Localization. Proceedings of IUI 2005 (International Conference on Intelligent User Interfaces), San Diego, CA, Jan 9-12, 2005, p. 284-286.	
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(19) Europäisches Patentamt
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(12) EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(43) Date of publication:
28.01.2004 Bulletin 2004/05

(51) Int Cl.[7]: **H04M 9/08**, H04M 1/60

(21) Application number: **02016435.6**

(22) Date of filing: **22.07.2002**

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU MC NL PT SE SK TR
Designated Extension States:
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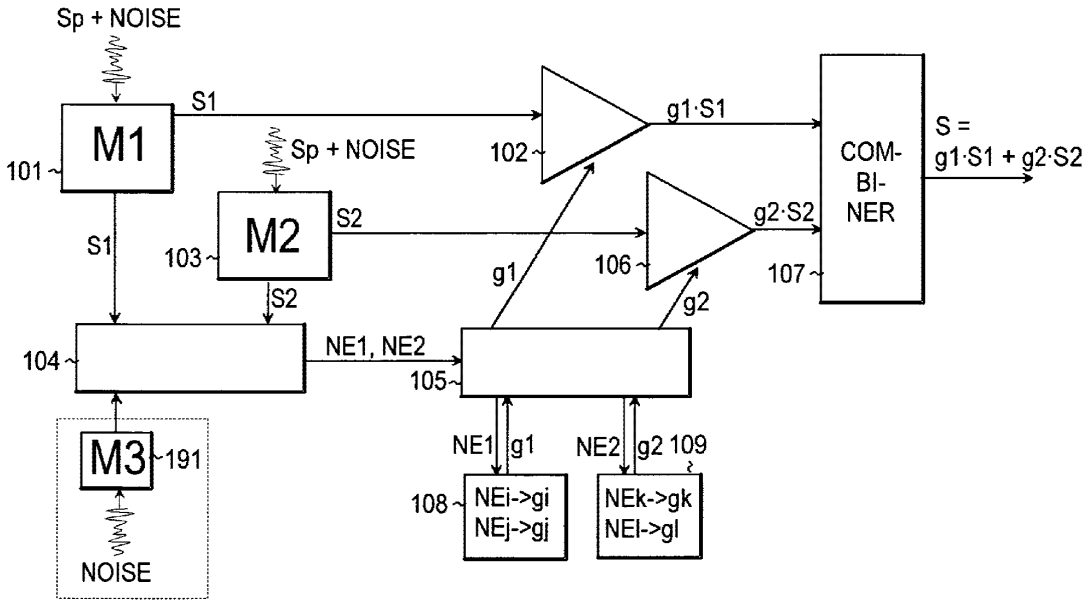
(71) Applicant: **SIEMENS AKTIENGESELLSCHAFT**
80333 München (DE)

(72) Inventor: **Pedersen, Jens Erik**
9000 Alborg (DK)

(54) A system and method for reducing the effect of background noise

(57) Acoustical signals are collected with two microphones having different sensitivity to background noise. The level of background noise is estimated, and depending of the level of background noise, i) the amplification gain of the signals is modified before the signals are combined to a combined signal, or ii) the way of combining the signals is changed, to produce a signal that has less background noise than one of the microphones.

FIG 1



EP 1 385 324 A1

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Description

Field of the invention

[0001] The invention relates generally to enhancing speech quality in a telecommunications system, and more specifically to reducing the effect of background noise in the communication between users.

Background of the invention

[0002] Due to the recent explosive increase in the mobile device penetration, it is no more surprising to see people going on the sidewalk or pedestrian area with a mobile phone on their ear. The mobile phone is considered as a practical tool and it is supposed to be carried with to almost anywhere. People are supplied with means for being within reach in principle independently of time and location. As a consequence it may sometimes happen that the surroundings are not optimal for convenient telephoning. In fact, the sight of people trying to make a phone call in noisy places, such as restaurants or street corners, is getting more common all the time.

[0003] Technically, to provide the user with a microphone system which operates in a difficult acoustic environment has not been a difficult task in many years. For example, U.S. patent 5,327,506 discloses a speaker/microphone system that should be applicable in background noise levels up to far beyond over 100 decibels. Such a system is suitable for persons in high ambient noise environments, such as for helicopter pilots. The idea in 506 is that the outgoing voice sounds are taken from the air within the external auditory canal of a person while substantially eliminating audio vibration pickup of sound transmitted by bone conduction.

[0004] Another approach for high background noise microphone arrangements is found in U.S. patent 5,659,620. Here the microphone holder is designed for arrangement in its entirety in the outer ear outside the auditory meatus, and the microphone unit being mounted in vibration transmitting tissue contact in a part of the edge of the holder facing the bottom of tragus. As one of the benefits, all surround tones are not cut off thus increasing the comfort of wearing such a device. When people talk, vibrations in the throat and vocal cords are generated. The vibrations propagate through the bony and liquid-filled tissue, and the idea in 620 is that the jawbone which passes near the front part of the outer ear produces a strong transmission and transfers considerably more of the persons speech than if the signal were collected in the throat.

[0005] The idea of getting almost a background free aural image from inside the ear has also been adapted within the area of mobile communications, as illustrated in the international patent application WO 02/07477. In order to reduce and isolate bone conduction of sound, a sound isolation cup serves as a jacket that surrounds a miniature transducer inside the housing of a microphone/loudspeaker element that is placed in the ear.

[0006] However, under low background noise circumstances, the solutions above suffer from a poorer acoustical quality than an ordinary microphone system. In the 620 approach discussed above, the low spectrum dominates the transmitted sound spectrum because of the acoustical properties of the tissue. This means that in order to keep the sound quality acceptable, or at least to have a proper balance in the sound, the low frequencies have to be filtered. In the other two approaches discussed above, because the acoustic conduct from the speech producing organs to the ear is far from optimal, the sound quality gets badly distorted. Hence, prior art solutions can only be considered as enabling solutions, and in order to keep in pace with the challenging market, the wishes of the quality-conscious consumers of a mobile device with a good sound quality and a possibility to use the device also under high background noise conditions need to be fulfilled. The prior art solutions do not serve this purpose.

[0007] It is an object of the invention to bring about a system and method which provides the users of mobile devices with the best possible audio quality under high background noise circumstances and otherwise reduces the effect of the background noise.

Summary of the invention

[0008] This and other objectives of the invention are accomplished in accordance with the principles of the present invention by providing a system in which the processing of collected audio information is changed according to the estimated level of background noise thus reducing its overall effect.

[0009] More specifically, audio information is collected with two transducers having different sensitivity to the background noise. The background noise is estimated and i) amplification gain of the signals is modified before the signals are combined to a combined signal, or ii) the way of combining the signals is changed, which can be done either digitally or analogously.

[0010] According to the first embodiment of the invention, gain of at least one of the amplifiers adapted to amplify the detected signal is adjusted based on the noise estimate. The signal is then amplified using the adjusted gain thus producing at least one amplified signal. After this step, a combined signal is constructed from one or more of the amplified signals, and in the combined signal, the proportion of background noise is less than in one of the detected signals.

[0011] According to one aspect of the present invention, the system has also storage means for storing at least one noise estimate, and, correspondingly, also comparison means to compare said stored noise estimate with a predefined threshold value. After the comparison, a differential noise estimate is passed to gain control means.

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[0012] According to another aspect of the present invention, the system comprises storage means for storing at least two gain control parameters and comparison means for comparing at least two stored gain control parameters. The result of the comparison may be a differential gain parameter to be passed to the amplification means.

[0013] According to another aspect of the present invention, the gain control is adjusted to change the gain between the first and second microphones so that the gain of the first microphone is increased whereas the gain of the second microphone is decreased if the noise estimate indicates that the background noise level is above a first threshold value. Further, the gain control can be adjusted to change the gain of the second microphone substantially close to zero value if the background noise estimate shows that the background noise level is above a second threshold value. Respectively, they can be adapted to adjust the relative gain of the first microphone substantially close to one if the background noise estimate shows that the background noise level is above a pre-set threshold value.

[0014] In one preferred embodiment of the invention the first microphone is to be placed in the auditory canal of a user of the mobile handset; also a jawbone microphone can be used. The second microphone may be a microphone mounted in the mobile handset or in a vehicle, or it may be fixed in a hands-free set of a mobile handset. Examples of such mobile handsets where the invention may be used are mobile phones, PDA devices, laptop computers, dictation machines and so forth.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0015] In the following, the invention and its preferred embodiments are described more closely referring to the examples shown in FIG. **1-7** in the appended drawings, wherein:

FIG. **1** illustrates one system for reducing the effect of background noise,

FIG. **2** illustrates another system for reducing the effect of background noise,

FIG. **3** shows one microphone set-up according to a preferred embodiment of the invention,

FIG. **4A** shows another microphone set-up according to another preferred embodiment of the invention,

FIG. **4B** illustrates a variation of the set-up shown in FIG. **4A**,

FIG. **5** shows one audio data collection set-up including two microphones,

FIG. **6** illustrates the relationship between noise level estimate and gains with which the signals detected by the microphones are amplified, and

FIG. **7** illustrates how a switch can be included into the system.

Detailed description of the invention

[0016] FIG. **1** illustrates a first system for reducing the effect of background noise, for example, in a microphone. Mechanical vibrations or pressure variations, preferably originating from speech $\mathbf{S_p}$ distorted by noise, is collected with a first transducer serving as a microphone **101**, producing a signal $\mathbf{S_1}$ which is then amplified with a gain $\mathbf{g_1}$ using an amplifier **102** to produce an amplified signal $\mathbf{g_1S_1}$. The system also includes another microphone **103** and a corresponding amplifier **106**, the microphone **103** similarly being exposed to speech $\mathbf{S_p}$ and background noise and producing first a signal $\mathbf{S_2}$ which is after amplification denoted by $\mathbf{g_2S_2}$, where $\mathbf{g_2}$ corresponds to the gain of the amplifier **106**. Both microphones **101** and **103** are transducers that convert acoustical or mechanical vibrations to an electric signal, i.e. normally to a small current, and they exhibit different sensitivity to background noise. The reason for the different noise sensitivity may be that the first microphone **101** is a bone conductor microphone or an earplug type microphone, whereas the second microphone **103** is a normal type transducer commonly used as a microphone in mobile terminals, and therefore more sensitive to noise than the aforementioned types of microphones.

[0017] Preferably, the microphones **101** and **103** are assembled to receive human speech $\mathbf{S_p}$, and in particular such a speech that is going to be further processed in a mobile terminal to be sent to a remote party of the discussion. It is by no means necessary that the speech $\mathbf{S_p}$ to be collected by the microphone (**101** or **103**) is originating from a single person, but may be originating from a conference call etc.

[0018] The output signals $\mathbf{S_1}$ and $\mathbf{S_2}$ of the microphones **101** and **103** are transmitted to a noise estimator **104** which includes means adapted to estimate background noise level thus producing noise estimates $\mathbf{NE_1}$ and $\mathbf{NE_2}$. The noise level can be estimated for both microphones **101** and **103** separately, the output signals **S1** and **S2** of both microphones **101** and **103** may be used to obtain a combined signal from which the noise is estimated, or only the output of the microphone **103** more sensitive to background noise may be used for noise estimation. In the latter two cases only one noise estimate is produced.

[0019] For example, the noise estimation can be done by averaging short periods of the signal **S1** or **S2**. During a silent period, i.e. when the user does not speak, the measured signal level is a good approximation of the

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background noise. This kind of approach is commonly used in the Discontinuous Transmission DTX widely used in the Global System for Mobile communications GSM, when instead of the coded silence only so called DTX parameters describing the nature of the background noise are sent, thus reducing obsolete usage of the air interface. The DTX parameters are received in the remote end or in the network between persons talking to each other and some noise similar to background is generated, calling this generated noise Comfort Noise. The idea of Comfort Noise comes from the observation that if during a telephone conversation the loudspeaker gets silent while one person is talking, he or she does not feel comfortable. Modern GSM mobile phones, for example, thus already have means for estimating and describing background noise. Similar means can be applied in the noise estimator 104 for serving the implementation of the invention.

[0020] The noise estimates $\mathbf{NE_1}$ and $\mathbf{NE_2}$ generated are passed to a gain control means **105**. The gain control means **105** adjust the gain $\mathbf{g_1}$, $\mathbf{g_2}$ of the both amplifiers **102** and **106**. In the adjustment, a noise estimate $\mathbf{NE_1}$ or $\mathbf{NE_2}$ is used to determine the desired amplification gain. For this purpose the system may include storage means for noise-amplification relationships, including means **108** and **109**, e.g. tables or functions which respond with a desired gain level $\mathbf{g_x}$ to a query including a corresponding noise level $\mathbf{NE_x}$. For example, means 108 return a gain value $\mathbf{g_1}$ in response to noise estimate $\mathbf{NE_1}$, and means **109** return a gain value $\mathbf{g_2}$ in response to noise estimate $\mathbf{NE_2}$.

[0021] In other words, means **108** and **109** tell the gain control means **105** what is the optimal relation between a noise estimate NE_x and an amplifier gain g_x. Means **108** and **109** are preferably microphone specific, i.e. there are two tables in the system. The gain control means **105** get the noise estimate NE_x, retrieve the gain values g_x corresponding the estimate of present noise NE_x and determine how the gain $\mathbf{g_1}$ and $\mathbf{g_2}$ of the amplifiers **102** and **106** is to be adjusted. In principle, the gain values $\mathbf{g_1}$ and $\mathbf{g_2}$ get values between 0 and 1 so that $g_1 + g_2 = 1$.

[0022] After passing the gain adjustment information $\mathbf{g_1}$ and $\mathbf{g_2}$ to the amplifiers **102** and **106**, the amplifiers amplify the signals S_1 and S_2 using the amplifier gain set based on the gain adjustment information. After amplifying, a combined signal **S** is constructed in the combining means **107**, the construction being made using the amplified signals $\mathbf{g_1S_1}$ and $\mathbf{g_2S_2}$. This may include changing the delay and phase of at least one of the signals g_xS_x so that the distortion resulting from the amplification and the signal path is minimised, and finally summing up the signals g_xS_x so that the combined signal **S** represents a linear combination of the signals $\mathbf{S_1}$ and $\mathbf{S_2}$ detected by the microphones **101** and **103**. This constructed signal S is then ready for being processed further, including all of the numerous steps necessary for transmitting the audio information over the air interface. The combined signal **S** has a smaller proportion of background noise than the output signal $\mathbf{S_2}$ of microphone **103** collected. In this way the effect of background noise can be reduced.

[0023] Preferably, the tables **108** and **109** are generated so that corresponding to a change ΔNE ($=NE_{t=t2}-NE_{t=t1}$) in the noise level NE_x there is a corresponding change Δg ($=g_{t=t2}-g_{t=t1}$) in the gain value g_x. As characteristic to one aspect of the present invention, the gain adjustments of the amplifiers **102**, **106** are opposed to each other; i.e. when the background noise is increasing, the gain $\mathbf{g_1}$ of the signal detected by the first (low-noise) microphone **101** is increased whereas the gain $\mathbf{g_2}$ of the signal detected by the second (more sensitive to background noise) microphone **103** is decreased. It is favourable to normalise the gains so that the relative gain for the both microphones equals to 1.

[0024] In other words, the means **108** and **109** are modified to correspond to the different noise behaviour of the two transducers so that the linear combination of the signals $\mathbf{S = g_1S_1 + g_2S_2}$ detected by the two transducers serving as microphones **101** and **103** can be subjectively (by listening) considered optimal. This may include different threshold values: The first threshold value corresponds to the value of at least one of the noise estimates, at which value the quality of signal $\mathbf{S_2}$ of the second microphone **103** that is more sensitive to background noise starts to deteriorate; this is the point where the relative gain of the first microphone **101** is increased from substantially zero gain value to a small value. The second threshold value corresponds to the value of at least one of the noise estimates NE_x at which the quality of the detected signal of the second microphone **103** is so much worse than the quality of the signal $\mathbf{S_1}$ detected by the first microphone **101** that the relative gain $\mathbf{g_2}$ of the second microphone **103** is set to substantially zero gain.

[0025] As an example, if the first microphone detects a background noise level of 2,0 mV (corresponding to a noise 70 dB) and the second microphone detects a background noise level of 5,0 mV (corresponding to a noise of 72 dB), the average noise level estimated in the noise estimator may be between 70 and 72 dB. The relative gains for the microphones read from the table are then 0,4 and 0,6, respectively. This is not straightforward, because the sensitivity of the microphone plays a significant role; the signal levels may need to be adjusted to correspond some reference level. The relative gains are then to be understood against this reference level only.

[0026] When the detected background noise jumps to 2,2 mV (71 dB) and 7,0 mV (76 dB), the average noise level may be estimated to be between 71 and 76 dB. The relative gains for the microphones read from the table are then 0,95 and 0,05, respectively. The second microphone is more sensitive to the background noise, i. e. the background noise generates a bigger impulse in the microphone. Secondly, the second microphone is

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not yet shut-off completely, because the noise level is not above a defined shut-off threshold value for background noise.

[0027] The transition at different moments of time between subsequent values of the relative signal $\mathbf{S_1}$ and $\mathbf{S_2}$ proportions in the combined signal **S** defined by a ratio $\mathbf{g_1/g_2}$ (when g2≠0) can thus be made smooth or at least to correspond small steps in order to avoid abrupt transitions that might be considered annoying by the listener. This corresponds to successive changes of $\mathbf{g_1}$ and $\mathbf{g_2}$. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that this is not necessary, but the transition may resemble a step function, i.e. the gain $\mathbf{g_1}$ for the signal detected by the first microphone **101** is zero below a threshold value and one otherwise, and the gain $\mathbf{g_2}$ for the signal detected by the second microphone is then reversed, i.e. it obtains values $1\text{-}\mathbf{g_1}$.

[0028] FIG. **6** shows an example of the relation between estimated noise level $\mathbf{NE_2}$ estimated from the signal $\mathbf{S_2}$, and the amplifier gain g_1. In this case, $g_2=1\text{-}\mathbf{g_1}$. At times preceding **TA**, $\mathbf{NE_2}$ is smaller than the first threshold value. Correspondingly, $\mathbf{g_1}=0$ and $g_2=1$. At **TA**, the value of $\mathbf{NE_2}$ is increasing, so $\mathbf{g_1}$ is stepwise increased. At **TB**, $\mathbf{NE_2}$ has reached the second threshold value, and $\mathbf{g_1}$ is set to one. At **TC**, $\mathbf{NE_2}$ is again smaller than the second threshold value, so the value of **g1** must be decreased. At **TD**, $\mathbf{NE_2}$ falls below the first threshold value and **g1** is set to zero value. At the time interval $\mathbf{P_1}$ the change in $\mathbf{NE_2}$ is less than the threshold Δ**NE** set for the change of **NE**, so during this interval $\mathbf{g_1}$ is not changed. Immediately after $\mathbf{P_1}$, when the change in $\mathbf{NE_2}$ is larger than the threshold value, the $\mathbf{g_1}$ is changed by $\Delta\mathbf{g}$. During the interval $\mathbf{P_2}$, $\mathbf{g_1}$ is not changed because $\mathbf{NE_2}$ shows sharp peaks; this may present some distortion so the changes are neglected.

[0029] The second predefined threshold value can be chosen to be a fixed value as well. The value may be experimentally determined to correspond to the level of background noise in which the input signal of the second microphone **103** has been deteriorated in such a bad way that in order to get a better signal quality for the signal **S**, only the input signal $\mathbf{g_1S_1}$ is used.

[0030] FIG 7 shows how a second system according to the invention, the system having only a stepwise transition for the value of $\mathbf{g_1}$. Speech **Sp** and noise are detected by microphones **101** and **103** producing signals **S1** and **S2**. Background noise is collected by a third microphone **191** directly connected to noise estimator **104**. The noise estimator estimates the level **NE** of background noise and passes it to gain control means **705**. The gain control means **705** are adapted to compare the noise level estimate **NE** with a predefined threshold value. If the value of **NE** is less than the threshold value, **g1** is set to zero, otherwise **g1** gets the value of 1. The value of **g1** indicates the position of a switch **SW1** controlled by the gain control means **705**, the switch **SW1** being so arranged that the terminals **TE1** and **TE2** are connected when **g1=1**; **TE1** and **TE3** are connected in all other cases. The terminal **TE1** leads to amplification means **702** which produce an amplified signal **AS**. Because only one signal is fed (S1, if TE1 and TE2 are connected) to the amplifier, no literal combining of the signals (S1, S2) need to be performed.

[0031] The switch turns the relative gain $\mathbf{g_2}$ of the second microphone to zero and the relative gain of the first microphone $\mathbf{g_1}$ to one. In this case the function of the switch **SW1** and amplification means **702** may be understood as linear amplification with amplification factor 1.0 when the signal received by a microphone is amplified and zero otherwise.

[0032] Further, in order to avoid annoying abrupt transitions between the first and second microphones, or to avoid fluctuations in the microphone gains, the system like presented in FIG. **1** may comprise also storing means adapted for storing noise parameters in order to form a noise history. The noise parameters can be calculated for one microphone, both microphones separately or they can be obtained by combining the values computed from the inputs of the both microphones. One possibility is to use the second microphone input as the preferable source for noise estimation, as the first microphone is less sensitive to background noise.

[0033] If history data is collected, the system may further be adapted to have a hysteresis effect, i.e. if the noise level is having fluctuations back and forth, the system can adapt the threshold value to correspond a larger shift in the background noise. In order to have a hysteresis effect, there are storage means and comparison means; the hysteresis information may be obtained from a stored table, the table being read in a way taking into account the noise level history.

[0034] Similarly, the history data may be used for making prognoses or extrapolations for the noise level, and in this way the system may, based on the noise level measured at least in two earlier moments of time, predict a noise level in the future thus making the possibly larger transitions in gains over a longer period of time.

[0035] A third microphone **191** is optionally included in the system. Its main purpose is to detect background noise. It may be located in the vicinity of the noise estimation means **104** so that the transmitting of the signal to the noise estimation means **104** from the microphone **191** is straightforward. In this case the signals $\mathbf{S_1}$ and/or $\mathbf{S_2}$ need not to be passed from the other two microphones **101** and **103** to the noise estimator **104**. This makes the system simpler, as the signal from microphones **101** and **103** need only travel the path to amplifiers **102** and **106**. For example, in a wireless hands-free set the microphone **101** is located in one ear of the user, whereas the second microphone **103** is fixed in the car of the user. The amplifiers are located close to the microphones, especially because the signals are to be transmitted over the air interface to the combiner means **107**. This means that the noise estimator **104** and gain control means **105** need to instruct the amplifiers **102** and **106** separately; the noise may be measured by the

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microphone **191**, and the gain parameters $\mathbf{g_1}$ and $\mathbf{g_2}$ be broadcast to the amplifiers **102** and **106**.

[0036] FIG. **2** shows a third system according to the present invention. The transducers **101** and **103** are exposed to speech signal $\mathbf{S_p}$ distorted by background noise. They detect acoustical vibrations, i.e. mechanical vibrations or pressure changes. Amplifiers **202** and **206** amplify the signals $\mathbf{S_1}$ and $\mathbf{S_2}$ with constant gains thus producing amplified signals $\mathbf{AS_1}$ and $\mathbf{AS_2}$, respectively. An Analog to Digital Converter ADC **207** converts the signals $\mathbf{AS_1}$ and $\mathbf{AS_2}$ pre-amplified by amplifiers **102** and **106** into a digital form. In addition to performing this step, the **ADC** may further include combining means to form a combined signal S from at least one of the amplified signals $\mathbf{AS_1}$ and $\mathbf{AS_2}$ in such a manner that the relative ratio of the signals may be altered. The combining may be performed digitally, thus possibly including multiplication and summing operations, or it may be performed for the analog signals before the conversion.

[0037] The noise level is detected in noise estimator **204**, including tables **208** and **209** showing noise responses of the microphones **101** and **103** in a manner similar to the tables discussed above. The noise estimates NE_x are then used to deduce the target gain factors g_x. The target gain factors $\mathbf{g_1}$ and $\mathbf{g_2}$ which correspond to combining parameters are lead to the combining means of the ADC **207**, where the ADC either, based on the combining parameters g_1 and g_2, performs the conversion and only after that digitally multiplies the converted signal by the gain factor, or, uses the target gain factor to change the relative strength of the signals before the conversion.

[0038] In a fourth system according to the present invention, the system may have storage means for storing at least one noise estimate $\mathbf{NE_1}$ or $\mathbf{NE_2}$ in the noise estimator **104**, whereas the system otherwise corresponds to the system already discussed with reference to FIG. **1**. This means that at least one noise estimate $NE_{t=tpast}$ value may be stored, and, correspondingly, at a later point in time $t=t_1$, at least one other noise level estimate $NE_{t=t1}$ may be stored as well. The stored noise estimates may be compared using comparison means located preferably in the noise estimator **104**. The comparison may involve computing a noise level difference $\Delta NE = NE_{t=t1}-NE_{t=tpast}$ describing the changing of the background noise level. This difference may be transmitted then to gain control means **105** which change gains according to a function $\Delta g=f(\Delta NE)$. It is also possible that the difference is not passed to gain control means **105** if it does not exceed a preset threshold value, i.e. if $\Delta NE < \Delta NE_{threshold}$; only changes in the gain when the change in the background noise level is larger than the threshold value are passed to the amplifier **102** or **106**. In this case the older value measured at t_{past} may remain stored in the register and newer noise estimates $NE_{t=t1'}$ calculated at times $t_{1'} > t_1$ are overwritten on the value $NE_{t=t1}$.

[0039] A fifth system in accordance with the present invention, the system comprises storage means such as a register in the gain control means **204** in addition to other components as discussed with reference to FIG. **2**. The storage meansmay be used for storing at least two gain control parameters. Further, the system may also include comparison means for comparing at least two stored gain control parameters. Like discussed above, the comparison of the parameters may include performing some mathematical operations, like calculating the difference between a newer and an older gain parameter value, and, in the case that a pre-set threshold value for the difference is exceeded, which can be checked again by comparison, the system may calculate a new gain to be passed to the ADC **207**. The new gain may also be selected from a plurality of different gain set-ups, if the system is to be kept simple and fast.

[0040] FIG. **3** shows a microphone set-up according to one preferred embodiment of the present invention. The mobile phone in the figure has two microphones **M1** and **M2**. The second microphone **M2** is an ordinary microphone denoted by asterisks **30** describing holes in the cover of the bottom half of the phone. The first microphone **M1** is located close to the loudspeaker which is denoted by asterisks, whereas the microphone **M1** is denoted by arc **31**. Because the loudspeaker is - usually - placed close to the ear, using a jawbone contact element as the microphone **M1**, the vibrations in the jawbone of the user can be detected thus producing a signal S_1. The sensitivity of **M1** to disturbances from the loudspeaker is reduced because **M1** detects mechanical vibrations from the jawbone of the user.

[0041] FIG. **4A** further illustrates a microphone set-up according to one other preferred embodiment of the present invention. The first microphone **M1** is located in an earplug-like element which can measure the air vibrations in the ear canal (i.e. auditory canal) of the user of the mobile device. Depending of the actual realisation of the invention, this earplug microphone can be similar to those disclosed in the referenced publications. Some of the prior art earplug microphones have a wireless transmitter, such as a BLUETOOTH transmitter.

[0042] A solution according to FIG. **4A** is especially suitable for different hands-free applications. For example, many countries in Europe have recently adopted restrictions for usage of mobile phones while driving a vehicle. In order to comply with the legislation, a driving mobile user willing to receive a phone call need either to stop or to have a hands-free equipment installed in his or her car.

[0043] Some hands-free equipment sets include a speaker, a microphone and then some wiring systems, possibly with an extra antenna. The speaker is typically mounted somewhere in the cabin, whereas the microphone is located close to the head of the driver. As known, even though some of the different speech codecs widely used in the mobile devices enhance the speech quality in noisy environments, such as in a moving car, the background noise may still be annoying and,

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depending of the car, even make the discussion impossible, depending on the circumstances such as other traffic, speed of the vehicle, road conditions etc. This drawback can be eliminated if the user is supplied with an earplug-like device in addition to the normal hands-free set installed in the car. As an alternative, a jawbone microphone can be used as well, while there are some of them available on the market already. Preferably the first microphone (either earplug or jawbone) is equipped with a wireless transmitter. Then either the mobile handset or the hands-free set includes a receiver to receive the transmitted audio information, such as BLUETOOTH low-power RF data.

[0044] The transmitter needs not to be wireless but may be a conventional earplug microphone as well like illustrated in FIG. **4B**, where there is a wire including two lines, one for the signal and one for the ground level. In the other end the wires may be connected to the front panel of the car, the panel supplying a plug-in for the microphone data and further connected to the hands-free set, or directly to the mobile handset.

[0045] FIG. 5 illustrates another option for implementing the invention. Here the first and second microphones are included in a headset kit of a mobile phone. Typically, the headset kit includes a plug **501** which is connected to a mobile phone or a car front panel. The handset provides hands-free operation and may also include an answer/end button located in the second microphone **M2** or somewhere else in the cable. The earplug including a loudspeaker may also include an earplug microphone **M1**, provided that the acoustical separation of the loudspeaker and microphone can be guaranteed, or a jawbone microphone, where the acoustical separation should be a minor problem.

[0046] For a person skilled in the art it is also clear that no implicit tables like those described with reference to FIG. **1** and **2** are necessary. Depending on the number of steps for different amplifications needed, the system can be coded directly if the number is low, otherwise also a numerical model which interpolates some experimentally tested values may also be used.

[0047] Although the invention was described above with reference to the examples shown in the appended drawings, it is obvious that the invention is not limited to these, but it may be modified by those skilled in the art without departing from the scope and the spirit of the invention.

Claims

1. A system for reducing the effect of background noise especially in a mobile handset, the system comprising

   - a first transducer (101) for detecting an acoustical signal producing a first signal detected (S1),
   - a second transducer (103) for detecting an acoustical signal producing a second signal detected (S2), the first and second transducers having different sensitivities to background noise,
   - amplifier means (102, 106) for amplifying the first and/or second signal (S1, S2) detected thus producing at least one amplified signal (g1S1, g2S2),
   - noise estimator means (104) adapted to estimate a background noise level present at least in one of the detected signals (S1, S2) or in a signal measured by a third transducer (191) thus producing at least one noise estimate (NE1, NE2),
   - gain control means (105), responsive to said noise estimator means (104, 204), adapted to adjust gain (g1, g2) of the amplification means (102, 106, 207), the adjustment being made depending on at least one noise estimate (NE1, NE2), and
   - combining means (107), adapted to form a combined signal (S) from at least one amplified signal (g1S1, g2S2) thus reducing the effect of background noise.

2. A system according to claim 1, **wherein** the noise estimator means are connected to the first and/or second transducer (101, 102) for receiving noise level information.

3. A system according to claim 1 or 2, the system further **comprising**

   - storage means for storing at least one noise estimate, and
   - comparison means for comparing the stored noise estimate with a predefined threshold value, the comparison producing a differential noise estimate to be passed to gain control means (105).

4. A system according to claim 1 or 2, the system further **comprising**

   - storage means for storing at least two gain control parameters, and
   - comparison means for comparing the two gain control parameters, the comparison producing a differential gain parameter to be passed to the amplification means.

5. A system according to claim 1 or 2, **wherein** the gain control means (105) are adapted to adjust gain (g1, g2) between the first and second amplifiers (102, 106) so that the gain (g1) of the first amplifier (102) is increased whereas the gain (g2) of the second amplifier (106) is decreased if the noise esti-

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mate (NE1, NE2) indicates that the background noise level is above a first threshold value.

6. A system according to claim 1, 2 or 5, **wherein** the gain control means (105, 207) are adapted to adjust gain (g2) of the second amplifier substantially close to zero value if the background noise estimate (NE) shows that the background noise level is above a second threshold value.

7. A system according to claim 1, 2, 5 or 6, **wherein** the gain control means (105, 207) are adapted to adjust the relative gain of the first transducer substantially close to one if the background noise estimate (NE) shows that the background noise level is above a pre-set threshold value.

8. A system according to claim 1, **wherein** the construction is performed by adding the amplified signals (g1S1, g2S2).

9. A system according to any one of the preceding claims, **wherein** the first transducer (101) is a microphone to be located in the auditory canal of a user of the mobile handset.

10. A system according to any one of the preceding claims, **wherein** the first transducer (101) is a jawbone microphone.

11. A system according to claim 9 or 10, **wherein** the second transducer (103) is a microphone mounted in the mobile handset.

12. A system according to claim 9 or 10, **wherein** the second transducer (103) is a microphone fixed in a hands-free set of a mobile handset.

13. A system according to claim 1 or 2, **wherein** said gain control means (105, 207) are located in the mobile handset or in the hands-free set of a mobile handset.

14. A method for reducing the effect of background noise especially in a mobile handset, the method **comprising** the steps of

- collecting a first acoustical signal (S1),
- collecting a second acoustical signal (S2), whereby in the collected signals (S1, S2) a different level of background noise is present,
- estimating background noise level from at least one of the signals (S1, S2) collected,
- in response to said estimating step, adjusting gain (g1, g2) of at least one amplifier (102, 106) adapted to amplify signals collected (S1, S2),
- in response to said adjustment step, amplifying said collected first and/or second signal (S1, S2) to produce at least one amplified signal (g1S1, G2S2), and
- in response to said amplifying step, constructing a combined signal (S) from at least one amplified signal (g1S1, g2S2) thus reducing the effect of background noise in the combined signal.

15. A method according to claim 14, further **comprising** the steps of

- producing and storing at least one noise estimate (NE1, NE2) in the background noise estimation step, and
- comparing said stored noise estimate (NE1, NE2) with a predefined threshold value, the comparison result being used in the gain adjustment step.

16. A method according to claim 14, further **comprising** the steps of

- in the gain adjusting step, storing at least two gain control parameters, and
- comparing at least two stored gain control parameters in order to decide whether the gain adjusting step is to be taken, the gain adjusting step being performed only if the comparison result shows that a gain control parameter being larger than a predefined threshold value.

17. A method according to claim 14, **wherein** the gain adjustment step is adapted to adjust amplification balance between the signals detected by first and second transducers (101, 103) so that the gain (g1) of the amplifier (101) amplifying the first signal (S1) collected is increased whereas the gain (g2) of the amplifier (106) amplifying the second signal (S2) is decreased if in the noise estimation step it is detected that the background noise level is higher than a first threshold value.

18. A method according to claim 14, **wherein** the gain adjustment step is adapted to adjust gain (g2) of the amplifier amplifying the second signal (S2) substantially close to zero value if the background noise estimate (NE) shows that the background noise level is above a second threshold value.

19. A method according to claim 14, **wherein** the construction step includes adding the amplified signals (g1S1, g2S2).

20. A method according to any one of claims 14-19, **wherein** the first signal is collected using a microphone to be located in the auditory canal of a user of the mobile handset.

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21. A method according to any one of claims 14-19, **wherein** the first signal is collected using a jawbone microphone.

22. A system for reducing the effect of background noise especially in a mobile handset, the system **comprising**

- a first transducer (101) for detecting an acoustical signal producing a first signal detected (S1),
- a second transducer (103) for detecting an acoustical signal producing a second signal detected (S2), the first and second transducer (101, 103) having different sensitivity to background noise,
- amplification means (202, 206) for amplifying the first and/or second signal (S1, S2) detected thus producing at least one amplified signal (AS1, AS2),
- combining means (207) adapted to form a combined signal (S) from at least one of the amplified signals (AS1, AS2) using at least one combining parameter (g1, g2) thus reducing the effect of background noise,
- noise estimator means (204) adapted to estimate background noise level present at least in one of the detected signals (S1, S2) or in a signal measured by a third transducer (191) thus producing at least one noise estimate (NE1, NE2),
- combining parameter generation means (208, 209) adapted to generate at least one combining parameter (g1, g2) in response to at least one noise estimate (NE1, NE2), and
- means (204) for passing the generated combining parameter (g1, g2) to the combining means (207).

23. A method for reducing the effect of background noise especially in a mobile handset, the method **comprising** the steps of

- collecting a first acoustical signal (S1),
- collecting a second acoustical signal (S2), whereby in the collected signals a different level of background noise is present,
- estimating background noise level (NE1, NE2) from at least one of the signals collected or from a third acoustical signal,
- in response to the background noise estimating step, using at least one background noise level parameter (NE1, NE2) for selecting at least one combining parameter (g1, g2), and
- in response to said selecting step, using said summing parameter for combining the first and acoustical signals (S1, S2) to form a combined signal (S) which has less background noise than the second signal collected.

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FIG 1

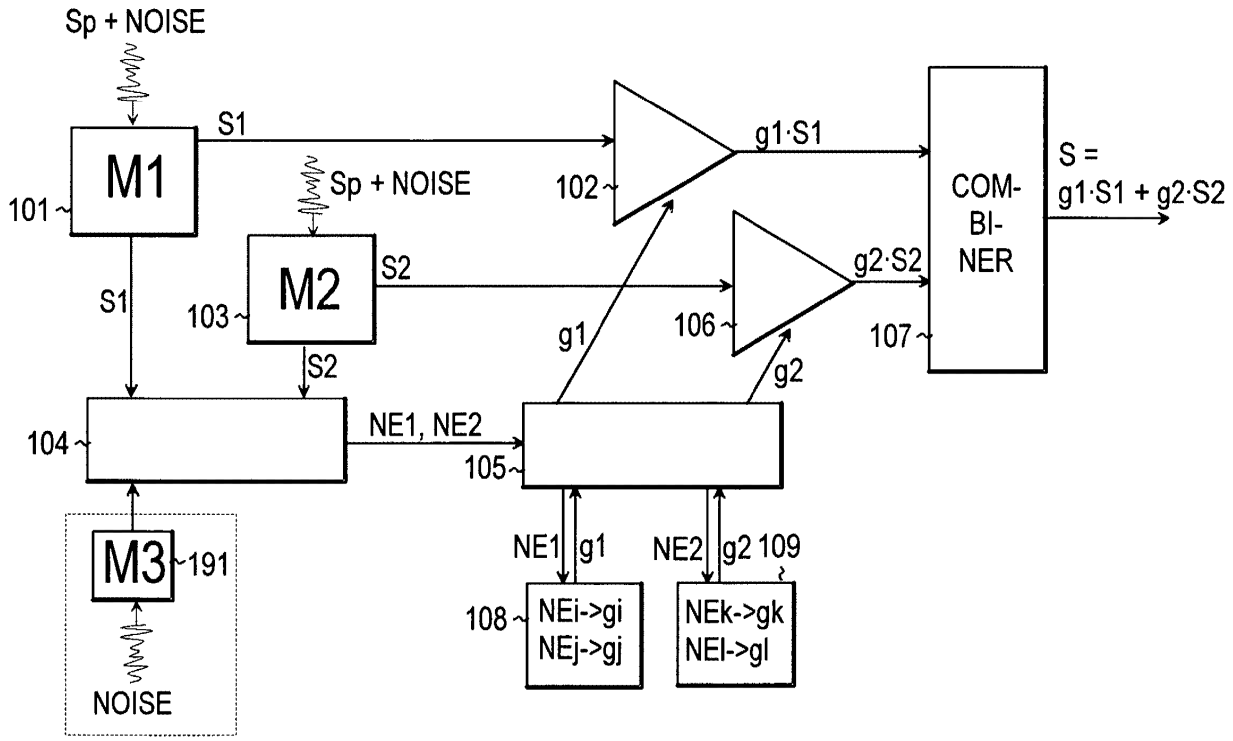
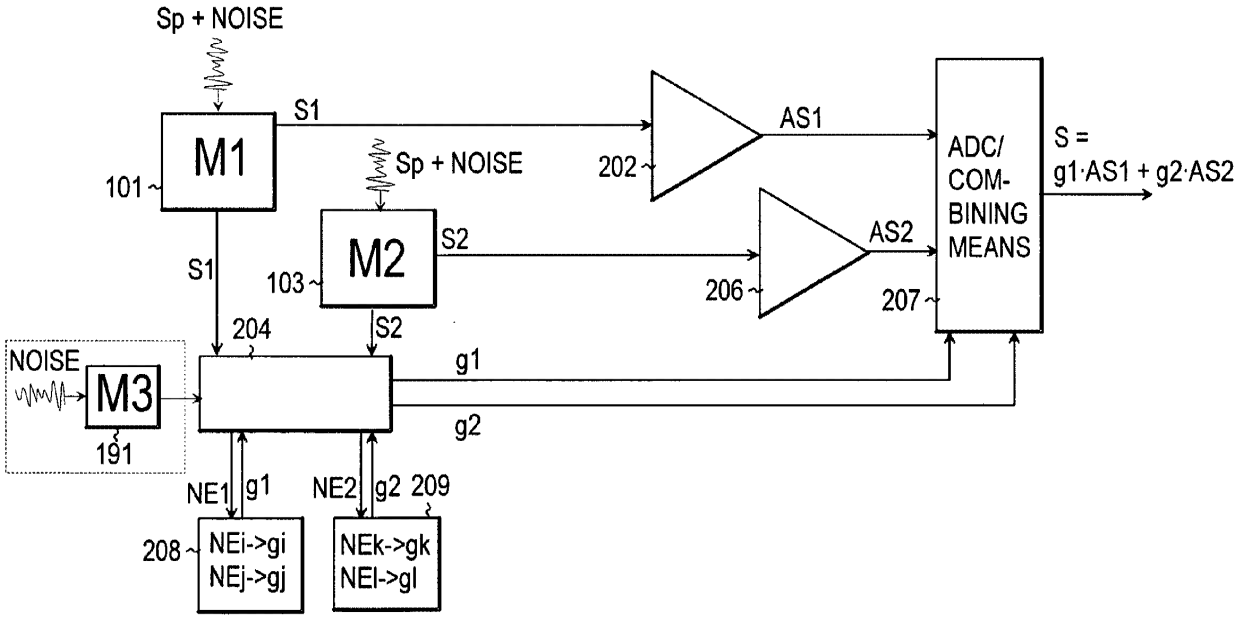

Sp + NOISE
M1
101
S1
Sp + NOISE
M2
103
S2
S1
S2
104
NE1, NE2
105
M3
191
NOISE
102
g1·S1
106
g2·S2
COM-
BI-
NER
107
S =
g1·S1 + g2·S2
g1
g2
NE1
g1
NE2
g2
109
108
NEi->gi
NEj->gj
NEk->gk
NEl->gl

FIG 2


Sp + NOISE
S1
M1
101
Sp + NOISE
202
AS1
ADC/
COM-
BINING
MEANS
S =
g1·AS1 + g2·AS2
S1
M2
S2
103
206
AS2
207
204
S2
NOISE
M3
191
g1
g2
NE1
g1
NE2
g2
209
208
NEi->gi
NEj->gj
NEk->gk
NEl->gl

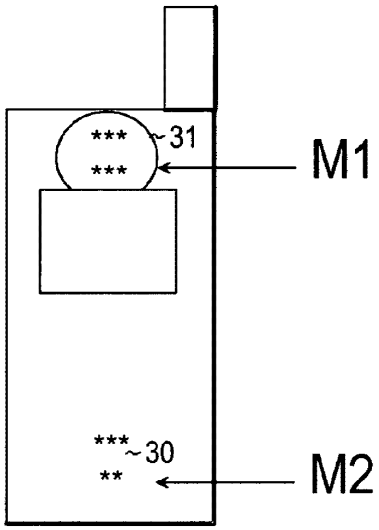


FIG 3
(LEFT)

FIG. 4A

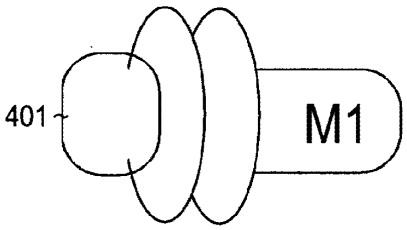
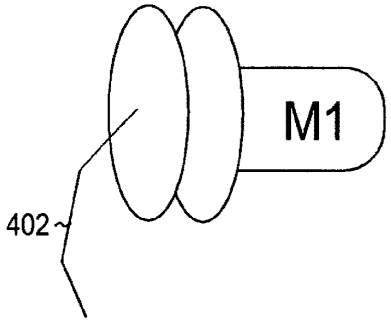


FIG 4B



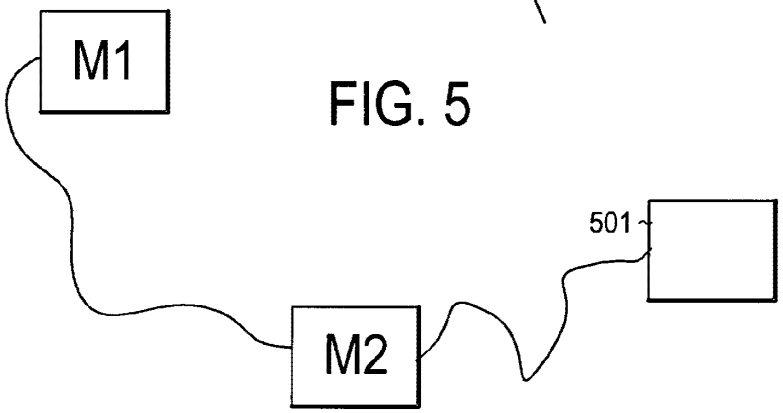


FIG. 5

FIG 6

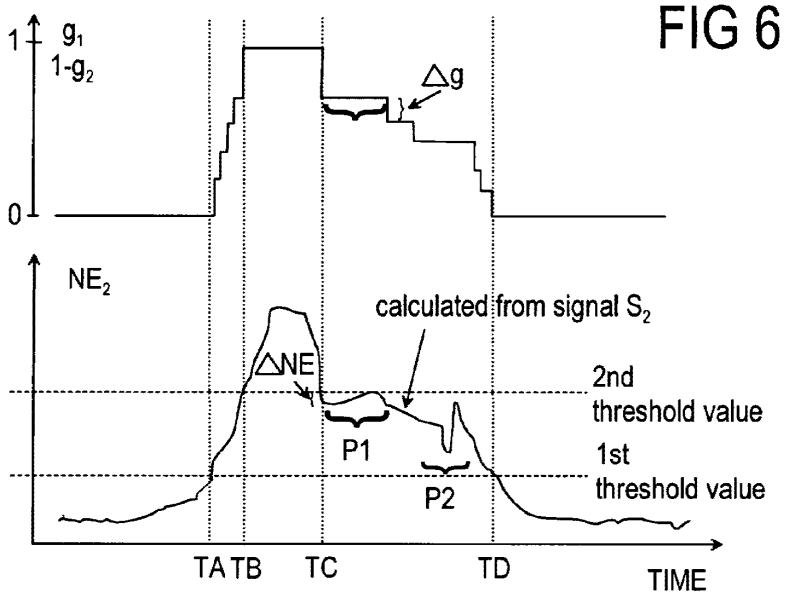
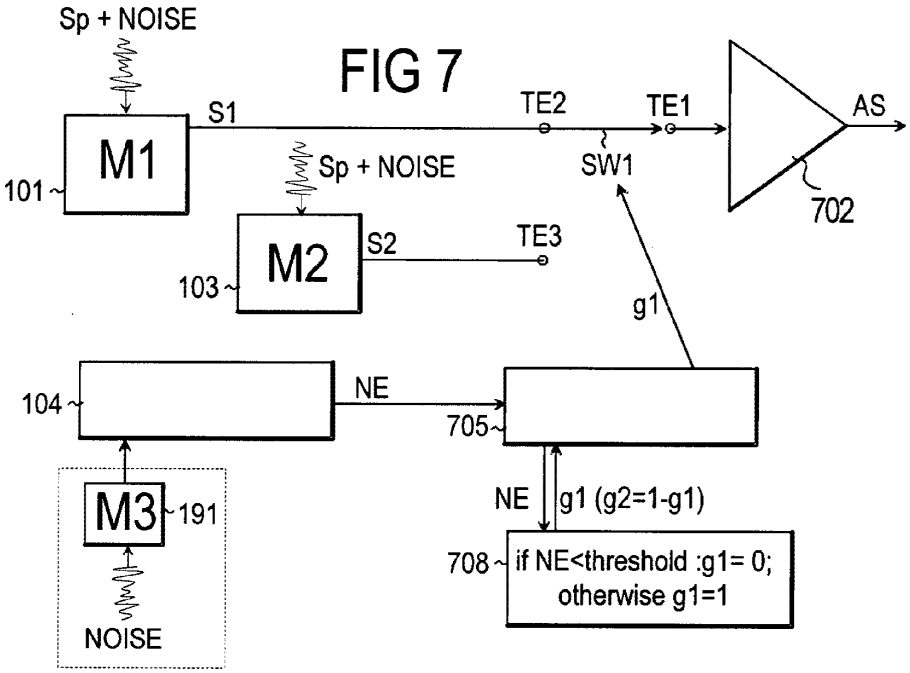

1
0
g_1
$1-g_2$
Δg
NE_2
calculated from signal S_2
ΔNE
2nd
threshold value
P1
1st
threshold value
P2
TA TB
TC
TD
TIME

FIG 7


Sp + NOISE
M1
101
S1
TE2
TE1
AS
SW1
Sp + NOISE
M2
103
S2
TE3
702
g1
104
NE
705
M3
191
NOISE
NE
g1 (g2=1-g1)
708
if NE<threshold :g1= 0;
otherwise g1=1

European Patent Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 02 01 6435

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
A	US 5 640 450 A (WATANABE OSAMU) 17 June 1997 (1997-06-17) * abstract * ---	1-23	H04M9/08 H04M1/60
A	EP 0 767 570 A (NOKIA MOBILE PHONES LTD) 9 April 1997 (1997-04-09) * abstract * ---	1-23	
A	WO 99 05840 A (QUALCOMM INC) 4 February 1999 (1999-02-04) * abstract * -----	1-23	

TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7)

H04M

The present search report has been drawn up for all claims

Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner
THE HAGUE	2 December 2003	Montalbano, F

CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS

X : particularly relevant if taken alone
Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category
A : technological background
O : non-written disclosure
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T : theory or principle underlying the invention
E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date
D : document cited in the application
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& : member of the same patent family, corresponding document

EPO FORM 1503 03.82 (P04C01)

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ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO. EP 02 01 6435

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
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02-12-2003

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For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82

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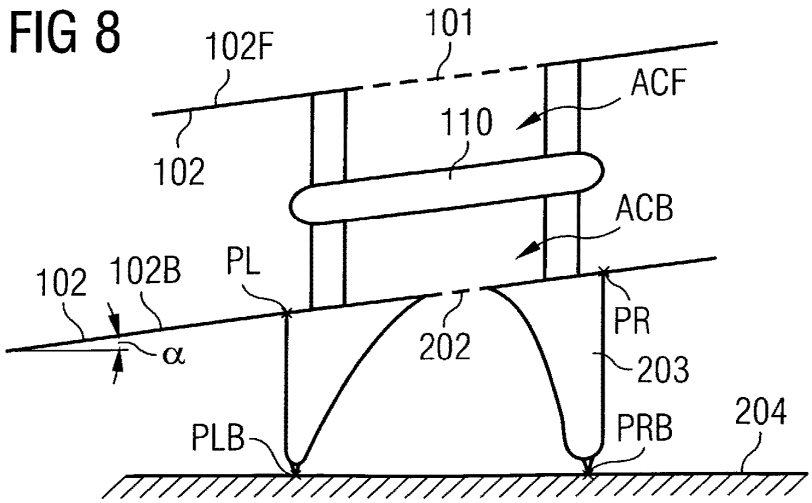
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(54) A dual directional mode mobile terminal and a method for manufacturing of the same

(57) A mobile terminal is equipped with an acoustoelectrical transducer arranged in a housing of the mobile terminal, the housing comprising i) a user sided first inlet aperture in communication with the acoustoelectrical transducer, ii) a second inlet aperture also in communication with the acoustoelectrical transducer, and iii) sealing means for sealing the second inlet aperture when the mobile terminal is placed on an external surface or object. As a result, the mobile terminal has selectable directional characteristics.

FIG 8



EP 1 401 240 A1

Printed by Jouve, 75001 PARIS (FR)

Description

Field of the invention

[0001] The invention relates generally to enhancing speech quality in a telecommunications system, and, more specifically, to enhancing directional properties of a microphone in a mobile terminal.

Background of the invention

[0002] The mobile device boom of the recent years has resulted in different new uses for the mobile terminals widely used in telecommunications. The users expect their new devices to be usable in many different situations. The expectations regarding to the acoustical quality of the device are high, and because the device may be used for various purposes, this sets very high requirements for the design of the terminals.

[0003] As an example of the dual use of the mobile handset, it is very common that the terminal, in addition to its normal use as a handset, is used as a hands-free device. This may be the case when the user is willing to use the mobile terminal in a vehicle, for example, or use it for conference calling. Typically, in the latter case, the mobile terminal is set on a table, the persons willing to speak then usually grouping around the terminal.

[0004] From the acoustical design point of view, the latter kind of use requires quite different acoustical and directional properties of the microphone than the first use mentioned. In conference calling, it is very critical that the microphone shows omni-directional characteristics so that the position of the person speaking does not influence too radically on the sound quality, and when one person is speaking, also comments from the background should be carefully detected.

[0005] On the other hand, when a mobile terminal is used as a handset, it is preferable that the background noise is not detected by the microphone. Normally, the mouth and other sound producing organs of the mobile user are within a predetermined distance from the microphone when he or she is speaking to his or her mobile handset. If human anatomy factors are taken into account, it is easier to design a phone in such a way that the mouth of an average male/female user is quite close to the centre of inlet of the microphone. Thus the microphone should preferably show unidirectional characteristics in order to receive the speech of the user but not noise from his or her background.

[0006] Figure 1 illustrates a prior art mobile terminal 100. The terminal 100 includes housing 102, wherein a microphone 110 is assembled. For the microphone 110 an aperture 101 is important so that the energy of acoustic signals is not attenuated too much which would be the case if the acoustic signals had to traverse through the housing 102.

[0007] Having both omni- and unidirectional characteristics in the acoustical parts of one mobile terminal is not a straightforward task. Some prior art solutions that might be applicable to at least some extent can be found, but they present drawbacks which both an ordinary user and an acoustics designer would find annoying.

[0008] International patent publication WO 01/69967 A2 shows one example of implementing a selectivity switch between a directional mode and an omni-directional mode in a hearing aid device. The switch includes a switch body having a port aperture therein in communication with one of the ports of the microphone, and a switch actuator moveably connected to the switch body and moveable to a first position wherein the port aperture is generally unobstructed by the actuator and a second position wherein the actuator covers the port aperture.

[0009] In the modern mobile lifestyle, a mobile terminal sometimes presents some values of the user of the terminal. Thus, the aesthetic design is very important, and the switch does not support the purpose of creating an aesthetically enjoyable device. Secondly, the shape and form of a hearing aid device is quite different to a mobile phone, basically because the hearing aid device is located in the ear of the user, so the mechanics of the device can be designed in a completely different manner. Therefore the '967 solution cannot be without problems used for ordinary mobile terminals.

[0010] Another solution from U.S. patent 5,933,510, despite of its many advantages, fits only poorly for the acoustical design of a mobile terminal. In '510, a microphone housing includes apertures and a switch; the user may select with the switch, whether or not he or she is willing to use the microphone in omni- or unidirectional mode. Firstly, it is difficult to make the switch and sealing elements to comply with the decorative design desired for the terminal. Secondly, the design of a rotating sleeve for the microphone housing in the manner described in '510 is also extremely challenging.

[0011] It is an object of the invention to bring about a mobile terminal equipped with a sound receiving system having selectable directional characteristics.

Summary of the invention

[0012] This and other objectives of the invention are accomplished in accordance with the principles of the present invention by providing in accordance with any one of the independent patent claims.

[0013] A dual directional mode mobile terminal includes a microphone having been assembled in a housing. The housing includes a first and a second aperture, of which the first aperture is on the user side when the terminal is used as a handset, the first and second apertures forming acoustical conduits to the both sides of the microphone. The housing further includes sealing means for sealing the second aperture together with an external surface, when the mobile terminal is placed on said surface, thereby enabling in the mobile terminal a

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second acoustical directivity mode.

[0014] A method for manufacturing a dual directional mode mobile terminal, includes the steps of i) assembling a microphone into a housing, wherein the housing includes at least a first and a second apertures, of which the first aperture is designed to be on the user side when the terminal is used as a handset, the first and second apertures thus forming acoustical conduits to both sides of the microphone, and ii) assembling the housing with sealing means for sealing at least one of the apertures together with an external surface, when the mobile terminal is placed on said surface, thereby enabling in the mobile terminal a second acoustical directivity mode.

[0015] A mobile terminal which is equipped with an acoustoelectrical transducer arranged in a housing of the mobile terminal, wherein the housing comprises i) a user sided first aperture in communication with the acoustoelectrical transducer, ii) a second aperture also in communication with the acoustoelectrical transducer, and iii) sealing means for sealing the second aperture when the mobile terminal is placed on an external surface or object.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0016] In the following, the invention and its preferred embodiments are described more closely referring to the examples shown in Figure 2-11 in the appended drawings, wherein:

Figure 1	shows a conventional microphone arrangement in a mobile terminal,
Figure 2	shows a dual-mode mobile terminal according to one aspect of the invention,
Figure 3	illustrates one embodiment of the present invention where acoustic sealing is enhanced by a second support member,
Figure 4	depicts the traverse design aspects in accordance with the invention,
Figure 5	further illustrates one embodiment of the invention,
Figure 6	illustrates a cut of a sealing member 203 from Figure 2,
Figure 7	illustrates the sealing member 203 seen from above,
Figure 8	shows the second acoustical mode closer,
Figure 9A and 9B	show how the directivity mode of the mobile terminal is changed according to one aspect of the present invention,
Figure 10	shows a first measurement result of the mobile terminal in the first directional mode, and
Figure 11	shows a second measurement result of the mobile terminal in the second directional mode.

[0017] Same reference numbers denote similar elements throughout the figures.

Detailed description of the invention

[0018] Figure 2 illustrates one embodiment of the present invention. The mobile terminal has a housing 200, and, as shown in Figure 1 described above, there is also an aperture 101 provided for the speech. The aperture 101 leads sound waves to a microphone 110 that is assembled inside the housing 200. In the housing 200 there is also a second aperture 202. The second aperture 202 is preferably located on the opposite side of the housing 200 so that the apertures 101 and 202 provide acoustic conduits leading to both sides of the microphone.

[0019] For sake of clarity, there are three points marked in the housing. PL and PR are the points where sealing means 203 are attached to the housing 200, and the point PA illustrates the point of the housing that supports the lower end of the housing against a flat surface 204 when the mobile terminal is tilted on said sealing means 203. The sealing means 203 are not drawn to scale; according to one aspect of the present invention their height is some millimetres. Depending on the aesthetic goals of the designer, sealing means 203 that are higher or lower can be used.

[0020] According to one embodiment of the present invention the mobile terminal can be placed on a table 205, for example, or other flat surface 204, so that the sealing means 203 together with the flat surface 204 seal the second aperture 202. The sealing of the second aperture 202 has the effect that the mobile terminal is in omni-directional mode where the microphone 110 receives voice signals mostly through the aperture 101 thus losing some of its directional sensitivity.

[0021] Normally, the microphone 110 is directionally sensitive when both apertures 101 and 202 are open. When both apertures 101, 102 are open, the sound waves coming from the background noise can be understood to cancel each other, i.e. the microphone shows unidirectional characteristics and is well suitable for to be used as a handset of a mobile terminal.

The uni- and omni-directional characteristics of the microphone 110 are herewith referred with the term acous-

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tical modes of the microphone.

[0022] Figure 3 shows another example of implementing the present invention. Instead of only having sealing means 303 such as a sealing member, the mobile terminal now also has a support member 304. In addition, the marked point PB illustrates the effective support point of the support member 304 that is comparable to point PA with reference to Figure 2.

[0023] One function of the support member 304 is to increase the pressure between the sealing means 303 and the flat surface 204. The sealing means 303 are located close to the second aperture 202 which is further located at the spot of the microphone. As the mobile terminal of Figure 2, the mobile terminal can as well be placed on a flat surface 204 thus giving omni-directional characteristics for the mobile terminal. The position PB which is also the position of the second support member 304 may be located based on the weight distribution of the mobile terminal. To the weight distribution influences the weight of the contents of the mobile terminal, i.e. the battery, different electrical parts, the display, and so forth. The PB can be positioned so that the torque caused by the weight of the mobile terminal causes a stronger or greater force on the sealing means 303 and so enhances the sealing made by the sealing means 303 and the flat surface 204. If the sealing means 303 are made of a soft material showing high elastic properties, a good sealing can be provided.

[0024] Figure 4 depicts a cross sectional cut of a mobile terminal. The terminal has a microphone 110 which is positioned inside the housing 200. In the housing 200 there are apertures 101 and 202. The apertures 101, 202 act as inlet holes which form acoustical conduits to both sides of the microphone 110. It is to be noted that the apertures 101, 202 need not to be on opposite sides of the mobile terminal; the only limiting condition is that the acoustical conduits lead to both sides of the microphone. Further, there are support and sealing means 203 at the bottom side of the housing. The design of the sealing means 203 may involve taking into account the curvature of the housing 200. In some mobile terminal models, the housing 200 is strongly curved and, therefore, it is impossible to provide a good enough sealing with sealing means 203 that do not take into account the shape of the bottom of the housing 200.

[0025] Further, Figure 5 illustrates the mobile terminal viewed from below. In the sealing means 203 that is upper part of the mobile terminal housing 200 the aperture 202 and the sealing means 203 are shown.

[0026] Figure 6 illustrates closer the sealing means 203. First, the sealing means 203 have a hole 600 for the acoustical inlet. The contact part 601 of the sealing means 203 has been only marked with a box on the right-hand side, but it preferably extends through the sealing means 203. For example, if the sealing means 203 have the form of a ring like in Figure 5, the part 601 extends around the bottom of the ring.

[0027] Further, aperture part 603 has similarly been marked with a box. The acoustical signals coming from outside the mobile phone in order to reach the inlet hole 600 and to further proceed into the microphone 110 traverse beyond this part. In its design one must take into account the acoustical considerations: Special curvature may be needed in order to provide a proper distortion free acoustical transmission characteristics.

[0028] The sealing means 203 are connected to the mobile terminal using the aperture part 605 of the sealing means 203. On the left-hand side the height of the sealing means 203 is denoted with h' and on the right-hand side with h. The difference (h'- h) between h' and h is denoted with Δ. If the microphone is located as usually at the bottom part of the mobile terminal and if the tilting of the housing because of the height difference of the sealing means and the bottom part of the housing is like in Figure 2, h is larger than h'. The tilting may therefore depend on the distance between PA and PL, and partially as well on the distance between PL and PR. In the case of a mobile terminal with a support element like in Figure 3 there is no need for this kind of asymmetry and h' can equal h. The size of Δ may be adapted to make the sealing proper taking into account the tilting angle of the between the bottom part of the housing and the surface where the mobile terminal is lying.

[0029] Another possibility to achieve an asymmetric elastic behaviour is to use elastic materials asymmetrically, i.e. a more elastic material on the h' side and a stiffer material on the opposite side. This can in principle be achieved with e.g. block copolymers where the ratios of different polymer materials exhibit small changes along the bottom part of the sealing means. In this way it is also possible to ensure a good enough sealing. Another option, for example, is to use some other material that has spatially non uniform elasticity constant.

[0030] Figure 7 shows the sealing means from bottom. 600 is the inlet and 601 is the contact part. The profile of the aperture part 603 with its curvature is not visible in the figure.

[0031] Figure 8 presents the mobile terminal when the second acoustical directivity mode is activated. The mobile terminal 102 is placed on a flat surface 204. In the figure only the portion of the mobile terminal which illustrates the housing means and their vicinity is shown. The sealing means 203 have a contact with the flat surface 204 at aperture points PLB and PRB. Preferably, the sealing means extend from the housing of the mobile phone in such a way that in the figure left-hand side contact point PL acts as the outermost aperture point for the sealing means at part PLB and, respectively, the point PR at as the contact point of the sealing means for the point PRB.

[0032] The housing 200 is usually constructed from two parts; 102F is the front part and 102B is the back part. Between the front and back part 102F, 102B of the housing 200 there is a microphone 110. In the front part 102F at the spot of the microphone 110 there is at least one opening for the aperture 101 and on the back side

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part of the housing there is correspondingly at least one aperture 202 leading to the bottom side of the microphone.

[0033] Between the housing and the microphone there is sealing on both sides of the microphone 110. Preferably, the sealing is obtained with the help of an elastic gasket, such as a sealing ring. The first purpose of the sealing is to enable the propagation of sound from the exterior of the housing to the microphone, disabling propagation of the sound inside the housing, whereas the second purpose is to reduce the distortions caused by the loudspeaker of the mobile terminal.

[0034] Below the microphone 110 there is a resonance cavity ACB which is consists of smaller cavities formed by i) space limited by the microphone 110, possible sealing between the microphone, and bottom part 102 of the housing 200, and ii) acoustically well conductive part of the housing 200 including at least one aperture 202, sealing means 203, and the flat surface S. Respectively, another resonance cavity ACF is formed in between the microphone and the front part of the housing.

[0035] As already discussed with reference to Figures 2 and 6, the mobile phone may be tilted. To serve this purpose the sealing means are designed in the manner described with reference to Figure 6, the distance between PL and PLB may be shorter than the distance between PR and PRB. This means that the PL, PLB part could be more elastic than the PR and PRB so that the PL, PLB part of the sealing means compresses more. The aperture between the flat surface 204 and the sealing means 203 shall be preferably good in order to enhance the omni-directional mode. It is possible that if the sealing is not proper the direction and sensitivity of microphone is reduced to correspond the unidirectional microphone.

[0036] The tilting angle α corresponds to the tilting of the mobile terminal with respect to the flat surface 204. In practice, it may get almost any target value, the target value being thus between a very small angle and a substantially large angle. The magnitude of α has an impact on the aesthetic design of the mobile terminal, and, secondly, it may influence on the contact force between the contact part 601 and the flat surface 204 thus leading to further elasticity considerations. The more the mobile terminal is tilted, the smaller the contact force in the support means is, so requiring more elastic material.

[0037] Figure 9A illustrates another way to realise the invention. The mobile terminal has a housing 200 which includes a battery cover 901. The battery cover may be removable; usually the mobile terminal battery is stored under the cover. For some manufacturers the cover and the battery are combined to a single element. The aperture 202 is marked with a dot in the figure. When the inlet hole is open the mobile phone is in unidirectional directivity mode.

[0038] Figure 9B shows the aperture 202 covered with removable sealing means 1001 according to one aspect of the present invention.

[0039] The removable sealing means 1001 can be stored under the battery cover or back cover 901. Preferably, the aperture 202 and the sealing means 1001 are designed in such a way that the sealing means are tightly matched with the aperture 202. This may be realised, for example, by supplying the sealing means with attaching means and sealing means, so that the sealing means 1001 correspond partially to a flat surface 204. As shown in Figure 8, this mode of the invention is particularly usable when the table 205 or other surface is not essentially flat so that it would not provide a uniform enough flat surface 204 for the sealing means 203 to match at points PLB and PRB shown in Figure 8. Further, the external surface can be used for causing this kind of extra pressure for pushing the sealing means 203 stronger against the housing 200 of the mobile terminal, because the sealing means 1001 would not necessarily be able to cause the sealing to be tight enough hence the weight of the mobile terminal can be used for this purpose to increase the sealing.

[0040] Figure 10 illustrates a measurement result of the spectral energy density versus the frequency of a signal output at a reference point close to the telephone. The measurement has been performed for the inventive mobile phone assembly in unidirectional mode, and in Loudness Rating Guarding Position LRGP in accordance with the standard 3G TS 26.132 (TSG SA; Codec Working Group; Terminal Acoustic Characteristics for Telephony).

[0041] The energy spectrum measured is presented as observed by the codec of the mobile terminal. The upper piecewise linear curve corresponds to the maximal allowed spectral density values, whereas the lower piecewise linear curve illustrates the minimum acceptable spectral energies. As can be seen from the measurement results, the observed spectra lies clearly between the allowed values.

[0042] Figure 11 shows the acoustic behaviour of the same mobile terminal when it is in the second acoustical directivity mode. The spectral energy density shows again that the values are allowed, i.e. that the spectra lies clearly between the agreed limits.

[0043] Both measurements were conducted with a the mobile terminal lying head up on the table, positioned 50 cm from the reference mouth and with 30° azimuth. For the measurements the mobile terminal input gain was not adjusted, though this is not visible in the figure. In practice, because of the different resonance cavities caused by the differences in the acoustical apertures when the mobile terminal is in different acoustical modes, the gain must be adjusted between the modes. The adjustment may be done automatically by detecting the measured signal strength in the codec.

[0044] To summarise, according to one aspect of the present invention, the mobile phone can be made to show dual mode characteristics. First, a microphone is assembled into a housing that includes at least two inlet

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holes. At least one of the apertures is designed to be on the user side when the terminal is used as a handset, and the apertures together form acoustical conduits to the both sides of the microphone. The housing is further assembled to include sealing means; with the sealing means at least one of the inlet holes may be sealed together with an external surface, such as a table or any other flat surface. When the mobile terminal is placed on said flat surface, one acoustical aperture is thus closed and the mobile terminal shows acoustical omni-directional characteristics as a second acoustical directivity mode.

[0045] According to one further aspect of the present invention, the assembling step may include the assembling of an elastic gasket. Preferably, said elastic gasket is asymmetric, and the height of the lower part of the gasket being smaller than the height of the higher part of the gasket, the difference being adapted to make the sealing proper taking into account the elevation angle between the bottom of housing and the surface.

[0046] According to still another aspect of the present invention, in addition to the sealing means, the housing may further include a support member to increase the pressure between the sealing means and the surface.

[0047] Although the invention was described above with reference to the examples shown in the appended drawings, it is obvious that the invention is not limited to these, but it may be modified by those skilled in the art without departing from the scope and the spirit of the invention. For example, instead of a microphone, any other transducer or sound detector may be used in connection with the embodiments of the inventive sealing mechanism.

Reference numbers used in the description:

[0048]

100	mobile terminal
101	aperture
102	housing
110	microphone
200	housing
202	second aperture
203	sealing means
204	flat surface
205	table
303	sealing means
304	support member
600	hole for the acoustic inlet
601	contact part
603	aperture part
901	battery cover
1001	removable sealing means

Claims

1. A dual directional mode mobile terminal including a microphone (110), said microphone (110) having been assembled in a housing (200),
characterised in that

   - the housing (200) includes at least a first and a second aperture (101, 202), of which the first aperture (101) is on the user side when the terminal is used as a handset, the first and second apertures (101, 202) forming acoustical conduits (ACF, ACB) to the both sides of the microphone (110); and
   - the housing (200) further includes sealing means (203, 303, 1001) for sealing the second aperture (202) together with an external surface (204), when the mobile terminal is placed on said surface, thereby enabling in the mobile terminal a second acoustical directivity mode.

2. A mobile terminal according to claim 1,
characterised in that
the sealing means (203) include an elastic gasket.

3. A mobile terminal according to claim 2,
characterised in that
the elastic gasket is asymmetric, the height h' of a lower part of the gasket being smaller than the height h of a higher part of the gasket, the difference $\Delta = h' - h$ being adapted to make the sealing proper taking into account an elevation angle (α) between a backside surface (102B) of the housing (200) and the external surface (204).

4. A mobile terminal according to claim 1,
characterised in that
in addition to the sealing means (303), the housing (200) further includes a support member (304) to increase the pressure exerted on the sealing means (303) by the external surface (204).

5. A mobile terminal according to claim 1,
characterised in that
the sealing means (1001) further have means adapted for connecting the sealing means to the inlet hole (202) in an acoustically proper way.

6. A mobile terminal according to claim 5,
characterised in that
the mobile terminal has means (200) for storing the sealing means (1001).

7. A method for manufacturing a dual directional mode mobile terminal, the method
characterised in that
it includes the steps of:

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- assembling a microphone (110) into a housing (200), wherein the housing (200) includes at least first and second apertures (101, 202), of which a first aperture (101) is designed to be on the user side when the terminal is used as a handset, the first and second apertures thus forming acoustical conduits to both sides of the microphone (110); and
- assembling the housing (200) with sealing means (203) for sealing the second aperture (202) holes together with an external surface (204), when the mobile terminal is placed on said external surface (204), thereby enabling in the mobile terminal a second acoustical directivity mode.

8. A method according to claim 7, **characterised in that** the assembling step includes the assembling of an elastic gasket.

9. A method according to claim 8, **characterised in that** said elastic gasket is asymmetric, the height h' of the lower part of the gasket being smaller than the height h of the higher part of the gasket, the difference Δ = h'- h being adapted to make the sealing proper taking into account the elevation angle (α) between the bottom (102B) of housing and the external surface (204).

10. A method according to claim 7, **characterised in that** in addition to the sealing means (303), the housing further includes a support member (304) to increase the pressure between the sealing means (303) and the surface (204).

11. A method according to claim 7, wherein the sealing means (1001) are further adapted to be connected to the inlet hole (202) in an acoustically proper way.

12. A method according to claim 11, wherein the sealing means (1001) are stored in the mobile phone, and when used, manually placed into the aperture (202).

13. A mobile terminal equipped with an acoustoelectrical transducer (110) arranged in a housing (200) of the mobile terminal, **characterised in that** the housing (200) comprises:

- a user sided first aperture (101) in communication with the acoustoelectrical transducer (110);
- a second aperture (202) also in communication with the acoustoelectrical transducer (110); and
- sealing means (203) for sealing the second aperture (202) when the mobile terminal is placed on an external surface (204) or an object.

14. A mobile terminal according to claim 13, wherein the sealing means (203) are responsive to an external force or pressure.

