Bitwise Gate Grouping Algorithm for Mixed Radix Conversion

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***Abstract*—A conversion driven design approach is described. It takes the outputs of mature and time-proven EDA synthesis tools to generate mixed radix datapath circuits in an endeavour to investigate the added relative advantages or disadvantages. The application is found in a wide variety and overlapping areas of circuit design. Grouping of signals is defined as a general approach to higher radix conversion driven design. A possible solution to the grouping problem exploiting the bitwise meaning of the signals is proposed, and an algorithm underpinning the approach is formally described and analysed.**

I. Introduction

Single-rail circuits, traditionally used and adopted in conventional EDA flows, have a number of drawbacks with respect to security applications, asynchronous design and network-on-chip communication. These types of circuits have no power balancing, no completion detection and prone to hazards; *m-of-n codes* are known and often cited as a solution [1].

M-of-n codes are an encoding scheme in which data is represented using n wires and where m of them are set to an active level (usually high). A protocol is used to separate data using dummy signals (spacers) and called *return-to-zero* (RTZ) or *spacer protocol*. M-of-n codes with RTZ protocol are switching-balanced, i.e. have data independent switching of signals. Circuits based on m-of-n codes, typically 1-of-4 or 1-of-2, over the years have been used in a number of areas of electronics. Some specific examples but certainly not exhaustive include: network-on-chip [2], FPGA fabric [3], low power circuits [4], security based circuits [5] and clockless circuits.

1-of-2 (dual-rail) is widely used due to its simple theory and component implementation. However, we can observe 1-of-4 has a halved switching factor compared to that of 1-of-2, which makes it highly desirable if the goal is to minimise switching power, variability[1] (e.g. cross talk) and at the wire-level to have a constant power consumption. For security based circuits, this means the benefit of constant power consumption will be still present but lowered. The encoding of binary data in dual-rail and 1-of-4 is shown in Table I.

Since the synthesis of 1-of-4 circuits is based on multi-valued logic (MVL) synthesis, it is a rather complex task with little tool support. A number of forward-thinking efforts dedicated to the MVL synthesis have been made in recent years, in particular [7] and [8], but an effective methodology for MVL design is still an open challenge.

[1]Submicron effects, without indepth silicon experimentation this added advantage cannot be validated, however it is an often cited benefit of radix based circuits [6] and this work has been conducted under this presumption.

Table I
Dual-rail and 1-of-4 encodings

multi-valued	single-rail (binary)	dual-rail	1-of-4
0	00	01 01	0001
1	01	01 10	0010
2	10	10 01	0100
3	11	10 10	1000
NULL	spacer (NULL)	00 00	0000

Prior to our work a review of the literature revealed a lack of a straightforward means or design flow to construct MVL circuits; on this premise this work was initiated. Our justification and reasoning for the research stems from the following facts:

- Moving away from the RTL design flow is frequently frowned upon by industry;
- Existing EDA tools are mature, known and time-proven;
- MVL synthesis methods employ computationally expensive algorithms instead of reusing the computational power of existing tools.

Having recognised a novel property of binary datapath circuits to facilitate conversion to a mixed radix circuit using a mixture of 1-of-4 and dual-rail, we now suggest a conversion driven design (CDD) approach. The goal of this approach is to achieve a tight integration with the conventional EDA flows with low algorithmic complexity.

As explained in Section II, signal grouping problem is a key point of the CDD. This article presents one of the approaches to the grouping which exploits bitwise meaning of the signals. The approach and the algorithm are described in the Section III. Section IV concludes the research and suggests further investigations of the problem.

II. Conversion basics

The problem addressed in this report can be characterised as follows. The original single-rail datapath is given as a structural HDL netlist; where datapath is defined as logic gates without registers or combinational loops. The goal of the conversion is to produce an equivalent higher radix circuit.

Since dual-rail is based on binary computations, there is a transparent correspondence between initial specification and the resultant circuit. Conversion to dual-rail can be performed using direct mapping of single-rail gates to dual-rail counterparts [9]. The method was implemented earlier in a set of

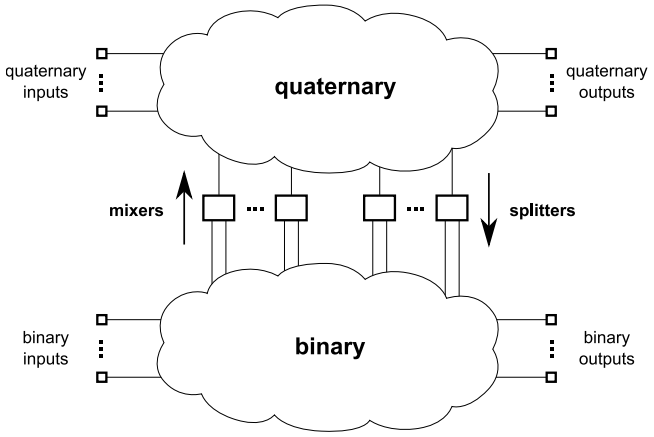

Figure 1. Mixed encoding in a converted combinational logic circuit.

software tools which interface to conventional EDA tools and form a coherent design flow [10].

Conversion from binary to multi-valued logic can employ grouping of data signals. However, a grouping of all signals in the circuit is not globally efficient, because the original structure usually causes restructuring and splitting of higher radix data. This leads to the use of mixed radix encoding, which means that the circuit becomes partially binary and partially multi-valued (heterogeneous) [8].

In terms of CDD, quaternary logic is of more interest compared to other types of multi-valued logic due to the simplicity of signal grouping by two bits. As it was mentioned in Section I, the motivation for this work implies the use of dual-rail and 1-of-4 encodings. However, in general the CDD approach is not based on m-of-n codes and can use different representations of mixed radix data. In this report we use terms *binary* and *quaternary* in order to put aside particular encodings and to generalise conversion algorithms.

