



A Two-Stage Hybrid Protection Strategy for Active Distribution Networks with Switching Points

Mathias Pishgar*

Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Osaka Metropolitan University, Osaka, Japan

DESCRIPTION

Active distribution networks are becoming increasingly complex as renewable generation, energy storage, flexible loads and power-electronic interfaces are integrated into conventional electrical infrastructure. Unlike traditional distribution systems, active networks can experience changing power-flow directions, variable operating conditions and rapidly changing fault currents. Switching points add another layer of complexity because network topology can change according to operational requirements, maintenance activities, fault isolation or service restoration. These conditions require protection arrangements that remain dependable while adapting to different network configurations. A two-stage hybrid protection framework can address these challenges by combining complementary protection principles rather than depending on a single detection mechanism. The first stage can provide rapid identification of abnormal electrical conditions, while the second stage can perform more detailed discrimination and coordination before the appropriate switching or isolation action is completed. Such an arrangement can improve the balance between operating speed, selectivity, reliability and adaptability.

The first stage is primarily responsible for detecting disturbances as quickly as possible. Measurements such as current magnitude, voltage variation, phase angle, rate of change of current and power-flow direction can provide valuable information about abnormal conditions. Threshold-based indicators are computationally simple and can respond rapidly, making them suitable for initial fault recognition. However, fixed thresholds may become unreliable when distributed generation changes the magnitude and direction of fault currents. The first stage can therefore combine several electrical indicators to improve sensitivity while reducing unnecessary operations. The second stage provides additional discrimination. Once an abnormal condition is identified, the protection system can evaluate information from neighboring devices, switching-point status,

network topology and local operating conditions. This stage can distinguish faults from temporary disturbances such as voltage fluctuations, switching transients, load changes or renewable generation variability. By using additional information only after an initial indication is received, the framework can maintain rapid response without requiring every protection decision to rely on computationally intensive procedures.

Switching points are particularly important because opening or closing a network section changes the electrical relationships among buses, feeders and protection devices. A protection setting that is appropriate for one configuration may become unsuitable after the topology changes. The proposed framework can therefore associate protection logic with the current network configuration. Information from circuit breakers, sectionalizing switches and tie switches can be used to determine the active topology before the protection system selects an appropriate operating strategy. Communication can further improve coordination among protection devices. Intelligent electronic devices positioned at different points in the network can exchange measurements and operating states through a communication layer. When a fault occurs, local measurements can provide immediate evidence while neighboring information supports confirmation and location. This distributed decision process can reduce unnecessary disconnection of healthy sections and help preserve service for unaffected consumers.

Hybrid protection also offers advantages when inverter-based resources are connected to the distribution network. Conventional fault protection often assumes that fault currents are substantially higher than normal currents. Power electronic converters may limit fault current or alter its waveform, making traditional overcurrent methods less dependable. Voltage-based indicators, directional information, sequence components and rate-of-change quantities can complement current measurements. Combining these signals can improve fault recognition under operating conditions where a single electrical

Correspondence to: Mathias Pishgar, Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Osaka Metropolitan University, Osaka, Japan, Email: mathias.pishgar@omu.ac.jp

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indicator is insufficient. Reliability requires the framework to address communication failures as well. A protection system should not become ineffective simply because a communication link is unavailable. Local backup functions can remain active and provide a basic level of protection when coordinated information cannot be obtained. Once communication is restored, the system can return to its coordinated operating mode. This layered arrangement provides resilience while retaining the advantages of networked protection.

The two-stage architecture can also support faster restoration after a fault. After the abnormal section is isolated, switching points can be operated to reconnect healthy areas through

alternative paths when network conditions permit. Restoration decisions should consider voltage limits, line capacities, distributed generation output and the possibility of additional faults. By integrating protection and switching information, the system can move from fault detection to controlled service restoration more efficiently. Coordination between the stages is essential. If the first stage is excessively sensitive, unnecessary second-stage decisions may be triggered frequently. If it is too conservative, dangerous faults may remain undetected for too long. The second stage must also provide sufficiently fast confirmation to avoid undermining the benefits of rapid initial detection. Appropriate timing margins, adaptive thresholds and topology-aware decision rules can help maintain this balance.