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FIG 1 Prior Art

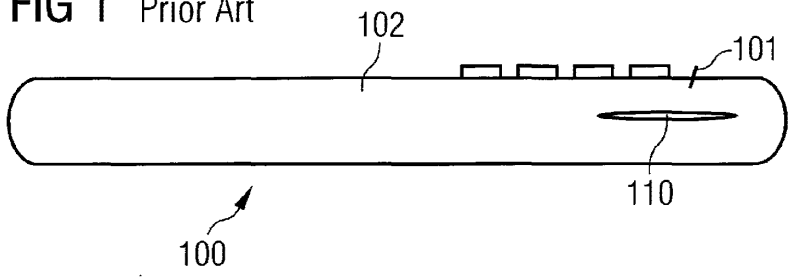


FIG 2

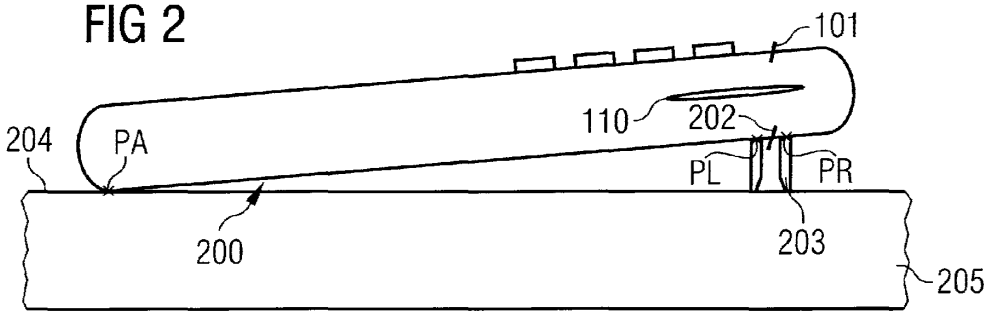


FIG 3

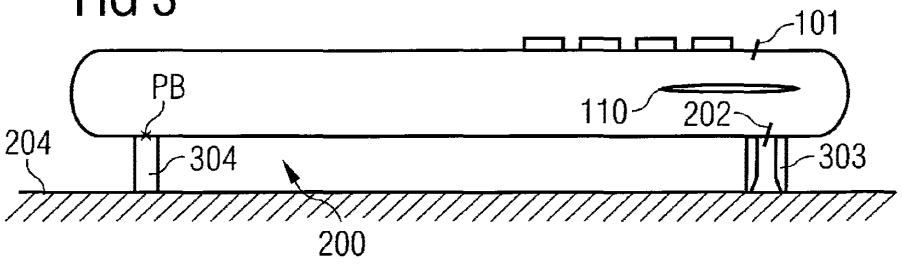


FIG 4

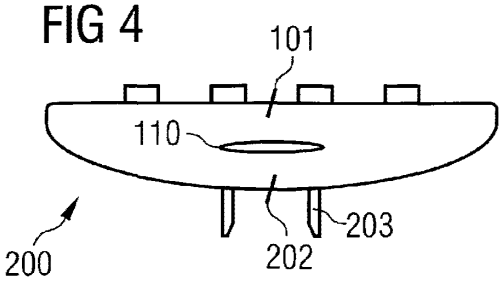


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FIG 5

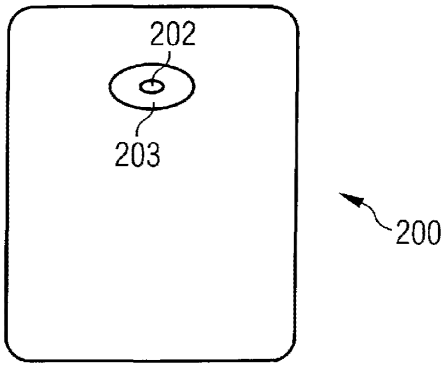


FIG 6

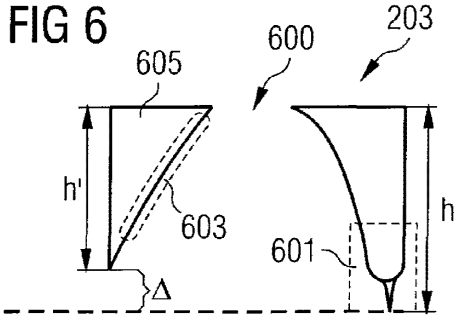


FIG 7

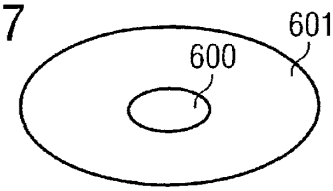


FIG 8

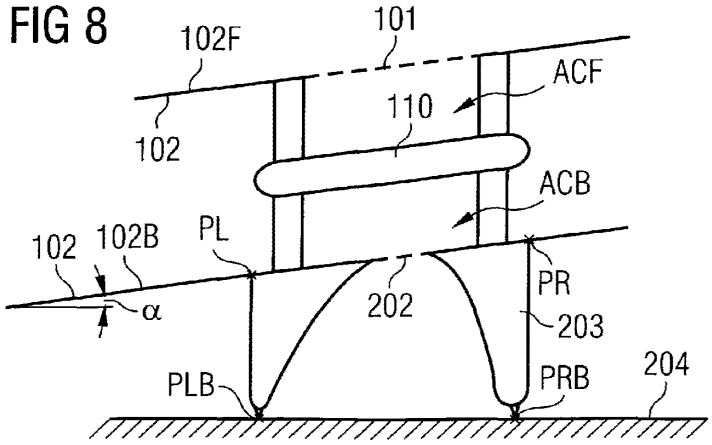


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FIG 9A

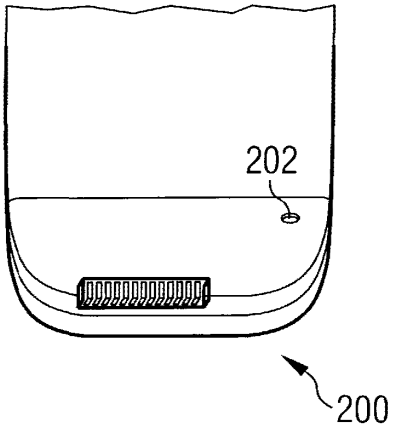


FIG 9B

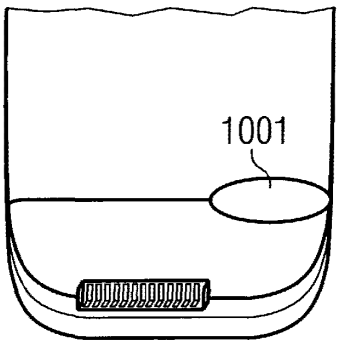


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FIG 10

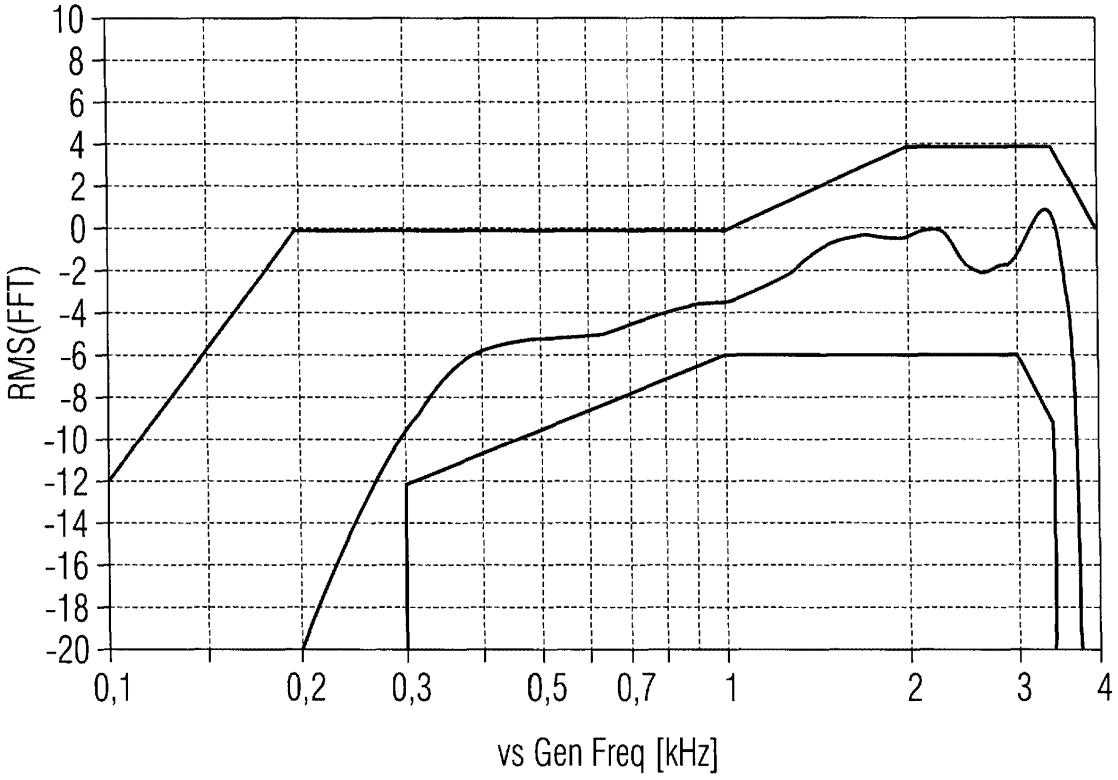
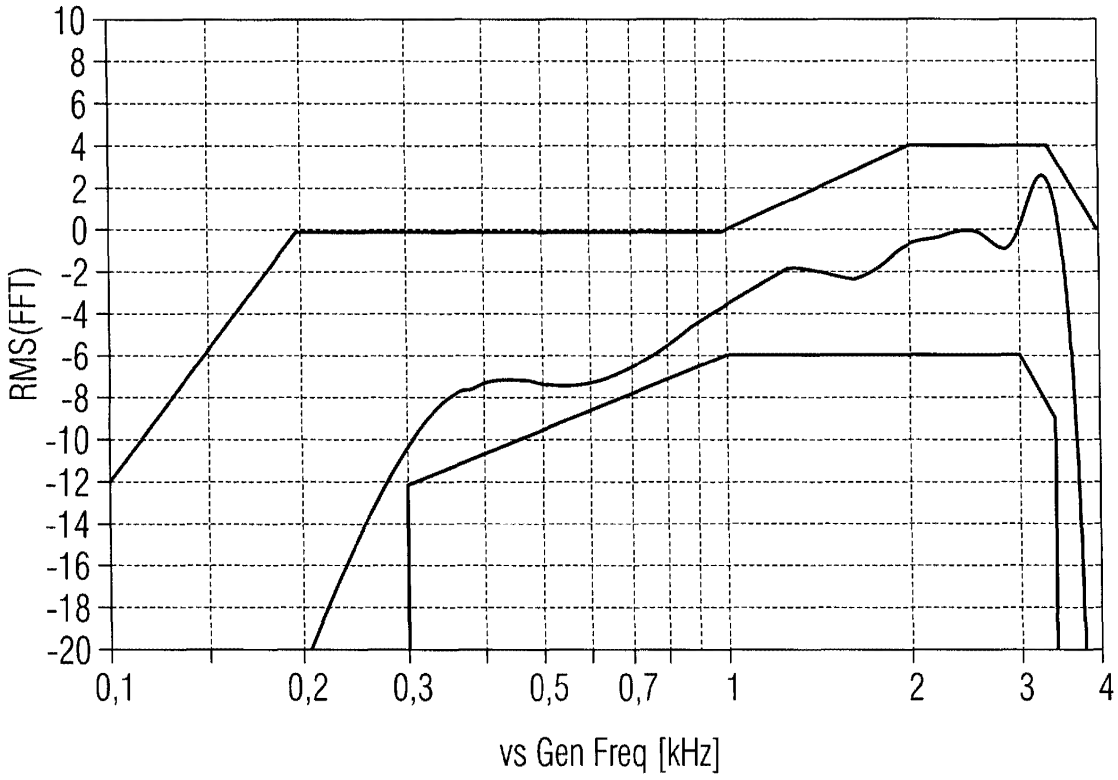

10
8
6
4
2
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-2
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-6
-8
-10
-12
-14
-16
-18
-20
RMS(FFT)
0,1
0,2
0,3
0,5
0,7
1
2
3
4
vs Gen Freq [kHz]

FIG 11


10
8
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-2
-4
-6
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-10
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-14
-16
-18
-20
RMS(FFT)
0,1
0,2
0,3
0,5
0,7
1
2
3
4
vs Gen Freq [kHz]

European Patent Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 02 02 0319

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
A	US 4 142 072 A (BERLAND OLE) 27 February 1979 (1979-02-27) * the whole document * ---	1-14	H04R25/00
A	DE 100 50 559 C (FAITA EBERHARD) 4 April 2002 (2002-04-04) * the whole document * ---	1-14	
A	EP 0 984 666 A (RESISTANCE TECHNOLOGY INC) 8 March 2000 (2000-03-08) * abstract * * claims 1,2 * ---	1-14	
A	WO 01 69964 A (RESISTANCE TECHNOLOGY INC ;DARBUT ALEXANDER L (US)) 20 September 2001 (2001-09-20) * page 2, line 26 - page 3, line 9 * * abstract * -----	1-14	

TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7)

H04R

The present search report has been drawn up for all claims

Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner
THE HAGUE	31 March 2003	Dionisi, M

CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS

X : particularly relevant if taken alone
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EPO FORM 1503 03.82 (P04C01)

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31-03-2003

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For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82

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(54) External ear canal voice detection

Sprachdetektion im Gehörgang

Détection de la voix dans le conduit auditif externe

(84) Designated Contracting States:
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Printed by Jouve, 75001 PARIS (FR)

EP 1 519 625 B1

Description

[0001] This document generally relates to ear-level communication systems and particularly, but not by way of limitation, to such systems communicating with remote devices via full duplex audio.

[0002] Ear-level communication systems are used for hearing impaired individuals to use a communication device such as a cellular phone or other devices transmitting audio signals. They also allow private, hand-free use of such a communication device by individuals with normal hearing.

[0003] An ear-level communication system generally includes tethered or wireless headsets with a microphone boom or a microphone within a cord of the headset to detect voice of the person wearing the headsets. An alternative way to detect voice is via bone connection. Examples include a "clam" shell device that couples to the helix and a custom carmold with a vibration detector on the outer shell. Voice is picked up by detecting bone vibration caused by, and representative of, the voice of the person wearing the device.

[0004] Bi-directional communication has been achieved by a simplex system including a device in the ear canal that both transmits sound to and picks up sound within the ear canal. The device is tethered to a push-to-talk (PIT) system such as a walkie talkie. It is not full duplex and therefore requires interaction by the user in order to switch from listen mode to talk mode.

[0005] Voice operated exchange (VOX) is used to conserve energy when voice is not being detected or transmitted. For example, a headset system includes two ear pieces - for full duplex communication with one earpiece for transmitting and the other for receiving voice - and uses ear canal voice detection to trigger a VOX circuit in a control unit wired to the headset. The system requires a headset with two headphones and wires connecting the headphone to a control unit such as a device clipped on belt. In another example, a full duplex system includes a single headphone to transmit and receiving voice, again with a VOX circuit in a control unit wired to the headphone.

[0006] Such ear-level communication systems are likely to be worn by a person for long periods of time. Users with hearing loss may use such a system on a regular basis, both as a conventional hearing aid allowing communication directly with a person and as a hearing aid allowing communicating through another device. Users with normal hearing may wear such a system to be communicatively connected to another person or facility without the need to hold a device at any time. For appearance or secrecy reasons, minimal visibility is generally desirable. Wired connection between a headset or earpiece and a controller makes the system easily visible and is cumbersome to users who need to communicate while being physically active.

[0007] Thus, there is a need for an ear-level communication system that is not easily visible. A need related to miniaturization is the longevity of the system between battery replacements or recharges.

[0008] WO 98/45937A discloses a communications apparatus comprising ear units, a control unit and a radio transceiver.

[0009] Ear level full duplex audio communication systems each include one or two ear attachments devices, such as in-the-ear (ITE) or behind-the-ear (BTE) devices, that wirelessly communicates to a remote device. Such a system allows a hearing impaired individual to communicate with or through the remote device, such as to talk to another person through a cellular phone. Such a system also functions as an ear piece wirelessly extended from the remote device that allows an individual to privately communicate with or through the remote device without the need of holding the device.

[0010] WO 03/073790A discloses a system adapted for use in at least one of a first ear having a first ear canal and a second ear having a second ear canal comprising: a first ear-level device configured to be one of an in-the-ear device and a behind-the-ear device, the first ear-level device including: a first microphone adapted for use in one of the first ear canal and the second ear canal, and adapted to receive an occluded sound within the one of the first ear canal and the second ear canal; and a wireless receiver, connected to a first processor, to receive a first wireless signal representing a remote sound; wherein the first processor, is connected to the first microphone, and is adapted to process the occluded sound and the remote sound; the first ear level device further including a speaker adapted for use in the one of the first ear canal and the second ear canal and adapted to transmit the processed remote sound to the one of the first ear canal and the second ear canal; a wireless transmitter, connected to the first processor; a first earmold housing at least the first microphone and the speaker, at least a portion of the first earmold configured for placement in the one of the first ear canal and the second ear canal; and a voice operated exchange (VOX) circuit connected to the first processor.

[0011] In the present invention, the wireless transmitter is adapted to receive the processed occluded sound from the first processor and transmit a second wireless signal representing the occluded sound; and the VOX circuit includes an occluded sound gating module adapted to gate the occluded sound on, and to gate the remote sound off, when the occluded sound is detected while the remote sound is not detected, and a remote sound gating module adapted to gate the remote sound on, and to gate the occluded sound off, when the incoming remote sound is detected while the occluded sound is not detected.

[0012] In a preferred embodiment, a system includes an ITE module and a BTE module attached to the ITE module. The ITE module includes a microphone for use in an ear canal. The microphone receives an occluded sound from within the ear canal. The BTE module includes a processor and a wireless transmitter. The processor processes the occluded sound. The wireless trans-

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mitter receives the processed occluded sound from the processor and transmits a wireless signal representing the occluded sound.

[0013] In a preferred embodiment, a system includes a first ear-level device and a second ear-level device for use in two opposite ears. The first ear-level device includes a microphone, a first processor, and a wireless transmitter. The microphone is for use in one ear canal to receive an occluded sound from within that ear canal. The first processor converts the occluded sound to an electrical signal. The wireless transmitter receives the electrical signal and transmits an outgoing wireless signal representing the occluded sound. The second ear-level device includes a wireless receiver, a second processor, and a speaker. The wireless receiver receives an incoming wireless signal representing a remote sound. The second processor converts the incoming wireless signal to the remote sound. The speaker is for use in the opposite ear canal to transmit the remote sound to that ear canal.

[0014] The present invention also relates to a method comprising: detecting an occluded sound using a first microphone adapted for use in an ear canal; detecting an incoming radio signal representing a remote sound from a remote device; starting a voice operated exchange (VOX) housed within an ear-level communication device when at least one of the occluded sound and the incoming radio signal is detected if the VOX is not already on, the ear-level communication device being one of an in-the-ear (ITE) device and a behind-the-ear (BTE) device; gating the occluded sound on, and gating the remote sound off, when the occluded sound is detected while the incoming radio signal is not detected; and gating the remote sound on, and gating the occluded sound off, when the incoming radio signal is detected while the occluded sound is not detected.

[0015] Preferred embodiments of the present invention will now be described by way of example only and with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is an illustration of an embodiment of an ear-level communication system and potions of an environment in which it is used. This ear-level communication system uses a single ear-level device.

FIG. 2 is an illustration of an embodiment of another ear-level communication system and portions of an environment in which it is used. This ear-level communication system uses a pair of ear-level devices.

FIG. 3A is an illustration of one exemplary exterior configuration of an in-the-ear (ITE) device used as the single ear-level device of FIG 1 or one of the pair of ear-level devices of FIG. 2.

FIG. 3B is an illustration of one exemplary exterior configuration of an in-the-canal (ITC) device used as the single ear-level device in FIG. 1 or one of the pair of ear-level devices of FIG. 2.

FIG. 3C is an illustration of one exemplary exterior configuration of a completely-in-the-canal (CIC) device used as the single-ear-level device of FIG. 1 or one of the pair of ear-level devices of FIG. 2.

FIG. 4A is a block diagram showing one embodiment of the circuit of ear-level device shown in FIGS. 3A, 3B, or 3C used as the single ear-level device of FIG. 1.

FIG. 4B is a block diagram showing one embodiment of portions of a voice operated exchange (VOX) circuit included in the single car-level device of FIG. 1.

FIG. 5 is a block diagram showing another embodiment of the circuit of ear-level device shown in FIGS. 3A, 3B, or 3C used as the pair of ear-level devices of FIG. 1B.

FIG. 6 is an illustration of one exemplary exterior configuration of an ear-level device including a behind-the-ear (BTE) device used as the single ear-level device of FIG. 1 or one of the pair of ear-level devices of FIG. 2.

FIG. 7 is a block diagram showing one embodiment of the circuit of the ear-level device shown in FIG. 6 used as the single ear-level device of FIG. 1.

FIG. 8 is a block diagram showing another embodiment of the circuit of ear-level device shown in FIG. 6 used as the pair of ear-level devices of FIG. 2.

FIG. 9 is a flow chart illustrating an embodiment of a method for audio communication between the single ear-level device or the pair of ear-level devices and a remote device.

FIG. 10 is a flow chart illustrating another embodiment of the method for audio communication between the single ear-level device and a remote device.

[0016] The following embodiments are described in sufficient detail to enable those skilled in the art to practice the invention, and it is to be understood that the embodiments may be combined, or that other embodiments may be utilized and that structural, logical and electrical changes may be made without departing from the scope of the present invention, as defined by the appended claims.

[0017] It should be noted that references to "an", "one", or "various" embodiments in this disclosure are not necessarily to the same embodiment, and such references contemplate more than one embodiment.

[0018] This document discusses, among other things, ear-level full duplex audio communication systems for communicating with remote devices. These systems each include one or two ear-level devices each worn in or about an ear, such as in-the-ear (ITE) or behind-the-ear (BTE) devices, wirelessly coupled to a remote device such as a computer, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a cellular phone, a walkie talkie, or a language translator. When used as a hearing aid, such a system allows a hearing impaired individual to communicate with or through the remote device, such as to talk to another person through a cellular phone. When being used as an ear piece wirelessly extended from the remote device,

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such system allows an individual with normal hearing to privately communicate with or through the remote device without the need of holding the device or wearing any device wired to the remote device.

[0019] In this document, "voice" includes to the sound of speech made by a person, and sound generally includes an audible signal that includes voice and other signals that can be heard and/or detected by an audio detector. Unless particularly indicated, for example, when voice is distinguished from sound by speech recognition, "voice" and "sound" are used interchangeably throughout thus document because they are not practically separated. For example, detection of a sound refers to the same action as detection of a voice because, while the purpose is to detect the voice, other sounds are picked up as well.

[0020] FIG. 1 is an illustration of an embodiment of an ear-level communication system 100 and portions of an environment in which it is used. System 100 includes an ear-level device 110 attached to an ear 101A. Bar-level device 110 communicates with a remote device 190 through a wireless telemetry link 195. The other ear 101B is free of device attachment. Ear-level device 110 is a self-contained device including its own power source such as a replaceable or rechargeable battery. To maximize battery life or period between recharges, at least a portion of the circuit of ear-level device 110 is voice activated. That is, ear-level device 110 is activated only when it detects a need to transmit or receive a sound.

[0021] Ear-level device 110 is a full duplex audio device that allows two-way simultaneous conversation between ear 101A and remote device 190. In one embodiment, when being worn by a person having ear 101A, ear-level device 110 picks up sound from the ear canal of ear 101A and delivers sound to the same ear canal. It detects the occluded sound from the ear canal when the person speaks and transmits to the same ear canal a sound received from remote device 190 and/or a sound picked up from the environment surrounding the person. In one embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. 1, ear-level device 110 is configured for right ear attachment. In an alternative embodiment, ear-level device 110 is configured for left ear attachment.

[0022] FIG. 2 is an illustration of an embodiment of an ear-level communication system 200 and portions of an environment in which it is used. System 200 includes a pair of ear-level devices 210A, attached to an ear 101 A, and 210B, attached to ear 101B. Ear-level devices 210A and 210B communicate with a remote device 290 through a wireless telemetry link 295. Ear-level devices 210A and 210B are each a self-contained device including its own power source such as a replaceable or rechargeable battery. To maximize battery life or period between recharges, at least a portion of the circuit of each of ear-level devices 210A and 210B is voice activated. That is, ear-level devices 210A and 210B are each activated only when a need to transmit or receive a sound is detected by the device itself.

[0023] In one embodiment, ear-level device 210A is an audio transmitter that picks up sound from the ear canal of ear 101A, and ear-level device 210B is an audio receiver that delivers sound to the same ear canal. Ear-level device 210A is activated when it detects a sound from the ear canal. Ear-level device 210B is activated when it detects a signal from remote device 290. When both are being worn by a person, ear-level devices 210A and 210B supports full duplex audio allowing two-way simultaneous conversation between the person and remote device 290. In one embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. 2, ear-level device 210A is configured for right ear attachment, and ear-level device 210B is configured for left ear attachment. In an alternative embodiment, ear-level device 210A is configured for left ear attachment, and ear-level device 210B is configured for right ear attachment.

[0024] FIGS. 3A, 3B, and 3C are illustrations of exemplary exterior configuration of ear-level device 110 or one of ear-level devices 210A and 210B. For the purpose of this document, only a device attached to a right ear is shown for each exemplary exterior configuration. It is to be understood that each of ear-level devices 110, 210A, and 210B can be either a device configured for right ear attachment or a device configured for left ear attachment. Generally, a device configured for right car attachment has an exterior configuration that is substantially symmetrical to that of a device of the same type configured for left ear attachment. In system 100, a single ear-level device 110 is a device configured either for right ear attachment or for left ear attachment. In system 200, either one of car-level device 210A and 210B is a device configured for right ear attachment, while the other is a device configured for left ear attachment.

[0025] An occluded sound 305, an ambient sound 306, and a remote sound 307 are illustrated in each of FIGS. 3A, 3B, and 3C. Remote sound 307 is represented by a wireless radio signal transmitted to ear-level device 110. In this document, "occluded sound" includes occluded sound 305, "ambient sound" includes ambient sound 306, and "remote sound" includes remote sound 307.

[0026] FIG. 3A is an illustration of an exemplary exterior configuration of an in-the-ear (ITE) device 310A used as ear-level device 110 or one of ear-level devices 210A and 210B. As shown in FIG. 3A, ITE device 310A is attached to an ear 101 with a pinna 302 and an ear canal 303. ITE device 310A includes a portion inserted into ear canal 303 and another portion fit into the cavity formed by pinna 302.

[0027] FIG. 3B is an illustration of an exemplary exterior configuration of an in-the-canal (ITC) device 310B used as ear-level device 110 or one of ear-level devices 210A and 210B. As shown in FIG. 3B, ITC device 310B is attached to ear 101 with pinna 302 and ear canal 303. ITC device 310B is a form of ITE device that also includes a portion inserted in ear canal 303 and another portion fit into the cavity formed by pinna 302, but the latter portion is smaller than that of ITE device 310A. Its overall

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size is therefore generally smaller than that of ITE deviee 310A.

[0028] FIG. 3C is an illustration of an exemplary exterior configuration of a completely-in-the-canal (CIC) device 310C used as ear-level device 110 or one of ear-level devices 210A and 210B. As shown in FIG. 3C, CIC device 310C is attached to ear 101 with pinna 302 and ear canal 303. CIC device 310C is a form of ITC device but includes only a portion that is completed inserted into ear canal 303. Its overall size is therefore generally smaller than that of ITC device 310B.

[0029] In one embodiment, each of ITE device 310A, ITC device 310B, and CIC device 310C includes a custom earmold. In another embodiment, each of ITE device 310A, ITC device 310B, and CIC device 310C includes a modular earmold. In one embodiment, the earmold is fully occluded to maximize audio efficiency. In another embodiment, the earmold is vented to remove undesirable low frequency sound.

[0030] The choice of a device type, such as from the types shown in FIGS. 3A, 3B, and 3C, depends on the need of individual users. For example, ITE device 310A has a relatively large size to accommodate a relatively large amplifier to serve the need of individuals suffering severe hearing loss. The relatively large size can also be utilized to house a relatively large size battery. On the other hand, CIC device 310C is almost invisible, while the room for the circuit and the battery is very limited. Generally, the selection of the device type is a compromise among considerations such as the user's degree of hearing loss (if applicable), ear canal size, desire of invisibility, desired longevity between battery replacements or recharges, and cost.

[0031] FIG. 4A is a block diagram showing one embodiment of the circuit of ear-level device shown in FIGS. 3A, 3B, or 3C used as the single ear-level device 110. The circuit is housed in an earmold configured for use as one of the device types illustrated as ear-level devices 310A, 310B, or 310C.

[0032] Ear-level device 110 includes an external microphone 420, an ear canal microphone 440, an car canal speaker 470, a processor 460, a wireless transceiver 450, an antenna 455, a voice operated exchange (VOX) circuit 430, and a battery 480. External microphone 420 picks up ambient sound such that a hearing impaired person wearing ear-level device 110 is not "isolated" when communicating to remote device 190. Thus, ear-level device enables the hearing impaired person to talk to another person either directly (if the other person is nearby) or through a device such as a cell phone. Ear canal microphone 440 detects sound from the ear canal. The sound includes primarily speech of the person wearing ear-level device 110. Ear canal speaker 470 transmits sound received from remote device 190 and/or external microphone 420 to the same ear canal. In one embodiment, ear canal microphone 440 and ear canal speaker 470 are implemented as one physical device. Processor 460 converts the sound picked up from the ear canal to an electrical signal to be transmitted to remote device 190, and converts the signals received from remote device 190 and/or external microphone 420 to a sound audible to the person wearing ear-level device 110. In one embodiment, processor 460 includes one or more of amplification circuitry, filtering circuitry, acoustic feedback reduction circuitry, noise reduction circuitry, and tone control circuitry, among other circuits performing signal processing functions as known in the art In one embodiment, processor 460 includes a speech recognition module to enhance the audio signal received by and/or transmitted from ear-level device 110. Wireless transceiver 450 and antenna 455 form a telemetry interface supporting telemetry link 195 between ear-level device 110 and remote device 190. Wireless transceiver 450 includes a wireless transmitter and a wireless receiver. The wireless transmitter receives the electrical signal representing the sound picked up from the ear canal from processor 460 and transmits an outgoing wireless signal representing the same sound to remote device 190. The wireless receiver receives an incoming wireless signal representing a remote sound from remote device 190 and transmits an electrical signal representing the remote sound to processor 460. Telemetry link 195 provides for bi-directional communication allowing simultaneous signal transmission, in both directions, between ear-level device 110 and remote device 190. VOX circuit 430 activates a major portion of ear-level device 110 only when sound is detected by at least one of external microphone 420, ear canal microphone 440, end wireless transceiver 450. In one embodiment, VOX circuit 430 includes a voice-controlled switch connecting between battery 480 and the portions of ear-level device 110 that are voice activated. The switch is driven by the sound detected by at least one of external microphone 420, ear canal microphone 440, and wireless transceiver 450. It is turned on when sound detected by external microphone 420 exceeds a predetermined threshold, when sound detected by ear canal microphone 440 exceeds another predetermined threshold, and/or when wireless transceiver 450 receives the incoming wireless signal representing the remote sound. In one embodiment, as discussed with respect to FIG. 4B below, VOX circuit 430 gates or attenuates one or more sounds detected by external microphone 420, ear canal microphone 440, and wireless transceiver 450, to eliminate or reduce echo and ringing caused by the loop formed by ear canal speaker 470 and ear canal microphone 440. Battery 480 supplies the power needed for the operation of ear-level device 110. In one embodiment, battery 480 is a rechargeable battery that can be recharged without being taken out from ear-level device 110.

[0033] FIG. 4B is a block diagram showing one embodiment of portions of VOX circuit 430. In this embodiment, VOX circuit 430 includes an ambient sound gating module 421 that blanks or attenuates the sound detected by external microphone 420, an occluded sound gating module 441 that blanks or attenuates the sound detected

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by ear canal microphone 440, a remote sound gating module 451 that blanks or attenuates the sound detected by wireless transceiver 450, and controller 431 to coordinate the states of the gating modules. Because ear canal microphone 440 is capable of detecting the sound delivered to the ear canal from ear canal speaker 470, there is a need to avoid echo and/or ringing. For example, a remote sound from remote device 190 delivered to the ear canal may be detected as an occluded sound and transmitted back to remote device 190, causing echo. The gating modules function in a coordinated manner to eliminate or reduce such echo and/or ringing caused by breaking, or applying resistance into, the audio loop formed by ear canal speaker 470 and ear canal microphone 440.

[0034] For the purpose of description, each of the gating modules is "on" when sound is "gated on" and "off' when the sound is "gated off" A sound is "gated on" when it is allowed to pass and be processed, and is "gated off' when it is blanked or substantially attenuated. Blanking refers to a substantially complete blockage of a sound, or in other words, that a detected sound is practically ignored by processor 460 such that it does not cause any echo or ringing that is audible by an ear. Substantial attenuation refers to an attenuation after which the attenuated sound does not cause any echo or tinging having an intolerable intensity.

[0035] Ambient sound gating module 421 includes a voice-driven switch or attenuator driven by the output of a comparator that compares the amplitude of a detected ambient sound with a predetermined threshold for the ambient sound. When the amplitude of the detected ambient sound exceeds the threshold for the ambient sound, and when controller 431 permits, ambient sound gating module 421 is turned on. When the amplitude of the detected ambient sound drops below the threshold for the ambient sound, ambient sound gating module 421 is turned off. In one embodiment, after the amplitude of the detected ambient sound drops below the threshold for the ambient sound, ambient sound gating module 421 is turned off after a predetermined delay.

[0036] Occluded sound gating module 441 includes a voice-driven switch or attenuator driven by the output of a comparator that compares the amplitude of a detected occluded sound with a predetermined threshold for the occluded sound. When the amplitude of the detected occluded sound exceeds the threshold for the occluded sound, and when controller 431 permits, occluded sound gating module 441 is turned on. When the amplitude of the detected occluded sound drops below the threshold for the occluded sound, occluded sound gating module 441 is turned off. In one embodiment, after the amplitude of the detected occluded sound drops below the threshold for the occluded sound, occluded sound gating module 441 is turned off after a predetermined delay.

[0037] In one embodiment, remote sound gating module 451 includes a voice-driven switch or attenuator driven by the output of a comparator that compares the amplitude of a remote sound with a predetermined threshold for the remote sound. When the amplitude of the detected remote sound exceeds the threshold for the remote sound, and when controller 431 permits, remote sound gating module 451 is turned on. When the amplitude of the detected remote sound drops below the threshold for the remote sound, remote sound gating module 451 is turned off. In one embodiment, after the amplitude of the detected remote sound drops below the threshold for the remote sound, remote sound gating module 451 is turned off after a predetermined delay.

[0038] In another embodiment, remote sound gating module 451 includes a switch or attenuator driven by the detection of the incoming wireless signal representing the remote sound. Remote sound gating module 451 is turned on upon detection of the incoming wireless signal when controller 431 permits, and turned off when the incoming wireless signal is no longer detected. In one embodiment, remote sound gating module 451 is turned off after the incoming wireless signal is absent for a predetermined period.

[0039] Controller 431 coordinates the on/off states of all the gating modules so the sounds are processed in an orderly fashion. Even if a sound is detected, the gating module corresponding to that sound is turned on only when controller 431 permits. In one embodiment, assuming that sounds A and B are gated by gating modules A and B, respectively, if both sounds A and B are detected, whichever sound is detected earlier is gated on. That is, if sound A exceeds its threshold first, gating module A is turned on and remain on until sound A drops below threshold A. Then, gating module B is turned only if sound B exceeds its threshold after gating module A has been turn off.

[0040] In one embodiment, controller 431 coordinates the on/off states of all the gating modules according to predetermined or programmed gating coordination rules. According to one exemplary rule, ambient sound gating module 421 is off, occluded sound gating module 441 is off, and remote sound gating module 451 is on. This rule allows only the transmission of the remote sound to ear canal 303, and prevents the remote sound from being detected by ear canal microphone 440 and echoed back to remote device 190. According to another exemplary rule, ambient sound gating module 421 is on, occluded sound gating module 441 is off, and remote sound gating module 451 is on. This rule allows the transmission of both the remote sound and the ambient sound to ear canal 303, and prevents the remote sound from being detected by ear canal microphone 440 and echoed back to remote device 190. This also prevents the ambient sound from being transmitted to remote device 190. According to yet another exemplary rule, ambient sound gating module 421 is off, occluded sound gating module 441 is on, and remote sound gating module 451 is off. When the person wearing ear-level device 110 speaks, both external microphone 420 and ear canal microphone 440 detect the voice. The voice as detected by ear-level

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device 110 is first transmitted to remote device 190. Without the gating modules (or when ambient sound gating module 421 and occluded sound gating module 441 are both on), the same voice as detected by external microphone 420 is transmitted to ear canal 303, and therefore again detected by ear canal microphone 440, and again be transmitted to remote device 190. This rule allows only the transmission of the occluded sound to remote device 190, and prevents the same sound from being transmitted to remote device 190 twice. Other rules are applied as a person skilled in the art should see fit based on an understanding after reading this entire document.

[0041] FIG. 5 is a block diagram showing another embodiment of the circuit of ear-level device shown in FIGS. 3A, 3B, or 3C used as each of ear-level devices 210A and 210B. The circuit of each of ear-level devices 210A and 210B is housed in an earmold configured for use as of one of the device types illustrated as ear-level devices 310A, 310B, or 310C.

[0042] Ear-level device 210A is an audio transmitter that includes an ear canal microphone 540, a processor 560A, a wireless transmitter 550A, an antenna 555A, a transmitter VOX circuit 530A, and a battery 580A. Ear canal microphone 540 detects sound from the ear canal. The sound includes primarily speech of the person wearing ear-level device 210A. Processor 560A converts the sound picked up from the ear canal to an electrical signal to be transmitted to remote device 290. In one embodiment, processor 560A includes one or more of amplification circuitry, filtering circuitry, acoustic feedback reduction circuitry, noise reduction circuitry, and tone control circuitry, among other circuits performing signal processing functions as known in the art. In one embodiment, processor 560A includes a speech recognition module used to enhance the sound transmitted from ear-level device 210A. Wireless transmitter 550A and antenna 555A form a telemetry interface supporting signal transmission from ear-level device 210A to remote device 290. Wireless transmitter 550A receives the electrical signal representing the sound picked up from the ear canal from processor 560A and transmits an outgoing wireless signal representing the same sound to remote device 290. VOX circuit 530A activates a major portion of ear-level device 210A only when sound is detected by ear canal microphone 540. In one embodiment, VOX circuit 530A includes a voice-controlled switch connecting between battery 580A and the portions of ear-level device 210A that are voice activated. The switch is driven by the sound detected by ear canal microphone 540. It is turned on when sound detected by ear canal microphone 540 exceeds a predetermined threshold. In one embodiment, VOX circuit 530A activates processor 560A when the sound is detected. In one further embodiment, VOX circuit 530A also activates wireless transmitter 550A when the sound is detected. Battery 580A supplies the power needed for the operation of ear-level device 210A. In one embodiment, battery 580A is a rechargeable battery that can be recharged without being taken out from ear-level device 210A.

[0043] Ear-level device 210B is an audio receiver that includes an external microphone 520, an ear canal speaker 570, a processor 560B, a wireless receiver 550B, an antenna 555B, a receiver VOX circuit 530B, and a battery 580B. External microphone 520 picks up ambient sound such that the person wearing ear-level devices 210A and 210B is not "isolated" when communicating to remote device 290. It allows that person to talk to a nearby person directly, without the need to take off ear-level devices 210A and/or 210B. Bar canal speaker 570 transmits sound received from remote device 290 and/or external microphone 520 to the same ear canal. Processor 560B converts the signals received from remote device 290 and/or external microphone 520 to a sound audible to the person wearing ear-level device 210B. In one embodiment, processor 560B includes one or more of amplification circuitry, filtering circuitry, acoustic feedback reduction circuitry, noise reduction circuitry, and tone control circuitry, among other circuits performing signal processing functions as known in the art. In one embodiment, processor 560B includes a speech recognition module used to enhance the audio signals received by ear-level device 210B. Wireless receiver 550B and antenna 555B form a telemetry interface supporting signal transmission from remote device 290 to ear-level device 210B. Wireless receiver 550B receives an incoming wireless signal representing a remote sound from remote device 290 and transmits an electrical signal representing the remote sound to processor 560B. VOX circuit 530B activates a major portion of ear-level device 110 only when sound is detected by at least one of external microphone 520 and wireless receiver 550B. In one embodiment, VOX circuit 530B includes a voice-controlled switch connecting between battery 580B and the portions of ear-level device 210B that are voice activated. The switch is driven by the sound detected by at least one of external microphone 520 and wireless receiver 550B. It is turned on when sound detected by external microphone 520 exceeds a predetermined threshold and/or when wireless transceiver 550B receives the incoming wireless signal representing the remote sound. In one embodiment, VOX circuit 530B activates processor 560B when the sound is detected. In one further embodiment, VOX circuit 530B also activates ear-level speaker 570 when the sound is detected. Battery 580B supplies the power needed for the operation of ear-level device 210B. In one embodiment, battery 580B is a rechargeable battery that can be recharged without being taken out from ear-level device 210B.

[0044] System 200 accommodates a larger overall circuit size without necessarily increasing the size of each ITE device. While two separate ear-level devices are required, because system 200 includes separate audio transmitter (ear-level device 210A) and receiver (ear-level device 210B) disposed in the ear canals of opposite ears, ear canal speaker 570 and ear canal microphone 540 do not form a loop causing echo and ringing.

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[0045] FIG. 6 is an illustration of an exemplary exterior configuration of an ear-level device including a behind-the-ear (BTE) device 610 used as ear-level device 110 or one of ear-level devices 210A and 210B. BTE device 610 is attached to ear 101 with pinna 302 and ear canal 303. In one embodiment, BTE device 610 is used when none of ITE device 310A, PTC device 310B, and CIC device 310C provides sufficient space accommodating the required circuit and battery sizes. For the purpose of this document, only a device attached to a right ear is shown for each exterior structure. It is to be understood that each of ear-level devices 110, 210A, and 210B can be either a BTE device configured for right ear attachment or a BTE device configured for left ear attachment. Generally, a BTE device configured for right ear attachment has a substantially symmetrical appearance to a device of the same type configured for left ear attachment In system 100, ear-level device 110 is a device configured either for right ear attachment or for left ear attachment. In system 200, either one of ear-level device 210A and 210B is a device structured for right ear attachment, while the other is a device structured for left ear attachment.

[0046] BTE device 610 includes a behind-the-earmodule (BTE module) 611 and an in-the-ear module (ITE module) 612. ITE module 612 includes a custom or modular earmold. In one embodiment, the earmold is fully occluded to maximize audio efficiency. In another embodiment, the earmold is vented to remove undesirable low frequency sound.

[0047] FIG. 7 is a block diagram showing one embodiment of the circuit of ear-level device shown in FIG. 6 used as ear-level device 110. The exterior configuration of ear-level device 110 is of the type illustrated as BTE device 610.

[0048] Ear-level device 110 configured as BTE device 610 differs from ear-level device 110 configured as ITE/ITC/CIC devices 310A/310B/310C primarily in the physical arrangement of device components. By way of example, but not by way of limitation, FIG. 7 illustrates one embodiment in which BTE module 611 includes external microphone 420, processor 460, wireless transceiver 450, antenna 455, VOX circuit 430, and battery 480, and ITE module 612 includes ear canal microphone 440 and ear canal speaker 470. Other possible embodiments depend on size and other considerations that are known to those skilled in the art. In one embodiment, behind-ear portion 611 includes only battery 480 to maximize the duration of use of ear-level device 110 between battery replacements or recharges.

[0049] FIG. 8 is a block diagram showing another embodiment of the circuit of ear-level device shown in FIG. 6 used as each of ear-level devices 210A and 210B. The exterior configuration of each of ear-level devices 210A and 210B is of the type illustrated as BTE device 610.

[0050] Ear-level devices 210A/210B configured as BTE device 610 differ from ear-level devices 210A/210B configured as ITE/ITC/CIC devices 310A/310B/310C primarily in the physical arrangement of device components. By way of example, but not by way of limitation, FIG. 8 illustrates one embodiment of ear-level device 210A including a BTE module 611A and an ITE module 612A, and ear-level device 210B including a BTE module 611B and an ITE module 612B. BTE module 611A includes processor 560A, wireless transmitter 550A, antenna 555A, transmitter VOX circuit 530A, and battery 580A. ITE module 612A includes ear canal microphone 540. Behind-the-ear portion 611B includes external microphone 520, processor 560B, wireless receiver 550B, antenna 555B, receiver VOX circuit 530B, and battery 580B. ITE module 612B includes ear canal speaker 570. Other possible embodiments depend on size and other considerations that are known to those skilled in the art. In one embodiment, BTE modules 611A and 611B include only batteries 580A and 580B, respectively, to maximize the duration of use of ear-level devices 210A and 210B, respectively, between battery replacements or recharges.

[0051] FIG. 9 is a flow chart illustrating an embodiment of a method for audio communication using system 100 or system 200. The method provides for private, simultaneous two-way communication between a person and a remote device such as a computer, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a cellular phone, a walkie talkie, or a language translator. In this embodiment. VOX is used for power management. A VOX circuit includes a power switch connecting a battery to the portions of the circuit of system 100 or system 200 that are voice activated. The VOX is "on" when the voice-activated portions of the circuit are activated, i.e., when the power switch remains on. It is "started" by turning on the power switch, and "stopped" by turning off the power switch.

[0052] Steps 910-918 illustrate the process of detecting a sound from an ear canal and transmitting it to a remote device. A microphone disposed in an ear canal detects an occluded sound within the ear canal at 910. If the occluded sound is detected at 911, the VOX of the system is started at 912 if it is not already on. The occluded sound is enhanced at 914 with a voice recognition system that improves the signal-to-noise ratio, where the signal is the voice of a speech, and the noise is any sound other than the voice of the speech. The occluded sound is then converted to an outgoing radio signal at 916. The outgoing radio signal representing the occluded sound is transmitted to the remote device at 918.

[0053] Steps 920-928 illustrate the process of detecting a sound sent from the remote device and transmitting it to the ear canal. A radio receiver detects an incoming radio signal representing a remote sound from the remote device at 920. If the incoming radio signal is detected at 921, the VOX of the system is started at 922 if it is not already on. The incoming radio signal is converted to a first incoming audio signal (the remote sound) at 924. The first incoming audio signal is enhanced at 926 with a voice recognition system that improves the signal-to-noise ratio, where the signal is the voice from the remote device, and the noise is any sound other than the voice.

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A speaker disposed in the ear canal transmits the first incoming audio signal representing the sound from the remote device to the ear canal at 928.

[0054] Steps 930-938 illustrate the process of detecting a sound from the environment and transmit it to the ear canal. A microphone outside the ear canal detects an ambient sound at 930. If the ambient sound is detected at 931, the VOX of the system is started at 932 if it is not already on. The ambient sound is converted to a second incoming audio signal at 934. The second incoming audio signal is enhanced at 936 with a voice recognition system that improves the signal-to-noise ratio, where the signal is any voice included in the ambient sound, and the noise is any sound other than the voice. A speaker disposed in the ear canal transmits the second incoming audio signal representing to the ear canal at 928.

[0055] If no signal (sound or radio signal) is detected at 911, 921, and 931, the VOX is stopped at 940. In other words, if no sound is to be processed, the communication system is inactivated except for the portions that must be active for sound detection at all times. In one embodiment, the VOX is stopped after a predetermined period of time to avoid frequent activation/deactivation during a conversation.

[0056] Systems 100 and 200 are each a full duplex system capable of performing steps 910-918, 920-928, and 930-938 are performed in parallel and simultaneously. In an embodiment in which system 100 performs the method, ear-level device 110 performs steps 910-918, 924-928, and 930-938. If a signal is detected at 911, 921, or 931, VOX 430 activates at least portions of device 110 performing steps 914-918, 924-928, or 934-938, respectively. If no signal is detected at 911, 921, or 931, VOX 430 deactivates at least the portions of device 110 performing steps 914-918, 924-928, or 934-938, respectively.

[0057] In an embodiment in which system 200 performs the method, ear-level device 210A performs steps 910-918, and ear-level device 210B performs steps 920-928 and 930-930. If a signal is detected at 911, transmitter VOX 530A activates at least portions of device 210A performing steps 914-918. If a signal is detected at 921 or 931, receiver VOX 530B activates at least portions of device 210B performing steps 924-928 or 934-938, respectively. If no signal is detected at 911, transmitter VOX 530A deactivates at least the portions of device 210A performing steps 914-918. If no signal is detected at 921 or 931, receiver VOX 530B deactivates at least the portions of device 210B performing steps 924-928 or 934-938, respectively.

[0058] FIG. 10 is a flow chart illustrating another embodiment of the method for audio communication using system 100. In this embodiment, in addition to power management, the VOX is also used for gating, i.e., blanking or attenuating, sounds. The VOX circuit includes a power switch connecting a battery to the portions of the circuit of system 100 that are voice activated and gating modules capable of blanking or attenuating the occluded sound, the remote sound, and the ambient sound. Examples of such gating modules include occluded sound gating module 441, remote sound gating module 451, and ambient sound gating module 421, designated for the occluded sound, the remote sound, and the ambient sound, respectively.

[0059] Steps 1010-1019 illustrate the process of detecting the occluded sound from the ear canal and transmitting it to the remote device. The microphone disposed in the ear canal detects the occluded sound within the ear canal at 1010. If the occluded sound is detected at 1011, the VOX of the system is started to power the voice-activated portions of the circuit of system 100 at 1012 if they are not already powered. The VOX determines whether to start gating the occluded sound on at 1013. In one embodiment, the occluded sound is gated on when its amplitude exceeds a predetermined threshold and when the effective gating coordination rule permits. Examples of gating coordination rules are described above with respect to FIG. 4B. If the occluded sound is gated on at 1013, it is processed at 1014 by following steps that are identical or similar to steps 914-916-918. The occluded sound is gated off at 1019 if it has been gated on but is no longer detected. In one embodiment, the occluded sound is gated off after it is not detected for a predetermined period.

[0060] Steps 1020-1028 illustrate the process of detecting the remote sound sent from the remote device and transmitting it to the ear canal. A radio receiver detects the incoming radio signal representing the remote sound from the remote device at 1020. If the remote sound is detected at 1021, the VOX of the system is started to power the voice-activated portions of the circuit of system 100 at 1022 if they are not already powered. The VOX determines whether to start gating the remote sound on at 1023. In one embodiment, the remote sound is gated on when its amplitude exceeds a predetermined threshold and when the effective gating coordination rule permits. In another embodiment, the remote sound is gated on when the incoming radio signal is detected and when the effective gating coordination rules permits. If the remote sound is gated on at 1023, it is processed at 1024 by following steps that are identical or similar to steps 924-926-928. The remote sound is gated off at 1029 if it has been gated on but is no longer detected. In one embodiment, the remote sound is gated off after it is not detected for a predetermined period.

[0061] Steps 1030-1038 illustrate the process of detecting the ambient sound and transmit it to the ear canal. A microphone outside the ear canal detects the ambient sound at 1030. If the ambient sound is detected at 1031, the VOX of the system is started to power the voice-activated portions of the circuit of system 100 at 1032 if they are not already powered. The VOX determines whether to start gating the ambient sound on at 1033. In one embodiment, the ambient sound is gated on when its amplitude exceeds a predetermined threshold and when the effective gating coordination rule permits. If the

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ambient sound is gated on at 1033, it is processed at 1034 by following steps that are identical or similar to steps 934-936-938. The ambient sound is gated off at 1039 if it has been gated on but is no longer detected. In one embodiment, the ambient sound is gated off after it is not detected for a predetermined period.

[0062] If no signal (sound or radio signal) is detected at 1011,1021, and 1031, the VOX is stopped at 1040. In other words, if no sound is to be processed, the communication system is inactivated except for the portions that must be active for sound detection at all times, In one embodiment, the VOX is stopped after a predetermined period of time to avoid Sequent activation/deactivation during a conversation.

[0063] It is to be understood that the above detailed description is intended to be illustrative, and not restrictive. Other embodiments will be apparent to those of skill in the art upon reading and understanding the above description. For example, two ear-level devices 110, or a pair of devices each being similar to ear-level device 110, can be used to deliver a stereo sound. The scope of the invention should, therefore, be determined with reference to the appended claims.

Claims

1. A system adapted for use in at least one of a first ear (101A) having a first ear canal (303) and a second ear (101B) having a second ear canal (303) comprising:

   a first ear-level device (110, 210A) configured to be one of an in-the-ear (ITE) device and a behind-the-ear (BTE) device, the first ear-level device including:

   a first microphone (440) adapted for use in one of the first ear canal and the second ear canal, and adapted to receive an occluded sound (305) within the one of the first ear canal (303) and the second ear canal (303); and
   a wireless receiver, connected to a first processor (460), to receive a first wireless signal representing a remote sound;

   wherein the first processor (460) is connected to the first microphone (440) and is adapted to process the occluded sound (305) and the remote sound; the first ear level device further including:

   a speaker adapted for use in the one of the first ear canal (303) and the second ear canal (303) and adapted to transmit the processed remote sound to the one of the first ear canal (303) and the second ear canal (303);
   a wireless transmitter, connected to the first processor (460) and adapted to receive the processed occluded sound from the first processor (460) and transmit a second wireless signal representing the occluded sound;
   a first earmold housing at least the first microphone (440) and the speaker (470), at least a portion of the first earmold configured for placement in the one of the first ear canal (303) and the second ear canal (303); and
   a first voice operated exchange (VOX) circuit (430) connected to the first processor (460);
   the first VOX circuit (430) including:

   an occluded sound gating module (441) adapted to gate the occluded sound on, and to gate the remote sound off, when the occluded sound is detected while the remote sound is not detected; and
   a remote sound gating module (451) adapted to gate the remote sound on, and to gate the occluded sound off, when the incoming remote sound is detected while the occluded sound is not detected.

2. A system according to claim 1, wherein the first earmold houses the first microphone (440), the first processor (460) and the wireless transmitter, and wherein the first earmold is configured for use as the ITE device (310A).

3. A system according to claim 1, wherein the first ear level device (110,210A) comprises an ITE module including the first microphone (440) and a BTE module attached to the ITE module, the BTE module including the first processor and the wireless transmitter.

4. A system according to claim 1, wherein the first microphone (440) and the speaker (470) are implemented as one common device receiving the occluded sound and transmitting the processed remote sound.

5. A system according to claim 4, further comprising a second microphone (420) connected to the first processor (460), the second microphone (420) adapted to receive an ambient sound from outside the one of the first ear canal (303) and the second ear canal (303), and wherein:

   the first processor (460) further processes the ambient sound; and
   the speaker (470) is configured to transmit the processed remote and ambient sounds to the one of the first ear canal (303) and the second ear canal (303).

6. A system according to claim 5, wherein the first VOX

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circuit (430) comprises an ambient sound gating module (421), coupled to the first microphone (420), to blank or substantially attenuate the ambient sound.

7. A system according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the first processor (460) comprises a speech recognition module.

8. A system according to any of claims 4 - 7, wherein the first earmold houses the first microphone (440), the first processor (460), the wireless transmitter, the wireless receiver, and the speaker (470), and wherein the first earmold is configured for use as the ITE device.

9. A system according to claim 8, wherein the first earmold is configured for use as an in-the-canal (ITC) device (310B).

10. A system according to claim 9, wherein the first earmold is configured for use as a completely-in-the-canal (CIC) device (310C).

11. A system according to any of claims 4 - 7, wherein the first ear level device (110,210A) comprises an ITE module including the first microphone (440) and the speaker (470) and a BTE module attached to the ITE module and including the second microphone (420), the first processor (460), the wireless transmitter and the wireless receiver.

12. A system according to claim 11, wherein the BTE module comprises the first voice operated exchange (VOX) circuit (430).

13. A system according to claim 11, wherein the BTE module comprises a rechargeable battery (480).

14. A system according to any of claims 7 - 13, further comprising a remote device (190, 290) communicatively coupled to the wireless transmitter and the wireless receiver via a telemetry link (195, 295) providing for simultaneous bidirectional communication between the first ear-level device (110, 210A) and the remote device (190, 290).

15. A system according to claim 14, wherein the remote device (190, 290) comprises at least one of a computer, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a cellular phone, a walkie talkie, or a language translator.

16. A system according to claim 1, wherein the first microphone (440) is adapted for use in the first ear canal (303) and receives the occluded sound within the first ear canal (303), wherein the at least the portion of the first earmold is configured for placement in the first ear canal (303), and further comprising a second ear-level device (210B) including:

a wireless receiver to receive a first wireless signal representing a remote sound;
a second processor (260), connected to the wireless receiver, to convert the first wireless signal to the remote sound;
a speaker (470) connected to the second processor, the speaker adapted for use in the second ear canal (303) to transmit the remote sound to the second ear canal (303); and
a second earmold housing at least the speaker, at least a portion of the second earmold configured for placement in the second ear canal (303).

17. A system according to claim 16, wherein the second ear-level device (210B) further comprises a second microphone (420) connected to the second processor (460), the second microphone (420) adapted to receive an ambient sound from outside the second ear canal (303), and wherein:

the second processor (460) further processes the ambient sound; and
the speaker (470) is configured to transmit the remote sound and the processed ambient sound to the second ear canal (303).

18. A system according to any of claims 16 and 17, wherein the first ear-level device (110,210A) comprises the first voice operated exchange (VOX) circuit (430) connected to the first processor (460), and the second ear-level device (210B) further comprises a second VOX circuit (430) connected to the second processor.

19. A system according to any of claims 16 - 18, wherein the first processor and the second processor each comprise a speech recognition module.

20. A system according to any of claims 16 - 19, wherein the first and second ear-level devices are each the BTE device.

21. A system according to any of claims 16 - 19, wherein the first and second ear-level devices are each the ITE device.

22. A system according to claim 21, wherein the first and second ear-level devices are each an in-the-canal (ITC) device (310B).

23. A system according to claim 22, wherein the first and second ear-level devices are each a completely-in-the-canal (CIC) device (310C).

24. A system according to any of claims 16 - 23, further

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comprising a remote device (190,290) communicatively coupled to the first and second ear-level devices.

25. A system according to claim 24, wherein the remote device (190, 290) comprises at least one of a computer, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a cellular phone, a walkie talkie, or a language translator.

26. A method, comprising:

detecting an occluded sound using a first microphone adapted for use in an ear canal (303);
detecting an incoming radio signal representing a remote sound from a remote device (190, 290);
starting a voice operated exchange (VOX) housed within an ear-level communication device when at least one of the occluded sound and the incoming radio signal is detected if the VOX is not already on, the ear level communication device being one of an in-the-ear (ITE) device and a behind-the-ear (BTE) device;
gating the occluded sound on, and gating the remote sound off, when the occluded sound is detected while the incoming radio signal is not detected; and
gating the remote sound on, and gating the occluded sound off, when the incoming radio signal is detected while the occluded sound is not detected.

27. A method according to claim 26, wherein detecting the occluded sound comprises comparing an amplitude of the occluded sound to an occluded sound threshold, wherein the occluded sound is detected when the amplitude of the occluded sound exceeds the occluded sound threshold.

28. A method according to any of claims 26 and 27, wherein detecting the incoming radio signal comprises comparing an amplitude of the remote sound to a remote sound threshold, wherein the incoming radio signal is detected when the amplitude of the remote sound exceeds the remote sound threshold.

29. A method according to any of claims 26 - 28, further comprising detecting an ambient sound using a second microphone, and wherein starting the VOX comprises starting the VOX when at least one of the occluded sound, the incoming radio signal, and the ambient sound is detected if the VOX is not already on.

30. A method according to claim 29, further comprising gating the occluded sound off, gating the remote sound on, and gating the ambient sound off, when the incoming radio signal is detected while the occluded sound is not detected.

31. A method according to claim 29, further comprising gating the occluded sound off, gating the remote sound on, and gating the ambient sound on, when the incoming radio signal is detected while the occluded sound is not detected.

32. A method according to claim 29, further comprising gating the occluded sound on, gating the remote sound off, and gating the ambient sound off, when the occluded sound is detected while the incoming radio signal is not detected.

Patentansprüche

1. System, das zur Verwendung in einem ersten Ohr (101A) mit einem ersten Gehörgang (303) und/oder einem zweiten Ohr (101B) mit einem zweiten Gehörgang (303) eingerichtet ist, mit:

einer ersten ohrebenen- bzw. ohrseitigen Vorrichtung (110, 210A), die dafür eingerichtet ist, eine In-Ohr-Vorrichtung (ITE) oder eine Hinter-Ohr-Vorrichtung (BTE) zu sein, wobei die erste ohrseitige Vorrichtung beinhaltet:

ein erstes Mikrofon (440), das zur Verwendung in dem ersten Gehörgang oder dem zweiten Gehörgang eingerichtet ist, und das dafür eingerichtet ist, einen verdeckten Ton (305) in jeweils dem ersten Gehörgang (303) oder dem zweiten Gehörgang (303) zu empfangen; und
einen Drahtlosempfänger, der mit einem ersten Prozessor (460) verbunden ist, um ein erstes Drahtlossignal zu empfangen, welches einen Fernton darstellt;

wobei der erste Prozessor (460) mit dem ersten Mikrofon (440) verbunden und dafür eingerichtet ist, den verdeckten Ton (305) und den Fernton zu verarbeiten;
wobei die erste ohrseitige Vorrichtung ferner beinhaltet:

einen Lautsprecher, der zur Verwendung in dem jeweiligen ersten Gehörgang (303) oder dem zweiten Gehörgang (303) eingerichtet ist, und der dafür eingerichtet ist, den verarbeiteten Fernton an den jeweiligen ersten Gehörgang (303) oder den zweiten Gehörgang (303) zu übertragen;
einen Drahtlossender, der mit dem ersten Prozessor (460) verbunden und dafür eingerichtet ist, den verarbeiteten verdeckten Ton von dem ersten Prozessor (460) zu empfangen und ein zweites Drahtlossignal, das den verdeckten Ton darstellt, zu senden;

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ein erstes Ohrformgehäuse wenigstens bei dem ersten Mikrofon (440) und dem Lautsprecher (470), wobei wenigstens ein Teil der ersten Ohrform dafür eingerichtet ist, in dem ersten Gehörgang (303) oder dem zweiten Gehörgang (303) platziert zu werden; und
eine erste stimmbetriebene Austauschschaltung (VOX) (430), die mit dem ersten Prozessor (460) verbunden ist;

wobei die erste VOX-Schaltung (430) beinhaltet:

ein Ausblendmodul (441) für einen verdeckten Ton, das dafür eingerichtet ist, den verdeckten Ton einzublenden und den Fernton auszublenden, wenn der verdeckte Ton bestimmt wird, während der Fernton nicht bestimmt wird; und
ein Ausblendmodul (441) für einen Fernton, das dafür eingerichtet ist, den Fernton einzublenden und den verdeckten Ton auszublenden, wenn der eingehende Fernton bestimmt wird, während der verdeckte Ton nicht bestimmt wird.

2. System nach Anspruch 1, bei dem eine erste Ohrform das erste Mikrofon (440), den ersten Prozessor (460) und den Drahtlossender einschließt, und bei dem die erste Ohrform zur Verwendung als ITE-Vorrichtung (310) eingerichtet ist.

3. System nach Anspruch 1, bei dem die erste ohrseitige Vorrichtung (110, 210A) ein ITE-Modul, das das erste Mikrofon (440) beinhaltet, und ein zweites BTE-Modul, das an das ITE-Modul angebracht ist, beinhaltet, wobei das ITE-Modul den ersten Prozessor und den Drahtlossender beinhaltet.

4. System nach Anspruch 1, bei dem das erste Mikrofon (440) und der Lautsprecher (470) als eine gemeinsame Vorrichtung implementiert sind, die den verdeckten Ton empfängt und den verarbeiteten Fernton sendet.

5. System nach Anspruch 4, ferner mit einem zweiten Mikrofon (420), das mit dem ersten Prozessor (460) verbunden ist, wobei das zweite Mikrofon (420) dafür eingerichtet ist, einen ümgebungston von außerhalb das jeweiligen ersten Gehörgangs (303) oder des zweiten Gehörgangs (303) zu empfangen, und wobei:

der erste Prozessor (460) den Umgebungston ferner bzw. weiterverarbeitet; und
der Lautsprecher (470) dafür eingerichtet ist, den verarbeiteten Fern- und Umgebungston an den jeweiligen ersten Gehörgang (303) und zweiten Gehörgang (303) zu senden.

6. System nach Anspruch 5, bei dem die erste VOX-Schaltung (430) ein Umgebungstonausblendmodul (421) aufweist, das mit dem ersten Mikrofon (420) verbunden ist, um den Umgebungston auf Null zu setzen oder ihn wesentlich zu dämpfen.

7. System nach einem der vorstehenden Ansprüche, bei dem der erste Prozessor (460) ein Spracherkennungsmodul aufweist.

8. System nach einem der Ansprüche 4 bis 7, bei dem die erste Ohrform, das erste Mikrofon (440), den ersten Prozessor (460), den Drahtlossender, den Drahtlosempfänger und den Lautsprecher (470) einschließt, und bei dem die erste Ohrform dafür eingerichtet ist, als die ITE-Vorrichtung verwendet zu werden.

9. System nach Anspruch 8, bei dem die erste Ohrform zur Verwendung als In-Kanal-Vorrichtung (ITC) (310B) verwendet zu werden.

10. System nach Anspruch 9, bei dem die erste Ohrform zur Verwendung als vollständig-In-Kanal-Vorrichtung (CIC) (310C) verwendet zu werden.

11. System nach einem der Ansprüche 4 bis 7, bei dem die erste ohrseitige Vorrichtung (110, 210A) ein ITE-Modul aufweist, das das erste Mikrofon (440) und den Lautsprecher (470) und ein BTE-Modul, das an das ITE-Modul angebracht ist, und das das zweite Mikrofon (420), den ersten Prozessor (460), den drahtlos Sender und den drahtlos Empfänger beinhaltet, beinhaltet.

12. System nach Anspruch 11, bei dem das BTE-Modul die erste sprachbetriebene Austauschschaltung (VOX) (340) aufweist.

13. System nach Anspruch 11, bei dem das BTE-Modul eine widerauflabdare Batterie (480) aufweist.

14. System nach einem der Ansprüche 7 bis 13, das ferner eine entfernte Vorrichtung (190, 290) aufweist, die mit dem Drahtlossender und dem Drahtlosempfänger über eine Telemetrieverbindung (195, 295) in Kommunikationsverbindung steht, um eine gleichzeitige bi-direktionale Kommunikation zwischen der ersten ohrseitigen Vorrichtung (110, 210A) und der entfernten Vorrichtung (190, 290) bereitzustellen.

15. System nach Anspruch 14, bei dem die entfernte Vorrichtung (190, 290) wenigstens einen Computer, einen Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), ein Mobiltelefon, ein Walkie Talkie und/oder einen Sprachübersetzer aufweist.

16. System nach Anspruch 1, bei dem das erste Mikro-

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fon (440) dafür eingerichtet ist, in dem ersten Gehörgang (303) verwendet zu werden, und dieses den verdeckten Ton in dem ersten Gehörgang (303) empfängt, wobei der wenigstens eine Abschnitt der ersten Ohrform zur Anordnung in dem ersten Gehörgang (303) eingerichtet ist, und ferner mit einer zweiten ohrseitigen Vorrichtung (210B), die beinhaltet:

einen Drahtlosempfänger, um ein erstes Drahtlossignal zu empfangen, das einen Fernton darstellt;
einen zweiten Prozessor (260), der mit dem Drahtlosempfänger verbunden ist, um das erste Drahtlossignal in den Fernton umzuwandeln;
einen Lautsprecher (470), der mit dem zweiten Prozessor verbunden ist, wobei der Lautsprecher zur Verwendung in dem zweiten Gehörgang (303) eingerichtet ist, um den Fernton an den zweiten Gehörgang (303) zu übertragen; und
einer zweiten Ohrform, die wenigstens den Lautsprecher einschließt, wobei wenigstens ein Teil der zweiten Ohrform zur Anordnung in dem zweiten Gehörgang (303) eingerichtet ist.

17. System nach Anspruch 16, bei dem die zweite ohrseitige Vorrichtung (210B) ferner ein zweites Mikrofon (420) aufweist, das mit dem zweiten Prozessor (460) verbunden ist, wobei das zweite Mikrofon (420) dafür eingerichtet ist, einen Umgebungston von außerhalb des zweiten Gehörgangs (303) zu empfangen, und bei dem:

der zweite Prozessor (460) den Umgebungston weiterverarbeitet; und
der Lautsprecher (470) dafür eingerichtet ist, den Fernton und den verarbeiteten Umgebungston an den zweiten Gehörgang (303) zu senden.

18. System nach einem der Ansprüche 16 oder 17, bei dem die erste ohrseitige Vorrichtung (110, 210A) die erste sprachbetriebene Austauschschaltung (VOX) (430) mit dem ersten Prozessor (460) verbunden aufweist, und wobei die zweite ohrseitige Vorrichtung (210B) ferner eine zweite VOX-Schaltung (430) aufweist, die mit dem zweiten Prozessor verbunden ist.

19. System nach einem der Ansprüche 16 bis 18, bei dem der erste Prozessor und der zweite Prozessor jeweils ein Spracherkennungsmodul aufweisen.

20. System nach einem der Anspruch 16 bis 19, bei dem die ersten und zweiten ohrseitigen Vorrichtungen jeweils die BTE-vorrichtungen darstellen.

21. System nach einem der Ansprüche 16 bis 19, bei dem die ersten und zweiten ohrseitigen Vorrichtungen jeweils die ITE-Vorrichtungen darstellen.

22. System nach Anspruch 21, bei dem die ersten und zweiten ohrseitigen Vorrichtungen jeweils eine In-Gehörgangs-Vorrichtung (ITC) (310B) darstellen.

23. System nach Anspruch 22, bei dem die ersten und zweiten ohrseitigen Vorrichtungen jeweils Vollständig-In-Gehörgangs-Vorrichtungen (CIC) (310C) darstellen.

24. System nach einem der Ansprüche 16 bis 23, das ferner eine entfernte Vorrichtung (190, 290) aufweist, die kommunikativ mit den ersten und zweiten ohrseitigen Vorrichtungen verbunden ist.

25. System nach Anspruch 24, bei dem die entfernte Vorrichtung (190, 290) wenigstens einen Computer, einen Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), ein Mobiltelefon, ein Walkie Talkie und/oder einen Sprachübersetzer aufweist.

26. Verfahren, das beinhaltet:

Bestimmen eines verdeckten Tons unter Verwendung eines ersten Mikrofons, das zur Verwendung in einem Gehörgang (303) eingerichtet ist;
Bestimmen eines eingehenden Funksignals, das einen Fernton von einer entfernten Vorrichtung (190, 290) darstellt;
Starten einer sprachbetriebenen Austauscheinrichtung (VOX), die in einer ohrseitigen Kommunikationsvorrichtung eingeschlossen ist, wenn der verdeckte Ton und/oder das eingehende Funksignal bestimmt wird, wenn die VOX nicht bereits an ist, wobei die ohrseitige Kommunikationsvorrichtung eine In-Ohr-Vorrichtung (ITE) oder eine Hinter-Ohr-Vorrichtung (BTE) darstellt;
Einblenden des verdeckten Tons und Ausblenden des Ferntons, wenn der verdeckte Ton bestimmt wird, während das eingehende Funksignal nicht bestimmt wird; und
Einblenden des Ferntons und Ausblenden des verdeckten Tons, wenn das eingehende Funksignal bestimmt wird, während der verdeckte Ton nicht bestimmt wird.

27. Verfahren nach Anspruch 26, bei dem das Bestimmen des verdeckten Tons, das Vergleichen einer Amplitude des verdeckten Tons mit einem Schwellwert für einen verdeckten Ton beinhaltet, wobei der verdeckte Ton bestimmt wird, wenn die Amplitude des verdeckten Tones den Schwellwert für den verdeckten Ton überschreitet.

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28. Verfahren nach einem der Ansprüche 26 oder 27, bei dem das Bestimmen des eingehenden Funksignals das Vergleichen einer Amplitude des Ferntons mit einem Ferntonschwellwert beinhaltet, wobei das eingehende Funksignal bestimmt wird, wenn die Amplitude des Ferntons den Ferntonschwellwert überschreitet.

29. Verfahren nach einem der Ansprüche 26 bis 28, das ferner das Bestimmen eines Umgebungstons unter Verwendung eines zweiten Mikrofons beinhaltet, und wobei das Starten der VOX das Starten der VOX beinhaltet, wenn wenigstens der verdeckte Ton, das eingehende Funksignal und/oder der Umgebungston bestimmt wird, während die VOX noch nicht bereits an ist.

30. Verfahren nach Anspruch 29, das ferner das Ausblenden des verdeckten Tons, das Einblenden des Ferntons und das Ausblenden des Umgebungstons beinhaltet, wenn das eingehende Funksignal bestimmt wird, während der verdeckte Ton nicht bestimmt wird.

31. Verfahren nach Anspruch 29, das ferner das Ausblenden des verdeckten Tons, das Einblenden des Ferntons und das Einblenden des Umgebungstons beinhaltet, wenn das eingehende Funksignal bestimmt wird, während der verdeckte Ton nicht bestimmt wird.

32. Verfahren nach Anspruch 29, das ferner das Einblenden des verdeckten Tones, das Ausblenden des Ferntons und das Ausblenden des Umgebungstons beinhaltet, wenn der verdeckte Ton bestimmt wird, während das eingehende Funksignal nicht bestimmt wird.

Revendications

1. Un système adapté en vue d'une utilisation dans au moins une parmi une première oreille (101A) ayant un premier conduit auditif (303) et une seconde oreille (101B) ayant un second conduit auditif (303), comprenant:

   un premier dispositif d'oreille (110, 210A) configuré pour être un parmi un dispositif placé à l'intérieur de l'oreille (ITE) et un dispositif contour d'oreille (BTE), le premier dispositif d'oreille comprenant :

   un premier microphone (440) adapté en vue d'une utilisation dans un parmi le premier conduit auditif et le second conduit auditif, et adapté pour recevoir un son occlus (305) à l'intérieur de celui parmi le premier conduit auditif (303) et le second conduit auditif (303) ; et
   un récepteur sans fil, connecté à un premier processeur (460), pour recevoir un premier signal sans fil représentant un son distant ;

   dans lequel le premier processeur (460) est connecté au premier microphone (440) et est adapté pour traiter le son occlus (305) et le son distant; le premier dispositif d'oreille comprenant en outre :

   un haut-parleur adapté en vue d'une utilisation dans celui parmi le premier conduit auditif (303) et le second conduit auditif (303) et adapté pour transmettre le son distant traité à celui parmi le premier conduit auditif (303) et le second conduit auditif (303) ; un émetteur sans fil, connecté au premier processeur (460) et adapté pour recevoir le son occlus traité du premier processeur (460) et émettre un second signal sans fil représentant le son occlus ;
   un premier embout auriculaire logeant au moins le premier microphone (440) et le haut-parleur (470), au moins une portion du premier embout auriculaire étant configurée en vue d'être placée dans celui parmi le premier conduit auditif (303) et le second conduit auditif (303) ; et
   un premier circuit d'échange à commande vocale (VOX) (430) connecté au premier processeur (460) ;
   le premier circuit VOX (430) comprenant :

   un module de contrôle de son occlus (441) adapté pour laisser passer le son occlus et pour bloquer le son distant lorsque le son occlus est détecté alors que le son distant n'est pas détecté ; et
   un module de contrôle de son distant (451) adapté pour laisser passer le son distant et pour bloquer le son occlus lorsque le son distant entrant est détecté alors que le son occlus n'est pas détecté.

2. Système selon la revendication 1, dans lequel le premier embout auriculaire loge le premier microphone (440), le premier processeur et l'émetteur sans fil, et dans lequel le premier embout auriculaire est configuré pour être utilisé comme dispositif ITE (310 A).

3. Système selon la revendications 1, dans lequel le premier dispositif d'oreille (110, 210A) comprend un module ITE comprenant le premier microphone (440) et un module BTE fixé au module ITE, le module BTE comprenant le premier processeur et l'émetteur sans fil.

4. Système selon la revendication 1, dans lequel le premier microphone (440) et le haut-parleur (470) sont

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mis en oeuvre sous la forme d'un dispositif commun recevant le son occlus et émettant le son distant traité.

5. Système selon la revendication 4, comprenant en outre un second microphone (420) connecté au premier processeur (460), le second microphone (420) étant adapté pour recevoir un son ambiant de l'extérieur de celui parmi le premier conduit auditif (303) et le second conduit auditif (303), et dans lequel :

le premier processeur (460) traite en outre le son ambiant ; et
le haut-parleur (470) est configuré pour transmettre les sons distant et ambiant traités à celui parmi le premier conduit auditif (303) et le second conduit auditif (303).

6. Système selon la revendication 5, dans lequel le premier circuit VOX (430) comprend un module de contrôle de son ambiant (421), couplé au premier microphone (420), pour occulter ou atténuer sensiblement le son ambiant.

7. Système selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, dans lequel le premier processeur (460) comprend un module de reconnaissance vocale.

8. Système selon l'une quelconque des revendications 4 à 7, dans lequel le premier embout auriculaire loge le premier microphone (440), le premier processeur (460), l'émetteur sans fil, le récepteur sans fil, et le haut-parleur (470), et dans lequel le premier embout auriculaire est configuré pour être utilisé comme dispositif ITE.

9. Système selon la revendication 8, dans lequel le premier embout auriculaire est configuré pour être utilisé comme dispositif intra-conduit (ITC) (310B).

10. Système selon la revendication 9, dans lequel le premier embout auriculaire est configuré pour être utilisé comme dispositif complètement intra-conduit (CIC) (310C).

11. Système selon l'une quelconque des revendications 4 à 7, dans lequel le premier dispositif d'oreille (110, 210A) comprend un module ITE comprenant le premier microphone (440) et le haut-parleur (470) et un module BTE fixé au module ITE et comprenant le second microphone (420), le premier processeur (460), l'émetteur sans fil et le récepteur sans fil.

12. Système selon la revendication 11, dans lequel le module BTE comprend le premier circuit d'échange à commande vocale (VOX) (430).

13. Système selon la revendication 11, dans lequel le module BTE comprend une batterie rechargeable (480).

14. Système selon l'une quelconque des revendications 7 à 13, comprenant en outre un dispositif distant (190, 290) couplé en communication à l'émetteur sans fil et au récepteur sans fil via une liaison de télémesure (195, 295) assurant une communication bidirectionnelle simultanée entre le premier dispositif d'oreille (110, 210A) et le dispositif distant (190, 290).

15. Système selon la revendication 14, dans lequel le dispositif distant (190, 290) comprend au moins un parmi un ordinateur, un assistant numérique personnel (PDA), un téléphone cellulaire, un talkie-walkie, ou un traducteur de langue.

16. Système selon la revendication 1, dans lequel le premier microphone (440) est adapté en vue d'une utilisation dans le premier conduit auditif (303) et reçoit le son occlus à l'intérieur du premier conduit auditif (303), ans lequel au moins la portion du premier embout auriculaire est configurée en vue d'être placée dans le premier conduit auditif (303), et comprenant en outre un second dispositif d'oreille (210B) comprenant :

un récepteur sans fil pour recevoir un premier signal sans fil représentant un son distant ;
un second processeur (260), connecté au récepteur sans fil, pour convertir le premier signal sans fil dans le son distant ;
un haut-parleur (470) connecté au second processeur, le haut-parleur étant adapté en vue d'une utilisation dans le second conduit auditif (303) pour transmettre le son distant au second conduit auditif (303) ; et
un second embout auriculaire logeant au moins le haut-parleur, au moins une portion du second embout auriculaire étant configurée en vue d'être placée dans le second conduit auditif (303).

17. Système selon la revendication 16, dans lequel le second dispositif d'oreille (210B) comprend en outre un second microphone (420) connecté au second processeur (460), le second microphone (420) étant adapté pour recevoir un son ambiant de l'extérieur du second conduit auditif (303), et dans lequel :

le second processeur (460) traite en outre le son ambiant ; et le haut-parleur (470) est configuré pour transmettre le son distant et le son ambiant traité au second conduit auditif (303).

18. Système selon l'une quelconque des revendications 16 et 17, dans lequel le premier dispositif d'oreille

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(110, 210) comprend le premier circuit d'échange à commande vocale (VOX) (430) connecté au premier processeur (460), et le second dispositif d'oreille (210B) comprend en outre un second circuit VOX (430) connecté au second processeur.

19. Système selon l'une quelconque des revendications 16 à 18, dans lequel le premier processeur et le second processeur comprennent chacun un module de reconnaissance vocale.

20. Système selon l'une quelconque des revendications 16 à 19, dans lequel les premier et second dispositifs d'oreille sont respectivement le dispositif BTE.

21. Système selon l'une quelconque des revendications 16 à 19, dans lequel les premier et second dispositifs d'oreille sont respectivement le dispositif ITE.

22. Système selon la revendication dans lequel les premier et second dispositifs d'oreille sont respectivement un dispositif intra-conduit (ITC) (310B).

23. Système selon la revendication 22, dans lequel les premier et second dispositifs d'oreille sont respectivement un dispositif complètement intra-conduit (CIC) (310C).

24. Système selon l'une quelconque des revendications 16 à 23, comprenant en outre un dispositif distant (190, 290) couplé en communication aux premier et second dispositifs d'oreille.

25. Système selon la revendication 24, dans lequel le dispositif distant (190, 290) comprend au moins un parmi un ordinateur, un assistant numérique personnel (PDA), un téléphone cellulaire, un talkie walkie, ou un traducteur de langue.

26. Un procédé comprenant les étapes consistant à :

détecter un son occlus au moyen d'un premier microphone adapté en vue d'une utilisation dans un conduit auditif (303) ;
détecter un signal radio entrant représentant un son distant provenant d'un dispositif distant (190, 290) ;
lancer un échange à commande vocale (VOX) logé à l'intérieur d'un dispositif de communication d'oreille lorsqu'au moins un parmi le son occlus et le signal radio entrant est détecté si le VOX n'est pas déjà en marche, le dispositif de communication d'oreille étant un parmi un dispositif placé à l'intérieur de l'oreille (ITE) et un dispositif contour d'oreille (BTE) ;
laisser passer le son occlus, et bloquer le son distant lorsque le son distant occlus est détecté alors que le signal radio entrant n'est pas détecté ; et
laisser passer le son distant, et bloquer le son occlus lorsque le signal radio entrant est détecté alors que le son occlus n'est pas détecté.

27. Procédé selon la revendication 26, dans lequel la détection du son occlus comprend la comparaison d'une amplitude du son occlus avec un seuil de son occlus, dans lequel le son occlus est détecté lorsque l'amplitude du son occlus dépasse le seuil du son occlus.

28. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications 26 et 27, dans lequel la détection du signal radio entrant comprend la comparaison d'une amplitude du son distant avec un seuil de son distant, dans lequel le signal radio entrant est détecté lorsque l'amplitude du son distant dépasse le seuil du son distant.

29. Procédé selon l'une quelconque des revendications 26 à 28, comprenant en outre la détection d'un son ambiant au moyen d'un second microphone, et dans lequel le lancement du VOX comprend le lancement du VOX lorsqu'au moins un parmi le son occlus, le signal radio entrant et le son ambiant est détecté si le VOX n'est pas déjà en marche.

30. Procédé selon la revendications 29, comprenant en outre l'étape consistant à bloquer le son occlus, laisser passer le son distant et bloquer le son ambiant lorsque le signal radio entrant est détecté alors que le son occlus n'est pas détecté.

31. Procédé selon la revendication 29, comprenant en outre l'étape consistant à bloquer le son occlus, laisser passer le son distant et laisser passer le son ambiant lorsque le signal radio entrant est détecté alors que le son occlus n'est pas détecté.

32. Procédé selon la revendication 29, comprenant en outre l'étape consistant à laisser passer le son occlus, bloquer le son distant, et bloquer le son ambiant lorsque le son occlus est détecté alors que le signal radio entrant n'est pas détecté.

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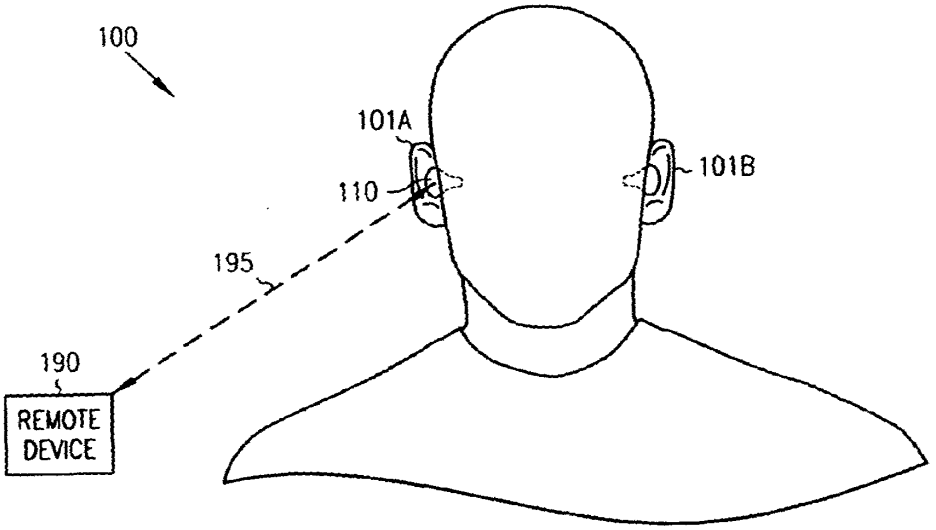

100
101A
101B
110
195
190
REMOTE DEVICE

FIG. 1

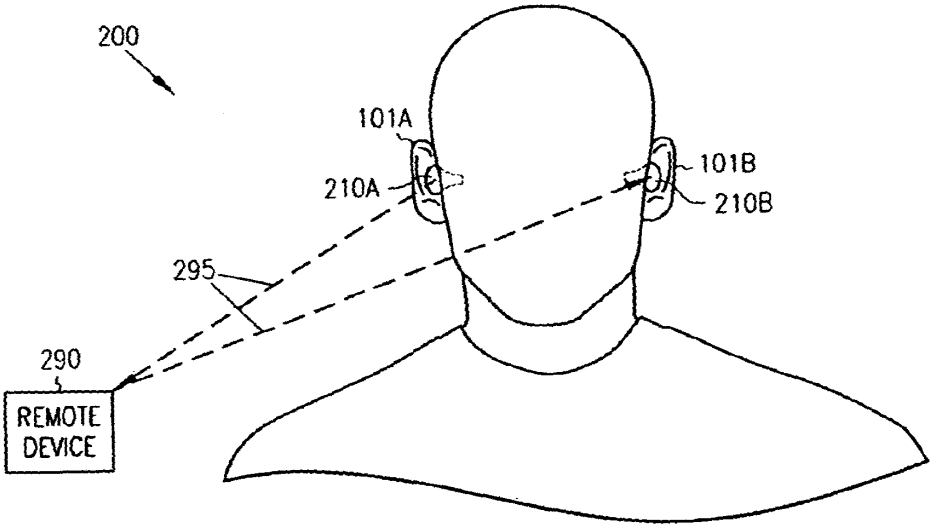

200
101A
101B
210A
210B
295
290
REMOTE DEVICE

FIG. 2

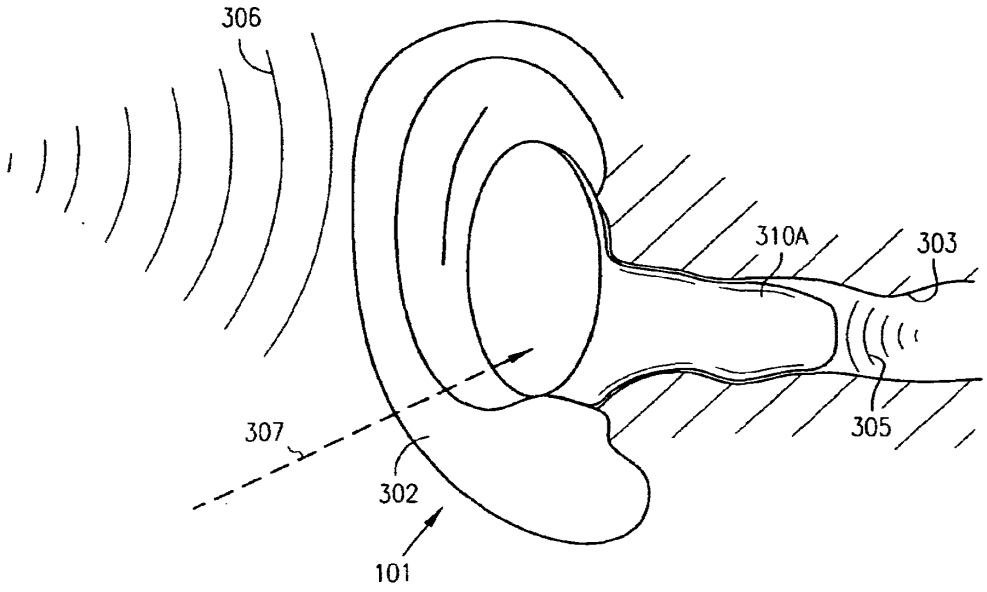


FIG. 3A

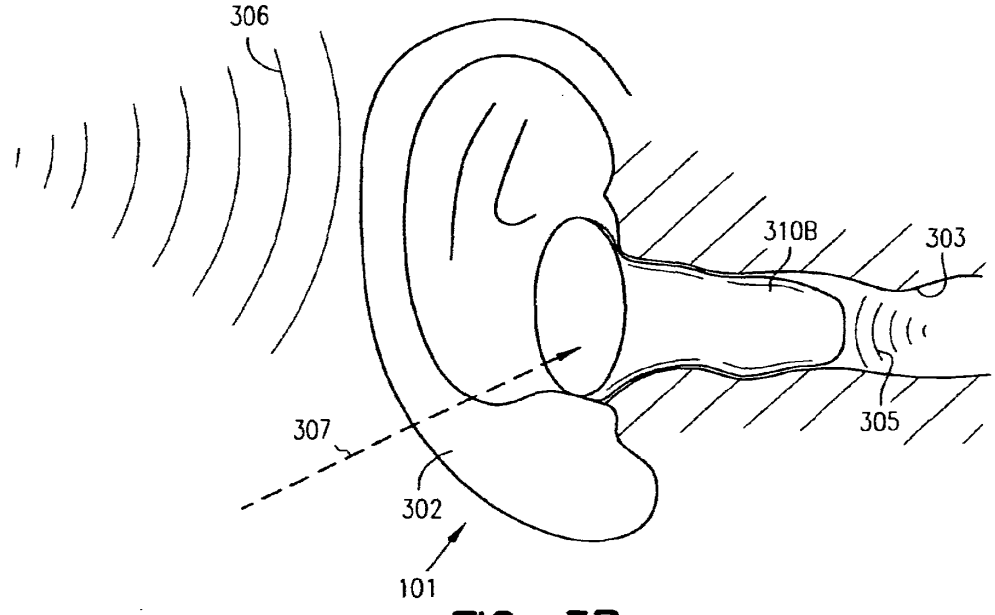


FIG. 3B

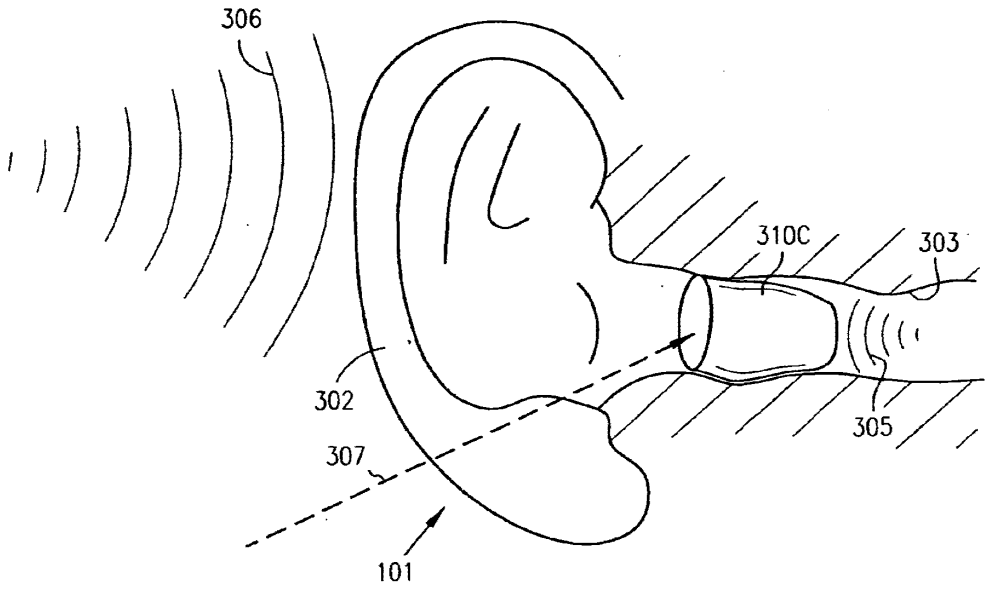


FIG. 3C

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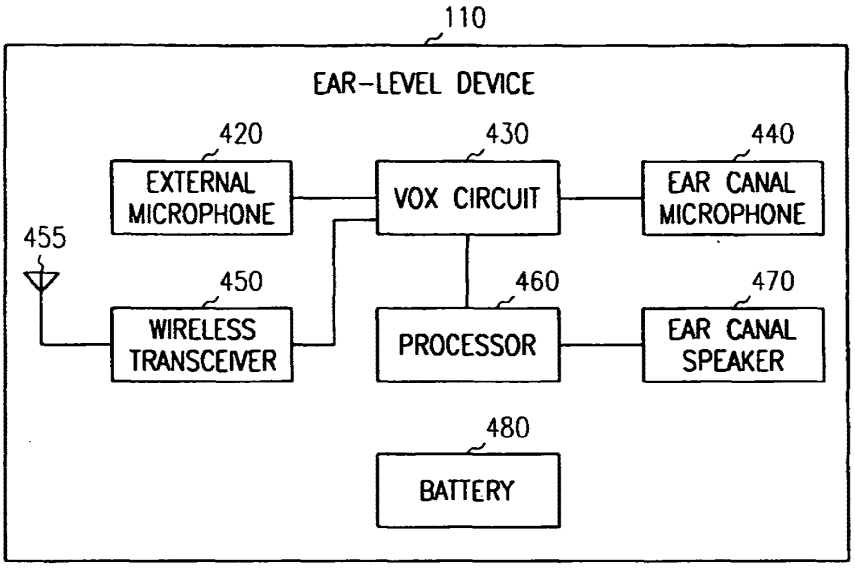


FIG. 4A

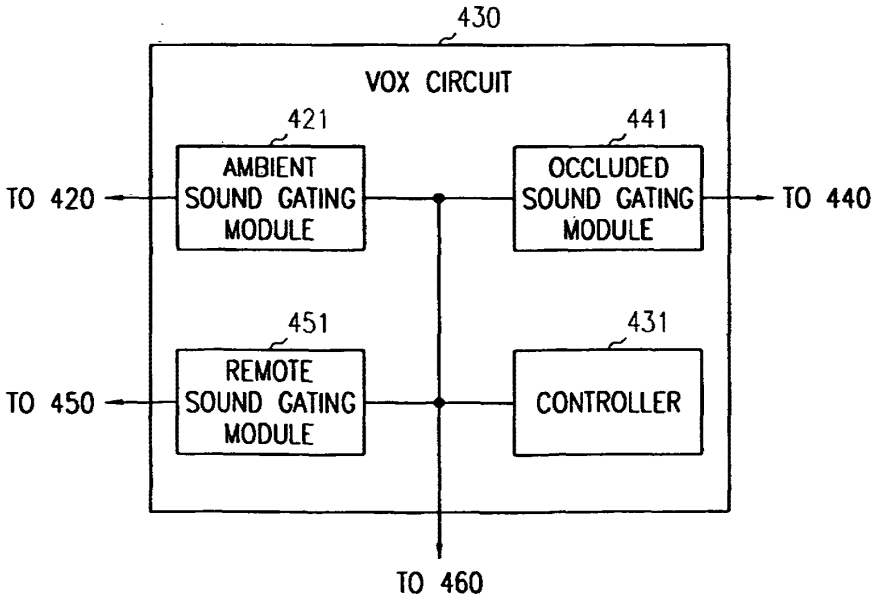


FIG. 4B

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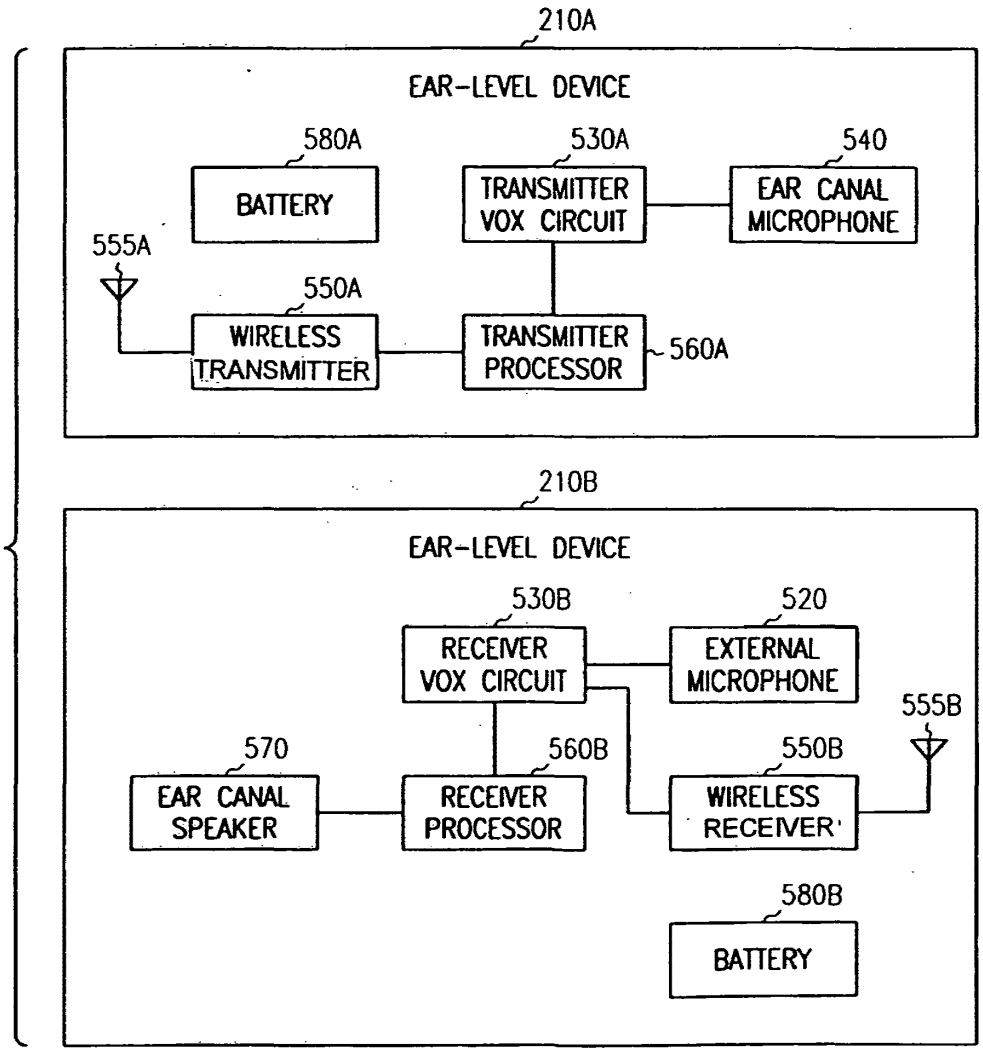


FIG. 5

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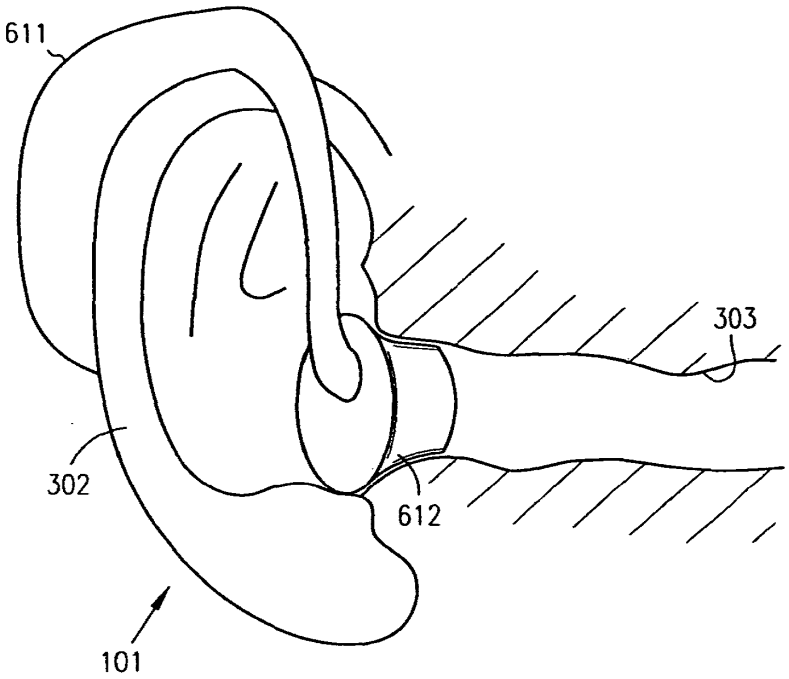

611
303
302
612
101

FIG. 6

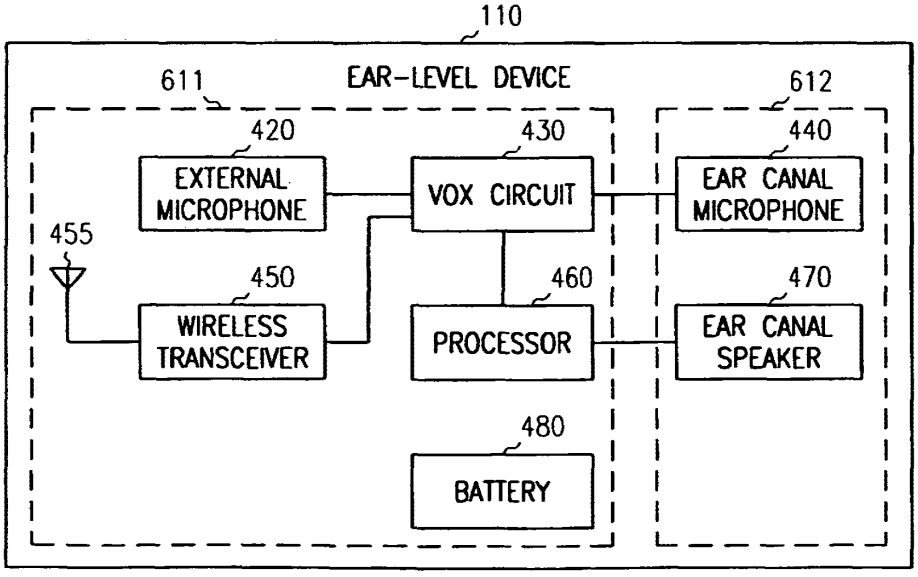

110
611
EAR-LEVEL DEVICE
612
420
EXTERNAL MICROPHONE
430
VOX CIRCUIT
440
EAR CANAL MICROPHONE
455
450
WIRELESS TRANSCEIVER
460
PROCESSOR
470
EAR CANAL SPEAKER
480
BATTERY

FIG. 7

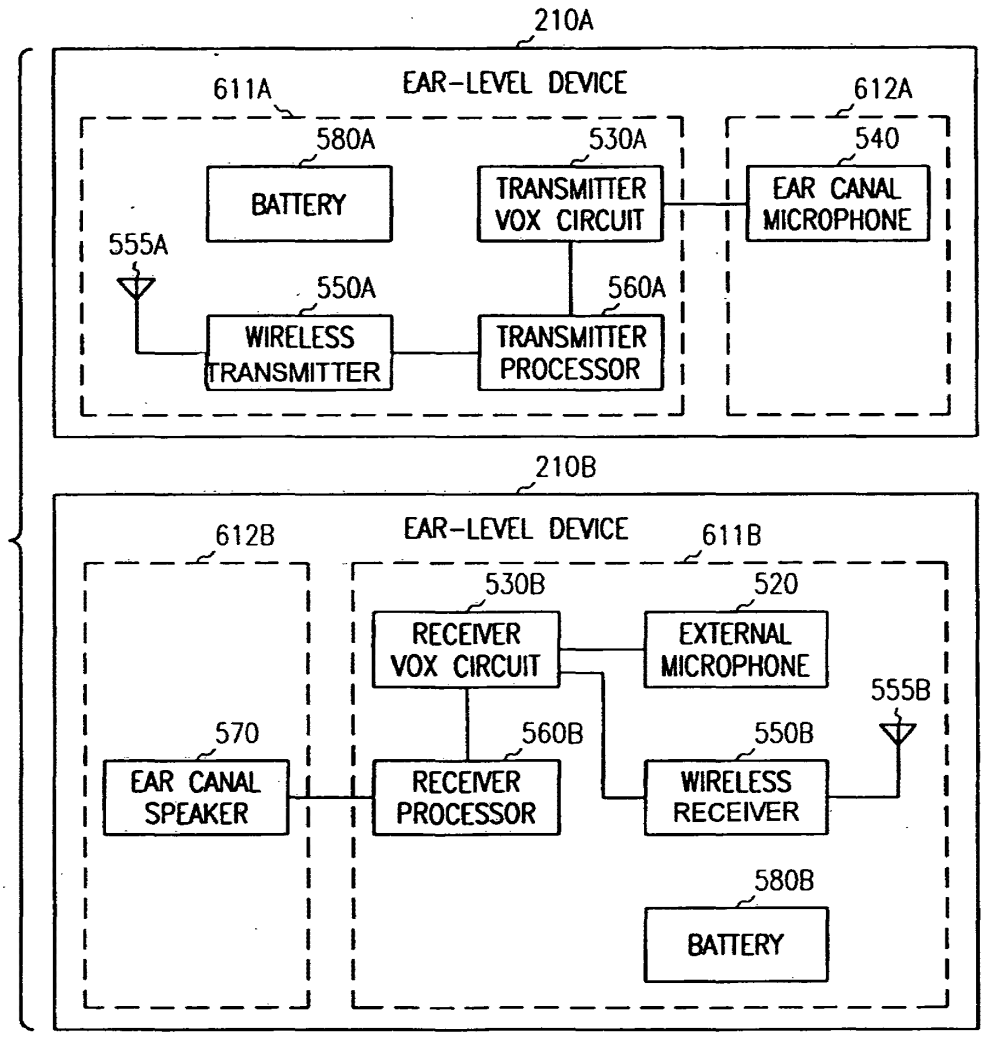

210A
EAR-LEVEL DEVICE
611A
612A
580A
530A
540
BATTERY
TRANSMITTER VOX CIRCUIT
EAR CANAL MICROPHONE
555A
550A
560A
WIRELESS TRANSMITTER
TRANSMITTER PROCESSOR
210B
EAR-LEVEL DEVICE
612B
611B
530B
520
RECEIVER VOX CIRCUIT
EXTERNAL MICROPHONE
555B
570
560B
550B
EAR CANAL SPEAKER
RECEIVER PROCESSOR
WIRELESS RECEIVER
580B
BATTERY

FIG. 8

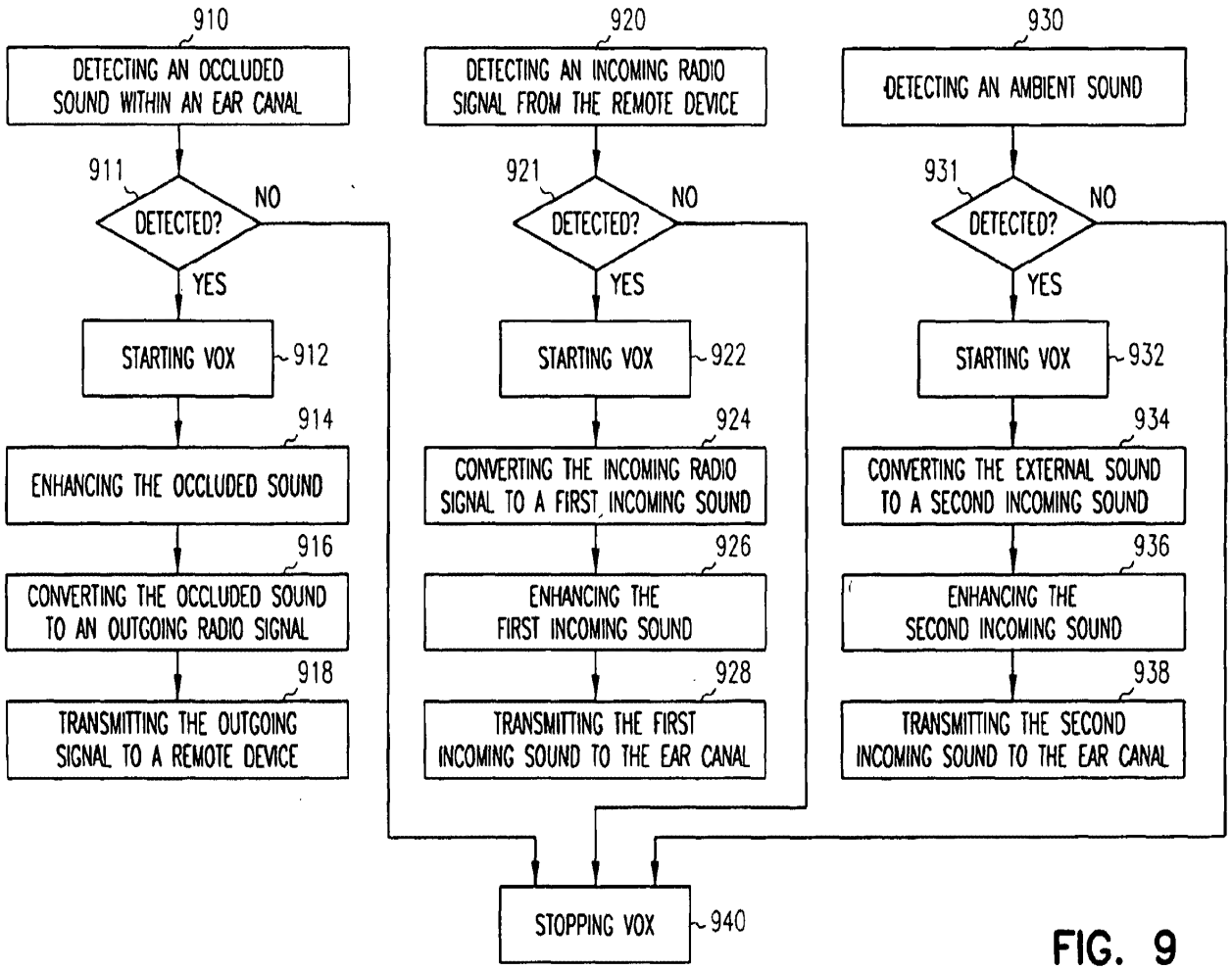

910
DETECTING AN OCCLUDED SOUND WITHIN AN EAR CANAL
911
DETECTED?
NO
YES
STARTING VOX
912
914
ENHANCING THE OCCLUDED SOUND
916
CONVERTING THE OCCLUDED SOUND TO AN OUTGOING RADIO SIGNAL
918
TRANSMITTING THE OUTGOING SIGNAL TO A REMOTE DEVICE
920
DETECTING AN INCOMING RADIO SIGNAL FROM THE REMOTE DEVICE
921
DETECTED?
NO
YES
STARTING VOX
922
924
CONVERTING THE INCOMING RADIO SIGNAL TO A FIRST INCOMING SOUND
926
ENHANCING THE FIRST INCOMING SOUND
928
TRANSMITTING THE FIRST INCOMING SOUND TO THE EAR CANAL
930
DETECTING AN AMBIENT SOUND
931
DETECTED?
NO
YES
STARTING VOX
932
934
CONVERTING THE EXTERNAL SOUND TO A SECOND INCOMING SOUND
936
ENHANCING THE SECOND INCOMING SOUND
938
TRANSMITTING THE SECOND INCOMING SOUND TO THE EAR CANAL
STOPPING VOX
940

FIG. 9

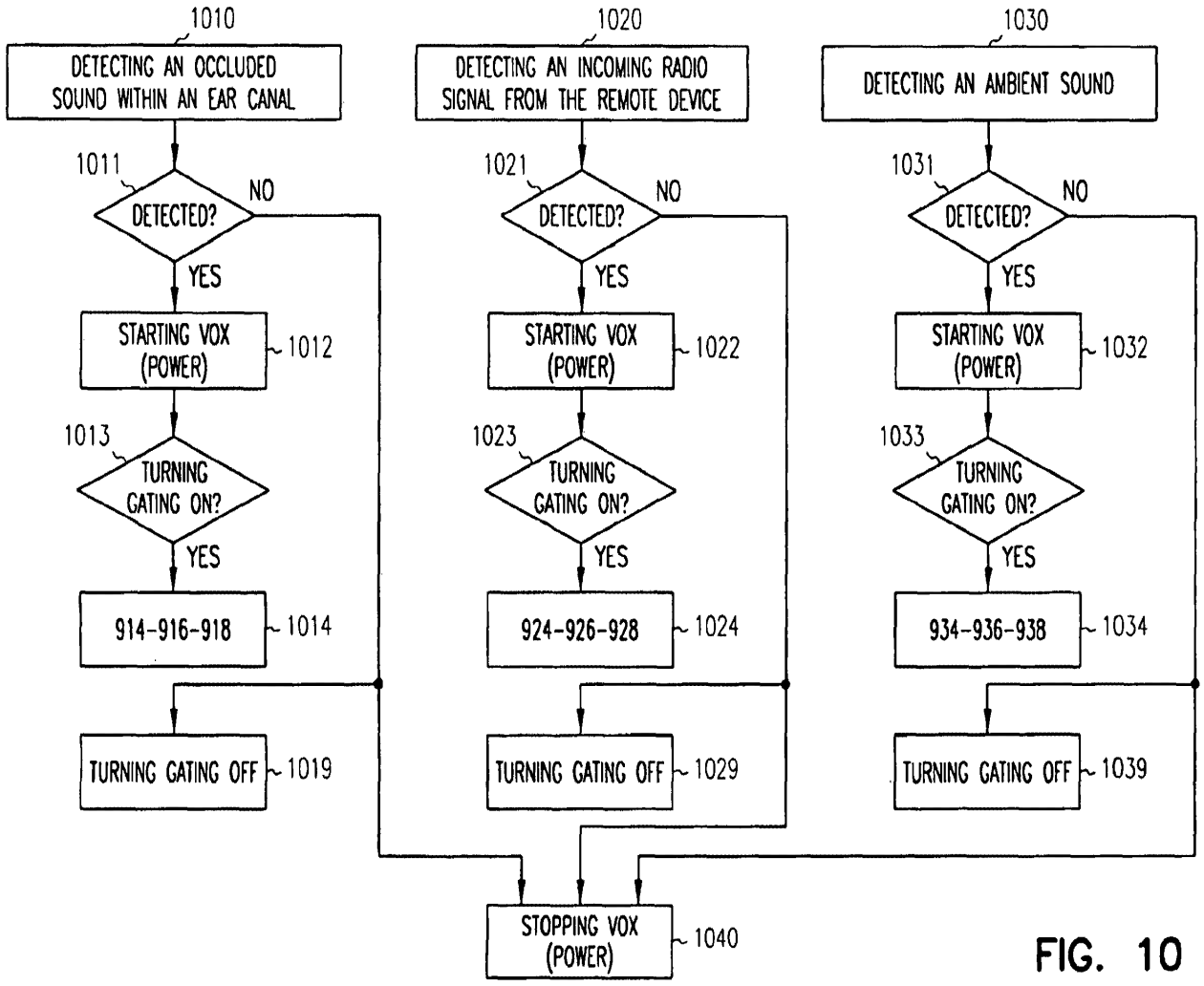

1010
DETECTING AN OCCLUDED SOUND WITHIN AN EAR CANAL
1011
DETECTED?
NO
YES
STARTING VOX (POWER)
1012
1013
TURNING GATING ON?
YES
914-916-918
1014
TURNING GATING OFF
1019
1020
DETECTING AN INCOMING RADIO SIGNAL FROM THE REMOTE DEVICE
1021
DETECTED?
NO
YES
STARTING VOX (POWER)
1022
1023
TURNING GATING ON?
YES
924-926-928
1024
TURNING GATING OFF
1029
1030
DETECTING AN AMBIENT SOUND
1031
DETECTED?
NO
YES
STARTING VOX (POWER)
1032
1033
TURNING GATING ON?
YES
934-936-938
1034
TURNING GATING OFF
1039
STOPPING VOX (POWER)
1040

FIG. 10

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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- WO 03073790 A **[0010]**

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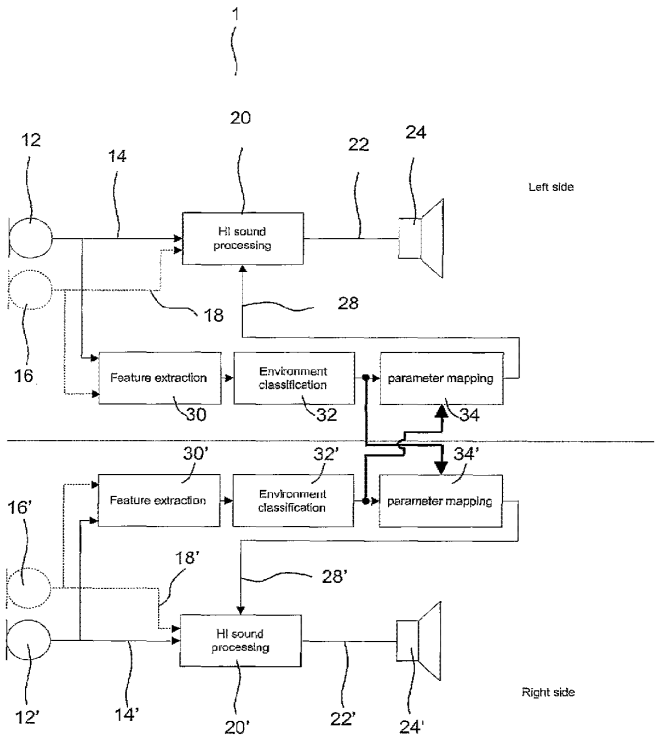
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: A BINAURAL HEARING AID SYSTEM WITH COORDINATED SOUND PROCESSING



(57) Abstract: The present invention relates to a binaural hearing aid system comprising a first hearing aid and a second hearing aid, each of which comprises a microphone and an A/D converter for provision of a digital input signal in response to sound signals received at the respective microphone in a sound environment, a processor that is adapted to process the digital input signals in accordance with a predetermined signal processing algorithm to generate a processed output signal, and a D/A converter and an output transducer for conversion of the respective processed sound signal to an acoustic output signal, and a binaural sound environment detector for binaural determination of the sound environment surrounding a user of the binaural hearing aid system based on at least one signal from the first hearing aid and at least one signal from the second hearing aid for provision of outputs for each of the first and second hearing aids for selection of the signal processing algorithm of each of the respective hearing aid processors so that the hearing aids of the binaural hearing aid system perform coordinated sound processing.

WO 2004/114722 A1

SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

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A BINAURAL HEARING AID SYSTEM WITH COORDINATED SOUND PROCESSING

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a binaural hearing aid system with a first hearing aid and a second hearing aid, each of which comprises a microphone, an A/D converter for provision of a digital input signal in response to sound signals received at the respective microphone in a sound environment, a processor that is adapted to process the digital input signals in accordance with a predetermined signal processing algorithm to generate a processed output signal, and a D/A converter and an output transducer for conversion of the respective processed sound signal to an acoustic output signal.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Today's conventional hearing aids typically comprise a Digital Signal Processor (DSP) for processing of sound received by the hearing aid for compensation of the user's hearing loss. As is well known in the art, the processing of the DSP is controlled by a signal processing algorithm having various parameters for adjustment of the actual signal processing performed. The gains in each of the frequency channels of a multi-channel hearing aid are examples of such parameters.

The flexibility of the DSP is often utilized to provide a plurality of different algorithms and/or a plurality of sets of parameters of a specific algorithm. For example, various algorithms may be provided for noise suppression, i.e. attenuation of undesired signals and amplification of desired signals. Desired signals are usually speech or music, and undesired signals can be background speech, restaurant clatter, music (when speech is the desired signal), traffic noise, etc.

The different algorithms or parameter sets are typically included to provide comfortable and intelligible reproduced sound quality in different sound environments, such as speech, babble speech, restaurant clatter, music, traffic noise, etc. Audio signals obtained from different sound environments may possess very different characteristics, e.g. average and maximum sound pressure levels (SPLs) and/or frequency content. Therefore, in a hearing aid with a DSP, each type of sound environment may be associated with a particular program wherein a particular setting of algorithm parameters of a signal processing algorithm provides processed sound of optimum signal quality in a specific sound environment. A set of such parameters may typically include parameters related to broadband gain, corner frequencies or slopes of frequency-selective filter algorithms and

parameters controlling e.g. knee-points and compression ratios of Automatic Gain Control (AGC) algorithms.

Consequently, today's DSP based hearing instruments are usually provided with a number of different programs, each program tailored to a particular sound environment category and/or particular user preferences. Signal processing characteristics of each of these programs is typically determined during an initial fitting session in a dispenser's office and programmed into the instrument by activating corresponding algorithms and algorithm parameters in a non-volatile memory area of the hearing aid and/or transmitting corresponding algorithms and algorithm parameters to the non-volatile memory area.

Some known hearing aids are capable of automatically classifying the user's sound environment into one of a number of relevant or typical everyday sound environment categories, such as speech, babble speech, restaurant clatter, music, traffic noise, etc.

Obtained classification results may be utilised in the hearing aid to automatically select signal processing characteristics of the hearing aid, e.g. to automatically switch to the most suitable algorithm for the environment in question. Such a hearing aid will be able to maintain optimum sound quality and/or speech intelligibility for the individual hearing aid user in various sound environments.

US 5,687,241 discloses a multi-channel DSP based hearing instrument that utilises continuous determination or calculation of one or several percentile values of input signal amplitude distributions to discriminate between speech and noise input signals. Gain values in each of a number of frequency channels are adjusted in response to detected levels of speech and noise.

However, it is often desirable to provide a more subtle characterization of a sound environment than only discriminating between speech and noise. As an example, it may be desirable to switch between an omni-directional and a directional microphone preset program in dependence of, not just the level of background noise, but also on further signal characteristics of this background noise. In situations where the user of the hearing aid communicates with another individual in the presence of the background noise, it would be beneficial to be able to identify and classify the type of background noise. Omni-directional operation could be selected in the event that the noise being traffic noise to allow the user to clearly hear approaching traffic independent of its direction of arrival. If, on the other hand, the background noise was classified as being babble-noise, the directional listening program could be selected to allow the user to hear a target speech signal with improved signal-to-noise ratio (SNR) during a conversation.

Applying Hidden Markov Models for analysis and classification of the microphone signal may obtain a detailed characterisation of e.g. a microphone signal. Hidden Markov Models are capable of modelling stochastic and non-stationary signals in terms of both short and long time temporal variations. Hidden Markov Models have been applied in speech recognition as a tool for modelling statistical properties of speech signals. The article "A Tutorial on Hidden Markov Models and Selected Applications in Speech Recognition", published in Proceedings of the IEEE, VOL 77, No. 2, February 1989 contains a comprehensive description of the application of Hidden Markov Models to problems in speech recognition.

WO 01/76321 discloses a hearing aid that provides automatic identification or classification of a sound environment by applying one or several predetermined Hidden Markov Models to process acoustic signals obtained from the listening environment. The hearing aid may utilise determined classification results to control parameter values of a signal processing algorithm or to control switching between different algorithms so as to optimally adapt the signal processing of the hearing aid to a given sound environment.

The different available signal processing algorithms may change the signal characteristics significantly. In binaural hearing aid systems, it is therefore important that the determination of sound environment does not differ for the two hearing aids. However, since sound characteristics may differ significantly at the two ears of a user, it will often occur that sound environment determination at the two ears of a user differs, and this leads to undesired different signal processing of sounds for each of the ears of the user.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Thus, there is a need for a binaural hearing aid system wherein sound environment determination does not differ for the two hearing aids so that signal processing in the two hearing aids may be coordinated and the user be provided with desired processed sound in both ears at the same time.

According to the present invention, this and other objects are solved by provision of a binaural hearing aid system of the above-mentioned type wherein the hearing aids are connected either by wire or by a wireless link to at least one binaural sound environment detector for binaural determination of the sound environment surrounding a user of the binaural hearing aid system based on at least one signal from the first hearing aid and at least one signal from the second hearing aid whereby the sound environment is determined and classified based on binaural signals. The one or more binaural sound environment detectors provide outputs for each of the first and second hearing aids for selection of the

signal processing algorithm of each of the hearing aid processors so that the hearing aids of the binaural hearing aid system perform coordinated sound processing.

In this way both hearing aids may process sound in response to a common determination of sound environment. Sound environment determination may be performed by one common environment detector, for example situated in one of the hearing aids or in a remote control, or, by a plurality of environment detectors, such as an environment detector in each of the first and second hearing aids.

In the event that the user has substantially the same hearing loss in both ears and the sound environment is omni-directional, i.e. the sound environment does not change with direction, coordination of sound processing in the hearing aids leads to execution of identical signal processing algorithms in the respective signal processors of the hearing aids. In the event that the hearing aid user suffers from a binaural hearing loss, the signal processing algorithms may desirably differ for compensation of the different binaural hearing losses.

It is an important advantage of the present invention that binaural sound environment detection is more accurate than monaural detection since signals from both ears are taken into account.

It is a further advantage of the present invention that signal processing in the hearing aids of the binaural hearing aid system is coordinated since the sound environment detection is the same for both hearing aids.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a better understanding of the present invention reference will now be made, by way of example, to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Fig. 1 illustrates schematically a prior art monaural hearing aid with sound environment classification,

Fig. 2 illustrates schematically a first embodiment of the present invention,

Fig. 3 illustrates schematically a second embodiment of the present invention,

Fig. 4 illustrates schematically a third embodiment of the present invention, and

Fig. 5 illustrates schematically a fourth embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Fig. 1 illustrates schematically a prior art monaural hearing aid 10 with sound environment classification.

The monaural hearing aid 10 comprises a first microphone 12 and a first A/D converter (not shown) for provision of a digital input signal 14 in response to sound signals received at the microphone 12 in a sound environment, and a second microphone 16 and a second A/D converter (not shown) for provision of a digital input signal 18 in response to sound signals received at the microphone 16, a processor 20 that is adapted to process the digital input signals 14, 18 in accordance with a predetermined signal processing algorithm to generate a processed output signal 22, and a D/A converter (not shown) and an output transducer 24 for conversion of the respective processed sound signal 22 to an acoustic output signal.

The hearing aid 10 further comprises a sound environment detector 26 for determination of the sound environment surrounding a user of the hearing aid 10. The determination is based on the output signals of the microphones 12, 16. Based on the determination, the sound environment detector 26 provides outputs 28 to the hearing aid processor 20 for selection of the signal processing algorithm appropriate in the determined sound environment. Thus, the hearing aid processor 20 is automatically switched to the most suitable algorithm for the determined environment whereby optimum sound quality and/or speech intelligibility is maintained in various sound environments.

The signal processing algorithms of the processor 20 may perform various forms of noise reduction and dynamic range compression as well as a range of other signal processing tasks.

The sound environment detector 26 comprises a feature extractor 30 for determination of characteristic parameters of the received sound signals. The feature extractor 30 maps the unprocessed sound inputs 14, 18 sound features, i.e. the characteristic parameters. These features can be signal power, spectral data and other well-known features.

The sound environment detector 26 further comprises an environment classifier 32 for categorizing the sound environment based on the determined characteristic parameters. The environment classifier categorizes the sounds into a number of environmental classes, such as speech, babble speech, restaurant clatter, music, traffic noise, etc. The classification process may consist of a simple nearest neighbour search, a neural network, a Hidden Markov Model system or another system capable of pattern recognition. The output of the environmental classification can be a "hard" classification containing one

single environmental class or a set of probabilities indicating the probabilities of the sound belonging to the respective classes. Other outputs may also be applicable.

The sound environment detector 26 further comprises a parameter map 34 for the provision of outputs 28 for selection of the signal processing algorithms.

The parameter map 34 maps the output of the environment classification 32 to a set of parameters for the hearing aid sound processor 20. Examples of such parameters are amount of noise reduction, amount of gain and amount of HF gain. Other parameters may be included.

Figs. 2-5 illustrate various preferred embodiments of the present invention. The illustrated binaural hearing aid system 1 comprises a first hearing aid 10 and a second hearing aid 10', each of which comprises a first microphone 12, 12 ' and an A/D converter (not shown) and a second microphone 16, 16' and A/D converter (not shown) for provision of a digital input signals 14, 14', 18, 18' in response to sound signals received at the respective microphones 12, 12', 16, 16' in a sound environment, a processor 20, 20' that is adapted to process the digital input signals 14, 18, 14', 18' in accordance with a predetermined signal processing algorithm to generate a processed output signal 22, 22', and a D/A converter (not shown) and an output transducer 24, 24' for conversion of the respective processed sound signals 22, 22' to an acoustic output signal

In the embodiments illustrated in Figs. 2-4, each of the hearing aids 10, 10' of the binaural hearing aid system 1 further comprises a binaural sound environment detector 26, 26' for determination of the sound environment surrounding a user of the binaural hearing aid system 1. The determination is based on the output signals of the microphones 12, 12', 16, 16'. Based on the determination, the binaural sound environment detector 26, 26' provides outputs 28, 28' to the hearing aid processors 20, 20' for selection of the signal processing algorithm appropriate in the determined sound environment. Thus, the binaural sound environment detectors 26, 26' determines the sound environment based on signals from both hearing aids, i.e. binaurally, whereby hearing aid processors 20, 20' is automatically switched in co-ordination to the most suitable algorithm for the determined environment whereby optimum sound quality and/or speech intelligibility is maintained in various sound environments by the binaural hearing aid system 1.

The binaural sound environment detectors 26, 26' illustrated in Figs. 2-4 are both similar to the binaural sound environment detector shown in Fig. 1 apart from the fact that the monaural environment detector only receives inputs from one hearing aid while each of the binaural sound environment detectors 26, 26' receives inputs from both hearing aids. Thus,

according to the present invention, signals are transmitted between the hearing aids 10, 10' so that the algorithms executed by the signal processors 20, 20' are selected in co-ordination, e.g. in case of an omni-directional sound environment, i.e. the sound environment does not change with direction, the algorithms are selected to be identical apart from possible differences in hearing loss compensation of the two ears.

In the embodiment of Fig. 2, the unprocessed signals 14, 14', 18, 18' from the microphones 12, 12', 16, 16' of one hearing aid 10, 10' are transmitted to the other hearing aid and inputted to the respective feature extractor 30, 30'. Thus, feature extraction in each of the hearing aids is based on the identical four input signals so that identical sound environment characteristic parameters will be determined binaurally in both hearing aids 10, 10'.

The signals may be transmitted in analogue form or in digital form, and the communication channel may be wired or wireless.

In the embodiment shown in Fig. 3, the output 36, 36' of the feature extractor 30, 30' of one hearing aid 10, 10' is transmitted to the respective other hearing aid 10', 10. The environment classifier 32, 32' then operates on two sets of features 36, 36' to determine the environment. Since both environment classifiers 32, 32' receive the same data, they will produce the same output.

In the embodiment shown in Fig. 4, the output 38, 38' of the environment classifier 32, 32' of one hearing aid 10, 10' is transmitted to the respective other hearing aid 10, 10'. The parameter map 34, 34' then operates on two inputs 38, 38' to produce the parameters for the processor algorithms, but since both parameter mapping units 34, 34' receive identical inputs, identical parameter values will be produced.

This embodiment has a number of advantages: Usually classification systems take both past and present data into account – they have memory. This makes them sensitive to missing data, since a classification requires a complete data set. Therefore it is required that the data link is safe, in the sense that data is guaranteed to be transmitted. The parameter mapping can be implemented without memory so that only present data is taken into account when generating parameters. This makes the system robust to packet loss and latency, since the parameter mapping may simply re-use old data in the event that data is missing. This will of course delay the correct action, but to the user the systems will appear to be synchronized.

The transmission data rate is low, since only a set of probabilities or logic values for the environment classes has to be transmitted.

Rather high latency can be accepted. By applying time constants to the variables that will change according to the output of the parameter mapping it is possible to smooth out any differences that is caused by latency. As described earlier it is important that signal processing in the two hearing instruments is coordinated. However if transition periods of a few seconds are allowed the system can operate with only 3-4 transmissions per second. Hereby, power consumption is kept low.

A binaural hearing aid system 1 with a remote control 40 is shown in Fig. 5. The environment detector 26 is positioned in the remote control 40. The required signals are transmitted to and from both hearing aids.

CLAIMS

1. A binaural hearing aid system comprising

a first hearing aid and a second hearing aid, each of which comprises

a microphone and an A/D converter for provision of a digital input signal in response to sound signals received at the respective microphone in a sound environment,

a processor that is adapted to process the digital input signals in accordance with a predetermined signal processing algorithm to generate a processed output signal, and

a D/A converter and an output transducer for conversion of the respective processed sound signal to an acoustic output signal, and

a binaural sound environment detector for binaural determination of the sound environment surrounding a user of the binaural hearing aid system based on at least one signal from the first hearing aid and at least one signal from the second hearing aid for provision of outputs for each of the first and second hearing aids for selection of the signal processing algorithm of each of the respective hearing aid processors so that the hearing aids of the binaural hearing aid system perform coordinated sound processing.

2. A system according to claim 1, wherein the binaural sound environment detector having inputs for each of the digital input signals is provided in a remote control of the system.

3. A system according to claim 1, wherein the binaural sound environment detector is provided in one of the hearing aids and provides an output for the other hearing aid.

4. A system according to claim 1, wherein each of the hearing aids comprises a binaural sound environment detector.

5. A system according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the binaural sound environment detector comprises

a feature extractor for determination of characteristic parameters of the received sound signals,

an environment classifier for categorizing the sound environment based on the determined characteristic parameters, and

a parameter map for the provision of outputs for selection of the signal processing algorithms.

6. A system according to claim 4 and 5, wherein each of the feature extractors has inputs for each of the digital input signals.

7. A system according to claim 4 and 5, wherein each of the environment classifiers has inputs connected to each of the feature extractors.

8. A system according to claim 4 and 5, wherein each of the parameter maps has inputs for connected to each of the environment classifiers.

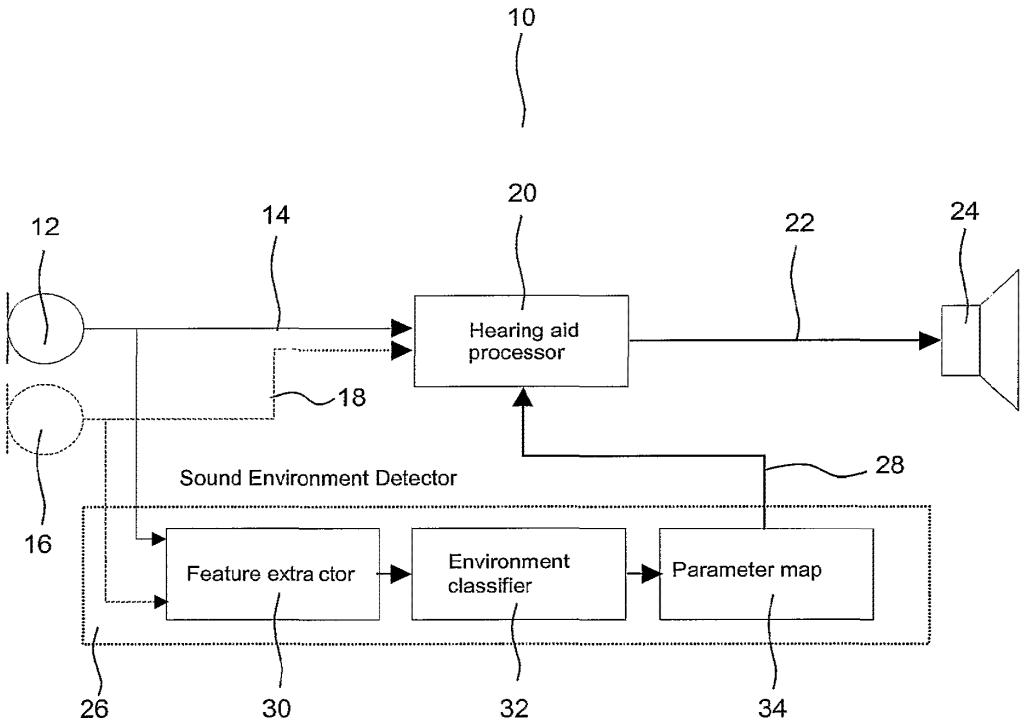

10
12
14
20
22
24
Hearing aid processor
18
16
Sound Environment Detector
28
Feature extra ctor
Environment classifier
Parameter map
26
30
32
34

Fig. 1

2/5

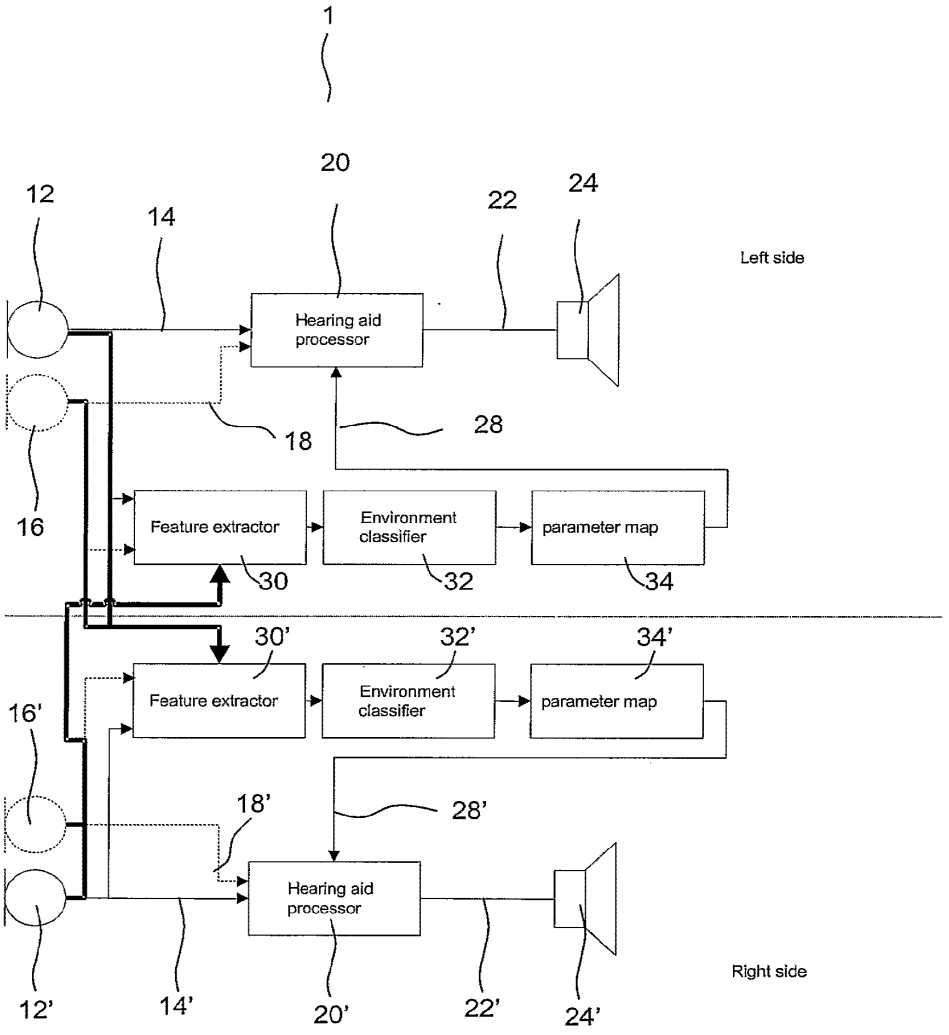

1
20
12
14
22
24
Left side
Hearing aid processor
18
28
16
Feature extractor
Environment classifier
parameter map
30
32
34
30'
32'
34'
Feature extractor
Environment classifier
parameter map
16'
18'
28'
Hearing aid processor
12'
14'
20'
22'
24'
Right side

Fig. 2

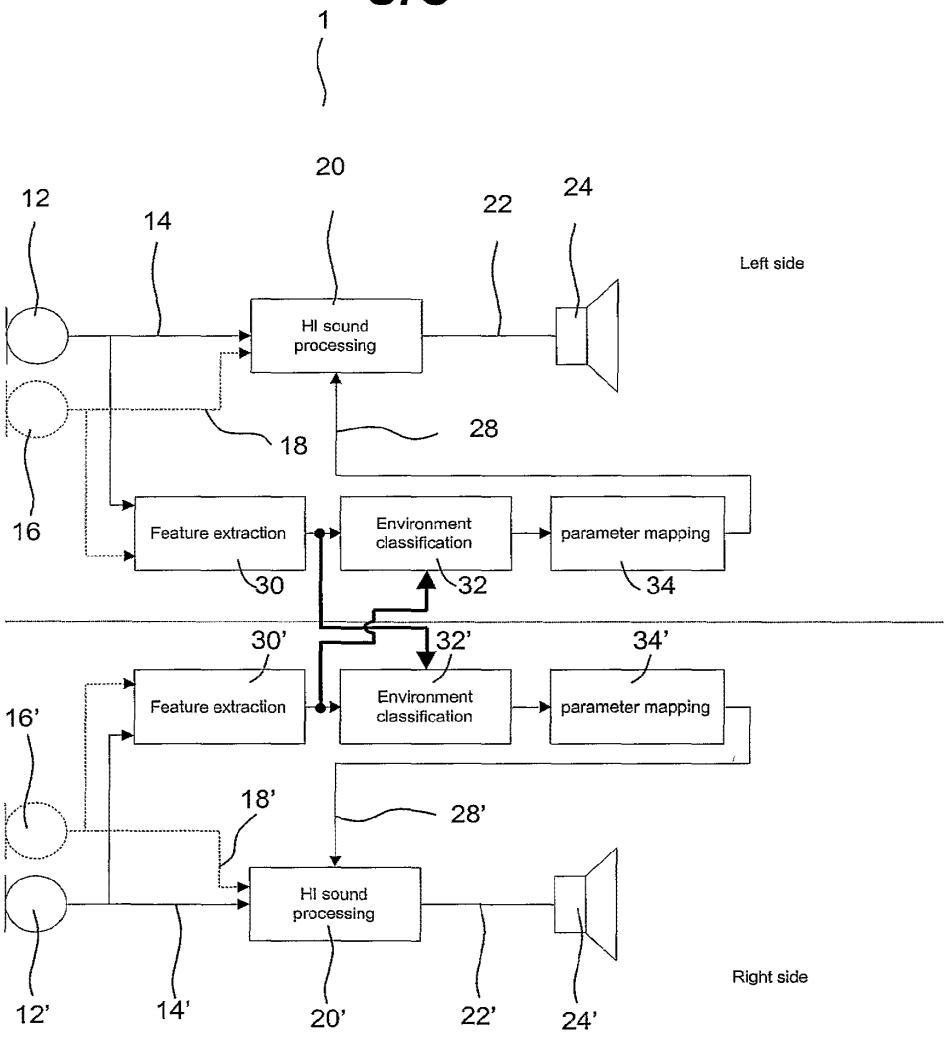

1
20
12
14
22
24
Left side
HI sound processing
18
28
16
Feature extraction
Environment classification
parameter mapping
30
32
34
30'
32'
34'
16'
Feature extraction
Environment classification
parameter mapping
18'
28'
HI sound processing
Right side
12'
14'
20'
22'
24'

Fig. 3

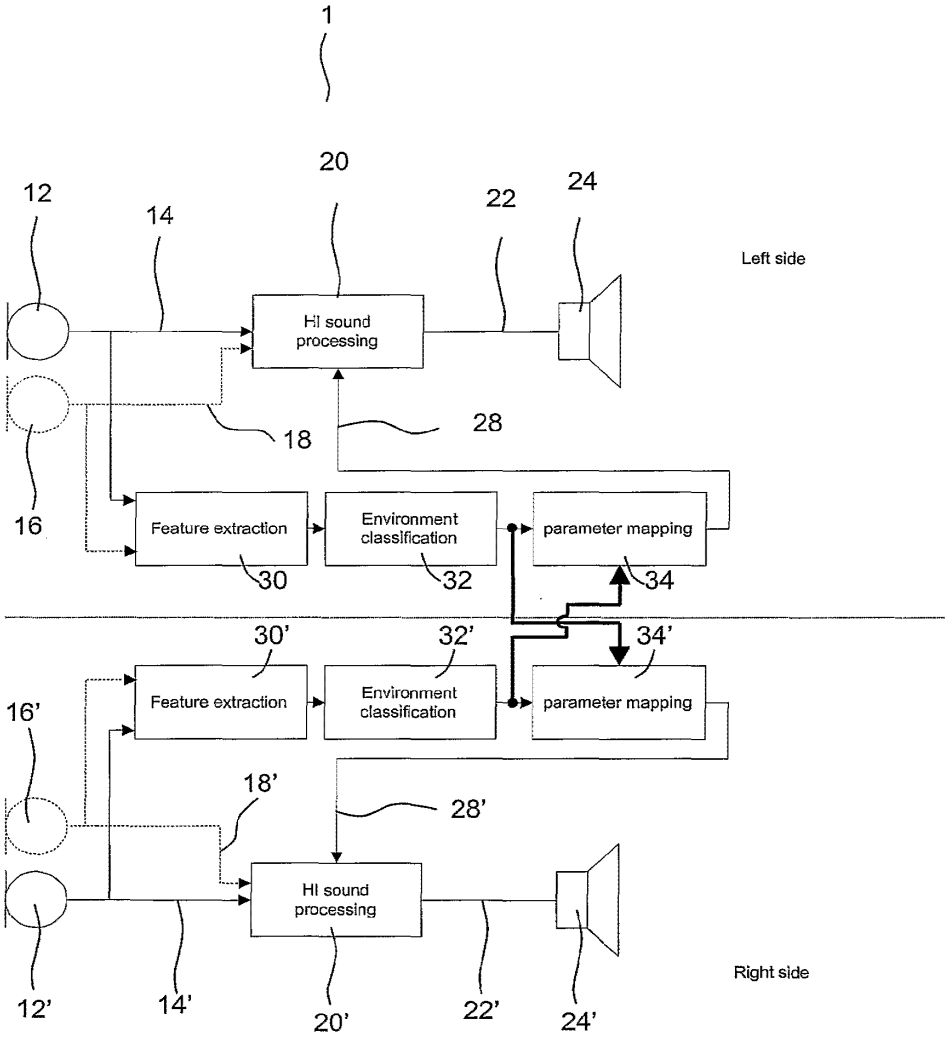

1
20
12
14
22
24
Left side
HI sound processing
18
28
16
Feature extraction
Environment classification
parameter mapping
30
32
34
30'
32'
34'
Feature extraction
Environment classification
parameter mapping
16'
18'
28'
HI sound processing
12'
14'
20'
22'
24'
Right side

Fig. 4

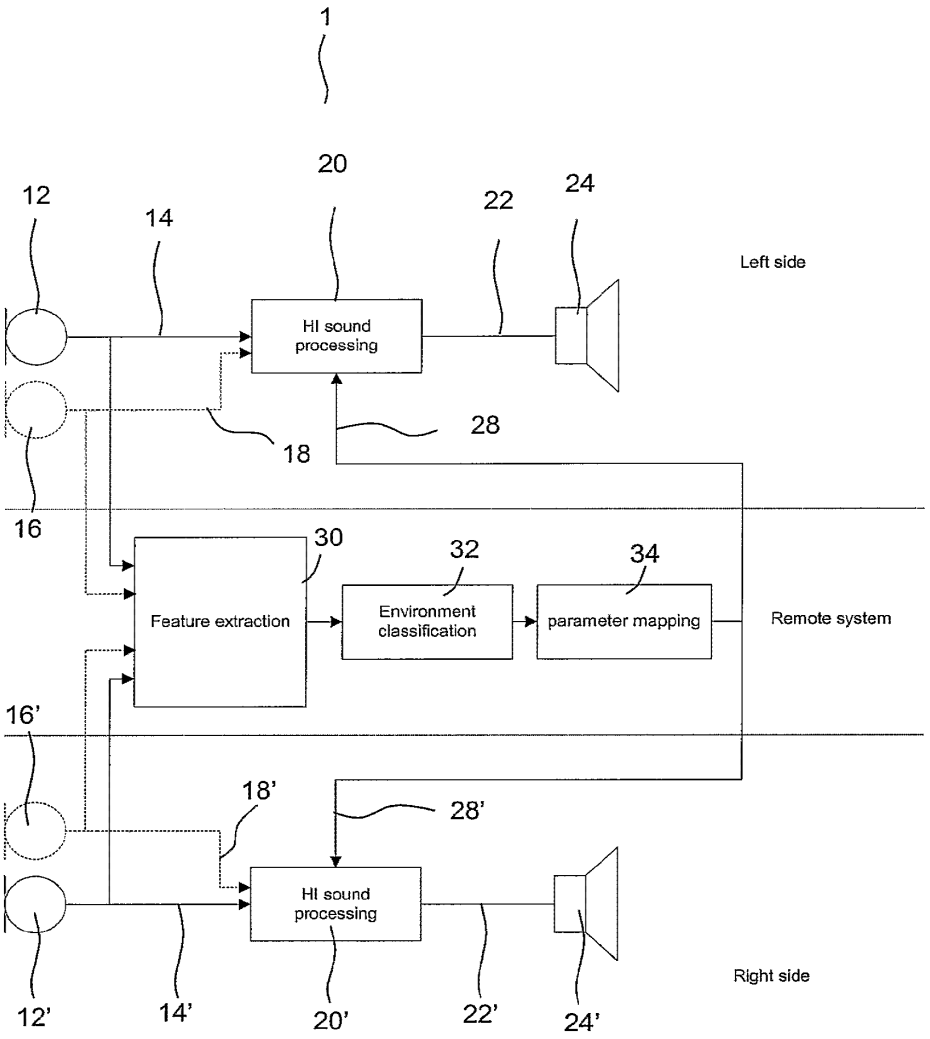

1
20
12
14
22
24
Left side
HI sound processing
28
18
16
30
32
34
Feature extraction
Environment classification
parameter mapping
Remote system
16'
18'
28'
HI sound processing
Right side
12'
14'
20'
22'
24'

Fig. 5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No
PCT/DK2004/000442

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 7 H04R25/00

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 7 H04R

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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X	US 5 757 932 A (BISGAARD NIKOLAI ET AL) 26 May 1998 (1998-05-26) the whole document	1-8
A	US 6 549 633 B1 (WESTERMANN SOEREN ERIK) 15 April 2003 (2003-04-15) the whole document	1-8
A	US 2002/037087 A1 (ALLEGRO SYLVIA ET AL) 28 March 2002 (2002-03-28) the whole document	5
A	WO 02/32208 A (PHONAK AG ; ALLEGRO SILVIA (CH)) 25 April 2002 (2002-04-25)	

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

° Special categories of cited documents :

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"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

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"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
9 November 2004	18/11/2004

Name and mailing address of the ISA	Authorized officer
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Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet) (January 2004)

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International Application No
PCT/DK2004/000442

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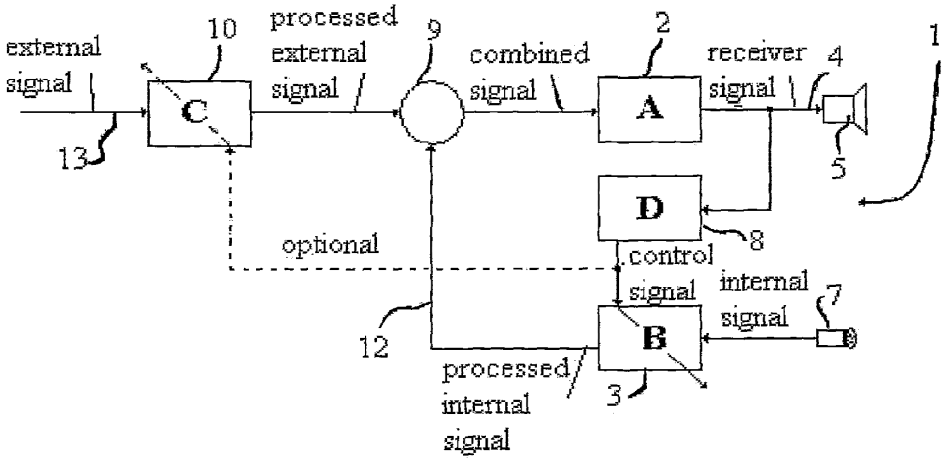
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Declaration under Rule 4.17:
— *of inventorship (Rule 4.17(iv))*

Published:
— *with international search report*

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

(54) Title: ACOUSTICALLY TRANSPARENT OCCLUSION REDUCTION SYSTEM AND METHOD



(57) Abstract: A system and method that reduces the perceptual effect resulting from ear occlusion is disclosed. It comprises of an electro-acoustic feedback network that produces phase cancelling sounds in the ear, where a receiver and a microphone are located. A novel control mechanism is disclosed that controls the response of the feedback network to minimise distortion in the ear while maintaining a desired frequency response for external signals. Devices producing the external signal include hearing aids, personal sound devices, in ear monitors, communications headsets and hearing protectors. The integration of the present invention with these devices improves the user's perception of their own voice.

WO 2006/037156 A1

Acoustically Transparent Occlusion Reduction System and Method

Field of Invention

The present invention relates to an improved occlusion reduction system for applications such as hearing aids, personal sound devices, in ear monitors, communications headsets and hearing protection devices.

Description of Background Art

An electro-acoustic negative feedback scheme was originally presented by H.F Olson, in 1961 in U.S Patent No 2,983,790. A more comprehensive implementation was later proposed by Bose et al, in 1982 in U.S Patent No 4,494,074 under the title "Feedback Control". Using headphones, Bose proposed the idea of an electro-acoustic feedback in the proximity of the ear canal. The concept was later used by Langberg et al, in 1988 in U.S. Patent No 4,985,925, describing a system functioning as a bilateral transducer drive with a shunt feedback correction network. Later on in 1991, Langberg et al, in U.S Patent No. 5,267,321 entitled "Active Sound Absorption" describes an electro-acoustical feedback system, with the receiver acting as both a diaphragm actuator and motion sensor. In 1996, U.S Patent No. 5,774,565 to Benning et al describes an electro-acoustic feedback subsystem with oscillation prevention circuit in the forward path of the loop. In 2002, U.S Patent Application No. 2003/0012391 A1 to Armstrong et al, entitled "Digital Hearing Aids System" discloses a hearing aid including an occlusion processing subsystem.

The occlusion effect is commonly described as a hollow or echoing like sound of a person's own voice. The occlusion effect results from acoustically sealing or partially sealing the ear, or to a greater effect sealing or partially sealing the ear canal from the external acoustic environment. As a result, the occlusion effect creates discomfort and/or an unnatural sound sensation. This problem is commonly reported to clinicians in the

hearing aid industry as it affects a large number of hearing aid wearers (those with mild low-frequency hearing loss). Until now, there were at least two common schemes to decrease the occlusion effect in hearing aids, either using a vent or by increasing the insertion depth of the earmold into the ear canal. To restore naturalness of a hearing aid wearer's voice, vents of up to 3.5 mm in diameter may be employed. These vents need to be sufficiently large so that the residual sound pressure in the canal due to the occlusion effect is not significant. On the other hand, a sufficiently large vent limits the hearing aid amplification due to oscillations created by positive feedback occurring around the loop defined by an external microphone, amplifier, receiver, and path through the vent back to the external microphone.

The soft tissue in the ear canal is excited by vibration energy propagated by the skull and jaw due to the wearer's voice and this results in an increased sound pressure within the occluded of partially occluded ear relative to an open ear. Another solution is to insert the earmold further into the ear canal to fill the cartilaginous portion of the canal and hence reduce the occlusion effect at its source. However there are a number of practical problems relating to the deep insertion of an earmold, for instance physical discomfort.

While some of the aforementioned patents include methods to alter the response of the electro-acoustic feedback system, none of these patents incorporate methods to compensate for the effect that response alteration within the feedback system has on external signals such as from an external microphone or hearing aid processor. In addition, the aforementioned patents do not provide a mechanism to prevent the receiver from overloading by sensing the level of signal at the optimum point, being the input to the receiver.

Summary of Invention

It is an object of the present invention to provide an improved occlusion reduction system for applications such as hearing aids, personal sound devices, in ear monitors, communications headsets and hearing protection devices.

In accordance with a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided an electro-acoustic system comprising of: an electro-acoustic circuit including a negative-feedback loop comprising of: a microphone for generating an internal signal from an acoustical signal located within or closely coupled to an occluded or partially occluded ear; a second electronic circuit, (B) for modifying the internal signal to produce a processed internal signal; a combiner for combining the processed internal signal with a processed external signal to produce a combined signal; a first electronic circuit (A), for modifying the combined signal to produce an receiver signal; and a receiver for generating an acoustical signal from the receiver signal at a location within or closely coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear; a third electronic circuit (C) for modifying an external signal such as from an external microphone or hearing aid processor to produce an external processed signal; a fourth electronic circuit (D), for estimating the level of the receiver signal optimally from the receiver signal and producing a control signal; wherein the processing performed by the second electronic circuit (B) preferably is controlled by the control signal.

The negative-feedback loop preferably can include a filter that alters the open loop response so that the real component of the response is large and negative at frequencies where the occlusion effect can be typically the greatest. Consequently reducing all signals introduced into the closed loop within this frequency range.

The third electronic circuit (C) preferably can include filtering that provides compensation for the closed loop response of the negative-feedback loop.

Optionally the filtering provided by the third electronic circuit (C) adapts to compensate for changes in the closed response of the negative-feedback loop.

Optionally the control signal can control the response of the first electronic circuit (A) while controlling the response of the third electronic circuit (C).

The microphone for generating the internal signal optionally can be coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear by a tube. The receiver optionally can be coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear by a tube. The microphone and receiver optionally can be combined in a single unit or jointly coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear by a common tube. At least one of the electronic circuits can be implemented digitally. At least one of the digital electronic circuits can performed signal processing at a sampling rate at least four times that of the bandwidth of the signal.

In accordance with a further aspect of the present invention, there is provided an electro-acoustic system including a negative-feedback loop comprising of: a microphone for generating an internal signal from an acoustical signal located within or closely coupled to an occluded or partially occluded ear; a second electronic circuit (B) for modifying the internal signal to produce a processed internal signal; a combiner for combining the processed internal signal with a processed external signal to produce a combined signal; a first electronic circuit (A) for modifying the combined signal to produce a receiver signal; and a receiver for generating an acoustical signal from the receiver signal at a location within or closely coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear; a third electronic circuit (C) for modifying an external signal such as from external microphone to produce a processed external signal; a fourth electronic circuit (D) for estimating the level of the receiver signal and producing a control signal from this estimate; wherein the control signal controls the processing performed by the second

electronic circuit (B) and controls the processing performed by the third electronic circuit (C).

In accordance with a further aspect of the present invention, there is provided an electro-acoustic system including a negative-feedback loop comprising of: a microphone for generating an internal signal from an acoustical signal located within or closely coupled to an occluded or partially occluded ear; a second electronic circuit (B) for modifying the internal signal to produce a processed internal signal; a combiner for combining the processed internal signal with a processed external signal to produce a combined signal; a first electronic circuit (A) for modifying the combined signal to produce a receiver signal; and a receiver for generating an acoustical signal from the receiver signal at a location within or closely coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear; a third electronic circuit (C) for modifying an external signal to produce a processed external signal; a fourth electronic circuit (D) for estimating the level of the receiver signal and producing a control signal from this estimate; wherein the control signal controls the processing performed by first electronic circuit (A) and controls the processing performed by the third electronic circuit (C).

In accordance with a further aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of providing a negative feedback loop for an electro-acoustic system, the method including the steps of: (a) generating an internal signal representing an acoustical signal located within or closely coupled to an occluded or partially occluded ear; (b) modifying the internal signal to produce a processed internal signal; (c) combining the processed internal signal with a processed external signal to produce a combined signal; (d) modifying the combined signal to produce a receiver signal; (e) generating an acoustical signal from the receiver signal at a location within or closely coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear; (f) modifying an external signal to produce a processed external

signal; (g) estimating the level of the receiver signal either directly from the receiver signal or from the combined signal and producing a control signal from this estimate; wherein the degree of modification in step (b) is controlled by the control signal. The control signal can be utilised to control the amount of modification occurring in step (f).

In any of the aforementioned aspects of the present invention the fourth electronic circuit (D) optionally produces a control signal using estimates of the signal levels from the internal signal or the processed internal signal and the receiver signal or the combined signal.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Preferred embodiments of the present invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of the occlusion reduction scheme of the preferred embodiment;

Fig. 2 is a schematic diagram of an analog electronic circuit for the electro-acoustic negative feedback loop;

Fig. 3 is a schematic diagram of an analog adaptive pre-compensation electronic circuit;

Fig. 4 is a schematic diagram of an analog level estimator and control signal generation electronic circuit;

Fig. 5 is a schematic diagram of a digital implementation of the occlusion reduction scheme;

Fig. 6 is a schematic diagram of an adaptive IIR filter;

Fig. 7 is a schematic diagram of a level estimator and control signal generator ;

Fig. 8 is a graph of the simulated closed loop response in a Zwislocki coupler;

Fig. 9 is a graph of the measured response of the effective gain reduction inside a real ear;

Fig. 10 is a graph of the measured responses from an external signal to a Zwislocki coupler microphone; and

Fig. 11 is an illustration of the occlusion reduction scheme implemented as an in-the-canal hearing aid device.

Detail Description of the Preferred and Other Embodiments

The preferred embodiment operates to reduce the level of signals generated within an electro-acoustic negative feedback loop, such as signals produced by vibration in the ear canal walls due to bone conduction of a user's voice. The reduction occurs in the low to mid audible frequencies, typically ranging from 80 Hz up to 1 kHz, where the occlusion effect is more predominant and perceptually apparent.

A negative feedback scheme is provided which combines a processed externally generated signal such as from an external microphone or a sound system with a processed internal signal such as from a microphone located within or closely coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear. The combined signal after optional further processing is applied to a receiver located within or closely coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear. The level of the signal to be applied to the receiver is optimally estimated either from the signal applied to the receiver or from the combined processed external and processed internal signals. Optionally this signal level can be estimated from signals at other points within the scheme. High signal levels applied to the receiver may produce a distorted output from the receiver. This distortion is reduced by applying active gain reduction in the feedback path in response to estimated high signal levels being present. Optionally low signal levels can be detected so that noise inherent in the negative feedback components such as the internal microphone can be minimised by

applying active gain reduction in the feedback path. Thus, the high and the low signal level thresholds for gain reduction in the loop can depend on the dynamic operational range of the discrete components within the system. In addition, an adaptive equalisation filter is applied to the external signal to compensate for variations of the transfer response of the closed loop.

The preferred embodiment includes of a microphone to sense the sound pressure in the ear. The preferred embodiment also includes a novel design of estimating the level of the signal to be applied to the receiver and reducing the gain in the feedback path of the loop when this level is high. This mechanism effectively improves the robustness of the closed loop system by limiting excessive driving levels being applied to the receiver. A filter within the feedback path of the loop yields the necessary phase and gain around the loop to generate a phase cancelling sound in the ear without creating acoustic feedback. This negative feedback response also causes a sound pressure reduction for external signals thus affecting the response from the external processed signal to the receiver signal. As a result, an adaptive pre-compensation filter is provided. The adaptive pre-compensation filter performs adaptive equalisation to maintain a constant frequency response between the external signal and the receiver signal in response to changes in loop response.

In addition, the negative feedback response also causes a reduction in external sounds transmitted through a vent or leakage, thus minimising both effects.

Referring initially to **Fig. 1**, a schematic diagram 1 illustrates the occlusion reduction scheme of the preferred embodiment. This electronic circuit can be encapsulated in an earmold 100 as discussed hereinafter with reference to **Fig. 11**. The earmold optionally contains tubing for coupling the receiver to the ear. The earmold optionally contains tubing for coupling the internal microphone to the ear. The

microphone and receiver optionally can be combined into a single unit or jointly coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear by a common tube. Optionally these tubes can be protected from wax blockage using wax guards. The lengths of these tubes are preferably as short as possible to minimise delays around the feedback loop, but can be any length. The earmold can optionally contain an open vent to depressurise the ear thus reducing the sensation of stuffiness in the ear. Optionally, the vent can be fitted with an acoustic damper for compensating for the vent resonance that may affect the closed loop response.

The internal signal from an internal microphone 7 is proportional to the ear canal sound pressure. This internal signal is filtered in a feedback loop shown as first electronic circuit **(A)** 2 and second electronic circuit (**B) 3** to produce the receiver signal 4 output to the receiver 5. The aim is to produce cancellation around the loop, limited to a given low to mid frequency band.

An analog implementation of the occlusion reduction scheme is depicted in **Figs. 2-4** and a digital implementation is shown in **Figs. 5-7**.

In addition, **Fig. 1** shows fourth electronic circuit (D) 8 that estimates the level of the receiver signal to produce a control signal. Optionally the input to the fourth electronic circuit (D) 8 can be obtained from the output of a combiner 9 with appropriate compensation for the effects of the first electronic circuit (A) 2. The response of the negative feedback loop is controlled by the control signal. The estimated level of the receive signal 4 can be compared to a reference level which is not shown in this figure. The control signal reduces the gain in the loop as the level of the receive signal increases above the reference level. The reference level is set to a level to minimise distortion occurring within the loop.

The combined signal within the loop results from a combination 9 of processed internal signal 12 and processed external signal. The processed external signal results from a filtered external signal 13. The pre-compensation filter 10 depicted as the third electronic circuit (**C**) 10 in **Fig. 1**, equalises the magnitude of the transfer function from the external signal 13 to the receiver signal 4 so that it is approximately constant across frequency, assuming a fixed closed loop response. Optionally, the filter in the third electronic circuit (C) 10 is adaptively controlled by fourth electronic circuit (D) 8 so that the magnitude of the transfer function from the external signal 13 to the receiver signal 4 is approximately constant across frequency regardless of changes in the closed loop response.

Optionally the fourth electronic circuit (D) uses estimates of signal levels from the receiver signal or combined signal and from the internal signal or processed internal signal to produce a control signal to control the loop response. This control signal can control the loop response by directly applying gain reduction to the first electronic circuit (A) or to the second electronic circuit (B). The control signal produce from this arrangement can be used in combination with the fixed or adaptive third electronic circuit (C).

Analog Implementation

Fig. 2, depicts an analog implementation 20 of the negative feedback loop of **Fig. 1**. Firstly, the internal signal is applied to a high pass filter 21 and lead-lag filter 22 in order to reduce effects from jaw movements and very low frequency instability in the loop. The equations for the transfer function in relation to the corresponding discrete components are shown below:

$$H_{HP}(j\omega) = \frac{j\omega \cdot R_1 C_2}{1 + j\omega \cdot R_1 \times C_1}$$

if $R_4 = R_5, C_2 = C_3$ then the lead lag transfer function equation is shown below

$$H_{Lead-Lag}(j\omega) = \frac{(R_3 + R_6) + j\omega \bullet C_2 \bullet (2R_3R_6 + R_6R_4 + R_3R_4)}{R_6 + j\omega \bullet C_2 \bullet (R_3R_6 + R_6R_4)}$$

The next filtering stage reduces the dominant transducer resonance within the loop and provides greater open loop gain at frequencies at which the occlusion effect is greatest. This is achieved by using a bi-quadratic filter 24, and placing a complex pair of zeros at the dominant transducer resonance frequency followed by a pair of real poles to provide low frequency emphasis in the open loop response.

In the arrangement of Fig. 2, if we allow $R_8 = R_{10}, C_4 = C_6$, $R_9 = R_{11}, C_5 = C_7$ and $R_{12} = R_{13}, C_8 = C_9$,then the biquadratic transfer function equation can be computed as follows

$$H_{bi-quad}(j\omega) = \frac{(j\omega)^2 C_4R_9C_5 + j\omega\left(C_4 + \frac{C_5R_9}{R_8} - C_5\right) + \frac{1}{R_8}}{(j\omega)^2 C_5R_9C_8 + j\omega\left(\frac{C_5R_9}{R_{12}} + C_8\right) + \frac{1}{R_{12}}}$$

To determine the pole zero placement, the biquadratic transfer function equation can be directly related to a well known second order transfer function equation.

$$K(j\omega) = \frac{(j\omega)^2 + 2\xi_z\omega_z j\omega + \omega_z^2}{(j\omega)^2 + 2\zeta_p\omega_p j\omega + \omega_p^2}$$

Where the ω_p and ω_z are the location of the pole and zero frequencies. Similarly ξ_z and ζ_p are the damping factors for the poles and zeros respectively. Thus, this relationship can be used to position the poles and zeros at the desired frequencies with the desired damping.

With appropriate phase compensation, amplification is added to the loop. The gain amplification is chosen in accordance to a well-known gain and phase margin criteria (e.g. Linear Control Systems Analysis and Designs, John J.D'Azzo, Constantine H.

Houpis, 2nd Edition, McGraw-Hill, 1981). A loop gain of less than or equal to –3 dB is chosen at frequencies likely to produce positive feedback. The filtering arrangement of **Fig. 1** shown in **Fig 2**, produces a gain greater than unity, for an open loop response between 80 Hz and 1 kHz and less than unity at other frequencies, where positive feedback may occur. The frequency band ranging from 80 Hz up to 1 kHz is an appropriated choice as the occlusion effect is subjectively more apparent at these frequencies, as described in literature (e.g. Hearing Aids, Harvey Dillon, Boomerang-Press, 2001).

The bi-quadratic filter 24 is followed up by a voltage controlled variable resistance 25, referred to as **VVR**. This control produces up to – 20 dB of gain around the loop, by controlling the voltage at the gate of the JFET. Thus, the gain across the VVR network is found by observing that the JFET is series with R_7 forms a voltage divider, with its gain given by:

$$Gain_{VVR} = \frac{R_{Q1}}{R_7 + R_{Q1}}$$

Where R_{Q1}, is the variable resistance across drain to source junction.

The VVR is followed by a bufferstage 26, that is subsequently followed by a variable resistor, R_{14}. 27. This latter resistor is used to fined tune the gain around the loop manually. The variable resistor 27 is followed by an amplifier and a combiner 9, combining a processed external signal 28 with the processed internal signal 12. Finally, this buffer functions as a voltage controlled voltage source to the receiver, optionally a **class D** amplifier may be used.

Referring now to **Fig. 3**, there is illustrated the precompensation circuit 10 of **Fig. 1** in more detail. The circuit may be used to pre-compensate an external signal 13 to produce a processed external signal 28. The external signal is pre-compensated with a

fixed high pass filter 32, a variable notch filter 33, and an adjustable gain control 34. Note that the notch and the gain are also controlled with voltage variable resistances, using JFET transistors.

If $C_{13} = C_{14}$,then the transfer function equation for the notch filter, positioned between U6 and U7 is shown below

$$H_{Notch}(j\omega) = \frac{1 + j\omega(2R_x C_{13}) + \left(R_x R_{19} C_{13}^{\ 2}\right)\cdot(j\omega)^2}{1 + j\omega(R_{19} + 2R_x)C_{13} + \left(R_x R_{19} C_{13}^{\ 2}\right)\cdot(j\omega)^2}$$

Where $R_x = R_{20} + R_{Q3} + R_{Q4}$ and $R_{Q3} + R_{Q4}$ is the combined resistance across drain to source junction of the two JFET transistors. Also note that the amplification at U7 is controlled by the source to drain resistance at Q5, and the low pass filter between U5 and U6 is essentially switched on and off by Q2.

The voltage variable resistances shown in **Fig. 2** and **3** are driven by the circuit 40 shown in **Fig. 4**. This circuit functions as a signal level estimator and threshold detector and produces a control voltage 41. In this circuit the receiver signal 4 is compared to a reference voltage 43, shown as v-Ref in the figure, at the negative input of U8 (44). If this voltage does not exceed the reference level, the current source, made up by BJ3 and BJ4 transistor pair pulls down the voltage across the RC tank towards the negative supply voltage, with a time constant equal to the release time. Note that the voltage across the RC tank feeds directly into the gate of the JFET control transistor in **Fig. 2** from U9 buffer (1), resulting in a VVR signal 25. Similarly from U10 and U11 buffer (2) and buffer (3), results is an inverted VVR signal 35, that is directly applied to the gates of all the JFET transistors shown in **Fig. 3**. As the voltage exceeds the threshold reference level, the current source, shown as BJ6 and BJ5 transistor pair, charges the RC tank, towards the base voltage at BJ6, with a time constant set by the attack time. The

attack and release time constants can be approximated by finding the appropriate ratio between resistors R_{31} and R_{30}.

The voltage across the capacitor C_{15} ranges from a voltage at the based of BJ7 , say 0.7V or fully charged to the voltage at the collector of BJ3, say -2.8V or fully discharged, then the change in voltage $\Delta V \approx 3.5V$, from which the current needed to produce the discharging rate can be evaluated as follows:

$$\text{Discharging } I = C_{15} \times \frac{\Delta V}{\text{Re}lease\_Time} = 7uA$$

thus effectively $I_{charging} \approx 11 \times I_{discharging}$

Then $R_{31} = \frac{0.7}{77u} \approx 8.2k$ $\qquad R_{30} = 11 \times R_{31} \approx 91k$

Digital Implementation

A digital implementation of the arrangement of **Fig. 1** typically requires the signal within the loop to be oversampled to reduce the delay introduced into the loop by sampling. The signal processing performed by electronic circuits A, B, C and D and the combiner 9 may be performed digitally. The digital processing optionally is performed by a digital signal processor which is instructed to perform the signal processing. Various techniques are available to those skilled in the art to perform these processes. Examples of these are performing the filtering operations using FIR or IIR filters or modifying the signals in the frequency domain using the short-time Fourier transform techniques. One implementation of the scheme described for **Fig 1** is shown in **Figs. 5-7**.

In **Fig. 5,** after A/D conversion 50, the internal signal is filtered with an IIR filter 51 in order to provide the required gain and phase compensation, with the same criteria applied in the description of **Fig. 2**.

In this digital implementation the level of the receiver signal 4 is directly estimated and the control signal *r(n)* is produced by the level estimator and control signal generator

8 which is shown in greater detailed in **Fig. 7.**. Referring now to **Fig. 7,** the receive signal level is estimated with a digital 1st order switchable time-constant envelope detector. The envelope signal is compared 71 to a threshold value and the maximum of either the ratio of its exceedance of this threshold or unity is produced. This maximum is inverted to produce the control signal. As the level of the envelope signal exceeds the threshold, the control signal shown as *r(n)* decreases at a rate determined by the attack time constant λ_{attack}. As the envelope signal decreases in level, the control signal increases at a rate determined by the release time constant $\lambda_{release}$. Alternative signal level compression strategies employing different envelope detector designs well known to those skilled in the art may be used.

The internal signal, after being filtered by the IIR filter 51, is scaled by the control signal *r(n)* to produce the processed internal signal. The processed external signal is added to the processed internal signal by the combiner 9 to produce the combined signal. The combined signal is scaled 2 to produce the receiver signal 4 which after D/A conversion is applied to the receiver 5.

As in the analog description, the negative feedback loop requires pre-compensation so that the gain response measured from the external signal to the receiver signal is not altered by the closed loop response. In **Fig. 5,** the pre-compensation filter 10 is realised as a cascaded IIR filter, with a structural realisation shown in **Fig. 6** . The first filter stage shown in **Fig. 6** is a high pass filter, comprising of a zero at 0 Hz and a pole at f_{HP}, the coefficient being a function of the sampling rate, Fs. The second stage of the filter shown in **Fig. 6** is adaptive, the locations of poles f_p and zeros f_z of the digital filter are varied in accordance with the output of a mapping function *p(n)* 61. Alternatively the damping factors for the poles and zeros can be controlled by two independent mapping functions derived from the control signal *r(n)*. **Fig. 5** shows *p(n)*

as a single output from a polynomial mapping function with input *r(n)*. The polynomial's coefficients are found using an autoregressive analysis of the required compensating response as a function of the control signal *r(n)*.

Any combination of analog and digital electronic circuits is possible in addition to the all analogue and the all digital implementations described with the appropriate conversions between analogue and digital formats. In particular, electronic circuits B, C and D may be implemented digitally with the combiner and electronic circuit A implemented in analog circuitry. Furthermore, the processed internal and processed external signals may be combined while both in a 1-bit format and applied directly to the receiver without electronic circuit A performing any function or with it simply providing the 1-bit drive current for the receiver.

Referring now to **Fig. 8** the simulated closed loop response in a Zwislocki coupler is shown. The scheme yields approximately 16 dB of occlusion reduction at 300 Hz, and 18 dB at 100 Hz. The occlusion reduction response is a measure of the level difference between the sound level in the coupler with the occlusion reduction system active and the sound level in the coupler without any occlusion reduction. Referring to **Fig. 9** occlusion reduction in a real ear is shown. This was calculated by taking the linear average of the energy in 1/12 octave bands recorded using an in-the-ear-canal microphone while a subject talked for 2 minutes. This signal was recorded while the feedback loop gain is maximum, and then again while the loop was open.

Referring now to **Fig. 10**, three responses measured in a Zwislocki coupler are shown. These are the transfer functions from an external signal to the coupler microphone for the compensated 93 and un-compensated responses 92. Also shown is the natural receiver response 94 employing a voltage controlled voltage source to the receiver. Note that the compensated response is not adversely affected by the occlusion

reduction scheme compared to that of the natural receiver response 94. Also similar responses are derived for minimally open vented cavities with the appropriate changes to the mappings, filtering and gain equalisation in electronic circuits A, B, and C.

Referring now to **Fig. 11**, there is shown one form of actual implementation of the present invention as an in-the-canal hearing aid device 100 placed in a user's ear 101 that substantially eliminates the discomfort associated with the occlusion effect. The device 100 includes a sealed or optionally vented 102 earmold that occludes or partially occludes the ear canal. The earmold encapsulates a hearing aid electronic circuit comprising of: a hearing aid processor 103 directly connected to an external microphone 104 and powered by small battery 105. The hearing aid processor includes occlusion reduction electronic circuits A, B, C, D and the combiner. A separate receiver 5 and an internal microphone 7 are also interconnected. These transducer elements are acoustically coupled to the inside of the ear canal with short tubes 108, 109; and protected from ear wax with wax-guarding devices 110, 111.

The forgoing describes preferred embodiments of the present invention. Modifications, obvious to those skilled in the art, can be made thereto without departing from the scope of the invention.

CLAIMS

1. An electro-acoustic system including:

an electro-acoustic circuit including a negative-feedback loop comprising of:

a microphone for generating an internal signal from an acoustical signal located within or closely coupled to an occluded or partially occluded ear;

a second electronic circuit (B) for modifying the internal signal to produce a processed internal signal;

a combiner for combining the processed internal signal with a processed external signal to produce a combined signal;

a first electronic circuit (A) for modifying the combined signal to produce a receiver signal;

and

a receiver for generating an acoustical signal from the receiver signal at a location within or closely coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear;

a third electronic circuit (C) for modifying an external signal to produce a processed external signal;

a fourth electronic circuit (D) for estimating the level of the receiver signal either directly from the receiver signal or from the combined signal and producing a control signal from this estimate;

wherein the processing performed by the second electronic circuit (B) is controlled by the control signal.

2. A system as claimed in claim 1 wherein the negative-feedback loop includes filtering that alters the open loop response so that the real component of the response is large and negative at frequencies where the occlusion effect is most apparent.

3. A system as claimed in claim 2 wherein the third electronic circuit (C) includes filtering that provides compensation for the closed response of the negative-feedback loop.

4. A system as claimed in claim 3 wherein the filtering provided by the third electronic circuit (C) is adaptive and controlled by the control signal.

5. A system as claimed in any previous claim wherein the fourth electronic circuit (D) estimates the level of the internal signal or the level of the processed internal signal and uses this estimate with the estimate of the receiver signal to produce a control signal.

6. A system as claimed in any previous claim wherein the gain of the second electronic circuit (B) is controlled by the control signal.

7. A system as claimed in any previous claim wherein the ear is occluded or partially occluded by an earmold.

8. A system as claimed in claim 7 wherein the earmold contains a vent.

9. A system as claimed in claim 8 wherein the vent contains an acoustic damper

10. A system as claimed in any previous claim wherein the microphone for generating the internal signal is coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear by a tube.

11. A system as claimed in any previous claim wherein the receiver is coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear by a tube.

12. A system as claimed in any previous claim wherein the microphone and the receiver are jointly coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear by a common tube.

13. A system as claimed in any previous claim wherein at least one of the electronic circuits is digital.

14. A system as claimed in any previous claim wherein at least one of the digital electronic circuits uses a sampling rate at least four times that of the bandwidth of the signal.

15. A system as claimed in claims 13 or claim 14 wherein the first electronic circuit (A) includes a digital to analogue converter.

16. A system as claimed in claim 13, claim 14 or claim 15 wherein the second electronic circuit (B) includes an analogue to digital converter.

17. A system as claimed in claim 16 wherein the second electronic circuit (B) includes a digital to analogue converter.

18. A system as claimed in claim 14 wherein at least one of the input signals to the combiner is a binary signal.

19. An electro-acoustic system including a negative-feedback loop comprising of:

a microphone for generating an internal signal from an acoustical signal located within or closely coupled to an occluded or partially occluded ear;

a second electronic circuit (B) for modifying the internal signal to produce a processed internal signal;

a combiner for combining the processed internal signal with a processed external signal to produce a combined signal;

a first electronic circuit (A) for modifying the combined signal to produce a receiver signal;

and

a receiver for generating an acoustical signal from the receiver signal at a location within or closely coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear;

a third electronic circuit (C) for modifying an external signal such as from external microphone to produce a processed external signal;

a fourth electronic circuit (D) for estimating the level of the receiver signal and producing a control signal from this estimate;

wherein the control signal controls the processing performed by the second electronic circuit (B) and controls the processing performed by the third electronic circuit (C).

20. An electro-acoustic system including a negative-feedback loop comprising of:

a microphone for generating an internal signal from an acoustical signal located within or closely coupled to an occluded or partially occluded ear;

a second electronic circuit (B) for modifying the internal signal to produce a processed internal signal;

a combiner for combining the processed internal signal with a processed external signal to produce a combined signal;

a first electronic circuit (A) for modifying the combined signal to produce a receiver signal;

and

a receiver for generating an acoustical signal from the receiver signal at a location within or closely coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear;

a third electronic circuit (C) for modifying an external signal to produce a processed external signal;

a fourth electronic circuit (D) for estimating the level of the receiver signal and producing a control signal from this estimate;

wherein the control signal controls the processing performed by first electronic circuit (A) and controls the processing performed by the third electronic circuit (C).

21. A method of providing a negative feedback loop for an electro-acoustic system, the method including the steps of:

(a) generating an internal signal representing an acoustical signal located within or closely coupled to an occluded or partially occluded ear;

(b) modifying the internal signal to produce a processed internal signal;

(c) combining the processed internal signal with a processed external signal to produce a combined signal;

(d) modifying the combined signal to produce a receiver signal;

(e) generating an acoustical signal from the receiver signal at a location within or closely coupled to the occluded or partially occluded ear;

(f) modifying an external signal to produce a processed external signal;

(g) estimating the level of the receiver signal either directly from the receiver signal or from the combined signal and producing a control signal from this estimate;

wherein the degree of modification in step (b) is controlled by the control signal.

22. A method as claimed in claim 21 wherein the control signal is utilised to control the amount of modification occurring in step (f).

23. A method substantially as herein described with reference to any one of the embodiments of the invention illustrated in the accompanying drawings and/or examples.

24. A system substantially as herein described with reference to any one of the embodiments of the invention illustrated in the accompanying drawings and/or examples.

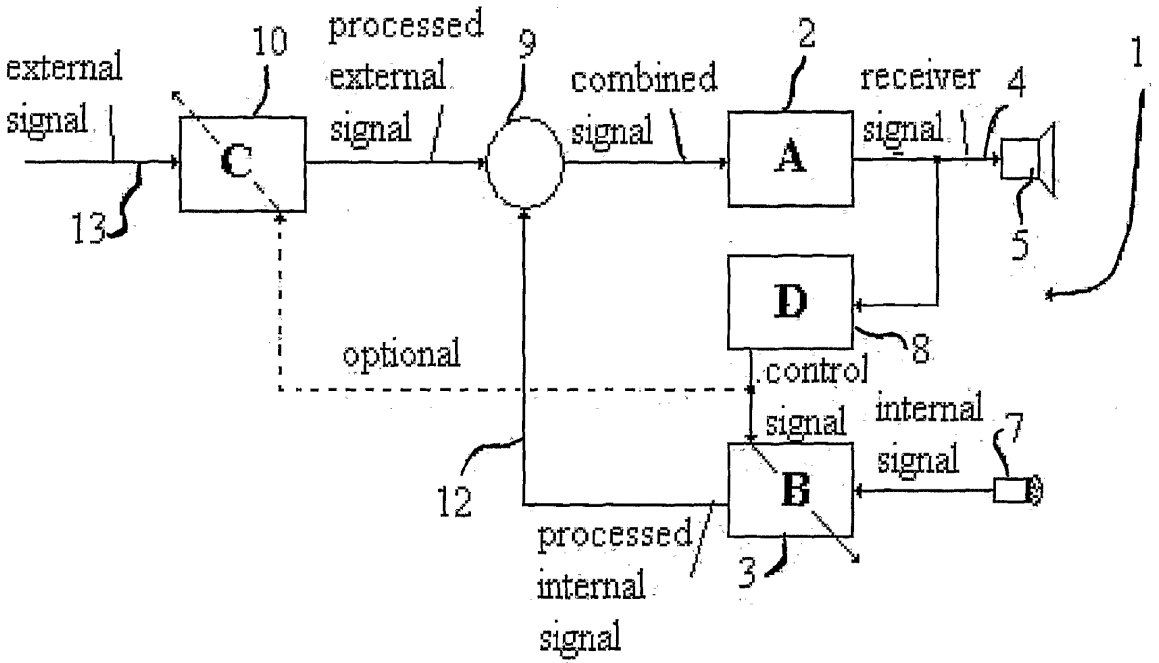

external
signal
10
C
13
processed
external
signal
9
combined
signal
2
A
receiver
signal
4
1
5
D
8
optional
control
signal
internal
signal
7
B
12
processed
internal
signal
3

Fig. 1

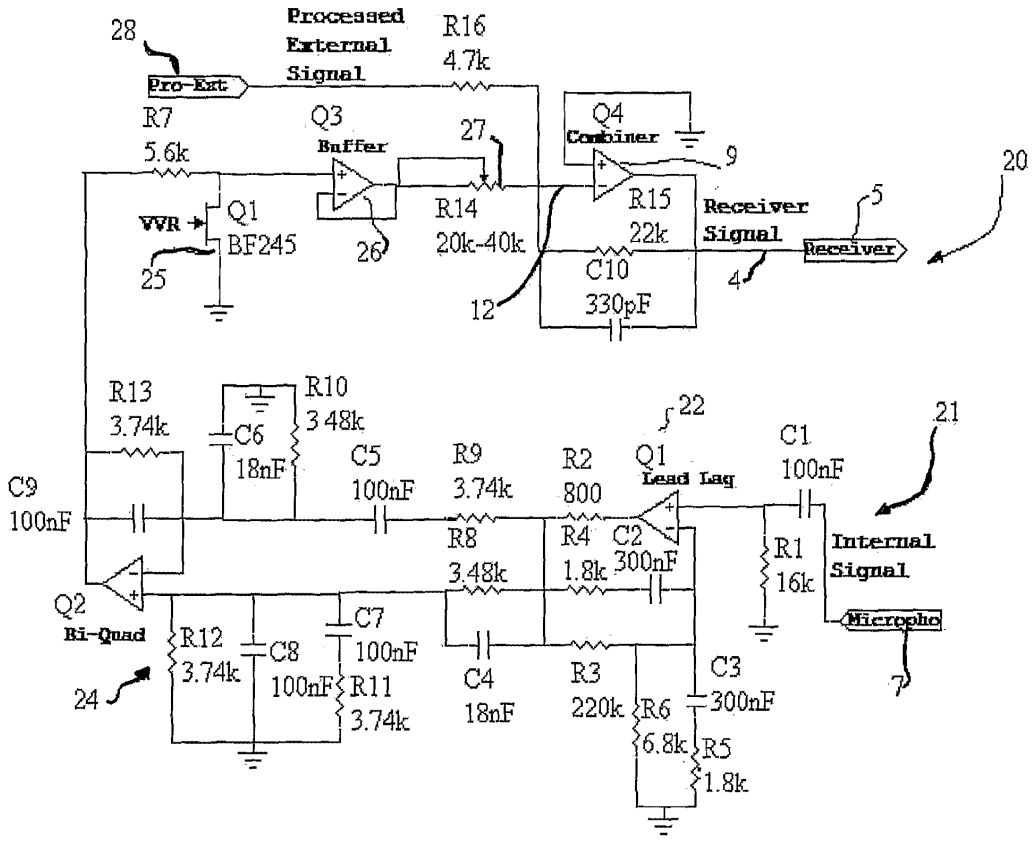

28
Processed
External
Signal
R16
4.7k
Pro-Ext
R7
5.6k
Q3
Buffer
27
Q4
Combiner
9
20
VVR
Q1
BF245
25
26
R14
20k-40k
R15
22k
Receiver
Signal
5
Receiver
C10
330pF
12
4
R13
3.74k
R10
3 48k
C6
18nF
22
C1
100nF
21
C9
100nF
C5
100nF
R9
3.74k
R2
800
Q1
Lead Lag
R8
3.48k
R4
1.8k
C2
300nF
R1
16k
Internal
Signal
Micropho
Q2
Bi-Quad
R12
3.74k
C8
100nF
C7
100nF
R11
3.74k
24
C4
18nF
R3
220k
R6
6.8k
C3
300nF
R5
1.8k
7

Fig. 2

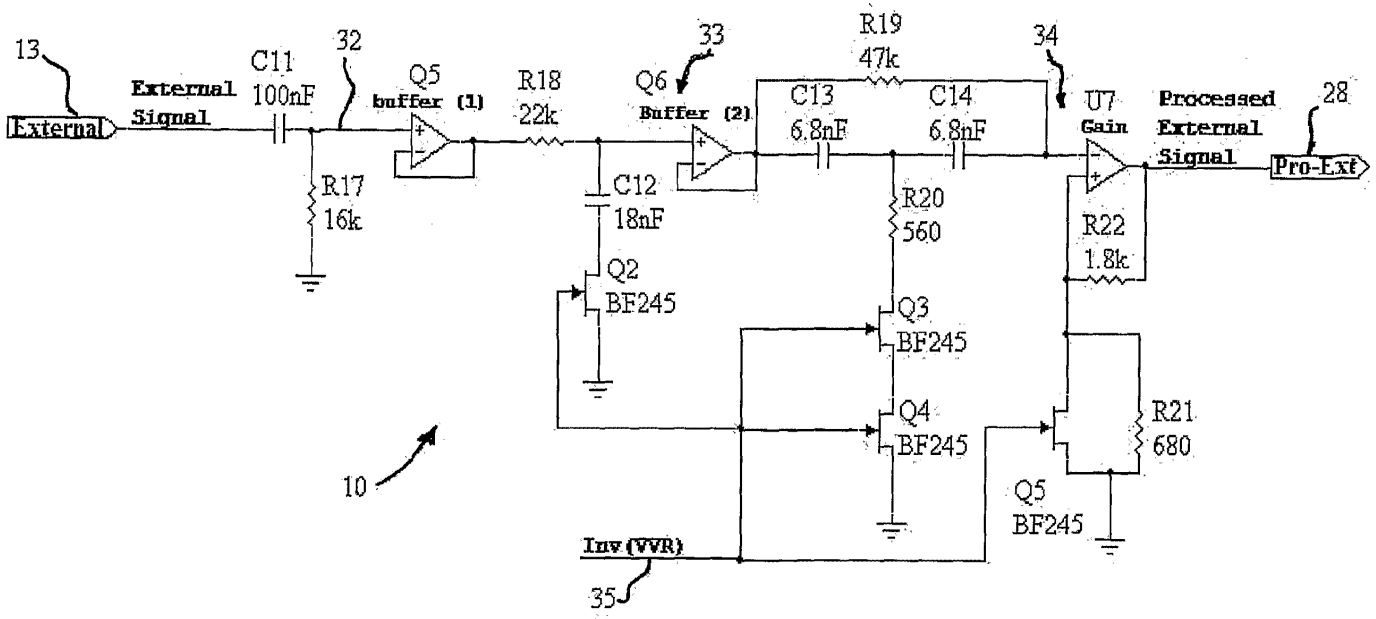

13
External
External Signal
C11
100nF
32
Q5
buffer (1)
R18
22k
33
Q6
Buffer (2)
R19
47k
34
C13
6.8nF
C14
6.8nF
U7
Gain
Processed External Signal
28
Pro-Ext
R17
16k
C12
18nF
R20
560
R22
1.8k
Q2
BF245
Q3
BF245
Q4
BF245
R21
680
Q5
BF245
10
Inv (VVR)
35

Fig. 3

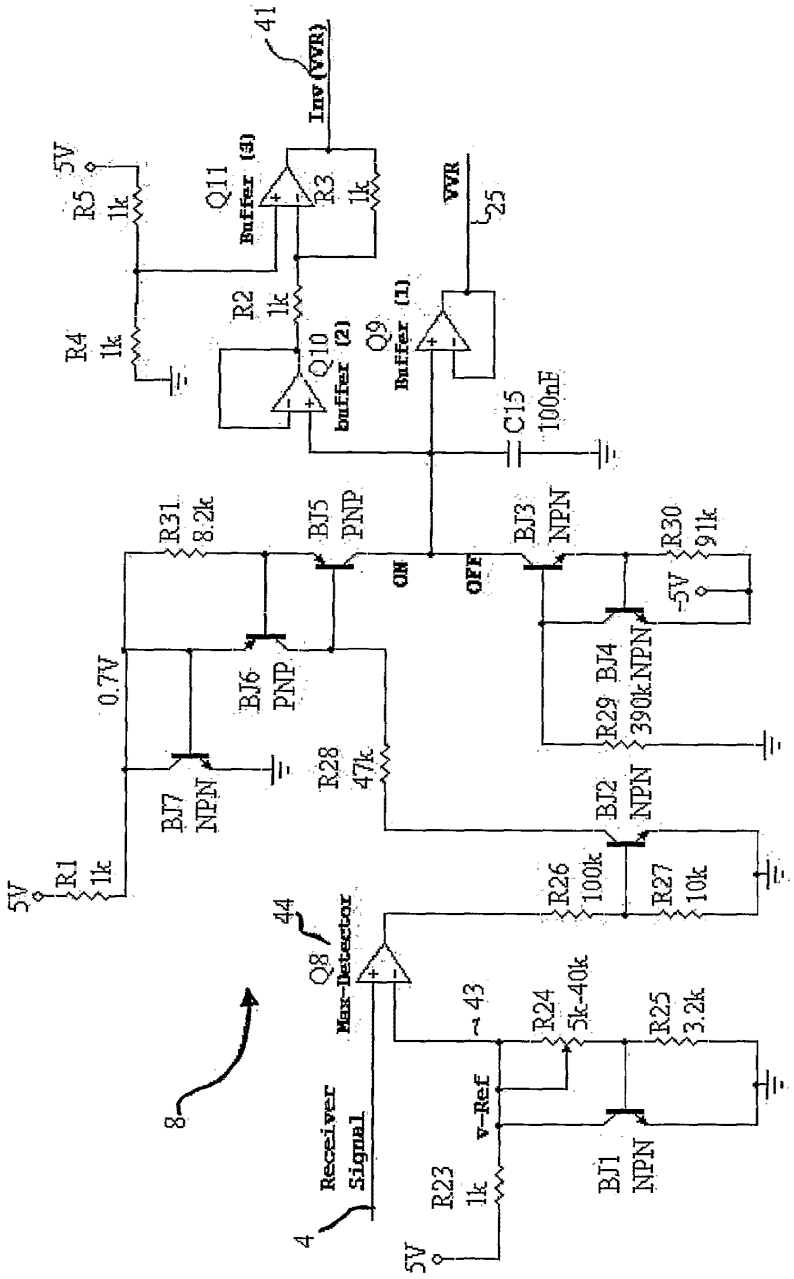


Fig. 4

Exhibit 1004
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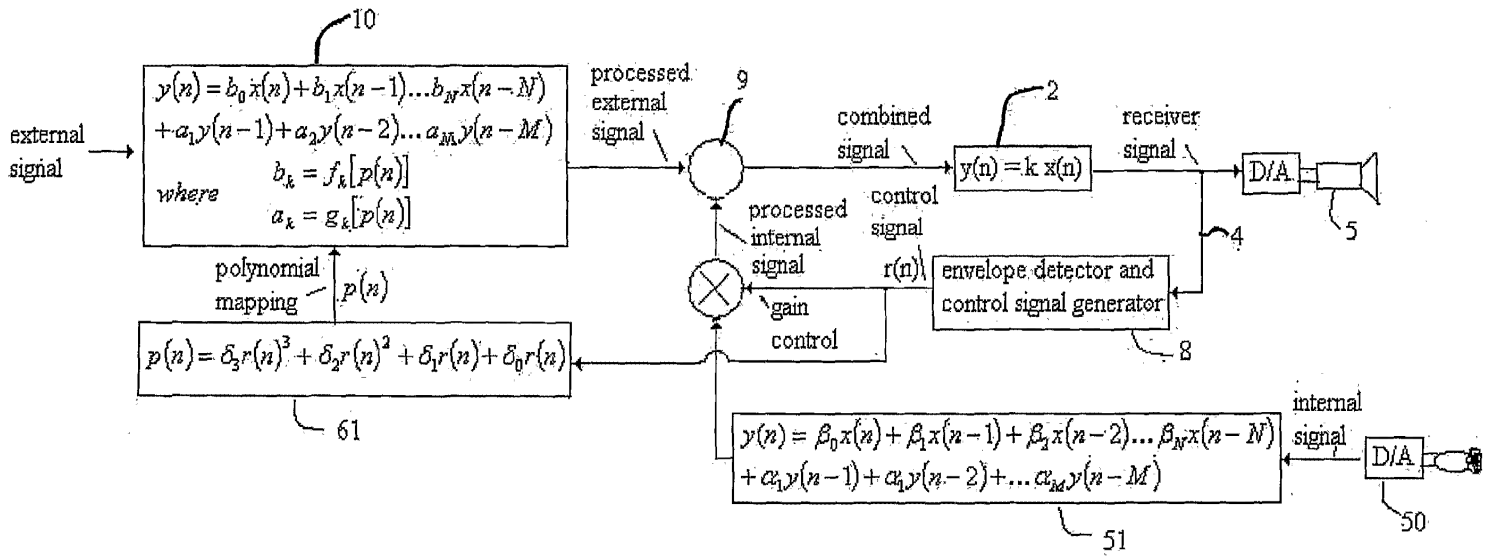

10
$y(n)=b_0x(n)+b_1x(n-1)\ldots b_Nx(n-N)$
$+a_1y(n-1)+a_2y(n-2)\ldots a_My(n-M)$
where $b_k=f_k[p(n)]$
$a_k=g_k[p(n)]$
external signal
processed external signal
9
combined signal
2
y(n) = k x(n)
receiver signal
D/A
5
4
processed internal signal
control signal
r(n)
envelope detector and control signal generator
8
gain control
polynomial mapping
p(n)
$p(n)=\delta_3r(n)^3+\delta_2r(n)^2+\delta_1r(n)+\delta_0r(n)$
61
$y(n)=\beta_0x(n)+\beta_1x(n-1)+\beta_2x(n-2)\ldots\beta_Nx(n-N)$
$+\alpha_1y(n-1)+\alpha_1y(n-2)+\ldots\alpha_My(n-M)$
internal signal
D/A
50
51

Fig. 5

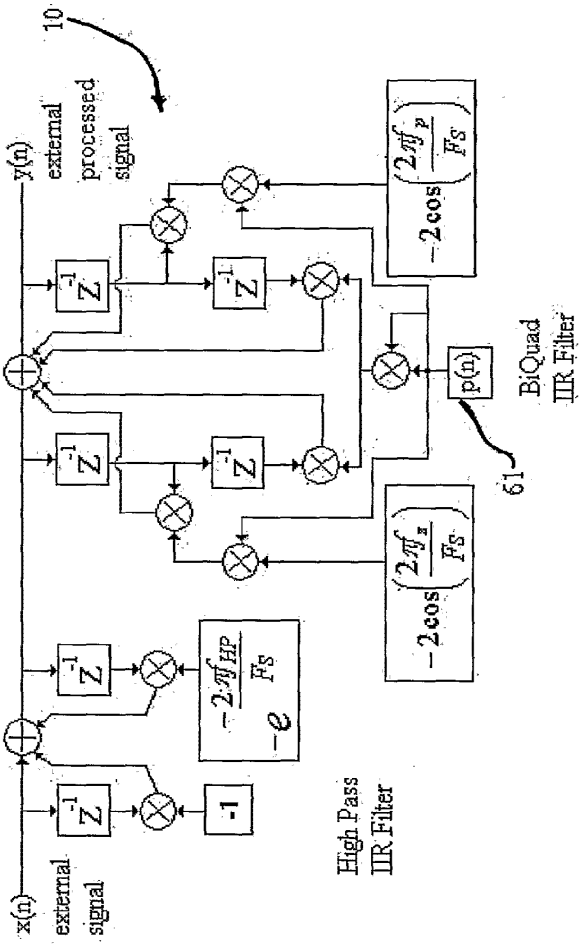


Fig. 6

Exhibit 1004
Page 0234 of 1001

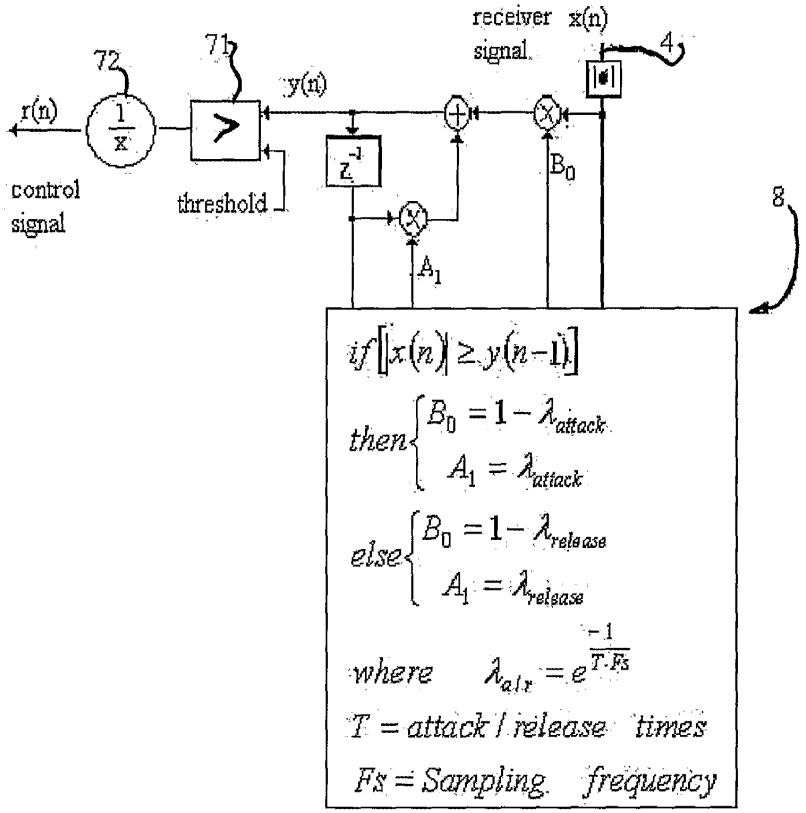

receiver x(n)
signal
4
72
71
y(n)
r(n)
1/x
>
control
signal
threshold
z^-1
B0
8
A1
if [|x(n)| ≥ y(n-1)]
then { B0 = 1 - λattack
A1 = λattack
else { B0 = 1 - λrelease
A1 = λrelease
where λa/r = e^(-1/(T·Fs))
T = attack / release times
Fs = Sampling frequency

Fig. 7

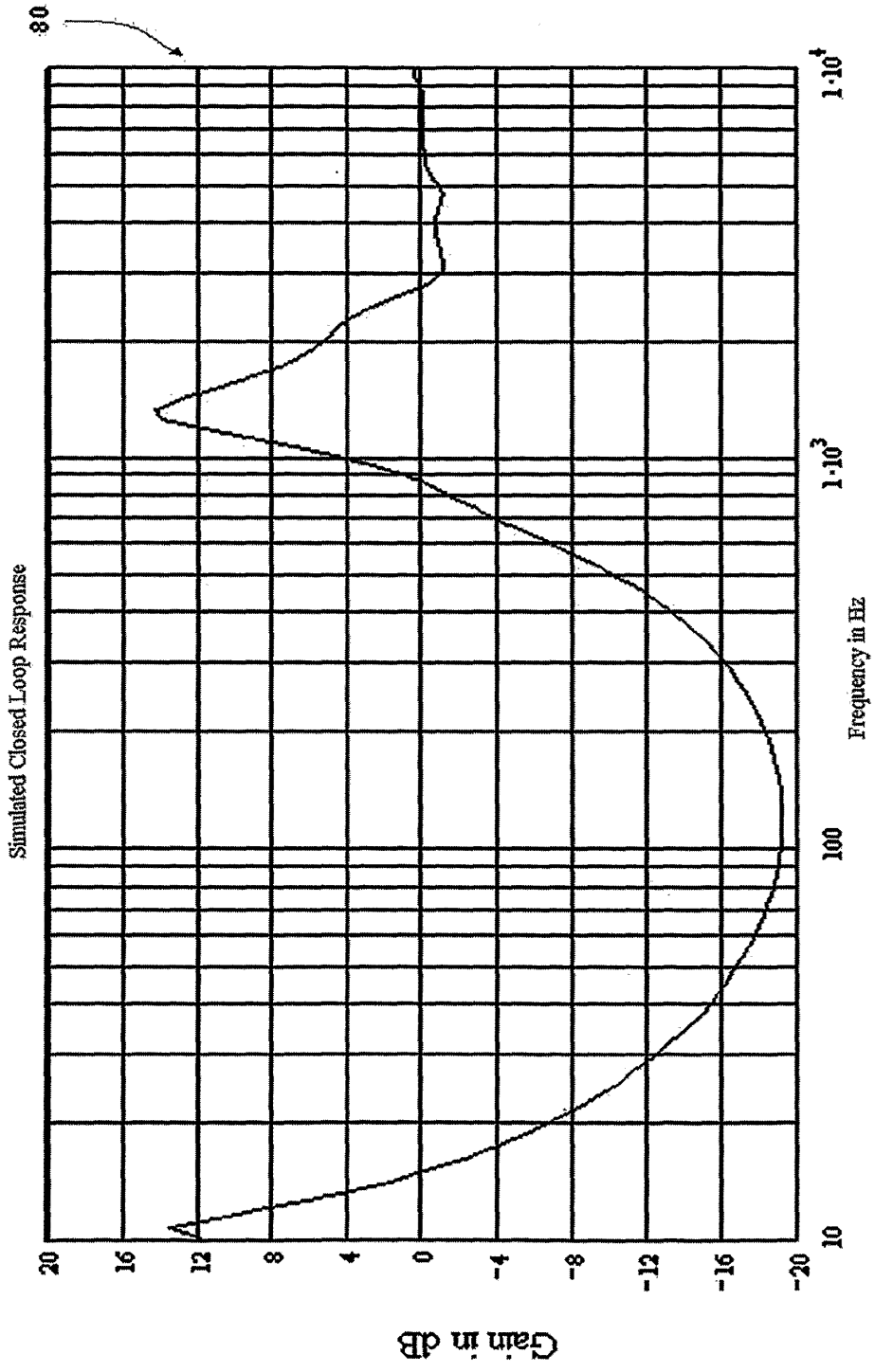

80
Simulated Closed Loop Response
Gain in dB
20
16
12
8
4
0
-4
-8
-12
-16
-20
10
100
1·10³
1·10⁴
Frequency in Hz

Fig. 8

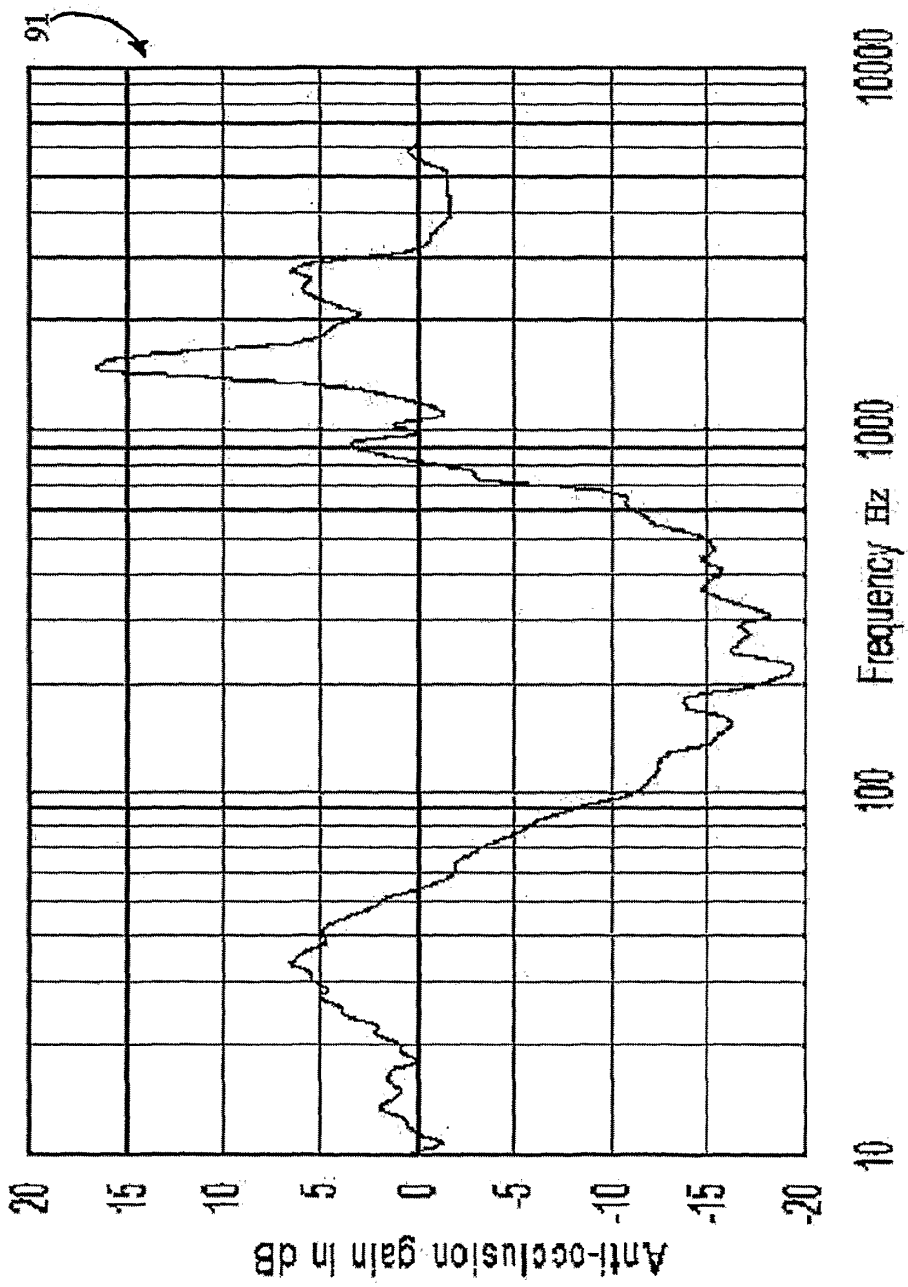

91
Anti-occlusion gain in dB
20
15
10
5
0
-5
-10
-15
-20
10
100
1000
10000
Frequency Hz

Fig. 9

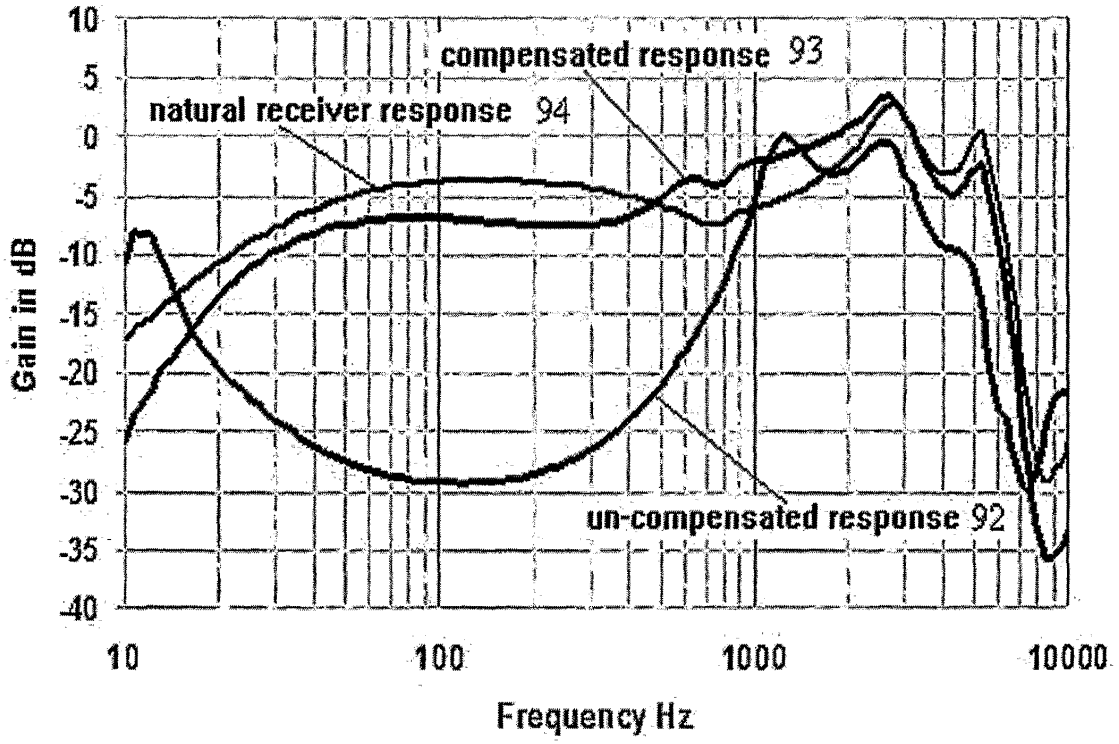

compensated response 93
natural receiver response 94
un-compensated response 92
Gain in dB
10
5
0
-5
-10
-15
-20
-25
-30
-35
-40
10
100
1000
10000
Frequency Hz

Fig. 10

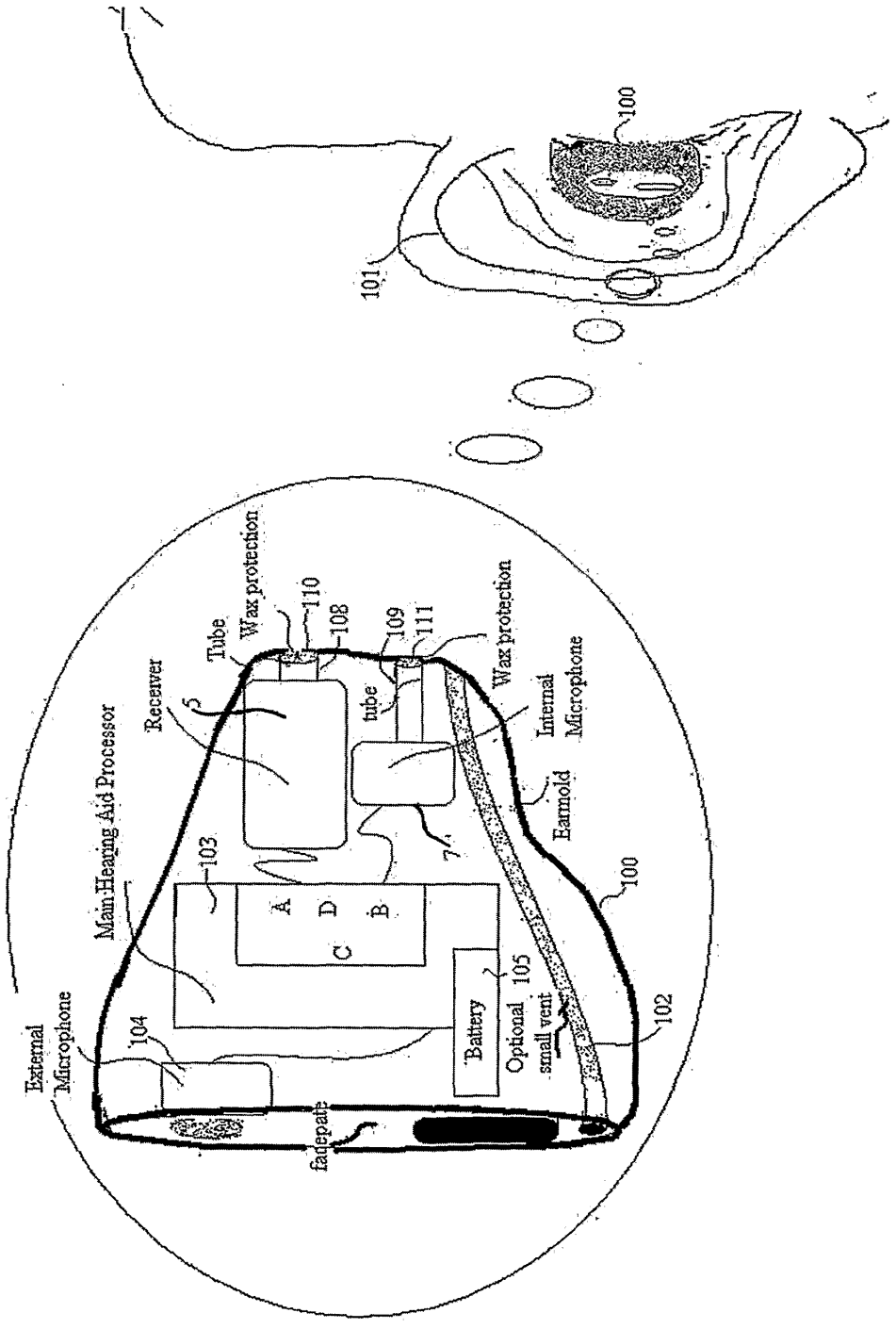


Fig. 11

Exhibit 1004
Page 0239 of 1001

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/AU2005/001506

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

Int. Cl. [7]: H04R 29/00; A61B 5/00

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)
WPAT: hearing aid, occlusion, gain, frequency range, sound level, signal strength and similar terms.
USPTO: hearing aid, occlusion, reduce

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 6687377 B2 (VOIX et al.) 3 February 2004 Col. 3 line 33-Col. 6 line 22	1-24
A	WO 2002/085063 A2 (WIDEX A/S et al.) 24 October 2002 Page 4 line 14-Page 10 line 32	1-24
A	US 6766031 B1 (WESTERMANN) 20 July 2004 Col. 2 line 18-Col. 5 line 28	1-24
A	CA 2381516 A1 (GENNUM CORPORATION, CA) 12 October 2002 Page 1 line 20-Page 18 line 2	1-24

[X] Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C [X] See patent family annex

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"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

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"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
3 November 2005	9 NOV 2005
Name and mailing address of the ISA/AU AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE PO BOX 200, WODEN ACT 2606, AUSTRALIA E-mail address: pct@ipaustralia.gov.au Facsimile No. (02) 6285 3929	Authorized officer **JUZER KHANBHAI** Telephone No : (02) 6283 2176

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/AU2005/001506

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 5195139 A (GAUTHIER) 16 March 1993 Col. 1 line 39-Col. 3 line 22	1-24

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/AU2005/001506

This Annex lists the known "A" publication level patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The Australian Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

Patent Document Cited in Search Report		Patent Family Member					
US	6687377	AU	20394/02	CA	2477010	CN	1483298
		EP	1356255	US	2002076057	WO	0250499
		ZA	200305523				
WO	2002/085063	CA	2442538	EP	1250027	US	2002150269
US	6766031	AU	69189/98	CA	2286037	DK	42297
		EP	0980641	WO	9847318		
CA	2381516	N/A					
US	5195139	AU	20280/92	EP	0584259	WO	9221218

Due to data integration issues this family listing may not include 10 digit Australian applications filed since May 2001.

END OF ANNEX

(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

REVISED VERSION

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(43) International Publication Date
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(51) International Patent Classification:
H04N 7/18 (2006.01) *G06F 19/00* (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:
PCT/US2007/060620

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(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
60/765,628 6 February 2006 (06.02.2006) US

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(72) Inventor; and

(75) Inventor/Applicant *(for US only)*: **MOBERLY, David** [US/US]; 3899 Magnolia Drive, Palo Alto, California 94306 (US).

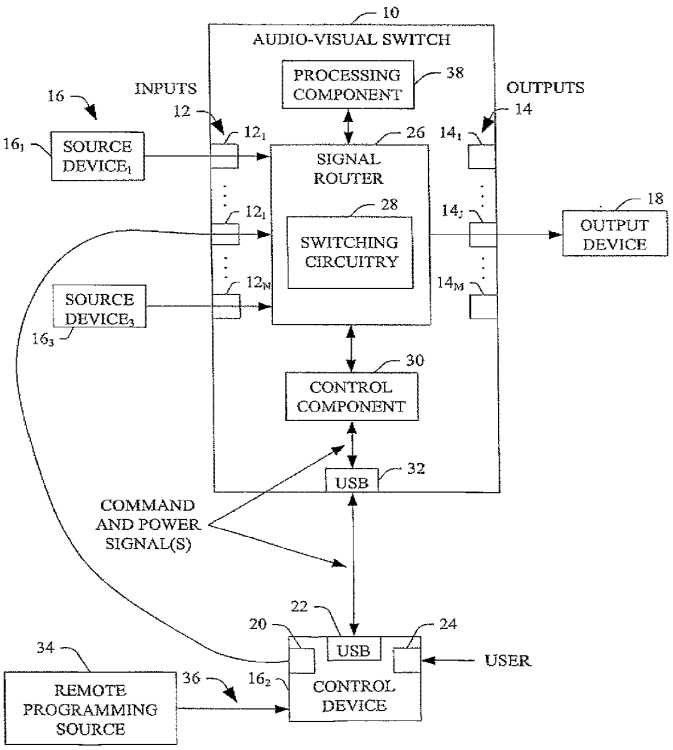
(74) Common Representative: **KONINKLIJKE PHILIPS ELECTRONICS, N.V.**; c/o Douglas B. McKnight, 595 Miner Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44143 (US).

(81) Designated States *(unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available)*: AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT, HN, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KM, KN, KP, KR, KZ, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, LY, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RS, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, SV, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW

(84) Designated States *(unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available)*: ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI,

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: USB-ENABLED AUDIO-VIDEO SWITCH



(57) Abstract: A telemedicine system (8) includes an audio-video switch (10) that receives at least two different signals and conveys at least one of the at least two different signals to an output device (18) that presents it to a user. A control device (162) monitors a position of the audio-video switch (10) and automatically controls the position to select which of the at least two different signals is passed through the audio-video switch (10) to the output device (18) in response to a signal from a remote source (34). Signals received from the remote source (34) include medically related audio video message signals, which are input to the audio-video switch (10), and a control signal that causes the audio-video switch (10) to select between passing the medically related audio-video message signals and other received signals to the output device (18).

WO 2007/092660 A1

FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, **MR,** NE, SN, TD, TG).

Declaration under Rule 4.17:

— *as to applicant's entitlement to apply for and be granted a patent (Rule 4.17(H))*

Published:

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(88) Date of publication of the supplementary international search report: 30 October 2008

(15) Information about Correction:
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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2007/060620

A CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
INV. H04N7/18 G06F19/00

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
H04N G06F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included In the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and where practical, search terms used)
EPO-Internal , WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No
X	EP 1 126 715 A2 (KATZ RONALD ALAN [US] TELEBUYER LLC [US]) 22 August 2001 (2001-08-22) page 3, paragraph 13 page 9, paragraph 70 page 16, paragraph 134 - page 17, paragraph 151; figures 1-5	1-26
X	US 2005/052527 A1 (REMY CHRISTOPHE [US] ET AL) 10 March 2005 (2005-03-10) page 3, paragraph 30 - paragraph 32; figure 3 page 5, paragraph 41 - paragraph 42; figures 7,8	1-26

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[X] Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C

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"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

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"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
3 Apri l 2007	13/04/2007

Name and mailing address of the ISA/	Authorized officer
European Patent Office, P B 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL- 2280 HV Rijεwijk Tel (+31-70) 340-2040,Tx 31 651 epo nl, Fax- (+31-70) 340-3016	Schinnerl , Arnold

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2007/060620

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 6 717 609 B2 (SUGIMOTO HIDEO [JP] ET AL) 6 April 2004 (2004-04-06) column 7, line 19 - column 8, line 42 abstract; figures 1-5	1-26
X	US 5 553 609 A (CHEN YAOBIN [US] ET AL) 10 September 1996 (1996-09-10) column 9, line 57 - column 12, line 53; figures 5-9	1,23,26
A	EP 1 343 326 A1 (MACROSYSTEM DIGITAL VIDEO A6 [DE]). 10 September 2003 (2003-09-10) abstract; figure 1 column 6, line 22 - line 58	1-26

Form PCT/ISAS10 (continuation of second sheet) (April 200B)

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No
PCT/US2007/060620

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
EP 1126715 A2	22-08-2001	NONE	
US 2005052527 A1	10-03-2005	US 2006119701 A1	08-06-2006
US 6717609 B2	06-04-2004	DE 10101064 A1	19-07-2001
		JP 2001197485 A	19-07-2001
		US 2003197781 A1	23-10-2003
US 5553609 A	10-09-1996	AU 4980596 A	27-08-1996
		WO 9624284 A1	15-08-1996
EP 1343326 A1	10-09-2003	AT 275799 T	15-09-2004
		DE 50200955 D1	14-10-2004
		US 2003193577 A1	16-10-2003

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US07/60620

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC: **H04N 7/18**(2006.01),**9/47**(2006.01)

USPC: 348/61
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
U.S. : 348/61, 65, 74; 600/522

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 5,553,609 (CHEN et al.) 10 September 1996, entire document	1-3, 5, 7-11, 13-24
---		---
Y		4, 6, 12, 25-26
Y	US 2008/005421 A1 (CHANG et al.) 03 January 2008; entire document	4, 6, 12, 25-26

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. ☐ See patent family annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search
14 July 2008 (14.07.2008)

Date of mailing of the international search report
29 AUG 2008

Name and mailing address of the ISA/US
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Commissioner for Patents
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Authorized officer
Mehrdad Dastouri
Telephone No. 571-272-2600

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(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau

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2 May 2008 (02.05.2008)

PCT

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H04R 3/02 (2006.01) *H04R 1/02* (2006.01)
H04M 1/62 (2006.01) *H04R 1/28* (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:
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21 September 2007 (21.09.2007)

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(30) Priority Data:
2006-291843 26 October 2006 (26.10.2006) JP
2006-291844 26 October 2006 (26.10.2006) JP

(71) Applicant *(for all designated States except US)*: **MATSUSHITA ELECTRIC WORKS, LTD.** [JP/JP]; 1048, Oaza-Kadoma, Kadoma-shi, Osaka, 5718686 (JP).

(72) Inventors; and
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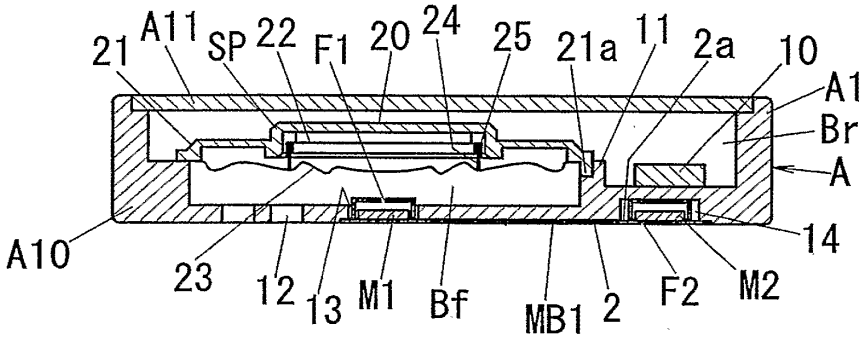
(74) Agents: **NISHIKAWA, Yoshikiyo** et al.; Hokuto Patent Attorneys Office Umeda-Daiichiseimei Bldg. 5th Floor, 12-17, Umeda 1-chome, Kita-ku, Osaka-shi, Osaka 5300001 (JP).

(81) Designated States *(unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available)*: AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BH, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DO, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT, HN, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KM, KN, KP, KR, KZ, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LY, MA, MD, ME, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RS, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, SV, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(84) Designated States *(unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available)*: ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:
— *with international search report*

(54) **Title:** INTERCOM DEVICE AND WIRING SYSTEM USING THE SAME



(57) **Abstract:** A compact intercom device is provided, which efficiently prevents howling phenomenon. This intercom device includes a housing; a speaker accommodated in the housing such that a front air chamber is defined at a front side of the speaker and a rear air chamber is defined as a rear side of the speaker, a first microphone disposed such that its sound receiving surface faces the front air chamber, a second microphone disposed such that its sound receiving surface faces outside of the housing; and a signal processing unit. When an audio output of the speaker is picked up by the second microphone, the signal processing unit removes a signal component corresponding to the audio output of the speaker from an output signal of the second microphone by use of an output signal of the first microphone.

WO 2008/050583 A1

DESCRIPTION

INTERCOM DEVICE AND WIRING SYSTEM USING THE SAME

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to an intercom device suitable for an interphone system or the like, and a wiring system using the same.

BACKGROUND ART

Conventionally, an interphone system has been widely used as short-distance conversation means between separated rooms or between an entrance and a room of a building or a house. A typical interphone system for household use is mainly formed with an indoor intercom device installed on a wall surface of the room, and an outdoor intercom device installed on a wall surface of the entrance, and connected to the indoor intercom device through a transmission line. For example, the outdoor intercom device has a microphone for receiving a visitor's voice, and a speaker for outputting a dweller's voice. By operating the outdoor intercom device, the visitor can have a conversation with the dweller using the indoor intercom device.

In this kind of intercom device, since the speaker is located near the microphone, there is an inconvenience that howling phenomenon easily occurs when the audio output of the speaker is picked up by the microphone. To solve this inconvenience, various measures or methods for preventing the howling phenomenon have been proposed.

For example, Japanese Patent Publication No. 2607257 discloses a loudspeaker communication device **300**, which is suitable for a handsfree telephone. As shown in FIG. 35A, this communication device **300** has a speaker **SP**, and a pair of microphones (**M1**, **M2**). In addition, to prevent the howling phenomenon caused when an audio output of the speaker **SP** is picked up by the microphone (**M1**, **M2**), the communication device **300** also includes a pair of amplifying circuits (**310**, **320**), a level-control amplifying circuit **330**, a

delay circuit **340**, and a differential amplifying circuit **350**, as shown in FIG. 35B. The delay circuit **340** delays an output of the microphone **M1** located closer to the speaker **SP** by a delay time, which is determined according to sound velocity and a difference between a distance **d1** between the microphone **M1** and the speaker **SP** and a distance **d2** between the microphone **M2** and the speaker **SP**. The level-control amplifying circuit **330** controls the output level of the microphone **M2** such that an amplification factor is **d2/d1**. In other words, the output level of the microphone **M2** is controlled so as to be substantially equal to the output level of the microphone **M1** with respect to the signal component corresponding to the audio output of the speaker **SP**. The differential amplifying circuit **350** receives an output of the delay circuit **340** and an output of the level-control amplifying circuit **330**, and provides an output signal corresponding to a difference between these outputs.

According to this communication device, the signal component corresponding to the audio output of the speaker **SP** is cancelled from the output of the microphone (**M1**, **M2**) by the differential amplifying circuit **350**. Therefore, it is possible to achieve a comfortable communication, while preventing the howling phenomenon.

However, as shown in FIG. 35A, since each of the microphones (M1, M2) is spaced from the speaker SP by a relatively large distance, there is another problem that the device itself becomes large in size. In addition, since the intercom device is usually installed on the wall surface or the like, it is strongly desired that the intercom device has a thin thickness. On the other hand, when the speaker is accommodated in an excessively thin housing, a volume of a rear air chamber, which is defined as a space of a rear side of the speaker, is reduced, so that a radiating sound pressure of the speaker lowers and a minimum resonance frequency of the speaker shifts to a higher frequency level. As a result, there is a fear that deteriorations in sound quality and electro-acoustic conversion efficiency of the speaker occur.

Thus, the conventional intercom device still has plenty of room for

improvement in downsizing of the device itself, sound quality, electro-acoustic conversion efficiency as well as the prevention of howling phenomenon.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Therefore, a primary concern of the present invention is to provide a compact intercom device, which has the capability of preventing howling phenomenon, and achieving an improvement in sound quality and efficiency.

That is, the intercom device of the present invention is characterized by comprising:

a housing;

a speaker accommodated in the housing such that a front air chamber is defined as a space enclosed by a front surface of the speaker and an inner surface of the housing, and a rear air chamber is defined as a space enclosed by a rear surface of the speaker and an inner surface of the housing;

a first microphone disposed such that its sound receiving surface faces the front air chamber;

a second microphone disposed such that its sound receiving surface faces outside of the housing; and

a signal processing unit configured to, when an audio output of the speaker is picked up by the second microphone, remove a signal component corresponding to the audio output of the speaker from an output signal of the second microphone by use of an output signal of the first microphone.

According to the invention, since the first microphone easily and efficiently collects the audio information output from the speaker, howling phenomenon can be efficiently prevented by the signal processing unit. In addition, a distance between the first microphone and the speaker becomes short, thereby allowing downsizing of the intercom device. Furthermore, since the sound receiving surface of the second microphone faces the outside of the housing, an acoustic coupling between the speaker and the second microphone reduces, and the second microphone becomes hard to pick up the audio output of the

speaker. As a result, the second microphone can be located closer to the speaker. Thus, it is possible to provide a compact intercom device capable of preventing the howling phenomenon.

From the viewpoint of more efficiently preventing the howling phenomenon, it is preferred that the rear air chamber is the space hermetically-sealed by the rear surface of the speaker and the inner surface of the housing. In addition, it is preferred that the first microphone is arranged such that the sound receiving surface of the first microphone faces a diaphragm of the speaker. Moreover, when the first microphone and the second microphone are mounted on a same circuit board, it is preferred that the circuit board is mounted on an outside surface of the housing such that the sound receiving surface of the first microphone faces the front air chamber and the sound receiving surface of the second microphone faces the outside of the housing.

On the other hand, from the viewpoint of further downsizing the intercom device, the second microphone is preferably located adjacent to the speaker. In addition, it is preferred that the first and second microphones are mounted on a single board.

From the viewpoint of improving sound quality and electro-acoustic conversion efficiency of the speaker, it is preferred that the intercom device has an acoustic tube having an opening communicated with the rear air chamber at its one end, and a closed end at the other end. Alternatively, the intercom device may have a plurality of acoustic tubes having different lengths, each of which has an opening communicated with the rear air chamber at its one end, and a closed end at the other end. In addition, it is preferred that the acoustic tube has a tube length of an odd multiple of one quarter of a wavelength determined in consideration of sonic velocity and an intended frequency where an increase in sound pressure level of the audio output of the speaker is needed.

Furthermore, it is preferred that the acoustic tube has a resonant frequency between a frequency equivalent to a lowest resonant frequency of the speaker that is supposed to be mounted on an infinite baffle and a lowest

resonant frequency of the speaker mounted on the rear air chamber with the absence of the acoustic tube. The acoustic tube can be formed along an inner surface of the rear air chamber. If necessary, a sound absorbing material may be disposed at the opening of the acoustic tube.

A further concern of the present invention is to provide a wiring system using the intercom device described above. That is, the wiring system comprises at least one transmission line installed in a building structure to transmit electric power and information signals, and a plurality of base units each adapted in use to be mounted in a wall surface of the building structure, and connected to the transmission line. The intercom device has a first connector detachably connectable to a second connector formed in each of the base units. This wiring system is characterized in that when the first connector is connected to the second connector of one of the base units, the intercom device functions such that the information signals provided through the transmission line are output as audio information from the speaker unit, and an output of the signal processing unit is sent out through the transmission line.

By the way, in the intercom device installed on the wall surface of the house, one provided with a liquid crystal display or the like for displaying not only the audio information but also visual information such as images comes into practical use recently. Once such an intercom device is installed on the wall surface, not only electric wiring work but also mounting/repair work to the wall surface are required in a case where a layout of the intercom device has to be changed. However, it is not easy for a general user himself/herself to do the work. In addition, a function of the conventional intercom device is completed by itself, and a new-type intercom device is required in a case where it is desired to add another function. In such a case, not only a purchase of the new-type intercom device but also the above-described mounting/repair work becomes necessary, so that this is a great burden in cost for the user. The wiring system of the present invention is effect. According to the wiring system of the present

invention, since the intercom device is detachably connectable to the base unit, there advantages that the wiring system allows great flexibility for the change of layout of the intercom device, and makes it easy to replace the intercom device without cumbersome repairing work. Thus, the present invention provides the wiring system capable of solving the problems described above.

As a preferred embodiment of the wiring system of the present invention, the wiring system further comprises a function unit adapted in use to be connected to the transmission line through one of the base units, the function unit having a third connector detachably connectable to one of the second connector of the base unit, and an extended connector formed in the intercom device. When the third connector of the function unit is connected to the second connector of the base unit, or when the first connector of the intercom device is connected to the second connector of the base unit, and the third connector of the function unit is connected to the extended connector of the intercom device, the function unit provides at least one of functions for supplying electric power provided through the transmission line, outputting information signals provided through the transmission line, and sending out information signals through the transmission line. At this time, it is particularly preferred that the first connector and the third connector are stylized in shape and arrangement, and the second connector and the extended connector are stylized in shape and arrangement corresponding to the stylization of the first connector and the third connector.

As another preferred embodiment of the wiring system of the present invention, the wiring system further comprises a function unit adapted in use to be connected to the transmission line through one of the base units. The function unit has a third connector detachably connectable to the second connector of the base unit and an extended connector detachably connectable to the first connector of the intercom device. When the third connector of the function unit is connected to the second connector of the base unit, and the extended connector of the function unit is connected to the first connector of the

intercom device, the function unit provides at least one of functions for supplying electric power provided from the transmission line through the base unit, outputting information signals provided from the transmission line through the base unit, and sending out information signals to the transmission line through the base unit, and the intercom device operates such that the information signals provided from the transmission line through the base unit and the function unit are output as audio information from the speaker unit, and the output of the signal processing unit is sent out to the transmission line through the base unit and the function unit. At this time, it is particularly preferred that the first connector and the third connector are stylized in shape and arrangement, and the second connector and the extended connector are stylized in shape and arrangement corresponding to the stylization of the first connector and the third connector.

In the wiring system described above, it is preferred that the first and second connectors provide an electric power transmission between the base unit and the intercom device by means of electromagnetic coupling, and/or the first and second connectors provide a signal transmission between the base unit and the intercom device by means of optical coupling.

Further characteristics of the present invention and advantages brought thereby will be clearly understood from the best mode for carrying out the invention described below.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an intercom device according to a first embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional view of the intercom device;

FIG. 3 is a circuit diagram of a voice processing unit of the intercom device;

FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view of a microphone board of the intercom device;

FIG. 5 is a cross-sectional view of a bare chip employed in the microphone board;

FIG. 6A is a simplified plan view of the microphone board, and FIG. 6B is a simplified circuit diagram of the microphone board;

FIG. 7 is a circuit diagram of an impedance converting circuit of the microphone board;

FIG. 8 is a circuit diagram of a signal processing unit of the intercom device;

FIG. 9A and FIG. 9B are diagrams showing signal waveforms in the signal processing unit;

FIG. 10A and FIG. 10B are diagrams showing further signal waveforms in the signal processing unit;

FIG. 11A and FIG. 11B are diagrams showing another signal waveforms in the signal processing unit;

FIGS. 12A to 12C are diagrams showing still another signal waveforms in the signal processing unit;

FIG. 13 is a cross-sectional view of an intercom device according to a second embodiment of the present invention;

FIGS. 14A to 14C are cross-sectional and plan views of another housing of the intercom device according to the second embodiment;

FIG. 15 is a graph showing frequency characteristics of the cancelled amount of voice components of the speaker;

FIG. 16 is a graph showing frequency characteristics of the radiating sound pressure of the speaker;

FIG. 17 is a cross-sectional view of an intercom device using an ideal baffle plate;

FIG. 18 is a graph showing sound pressure characteristics of the intercom device having an acoustic tube and the intercom device having no acoustic tube;

FIG. 19 is a simplified cross-sectional view showing a modification of the housing having the acoustic tube;

FIG. 20 is a simplified cross-sectional view of a housing having a plurality of acoustic tubes;

FIG. 21 is a plan view of a housing having a sound absorbing material;

FIG. 22 is a schematic diagram of a wiring system using an intercom device according to a third embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 23 is a schematic circuit diagram of a base unit of the wiring system;

FIG. 24 is a rear perspective view of the base unit;

FIG. 25A is a perspective view showing a gate housing and a main housing of the base unit, and FIG. 25B is a plan view of a module port of the gate housing;

FIG. 26 is a plan view of an attachment plate for mounting the base unit on a switch box;

FIG. 27 is a schematic circuit diagram of the function unit;

FIG. 28 is a perspective view of the intercom device for the wiring system;

FIG. 29 is a schematic circuit diagram of the intercom device for the wiring system;

FIG. 30 is a perspective view of the intercom device connected to the function unit or the base unit;

FIG. 31 is an exploded perspective view of the base unit;

FIG. 32A is a front view of the function unit, FIG. 31B is a side view of the function unit, FIG. 32C is an exploded side view of the function unit, and FIG. 32D is a perspective view of a joining member;

FIG. 33 is a perspective view illustrating how to mechanically couple the function unit to the base unit;

FIG. 34 is a schematic circuit diagram of an intercom device for a power line carrier type wiring system; and

FIG. 35A is a schematic perspective view of a conventional loudspeaker communication device, and FIG. 35B is a partial block diagram of the loudspeaker communication device.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

Referring to the attached drawings, an intercom device of the present invention and a wiring system using the intercom device are explained in detail

according to preferred embodiments.

(First Embodiment)

As shown in FIGS. 1 and 2, an intercom device **A** according to a first embodiment of the present invention includes a housing **A1**, a speaker **SP**, a microphone board **MB1**, and a voice processing unit **10**. The housing **A1** consists of a body **A10** having an opening at its back face, and a cover **A11** for closing the opening of the body **A10**, and accommodates the speaker **SP** and the voice processing unit **10** therein. The housing **A10** has a plurality of sound holes **12** formed in a front face of the body **A10**. The speaker **SP** accommodated in the housing **A1** provides a voice output through the sound holes **12** to outside of the housing **A1**. The microphone board **MB1** has a sound hole **F2** that picks up a voice emitted from a user of the intercom device **A**. In operation, when a conversation switch **SW1** is operated to the ON position, the intercom device **A** sends the picked-up voice to another intercom device **A** and receives signals from another intercom device **A** via an information line **Ls**.

As shown in FIG. 2, the speaker **SP** includes a cylindrical yoke **20** that is open at one end, and a round support **21** that extends radially outward from the open end of the yoke **20**. The yoke **20** is formed of an iron-containing material, such as a cold rolling steel plate (SPCC, SPCEN) or an electromagnetic soft iron (SUY), and has a thickness of about 0.8 mm. A columnar permanent magnet **22** (having a residual flux density of, for example, 1.39 T to 1.43 T) formed of, for example, neodymium is placed in the yoke **20**. An edge surface of the round support **21** is fixed on an edge portion on an outer peripheral side of a dome-shaped diaphragm **23**.

The diaphragm **23** is formed of a thermoplastic material, such as PET (PolyEthylene Terephthalate) or PEI (Polyetherimide), and has a thickness of, for example, 12 μm to 50 μm. A cylindrical bobbin **24** is fixed to the back of the diaphragm **23**, and a voice coil **25** is provided at the rear end of the bobbin **24**. The voice coil **25** is located at the open end of the yoke **20**, and the bobbin **24**

and the voice coil **25** are allowed to freely move back and forth (in the vertical direction in FIG. 2) in the vicinity of the open end of the yoke **20**. The voice coil **25** is formed by winding a polyurethane copper wire (having a diameter of 0.05 mm, for example) around a paper sleeve of craft paper.

When the polyurethane copper wire of the voice coil **25** receives a voice signal, an electromagnetic power is generated in the voice coil **25** by electric current of the voice signal and a magnetic field of the permanent magnet **22**, thereby to vibrate the bobbin **24**, along with the diaphragm **23**, forward and backward. As a result, a sound corresponding to the voice signal is emitted from the diaphragm **23**. That is to say, the speaker **SP** of this embodiment is an electrodynamic speaker. The speaker has, for example, a diameter of 20 mm to 25 mm, and a thickness of about 4.5 mm.

A rib **11** is formed on an inner surface of the front wall of the housing **A1**, which is opposed to the diaphragm **23**, and is in contact with an end face of a convex portion **21a** that protrudes frontward from an outer peripheral portion of the round support **21**. Thus, the speaker **SP** is fixed to the housing **A1** such that the diaphragm **23** faces the inner surface of the front wall of the housing **A1**.

With the speaker **SP** thus fixed within the housing **A1**, a front air chamber **Bf** is formed as a space enclosed by the inner surface of the front wall of the housing **A1** and a front surface (on which the diaphragm **23** is located) of the speaker **SP**, and a rear air chamber **Br** is formed as a space enclosed by an inner surface of the rear and side walls of the housing **A1** and the rear surface (on which the yoke **20** is located) of the speaker **SP**. The front air chamber **Bf** communicates with outside of the housing **A1** through the sound holes **12** formed in the front wall of the housing **A1**. The rear air chamber **Br** is insulated from (or does not communicate with) the front air chamber **Bf** since the end portion of the support **21** and the rib **11** are attached firmly to each other. Furthermore, the cover **A11** is tightly fitted in the opening formed in the rear wall of the body **A10**, so that the rear air chamber **Br** provides a

hermetically-sealed space that is insulated also from the outside of the housing **A1**. A gasket may be provided between the end portion (or the convex portion **21a**) of the support **21** and the rib **11** so as to increase the degree of adhesion between the support **21** and the rib **11**.

As shown in FIG. 3, the voice processing unit **10** is formed by an integral circuit (IC), which includes a communication unit **10a**, echo canceling units (**10b**, **10c**), an amplification unit **10d** and a signal processing unit **10e**. In operation, the communication unit **10a** receives a voice signal transmitted from an intercom device **A** installed, for example, in another room through the information line **Ls**. The received voice signal is transmitted through the echo canceling unit **10b** to the amplification unit **10d**, in which the signal is amplified, and then output from the speaker **SP**. When the conversation switch **SW1** is operated to the ON position, the voice communication function of the intercom device **A** becomes available. In this condition, voice signals respectively received from a microphone **M1** (first microphone) and a microphone **M2** (second microphone) on the microphone board **MB1** are processed by the signal processing unit **10e**. In the signal processing unit **10e**, each received signal is processed in the manner as described later, and the resulting signal passes through the echo canceling unit **10c**. Then, upon reception of the resulting signal from the echo canceling unit **10c**, the communication unit **10a** transmits the resulting signal through the information line **Ls** to the intercom device **A** installed in, for example, another room. In this manner, the intercom device **A** serves as an interphone that permits two-way voice communications between the rooms. An electric power for the intercom device **A** may be supplied from a wall socket disposed in the vicinity of the location where the intercom device **A** is installed. Alternatively, the electric power may be supplied through the information line **Ls**, or may be supplied from an internal battery accommodated in the intercom device **A**.

As shown in FIG. 4, the microphone board **MB1** has a module board **2** and the microphones **M1** and **M2**, which are mounted on a (top) surface **2a** of the

module board **2**. The microphone **M1** is mainly formed with a bare chip **BC1**, an IC chip **Ka1**, and a shield case **SC1**. Each of the bare chip **BC1**, the IC chip **Ka1**, and a wiring pattern (not shown) on the module board **2** are connected to each other with wires **W** (wire bonding). The shield case **SC1** covers the bare chip **BC1** and the IC chip **Ka1**. The microphone **M2** has the same construction as that of the microphone **M1**. That is to say, the microphone **M2** is formed with a bare chip **BC2**, an IC chip **Ka2**, and a shield case **SC2** mounted on the module board **2** that covers the bare chip **BC2** and the IC chip **Ka2**. The microphones (**M1**, **M2**) are preferred to be formed on a silicon substrate by a micro structure manufacturing process. That is, it is preferred that the microphones (**M1**, **M2**) are IC chips of Micro Electro Mechanical System (MEMS).

Each of the bare chips **BC1** and **BC2**, which will be generally referred to as "bare chip **BC**", provides a condenser-type silicon microphone, as shown in FIG. 5. More specifically, the bare chip BC includes a silicon thin film **1d** that is formed on a (top) surface of a silicon substrate **1b** so as to cover a cavity **1c** formed through the silicon substrate **1b**. An electrode **1f** is formed above the silicon thin film **1d** with an air gap **1e** interposed therebetween, and two pads **1g** are provided on the surface of the silicon substrate **1b** for producing an output in the form of a voice signal. When the silicon thin film **1d** is vibrated by a sound wave from outside, such as a human voice, a capacitance between the silicon thin film **1d** and the electrode **1f** changes, namely, the amount of electric charge changes. With the change in the electric charge amount, electric current proportional to the received sound wave flows from the two pads **1g**. Each of these bare chips **BC1** and **BC2** is fixed by die-bonding the silicon substrate **1b** on the module board **2**, as shown in FIG. 4. The silicon thin film **1d** of the bare chip **BC2** faces the sound hole **F2** formed in the module board **2**.

As shown in FIG. 4, a sound receiving surface of the microphone **M1** is positioned on a surface having the sound hole **F1** of the shield case **SC1**. On the other hand, a sound receiving surface of the microphone **M2** is positioned

on a surface having the sound hole **F2** of the module board **2**. Thus, the sound receiving surface of the microphone **M1** is to receive sound from an upper side of FIG. 4, and the sound receiving surface of the microphone **M2** is to receive sound from an opposite side, i.e., the lower side of FIG. 4. In brief, as shown in FIG. 2, the module board **2** is mounted to the housing **A1** such that the sound receiving surface of the microphone **M1** faces the diaphragm **23** of the speaker **SP**, and the sound receiving surface of the microphone **M2** faces outside of the housing **A1**. Since both of the microphones (**M1**, **M2**) are mounted on the same surface **2a** of the module board **2**, the thickness of the microphone board **MB1** can be advantageously reduced.

FIG. 6A is a simplified plan view of the module board **2**. The module board **2** has a substantially T-shape, which is composed of a rectangular portion **2f**, on which the microphone **M1** is mounted, a rectangular portion **2g**, on which the microphone **M2** is mounted, and a connecting portion **2h** that connects the rectangular portions **2f** and **2g**. The rectangular portion **2g** is formed to be larger than the rectangular portion **2f**. The rectangular portion **2g** has a negative power supply pad **P1**, a positive power supply pad **P2**, and output pads (**P3**, **P4**) on an edge portion of the rectangular portion **2g** such that each of the pads (**P1**, **P2**, **P3**, **P4**) forms a line along an end face of the edge portion of the rectangular portion **2g**.

As shown in FIG. 6B, the negative power supply pad **P1** is connected to a negative terminal of an external power supply, and the positive power supply pad **P2** is connected to a positive terminal of the external power supply. The electric power received from the pads (**P1**, **P2**) is supplied to the microphones (**M1**, **M2**) through the wiring patterns on the module board **2**. A voice signal corresponding to the voice picked up by the microphone **M1** is output from the output pad **P3** via the wiring pattern on the module board **2**. On the other hand, a voice signal corresponding to the voice picked up by the microphone **M2** is output from the output pad **P4** via the wiring pattern on the module board **2**. The negative power supply pad **P1** also serves as a ground pad that establishes

a ground for the voice signals delivered from the output pads (**P3**, **P4**).

As described above, electric powers needed to activate the microphones (**M1**, **M2**) are supplied from the power supply via the common negative and positive power supply pads (**P1**, **P2**). The negative power supply pad **P1** also serves as the ground pad for the outputs of microphones (**M1**, **M2**). Therefore, the number of pads used in the microphone board **MB1** can be reduced, and the construction of the microphone board **MB1** can be simplified.

Next, an operation of the microphone board MB1 will be explained. First, electric currents flowing from the bare chips **BC1** and **BC2** corresponding to the received sound signal are subjected to impedance-conversion, and converted to voltage signals by the IC chips **Ka1** and **Ka2**. Then, the voltage signals are output as voice signals from the output pads (**P3**, **P4**), respectively.

For example, each of the IC chip **Ka1** and the IC chip **Ka2**, which will be generally referred to as "IC chip **Ka**", has a circuit configuration, as shown in FIG. 7. The IC chip **Ka** has a constant-voltage circuit **Kb** formed of a chip IC that converts a power supply voltage +V (e.g., 5V) supplied from the power supply pads (**P1**, **P2**) to a constant voltage Vr (e.g., 12V). The constant-voltage circuit **Kb** applies the constant voltage Vr to a series circuit of a resistance **R11** and the bare chip **BC**. A connection midpoint of the resistance **R11** and the bare chip **BC** is connected to a gate terminal of a junction-type J-FET **S11** through a capacitor **C11**. A drain terminal of the J-FET **S11** is connected to an operating voltage +V, and a source terminal is connected through a resistance **R12** to the negative terminal of the power supply. Herein, the J-FET **S11** is intended for converting electrical impedance, and the voltage of the source terminal of the J-FET **S11** produces an output as the voice signal. It is to be understood that the impedance converting circuit of the IC chip **Ka** is not limited to the above-described configuration, and may be replaced by a circuit having a function of a source follower circuit by an operation amplifier. For example, an amplifying circuit for the voice signal may be provided in the IC chip **Ka**, if necessary.

In the microphone board **MB1**, on which signal transmission and supply of electric power are performed via the wiring patterns on the module board **2** as described above, the signal lines and the power-supply lines can be arranged with high efficiency, and attached to the outer surface of the housing **A1**, as shown in FIG. 1. In this embodiment, as shown in FIG. 1, the surface **2a** of the module board **2** is attached along an outer surface of the front wall of the housing **A1**, and the microphone **M1** is inserted in an opening **13** formed in the front wall of the housing **A1** such that the sound receiving surface of the microphone **M1** faces the front air chamber **Bf**. The diaphragm **23** faces the microphone **M1** through the sound hole **F1** formed in the shield case **SC1**. With this arrangement, the microphone **M1** has a high directivity to the voice emitted from the speaker **SP** via the sound hole **F1**, so that the voice emitted from the speaker **SP** can be efficiently picked up by the microphone **M1**. The microphone **M2** fits in a recess **14** formed in the front wall of the housing **A1**, and faces the outside (or the front) of the housing **A1** through the sound hole **F2** formed in the module board **2**. In this regard, a direction where the second microphone **M2** receives a voice from the outside of the housing **A1** is substantially equal to the direction of emitting a voice from the speaker **SP**. Thus, the microphone **M2** has a high directivity to the voice of a talker who is located in front of the intercom device **A**. When **X1**, **X2** represent distances from the center of the speaker **SP** to the centers of microphones (**M1**, **M2**), respectively, the relationship between the distances (**X1**, **X2**) is expressed as **X1** $<$**X2**.

Since the rear air chamber **Br** facing the rear surface of the speaker **SP** is hermetically-sealed in the housing **A1** as shown in FIG. 2, the voice emitted from the rear surface of the speaker **SP** (rear surface of the diaphragm **23**) is less likely to leak from the rear air chamber **Br**, so that an acoustic coupling between the speaker **SP** and the microphone **M2** is lowered. BY the way, the voice emitted from the rear surface of the speaker **SP** is reversed in phase with respect to the voice emitted from the front surface of the speaker **SP** (front surface of the

diaphragm **23**). Therefore, if the voice emitted from the rear surface of the speaker **SP** goes around to the front of the speaker **SP**, these voices emitted from the front and rear surfaces of the speaker **SP** are cancelled with each other. As a result, the radiating sound pressure of the speaker **SP** is lowered, and it becomes difficult for the talker located in front of the intercom device **A** to hear the voice (sound) emitted from the speaker **SP**. However, since the intercom device of this embodiment is formed to reduce the leaking of the voice emitted from the rear surface of the speaker **SP** to the outside of the housing **A1**, as described above, it is possible to prevent such a reduction in the radiating sound pressure, which is caused by the voice emitted from the rear surface of the speaker **SP** going around to the front of the speaker **SP**.

As shown in FIG. 2, since the recess **14**, in which the microphone **M2** is inserted, is an insulated space not communicated with the rear air chamber **Br**, the microphone **M2** is even less likely to pick up the voice (or sound) emitted from the speaker **SP**. Therefore, the acoustic coupling between the speaker **SP** and the microphone **M2** can be further reduced. With the above arrangement, the microphones (**M1**, **M2**) are adapted to separately pick up the voice emitted from the speaker **SP** and the voice of (generated by) the talker, respectively.

Furthermore, if the microphone board **MB1** is placed in the housing **A1**, it is difficult to maintain the spatial insulation between the front air chamber **Bf** and the rear air chamber **Br**. In this embodiment, however, the microphone board **MB1** is attached to the outer surface of the housing **A1**. Therefore, it is possible to maintain the spatial insulation between the front air chamber **Bf** and the rear air chamber **Br**.

As described below, the intercom device of this embodiment has a configuration to prevent a howling phenomenon caused when the microphones (**M1**, **M2**) pick up the voice emitted from the speaker **SP**.

As shown in FIG. 8, the signal processing unit **10e** of the voice processing unit **10** includes an amplifying circuit **30** for amplifying the output of the microphone **M1**, a band-pass filter **31** for removing noises of frequencies other

than a voice-band (300 to 4000 Hz) from the output of the amplifying circuit **30**, and a delaying circuit **32** for delaying the output of the band-pass filter **31**. The signal processing unit **10e** further includes an amplifying circuit **33** for amplifying the output of the microphone **M2** while reversing the phase of the output of the microphone **M2** by 180 degrees, a band-pass filter **34** for removing noises of frequencies other than the voice-band (300 to 4000 Hz) from the output of the amplifying circuit **33**, and an adder circuit **35** for adding the outputs of the delaying circuit **32** and the band-pass filter **34**.

Referring to FIG. 8 to FIG. 12C, operations of the signal processing unit **10e** will be explained below. First, an operation of the signal processing unit **10e** when the voice emitted from the speaker **SP** is picked up by the microphones (**M1**, **M2**) will be explained. FIGS. 9A and 9B, 10A and 10B, 11A and 11B, and 12A to 12C show voice signal waveforms that appear at respective units of the signal processing unit **10e** when the microphones (**M1**, **M2**) respectively pick up the voice emitted from the speaker **SP**. As mentioned above, the distance **X1** from the center of the speaker **SP** to the center of the microphone **M1** is smaller than the distance **X2** from the center of the speaker **SP** to the center of the microphone **M2**. Accordingly, as shown in FIGS. 9A and 9B, when the microphones (**M1**, **M2**) pick up the voice emitted from the speaker **SP**, the amplitude of the output **Y21** of the microphone **M2** is smaller than that of the output **Y11** of the microphone **M1** due to the difference between the distances (**X1**, **X2**). In addition, the phase of the output **Y21** of the microphone **M2** is delayed with respect to that of the output **Y11** of the microphone **M1** by a delay time **Td** (=(**X2**-**X1**)/**Vs**, where **Vs** is sonic velocity), which is proportional to the difference between the distances (**X2**-**X1**).

The amplifying circuit **30** amplifies the output **Y11** to produce an output **Y12**, and the amplifying circuit **33** amplifies the output **Y21** while reversing the phase thereof by 180 degrees, to produce an output **Y22**. At this time, each of the amplifying circuits (**30**, **33**) performs level adjustment based on the difference between the distances (**X2**-**X1**), so that the output levels of the

microphones (**M1**, **M2**) relative to the voice emitted from the speaker **SP** become equal to each other, as shown in FIGS. 10A and 10B. In this embodiment, since an amplitude rate of the amplifying circuit **30** is set to substantially 1, the amplifying circuit **30** may be eliminated from the signal processing unit **10e**.

As shown in FIGS. 11A and 11B, the band-pass filters (**31**, **34**) remove frequencies other than the voice band from the outputs **Y12** and **Y22**, to produce outputs **Y13** and **Y23**, respectively.

The delaying circuit **32** can be formed by, for example, a time delay device or a CR phase delaying circuit. The delaying circuit **32** delays the output of the microphone **M1**, which is located closer to the speaker **SP**, by the above-described delay time **Td**, thereby producing an output **Y14** whose phase coincides with the phase of the output **Y23** of the band-pass filter **34**. Thus, it is possible to reduce noises contained in a voice signal to be transmitted.

Through the amplifying and delaying processes described above, a voice component emitted from the speaker **SP**, which is contained in the output **Y14**, and the voice component emitted from the speaker **SP**, which is contained in the output **Y23**, have the same amplitude and the reversed phase relative to each other, as shown in FIG. 12A and FIG. 12B. The adder circuit **35** adds the output **Y14** and the output **Y23** to cancel the voice component of the speaker **SP** from the output of the microphone **M2**. Thus, it is possible to produce an output **Ya** shown in FIG. 12C, in which the voice component from the speaker **SP** is removed or reduced. As described above, the signal processing unit **10e** removes the voice component of the speaker **SP** from the output signal **Y21** of the microphone **M2** by using the output signal **Y11** of the microphone **M1**.

On the other hand, an operation of the signal processing unit **10e** when the voice emitted from the talker **H** in front of the intercom device **A** is picked up by the microphones (**M1**, **M2**) will be described below. Since the microphone **M2** has a high directivity to the voice from the talker **H** located in front of the intercom device **A**, the amplitude of the output **Y21** of the microphone **M2** is larger than that of the output **Y11** of the microphone **M1**. Furthermore, since

the signal from the microphone **M1** is not amplified while the signal from the microphone **M2** is amplified in the amplifying circuit **33**, the voice component from the talker **H** contained in the output **Y23** is sufficiently larger than the voice component from the talker **H** contained in the output **Y14**. Thus, even after the above-described adding process is performed in the adder circuit **35**, the signal corresponding to the voice generated by the talker **H** remains in the output **Ya** with a sufficiently large amplitude.

In the manner described above, the voice component from the speaker **SP** is reduced in the output **Ya** of the adder circuit **35**, whereas the voice component generated by the talker **H** in front of the intercom device **A** remains in the output **Ya**. Thus, a relative difference in the output **Ya** between the voice component from the talker **H**, which is desired to be saved, and the voice component from the speaker **SP**, which is desired to be reduced, becomes larger. That is to say, even when the voice from the talker **H** and the voice from the speaker **SP** are simultaneously generated, only the voice component from the speaker **SP** is reduced while the voice component from the talker **H** remains sufficiently large. Accordingly, it is possible to prevent the howling phenomenon caused when the microphones (**M1**, **M2**) pick up the voice output of the speaker **SP**.

Since the microphone **M1** is disposed in the front air chamber **Bf** so as to face the diaphragm **23**, as shown in FIG. 2, the microphone **M1** efficiently picks up the voice emitted from the speaker **SP**. Therefore, the signal processing unit **10e** can efficiently achieve the howling phenomenon prevention function. Furthermore, since the sound receiving surface of the microphone **M2** faces outside of the housing **A1**, and the output direction of the speaker **SP** and the directivity of the microphone **M2** substantially conform to each other, the acoustic coupling between the speaker **SP** and the microphone **M2** is reduced. Thus, the microphone **M2** is less likely to pick up the voice emitted from the speaker **SP**, and can be placed close to the speaker **SP**, that is to say, close to the front air chamber **Bf**, which makes it possible to downsize the intercom device **A**.

On the other hand, the signal processing unit **10e** transmits the voice signal to the echo canceling unit **10c** through a digital-analog converter (not shown), and the echo canceling unit (**10b**, **10c**) shown in FIG. 3 perform the process as described below to further efficiently prevent the howling phenomenon.

First, the echo canceling unit **10c** retrieves the output of the echo canceling unit **10b** as a reference signal, and performs a suitable computation on the output of the signal processing unit **10e**, thereby canceling a voice signal, which goes around from the speaker **SP** to the microphones (**M1**, **M2**). On the other hand, the echo canceling unit **10b** also retrieves the output of the echo canceling unit **10c** as the reference signal, and performs a suitable computation on the output of the communication unit **10a**, thereby canceling a voice signal, which goes around from a speaker of an intercom device installed in another room to its microphones.

More specifically, the echo canceling units (**10b**, **10c**) control the amount of loss at variable loss means (not shown) provided in a loop circuit consisting of the speaker **SP**, the microphones (**M1**, **M2**), the signal processing unit **10e**, the echo canceling unit **10c**, the communication unit **10a**, the echo canceling unit **10b**, the amplifying unit **10d** and the speaker **SP**, so as to prevent the howling phenomenon by making the loop gain less than 1. Herein, one of the transmitted voice signal and the received voice signal, which has a smaller signal level, is regarded as not important, and a transmission loss of a variable loss circuit, which is inserted in a transmission path of the signal having the smaller level, is increased. In this embodiment, the intercom devices transmit signals via the information line **Ls**. However, the transmission of signals is not limited to a wired line. A non-wired transmission manner such as radio wave, optical communication system, and infrared radiation may be alternatively employed.

(Second Embodiment)

As shown in FIG. 13, an intercom device **A'** according to a second

embodiment of the present invention includes an acoustic tube **40**, which is provided in the rear air chamber **Br** having a small volume, so as to improve the sound quality and electro-acoustic conversion efficiency of the speaker **SP**. The intercom device **A'** according to the second embodiment will be explained below.

The acoustic tube **40** has an opening at its one end and a closed end at the other end, and is provided in the rear air chamber **Br** to be along an inner wall surface(s) of the rear air chamber **Br**. By setting the resonance frequency of the acoustic tube **40** to an appropriate level, the lowest resonance frequency **fo** of the speaker **SP**, which is provided in the intercom device **A'**, is shifted to a lower frequency level, and the sound pressure level of the speaker **SP** increases, resulting in improvements of the sound quality and electro-acoustic conversion efficiency of the speaker **SP**. It is noted that except for the sound tube **40**, the construction of the intercom device **A'** shown in FIG. 13 is the same as that of the intercom device **A** shown in FIG. 2. Accordingly, details of the intercom device **A'** will be omitted herein.

The lowest resonance frequency **fo** of the speaker **SP** is generally determined by an equivalent mass (diaphragm, coil, additional mass of air) **Mo** of a vibration system of the speaker, stiffness **So** of an edge or the like supporting the vibration system, and stiffness **Sc** of air in the rear air chamber **Br**. That is, it is represented by an equation:

$$fo = \{1/(2\pi)\} \cdot \sqrt{\{(So+Sc)/Mo\}}$$

FIG. 14A through FIG. 14C show another housing **A2** of the intercom device **A'** according to a modification of the present embodiment. The housing **A2** accommodates the acoustic tube **40** therein. Effects of the sound tube **40** are explained below referring to the housing **A2** as an example. The housing **A2** essentially consists of a body **A20** having opening at its rear surface, and a cover **A21** for closing the opening of the body **A20**. In FIG. 14B, only the body **A20** is illustrated. As in the intercom device **A** of the first embodiment, the housing **A2** is capable of accommodating a speaker **SP**, a microphone board **MB1**, a

conversation switch **SW1**, and a voice processing unit **10**. The acoustic tube **40** is provided in the body **A20**.

The housing **A2** has two spaces **A2a** and **A2b** therein, which are insulated from each other. The space **A2a** has a lateral dimension of 30 mm, a vertical dimension of 40 mm, and a thickness of 8 mm, to accommodate the speaker **SP** therein. In the space **A2a**, columnar bosses **51** are formed at regularly spaced four locations on the inner surface of the front wall of the body **A20**, and screw holes **52** are respectively formed in the bosses **51**. The speaker **SP** is fixed to the inner surface of the front wall of the body **A20** by using mounting screws, which are thread engageable with the screw holes **52**. With the construction described above, a front air chamber **Bf** and a rear air chamber **Br** similar to those of the first embodiment (FIG. 2) are formed. The front air chamber **Br** is provided by a space enclosed by the inner surface of the front wall of the housing **A2** and the front surface side (diaphragm **23** side) of the speaker **SP**. The rear air chamber **Br** is provided by a space enclosed by the inner surface of the rear and side walls of the housing **A2** and the rear surface side (yoke **20** side) of the speaker **SP**. A plurality of sound holes **12** are formed in the front wall of the housing **A2**.

As shown in FIGS. 14A through 14C, the acoustic tube **40**, which has a rectangular shape in cross section, is formed along the inner walls of the rear air chamber **Br** at the back of the speaker **SP** over substantially three-quarter of the circumference of the rear air chamber **Br**. The acoustic tube **40** has an opening at one end **40a** and a closed end at the other end **40b**. The overall length **L** of the acoustic tube **40** is set to an odd multiple of one quarter of a wavelength, which is determined by the sonic velocity and a frequency **f** of which sound pressure level is desired to be increased. In this embodiment, the acoustic tube **40** has a length of one quarter of the wavelength determined by the frequency where an increase in sound pressure level of the audio output of the speaker **SP** is needed and the sonic velocity. In detail, since an open-end correction is performed on the acoustic tube **40**, where sonic velocity is set to C

and an open-end correction value is set to σ (=0.8**d**, wherein **d** is an open-end diameter of the acoustic tube **40**), the overall length is determined from an equation described below:

$$f = [C / \{4 (L+\sigma)\}]$$

In this embodiment, the overall length L of the acoustic tube **40** is set 95.2 mm and a cross-sectional area of the acoustic tube **40** is set to 4.2 mm^2 (equivalent to $\phi = 2.3$). By forming the acoustic tube **40** along the inner walls of the rear air chamber **Br**, it is possible to minimize a volume reduction of the rear air chamber **Br** caused by the formation of the acoustic tube **40**. In addition, with the acoustic tube **40** thus provided, the sound pressure level of the speaker **SP** can be increased in a desired frequency band (at around 700 Hz in this embodiment). As a result, it is possible to improve the sound quality and the electro-acoustic conversion efficiency of the speaker **SP**.

By utilizing the fact that input impedance becomes extremely small at the resonance frequency (i.e., a frequency at which the overall length of the tube is equal to an odd-number multiple of an approximately quarter (1/4) wavelength) of a closed tube, the acoustic tube **40** can reduce the sound leakage from the rear air chamber **Br** to the outside of the housing. That is, the sound waves radiated from the rear surface of the speaker **SP** is reflected toward the rear surface side of the speaker **SP**.

Referring to FIG. 15 through FIG. 18, effects of the acoustic tube **40** provided in the housing **A2** will be explained below in comparison with the intercom device **A** of the first embodiment, which has no acoustic tube in the housing **A1**, and an intercom device having an infinite baffle, which will be explained in detail below.

FIG. 15 shows frequency characteristics of the cancelled amount of the voice component from the speaker **SP** in the case of using the signal processing unit **10e** of intercom device **A** of the first embodiment, and FIG. 16 shows frequency characteristics of the radiating sound pressure measured in front of the speaker **SP**. FIG. 15 and FIG. 16 also show results obtained in the case

where the housing has no acoustic tube as in the first embodiment, and the case where an ideal baffle plate is used as the housing.

FIG. 17 shows a baffle plate **C** having an infinite size as an example of the above-mentioned ideal baffle plate, but the baffle plate **C** is not realistic for mounting a real speaker thereon. Thus, in this embodiment, a standard baffle as specified in JIS C 5532 is used to measure a frequency equivalent to a lowest resonant frequency of the speaker **SP** that is supposed to be mounted on the baffle plate **C**. The lowest resonant frequency of the speaker **SP** mounted on the standard baffle is equivalent to that of the speaker **SP** that is supposed to be mounted on the baffle plate **C** (an ideal baffle plate). The cancelled amount (**Y1a** in FIG. 15) in the case where the speaker **SP** and the microphone board **MB1** are mounted on the standard baffle to form an intercom device is kept at 10 dB or more in a frequency band of 100 Hz to 10000 Hz, and the radiating sound pressure characteristics (**Y2a** in FIG. 16) in the same case indicate that the lowest resonance frequency **fo1** of the speaker **SP** is 600 Hz, which is an equally ideal characteristic as provided by the speaker **SP** alone. A standard closed box as specified in JIS C 5532 may be used to measure a frequency equivalent to the lowest resonant frequency of the speaker **SP** that is supposed to be mounted on the baffle plate **C** having an infinite size (an ideal baffle plate) as shown in Fig. 17.

In the case where a rear air chamber having no acoustic tube **40** is used, as in the rear air chamber **Br** of the first embodiment, the cancelled amount (**Y1b** in FIG. 15) of the voice component from the speaker **SP** is kept at 10 dB or more in the frequency band of 100 Hz to 10000 Hz. Thus, substantially the same cancelled amount as that of the case where the standard baffle is used can be obtained. However, in the case where the rear air chamber **Br** is formed as an enclosed space, radiating sound pressure characteristics comparable to those of the case where the standard baffle is used can be obtained when the volume of the rear air chamber **Br** is sufficiently larger. On the other hand, when the volume of the rear air chamber **Br** is small, the mechanical equivalent stiffness

of the rear air chamber **Br** increases, and the lowest resonance frequency of the speaker **SP** becomes higher. As higher the lowest resonance frequency, the radiating sound pressure reduces, so that the sound quality and the electro-acoustic conversion efficiency of the speaker **SP** deteriorate. For example, the radiating sound pressure characteristics (**Y2b** in FIG. 16) of the case where the rear air chamber **Br** of the first embodiment is used indicate that the lowest resonance frequency **fo2** of the speaker **SP** is 1200 Hz, which is noticeably higher than the lowest resonance frequency obtained when the standard baffle is used. Furthermore, the sound pressure level in a frequency band below 800 Hz is lower by about 5 to 20 dB than that of the case where the standard baffle is used. It means that the sound quality and the electro-acoustic conversion efficiency of the speaker **SP** are deteriorated in this frequency band.

The radiating sound pressure characteristics (**Y2c** in FIG. 16) of the case where the volume of the rear air chamber **Br** is made three times larger than that of the rear air chamber **Br** of the first embodiment indicate that the lowest resonance frequency **fo3** of the speaker **SP** is 800 Hz, and the sound quality of the speaker **SP** is improved as compared with the case of using the housing **A1** of the first embodiment. However, the overall size of the housing increases with the increase in volume of the rear air chamber **Br**, which makes it difficult to downsize the intercom device. Thus, in this embodiment, by providing the acoustic tube **40** in the rear air chamber **Br** having a small volume, the sound quality and the electro-acoustic conversion efficiency of the speaker **SP** are improved, while making the intercom device smaller.

The overall length **L** of the acoustic tube **40** is set so that the resonance frequency of the acoustic tube **40** is located between the lowest resonance frequency **fo2** (=1200 Hz) of the case where the rear air chamber **Br** having no acoustic tube **40** is used, and the lowest resonance frequency **fo1** (=600 Hz) of the case where the standard baffle is used. By setting the overall length **L** of the acoustic tube **40**, as described above, the lowest resonance frequency **fo5** of

the speaker **SP** in the case where the housing **A2** having the acoustic tube **40** is used is set to about 700 Hz between **fo1** and **fo2**.

FIG. 18 shows frequency characteristics of the radiating sound pressure of the intercom device **A'**, which is provided with the housing **A2** and the sound tube **40** of the present embodiment, and the radiating sound pressure of the intercom device **A** of the first embodiment, which has no acoustic tube. The characteristics **Y3a** of the intercom device **A'** in FIG. 18 indicate that the sound pressure level in a frequency band not larger than 800 Hz is increased by about 5 to 10 dB, as compared with the characteristics **Y3b** of the intercom device **A**, and the lowest resonance frequency is reduced from **fo4** (=1200 Hz) to **fo5** (= about 700 Hz). That is, improvements in the speaker efficiency and the sound quality can be achieved. For example, the sound pressure level at around 700 Hz is increased by about 10 dB, and the improvement of the speaker efficiency brought by the increase of the sound pressure level corresponds to a 70% reduction in input current and a 90% reduction in input power of the speaker **SP**. Thus, the sound pressure level of the speaker **SP** increases around the lowest resonance frequency of the speaker **SP**. Therefore, by setting the overall length of the acoustic tube **40** to an appropriate length, and shifting the lowest resonance frequency of the speaker **SP** to a lower frequency side, it is possible to achieve improvements in sound quality and electro-acoustic conversion efficiency of the speaker **SP**.

As another preferred acoustic tube of the present invention, an acoustic tube **41** that communicates with the rear air chamber **Br** may be provided at the outside of a housing **A3**. For example, the acoustic tube **41** can be obtained by attaching a tubular member to into a hole (not shown) formed in the housing **A3**, as schematically shown in FIG. 19. When tubular member is made of urethane or the like, the overall length **L** of the acoustic tube **41** can be easily changed, if desired.

As a further modification of this embodiment, two or more acoustic tubes may be formed in the rear air chamber **Br**. As an example, three acoustic tubes

42, **43**, **44** can be formed in the rear air chamber **Br** of a housing **A4**, as schematically shown in FIG. 20. In this example, the acoustic tubes (**42**, **43**, **44**) have different lengths from each other. This means that they have mutually different resonance frequencies. Accordingly, the sound pressure level of the speaker **SP** is increased at a plurality of frequencies. By setting the overall lengths of the respective acoustic tubes (**42**, **43**, **44**) to appropriate values, it is possible to provide desired sound quality and electro-acoustic conversion efficiency of the speaker **SP**.

As shown by a dotted line in FIG. 21, a sound absorbing material **45** such as a nonwoven fabric may be provided at or in the vicinity of the open end **40a** of the acoustic tube **40**. By use of the sound absorbing material **45**, it is possible to provide an enhanced sound absorbing effect, and perform a fine adjustment of the resonance frequency of the acoustic tube **40**.

(Third Embodiment)

The present embodiment provides a wiring system using an intercom device **101** of the present invention. That is, this wiring system enables power and signal transmissions between electric devices spaced away from each other in a building structure.

As shown in FIG. 22, the wiring system comprises a power line **Lp** and an information line **Ls** installed in the building structure, which are connected to a commercial power source **AC** and the Internet network **NT** through a distribution board, switch boxes **102** embedded in wall surfaces of the building structure, base units **103** mounted on the switch boxes, and connected to the power line **Lp** and the information line **Ls**, and function units **104**, each of which is detachably connected to a desired one of the base units **103**, and has at least one of functions for supplying electric power from the power line **Lp**, outputting information from the information line **Ls**, and inputting information into the information line **Ls** in a connected state with the desired base unit. An intercom device **101** of the present invention, which is preferably provided by

the intercom device (**A**, **A'**) of the first or second embodiment described above, can be regarded as one of the function units **104**. In the present description, the wall surfaces of the building structure are not limited to surfaces of sidewalls standing between adjacent rooms. That is, the meaning of the wall surfaces includes outdoor and indoor wall surfaces, and the indoor wall surfaces comprise ceiling and floor surfaces as well as the sidewall surfaces. In the drawings, **MB** designates a main circuit breaker, **BB** designates a branch circuit breaker, and **GW** designates a gateway (e.g., a router or a built-in hub).

As shown in FIGS. 23 and 24, each of the base units **103** is formed with a gate housing **130** having terminals (**131a**, **132a**, **131b**, **132b**) connected to the power supply line **Lp** and the information line **Ls**, and a main housing **135** detachably connected to the function unit **104**. Theses housings can be made of a synthetic resin having electrical insulating characteristics (e.g., a non-crystalline plastic such as ABS resin). The terminals (**131b**, **132b**) are used to extend the wirings. The gate housing **130** and the main housing **135** have a pair of a module port **134** and a module connector **142**, which are detachably connected to each other to simultaneously establish both of supplying the electric power from the gate housing **130** to the main housing **135**, and making a signal transmission therebetween. In addition, when the function unit **104** has the module connector **142**, it can be connected to the gate housing **130** in place of the main housing **135**. If necessary, the gate housing **130** and main housing **135** may be integrally formed.

Circuit components of the base unit **103** are designed to transmit the electric power and the information signal to the function unit **104**. For example, the base unit **103** is provided with an AC/AC converter **160**, DC power section **161**, transceiver section **162**, E/O converter **163**, O/E converter **165**, and a function portion **167**.

The AC/AC converter **160** converts commercial AC voltage to a lower AC voltage having an increased frequency, and applies the lower AC voltage to a coil

172. The DC power section **161** generates an operating voltage of the internal circuit components from a stable DC voltage obtained by rectifying and smoothing the lower AC voltage. The transceiver section **162** transmits and receives the information signal for enabling the mutual communication through the information line **Ls**. The E/O converter **163** converts the information signal received from the information line **Ls** to an optical signal, and outputs the optical signal though a light emitting device (LED) **164**. On the other hand, the O/E converter **165** receives the optical signal provided from the outside, e.g., the function unit **104** by a light receiving device (PD) **166**, and converting the received optical signal into the information signal to transmit it to the transceiver section **162**. The base unit **103** shown in FIG. 23 has an outlet tap as the function portion **167**. Alternatively, a sensor device or a controller may be formed as the function portion **167**.

The module port **134** formed at a front surface of the gate housing **130** is composed of an electric power port **134a** for supplying the electric power and an information signal port **134b** for accessing the information line **Ls**, as shown in FIG. 25B. Arrangement and shapes of the electric power port **134a** and the information signal port **134b** are standardized (normalized or stylized) in the wiring system of this embodiment. For example, as shown in FIG. 25B, each of the electric power port **134a** and the information signal port **134b** is configured in a substantially rectangular shape such that they are arranged in parallel to each other.

On the other hand, the module connector **142** formed at a rear surface of the main housing **135** is composed of an electric power connector **142a** and an information signal connector **142b**, as shown in FIG. 25A. Arrangement and shapes of the electric power connector **142a** and the information signal connector **142b** are standardized (normalized or stylized) in the wiring system of this embodiment. For example, as shown in FIG. 25A, each of the electric power connector **142a** and the information signal connector **142b** is configured

in a substantially rectangular shape such that they are arranged in parallel to each other.

In this embodiment, the module port **134** has a guide portion **133** such as a ring-like wall or a ring-like groove extending around the electric power port **134a** and the information signal port **134b**. This guide portion **133** is formed to be engageable to an engaging portion **145** such as a ring-like wall of the main housing **135**, which is formed around the electric power connector **142a** and the information signal connector **142b**. By simply engaging the engaging portion **145** to the guide portion **133**, the electric power connector **142a** and the information signal connector **142b** can be simultaneously connected to the electric power port **134a** and the information signal port **134b**. Therefore, there advantages that the main housing **135** can be easily attached to or removed from the gate housing **130** with improved connection reliability. A module connector having the same structure described above may be formed in the function unit **104**. The module port **134** and the module connector **142** may be formed by female and male connectors.

In the present embodiment, the gate housing **130** is directly fixed to the switch box **102**. If necessary, the gate housing **130** may be fixed to the switch box **102** through an attachment member **175**, as shown in FIG. 26. For example, this attachment member **175** is formed by a rectangular frame **176** with a window hole **177**. In this case, the gate housing **130** is mounted on the attachment member **175** by fitting a front portion of the gate housing into the window hole **177**, and then engaging hooks (not shown) formed at both sides of the gate housing to the rectangular frame **176**. The attachment member **175** mounting the gate housing **130** thereon is fixed to the switch box **102** by use of fixing screws. Alternatively, the gate housing **130** may be directly fixed to the wall surface by use of exclusive clamps without using the switch box **102**.

The function unit **104** is designed to provide a desired function by using the electric power supplied to the function unit **104** through the base unit **103** or

using the mutual communication of the information signal between the function unit **104** and the information line **Ls** through the base unit **103**. For example, when the function unit **104** is connected to the base unit **103** mounted in the wall surface at a high position near the ceiling, it preferably has a receptacle function of receiving a plug with hook of a lighting apparatus, security function such as a motion sensor, temperature sensor, and monitoring camera, or a sound function such as speaker. In addition, when the function unit **104** is connected to the base unit **103** mounted in the wall surface at a middle height, at which the function unit **104** can be easily operated by the user, it preferably has a switch function of turning on/off the lighting apparatus, control function for electric appliances such as air-conditioning equipments, a display function such as liquid crystal display or a timer function. The intercom device of the present invention is preferably connected as one of the function units **104** to the base unit **103** at the middle height. Moreover, when the function unit **104** is connected to the base unit **103** mounted in the wall surface at a low position near the floor, it preferably has a receptacle function for receiving a plug of an electric appliance such as electric vacuum cleaner, the sound function such as speaker, or a footlight function.

Specifically, as shown in FIG. 27, when a function section **181** of the function unit **104** is formed by a switch, operation data obtained by operating the switch is transmitted to a processing section **188** such as CPU through an I/O interface **189**. Then the processed data is sent to, for example, an infrared remote controller (not shown) through a transceiver section **187**, so that an electric appliance to be controlled is turned on/off by receiving a remote control signal emitted from the infrared remote controller. In addition, when the function section **181** is formed by a sensor, data detected by the sensor is transmitted as the information signal to the information line **Ls**, and then informed to the user by a required communicator.

The coil **172** wound around a core **170** of the base unit **103** shown in FIG.

23 is used as a power transmission means for supplying electric power to the function unit **104** in a noncontact manner. That is, the coil **172** of the base unit **103** provides an electromagnetic coupling portion that works as a first side of a transformer. On the other hand, as shown in FIG. 27, the function unit **104** has an electromagnetic coupling portion comprised of a coil **182** wound around a core **180**, which works as a second side of the transformer. Therefore, by forming electromagnetic coupling between the base unit **103** and the function unit **104**, a low AC voltage can be induced in the coil **182** of the function unit **104** to supply of electric power from the base unit **103** to the function unit **104**. Similarly, an electromagnetic coupling portion **X2** is formed at the opposite side of the electromagnetic coupling portion **X1**, and used to make a connection between the function units. In this embodiment, since the low AC voltage having the higher frequency than the commercial AC voltage is obtained by the AC/AC converter **160**, there is an advantage that the electromagnetic coupling portions used as the transformer can be downsized.

In addition, the light emitting device (LED) **164** of the base unit **103** shown in FIG. 23 is used to transmit an optical signal as the information signal to the function unit **104** in a noncontact manner. On the other hand, as shown in FIG. 27, a light receiving device (PD) **186** is disposed in the function unit 10 such that the light emitting device **164** is in a face-to-face relation with the light receiving device **186** when the function unit **104** is connected to the base unit **103**. Similarly, to transmit the optical signal as the information signal from the function unit **104** to the base unit **103**, the function unit **104** has a light emitting device (LED) **184**, which is disposed in the face-to-face relation with the light receiving element (PD) **166** when the function unit **104** is connected to the base unit **103**. Thus, each of the base unit **103** and the function unit **104** has the pair of the E/O converter (**163**, **183**) and the O/E converter (**165**, **185**) as an optical coupling portion to enable the mutual communication of the information signal therebetween in a noncontact manner.

As shown in FIG. 23, the electromagnetic coupling portion **X** used to supply the electric power and the optical coupling portion **Y** used for the mutual communication of the information signal are disposed at a side surface of the base unit **103** to be spaced from each other by a constant distance. Arrangements and shapes of the electromagnetic coupling portion **X** and the optical coupling portion **Y** are standardized (or stylized) to make the base unit **103** shareable among the function units **104**. In addition, the pair of the electromagnetic coupling portion **X** and the optical coupling portion **Y** may be formed at each of both sides of the function unit **104**, as shown in FIG. 27. That is, the optical coupling portion **Y1** formed at one side (e.g., left side) of the function unit **104** is composed of the light receiving device **186** located at the upper side and the light emitting device **184** located at the lower side, and the optical coupling portion **Y2** formed at the opposite side (e.g., right side) of the function unit **104** is composed of a light emitting device **194** located at the upper side and a light receiving device **196** located at the lower side. In this case, since the base unit **103** is connected to the one side of the function unit **104**, and another function unit or the intercom device of the present invention can be connected to the other side of the function unit **104**, there is an advantage of further improving function expandability of the wiring system.

The intercom device **101** of this embodiment can be connected to the base unit **103**, as shown in FIG. 28. In addition, internal components of the intercom device **101** of this embodiment are shown in FIG. 29. As understood from the comparison with the function unit **104** of FIG. 27, the intercom device **101** of FIG. 29 is substantially equivalent to a function unit having the components of the intercom device shown in FIG. 2 as the function section **181**.

Since this intercom device **101** has the stylized connectors as well as the function unit **104** and base unit **103** described above, it can be used in a desired combination with the base unit **103** and the function unit **104**. For example, as shown by the arrow ① in FIG. 30, the intercom device **101** can be

connected to the function unit **104** having the timer function, which is connected to the base unit **103**. Alternatively, as shown by the arrow ② in FIG 30, the intercom device **101** may be connected at its one side to the base unit **103**. At this time, the function unit **104** having the timer function can be connected to the other side of the intercom device **101**. Thus, there is a remarkable advantage that a layout of the function units **104** having various functions and the intercom device **101** can be changed with a high degree of freedom according to the user's needs.

In addition, when the intercom device **101** is operated in conjunction with at least one functions unit **104**, the wiring system of this embodiment can provide a higher order function in addition to the communication function. For example, when the intercom device **101** is connected to one of the base units **103**, and the function unit **104** having a sensor function (e.g., motion sensor or fire sensor) is connected to another one of the base units **103**, which is disposed at a proper location, the intercom device **101** can output an alarm sound by receiving alarm signal from the function unit. Therefore, the intercom device **101** of this case has an alarm generating function for disaster or crime prevention as well as the communication function. In addition, since it is not needed to individually prepare a speaker for generating the alarm sound, there is a further advantage of achieving an improvement in cost performance of the wiring system as a whole.

Next, means for mechanically coupling between the base unit **103** and the function unit **104** (or the intercom device **101**) is explained.

For example, the base unit **103** shown in FIG. 31 has a cosmetic cover **112**, which is detachably attached to a front surface of the gate housing **135**, and horizontal guide rails **114** formed at upper and lower portions of the gate housing. The numeral **115** designates a stopper wall formed in a substantially center position in the longitudinal direction of the guide rail **114**. On the other hand, as shown in FIGS. 32A to 32C, the function unit **104** (or the intercom

device **101**) has concave portions **128** for accommodating joining members **150** therein, which are formed at both of its upper and lower sides, horizontal guide rails **124** extending in the concave portions **128**, and cover members **126** pivotally supported at upper and lower ends of the function unit **104**. In addition, as shown in FIG. 32D, the joining member **150** has a groove **152**, in which the horizontal guide rail (**114**, **124**) can be slidably fitted.

In this case, a cosmetic cover **112** is firstly removed from the gate housing **135** of the base unit **103**. Then, the electromagnetic coupling portion **X** and the optical coupling portion **Y** of the base unit **103** are connected to the electromagnetic coupling portion **X1** and the optical coupling portion **Y1** of the function unit **104** (or the intercom device **101**). Next, the cover member **126** is opened, and the joining member **150** is slid along the guide rail **124**, as shown by an arrow in FIG. 33. The slide movement of the joining member **150** is performed until the joining member **150** contacts the stopper wall **115**. As a result, the joining member **150** is engaged to the guide rail **114** of the base unit **103** over about half length of the joining member **150**. On the other hand, the remaining portion of the joining member **150** is still engaged to the guide rail **124** of the function unit **104** (or the intercom device **101**). Thus, by engaging the joining member **150** to both of the base unit **103** and the function unit **104** the base unit **103** can be mechanically coupled with the function unit **104** (or the intercom device **101**). Finally, the cosmetic cover **112** is attached to the base unit **103**, and the cover member **126** is closed.

According to this coupling means, since the joining member **150** is held between the cosmetic cover **112** and the gate housing **135**, it is possible to prevent accidental falling of the joining member **150**, and obtain the stable mechanical connection therebetween without spoiling the beauty of them. In addition, since the joining member **150** is always accommodated in the concave portion **128** of the function unit **104** (or the intercom device **101**), there is no worry about loss of the joining member **150**. This coupling means is also usual

in the case of mechanically coupling between the function units **104**, or between the function unit **104** and the intercom device **101**.

As an information-signal transmitting method available in the wiring system, a baseband transmission or a broadband transmission can be used. In addition, the protocol is not limited to a specific one. For example, sound and visual information signals may be transmitted and received according to JT-H232 packet to make the mutual communication between the intercom devices. In a control system, it is also preferred to use a routing protocol for a broadcast or a unicast that controlling can be performed at a control ratio of 1:1 or 1:N according to operation data. Alternatively, the protocol used between the base units may be different from the protocol used in the function unit or the intercom device connected to the base unit. In this case, a protocol conversion is preferably performed by the base unit.

In addition, the wiring system of the above embodiment is essential to use both of the information line and the power line installed in the building structure. As a modification of this embodiment, a power-line carrier communication may be used in the wiring system.

That is, the wiring system according to this modification is essential to install only the power line in the building structure. Therefore, the base unit is connected to only the power line. On the other hand, the base unit, the function unit and/or the intercom device need to have a transceiver unit for transmitting and receiving information signals in the power-line carrier communication manner. For example, when the transceiver unit is formed in the base unit, the electric power carrying the information signals thereon is separated to the electric power transmission and the information signal transmission by the base unit. Therefore, the same function unit and the intercom device used in the wiring system of the above embodiment are also available in this power-line carrier type wiring system.

Alternatively, the transceiver unit may be formed in the intercom device **101**, as shown in FIG. 34. In this case, the intercom device is detachably

connected to the base unit and/or the function unit by a power-line carrier type connector **Z**. In addition, the intercom device also comprises a PLC modem **210** for receiving the information signals carried by the power line, and transmitting information signals through the power line, a processing section **220** connected to the PLC modem, an I/O interface **230** between the processing section, and a function section **240** for providing the intercom function. Similar circuit components may be formed in the function unit and/or the base unit. As a modulation method for the power-line carrier communication, for example, it is possible to use a broad spectrum diffusion model, multi carrier model or an orthogonal Frequency division multiplexing (OFDM) model.

INDUSTRIAL APPLICABILITY

Thus, according to the present invention, the first microphone disposed in the front air chamber efficiently receives the voice output of the speaker, and the output of the first microphone is effectively used in the signal processing unit to remove the signal component corresponding to the voice output of the speaker from the output of the second microphone. Therefore, it is possible to improve the howling prevention effect. In addition, the intercom device can be downsized because a distance between the first microphone and the speaker becomes short. Furthermore, the intercom device is suitable for the wiring system with excellent function expandability, as described in the above embodiments.

Therefore, the present invention is expected to further increase the demand of the intercom device, and especially as one of the components of the wiring system of the next generation.

CLAIMS:

1. An intercom device comprising:
a housing;
a speaker accommodated in said housing such that a front air chamber is defined as a space enclosed by a front surface of said speaker and an inner surface of said housing, and a rear air chamber is defined as a space enclosed by a rear surface of said speaker and an inner surface of said housing;
a first microphone disposed such that its sound receiving surface faces the front air chamber;
a second microphone disposed such that its sound receiving surface faces outside of said housing; and
a signal processing unit configured to, when an audio output of said speaker is picked up by said second microphone, remove a signal component corresponding to the audio output of said speaker from an output signal of said second microphone by use of an output signal of said first microphone.

2. The intercom device according to claim 1, wherein the rear air chamber is the space hermetically-sealed by the rear surface of said speaker and the inner surface of said housing.

3. The intercom device according to claim 1, wherein said first microphone is arranged such that the sound receiving surface of said first microphone faces a diaphragm of said speaker.

4. The intercom device according to claim 1, wherein said second microphone is located adjacent to said speaker.

5. The intercom device according to claim 1, wherein said first microphone and said second microphone are mounted on a same circuit board.

6. The intercom device according to claim 5, wherein the circuit board is mounted on an outside surface of said housing such that the sound receiving surface of said first microphone faces the front air chamber and the sound receiving surface of said second microphone faces the outside of said housing.

7. The intercom device according to claim 1, further comprising an acoustic tube having an opening communicated with the rear air chamber at its one end, and a closed end at the other end.

8. The intercom device according to claim 7, wherein said acoustic tube has a tube length of an odd multiple of one quarter of a wavelength determined in consideration of sonic velocity and an intended frequency where an increase in sound pressure level of the audio output of said speaker is needed.

9. The intercom device according to claim 1, further comprising a plurality of acoustic tubes having different lengths, each of which has an opening communicated with the rear air chamber at its one end, and a closed end at the other end.

10. The intercom device according to claim 7, wherein said acoustic tube has a resonant frequency between a frequency equivalent to a lowest resonant

frequency of said speaker that is supposed to be mounted on an infinite baffle and a lowest resonant frequency of said speaker mounted on the rear air chamber with the absence of said acoustic tube.

11. The intercom device according to claim 7, wherein said acoustic tube is formed along an inner surface of the rear air chamber.

12. The intercom device according to claim 7, further comprising a sound absorbing material disposed at the opening of said acoustic tube.

13. A wiring system using the intercom device as set forth in claim 1, comprising at least one transmission line installed in a building structure to transmit electric power and information signals, and a plurality of base units each adapted in use to be mounted in a wall surface of said building structure, and connected to said transmission line;

wherein the intercom device has a first connector detachably connectable to a second connector formed in each of said base units,

when said first connector is connected to said second connector of one of said base units, the intercom device functions such that the information signals provided through said transmission line are output as audio information from said speaker unit, and an output of said signal processing unit is sent out through said transmission line.

14. The wiring system as set forth in claim 13, further comprising a function unit adapted in use to be connected to said transmission line through one of said base units, said function unit having a third connector detachably

connectable to one of said second connector of said base unit, and an extended connector formed in the intercom device,

when said third connector of said function unit is connected to said second connector of said base unit, or when said first connector of the intercom device is connected to said second connector of said base unit, and said third connector of said function unit is connected to said extended connector of the intercom device, said function unit provides at least one of functions for supplying electric power provided through said transmission line, outputting information signals provided through said transmission line, and sending out information signals through said transmission line.

15. The wiring system as set forth in claim 14, wherein said first connector and said third connector are stylized in shape and arrangement, and said second connector and said extended connector are stylized in shape and arrangement corresponding to the stylization of said first connector and said third connector.

16. The wiring system as set forth in claim 13, further comprising a function unit adapted in use to be connected to said transmission line through one of said base units,

said function unit has a third connector detachably connectable to said second connector of said base unit and an extended connector detachably connectable to said first connector of said intercom device,

when said third connector of said function unit is connected to said second connector of said base unit, and said extended connector of said function unit is connected to said first connector of the intercom device, said function unit provides at least one of functions for supplying electric power provided from said transmission line through said base unit, outputting information signals provided from said transmission line through said base unit, and sending out

information signals to said transmission line through said base unit, and the intercom device operates such that the information signals provided from said transmission line through said base unit and said function unit are output as audio information from said speaker unit, and the output of said signal processing unit is sent out to said transmission line through said base unit and said function unit.

17. The wiring system as set forth in claim 16, wherein said first connector and said third connector are stylized in shape and arrangement, and said second connector and said extended connector are stylized in shape and arrangement corresponding to the stylization of said first connector and said third connector.

18. The wiring system as set forth in claim 13, wherein said first and second connectors provide an electric power transmission between said base unit and the intercom device by means of electromagnetic coupling.

19. The wiring system as set forth in claim 13, wherein said first and second connectors provide a signal transmission between said base unit and the intercom device by means of optical coupling.

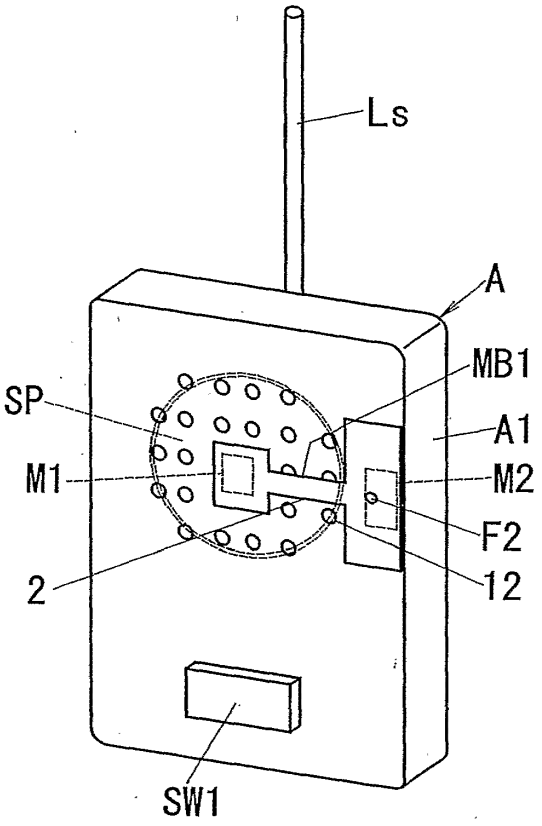


FIG. 1

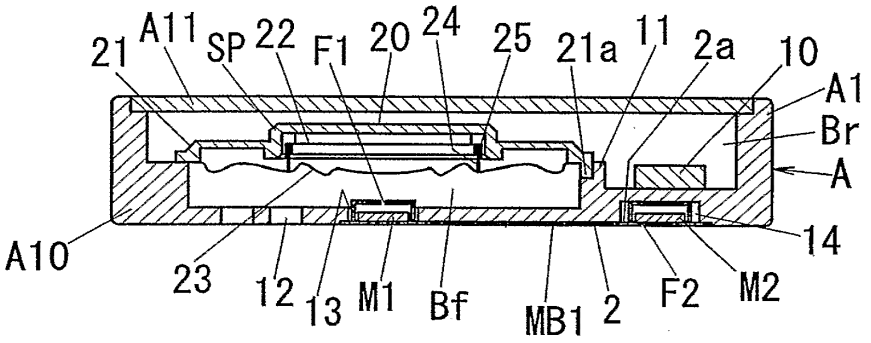

21
A11
SP
22
F1
20
24
25
21a
11
2a
10
A1
Br
A
14
A10
23
12
13
M1
Bf
MB1
2
F2
M2

FIG. 2

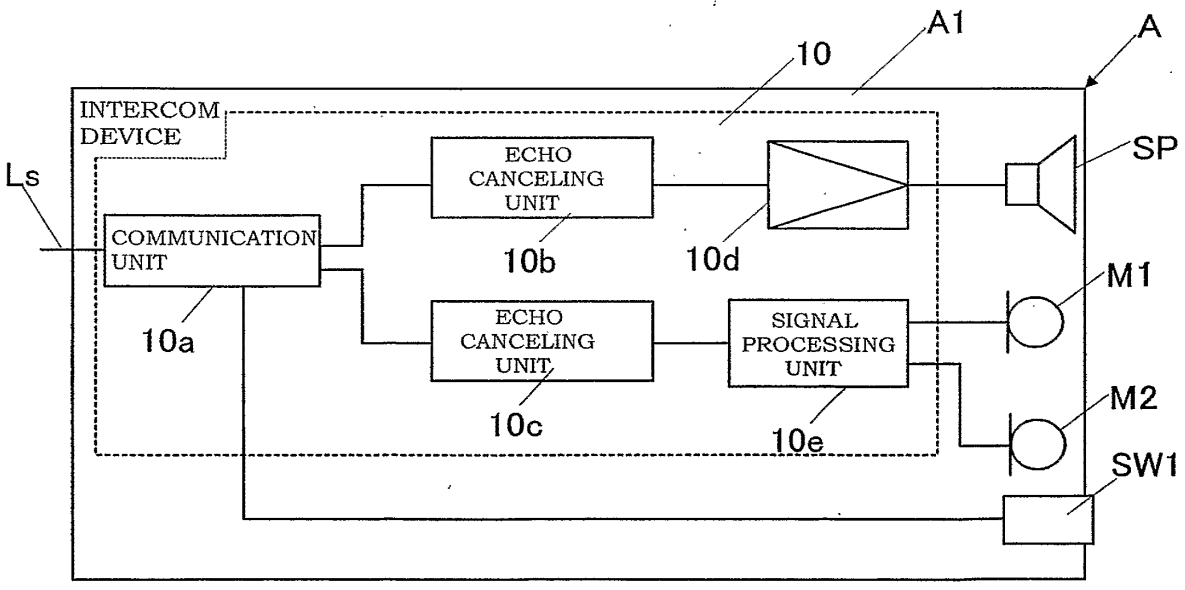

A1
A
10
INTERCOM DEVICE
Ls
COMMUNICATION UNIT
10a
ECHO CANCELING UNIT
10b
10d
SP
ECHO CANCELING UNIT
10c
SIGNAL PROCESSING UNIT
10e
M1
M2
SW1

FIG. 3

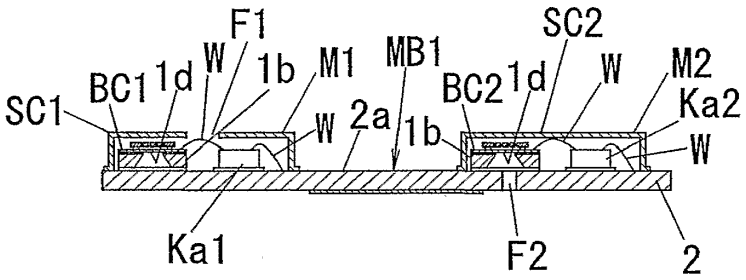

F1
W
1b
M1
MB1
SC2
W
M2
SC1
BC1
1d
W
2a
1b
BC2
1d
Ka2
W
Ka1
F2
2

FIG. 4

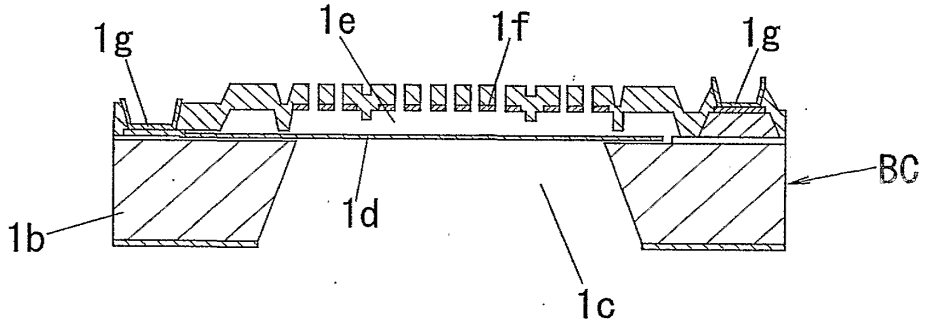

1g
1e
1f
1g
BC
1b
1d
1c

FIG. 5

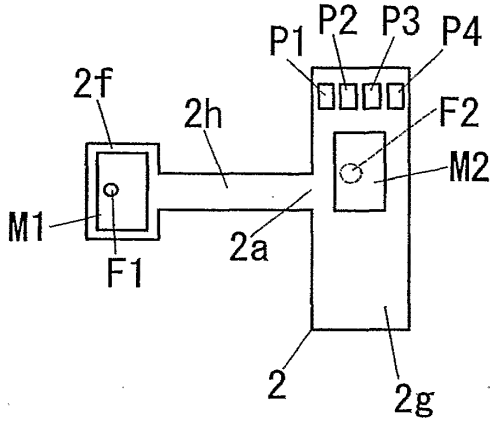


FIG. 6A

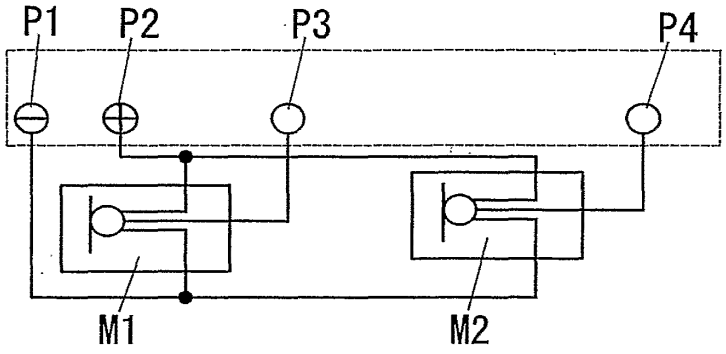


FIG. 6B

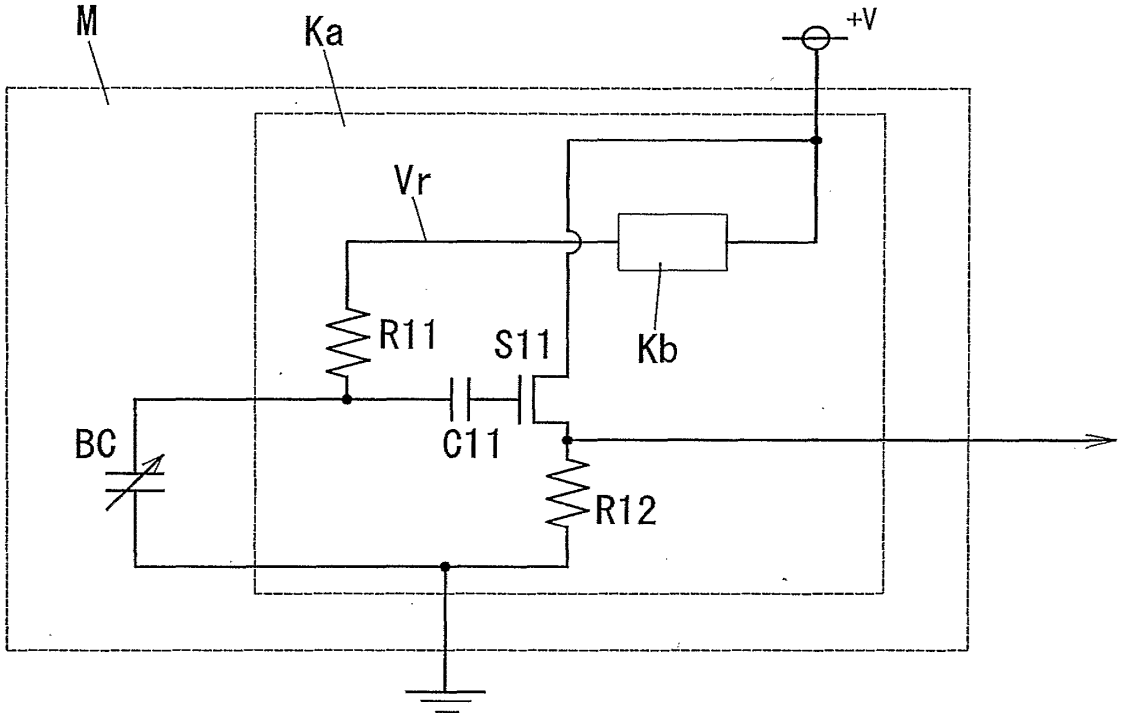


FIG. 7

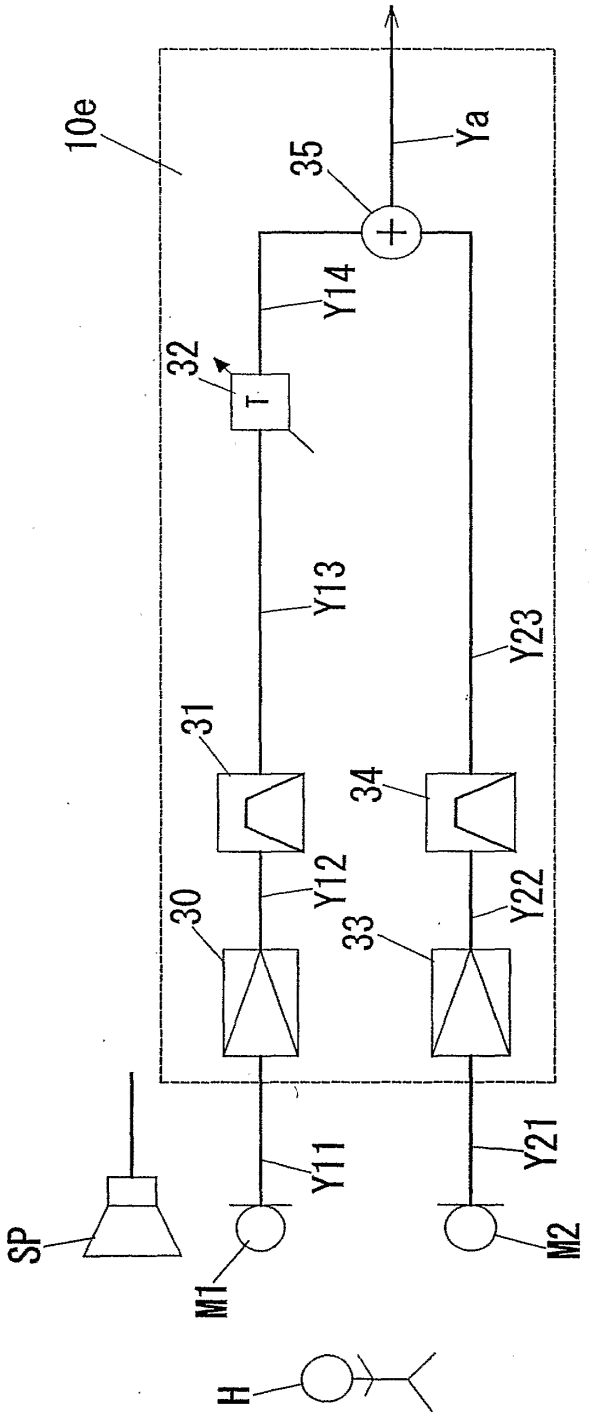


FIG. 8

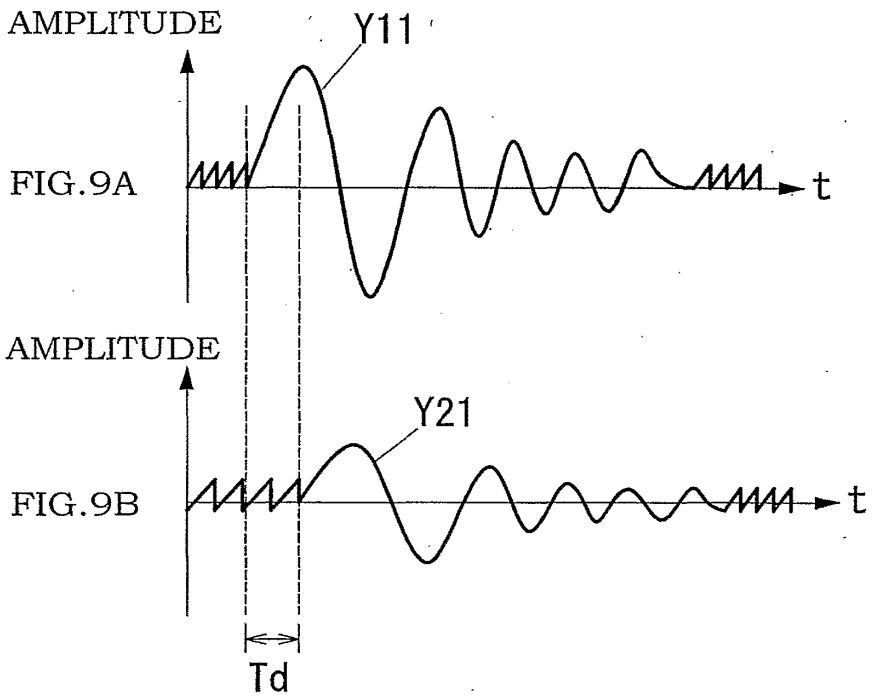


FIG.9A

FIG.9B

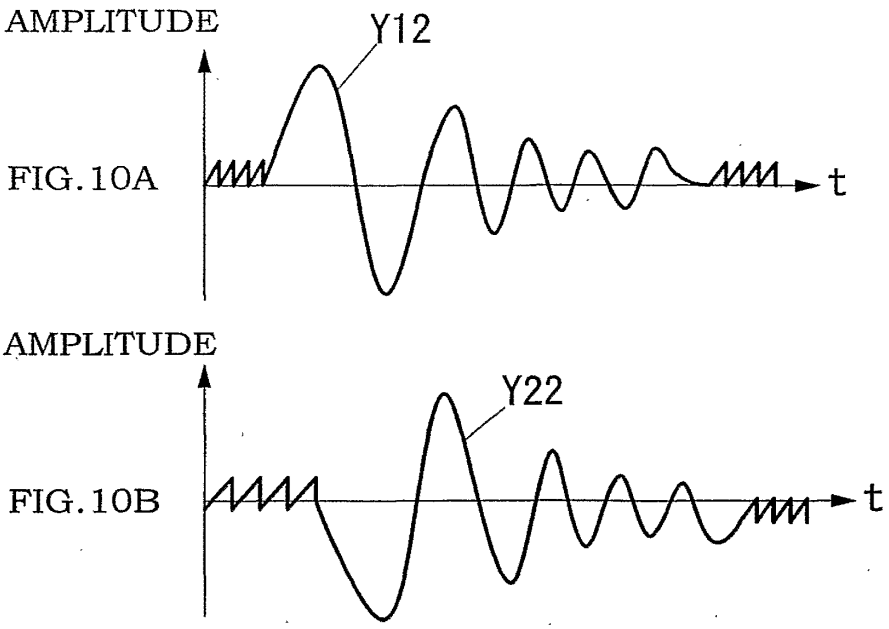


FIG.10A

FIG.10B

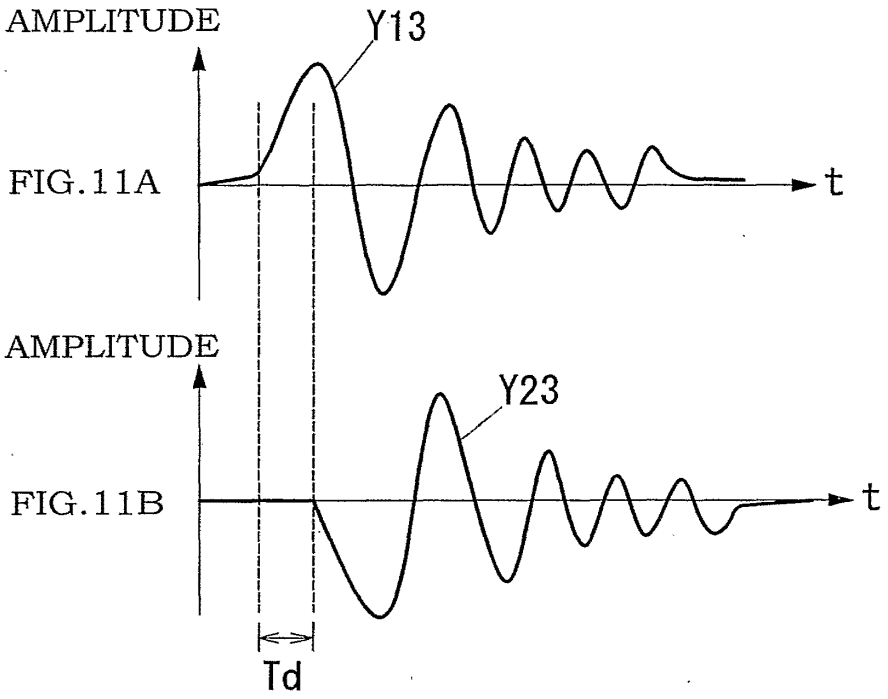


FIG.11A

FIG.11B

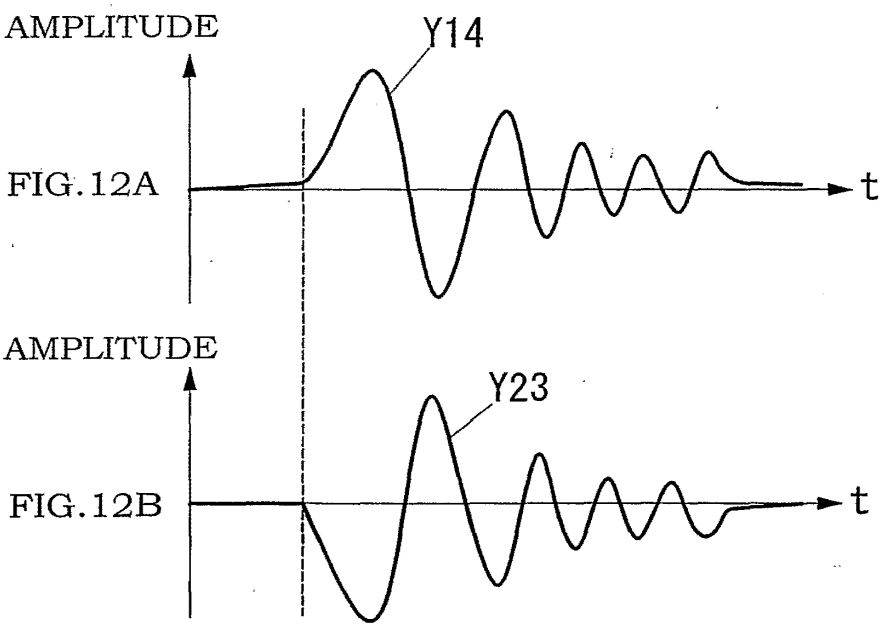
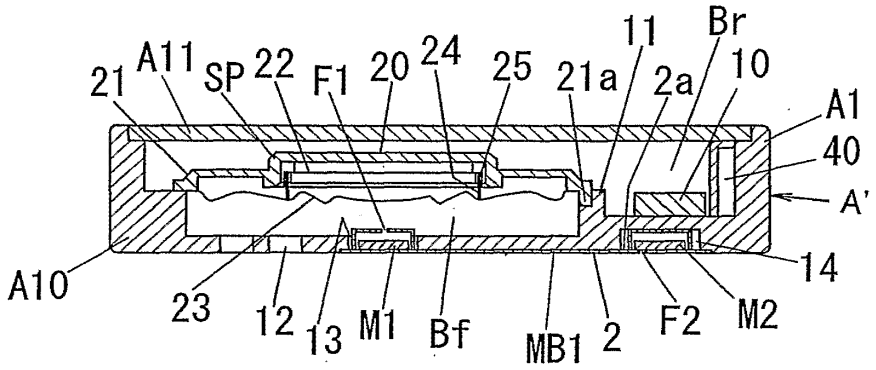


FIG.12A

FIG.12B

FIG.12C

FIG. 13



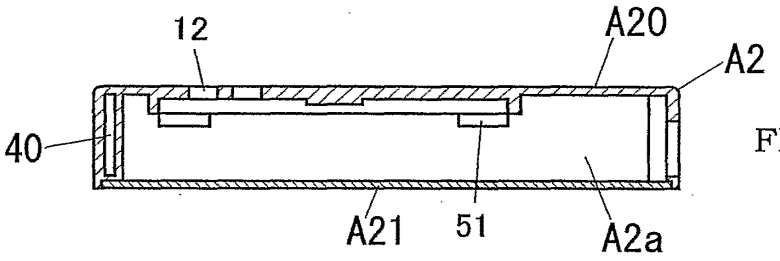
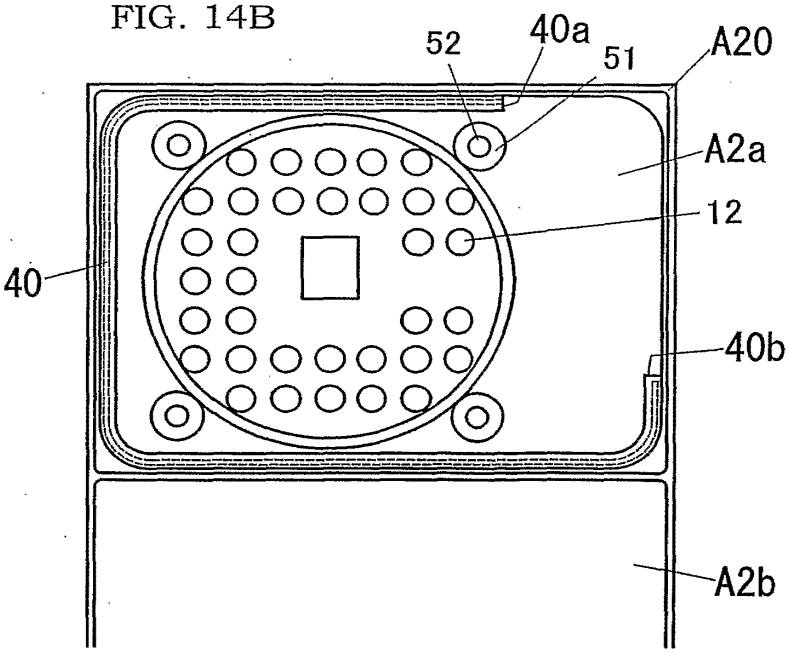


FIG. 14A

FIG. 14B



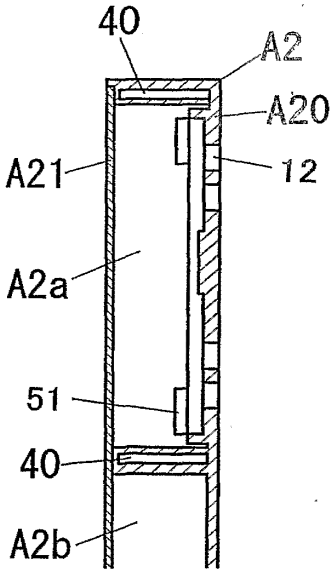


FIG. 14C

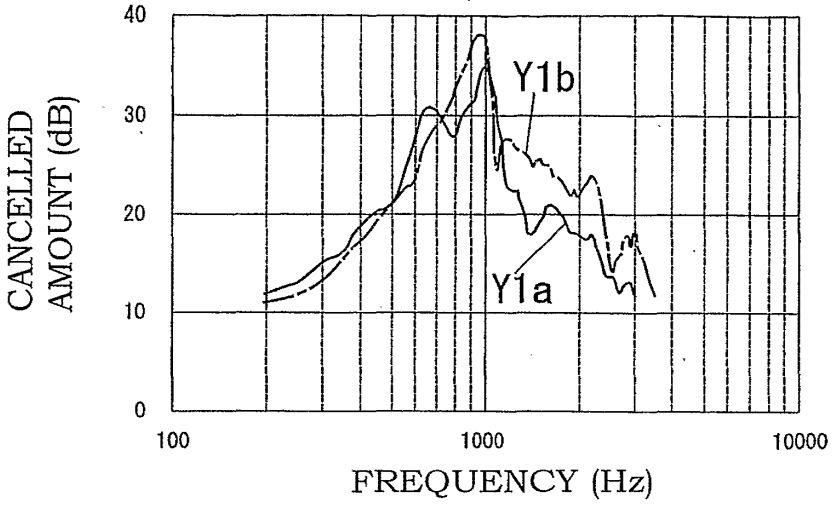


FIG. 15

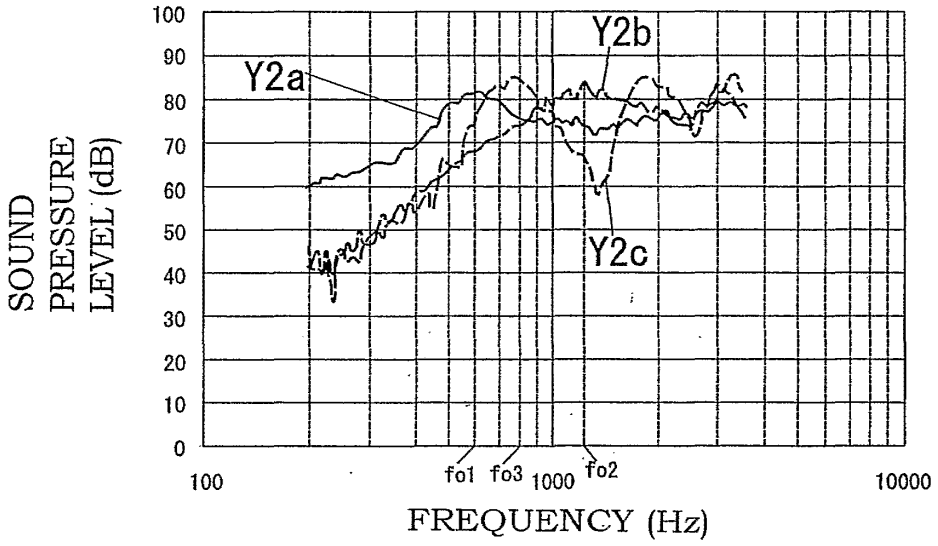


FIG. 16

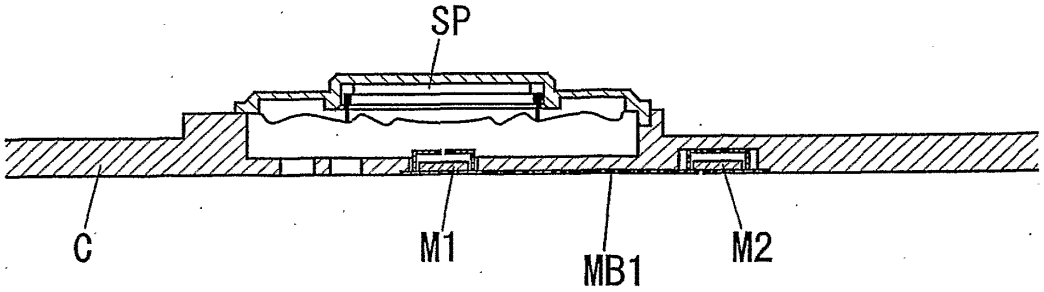


FIG. 17

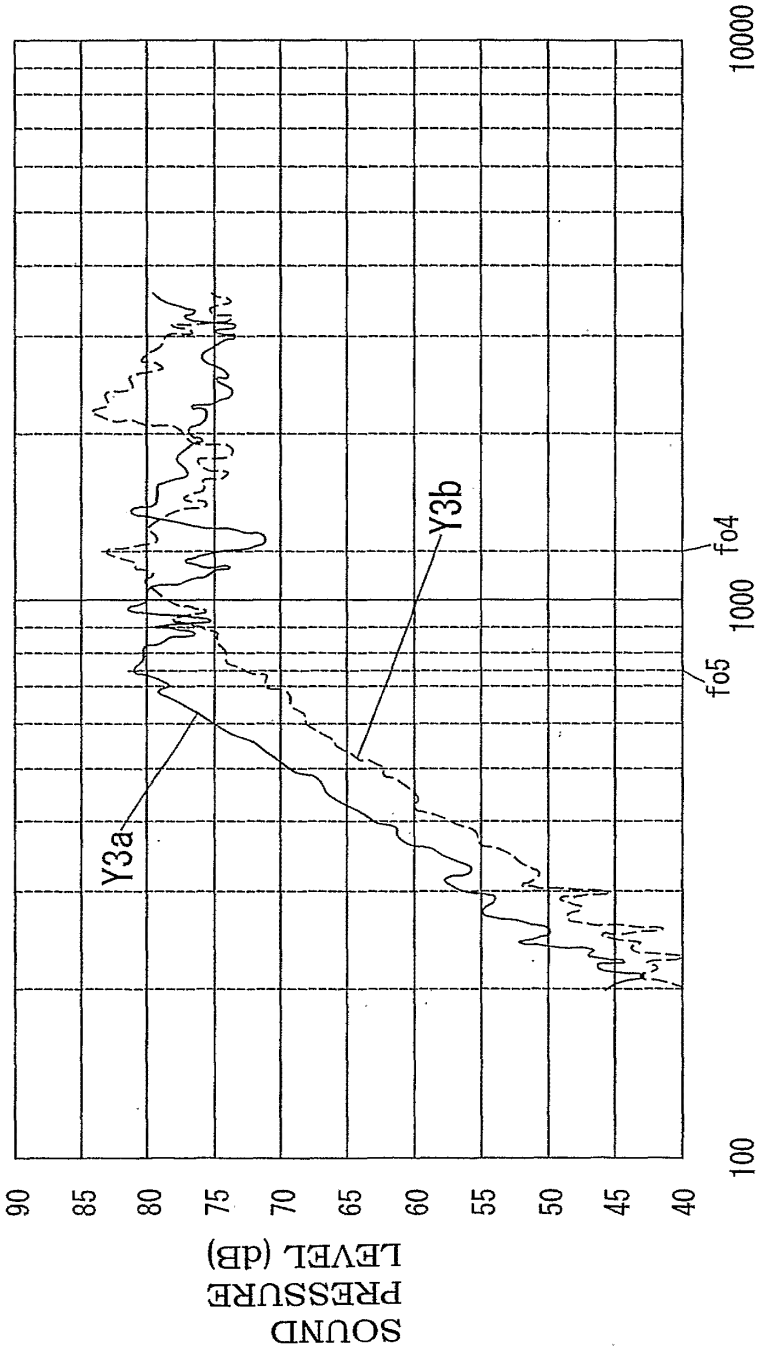

SOUND PRESSURE LEVEL (dB)
90
85
80
75
70
65
60
55
50
45
40
100
1000
10000
FREQUENCY (Hz)
fo4
fo5
Y3a
Y3b

FIG. 18

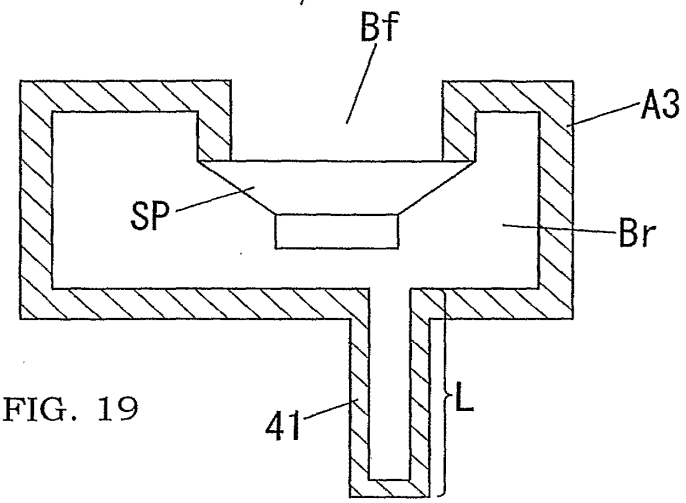


FIG. 19

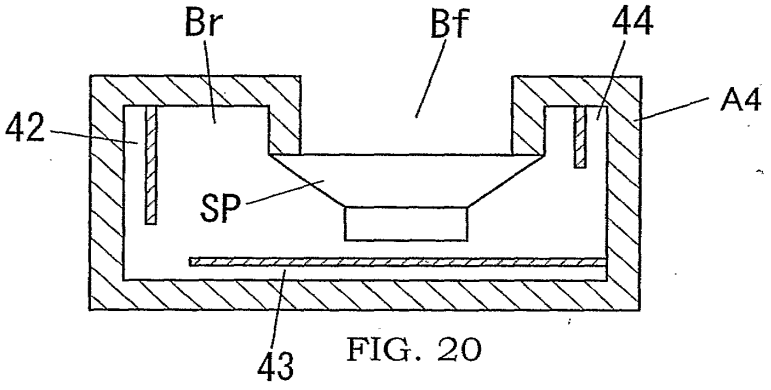


FIG. 20

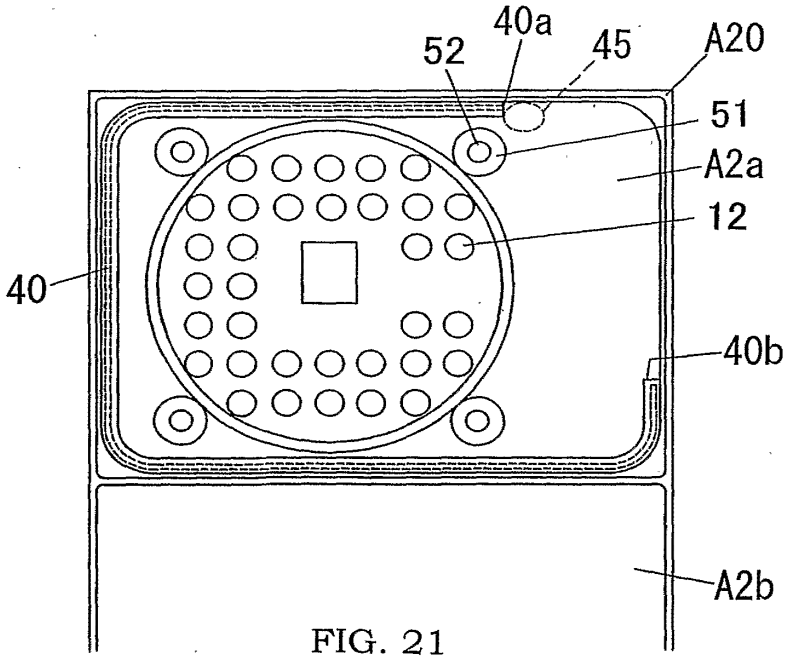


FIG. 21

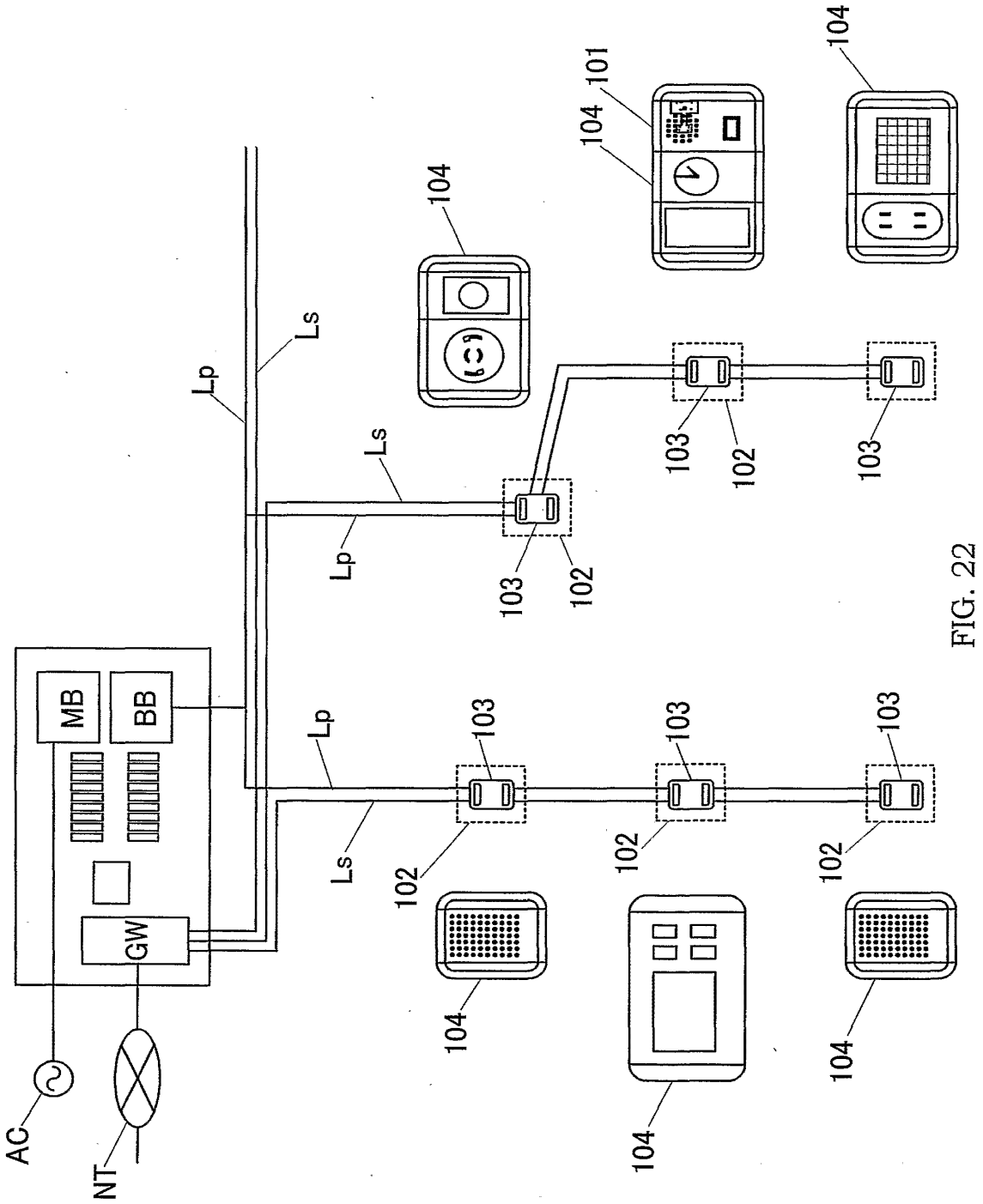


FIG. 22

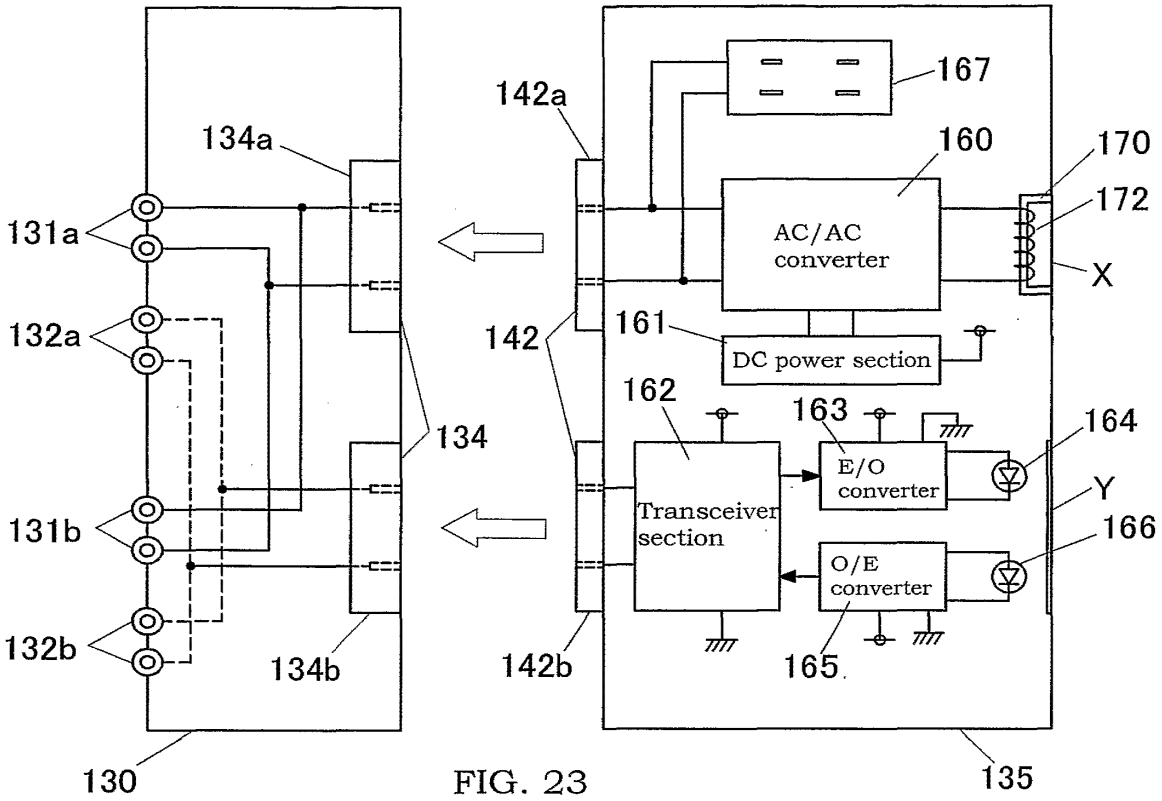

134a
131a
132a
131b
132b
134
134b
130
142a
167
160
170
172
AC/AC converter
X
142
161
DC power section
162
163
164
E/O converter
Y
Transceiver section
166
O/E converter
142b
165
135

FIG. 23

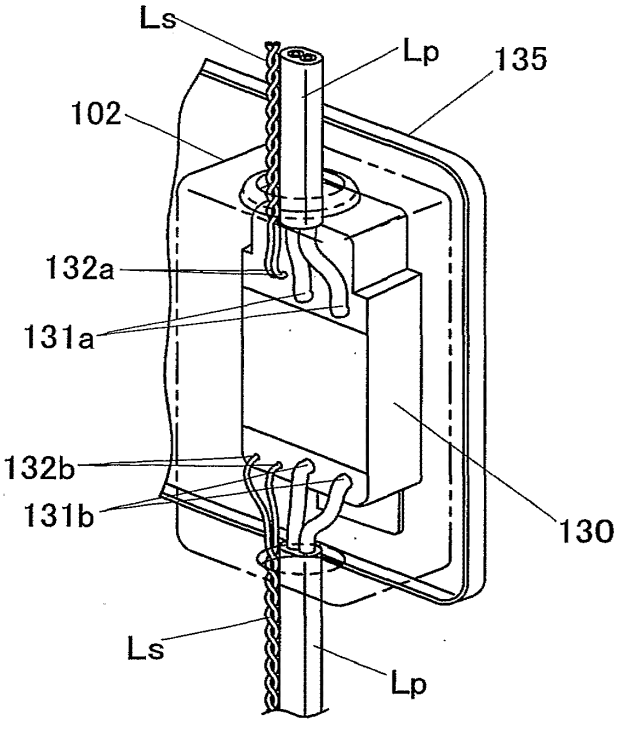

Ls
Lp
135
102
132a
131a
132b
131b
130
Ls
Lp

FIG. 24

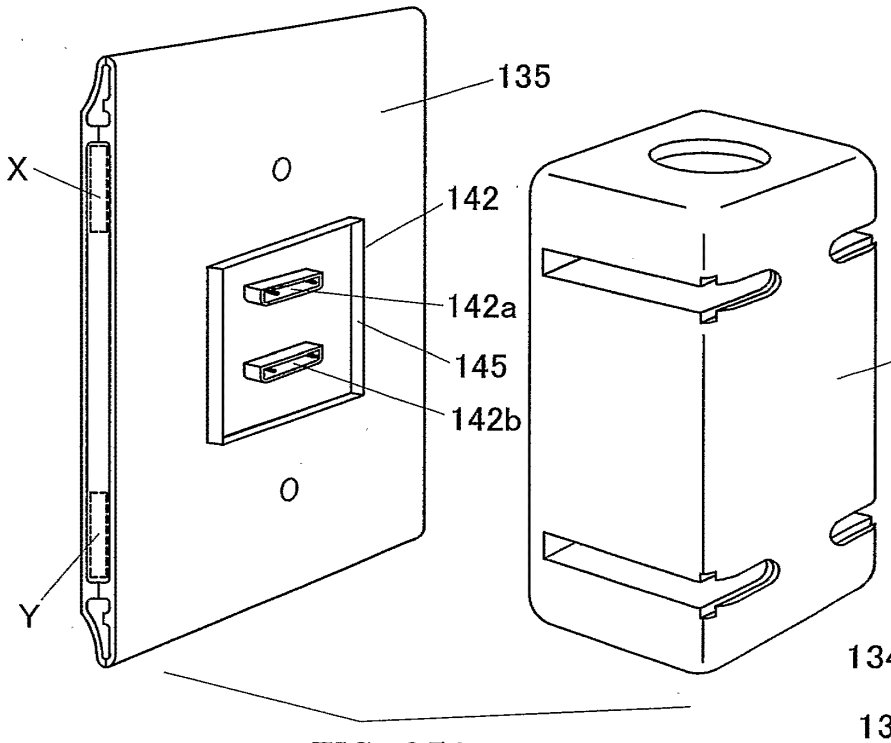


FIG. 25A

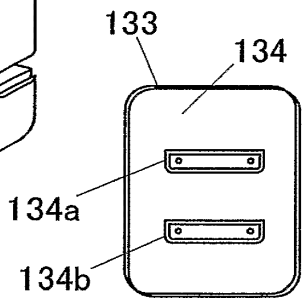


FIG. 25B

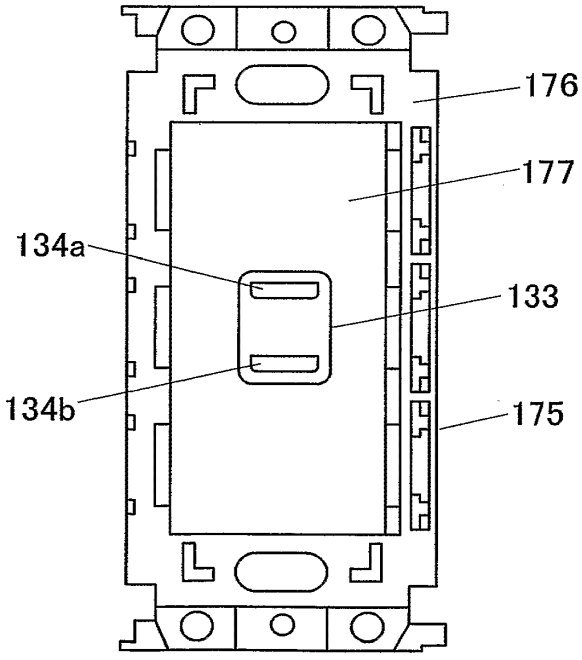


FIG. 26

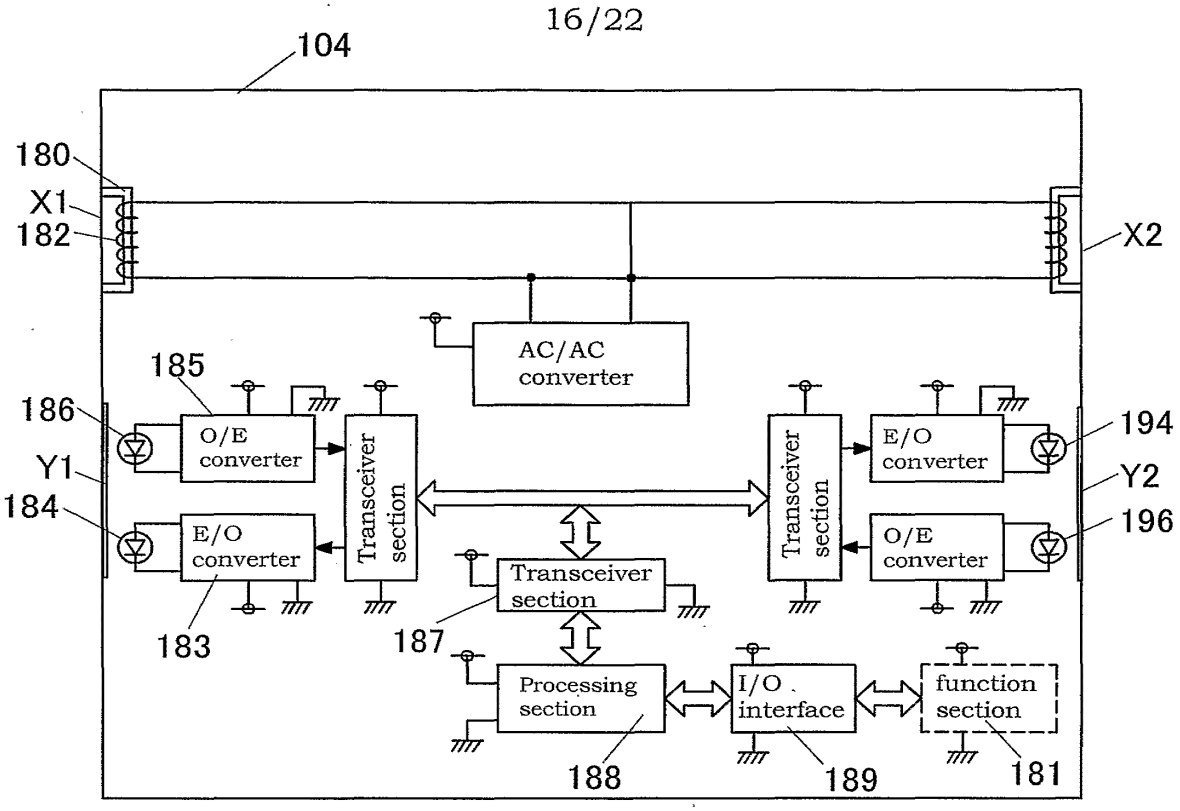

104
180
X1
182
X2
AC/AC converter
185
186
O/E converter
Transceiver section
Transceiver section
E/O converter
194
Y1
Y2
184
E/O converter
O/E converter
196
Transceiver section
183
187
Processing section
I/O interface
function section
188
189
181

FIG. 27

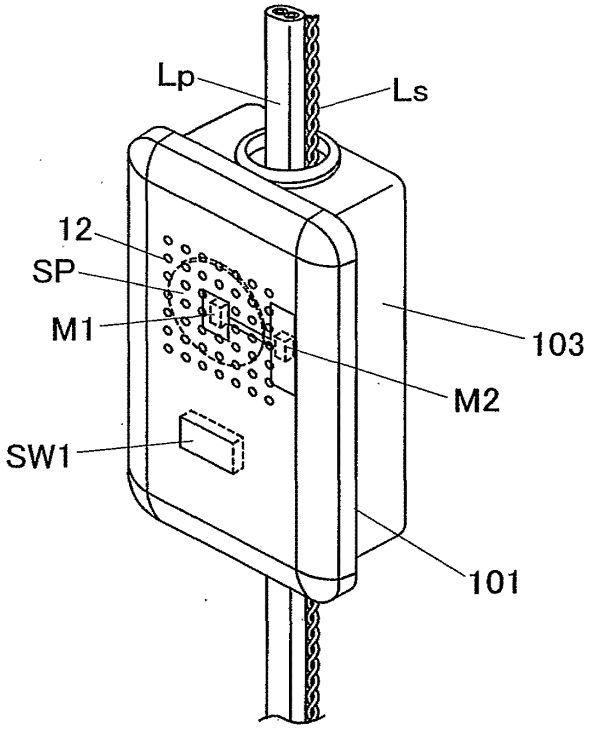

Lp
Ls
12
SP
M1
103
M2
SW1
101

FIG. 28

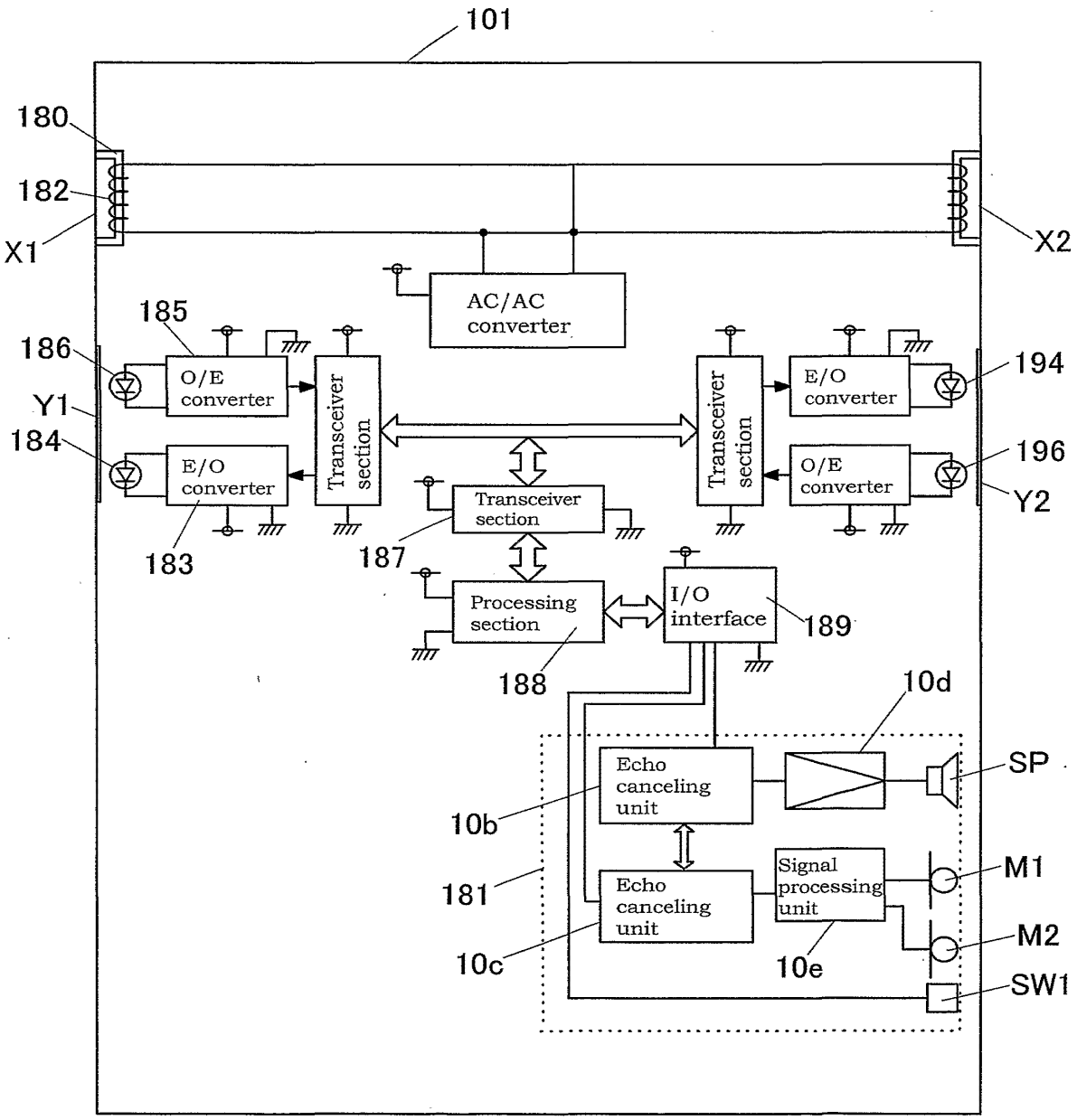

101
180
182
X1
X2
AC/AC converter
185
186
O/E converter
Transceiver section
Y1
184
E/O converter
183
Transceiver section
187
Transceiver section
E/O converter
194
O/E converter
196
Y2
Processing section
I/O interface
189
188
10d
Echo canceling unit
SP
10b
181
Echo canceling unit
Signal processing unit
M1
M2
10c
10e
SW1

FIG. 29

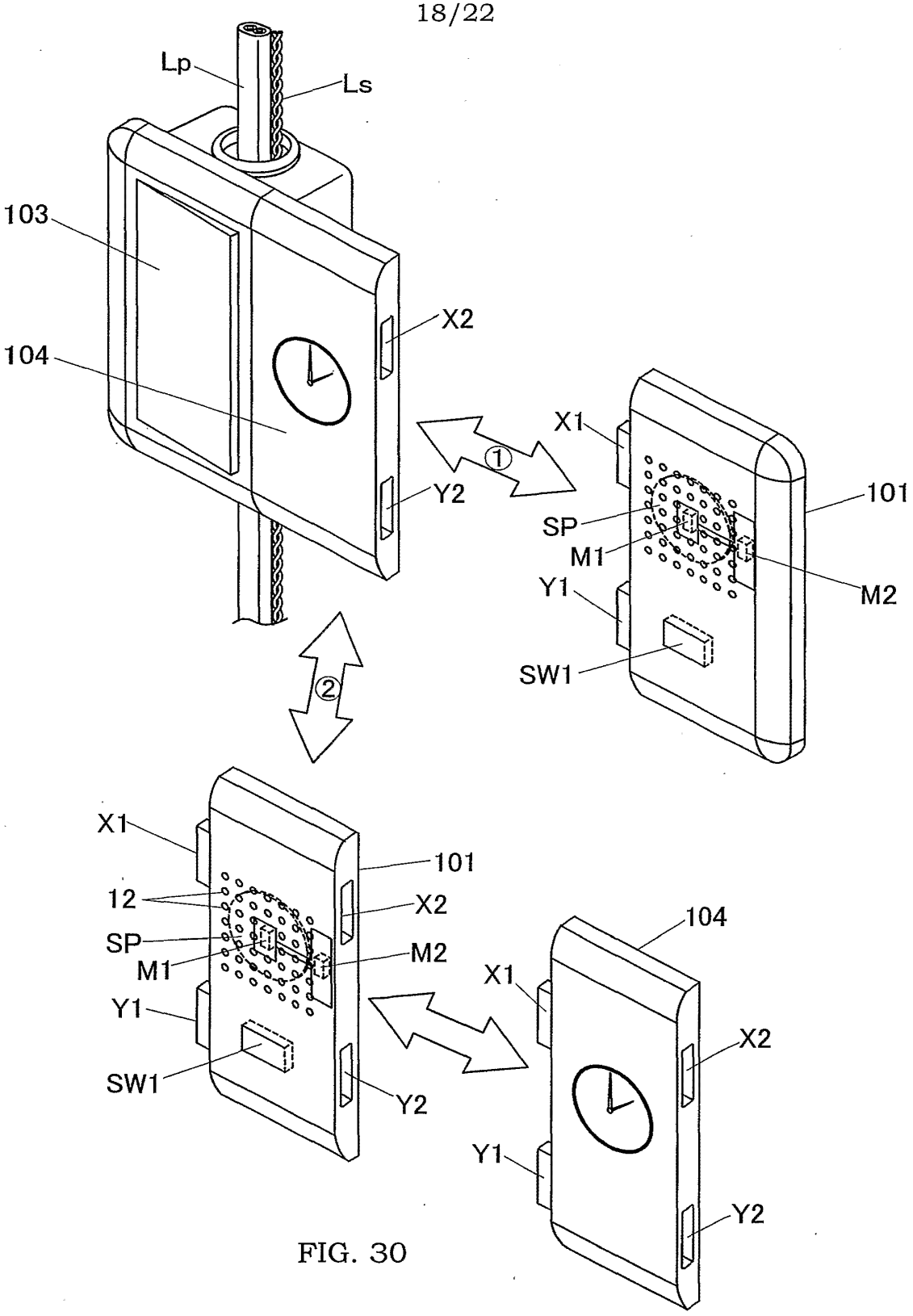

Lp
Ls
103
104
X2
Y2
①
X1
101
SP
M1
M2
Y1
SW1
②
X1
101
12
X2
SP
M1
M2
Y1
SW1
Y2
104
X1
X2
Y1
Y2

FIG. 30

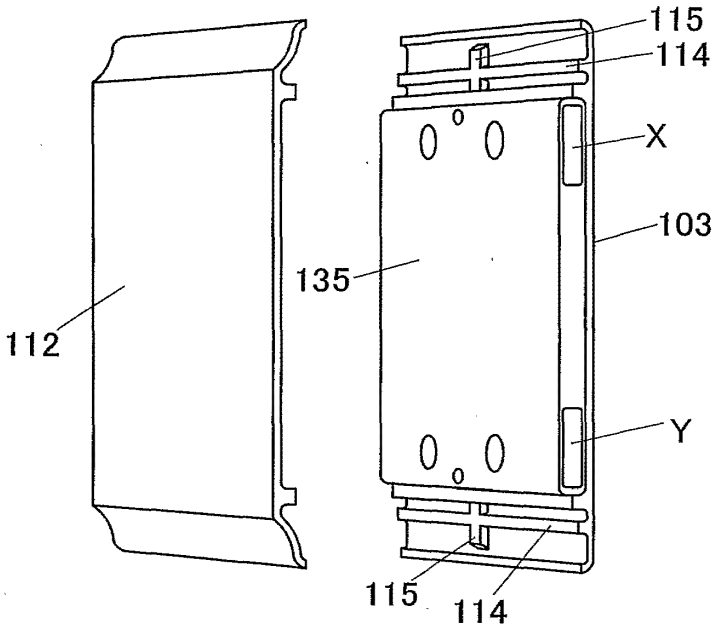


FIG. 31

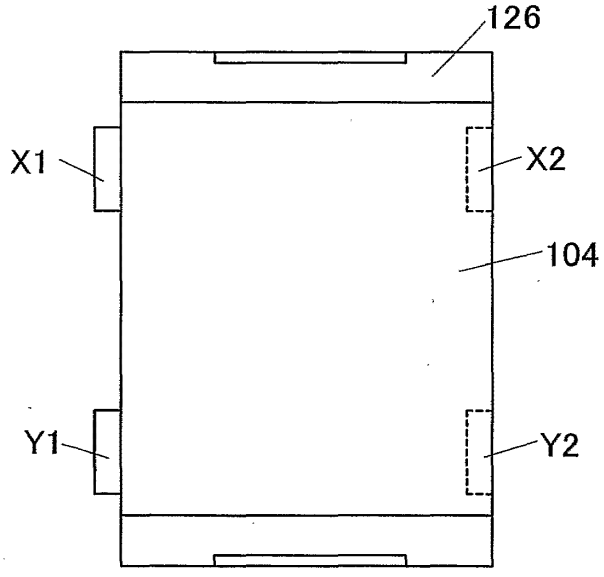


FIG. 32A

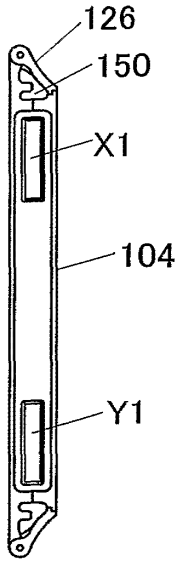


FIG. 32B

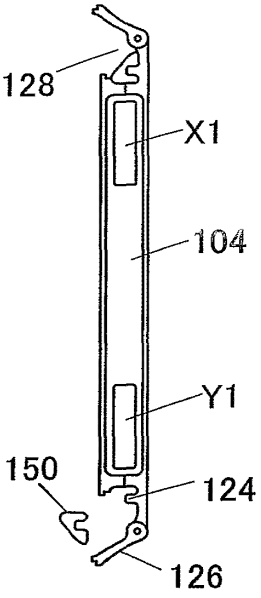


FIG. 32C

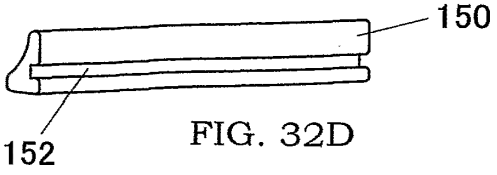


FIG. 32D

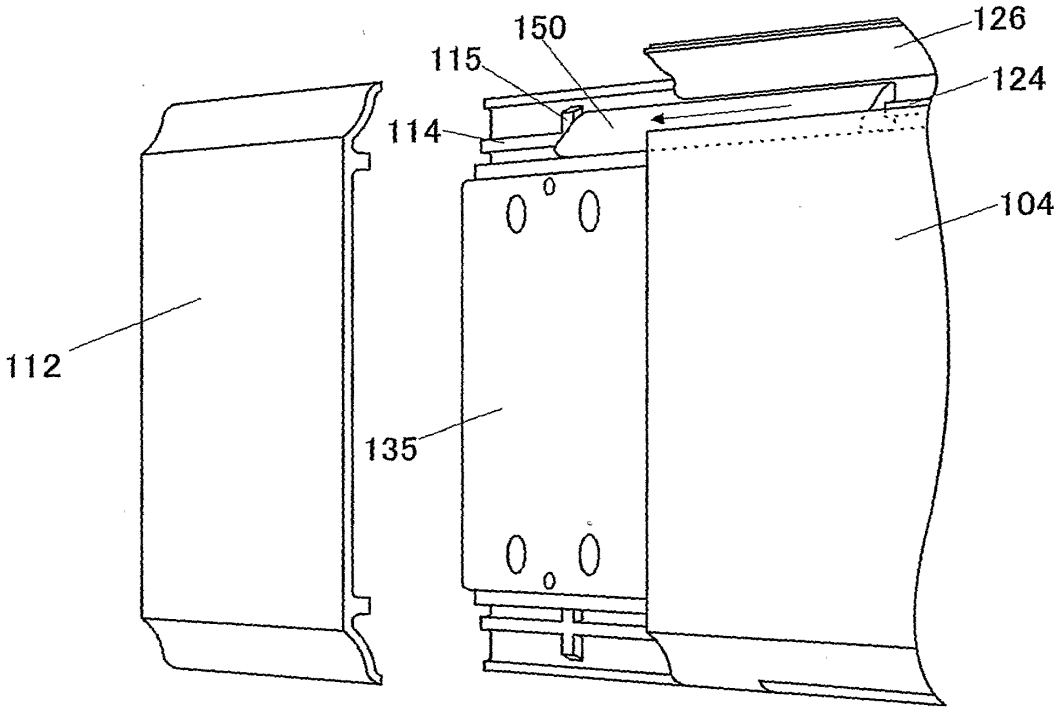


FIG. 33

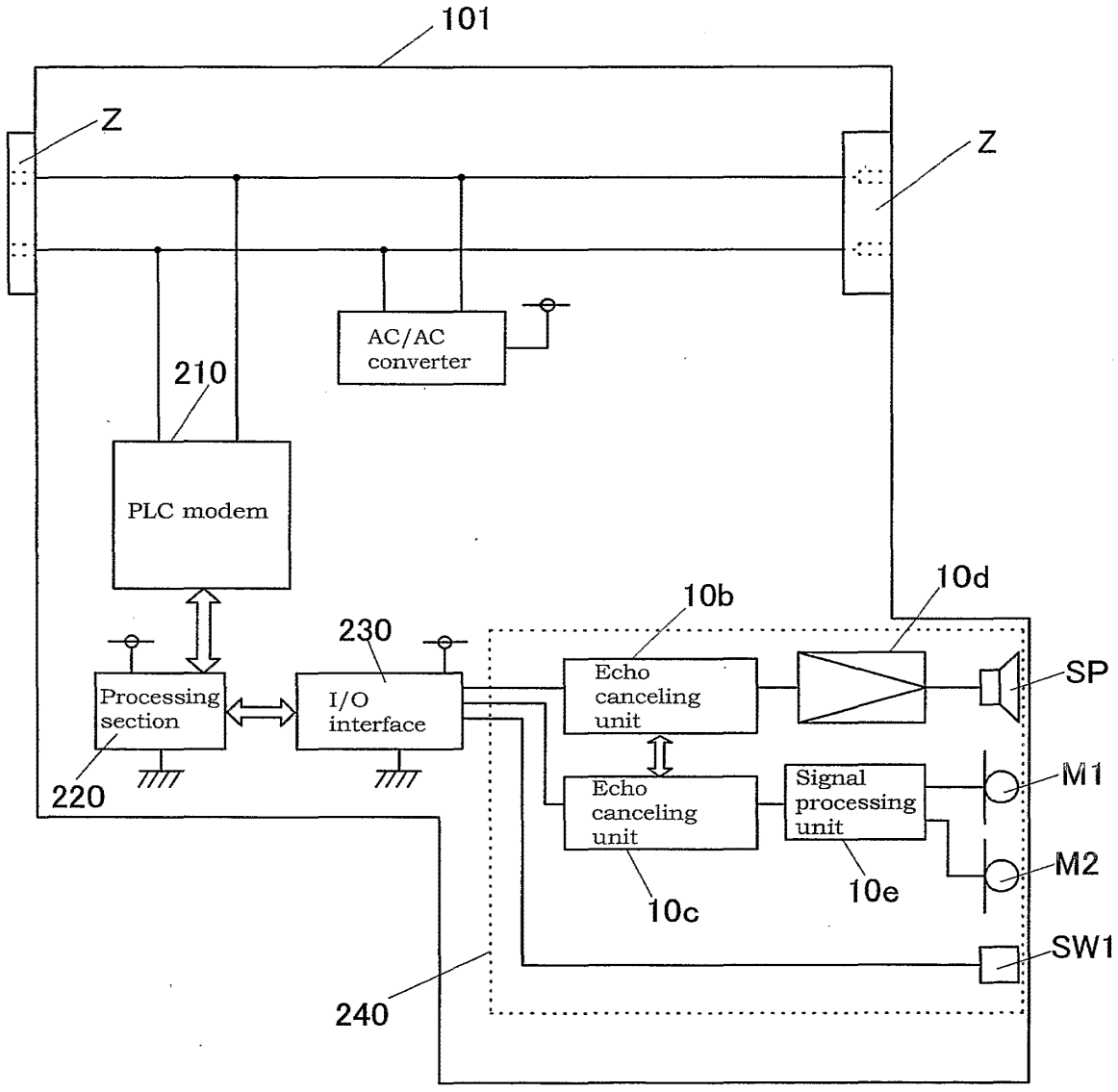

101
Z
Z
AC/AC converter
210
PLC modem
10b
10d
230
Processing section
I/O interface
Echo canceling unit
SP
220
Echo canceling unit
Signal processing unit
M1
M2
10c
10e
SW1
240

FIG. 34

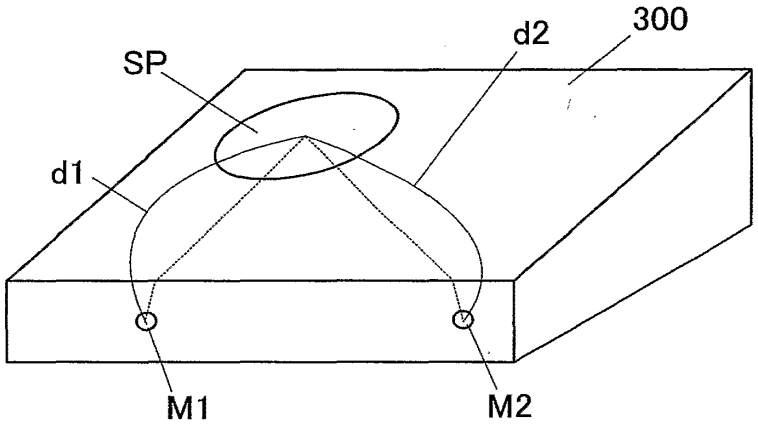


FIG. 35A

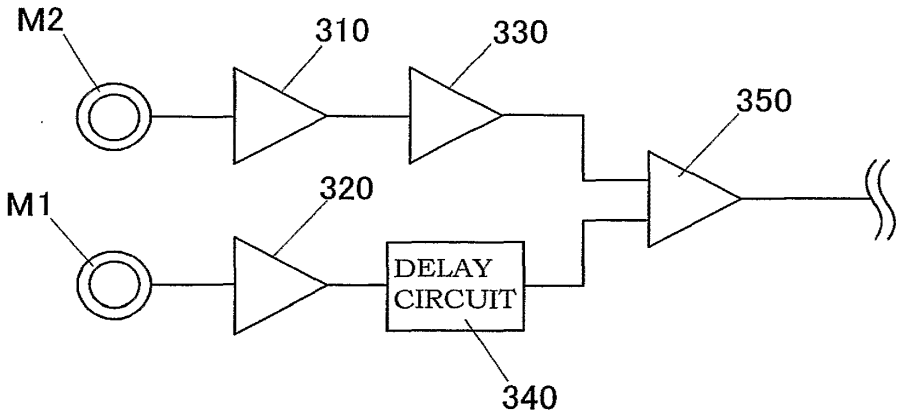


FIG. 35B

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/JP2007/069131

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

Int.Cl. H04R3/02(2006.01)i, H04M1/62(2006.01)i, H04R1/02(2006.01)i, H04R1/28(2006.01)i

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

Int.Cl. H04R3/02, H04M1/62, H04R1/02, H04R1/28

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Published examined utility model applications of Japan 1922-1996
Published unexamined utility model applications of Japan 1971-2007
Registered utility model specifications of Japan 1996-2007
Published registered utility model applications of Japan 1994-2007

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	JP 63-135100 A (BIBA KABUSHIKI KAISHA) 1988.06.07, Full Text; Fig.1 (No Family)	1-19
A	JP 2003-143677 A (MITSUBISHI ELECTRIC CORPORATION) 2003.05.16, Full Text; Fig.2 (No Family)	1-19
A	JP 01-253352 A (MATSUSHITA ELECTRIC WORKS,LTD.) 1989.10.09, Full Text; Fig.2 (No Family)	1-19

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

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"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

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"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
25.12.2007	08.01.2008

Name and mailing address of the ISA/JP	Authorized officer
Japan Patent Office 3-4-3, Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-8915, Japan	Hiroshi Ono 5Z 3654 Telephone No. +81-3-3581-1101 Ext. 3541

Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet) (April 2007)

Electronic Patent Application Fee Transmittal

Application Number:	17592143
Filing Date:	03-Feb-2022
Title of Invention:	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION
First Named Inventor/Applicant Name:	Steven Wayne Goldstein
Filer:	John Patrick Keady
Attorney Docket Number:	CONT-17321892

Filed as Small Entity

Filing Fees for Utility under 35 USC 111(a)

Description	Fee Code	Quantity	Amount	Sub-Total in USD($)
Basic Filing:				
Pages:				
Claims:				
Miscellaneous-Filing:				
Petition:				
Patent-Appeals-and-Interference:				
Post-Allowance-and-Post-Issuance:				
Extension-of-Time:				

Description	Fee Code	Quantity	Amount	Sub-Total in USD($)
Miscellaneous:				
SUBMISSION- INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STMT	2806	1	130	130
		Total in USD ($)		**130**

Electronic Acknowledgement Receipt	
EFS ID:	45881454
Application Number:	17592143
International Application Number:	
Confirmation Number:	3471
Title of Invention:	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION
First Named Inventor/Applicant Name:	Steven Wayne Goldstein
Customer Number:	150139
Filer:	John Patrick Keady
Filer Authorized By:	
Attorney Docket Number:	CONT-17321892
Receipt Date:	06-JUN-2022
Filing Date:	03-FEB-2022
Time Stamp:	12:40:13
Application Type:	Utility under 35 USC 111(a)

Payment information:

Submitted with Payment	yes
Payment Type	CARD
Payment was successfully received in RAM	$130
RAM confirmation Number	E202266C41323374
Deposit Account	
Authorized User	
The Director of the USPTO is hereby authorized to charge indicated fees and credit any overpayment as follows:	

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Document Number	Document Description	File Name	File Size(Bytes)/ Message Digest	Multi Part /.zip	Pages (if appl.)
1	Transmittal Letter	IDS-transmittal-ltr.pdf	121370 ff3c2c2719e89e761ad48875e74fbc4e99e61148	no	1
Warnings:					
Information:					
2	Information Disclosure Statement (IDS) Form (SB08)	MASTER_HARWARE-IDS.pdf	1036842 dc14147712769b456f1084d3e094e3e003024f79	no	11
Warnings:					
Information:					
3	Information Disclosure Statement (IDS) Form (SB08)	MASTER_SOFTWARE-IDS.pdf	1037683 6e397a2ca02c3bd4b06fe411a6c015c15e363a13	no	12
Warnings:					
Information:					
4	Foreign Reference	EP1385324A1.pdf	291998 fd44f66dc1543bbf582c8d89c4cae777488fccff	no	15
Warnings:					
Information:					
5	Foreign Reference	EP1401240A1.pdf	269098 415e812ff51bde7a5bbcfea0ddc74575071e1f22	no	14
Warnings:					
Information:					
6	Foreign Reference	EP1519625B1.pdf	1060783 52f1291b06313730594dd459696b6ec0158d4382	no	27
Warnings:					
Information:					

7	Foreign Reference	WO2004114722A1.pdf	725963 bf5581f79d06ef7598680ed66e6f82a713bc0100	no	19
Warnings:					
Information:					
8	Foreign Reference	WO2006037156A1.pdf	1531590 348f0530551347acbea6bc41f27261c87be88ec1	no	37
Warnings:					
Information:					
9	Foreign Reference	WO2007092660A1.pdf	159414 f1e779a0a3e51b76d6a7b22a5bb118212168a792	no	6
Warnings:					
Information:					
10	Foreign Reference	WO2008050583A1.pdf	2971807 88026f6ed1c5e16337df4097ac505bcea35770b2	no	67
Warnings:					
Information:					
11	Fee Worksheet (SB06)	fee-info.pdf	38062 2eb6ec10c37614c4f63bc921ff7458337d0c1740	no	2
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		Total Files Size (in bytes):	9244610		

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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

APPLICATION NO.	:	17/592,143 CONFIRMATION NO. 3471
APPLICATION OF	:	STEVEN WAYNE GOLDSTEIN
DATE FILED	:	03 FEB. 2022
EXAMINER	:	UNKNOWN
TC/A.U.	:	OPAP
DOCKET	:	CONT-17321892
TITLE	:	METHOD AND DEVICE FOR ACUTE SOUND DETECTION AND REPRODUCTION

TRANSMITTAL LETTER

Commissioner for Patents
P. O. Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

Date: June 6, 2022

Sir:

The attached extensive IDSs contain references filed in recent IPRs for similar inventive scope and similar references filed in invalidity contentions filed in Court for similar inventive scope. In the abundance of due diligence, Applicant has compiled the extensive list for the Examiner's consideration and apologizes ahead of time if any of the references are copies of previously considered related art.

Should the Examiner believe that anything further is necessary, the Examiner is respectfully requested to contact the undersigned representative at the telephone number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,
TECHIYA LLC

Date: June 6, 2022

/John P. Keady/
John P. Keady, Ph.D (Physics), Ph.D (Comp. Sci)
Assistant General Counsel: Intellectual Property
and Chief Technical Officer
Staton Techiya LLC
Reg. No. 56,389
571-606-1291

PTO/SB/08a (02-18)
Approved for use through 11/30/2020. OMB 0651-0031
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INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT

(Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)

Application Number	17592143
Filing Date	2022-02-03
First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
Art Unit	OPAP
Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

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	1	8045840		2011-10-25	Murata	

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	1	2006054698	WO		2006-05-26	Murata		☒
	2	2009023784	WO		2009-02-19	Usher		☐
	3	2012097150	WO		2012-07-19	Usher		☐

INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
	Application Number	17592143
	Filing Date	2022-02-03
	First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
	Art Unit	OPAP
	Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

	4	H0877468	JP		1996-03-22	Keizaburo		☒
	5	H10162283	JP		1998-06-19	Masahiro		☒
	6	EP1519625	EP	A2		Victorian		☐
	7	2006037156	WO	A1		Mejia et al.		☐
	8	EP1401240	EP			Jensen		☐
	9	2008050583	WO			Kitada		☐
	10	2007092660	WO			Moberly		☐
	11	2004114722	WO			Pedersen		☐
	12	EP1385324	EP			Pedersen		☐
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	Filing Date	2022-02-03
	First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
	Art Unit	OPAP
	Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

Examiner Initials*	Cite No	Include name of the author (in CAPITAL LETTERS), title of the article (when appropriate), title of the item (book, magazine, journal, serial, symposium, catalog, etc), date, pages(s), volume-issue number(s), publisher, city and/or country where published.	T[5]
	1	Olwal, A. and Feiner S. Interaction Techniques Using Prosodic Features of Speech and Audio Localization. Proceedings of IUI 2005 (International Conference on Intelligent User Interfaces), San Diego, CA, Jan 9-12, 2005, p. 284-286.	
	2	Bernard Widrow, John R. Glover Jr., John M. McCool, John Kaunitz, Charles S. Williams, Robert H. Hearn, James R. Zeidler, Eugene Dong Jr, and Robert C. Goodlin, Adaptive Noise Cancelling: Principles and Applications, PROCEEDINGS OF THE IEEE, VOL. 63, NO. 12, DECEMBER 1975	
	3	Mauro Dentino, John M. McCool, and Bernard Widrow, Adaptive Filtering in the Frequency Domain, PROCEEDINGS OF THE IEEE, VOL. 66, NO. 12, DECEMBER 1978	

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EXAMINER SIGNATURE

Examiner Signature		Date Considered	

*EXAMINER: Initial if reference considered, whether or not citation is in conformance with MPEP 609. Draw line through a citation if not in conformance and not considered. Include copy of this form with next communication to applicant.

[1] See Kind Codes of USPTO Patent Documents at www.USPTO.GOV or MPEP 901.04. [2] Enter office that issued the document, by the two-letter code (WIPO Standard ST.3). [3] For Japanese patent documents, the indication of the year of the reign of the Emperor must precede the serial number of the patent document. [4] Kind of document by the appropriate symbols as indicated on the document under WIPO Standard ST.16 if possible. [5] Applicant is to place a check mark here if English language translation is attached.

INFORMATION DISCLOSURE STATEMENT BY APPLICANT (Not for submission under 37 CFR 1.99)		
	Application Number	17592143
	Filing Date	2022-02-03
	First Named Inventor	Steven Wayne Goldstein
	Art Unit	OPAP
	Examiner Name	UNKNOWN
	Attorney Docket Number	CONT-17321892

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

Please see 37 CFR 1.97 and 1.98 to make the appropriate selection(s):

That each item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was first cited in any communication from a foreign patent office in a counterpart foreign application not more than three months prior to the filing of the information disclosure statement. See 37 CFR 1.97(e)(1).

OR

☐ That no item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was cited in a communication from a foreign patent office in a counterpart foreign application, and, to the knowledge of the person signing the certification after making reasonable inquiry, no item of information contained in the information disclosure statement was known to any individual designated in 37 CFR 1.56(c) more than three months prior to the filing of the information disclosure statement. See 37 CFR 1.97(e)(2).

See attached certification statement.

The fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17 (p) has been submitted herewith.

☒ A certification statement is not submitted herewith.

SIGNATURE

A signature of the applicant or representative is required in accordance with CFR 1.33, 10.18. Please see CFR 1.4(d) for the form of the signature.

Signature	/John P. Keady/	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)	2022-06-30
Name/Print	John P. Keady	Registration Number	56389

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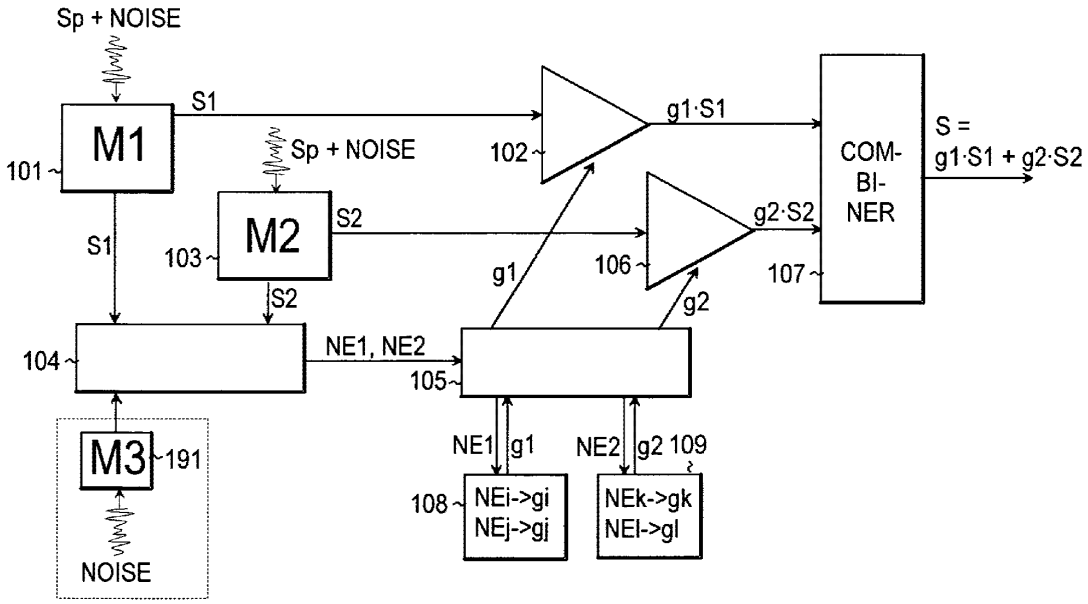
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(54) A system and method for reducing the effect of background noise

(57) Acoustical signals are collected with two microphones having different sensitivity to background noise. The level of background noise is estimated, and depending of the level of background noise, i) the amplification gain of the signals is modified before the signals are combined to a combined signal, or ii) the way of combining the signals is changed, to produce a signal that has less background noise than one of the microphones.

FIG 1



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Description

Field of the invention

[0001] The invention relates generally to enhancing speech quality in a telecommunications system, and more specifically to reducing the effect of background noise in the communication between users.

Background of the invention

[0002] Due to the recent explosive increase in the mobile device penetration, it is no more surprising to see people going on the sidewalk or pedestrian area with a mobile phone on their ear. The mobile phone is considered as a practical tool and it is supposed to be carried with to almost anywhere. People are supplied with means for being within reach in principle independently of time and location. As a consequence it may sometimes happen that the surroundings are not optimal for convenient telephoning. In fact, the sight of people trying to make a phone call in noisy places, such as restaurants or street corners, is getting more common all the time.

[0003] Technically, to provide the user with a microphone system which operates in a difficult acoustic environment has not been a difficult task in many years. For example, U.S. patent 5,327,506 discloses a speaker/microphone system that should be applicable in background noise levels up to far beyond over 100 decibels. Such a system is suitable for persons in high ambient noise environments, such as for helicopter pilots. The idea in 506 is that the outgoing voice sounds are taken from the air within the external auditory canal of a person while substantially eliminating audio vibration pickup of sound transmitted by bone conduction.

[0004] Another approach for high background noise microphone arrangements is found in U.S. patent 5,659,620. Here the microphone holder is designed for arrangement in its entirety in the outer ear outside the auditory meatus, and the microphone unit being mounted in vibration transmitting tissue contact in a part of the edge of the holder facing the bottom of tragus. As one of the benefits, all surround tones are not cut off thus increasing the comfort of wearing such a device. When people talk, vibrations in the throat and vocal cords are generated. The vibrations propagate through the bony and liquid-filled tissue, and the idea in 620 is that the jawbone which passes near the front part of the outer ear produces a strong transmission and transfers considerably more of the persons speech than if the signal were collected in the throat.

[0005] The idea of getting almost a background free aural image from inside the ear has also been adapted within the area of mobile communications, as illustrated in the international patent application WO 02/07477. In order to reduce and isolate bone conduction of sound, a sound isolation cup serves as a jacket that surrounds a miniature transducer inside the housing of a microphone/loudspeaker element that is placed in the ear.

[0006] However, under low background noise circumstances, the solutions above suffer from a poorer acoustical quality than an ordinary microphone system. In the 620 approach discussed above, the low spectrum dominates the transmitted sound spectrum because of the acoustical properties of the tissue. This means that in order to keep the sound quality acceptable, or at least to have a proper balance in the sound, the low frequencies have to be filtered. In the other two approaches discussed above, because the acoustic conduct from the speech producing organs to the ear is far from optimal, the sound quality gets badly distorted. Hence, prior art solutions can only be considered as enabling solutions, and in order to keep in pace with the challenging market, the wishes of the quality-conscious consumers of a mobile device with a good sound quality and a possibility to use the device also under high background noise conditions need to be fulfilled. The prior art solutions do not serve this purpose.

[0007] It is an object of the invention to bring about a system and method which provides the users of mobile devices with the best possible audio quality under high background noise circumstances and otherwise reduces the effect of the background noise.

Summary of the invention

[0008] This and other objectives of the invention are accomplished in accordance with the principles of the present invention by providing a system in which the processing of collected audio information is changed according to the estimated level of background noise thus reducing its overall effect.

[0009] More specifically, audio information is collected with two transducers having different sensitivity to the background noise. The background noise is estimated and i) amplification gain of the signals is modified before the signals are combined to a combined signal, or ii) the way of combining the signals is changed, which can be done either digitally or analogously.

[0010] According to the first embodiment of the invention, gain of at least one of the amplifiers adapted to amplify the detected signal is adjusted based on the noise estimate. The signal is then amplified using the adjusted gain thus producing at least one amplified signal. After this step, a combined signal is constructed from one or more of the amplified signals, and in the combined signal, the proportion of background noise is less than in one of the detected signals.

[0011] According to one aspect of the present invention, the system has also storage means for storing at least one noise estimate, and, correspondingly, also comparison means to compare said stored noise estimate with a predefined threshold value. After the comparison, a differential noise estimate is passed to gain control means.

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[0012] According to another aspect of the present invention, the system comprises storage means for storing at least two gain control parameters and comparison means for comparing at least two stored gain control parameters. The result of the comparison may be a differential gain parameter to be passed to the amplification means.

[0013] According to another aspect of the present invention, the gain control is adjusted to change the gain between the first and second microphones so that the gain of the first microphone is increased whereas the gain of the second microphone is decreased if the noise estimate indicates that the background noise level is above a first threshold value. Further, the gain control can be adjusted to change the gain of the second microphone substantially close to zero value if the background noise estimate shows that the background noise level is above a second threshold value. Respectively, they can be adapted to adjust the relative gain of the first microphone substantially close to one if the background noise estimate shows that the background noise level is above a pre-set threshold value.

[0014] In one preferred embodiment of the invention the first microphone is to be placed in the auditory canal of a user of the mobile handset; also a jawbone microphone can be used. The second microphone may be a microphone mounted in the mobile handset or in a vehicle, or it may be fixed in a hands-free set of a mobile handset. Examples of such mobile handsets where the invention may be used are mobile phones, PDA devices, laptop computers, dictation machines and so forth.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0015] In the following, the invention and its preferred embodiments are described more closely referring to the examples shown in FIG. **1-7** in the appended drawings, wherein:

FIG. **1** illustrates one system for reducing the effect of background noise,

FIG. **2** illustrates another system for reducing the effect of background noise,

FIG. **3** shows one microphone set-up according to a preferred embodiment of the invention,

FIG. **4A** shows another microphone set-up according to another preferred embodiment of the invention,

FIG. **4B** illustrates a variation of the set-up shown in FIG. **4A**,

FIG. **5** shows one audio data collection set-up including two microphones,

FIG. **6** illustrates the relationship between noise level estimate and gains with which the signals detected by the microphones are amplified, and

FIG. **7** illustrates how a switch can be included into the system.

Detailed description of the invention

[0016] FIG. **1** illustrates a first system for reducing the effect of background noise, for example, in a microphone. Mechanical vibrations or pressure variations, preferably originating from speech $\mathbf{S_p}$ distorted by noise, is collected with a first transducer serving as a microphone **101**, producing a signal $\mathbf{S_1}$ which is then amplified with a gain $\mathbf{g_1}$ using an amplifier **102** to produce an amplified signal $\mathbf{g_1S_1}$. The system also includes another microphone **103** and a corresponding amplifier **106**, the microphone **103** similarly being exposed to speech $\mathbf{S_p}$ and background noise and producing first a signal $\mathbf{S_2}$ which is after amplification denoted by $\mathbf{g_2S_2}$, where $\mathbf{g_2}$ corresponds to the gain of the amplifier **106**. Both microphones **101** and **103** are transducers that convert acoustical or mechanical vibrations to an electric signal, i.e. normally to a small current, and they exhibit different sensitivity to background noise. The reason for the different noise sensitivity may be that the first microphone **101** is a bone conductor microphone or an earplug type microphone, whereas the second microphone **103** is a normal type transducer commonly used as a microphone in mobile terminals, and therefore more sensitive to noise than the aforementioned types of microphones.

[0017] Preferably, the microphones **101** and **103** are assembled to receive human speech $\mathbf{S_p}$, and in particular such a speech that is going to be further processed in a mobile terminal to be sent to a remote party of the discussion. It is by no means necessary that the speech $\mathbf{S_p}$ to be collected by the microphone (**101** or **103**) is originating from a single person, but may be originating from a conference call etc.

[0018] The output signals $\mathbf{S_1}$ and $\mathbf{S_2}$ of the microphones **101** and **103** are transmitted to a noise estimator **104** which includes means adapted to estimate background noise level thus producing noise estimates $\mathbf{NE_1}$ and $\mathbf{NE_2}$. The noise level can be estimated for both microphones **101** and **103** separately, the output signals **S1** and **S2** of both microphones **101** and **103** may be used to obtain a combined signal from which the noise is estimated, or only the output of the microphone **103** more sensitive to background noise may be used for noise estimation. In the latter two cases only one noise estimate is produced.

[0019] For example, the noise estimation can be done by averaging short periods of the signal **S1** or **S2**. During a silent period, i.e. when the user does not speak, the measured signal level is a good approximation of the

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background noise. This kind of approach is commonly used in the Discontinuous Transmission DTX widely used in the Global System for Mobile communications GSM, when instead of the coded silence only so called DTX parameters describing the nature of the background noise are sent, thus reducing obsolete usage of the air interface. The DTX parameters are received in the remote end or in the network between persons talking to each other and some noise similar to background is generated, calling this generated noise Comfort Noise. The idea of Comfort Noise comes from the observation that if during a telephone conversation the loudspeaker gets silent while one person is talking, he or she does not feel comfortable. Modern GSM mobile phones, for example, thus already have means for estimating and describing background noise. Similar means can be applied in the noise estimator 104 for serving the implementation of the invention.

[0020] The noise estimates $\mathbf{NE_1}$ and $\mathbf{NE_2}$ generated are passed to a gain control means **105**. The gain control means **105** adjust the gain $\mathbf{g_1}$, $\mathbf{g_2}$ of the both amplifiers **102** and **106**. In the adjustment, a noise estimate $\mathbf{NE_1}$ or $\mathbf{NE_2}$ is used to determine the desired amplification gain. For this purpose the system may include storage means for noise-amplification relationships, including means **108** and **109**, e.g. tables or functions which respond with a desired gain level $\mathbf{g_x}$ to a query including a corresponding noise level $\mathbf{NE_x}$. For example, means 108 return a gain value $\mathbf{g_1}$ in response to noise estimate $\mathbf{NE_1}$, and means **109** return a gain value $\mathbf{g_2}$ in response to noise estimate $\mathbf{NE_2}$.

[0021] In other words, means **108** and **109** tell the gain control means **105** what is the optimal relation between a noise estimate NE_x and an amplifier gain g_x. Means **108** and **109** are preferably microphone specific, i.e. there are two tables in the system. The gain control means **105** get the noise estimate NE_x, retrieve the gain values g_x corresponding the estimate of present noise NE_x and determine how the gain $\mathbf{g_1}$ and $\mathbf{g_2}$ of the amplifiers **102** and **106** is to be adjusted. In principle, the gain values $\mathbf{g_1}$ and $\mathbf{g_2}$ get values between 0 and 1 so that $g_1 + g_2 = 1$.

[0022] After passing the gain adjustment information $\mathbf{g_1}$ and $\mathbf{g_2}$ to the amplifiers **102** and **106**, the amplifiers amplify the signals S_1 and S_2 using the amplifier gain set based on the gain adjustment information. After amplifying, a combined signal **S** is constructed in the combining means **107**, the construction being made using the amplified signals $\mathbf{g_1S_1}$ and $\mathbf{g_2S_2}$. This may include changing the delay and phase of at least one of the signals g_xS_x so that the distortion resulting from the amplification and the signal path is minimised, and finally summing up the signals g_xS_x so that the combined signal **S** represents a linear combination of the signals $\mathbf{S_1}$ and $\mathbf{S_2}$ detected by the microphones **101** and **103**. This constructed signal S is then ready for being processed further, including all of the numerous steps necessary for transmitting the audio information over the air interface. The combined signal **S** has a smaller proportion of background noise than the output signal $\mathbf{S_2}$ of microphone **103** collected. In this way the effect of background noise can be reduced.

[0023] Preferably, the tables **108** and **109** are generated so that corresponding to a change ΔNE ($=NE_{t=t2}-NE_{t=t1}$) in the noise level NE_x there is a corresponding change Δg ($=g_{t=t2}-g_{t=t1}$) in the gain value g_x. As characteristic to one aspect of the present invention, the gain adjustments of the amplifiers **102**, **106** are opposed to each other; i.e. when the background noise is increasing, the gain $\mathbf{g_1}$ of the signal detected by the first (low-noise) microphone **101** is increased whereas the gain $\mathbf{g_2}$ of the signal detected by the second (more sensitive to background noise) microphone **103** is decreased. It is favourable to normalise the gains so that the relative gain for the both microphones equals to 1.

[0024] In other words, the means **108** and **109** are modified to correspond to the different noise behaviour of the two transducers so that the linear combination of the signals $\mathbf{S = g_1S_1 + g_2S_2}$ detected by the two transducers serving as microphones **101** and **103** can be subjectively (by listening) considered optimal. This may include different threshold values: The first threshold value corresponds to the value of at least one of the noise estimates, at which value the quality of signal $\mathbf{S_2}$ of the second microphone **103** that is more sensitive to background noise starts to deteriorate; this is the point where the relative gain of the first microphone **101** is increased from substantially zero gain value to a small value. The second threshold value corresponds to the value of at least one of the noise estimates NE_x at which the quality of the detected signal of the second microphone **103** is so much worse than the quality of the signal $\mathbf{S_1}$ detected by the first microphone **101** that the relative gain $\mathbf{g_2}$ of the second microphone **103** is set to substantially zero gain.

[0025] As an example, if the first microphone detects a background noise level of 2,0 mV (corresponding to a noise 70 dB) and the second microphone detects a background noise level of 5,0 mV (corresponding to a noise of 72 dB), the average noise level estimated in the noise estimator may be between 70 and 72 dB. The relative gains for the microphones read from the table are then 0,4 and 0,6, respectively. This is not straightforward, because the sensitivity of the microphone plays a significant role; the signal levels may need to be adjusted to correspond some reference level. The relative gains are then to be understood against this reference level only.

[0026] When the detected background noise jumps to 2,2 mV (71 dB) and 7,0 mV (76 dB), the average noise level may be estimated to be between 71 and 76 dB. The relative gains for the microphones read from the table are then 0,95 and 0,05, respectively. The second microphone is more sensitive to the background noise, i. e. the background noise generates a bigger impulse in the microphone. Secondly, the second microphone is

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not yet shut-off completely, because the noise level is not above a defined shut-off threshold value for background noise.

[0027] The transition at different moments of time between subsequent values of the relative signal $\mathbf{S_1}$ and $\mathbf{S_2}$ proportions in the combined signal **S** defined by a ratio $\mathbf{g_1/g_2}$ (when $g2 \neq 0$) can thus be made smooth or at least to correspond small steps in order to avoid abrupt transitions that might be considered annoying by the listener. This corresponds to successive changes of $\mathbf{g_1}$ and $\mathbf{g_2}$. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that this is not necessary, but the transition may resemble a step function, i.e. the gain $\mathbf{g_1}$ for the signal detected by the first microphone **101** is zero below a threshold value and one otherwise, and the gain $\mathbf{g_2}$ for the signal detected by the second microphone is then reversed, i.e. it obtains values $1\text{-}\mathbf{g_1}$.

[0028] FIG. **6** shows an example of the relation between estimated noise level $\mathbf{NE_2}$ estimated from the signal $\mathbf{S_2}$, and the amplifier gain g_1. In this case, $g_2=1\text{-}\mathbf{g_1}$. At times preceding **TA**, $\mathbf{NE_2}$ is smaller than the first threshold value. Correspondingly, $\mathbf{g_1}=0$ and $g_2=1$. At **TA**, the value of $\mathbf{NE_2}$ is increasing, so $\mathbf{g_1}$ is stepwise increased. At **TB**, $\mathbf{NE_2}$ has reached the second threshold value, and $\mathbf{g_1}$ is set to one. At **TC**, $\mathbf{NE_2}$ is again smaller than the second threshold value, so the value of **g1** must be decreased. At **TD**, $\mathbf{NE_2}$ falls below the first threshold value and **g1** is set to zero value. At the time interval $\mathbf{P_1}$ the change in $\mathbf{NE_2}$ is less than the threshold $\Delta\mathbf{NE}$ set for the change of **NE**, so during this interval $\mathbf{g_1}$ is not changed. Immediately after $\mathbf{P_1}$, when the change in $\mathbf{NE_2}$ is larger than the threshold value, the $\mathbf{g_1}$ is changed by $\Delta\mathbf{g}$. During the interval $\mathbf{P_2}$, $\mathbf{g_1}$ is not changed because $\mathbf{NE_2}$ shows sharp peaks; this may present some distortion so the changes are neglected.

[0029] The second predefined threshold value can be chosen to be a fixed value as well. The value may be experimentally determined to correspond to the level of background noise in which the input signal of the second microphone **103** has been deteriorated in such a bad way that in order to get a better signal quality for the signal **S**, only the input signal $\mathbf{g_1S_1}$ is used.

[0030] FIG 7 shows how a second system according to the invention, the system having only a stepwise transition for the value of $\mathbf{g_1}$. Speech **Sp** and noise are detected by microphones **101** and **103** producing signals **S1** and **S2**. Background noise is collected by a third microphone **191** directly connected to noise estimator **104**. The noise estimator estimates the level **NE** of background noise and passes it to gain control means **705**. The gain control means **705** are adapted to compare the noise level estimate **NE** with a predefined threshold value. If the value of **NE** is less than the threshold value, **g1** is set to zero, otherwise **g1** gets the value of 1. The value of **g1** indicates the position of a switch **SW1** controlled by the gain control means **705**, the switch **SW1** being so arranged that the terminals **TE1** and **TE2** are connected when **g1=1**; **TE1** and **TE3** are connected in all other cases. The terminal **TE1** leads to amplification means **702** which produce an amplified signal **AS**. Because only one signal is fed (S1, if TE1 and TE2 are connected) to the amplifier, no literal combining of the signals (S1, S2) need to be performed.

[0031] The switch turns the relative gain $\mathbf{g_2}$ of the second microphone to zero and the relative gain of the first microphone $\mathbf{g_1}$ to one. In this case the function of the switch **SW1** and amplification means **702** may be understood as linear amplification with amplification factor 1.0 when the signal received by a microphone is amplified and zero otherwise.

[0032] Further, in order to avoid annoying abrupt transitions between the first and second microphones, or to avoid fluctuations in the microphone gains, the system like presented in FIG. **1** may comprise also storing means adapted for storing noise parameters in order to form a noise history. The noise parameters can be calculated for one microphone, both microphones separately or they can be obtained by combining the values computed from the inputs of the both microphones. One possibility is to use the second microphone input as the preferable source for noise estimation, as the first microphone is less sensitive to background noise.

[0033] If history data is collected, the system may further be adapted to have a hysteresis effect, i.e. if the noise level is having fluctuations back and forth, the system can adapt the threshold value to correspond a larger shift in the background noise. In order to have a hysteresis effect, there are storage means and comparison means; the hysteresis information may be obtained from a stored table, the table being read in a way taking into account the noise level history.

[0034] Similarly, the history data may be used for making prognoses or extrapolations for the noise level, and in this way the system may, based on the noise level measured at least in two earlier moments of time, predict a noise level in the future thus making the possibly larger transitions in gains over a longer period of time.

[0035] A third microphone **191** is optionally included in the system. Its main purpose is to detect background noise. It may be located in the vicinity of the noise estimation means **104** so that the transmitting of the signal to the noise estimation means **104** from the microphone **191** is straightforward. In this case the signals $\mathbf{S_1}$ and/or $\mathbf{S_2}$ need not to be passed from the other two microphones **101** and **103** to the noise estimator **104**. This makes the system simpler, as the signal from microphones **101** and **103** need only travel the path to amplifiers **102** and **106**. For example, in a wireless hands-free set the microphone **101** is located in one ear of the user, whereas the second microphone **103** is fixed in the car of the user. The amplifiers are located close to the microphones, especially because the signals are to be transmitted over the air interface to the combiner means **107**. This means that the noise estimator **104** and gain control means **105** need to instruct the amplifiers **102** and **106** separately; the noise may be measured by the

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microphone **191**, and the gain parameters $\mathbf{g_1}$ and $\mathbf{g_2}$ be broadcast to the amplifiers **102** and **106**.

[0036] FIG. **2** shows a third system according to the present invention. The transducers **101** and **103** are exposed to speech signal $\mathbf{S_p}$ distorted by background noise. They detect acoustical vibrations, i.e. mechanical vibrations or pressure changes. Amplifiers **202** and **206** amplify the signals $\mathbf{S_1}$ and $\mathbf{S_2}$ with constant gains thus producing amplified signals $\mathbf{AS_1}$ and $\mathbf{AS_2}$, respectively. An Analog to Digital Converter ADC **207** converts the signals $\mathbf{AS_1}$ and $\mathbf{AS_2}$ pre-amplified by amplifiers **102** and **106** into a digital form. In addition to performing this step, the **ADC** may further include combining means to form a combined signal S from at least one of the amplified signals $\mathbf{AS_1}$ and $\mathbf{AS_2}$ in such a manner that the relative ratio of the signals may be altered. The combining may be performed digitally, thus possibly including multiplication and summing operations, or it may be performed for the analog signals before the conversion.

[0037] The noise level is detected in noise estimator **204**, including tables **208** and **209** showing noise responses of the microphones **101** and **103** in a manner similar to the tables discussed above. The noise estimates NE_x are then used to deduce the target gain factors g_x. The target gain factors $\mathbf{g_1}$ and $\mathbf{g_2}$ which correspond to combining parameters are lead to the combining means of the ADC **207**, where the ADC either, based on the combining parameters g_1 and g_2, performs the conversion and only after that digitally multiplies the converted signal by the gain factor, or, uses the target gain factor to change the relative strength of the signals before the conversion.

[0038] In a fourth system according to the present invention, the system may have storage means for storing at least one noise estimate $\mathbf{NE_1}$ or $\mathbf{NE_2}$ in the noise estimator **104**, whereas the system otherwise corresponds to the system already discussed with reference to FIG. **1**. This means that at least one noise estimate $NE_{t=tpast}$ value may be stored, and, correspondingly, at a later point in time $t=t_1$, at least one other noise level estimate $NE_{t=t1}$ may be stored as well. The stored noise estimates may be compared using comparison means located preferably in the noise estimator **104**. The comparison may involve computing a noise level difference $\Delta NE = NE_{t=t1}-NE_{t=tpast}$ describing the changing of the background noise level. This difference may be transmitted then to gain control means **105** which change gains according to a function $\Delta g=f(\Delta NE)$. It is also possible that the difference is not passed to gain control means **105** if it does not exceed a preset threshold value, i.e. if $\Delta NE < \Delta NE_{threshold}$; only changes in the gain when the change in the background noise level is larger than the threshold value are passed to the amplifier **102** or **106**. In this case the older value measured at t_{past} may remain stored in the register and newer noise estimates $NE_{t=t1'}$ calculated at times $t_{1'} > t_1$ are overwritten on the value $NE_{t=t1}$.

[0039] A fifth system in accordance with the present invention, the system comprises storage means such as a register in the gain control means **204** in addition to other components as discussed with reference to FIG. **2**. The storage meansmay be used for storing at least two gain control parameters. Further, the system may also include comparison means for comparing at least two stored gain control parameters. Like discussed above, the comparison of the parameters may include performing some mathematical operations, like calculating the difference between a newer and an older gain parameter value, and, in the case that a pre-set threshold value for the difference is exceeded, which can be checked again by comparison, the system may calculate a new gain to be passed to the ADC **207**. The new gain may also be selected from a plurality of different gain set-ups, if the system is to be kept simple and fast.

[0040] FIG. **3** shows a microphone set-up according to one preferred embodiment of the present invention. The mobile phone in the figure has two microphones **M1** and **M2**. The second microphone **M2** is an ordinary microphone denoted by asterisks **30** describing holes in the cover of the bottom half of the phone. The first microphone **M1** is located close to the loudspeaker which is denoted by asterisks, whereas the microphone **M1** is denoted by arc **31**. Because the loudspeaker is - usually - placed close to the ear, using a jawbone contact element as the microphone **M1**, the vibrations in the jawbone of the user can be detected thus producing a signal S_1. The sensitivity of **M1** to disturbances from the loudspeaker is reduced because **M1** detects mechanical vibrations from the jawbone of the user.

[0041] FIG. **4A** further illustrates a microphone set-up according to one other preferred embodiment of the present invention. The first microphone **M1** is located in an earplug-like element which can measure the air vibrations in the ear canal (i.e. auditory canal) of the user of the mobile device. Depending of the actual realisation of the invention, this earplug microphone can be similar to those disclosed in the referenced publications. Some of the prior art earplug microphones have a wireless transmitter, such as a BLUETOOTH transmitter.

[0042] A solution according to FIG. **4A** is especially suitable for different hands-free applications. For example, many countries in Europe have recently adopted restrictions for usage of mobile phones while driving a vehicle. In order to comply with the legislation, a driving mobile user willing to receive a phone call need either to stop or to have a hands-free equipment installed in his or her car.

[0043] Some hands-free equipment sets include a speaker, a microphone and then some wiring systems, possibly with an extra antenna. The speaker is typically mounted somewhere in the cabin, whereas the microphone is located close to the head of the driver. As known, even though some of the different speech codecs widely used in the mobile devices enhance the speech quality in noisy environments, such as in a moving car, the background noise may still be annoying and,

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depending of the car, even make the discussion impossible, depending on the circumstances such as other traffic, speed of the vehicle, road conditions etc. This drawback can be eliminated if the user is supplied with an earplug-like device in addition to the normal hands-free set installed in the car. As an alternative, a jawbone microphone can be used as well, while there are some of them available on the market already. Preferably the first microphone (either earplug or jawbone) is equipped with a wireless transmitter. Then either the mobile handset or the hands-free set includes a receiver to receive the transmitted audio information, such as BLUETOOTH low-power RF data.

[0044] The transmitter needs not to be wireless but may be a conventional earplug microphone as well like illustrated in FIG. **4B**, where there is a wire including two lines, one for the signal and one for the ground level. In the other end the wires may be connected to the front panel of the car, the panel supplying a plug-in for the microphone data and further connected to the hands-free set, or directly to the mobile handset.

[0045] FIG. 5 illustrates another option for implementing the invention. Here the first and second microphones are included in a headset kit of a mobile phone. Typically, the headset kit includes a plug **501** which is connected to a mobile phone or a car front panel. The handset provides hands-free operation and may also include an answer/end button located in the second microphone **M2** or somewhere else in the cable. The earplug including a loudspeaker may also include an earplug microphone **M1**, provided that the acoustical separation of the loudspeaker and microphone can be guaranteed, or a jawbone microphone, where the acoustical separation should be a minor problem.

[0046] For a person skilled in the art it is also clear that no implicit tables like those described with reference to FIG. **1** and **2** are necessary. Depending on the number of steps for different amplifications needed, the system can be coded directly if the number is low, otherwise also a numerical model which interpolates some experimentally tested values may also be used.

[0047] Although the invention was described above with reference to the examples shown in the appended drawings, it is obvious that the invention is not limited to these, but it may be modified by those skilled in the art without departing from the scope and the spirit of the invention.

Claims

1. A system for reducing the effect of background noise especially in a mobile handset, the system comprising

   - a first transducer (101) for detecting an acoustical signal producing a first signal detected (S1),
   - a second transducer (103) for detecting an acoustical signal producing a second signal detected (S2), the first and second transducers having different sensitivities to background noise,
   - amplifier means (102, 106) for amplifying the first and/or second signal (S1, S2) detected thus producing at least one amplified signal (g1S1, g2S2),
   - noise estimator means (104) adapted to estimate a background noise level present at least in one of the detected signals (S1, S2) or in a signal measured by a third transducer (191) thus producing at least one noise estimate (NE1, NE2),
   - gain control means (105), responsive to said noise estimator means (104, 204), adapted to adjust gain (g1, g2) of the amplification means (102, 106, 207), the adjustment being made depending on at least one noise estimate (NE1, NE2), and
   - combining means (107), adapted to form a combined signal (S) from at least one amplified signal (g1S1, g2S2) thus reducing the effect of background noise.

2. A system according to claim 1, **wherein** the noise estimator means are connected to the first and/or second transducer (101, 102) for receiving noise level information.

3. A system according to claim 1 or 2, the system further **comprising**

   - storage means for storing at least one noise estimate, and
   - comparison means for comparing the stored noise estimate with a predefined threshold value, the comparison producing a differential noise estimate to be passed to gain control means (105).

4. A system according to claim 1 or 2, the system further **comprising**

   - storage means for storing at least two gain control parameters, and
   - comparison means for comparing the two gain control parameters, the comparison producing a differential gain parameter to be passed to the amplification means.

5. A system according to claim 1 or 2, **wherein** the gain control means (105) are adapted to adjust gain (g1, g2) between the first and second amplifiers (102, 106) so that the gain (g1) of the first amplifier (102) is increased whereas the gain (g2) of the second amplifier (106) is decreased if the noise esti-

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mate (NE1, NE2) indicates that the background noise level is above a first threshold value.

6. A system according to claim 1, 2 or 5, **wherein** the gain control means (105, 207) are adapted to adjust gain (g2) of the second amplifier substantially close to zero value if the background noise estimate (NE) shows that the background noise level is above a second threshold value.

7. A system according to claim 1, 2, 5 or 6, **wherein** the gain control means (105, 207) are adapted to adjust the relative gain of the first transducer substantially close to one if the background noise estimate (NE) shows that the background noise level is above a pre-set threshold value.

8. A system according to claim 1, **wherein** the construction is performed by adding the amplified signals (g1S1, g2S2).

9. A system according to any one of the preceding claims, **wherein** the first transducer (101) is a microphone to be located in the auditory canal of a user of the mobile handset.

10. A system according to any one of the preceding claims, **wherein** the first transducer (101) is a jawbone microphone.

11. A system according to claim 9 or 10, **wherein** the second transducer (103) is a microphone mounted in the mobile handset.

12. A system according to claim 9 or 10, **wherein** the second transducer (103) is a microphone fixed in a hands-free set of a mobile handset.

13. A system according to claim 1 or 2, **wherein** said gain control means (105, 207) are located in the mobile handset or in the hands-free set of a mobile handset.

14. A method for reducing the effect of background noise especially in a mobile handset, the method **comprising** the steps of

- collecting a first acoustical signal (S1),
- collecting a second acoustical signal (S2), whereby in the collected signals (S1, S2) a different level of background noise is present,
- estimating background noise level from at least one of the signals (S1, S2) collected,
- in response to said estimating step, adjusting gain (g1, g2) of at least one amplifier (102, 106) adapted to amplify signals collected (S1, S2),
- in response to said adjustment step, amplifying said collected first and/or second signal (S1, S2) to produce at least one amplified signal (g1S1, G2S2), and
- in response to said amplifying step, constructing a combined signal (S) from at least one amplified signal (g1S1, g2S2) thus reducing the effect of background noise in the combined signal.

15. A method according to claim 14, further **comprising** the steps of

- producing and storing at least one noise estimate (NE1, NE2) in the background noise estimation step, and
- comparing said stored noise estimate (NE1, NE2) with a predefined threshold value, the comparison result being used in the gain adjustment step.

16. A method according to claim 14, further **comprising** the steps of

- in the gain adjusting step, storing at least two gain control parameters, and
- comparing at least two stored gain control parameters in order to decide whether the gain adjusting step is to be taken, the gain adjusting step being performed only if the comparison result shows that a gain control parameter being larger than a predefined threshold value.

17. A method according to claim 14, **wherein** the gain adjustment step is adapted to adjust amplification balance between the signals detected by first and second transducers (101, 103) so that the gain (g1) of the amplifier (101) amplifying the first signal (S1) collected is increased whereas the gain (g2) of the amplifier (106) amplifying the second signal (S2) is decreased if in the noise estimation step it is detected that the background noise level is higher than a first threshold value.

18. A method according to claim 14, **wherein** the gain adjustment step is adapted to adjust gain (g2) of the amplifier amplifying the second signal (S2) substantially close to zero value if the background noise estimate (NE) shows that the background noise level is above a second threshold value.

19. A method according to claim 14, **wherein** the construction step includes adding the amplified signals (g1S1, g2S2).

20. A method according to any one of claims 14-19, **wherein** the first signal is collected using a microphone to be located in the auditory canal of a user of the mobile handset.

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21. A method according to any one of claims 14-19, **wherein** the first signal is collected using a jawbone microphone.

22. A system for reducing the effect of background noise especially in a mobile handset, the system **comprising**

- a first transducer (101) for detecting an acoustical signal producing a first signal detected (S1),
- a second transducer (103) for detecting an acoustical signal producing a second signal detected (S2), the first and second transducer (101, 103) having different sensitivity to background noise,
- amplification means (202, 206) for amplifying the first and/or second signal (S1, S2) detected thus producing at least one amplified signal (AS1, AS2),
- combining means (207) adapted to form a combined signal (S) from at least one of the amplified signals (AS1, AS2) using at least one combining parameter (g1, g2) thus reducing the effect of background noise,
- noise estimator means (204) adapted to estimate background noise level present at least in one of the detected signals (S1, S2) or in a signal measured by a third transducer (191) thus producing at least one noise estimate (NE1, NE2),
- combining parameter generation means (208, 209) adapted to generate at least one combining parameter (g1, g2) in response to at least one noise estimate (NE1, NE2), and
- means (204) for passing the generated combining parameter (g1, g2) to the combining means (207).

23. A method for reducing the effect of background noise especially in a mobile handset, the method **comprising** the steps of

- collecting a first acoustical signal (S1),
- collecting a second acoustical signal (S2), whereby in the collected signals a different level of background noise is present,
- estimating background noise level (NE1, NE2) from at least one of the signals collected or from a third acoustical signal,
- in response to the background noise estimating step, using at least one background noise level parameter (NE1, NE2) for selecting at least one combining parameter (g1, g2), and
- in response to said selecting step, using said summing parameter for combining the first and acoustical signals (S1, S2) to form a combined signal (S) which has less background noise than the second signal collected.

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FIG 1

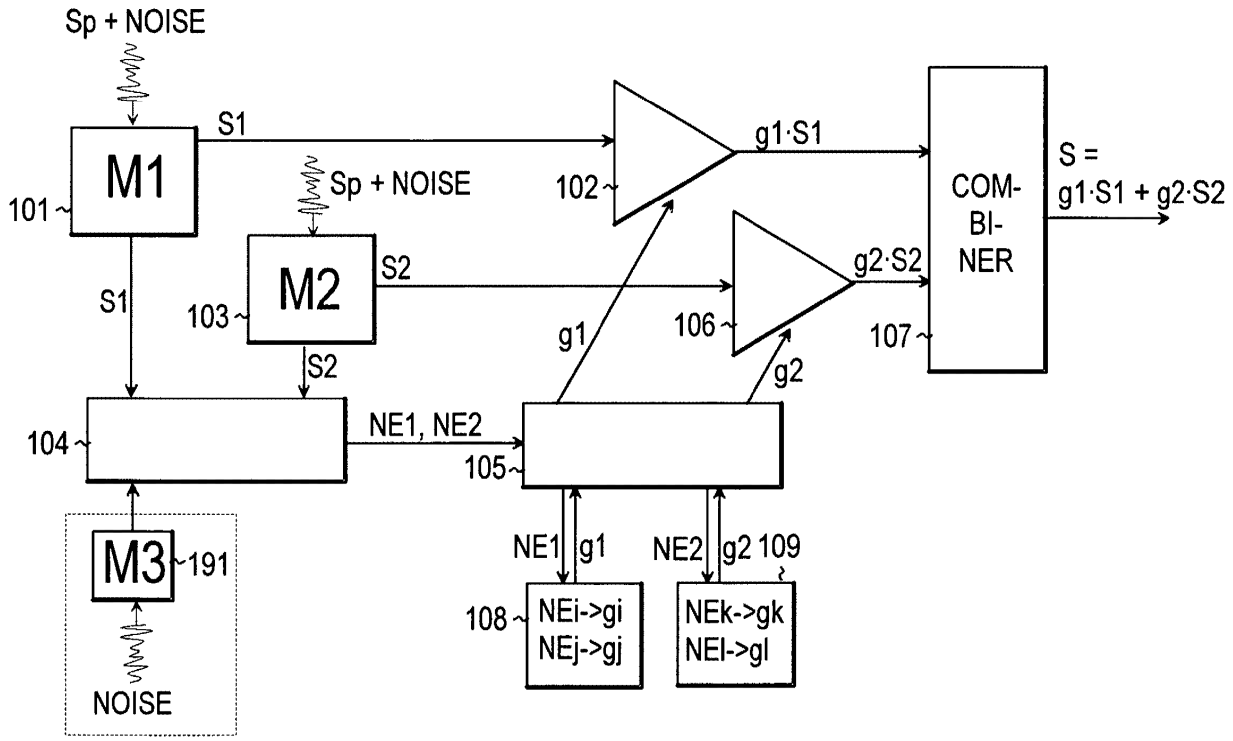
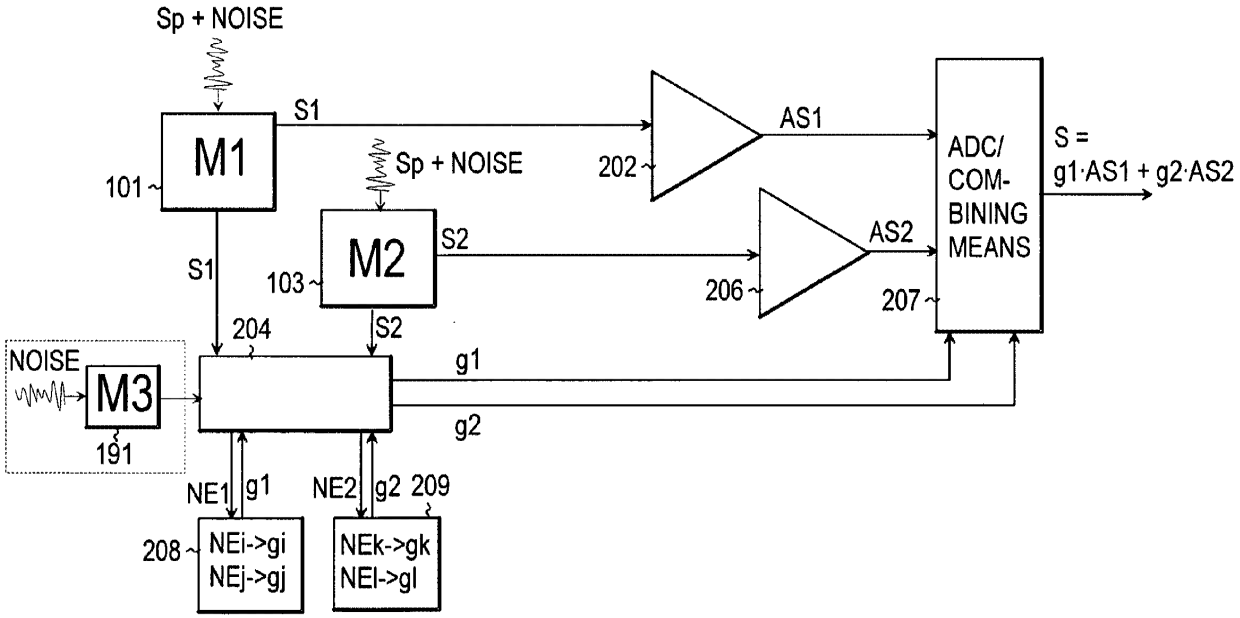

Sp + NOISE
M1
101
S1
Sp + NOISE
M2
103
S2
S1
S2
104
NE1, NE2
105
M3
191
NOISE
102
g1·S1
106
g2·S2
COM-
BI-
NER
107
S =
g1·S1 + g2·S2
g1
g2
NE1
g1
NE2
g2
109
108
NEi->gi
NEj->gj
NEk->gk
NEl->gl

FIG 2


Sp + NOISE
S1
M1
101
Sp + NOISE
202
AS1
ADC/
COM-
BINING
MEANS
S =
g1·AS1 + g2·AS2
S1
M2
103
S2
AS2
206
207
204
S2
NOISE
M3
191
g1
g2
NE1
g1
NE2
g2
209
208
NEi->gi
NEj->gj
NEk->gk
NEl->gl

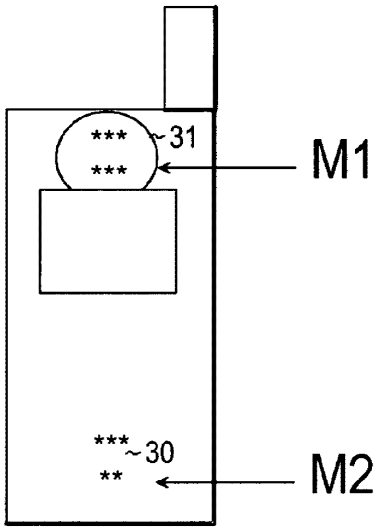


FIG 3
(LEFT)

FIG. 4A

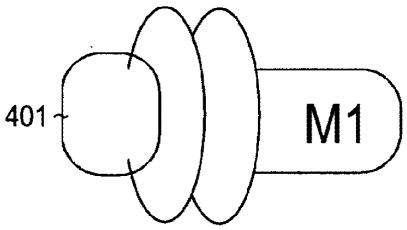
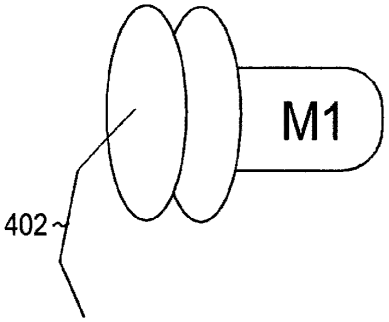


FIG 4B



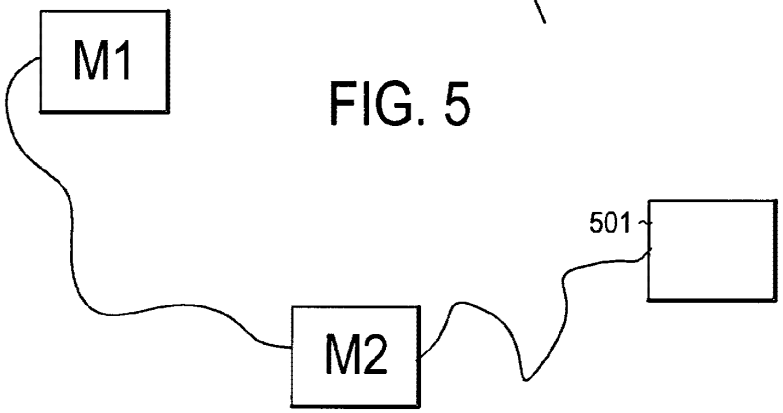


FIG. 5

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FIG 6

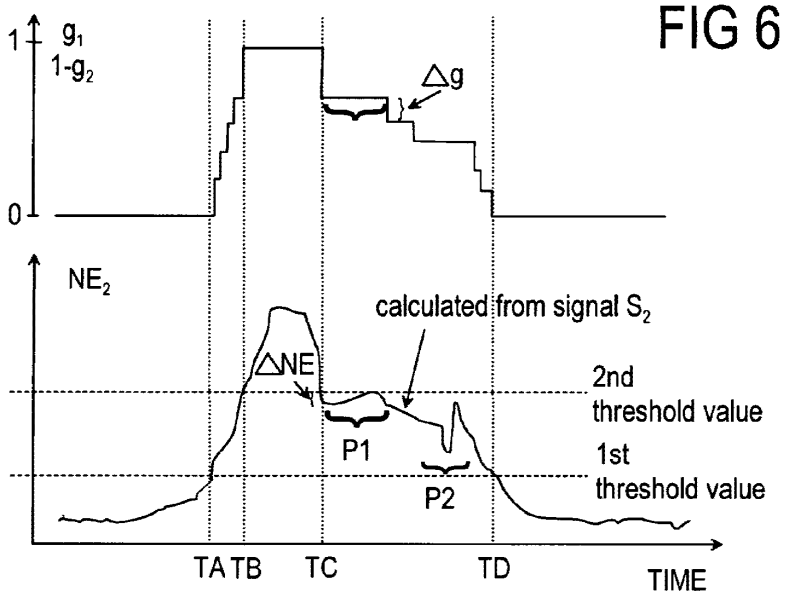


FIG 7

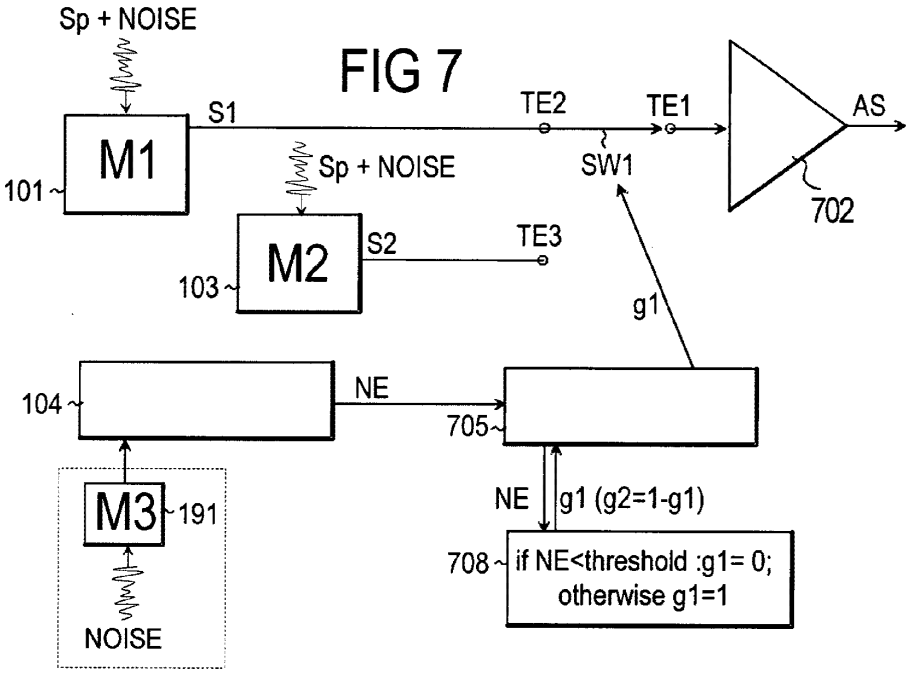


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European Patent Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 02 01 6435

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
A	US 5 640 450 A (WATANABE OSAMU) 17 June 1997 (1997-06-17) * abstract *	1-23	H04M9/08 H04M1/60
A	EP 0 767 570 A (NOKIA MOBILE PHONES LTD) 9 April 1997 (1997-04-09) * abstract *	1-23	
A	WO 99 05840 A (QUALCOMM INC) 4 February 1999 (1999-02-04) * abstract *	1-23	

TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7)

H04M

The present search report has been drawn up for all claims

Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner
THE HAGUE	2 December 2003	Montalbano, F

CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS

X : particularly relevant if taken alone
Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category
A : technological background
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E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date
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& : member of the same patent family, corresponding document

EPO FORM 1503 03.82 (P04C01)

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ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO. EP 02 01 6435

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
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02-12-2003

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For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82

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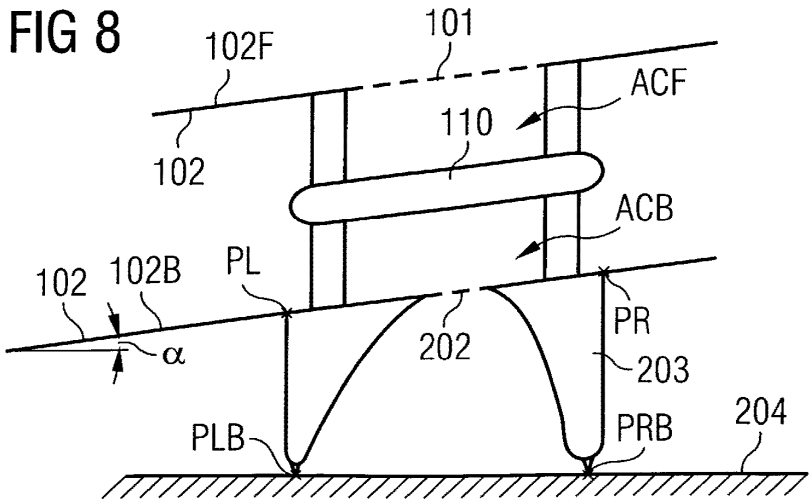
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(54) A dual directional mode mobile terminal and a method for manufacturing of the same

(57) A mobile terminal is equipped with an acoustoelectrical transducer arranged in a housing of the mobile terminal, the housing comprising i) a user sided first inlet aperture in communication with the acoustoelectrical transducer, ii) a second inlet aperture also in communication with the acoustoelectrical transducer, and iii) sealing means for sealing the second inlet aperture when the mobile terminal is placed on an external surface or object. As a result, the mobile terminal has selectable directional characteristics.

FIG 8



EP 1 401 240 A1

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Description

Field of the invention

[0001] The invention relates generally to enhancing speech quality in a telecommunications system, and, more specifically, to enhancing directional properties of a microphone in a mobile terminal.

Background of the invention

[0002] The mobile device boom of the recent years has resulted in different new uses for the mobile terminals widely used in telecommunications. The users expect their new devices to be usable in many different situations. The expectations regarding to the acoustical quality of the device are high, and because the device may be used for various purposes, this sets very high requirements for the design of the terminals.

[0003] As an example of the dual use of the mobile handset, it is very common that the terminal, in addition to its normal use as a handset, is used as a hands-free device. This may be the case when the user is willing to use the mobile terminal in a vehicle, for example, or use it for conference calling. Typically, in the latter case, the mobile terminal is set on a table, the persons willing to speak then usually grouping around the terminal.

[0004] From the acoustical design point of view, the latter kind of use requires quite different acoustical and directional properties of the microphone than the first use mentioned. In conference calling, it is very critical that the microphone shows omni-directional characteristics so that the position of the person speaking does not influence too radically on the sound quality, and when one person is speaking, also comments from the background should be carefully detected.

[0005] On the other hand, when a mobile terminal is used as a handset, it is preferable that the background noise is not detected by the microphone. Normally, the mouth and other sound producing organs of the mobile user are within a predetermined distance from the microphone when he or she is speaking to his or her mobile handset. If human anatomy factors are taken into account, it is easier to design a phone in such a way that the mouth of an average male/female user is quite close to the centre of inlet of the microphone. Thus the microphone should preferably show unidirectional characteristics in order to receive the speech of the user but not noise from his or her background.

[0006] Figure 1 illustrates a prior art mobile terminal 100. The terminal 100 includes housing 102, wherein a microphone 110 is assembled. For the microphone 110 an aperture 101 is important so that the energy of acoustic signals is not attenuated too much which would be the case if the acoustic signals had to traverse through the housing 102.

[0007] Having both omni- and unidirectional characteristics in the acoustical parts of one mobile terminal is not a straightforward task. Some prior art solutions that might be applicable to at least some extent can be found, but they present drawbacks which both an ordinary user and an acoustics designer would find annoying.

[0008] International patent publication WO 01/69967 A2 shows one example of implementing a selectivity switch between a directional mode and an omni-directional mode in a hearing aid device. The switch includes a switch body having a port aperture therein in communication with one of the ports of the microphone, and a switch actuator moveably connected to the switch body and moveable to a first position wherein the port aperture is generally unobstructed by the actuator and a second position wherein the actuator covers the port aperture.

[0009] In the modern mobile lifestyle, a mobile terminal sometimes presents some values of the user of the terminal. Thus, the aesthetic design is very important, and the switch does not support the purpose of creating an aesthetically enjoyable device. Secondly, the shape and form of a hearing aid device is quite different to a mobile phone, basically because the hearing aid device is located in the ear of the user, so the mechanics of the device can be designed in a completely different manner. Therefore the '967 solution cannot be without problems used for ordinary mobile terminals.

[0010] Another solution from U.S. patent 5,933,510, despite of its many advantages, fits only poorly for the acoustical design of a mobile terminal. In '510, a microphone housing includes apertures and a switch; the user may select with the switch, whether or not he or she is willing to use the microphone in omni- or unidirectional mode. Firstly, it is difficult to make the switch and sealing elements to comply with the decorative design desired for the terminal. Secondly, the design of a rotating sleeve for the microphone housing in the manner described in '510 is also extremely challenging.

[0011] It is an object of the invention to bring about a mobile terminal equipped with a sound receiving system having selectable directional characteristics.

Summary of the invention

[0012] This and other objectives of the invention are accomplished in accordance with the principles of the present invention by providing in accordance with any one of the independent patent claims.

[0013] A dual directional mode mobile terminal includes a microphone having been assembled in a housing. The housing includes a first and a second aperture, of which the first aperture is on the user side when the terminal is used as a handset, the first and second apertures forming acoustical conduits to the both sides of the microphone. The housing further includes sealing means for sealing the second aperture together with an external surface, when the mobile terminal is placed on said surface, thereby enabling in the mobile terminal a

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second acoustical directivity mode.

[0014] A method for manufacturing a dual directional mode mobile terminal, includes the steps of i) assembling a microphone into a housing, wherein the housing includes at least a first and a second apertures, of which the first aperture is designed to be on the user side when the terminal is used as a handset, the first and second apertures thus forming acoustical conduits to both sides of the microphone, and ii) assembling the housing with sealing means for sealing at least one of the apertures together with an external surface, when the mobile terminal is placed on said surface, thereby enabling in the mobile terminal a second acoustical directivity mode.

[0015] A mobile terminal which is equipped with an acoustoelectrical transducer arranged in a housing of the mobile terminal, wherein the housing comprises i) a user sided first aperture in communication with the acoustoelectrical transducer, ii) a second aperture also in communication with the acoustoelectrical transducer, and iii) sealing means for sealing the second aperture when the mobile terminal is placed on an external surface or object.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0016] In the following, the invention and its preferred embodiments are described more closely referring to the examples shown in Figure 2-11 in the appended drawings, wherein:

Figure 1	shows a conventional microphone arrangement in a mobile terminal,
Figure 2	shows a dual-mode mobile terminal according to one aspect of the invention,
Figure 3	illustrates one embodiment of the present invention where acoustic sealing is enhanced by a second support member,
Figure 4	depicts the traverse design aspects in accordance with the invention,
Figure 5	further illustrates one embodiment of the invention,
Figure 6	illustrates a cut of a sealing member 203 from Figure 2,
Figure 7	illustrates the sealing member 203 seen from above,
Figure 8	shows the second acoustical mode closer,
Figure 9A and 9B	show how the directivity mode of the mobile terminal is changed according to one aspect of the present invention,
Figure 10	shows a first measurement result of the mobile terminal in the first directional mode, and
Figure 11	shows a second measurement result of the mobile terminal in the second directional mode.

[0017] Same reference numbers denote similar elements throughout the figures.

Detailed description of the invention

[0018] Figure 2 illustrates one embodiment of the present invention. The mobile terminal has a housing 200, and, as shown in Figure 1 described above, there is also an aperture 101 provided for the speech. The aperture 101 leads sound waves to a microphone 110 that is assembled inside the housing 200. In the housing 200 there is also a second aperture 202. The second aperture 202 is preferably located on the opposite side of the housing 200 so that the apertures 101 and 202 provide acoustic conduits leading to both sides of the microphone.

[0019] For sake of clarity, there are three points marked in the housing. PL and PR are the points where sealing means 203 are attached to the housing 200, and the point PA illustrates the point of the housing that supports the lower end of the housing against a flat surface 204 when the mobile terminal is tilted on said sealing means 203. The sealing means 203 are not drawn to scale; according to one aspect of the present invention their height is some millimetres. Depending on the aesthetic goals of the designer, sealing means 203 that are higher or lower can be used.

[0020] According to one embodiment of the present invention the mobile terminal can be placed on a table 205, for example, or other flat surface 204, so that the sealing means 203 together with the flat surface 204 seal the second aperture 202. The sealing of the second aperture 202 has the effect that the mobile terminal is in omni-directional mode where the microphone 110 receives voice signals mostly through the aperture 101 thus losing some of its directional sensitivity.

[0021] Normally, the microphone 110 is directionally sensitive when both apertures 101 and 202 are open. When both apertures 101, 102 are open, the sound waves coming from the background noise can be understood to cancel each other, i.e. the microphone shows unidirectional characteristics and is well suitable for to be used as a handset of a mobile terminal.

The uni- and omni-directional characteristics of the microphone 110 are herewith referred with the term acous-

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tical modes of the microphone.

[0022] Figure 3 shows another example of implementing the present invention. Instead of only having sealing means 303 such as a sealing member, the mobile terminal now also has a support member 304. In addition, the marked point PB illustrates the effective support point of the support member 304 that is comparable to point PA with reference to Figure 2.

[0023] One function of the support member 304 is to increase the pressure between the sealing means 303 and the flat surface 204. The sealing means 303 are located close to the second aperture 202 which is further located at the spot of the microphone. As the mobile terminal of Figure 2, the mobile terminal can as well be placed on a flat surface 204 thus giving omni-directional characteristics for the mobile terminal. The position PB which is also the position of the second support member 304 may be located based on the weight distribution of the mobile terminal. To the weight distribution influences the weight of the contents of the mobile terminal, i.e. the battery, different electrical parts, the display, and so forth. The PB can be positioned so that the torque caused by the weight of the mobile terminal causes a stronger or greater force on the sealing means 303 and so enhances the sealing made by the sealing means 303 and the flat surface 204. If the sealing means 303 are made of a soft material showing high elastic properties, a good sealing can be provided.

[0024] Figure 4 depicts a cross sectional cut of a mobile terminal. The terminal has a microphone 110 which is positioned inside the housing 200. In the housing 200 there are apertures 101 and 202. The apertures 101, 202 act as inlet holes which form acoustical conduits to both sides of the microphone 110. It is to be noted that the apertures 101, 202 need not to be on opposite sides of the mobile terminal; the only limiting condition is that the acoustical conduits lead to both sides of the microphone. Further, there are support and sealing means 203 at the bottom side of the housing. The design of the sealing means 203 may involve taking into account the curvature of the housing 200. In some mobile terminal models, the housing 200 is strongly curved and, therefore, it is impossible to provide a good enough sealing with sealing means 203 that do not take into account the shape of the bottom of the housing 200.

[0025] Further, Figure 5 illustrates the mobile terminal viewed from below. In the sealing means 203 that is upper part of the mobile terminal housing 200 the aperture 202 and the sealing means 203 are shown.

[0026] Figure 6 illustrates closer the sealing means 203. First, the sealing means 203 have a hole 600 for the acoustical inlet. The contact part 601 of the sealing means 203 has been only marked with a box on the right-hand side, but it preferably extends through the sealing means 203. For example, if the sealing means 203 have the form of a ring like in Figure 5, the part 601 extends around the bottom of the ring.

[0027] Further, aperture part 603 has similarly been marked with a box. The acoustical signals coming from outside the mobile phone in order to reach the inlet hole 600 and to further proceed into the microphone 110 traverse beyond this part. In its design one must take into account the acoustical considerations: Special curvature may be needed in order to provide a proper distortion free acoustical transmission characteristics.

[0028] The sealing means 203 are connected to the mobile terminal using the aperture part 605 of the sealing means 203. On the left-hand side the height of the sealing means 203 is denoted with h' and on the right-hand side with h. The difference (h'- h) between h' and h is denoted with Δ. If the microphone is located as usually at the bottom part of the mobile terminal and if the tilting of the housing because of the height difference of the sealing means and the bottom part of the housing is like in Figure 2, h is larger than h'. The tilting may therefore depend on the distance between PA and PL, and partially as well on the distance between PL and PR. In the case of a mobile terminal with a support element like in Figure 3 there is no need for this kind of asymmetry and h' can equal h. The size of Δ may be adapted to make the sealing proper taking into account the tilting angle of the between the bottom part of the housing and the surface where the mobile terminal is lying.

[0029] Another possibility to achieve an asymmetric elastic behaviour is to use elastic materials asymmetrically, i.e. a more elastic material on the h' side and a stiffer material on the opposite side. This can in principle be achieved with e.g. block copolymers where the ratios of different polymer materials exhibit small changes along the bottom part of the sealing means. In this way it is also possible to ensure a good enough sealing. Another option, for example, is to use some other material that has spatially non uniform elasticity constant.

[0030] Figure 7 shows the sealing means from bottom. 600 is the inlet and 601 is the contact part. The profile of the aperture part 603 with its curvature is not visible in the figure.

[0031] Figure 8 presents the mobile terminal when the second acoustical directivity mode is activated. The mobile terminal 102 is placed on a flat surface 204. In the figure only the portion of the mobile terminal which illustrates the housing means and their vicinity is shown. The sealing means 203 have a contact with the flat surface 204 at aperture points PLB and PRB. Preferably, the sealing means extend from the housing of the mobile phone in such a way that in the figure left-hand side contact point PL acts as the outermost aperture point for the sealing means at part PLB and, respectively, the point PR at as the contact point of the sealing means for the point PRB.

[0032] The housing 200 is usually constructed from two parts; 102F is the front part and 102B is the back part. Between the front and back part 102F, 102B of the housing 200 there is a microphone 110. In the front part 102F at the spot of the microphone 110 there is at least one opening for the aperture 101 and on the back side

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part of the housing there is correspondingly at least one aperture 202 leading to the bottom side of the microphone.

[0033] Between the housing and the microphone there is sealing on both sides of the microphone 110. Preferably, the sealing is obtained with the help of an elastic gasket, such as a sealing ring. The first purpose of the sealing is to enable the propagation of sound from the exterior of the housing to the microphone, disabling propagation of the sound inside the housing, whereas the second purpose is to reduce the distortions caused by the loudspeaker of the mobile terminal.

[0034] Below the microphone 110 there is a resonance cavity ACB which is consists of smaller cavities formed by i) space limited by the microphone 110, possible sealing between the microphone, and bottom part 102 of the housing 200, and ii) acoustically well conductive part of the housing 200 including at least one aperture 202, sealing means 203, and the flat surface S. Respectively, another resonance cavity ACF is formed in between the microphone and the front part of the housing.

[0035] As already discussed with reference to Figures 2 and 6, the mobile phone may be tilted. To serve this purpose the sealing means are designed in the manner described with reference to Figure 6, the distance between PL and PLB may be shorter than the distance between PR and PRB. This means that the PL, PLB part could be more elastic than the PR and PRB so that the PL, PLB part of the sealing means compresses more. The aperture between the flat surface 204 and the sealing means 203 shall be preferably good in order to enhance the omni-directional mode. It is possible that if the sealing is not proper the direction and sensitivity of microphone is reduced to correspond the unidirectional microphone.

[0036] The tilting angle α corresponds to the tilting of the mobile terminal with respect to the flat surface 204. In practice, it may get almost any target value, the target value being thus between a very small angle and a substantially large angle. The magnitude of α has an impact on the aesthetic design of the mobile terminal, and, secondly, it may influence on the contact force between the contact part 601 and the flat surface 204 thus leading to further elasticity considerations. The more the mobile terminal is tilted, the smaller the contact force in the support means is, so requiring more elastic material.

[0037] Figure 9A illustrates another way to realise the invention. The mobile terminal has a housing 200 which includes a battery cover 901. The battery cover may be removable; usually the mobile terminal battery is stored under the cover. For some manufacturers the cover and the battery are combined to a single element. The aperture 202 is marked with a dot in the figure. When the inlet hole is open the mobile phone is in unidirectional directivity mode.

[0038] Figure 9B shows the aperture 202 covered with removable sealing means 1001 according to one aspect of the present invention.

[0039] The removable sealing means 1001 can be stored under the battery cover or back cover 901. Preferably, the aperture 202 and the sealing means 1001 are designed in such a way that the sealing means are tightly matched with the aperture 202. This may be realised, for example, by supplying the sealing means with attaching means and sealing means, so that the sealing means 1001 correspond partially to a flat surface 204. As shown in Figure 8, this mode of the invention is particularly usable when the table 205 or other surface is not essentially flat so that it would not provide a uniform enough flat surface 204 for the sealing means 203 to match at points PLB and PRB shown in Figure 8. Further, the external surface can be used for causing this kind of extra pressure for pushing the sealing means 203 stronger against the housing 200 of the mobile terminal, because the sealing means 1001 would not necessarily be able to cause the sealing to be tight enough hence the weight of the mobile terminal can be used for this purpose to increase the sealing.

[0040] Figure 10 illustrates a measurement result of the spectral energy density versus the frequency of a signal output at a reference point close to the telephone. The measurement has been performed for the inventive mobile phone assembly in unidirectional mode, and in Loudness Rating Guarding Position LRGP in accordance with the standard 3G TS 26.132 (TSG SA; Codec Working Group; Terminal Acoustic Characteristics for Telephony).

[0041] The energy spectrum measured is presented as observed by the codec of the mobile terminal. The upper piecewise linear curve corresponds to the maximal allowed spectral density values, whereas the lower piecewise linear curve illustrates the minimum acceptable spectral energies. As can be seen from the measurement results, the observed spectra lies clearly between the allowed values.

[0042] Figure 11 shows the acoustic behaviour of the same mobile terminal when it is in the second acoustical directivity mode. The spectral energy density shows again that the values are allowed, i.e. that the spectra lies clearly between the agreed limits.

[0043] Both measurements were conducted with a the mobile terminal lying head up on the table, positioned 50 cm from the reference mouth and with 30° azimuth. For the measurements the mobile terminal input gain was not adjusted, though this is not visible in the figure. In practice, because of the different resonance cavities caused by the differences in the acoustical apertures when the mobile terminal is in different acoustical modes, the gain must be adjusted between the modes. The adjustment may be done automatically by detecting the measured signal strength in the codec.

[0044] To summarise, according to one aspect of the present invention, the mobile phone can be made to show dual mode characteristics. First, a microphone is assembled into a housing that includes at least two inlet

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holes. At least one of the apertures is designed to be on the user side when the terminal is used as a handset, and the apertures together form acoustical conduits to the both sides of the microphone. The housing is further assembled to include sealing means; with the sealing means at least one of the inlet holes may be sealed together with an external surface, such as a table or any other flat surface. When the mobile terminal is placed on said flat surface, one acoustical aperture is thus closed and the mobile terminal shows acoustical omni-directional characteristics as a second acoustical directivity mode.

[0045] According to one further aspect of the present invention, the assembling step may include the assembling of an elastic gasket. Preferably, said elastic gasket is asymmetric, and the height of the lower part of the gasket being smaller than the height of the higher part of the gasket, the difference being adapted to make the sealing proper taking into account the elevation angle between the bottom of housing and the surface.

[0046] According to still another aspect of the present invention, in addition to the sealing means, the housing may further include a support member to increase the pressure between the sealing means and the surface.

[0047] Although the invention was described above with reference to the examples shown in the appended drawings, it is obvious that the invention is not limited to these, but it may be modified by those skilled in the art without departing from the scope and the spirit of the invention. For example, instead of a microphone, any other transducer or sound detector may be used in connection with the embodiments of the inventive sealing mechanism.

Reference numbers used in the description:

[0048]

100	mobile terminal
101	aperture
102	housing
110	microphone
200	housing
202	second aperture
203	sealing means
204	flat surface
205	table
303	sealing means
304	support member
600	hole for the acoustic inlet
601	contact part
603	aperture part
901	battery cover
1001	removable sealing means

Claims

1. A dual directional mode mobile terminal including a microphone (110), said microphone (110) having been assembled in a housing (200),
characterised in that

   - the housing (200) includes at least a first and a second aperture (101, 202), of which the first aperture (101) is on the user side when the terminal is used as a handset, the first and second apertures (101, 202) forming acoustical conduits (ACF, ACB) to the both sides of the microphone (110); and
   - the housing (200) further includes sealing means (203, 303, 1001) for sealing the second aperture (202) together with an external surface (204), when the mobile terminal is placed on said surface, thereby enabling in the mobile terminal a second acoustical directivity mode.

2. A mobile terminal according to claim 1,
characterised in that
the sealing means (203) include an elastic gasket.

3. A mobile terminal according to claim 2,
characterised in that
the elastic gasket is asymmetric, the height h' of a lower part of the gasket being smaller than the height h of a higher part of the gasket, the difference $\Delta = h' - h$ being adapted to make the sealing proper taking into account an elevation angle (α) between a backside surface (102B) of the housing (200) and the external surface (204).

4. A mobile terminal according to claim 1,
characterised in that
in addition to the sealing means (303), the housing (200) further includes a support member (304) to increase the pressure exerted on the sealing means (303) by the external surface (204).

5. A mobile terminal according to claim 1,
characterised in that
the sealing means (1001) further have means adapted for connecting the sealing means to the inlet hole (202) in an acoustically proper way.

6. A mobile terminal according to claim 5,
characterised in that
the mobile terminal has means (200) for storing the sealing means (1001).

7. A method for manufacturing a dual directional mode mobile terminal, the method
characterised in that
it includes the steps of:

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- assembling a microphone (110) into a housing (200), wherein the housing (200) includes at least first and second apertures (101, 202), of which a first aperture (101) is designed to be on the user side when the terminal is used as a handset, the first and second apertures thus forming acoustical conduits to both sides of the microphone (110); and
- assembling the housing (200) with sealing means (203) for sealing the second aperture (202) holes together with an external surface (204), when the mobile terminal is placed on said external surface (204), thereby enabling in the mobile terminal a second acoustical directivity mode.

8. A method according to claim 7, **characterised in that** the assembling step includes the assembling of an elastic gasket.

9. A method according to claim 8, **characterised in that** said elastic gasket is asymmetric, the height h' of the lower part of the gasket being smaller than the height h of the higher part of the gasket, the difference Δ = h'- h being adapted to make the sealing proper taking into account the elevation angle (α) between the bottom (102B) of housing and the external surface (204).

10. A method according to claim 7, **characterised in that** in addition to the sealing means (303), the housing further includes a support member (304) to increase the pressure between the sealing means (303) and the surface (204).

11. A method according to claim 7, wherein the sealing means (1001) are further adapted to be connected to the inlet hole (202) in an acoustically proper way.

12. A method according to claim 11, wherein the sealing means (1001) are stored in the mobile phone, and when used, manually placed into the aperture (202).

13. A mobile terminal equipped with an acoustoelectrical transducer (110) arranged in a housing (200) of the mobile terminal, **characterised in that** the housing (200) comprises:

- a user sided first aperture (101) in communication with the acoustoelectrical transducer (110);
- a second aperture (202) also in communication with the acoustoelectrical transducer (110); and
- sealing means (203) for sealing the second aperture (202) when the mobile terminal is placed on an external surface (204) or an object.

14. A mobile terminal according to claim 13, wherein the sealing means (203) are responsive to an external force or pressure.

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FIG 1 Prior Art

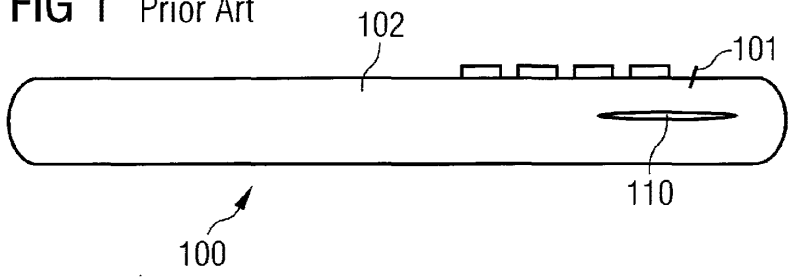


FIG 2

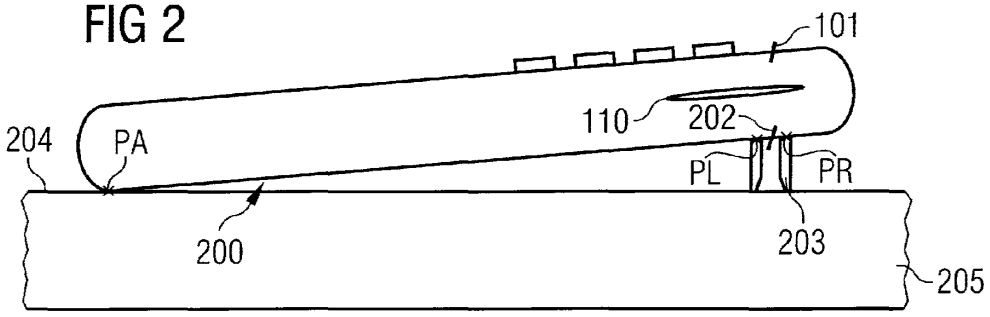


FIG 3

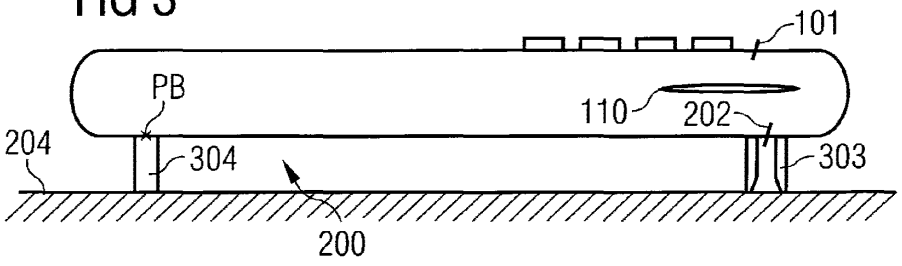


FIG 4

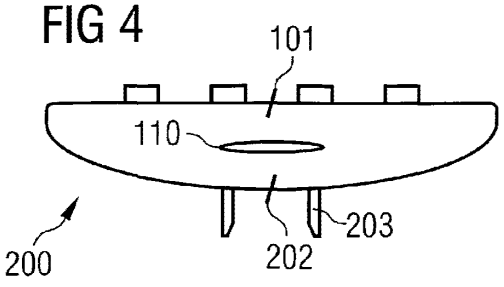


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FIG 5

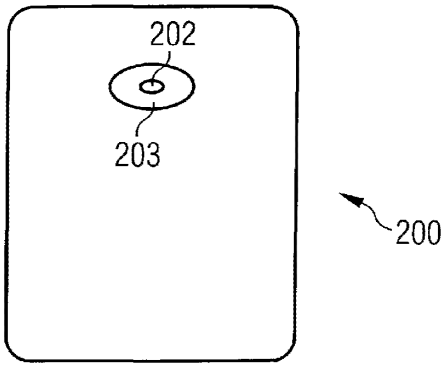


FIG 6

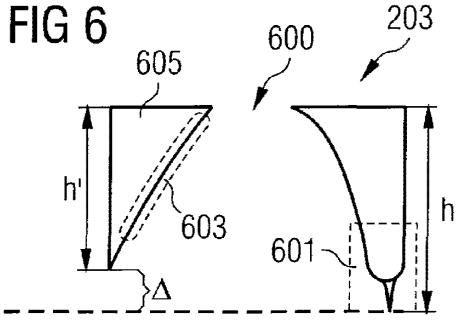


FIG 7

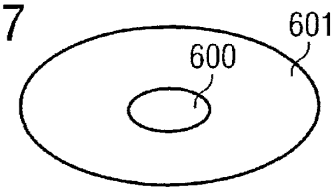


FIG 8

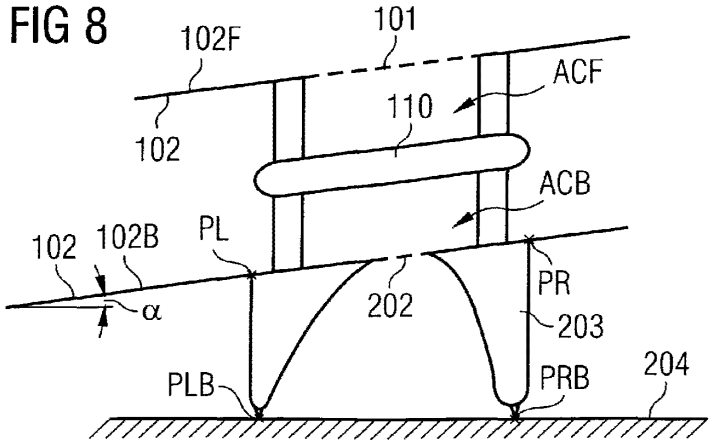


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FIG 9A

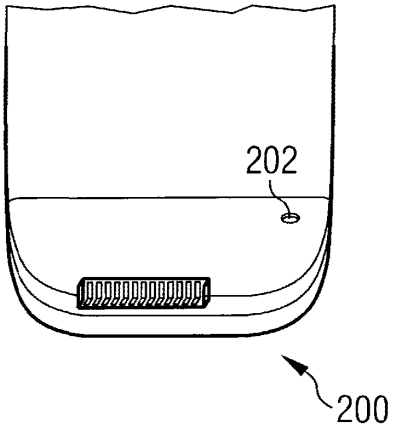


FIG 9B

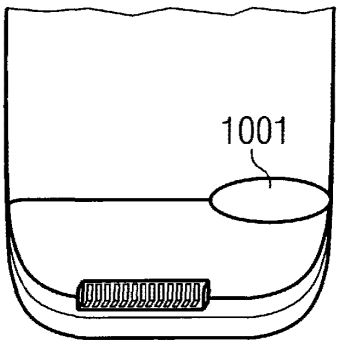


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FIG 10

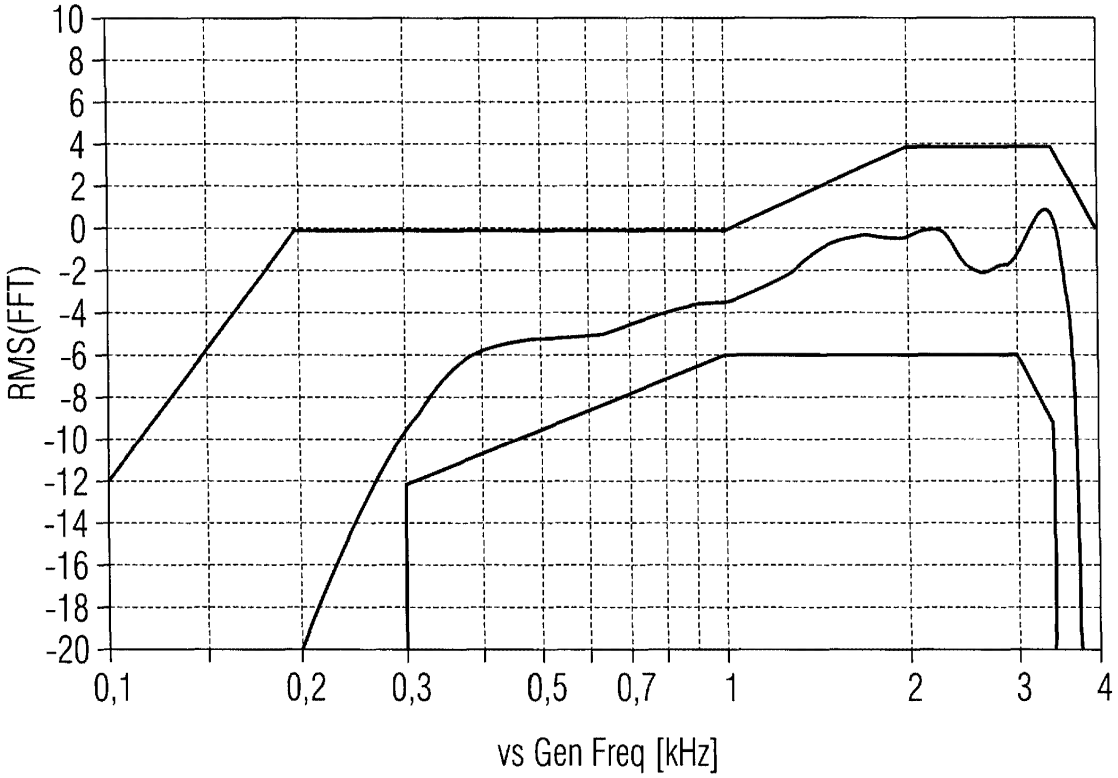
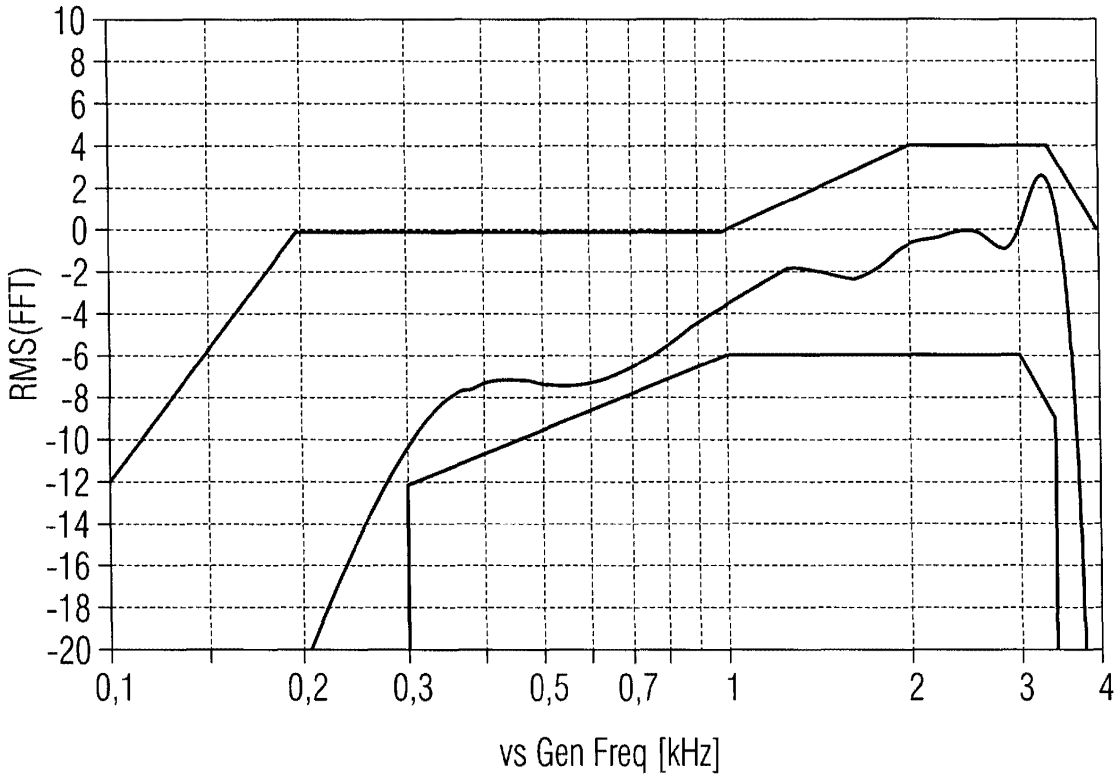


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FIG 11


10
8
6
4
2
0
-2
-4
-6
-8
-10
-12
-14
-16
-18
-20
RMS(FFT)
0,1
0,2
0,3
0,5
0,7
1
2
3
4
vs Gen Freq [kHz]

European Patent Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 02 02 0319

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Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
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A	WO 01 69964 A (RESISTANCE TECHNOLOGY INC ;DARBUT ALEXANDER L (US)) 20 September 2001 (2001-09-20) * page 2, line 26 - page 3, line 9 * * abstract * -----	1-14	

TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7)

H04R

The present search report has been drawn up for all claims

Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner
THE HAGUE	31 March 2003	Dionisi, M

CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS

X : particularly relevant if taken alone
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31-03-2003

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For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82

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(11) EP 1 519 625 B1

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(54) External ear canal voice detection

Sprachdetektion im Gehörgang

Détection de la voix dans le conduit auditif externe

(84) Designated Contracting States:
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EP 1 519 625 B1

Printed by Jouve, 75001 PARIS (FR)

Description

[0001] This document generally relates to ear-level communication systems and particularly, but not by way of limitation, to such systems communicating with remote devices via full duplex audio.

[0002] Ear-level communication systems are used for hearing impaired individuals to use a communication device such as a cellular phone or other devices transmitting audio signals. They also allow private, hand-free use of such a communication device by individuals with normal hearing.

[0003] An ear-level communication system generally includes tethered or wireless headsets with a microphone boom or a microphone within a cord of the headset to detect voice of the person wearing the headsets. An alternative way to detect voice is via bone connection. Examples include a "clam" shell device that couples to the helix and a custom carmold with a vibration detector on the outer shell. Voice is picked up by detecting bone vibration caused by, and representative of, the voice of the person wearing the device.

[0004] Bi-directional communication has been achieved by a simplex system including a device in the ear canal that both transmits sound to and picks up sound within the ear canal. The device is tethered to a push-to-talk (PIT) system such as a walkie talkie. It is not full duplex and therefore requires interaction by the user in order to switch from listen mode to talk mode.

[0005] Voice operated exchange (VOX) is used to conserve energy when voice is not being detected or transmitted. For example, a headset system includes two ear pieces - for full duplex communication with one earpiece for transmitting and the other for receiving voice - and uses ear canal voice detection to trigger a VOX circuit in a control unit wired to the headset. The system requires a headset with two headphones and wires connecting the headphone to a control unit such as a device clipped on belt. In another example, a full duplex system includes a single headphone to transmit and receiving voice, again with a VOX circuit in a control unit wired to the headphone.

[0006] Such ear-level communication systems are likely to be worn by a person for long periods of time. Users with hearing loss may use such a system on a regular basis, both as a conventional hearing aid allowing communication directly with a person and as a hearing aid allowing communicating through another device. Users with normal hearing may wear such a system to be communicatively connected to another person or facility without the need to hold a device at any time. For appearance or secrecy reasons, minimal visibility is generally desirable. Wired connection between a headset or earpiece and a controller makes the system easily visible and is cumbersome to users who need to communicate while being physically active.

[0007] Thus, there is a need for an ear-level communication system that is not easily visible. A need related to miniaturization is the longevity of the system between battery replacements or recharges.

[0008] WO 98/45937A discloses a communications apparatus comprising ear units, a control unit and a radio transceiver.

[0009] Ear level full duplex audio communication systems each include one or two ear attachments devices, such as in-the-ear (ITE) or behind-the-ear (BTE) devices, that wirelessly communicates to a remote device. Such a system allows a hearing impaired individual to communicate with or through the remote device, such as to talk to another person through a cellular phone. Such a system also functions as an ear piece wirelessly extended from the remote device that allows an individual to privately communicate with or through the remote device without the need of holding the device.

[0010] WO 03/073790A discloses a system adapted for use in at least one of a first ear having a first ear canal and a second ear having a second ear canal comprising: a first ear-level device configured to be one of an in-the-ear device and a behind-the-ear device, the first ear-level device including: a first microphone adapted for use in one of the first ear canal and the second ear canal, and adapted to receive an occluded sound within the one of the first ear canal and the second ear canal; and a wireless receiver, connected to a first processor, to receive a first wireless signal representing a remote sound; wherein the first processor, is connected to the first microphone, and is adapted to process the occluded sound and the remote sound; the first ear level device further including a speaker adapted for use in the one of the first ear canal and the second ear canal and adapted to transmit the processed remote sound to the one of the first ear canal and the second ear canal; a wireless transmitter, connected to the first processor; a first earmold housing at least the first microphone and the speaker, at least a portion of the first earmold configured for placement in the one of the first ear canal and the second ear canal; and a voice operated exchange (VOX) circuit connected to the first processor.

[0011] In the present invention, the wireless transmitter is adapted to receive the processed occluded sound from the first processor and transmit a second wireless signal representing the occluded sound; and the VOX circuit includes an occluded sound gating module adapted to gate the occluded sound on, and to gate the remote sound off, when the occluded sound is detected while the remote sound is not detected, and a remote sound gating module adapted to gate the remote sound on, and to gate the occluded sound off, when the incoming remote sound is detected while the occluded sound is not detected.

[0012] In a preferred embodiment, a system includes an ITE module and a BTE module attached to the ITE module. The ITE module includes a microphone for use in an ear canal. The microphone receives an occluded sound from within the ear canal. The BTE module includes a processor and a wireless transmitter. The processor processes the occluded sound. The wireless trans-

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mitter receives the processed occluded sound from the processor and transmits a wireless signal representing the occluded sound.

[0013] In a preferred embodiment, a system includes a first ear-level device and a second ear-level device for use in two opposite ears. The first ear-level device includes a microphone, a first processor, and a wireless transmitter. The microphone is for use in one ear canal to receive an occluded sound from within that ear canal. The first processor converts the occluded sound to an electrical signal. The wireless transmitter receives the electrical signal and transmits an outgoing wireless signal representing the occluded sound. The second ear-level device includes a wireless receiver, a second processor, and a speaker. The wireless receiver receives an incoming wireless signal representing a remote sound. The second processor converts the incoming wireless signal to the remote sound. The speaker is for use in the opposite ear canal to transmit the remote sound to that ear canal.

[0014] The present invention also relates to a method comprising: detecting an occluded sound using a first microphone adapted for use in an ear canal; detecting an incoming radio signal representing a remote sound from a remote device; starting a voice operated exchange (VOX) housed within an ear-level communication device when at least one of the occluded sound and the incoming radio signal is detected if the VOX is not already on, the ear-level communication device being one of an in-the-ear (ITE) device and a behind-the-ear (BTE) device; gating the occluded sound on, and gating the remote sound off, when the occluded sound is detected while the incoming radio signal is not detected; and gating the remote sound on, and gating the occluded sound off, when the incoming radio signal is detected while the occluded sound is not detected.

[0015] Preferred embodiments of the present invention will now be described by way of example only and with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is an illustration of an embodiment of an ear-level communication system and potions of an environment in which it is used. This ear-level communication system uses a single ear-level device.

FIG. 2 is an illustration of an embodiment of another ear-level communication system and portions of an environment in which it is used. This ear-level communication system uses a pair of ear-level devices.

FIG. 3A is an illustration of one exemplary exterior configuration of an in-the-ear (ITE) device used as the single ear-level device of FIG 1 or one of the pair of ear-level devices of FIG. 2.

FIG. 3B is an illustration of one exemplary exterior configuration of an in-the-canal (ITC) device used as the single ear-level device in FIG. 1 or one of the pair of ear-level devices of FIG. 2.

FIG. 3C is an illustration of one exemplary exterior configuration of a completely-in-the-canal (CIC) device used as the single-ear-level device of FIG. 1 or one of the pair of ear-level devices of FIG. 2.

FIG. 4A is a block diagram showing one embodiment of the circuit of ear-level device shown in FIGS. 3A, 3B, or 3C used as the single ear-level device of FIG. 1.

FIG. 4B is a block diagram showing one embodiment of portions of a voice operated exchange (VOX) circuit included in the single car-level device of FIG. 1.

FIG. 5 is a block diagram showing another embodiment of the circuit of ear-level device shown in FIGS. 3A, 3B, or 3C used as the pair of ear-level devices of FIG. 1B.

FIG. 6 is an illustration of one exemplary exterior configuration of an ear-level device including a behind-the-ear (BTE) device used as the single ear-level device of FIG. 1 or one of the pair of ear-level devices of FIG. 2.

FIG. 7 is a block diagram showing one embodiment of the circuit of the ear-level device shown in FIG. 6 used as the single ear-level device of FIG. 1.

FIG. 8 is a block diagram showing another embodiment of the circuit of ear-level device shown in FIG. 6 used as the pair of ear-level devices of FIG. 2.

FIG. 9 is a flow chart illustrating an embodiment of a method for audio communication between the single ear-level device or the pair of ear-level devices and a remote device.

FIG. 10 is a flow chart illustrating another embodiment of the method for audio communication between the single ear-level device and a remote device.

[0016] The following embodiments are described in sufficient detail to enable those skilled in the art to practice the invention, and it is to be understood that the embodiments may be combined, or that other embodiments may be utilized and that structural, logical and electrical changes may be made without departing from the scope of the present invention, as defined by the appended claims.

[0017] It should be noted that references to "an", "one", or "various" embodiments in this disclosure are not necessarily to the same embodiment, and such references contemplate more than one embodiment.

[0018] This document discusses, among other things, ear-level full duplex audio communication systems for communicating with remote devices. These systems each include one or two ear-level devices each worn in or about an ear, such as in-the-ear (ITE) or behind-the-ear (BTE) devices, wirelessly coupled to a remote device such as a computer, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a cellular phone, a walkie talkie, or a language translator. When used as a hearing aid, such a system allows a hearing impaired individual to communicate with or through the remote device, such as to talk to another person through a cellular phone. When being used as an ear piece wirelessly extended from the remote device,

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such system allows an individual with normal hearing to privately communicate with or through the remote device without the need of holding the device or wearing any device wired to the remote device.

[0019] In this document, "voice" includes to the sound of speech made by a person, and sound generally includes an audible signal that includes voice and other signals that can be heard and/or detected by an audio detector. Unless particularly indicated, for example, when voice is distinguished from sound by speech recognition, "voice" and "sound" are used interchangeably throughout thus document because they are not practically separated. For example, detection of a sound refers to the same action as detection of a voice because, while the purpose is to detect the voice, other sounds are picked up as well.

[0020] FIG. 1 is an illustration of an embodiment of an ear-level communication system 100 and portions of an environment in which it is used. System 100 includes an ear-level device 110 attached to an ear 101A. Bar-level device 110 communicates with a remote device 190 through a wireless telemetry link 195. The other ear 101B is free of device attachment. Ear-level device 110 is a self-contained device including its own power source such as a replaceable or rechargeable battery. To maximize battery life or period between recharges, at least a portion of the circuit of ear-level device 110 is voice activated. That is, ear-level device 110 is activated only when it detects a need to transmit or receive a sound.

[0021] Ear-level device 110 is a full duplex audio device that allows two-way simultaneous conversation between ear 101A and remote device 190. In one embodiment, when being worn by a person having ear 101A, ear-level device 110 picks up sound from the ear canal of ear 101A and delivers sound to the same ear canal. It detects the occluded sound from the ear canal when the person speaks and transmits to the same ear canal a sound received from remote device 190 and/or a sound picked up from the environment surrounding the person. In one embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. 1, ear-level device 110 is configured for right ear attachment. In an alternative embodiment, ear-level device 110 is configured for left ear attachment.

[0022] FIG. 2 is an illustration of an embodiment of an ear-level communication system 200 and portions of an environment in which it is used. System 200 includes a pair of ear-level devices 210A, attached to an ear 101 A, and 210B, attached to ear 101B. Ear-level devices 210A and 210B communicate with a remote device 290 through a wireless telemetry link 295. Ear-level devices 210A and 210B are each a self-contained device including its own power source such as a replaceable or rechargeable battery. To maximize battery life or period between recharges, at least a portion of the circuit of each of ear-level devices 210A and 210B is voice activated. That is, ear-level devices 210A and 210B are each activated only when a need to transmit or receive a sound is detected by the device itself.

[0023] In one embodiment, ear-level device 210A is an audio transmitter that picks up sound from the ear canal of ear 101A, and ear-level device 210B is an audio receiver that delivers sound to the same ear canal. Ear-level device 210A is activated when it detects a sound from the ear canal. Ear-level device 210B is activated when it detects a signal from remote device 290. When both are being worn by a person, ear-level devices 210A and 210B supports full duplex audio allowing two-way simultaneous conversation between the person and remote device 290. In one embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. 2, ear-level device 210A is configured for right ear attachment, and ear-level device 210B is configured for left ear attachment. In an alternative embodiment, ear-level device 210A is configured for left ear attachment, and ear-level device 210B is configured for right ear attachment.

[0024] FIGS. 3A, 3B, and 3C are illustrations of exemplary exterior configuration of ear-level device 110 or one of ear-level devices 210A and 210B. For the purpose of this document, only a device attached to a right ear is shown for each exemplary exterior configuration. It is to be understood that each of ear-level devices 110, 210A, and 210B can be either a device configured for right ear attachment or a device configured for left ear attachment. Generally, a device configured for right car attachment has an exterior configuration that is substantially symmetrical to that of a device of the same type configured for left ear attachment. In system 100, a single ear-level device 110 is a device configured either for right ear attachment or for left ear attachment. In system 200, either one of car-level device 210A and 210B is a device configured for right ear attachment, while the other is a device configured for left ear attachment.

[0025] An occluded sound 305, an ambient sound 306, and a remote sound 307 are illustrated in each of FIGS. 3A, 3B, and 3C. Remote sound 307 is represented by a wireless radio signal transmitted to ear-level device 110. In this document, "occluded sound" includes occluded sound 305, "ambient sound" includes ambient sound 306, and "remote sound" includes remote sound 307.

[0026] FIG. 3A is an illustration of an exemplary exterior configuration of an in-the-ear (ITE) device 310A used as ear-level device 110 or one of ear-level devices 210A and 210B. As shown in FIG. 3A, ITE device 310A is attached to an ear 101 with a pinna 302 and an ear canal 303. ITE device 310A includes a portion inserted into ear canal 303 and another portion fit into the cavity formed by pinna 302.

[0027] FIG. 3B is an illustration of an exemplary exterior configuration of an in-the-canal (ITC) device 310B used as ear-level device 110 or one of ear-level devices 210A and 210B. As shown in FIG. 3B, ITC device 310B is attached to ear 101 with pinna 302 and ear canal 303. ITC device 310B is a form of ITE device that also includes a portion inserted in ear canal 303 and another portion fit into the cavity formed by pinna 302, but the latter portion is smaller than that of ITE device 310A. Its overall

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size is therefore generally smaller than that of ITE deviee 310A.

[0028] FIG. 3C is an illustration of an exemplary exterior configuration of a completely-in-the-canal (CIC) device 310C used as ear-level device 110 or one of ear-level devices 210A and 210B. As shown in FIG. 3C, CIC device 310C is attached to ear 101 with pinna 302 and ear canal 303. CIC device 310C is a form of ITC device but includes only a portion that is completed inserted into ear canal 303. Its overall size is therefore generally smaller than that of ITC device 310B.

[0029] In one embodiment, each of ITE device 310A, ITC device 310B, and CIC device 310C includes a custom earmold. In another embodiment, each of ITE device 310A, ITC device 310B, and CIC device 310C includes a modular earmold. In one embodiment, the earmold is fully occluded to maximize audio efficiency. In another embodiment, the earmold is vented to remove undesirable low frequency sound.

[0030] The choice of a device type, such as from the types shown in FIGS. 3A, 3B, and 3C, depends on the need of individual users. For example, ITE device 310A has a relatively large size to accommodate a relatively large amplifier to serve the need of individuals suffering severe hearing loss. The relatively large size can also be utilized to house a relatively large size battery. On the other hand, CIC device 310C is almost invisible, while the room for the circuit and the battery is very limited. Generally, the selection of the device type is a compromise among considerations such as the user's degree of hearing loss (if applicable), ear canal size, desire of invisibility, desired longevity between battery replacements or recharges, and cost.

[0031] FIG. 4A is a block diagram showing one embodiment of the circuit of ear-level device shown in FIGS. 3A, 3B, or 3C used as the single ear-level device 110. The circuit is housed in an earmold configured for use as one of the device types illustrated as ear-level devices 310A, 310B, or 310C.

[0032] Ear-level device 110 includes an external microphone 420, an ear canal microphone 440, an car canal speaker 470, a processor 460, a wireless transceiver 450, an antenna 455, a voice operated exchange (VOX) circuit 430, and a battery 480. External microphone 420 picks up ambient sound such that a hearing impaired person wearing ear-level device 110 is not "isolated" when communicating to remote device 190. Thus, ear-level device enables the hearing impaired person to talk to another person either directly (if the other person is nearby) or through a device such as a cell phone. Ear canal microphone 440 detects sound from the ear canal. The sound includes primarily speech of the person wearing ear-level device 110. Ear canal speaker 470 transmits sound received from remote device 190 and/or external microphone 420 to the same ear canal. In one embodiment, ear canal microphone 440 and ear canal speaker 470 are implemented as one physical device. Processor 460 converts the sound picked up from the ear canal to an electrical signal to be transmitted to remote device 190, and converts the signals received from remote device 190 and/or external microphone 420 to a sound audible to the person wearing ear-level device 110. In one embodiment, processor 460 includes one or more of amplification circuitry, filtering circuitry, acoustic feedback reduction circuitry, noise reduction circuitry, and tone control circuitry, among other circuits performing signal processing functions as known in the art In one embodiment, processor 460 includes a speech recognition module to enhance the audio signal received by and/or transmitted from ear-level device 110. Wireless transceiver 450 and antenna 455 form a telemetry interface supporting telemetry link 195 between ear-level device 110 and remote device 190. Wireless transceiver 450 includes a wireless transmitter and a wireless receiver. The wireless transmitter receives the electrical signal representing the sound picked up from the ear canal from processor 460 and transmits an outgoing wireless signal representing the same sound to remote device 190. The wireless receiver receives an incoming wireless signal representing a remote sound from remote device 190 and transmits an electrical signal representing the remote sound to processor 460. Telemetry link 195 provides for bi-directional communication allowing simultaneous signal transmission, in both directions, between ear-level device 110 and remote device 190. VOX circuit 430 activates a major portion of ear-level device 110 only when sound is detected by at least one of external microphone 420, ear canal microphone 440, end wireless transceiver 450. In one embodiment, VOX circuit 430 includes a voice-controlled switch connecting between battery 480 and the portions of ear-level device 110 that are voice activated. The switch is driven by the sound detected by at least one of external microphone 420, ear canal microphone 440, and wireless transceiver 450. It is turned on when sound detected by external microphone 420 exceeds a predetermined threshold, when sound detected by ear canal microphone 440 exceeds another predetermined threshold, and/or when wireless transceiver 450 receives the incoming wireless signal representing the remote sound. In one embodiment, as discussed with respect to FIG. 4B below, VOX circuit 430 gates or attenuates one or more sounds detected by external microphone 420, ear canal microphone 440, and wireless transceiver 450, to eliminate or reduce echo and ringing caused by the loop formed by ear canal speaker 470 and ear canal microphone 440. Battery 480 supplies the power needed for the operation of ear-level device 110. In one embodiment, battery 480 is a rechargeable battery that can be recharged without being taken out from ear-level device 110.

[0033] FIG. 4B is a block diagram showing one embodiment of portions of VOX circuit 430. In this embodiment, VOX circuit 430 includes an ambient sound gating module 421 that blanks or attenuates the sound detected by external microphone 420, an occluded sound gating module 441 that blanks or attenuates the sound detected

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by ear canal microphone 440, a remote sound gating module 451 that blanks or attenuates the sound detected by wireless transceiver 450, and controller 431 to coordinate the states of the gating modules. Because ear canal microphone 440 is capable of detecting the sound delivered to the ear canal from ear canal speaker 470, there is a need to avoid echo and/or ringing. For example, a remote sound from remote device 190 delivered to the ear canal may be detected as an occluded sound and transmitted back to remote device 190, causing echo. The gating modules function in a coordinated manner to eliminate or reduce such echo and/or ringing caused by breaking, or applying resistance into, the audio loop formed by ear canal speaker 470 and ear canal microphone 440.

[0034] For the purpose of description, each of the gating modules is "on" when sound is "gated on" and "off' when the sound is "gated off" A sound is "gated on" when it is allowed to pass and be processed, and is "gated off' when it is blanked or substantially attenuated. Blanking refers to a substantially complete blockage of a sound, or in other words, that a detected sound is practically ignored by processor 460 such that it does not cause any echo or ringing that is audible by an ear. Substantial attenuation refers to an attenuation after which the attenuated sound does not cause any echo or tinging having an intolerable intensity.

[0035] Ambient sound gating module 421 includes a voice-driven switch or attenuator driven by the output of a comparator that compares the amplitude of a detected ambient sound with a predetermined threshold for the ambient sound. When the amplitude of the detected ambient sound exceeds the threshold for the ambient sound, and when controller 431 permits, ambient sound gating module 421 is turned on. When the amplitude of the detected ambient sound drops below the threshold for the ambient sound, ambient sound gating module 421 is turned off. In one embodiment, after the amplitude of the detected ambient sound drops below the threshold for the ambient sound, ambient sound gating module 421 is turned off after a predetermined delay.

[0036] Occluded sound gating module 441 includes a voice-driven switch or attenuator driven by the output of a comparator that compares the amplitude of a detected occluded sound with a predetermined threshold for the occluded sound. When the amplitude of the detected occluded sound exceeds the threshold for the occluded sound, and when controller 431 permits, occluded sound gating module 441 is turned on. When the amplitude of the detected occluded sound drops below the threshold for the occluded sound, occluded sound gating module 441 is turned off. In one embodiment, after the amplitude of the detected occluded sound drops below the threshold for the occluded sound, occluded sound gating module 441 is turned off after a predetermined delay.

[0037] In one embodiment, remote sound gating module 451 includes a voice-driven switch or attenuator driven by the output of a comparator that compares the amplitude of a remote sound with a predetermined threshold for the remote sound. When the amplitude of the detected remote sound exceeds the threshold for the remote sound, and when controller 431 permits, remote sound gating module 451 is turned on. When the amplitude of the detected remote sound drops below the threshold for the remote sound, remote sound gating module 451 is turned off. In one embodiment, after the amplitude of the detected remote sound drops below the threshold for the remote sound, remote sound gating module 451 is turned off after a predetermined delay.

[0038] In another embodiment, remote sound gating module 451 includes a switch or attenuator driven by the detection of the incoming wireless signal representing the remote sound. Remote sound gating module 451 is turned on upon detection of the incoming wireless signal when controller 431 permits, and turned off when the incoming wireless signal is no longer detected. In one embodiment, remote sound gating module 451 is turned off after the incoming wireless signal is absent for a predetermined period.

[0039] Controller 431 coordinates the on/off states of all the gating modules so the sounds are processed in an orderly fashion. Even if a sound is detected, the gating module corresponding to that sound is turned on only when controller 431 permits. In one embodiment, assuming that sounds A and B are gated by gating modules A and B, respectively, if both sounds A and B are detected, whichever sound is detected earlier is gated on. That is, if sound A exceeds its threshold first, gating module A is turned on and remain on until sound A drops below threshold A. Then, gating module B is turned only if sound B exceeds its threshold after gating module A has been turn off.

[0040] In one embodiment, controller 431 coordinates the on/off states of all the gating modules according to predetermined or programmed gating coordination rules. According to one exemplary rule, ambient sound gating module 421 is off, occluded sound gating module 441 is off, and remote sound gating module 451 is on. This rule allows only the transmission of the remote sound to ear canal 303, and prevents the remote sound from being detected by ear canal microphone 440 and echoed back to remote device 190. According to another exemplary rule, ambient sound gating module 421 is on, occluded sound gating module 441 is off, and remote sound gating module 451 is on. This rule allows the transmission of both the remote sound and the ambient sound to ear canal 303, and prevents the remote sound from being detected by ear canal microphone 440 and echoed back to remote device 190. This also prevents the ambient sound from being transmitted to remote device 190. According to yet another exemplary rule, ambient sound gating module 421 is off, occluded sound gating module 441 is on, and remote sound gating module 451 is off. When the person wearing ear-level device 110 speaks, both external microphone 420 and ear canal microphone 440 detect the voice. The voice as detected by ear-level

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device 110 is first transmitted to remote device 190. Without the gating modules (or when ambient sound gating module 421 and occluded sound gating module 441 are both on), the same voice as detected by external microphone 420 is transmitted to ear canal 303, and therefore again detected by ear canal microphone 440, and again be transmitted to remote device 190. This rule allows only the transmission of the occluded sound to remote device 190, and prevents the same sound from being transmitted to remote device 190 twice. Other rules are applied as a person skilled in the art should see fit based on an understanding after reading this entire document.

[0041] FIG. 5 is a block diagram showing another embodiment of the circuit of ear-level device shown in FIGS. 3A, 3B, or 3C used as each of ear-level devices 210A and 210B. The circuit of each of ear-level devices 210A and 210B is housed in an earmold configured for use as of one of the device types illustrated as ear-level devices 310A, 310B, or 310C.

[0042] Ear-level device 210A is an audio transmitter that includes an ear canal microphone 540, a processor 560A, a wireless transmitter 550A, an antenna 555A, a transmitter VOX circuit 530A, and a battery 580A. Ear canal microphone 540 detects sound from the ear canal. The sound includes primarily speech of the person wearing ear-level device 210A. Processor 560A converts the sound picked up from the ear canal to an electrical signal to be transmitted to remote device 290. In one embodiment, processor 560A includes one or more of amplification circuitry, filtering circuitry, acoustic feedback reduction circuitry, noise reduction circuitry, and tone control circuitry, among other circuits performing signal processing functions as known in the art. In one embodiment, processor 560A includes a speech recognition module used to enhance the sound transmitted from ear-level device 210A. Wireless transmitter 550A and antenna 555A form a telemetry interface supporting signal transmission from ear-level device 210A to remote device 290. Wireless transmitter 550A receives the electrical signal representing the sound picked up from the ear canal from processor 560A and transmits an outgoing wireless signal representing the same sound to remote device 290. VOX circuit 530A activates a major portion of ear-level device 210A only when sound is detected by ear canal microphone 540. In one embodiment, VOX circuit 530A includes a voice-controlled switch connecting between battery 580A and the portions of ear-level device 210A that are voice activated. The switch is driven by the sound detected by ear canal microphone 540. It is turned on when sound detected by ear canal microphone 540 exceeds a predetermined threshold. In one embodiment, VOX circuit 530A activates processor 560A when the sound is detected. In one further embodiment, VOX circuit 530A also activates wireless transmitter 550A when the sound is detected. Battery 580A supplies the power needed for the operation of ear-level device 210A. In one embodiment, battery 580A is a rechargeable battery that can be recharged without being taken out from ear-level device 210A.

[0043] Ear-level device 210B is an audio receiver that includes an external microphone 520, an ear canal speaker 570, a processor 560B, a wireless receiver 550B, an antenna 555B, a receiver VOX circuit 530B, and a battery 580B. External microphone 520 picks up ambient sound such that the person wearing ear-level devices 210A and 210B is not "isolated" when communicating to remote device 290. It allows that person to talk to a nearby person directly, without the need to take off ear-level devices 210A and/or 210B. Bar canal speaker 570 transmits sound received from remote device 290 and/or external microphone 520 to the same ear canal. Processor 560B converts the signals received from remote device 290 and/or external microphone 520 to a sound audible to the person wearing ear-level device 210B. In one embodiment, processor 560B includes one or more of amplification circuitry, filtering circuitry, acoustic feedback reduction circuitry, noise reduction circuitry, and tone control circuitry, among other circuits performing signal processing functions as known in the art. In one embodiment, processor 560B includes a speech recognition module used to enhance the audio signals received by ear-level device 210B. Wireless receiver 550B and antenna 555B form a telemetry interface supporting signal transmission from remote device 290 to ear-level device 210B. Wireless receiver 550B receives an incoming wireless signal representing a remote sound from remote device 290 and transmits an electrical signal representing the remote sound to processor 560B. VOX circuit 530B activates a major portion of ear-level device 110 only when sound is detected by at least one of external microphone 520 and wireless receiver 550B. In one embodiment, VOX circuit 530B includes a voice-controlled switch connecting between battery 580B and the portions of ear-level device 210B that are voice activated. The switch is driven by the sound detected by at least one of external microphone 520 and wireless receiver 550B. It is turned on when sound detected by external microphone 520 exceeds a predetermined threshold and/or when wireless transceiver 550B receives the incoming wireless signal representing the remote sound. In one embodiment, VOX circuit 530B activates processor 560B when the sound is detected. In one further embodiment, VOX circuit 530B also activates ear-level speaker 570 when the sound is detected. Battery 580B supplies the power needed for the operation of ear-level device 210B. In one embodiment, battery 580B is a rechargeable battery that can be recharged without being taken out from ear-level device 210B.

[0044] System 200 accommodates a larger overall circuit size without necessarily increasing the size of each ITE device. While two separate ear-level devices are required, because system 200 includes separate audio transmitter (ear-level device 210A) and receiver (ear-level device 210B) disposed in the ear canals of opposite ears, ear canal speaker 570 and ear canal microphone 540 do not form a loop causing echo and ringing.

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[0045] FIG. 6 is an illustration of an exemplary exterior configuration of an ear-level device including a behind-the-ear (BTE) device 610 used as ear-level device 110 or one of ear-level devices 210A and 210B. BTE device 610 is attached to ear 101 with pinna 302 and ear canal 303. In one embodiment, BTE device 610 is used when none of ITE device 310A, PTC device 310B, and CIC device 310C provides sufficient space accommodating the required circuit and battery sizes. For the purpose of this document, only a device attached to a right ear is shown for each exterior structure. It is to be understood that each of ear-level devices 110, 210A, and 210B can be either a BTE device configured for right ear attachment or a BTE device configured for left ear attachment. Generally, a BTE device configured for right ear attachment has a substantially symmetrical appearance to a device of the same type configured for left ear attachment In system 100, ear-level device 110 is a device configured either for right ear attachment or for left ear attachment. In system 200, either one of ear-level device 210A and 210B is a device structured for right ear attachment, while the other is a device structured for left ear attachment.

[0046] BTE device 610 includes a behind-the-earmodule (BTE module) 611 and an in-the-ear module (ITE module) 612. ITE module 612 includes a custom or modular earmold. In one embodiment, the earmold is fully occluded to maximize audio efficiency. In another embodiment, the earmold is vented to remove undesirable low frequency sound.

[0047] FIG. 7 is a block diagram showing one embodiment of the circuit of ear-level device shown in FIG. 6 used as ear-level device 110. The exterior configuration of ear-level device 110 is of the type illustrated as BTE device 610.

[0048] Ear-level device 110 configured as BTE device 610 differs from ear-level device 110 configured as ITE/ITC/CIC devices 310A/310B/310C primarily in the physical arrangement of device components. By way of example, but not by way of limitation, FIG. 7 illustrates one embodiment in which BTE module 611 includes external microphone 420, processor 460, wireless transceiver 450, antenna 455, VOX circuit 430, and battery 480, and ITE module 612 includes ear canal microphone 440 and ear canal speaker 470. Other possible embodiments depend on size and other considerations that are known to those skilled in the art. In one embodiment, behind-ear portion 611 includes only battery 480 to maximize the duration of use of ear-level device 110 between battery replacements or recharges.

[0049] FIG. 8 is a block diagram showing another embodiment of the circuit of ear-level device shown in FIG. 6 used as each of ear-level devices 210A and 210B. The exterior configuration of each of ear-level devices 210A and 210B is of the type illustrated as BTE device 610.

[0050] Ear-level devices 210A/210B configured as BTE device 610 differ from ear-level devices 210A/210B configured as ITE/ITC/CIC devices 310A/310B/310C primarily in the physical arrangement of device components. By way of example, but not by way of limitation, FIG. 8 illustrates one embodiment of ear-level device 210A including a BTE module 611A and an ITE module 612A, and ear-level device 210B including a BTE module 611B and an ITE module 612B. BTE module 611A includes processor 560A, wireless transmitter 550A, antenna 555A, transmitter VOX circuit 530A, and battery 580A. ITE module 612A includes ear canal microphone 540. Behind-the-ear portion 611B includes external microphone 520, processor 560B, wireless receiver 550B, antenna 555B, receiver VOX circuit 530B, and battery 580B. ITE module 612B includes ear canal speaker 570. Other possible embodiments depend on size and other considerations that are known to those skilled in the art. In one embodiment, BTE modules 611A and 611B include only batteries 580A and 580B, respectively, to maximize the duration of use of ear-level devices 210A and 210B, respectively, between battery replacements or recharges.

[0051] FIG. 9 is a flow chart illustrating an embodiment of a method for audio communication using system 100 or system 200. The method provides for private, simultaneous two-way communication between a person and a remote device such as a computer, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a cellular phone, a walkie talkie, or a language translator. In this embodiment. VOX is used for power management. A VOX circuit includes a power switch connecting a battery to the portions of the circuit of system 100 or system 200 that are voice activated. The VOX is "on" when the voice-activated portions of the circuit are activated, i.e., when the power switch remains on. It is "started" by turning on the power switch, and "stopped" by turning off the power switch.

[0052] Steps 910-918 illustrate the process of detecting a sound from an ear canal and transmitting it to a remote device. A microphone disposed in an ear canal detects an occluded sound within the ear canal at 910. If the occluded sound is detected at 911, the VOX of the system is started at 912 if it is not already on. The occluded sound is enhanced at 914 with a voice recognition system that improves the signal-to-noise ratio, where the signal is the voice of a speech, and the noise is any sound other than the voice of the speech. The occluded sound is then converted to an outgoing radio signal at 916. The outgoing radio signal representing the occluded sound is transmitted to the remote device at 918.

[0053] Steps 920-928 illustrate the process of detecting a sound sent from the remote device and transmitting it to the ear canal. A radio receiver detects an incoming radio signal representing a remote sound from the remote device at 920. If the incoming radio signal is detected at 921, the VOX of the system is started at 922 if it is not already on. The incoming radio signal is converted to a first incoming audio signal (the remote sound) at 924. The first incoming audio signal is enhanced at 926 with a voice recognition system that improves the signal-to-noise ratio, where the signal is the voice from the remote device, and the noise is any sound other than the voice.

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A speaker disposed in the ear canal transmits the first incoming audio signal representing the sound from the remote device to the ear canal at 928.

[0054] Steps 930-938 illustrate the process of detecting a sound from the environment and transmit it to the ear canal. A microphone outside the ear canal detects an ambient sound at 930. If the ambient sound is detected at 931, the VOX of the system is started at 932 if it is not already on. The ambient sound is converted to a second incoming audio signal at 934. The second incoming audio signal is enhanced at 936 with a voice recognition system that improves the signal-to-noise ratio, where the signal is any voice included in the ambient sound, and the noise is any sound other than the voice. A speaker disposed in the ear canal transmits the second incoming audio signal representing to the ear canal at 928.

[0055] If no signal (sound or radio signal) is detected at 911, 921, and 931, the VOX is stopped at 940. In other words, if no sound is to be processed, the communication system is inactivated except for the portions that must be active for sound detection at all times. In one embodiment, the VOX is stopped after a predetermined period of time to avoid frequent activation/deactivation during a conversation.

[0056] Systems 100 and 200 are each a full duplex system capable of performing steps 910-918, 920-928, and 930-938 are performed in parallel and simultaneously. In an embodiment in which system 100 performs the method, ear-level device 110 performs steps 910-918, 924-928, and 930-938. If a signal is detected at 911, 921, or 931, VOX 430 activates at least portions of device 110 performing steps 914-918, 924-928, or 934-938, respectively. If no signal is detected at 911, 921, or 931, VOX 430 deactivates at least the portions of device 110 performing steps 914-918, 924-928, or 934-938, respectively.

[0057] In an embodiment in which system 200 performs the method, ear-level device 210A performs steps 910-918, and ear-level device 210B performs steps 920-928 and 930-930. If a signal is detected at 911, transmitter VOX 530A activates at least portions of device 210A performing steps 914-918. If a signal is detected at 921 or 931, receiver VOX 530B activates at least portions of device 210B performing steps 924-928 or 934-938, respectively. If no signal is detected at 911, transmitter VOX 530A deactivates at least the portions of device 210A performing steps 914-918. If no signal is detected at 921 or 931, receiver VOX 530B deactivates at least the portions of device 210B performing steps 924-928 or 934-938, respectively.

[0058] FIG. 10 is a flow chart illustrating another embodiment of the method for audio communication using system 100. In this embodiment, in addition to power management, the VOX is also used for gating, i.e., blanking or attenuating, sounds. The VOX circuit includes a power switch connecting a battery to the portions of the circuit of system 100 that are voice activated and gating modules capable of blanking or attenuating the occluded sound, the remote sound, and the ambient sound. Examples of such gating modules include occluded sound gating module 441, remote sound gating module 451, and ambient sound gating module 421, designated for the occluded sound, the remote sound, and the ambient sound, respectively.

[0059] Steps 1010-1019 illustrate the process of detecting the occluded sound from the ear canal and transmitting it to the remote device. The microphone disposed in the ear canal detects the occluded sound within the ear canal at 1010. If the occluded sound is detected at 1011, the VOX of the system is started to power the voice-activated portions of the circuit of system 100 at 1012 if they are not already powered. The VOX determines whether to start gating the occluded sound on at 1013. In one embodiment, the occluded sound is gated on when its amplitude exceeds a predetermined threshold and when the effective gating coordination rule permits. Examples of gating coordination rules are described above with respect to FIG. 4B. If the occluded sound is gated on at 1013, it is processed at 1014 by following steps that are identical or similar to steps 914-916-918. The occluded sound is gated off at 1019 if it has been gated on but is no longer detected. In one embodiment, the occluded sound is gated off after it is not detected for a predetermined period.

[0060] Steps 1020-1028 illustrate the process of detecting the remote sound sent from the remote device and transmitting it to the ear canal. A radio receiver detects the incoming radio signal representing the remote sound from the remote device at 1020. If the remote sound is detected at 1021, the VOX of the system is started to power the voice-activated portions of the circuit of system 100 at 1022 if they are not already powered. The VOX determines whether to start gating the remote sound on at 1023. In one embodiment, the remote sound is gated on when its amplitude exceeds a predetermined threshold and when the effective gating coordination rule permits. In another embodiment, the remote sound is gated on when the incoming radio signal is detected and when the effective gating coordination rules permits. If the remote sound is gated on at 1023, it is processed at 1024 by following steps that are identical or similar to steps 924-926-928. The remote sound is gated off at 1029 if it has been gated on but is no longer detected. In one embodiment, the remote sound is gated off after it is not detected for a predetermined period.

[0061] Steps 1030-1038 illustrate the process of detecting the ambient sound and transmit it to the ear canal. A microphone outside the ear canal detects the ambient sound at 1030. If the ambient sound is detected at 1031, the VOX of the system is started to power the voice-activated portions of the circuit of system 100 at 1032 if they are not already powered. The VOX determines whether to start gating the ambient sound on at 1033. In one embodiment, the ambient sound is gated on when its amplitude exceeds a predetermined threshold and when the effective gating coordination rule permits. If the

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ambient sound is gated on at 1033, it is processed at 1034 by following steps that are identical or similar to steps 934-936-938. The ambient sound is gated off at 1039 if it has been gated on but is no longer detected. In one embodiment, the ambient sound is gated off after it is not detected for a predetermined period.

[0062] If no signal (sound or radio signal) is detected at 1011,1021, and 1031, the VOX is stopped at 1040. In other words, if no sound is to be processed, the communication system is inactivated except for the portions that must be active for sound detection at all times, In one embodiment, the VOX is stopped after a predetermined period of time to avoid Sequent activation/deactivation during a conversation.

[0063] It is to be understood that the above detailed description is intended to be illustrative, and not restrictive. Other embodiments will be apparent to those of skill in the art upon reading and understanding the above description. For example, two ear-level devices 110, or a pair of devices each being similar to ear-level device 110, can be used to deliver a stereo sound. The scope of the invention should, therefore, be determined with reference to the appended claims.

Claims

1. A system adapted for use in at least one of a first ear (101A) having a first ear canal (303) and a second ear (101B) having a second ear canal (303) comprising:

   a first ear-level device (110, 210A) configured to be one of an in-the-ear (ITE) device and a behind-the-ear (BTE) device, the first ear-level device including:

   a first microphone (440) adapted for use in one of the first ear canal and the second ear canal, and adapted to receive an occluded sound (305) within the one of the first ear canal (303) and the second ear canal (303); and
   a wireless receiver, connected to a first processor (460), to receive a first wireless signal representing a remote sound;

   wherein the first processor (460) is connected to the first microphone (440) and is adapted to process the occluded sound (305) and the remote sound; the first ear level device further including:

   a speaker adapted for use in the one of the first ear canal (303) and the second ear canal (303) and adapted to transmit the processed remote sound to the one of the first ear canal (303) and the second ear canal (303);
   a wireless transmitter, connected to the first processor (460) and adapted to receive the processed occluded sound from the first processor (460) and transmit a second wireless signal representing the occluded sound;
   a first earmold housing at least the first microphone (440) and the speaker (470), at least a portion of the first earmold configured for placement in the one of the first ear canal (303) and the second ear canal (303); and
   a first voice operated exchange (VOX) circuit (430) connected to the first processor (460);
   the first VOX circuit (430) including:

   an occluded sound gating module (441) adapted to gate the occluded sound on, and to gate the remote sound off, when the occluded sound is detected while the remote sound is not detected; and
   a remote sound gating module (451) adapted to gate the remote sound on, and to gate the occluded sound off, when the incoming remote sound is detected while the occluded sound is not detected.

2. A system according to claim 1, wherein the first earmold houses the first microphone (440), the first processor (460) and the wireless transmitter, and wherein the first earmold is configured for use as the ITE device (310A).

3. A system according to claim 1, wherein the first ear level device (110,210A) comprises an ITE module including the first microphone (440) and a BTE module attached to the ITE module, the BTE module including the first processor and the wireless transmitter.

4. A system according to claim 1, wherein the first microphone (440) and the speaker (470) are implemented as one common device receiving the occluded sound and transmitting the processed remote sound.

5. A system according to claim 4, further comprising a second microphone (420) connected to the first processor (460), the second microphone (420) adapted to receive an ambient sound from outside the one of the first ear canal (303) and the second ear canal (303), and wherein:

   the first processor (460) further processes the ambient sound; and
   the speaker (470) is configured to transmit the processed remote and ambient sounds to the one of the first ear canal (303) and the second ear canal (303).

6. A system according to claim 5, wherein the first VOX

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circuit (430) comprises an ambient sound gating module (421), coupled to the first microphone (420), to blank or substantially attenuate the ambient sound.

7. A system according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the first processor (460) comprises a speech recognition module.

8. A system according to any of claims 4 - 7, wherein the first earmold houses the first microphone (440), the first processor (460), the wireless transmitter, the wireless receiver, and the speaker (470), and wherein the first earmold is configured for use as the ITE device.

9. A system according to claim 8, wherein the first earmold is configured for use as an in-the-canal (ITC) device (310B).

10. A system according to claim 9, wherein the first earmold is configured for use as a completely-in-the-canal (CIC) device (310C).

11. A system according to any of claims 4 - 7, wherein the first ear level device (110,210A) comprises an ITE module including the first microphone (440) and the speaker (470) and a BTE module attached to the ITE module and including the second microphone (420), the first processor (460), the wireless transmitter and the wireless receiver.

12. A system according to claim 11, wherein the BTE module comprises the first voice operated exchange (VOX) circuit (430).

13. A system according to claim 11, wherein the BTE module comprises a rechargeable battery (480).

14. A system according to any of claims 7 - 13, further comprising a remote device (190, 290) communicatively coupled to the wireless transmitter and the wireless receiver via a telemetry link (195, 295) providing for simultaneous bidirectional communication between the first ear-level device (110, 210A) and the remote device (190, 290).

15. A system according to claim 14, wherein the remote device (190, 290) comprises at least one of a computer, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a cellular phone, a walkie talkie, or a language translator.

16. A system according to claim 1, wherein the first microphone (440) is adapted for use in the first ear canal (303) and receives the occluded sound within the first ear canal (303), wherein the at least the portion of the first earmold is configured for placement in the first ear canal (303), and further comprising a second ear-level device (210B) including:

a wireless receiver to receive a first wireless signal representing a remote sound;
a second processor (260), connected to the wireless receiver, to convert the first wireless signal to the remote sound;
a speaker (470) connected to the second processor, the speaker adapted for use in the second ear canal (303) to transmit the remote sound to the second ear canal (303); and
a second earmold housing at least the speaker, at least a portion of the second earmold configured for placement in the second ear canal (303).

17. A system according to claim 16, wherein the second ear-level device (210B) further comprises a second microphone (420) connected to the second processor (460), the second microphone (420) adapted to receive an ambient sound from outside the second ear canal (303), and wherein:

the second processor (460) further processes the ambient sound; and
the speaker (470) is configured to transmit the remote sound and the processed ambient sound to the second ear canal (303).

18. A system according to any of claims 16 and 17, wherein the first ear-level device (110,210A) comprises the first voice operated exchange (VOX) circuit (430) connected to the first processor (460), and the second ear-level device (210B) further comprises a second VOX circuit (430) connected to the second processor.

19. A system according to any of claims 16 - 18, wherein the first processor and the second processor each comprise a speech recognition module.

20. A system according to any of claims 16 - 19, wherein the first and second ear-level devices are each the BTE device.

21. A system according to any of claims 16 - 19, wherein the first and second ear-level devices are each the ITE device.

22. A system according to claim 21, wherein the first and second ear-level devices are each an in-the-canal (ITC) device (310B).

23. A system according to claim 22, wherein the first and second ear-level devices are each a completely-in-the-canal (CIC) device (310C).

24. A system according to any of claims 16 - 23, further

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comprising a remote device (190,290) communicatively coupled to the first and second ear-level devices.

25. A system according to claim 24, wherein the remote device (190, 290) comprises at least one of a computer, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a cellular phone, a walkie talkie, or a language translator.

26. A method, comprising:

detecting an occluded sound using a first microphone adapted for use in an ear canal (303);
detecting an incoming radio signal representing a remote sound from a remote device (190, 290);
starting a voice operated exchange (VOX) housed within an ear-level communication device when at least one of the occluded sound and the incoming radio signal is detected if the VOX is not already on, the ear level communication device being one of an in-the-ear (ITE) device and a behind-the-ear (BTE) device;
gating the occluded sound on, and gating the remote sound off, when the occluded sound is detected while the incoming radio signal is not detected; and
gating the remote sound on, and gating the occluded sound off, when the incoming radio signal is detected while the occluded sound is not detected.

27. A method according to claim 26, wherein detecting the occluded sound comprises comparing an amplitude of the occluded sound to an occluded sound threshold, wherein the occluded sound is detected when the amplitude of the occluded sound exceeds the occluded sound threshold.

28. A method according to any of claims 26 and 27, wherein detecting the incoming radio signal comprises comparing an amplitude of the remote sound to a remote sound threshold, wherein the incoming radio signal is detected when the amplitude of the remote sound exceeds the remote sound threshold.

29. A method according to any of claims 26 - 28, further comprising detecting an ambient sound using a second microphone, and wherein starting the VOX comprises starting the VOX when at least one of the occluded sound, the incoming radio signal, and the ambient sound is detected if the VOX is not already on.

30. A method according to claim 29, further comprising gating the occluded sound off, gating the remote sound on, and gating the ambient sound off, when the incoming radio signal is detected while the occluded sound is not detected.

31. A method according to claim 29, further comprising gating the occluded sound off, gating the remote sound on, and gating the ambient sound on, when the incoming radio signal is detected while the occluded sound is not detected.

32. A method according to claim 29, further comprising gating the occluded sound on, gating the remote sound off, and gating the ambient sound off, when the occluded sound is detected while the incoming radio signal is not detected.

Patentansprüche

1. System, das zur Verwendung in einem ersten Ohr (101A) mit einem ersten Gehörgang (303) und/oder einem zweiten Ohr (101B) mit einem zweiten Gehörgang (303) eingerichtet ist, mit:

einer ersten ohrebenen- bzw. ohrseitigen Vorrichtung (110, 210A), die dafür eingerichtet ist, eine In-Ohr-Vorrichtung (ITE) oder eine Hinter-Ohr-Vorrichtung (BTE) zu sein, wobei die erste ohrseitige Vorrichtung beinhaltet:

ein erstes Mikrofon (440), das zur Verwendung in dem ersten Gehörgang oder dem zweiten Gehörgang eingerichtet ist, und das dafür eingerichtet ist, einen verdeckten Ton (305) in jeweils dem ersten Gehörgang (303) oder dem zweiten Gehörgang (303) zu empfangen; und
einen Drahtlosempfänger, der mit einem ersten Prozessor (460) verbunden ist, um ein erstes Drahtlossignal zu empfangen, welches einen Fernton darstellt;

wobei der erste Prozessor (460) mit dem ersten Mikrofon (440) verbunden und dafür eingerichtet ist, den verdeckten Ton (305) und den Fernton zu verarbeiten;
wobei die erste ohrseitige Vorrichtung ferner beinhaltet:

einen Lautsprecher, der zur Verwendung in dem jeweiligen ersten Gehörgang (303) oder dem zweiten Gehörgang (303) eingerichtet ist, und der dafür eingerichtet ist, den verarbeiteten Fernton an den jeweiligen ersten Gehörgang (303) oder den zweiten Gehörgang (303) zu übertragen;
einen Drahtlossender, der mit dem ersten Prozessor (460) verbunden und dafür eingerichtet ist, den verarbeiteten verdeckten Ton von dem ersten Prozessor (460) zu empfangen und ein zweites Drahtlossignal, das den verdeckten Ton darstellt, zu senden;

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ein erstes Ohrformgehäuse wenigstens bei dem ersten Mikrofon (440) und dem Lautsprecher (470), wobei wenigstens ein Teil der ersten Ohrform dafür eingerichtet ist, in dem ersten Gehörgang (303) oder dem zweiten Gehörgang (303) platziert zu werden; und
eine erste stimmbetriebene Austauschschaltung (VOX) (430), die mit dem ersten Prozessor (460) verbunden ist;

wobei die erste VOX-Schaltung (430) beinhaltet:

ein Ausblendmodul (441) für einen verdeckten Ton, das dafür eingerichtet ist, den verdeckten Ton einzublenden und den Fernton auszublenden, wenn der verdeckte Ton bestimmt wird, während der Fernton nicht bestimmt wird; und
ein Ausblendmodul (441) für einen Fernton, das dafür eingerichtet ist, den Fernton einzublenden und den verdeckten Ton auszublenden, wenn der eingehende Fernton bestimmt wird, während der verdeckte Ton nicht bestimmt wird.

2. System nach Anspruch 1, bei dem eine erste Ohrform das erste Mikrofon (440), den ersten Prozessor (460) und den Drahtlossender einschließt, und bei dem die erste Ohrform zur Verwendung als ITE-Vorrichtung (310) eingerichtet ist.

3. System nach Anspruch 1, bei dem die erste ohrseitige Vorrichtung (110, 210A) ein ITE-Modul, das das erste Mikrofon (440) beinhaltet, und ein zweites BTE-Modul, das an das ITE-Modul angebracht ist, beinhaltet, wobei das ITE-Modul den ersten Prozessor und den Drahtlossender beinhaltet.

4. System nach Anspruch 1, bei dem das erste Mikrofon (440) und der Lautsprecher (470) als eine gemeinsame Vorrichtung implementiert sind, die den verdeckten Ton empfängt und den verarbeiteten Fernton sendet.

5. System nach Anspruch 4, ferner mit einem zweiten Mikrofon (420), das mit dem ersten Prozessor (460) verbunden ist, wobei das zweite Mikrofon (420) dafür eingerichtet ist, einen ümgebungston von außerhalb das jeweiligen ersten Gehörgangs (303) oder des zweiten Gehörgangs (303) zu empfangen, und wobei:

der erste Prozessor (460) den Umgebungston ferner bzw. weiterverarbeitet; und
der Lautsprecher (470) dafür eingerichtet ist, den verarbeiteten Fern- und Umgebungston an den jeweiligen ersten Gehörgang (303) und zweiten Gehörgang (303) zu senden.

6. System nach Anspruch 5, bei dem die erste VOX-Schaltung (430) ein Umgebungstonausblendmodul (421) aufweist, das mit dem ersten Mikrofon (420) verbunden ist, um den Umgebungston auf Null zu setzen oder ihn wesentlich zu dämpfen.

7. System nach einem der vorstehenden Ansprüche, bei dem der erste Prozessor (460) ein Spracherkennungsmodul aufweist.

8. System nach einem der Ansprüche 4 bis 7, bei dem die erste Ohrform, das erste Mikrofon (440), den ersten Prozessor (460), den Drahtlossender, den Drahtlosempfänger und den Lautsprecher (470) einschließt, und bei dem die erste Ohrform dafür eingerichtet ist, als die ITE-Vorrichtung verwendet zu werden.

9. System nach Anspruch 8, bei dem die erste Ohrform zur Verwendung als In-Kanal-Vorrichtung (ITC) (310B) verwendet zu werden.

10. System nach Anspruch 9, bei dem die erste Ohrform zur Verwendung als vollständig-In-Kanal-Vorrichtung (CIC) (310C) verwendet zu werden.

11. System nach einem der Ansprüche 4 bis 7, bei dem die erste ohrseitige Vorrichtung (110, 210A) ein ITE-Modul aufweist, das das erste Mikrofon (440) und den Lautsprecher (470) und ein BTE-Modul, das an das ITE-Modul angebracht ist, und das das zweite Mikrofon (420), den ersten Prozessor (460), den drahtlos Sender und den drahtlos Empfänger beinhaltet, beinhaltet.

12. System nach Anspruch 11, bei dem das BTE-Modul die erste sprachbetriebene Austauschschaltung (VOX) (340) aufweist.

13. System nach Anspruch 11, bei dem das BTE-Modul eine widerauflabbare Batterie (480) aufweist.

14. System nach einem der Ansprüche 7 bis 13, das ferner eine entfernte Vorrichtung (190, 290) aufweist, die mit dem Drahtlossender und dem Drahtlosempfänger über eine Telemetrieverbindung (195, 295) in Kommunikationsverbindung steht, um eine gleichzeitige bi-direktionale Kommunikation zwischen der ersten ohrseitigen Vorrichtung (110, 210A) und der entfernten Vorrichtung (190, 290) bereitzustellen.

15. System nach Anspruch 14, bei dem die entfernte Vorrichtung (190, 290) wenigstens einen Computer, einen Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), ein Mobiltelefon, ein Walkie Talkie und/oder einen Sprachübersetzer aufweist.

16. System nach Anspruch 1, bei dem das erste Mikro-

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