A result of the conversion is shown in Figure 1 and consists of binary and quaternary blocks connected through a row of splitters and mixers, which perform signal conversion according to the selected encodings. A splitter is an element which divides quaternary signal into two binary ones. A mixer is an element which merges two binary signals into one quaternary.

A generic outline for the proposed conversion technology can be described as follows. The algorithm starts with "transferring" gates from binary block to quaternary block by grouping them into pairs. After all possible grouping is done the circuit can be mapped into a final netlist. A mapping is a replacement of technology independent (abstract) binary and quaternary components with real cells using specific encoding and library.

The way the gates are grouped determines the efficiency of the conversion, therefore the conversion problem corresponds directly to the gate grouping problem described in the following sections.

III. Grouping based on bitwise regularity

For $2n$-bit binary circuits there is an intuition to group higher and lower bits of each signal pair, as shown in Figure 2, to form a n-signal quaternary circuit. Certain gates which violate bitwise regularity of the original circuit will remain ungrouped forming a binary part of the resultant mixed radix circuit. An algorithm employing bitwise meaning of circuit signals is described as follows.

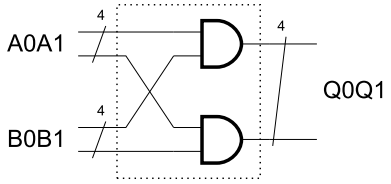

Figure 2. Bitwise gate grouping.

Let's consider a binary circuit, which perform calculations on 2-bit values. Assuming that separate calculations of both bits are relatively similar, one can determine for any gate in the lower bit part its equivalent in the higher bit part. A distinguished pair of such relative gates can form a quaternary gate. For n-bit binary circuits, if $n > 2$, gates can be grouped in similar way but merging even and odd bit parts of the circuit. Parts of the circuit that cannot be distributed between certain bit parts remain binary.

Although the intuition behind the bitwise approach is straight-forward, automatically distinguishing even and odd bit parts of the given netlist is computationally complex or, in certain cases, infeasible. For example, S-box circuits [11], [12] tend to reshuffle input data, thus input signals have no bitwise meaning. However, circuits displaying bitwise regularity can be converted using this approach if the information on the bitwise meaning of the input and output signals of the datapath is supplied, i.e. input and output ports are initially grouped into pairs. It is possible to automate port grouping using a naming convention.

The algorithm shown in Algorithm 1 implies bitwise gate grouping using given netlist and port grouping information. Here G is defined as a set of binary gates; initially it contains all gates of the original circuit. Each gate $g \in G$ has a preset $I(g) = \{i_0(g), \ldots, i_{n-1}(g)\}$, i.e. other gates or circuit ports connected to the inputs of g; n is the number of inputs of g. P is a set of grouped gates or circuit ports (pairs). Since port grouping specification is given, P initially contains paired circuit ports. Please note that the order of items in a bitwise pair is important.

Definition 1: Bitwise regularity ratio (BRR) υ for the given group of gates is a characteristic showing how many quaternary links the group can form w.r.t. the current state of P. In other words, for a bitwise group $p = \{g_1, g_2\}$ BRR can be calculated as follows:

$$\upsilon(p) = \frac{\upsilon_{out} + \sum_{j=1}^{n} \upsilon_j}{1+n}$$

where n is a number of gate inputs, $n = n(g_1) = n(g_2)$, and

Algorithm 1 Grouping based on bitwise regularity

```
all ports are assumed to be already grouped
repeat:
  υmax = 0
  N = size of G
  for i = 0 to N − 2:
    for j = i + 1 to N − 1:
      if g_i ∈ I(g_j) or g_j ∈
      I(g_i): skip this pair
      υ = regularity ratio for group {g_i, g_j}
      if υ > υmax:
        υmax = υ
        p_max = {g_i, g_j}
      end if
    end for
  end for
  if υmax > 0:
    add p_max to P
    remove gates in p_max from G
  end if
until there are no more pairs with u > 0
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$$\upsilon_{out} = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if there exist such } k \text{ and } \{e_1, e_2\} \in P \\ & \text{that } g_1 = i_k(e_1), g_2 = i_k(e_2) \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

$$\upsilon_{j} = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if there exist such } \{e_1, e_2\} \in P \\ & \text{that } e_1 = i_j(g_1), e_2 = i_j(g_2) \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

In these equations we assume that gates g_1 and g_2 are similar, i.e. they represent the same function and have equal number of inputs n. Considering similarity of bitwise circuit parts the gates corresponding to the same operation are also supposed to be similar. However, this constraint is not essential if we have a methodology of grouping non-similar gates.

BRR is used as estimation criterion in breadth-first search. Since each iteration of outer loop in Algorithm 1 adds new pair in P, BRRs of gate pairs change over time. If the search reveals several maximum regular pairs, the algorithm uses the first encountered one instead of searching through all possible varieties; this feature is treated as disadvantage which in certain cases can lead to inefficient results.

The described algorithm has polynomial complexity $O(N) = \frac{1}{2}N^2 \log_2 N$ not considering calculations of BRR, where N is the number of binary gates in the initial circuit. BRR calculation for one pair has a complexity $O(n, M) = nM + nM$, where n is an average number of gate inputs and M is a size of P at the moment. For $n = 2$ and linearly growing P we have total algorithmic complexity $O(N) = 2N^2 \log_2^2 N$. In terms of CDD this computational cost is rather expensive; VLSI design presumably requires conversion of datapath blocks with $N > 500$.

Example 1: Consider a 2-bit full adder shown in Figure 3. Initially P consists of pairs {A0, A1}, {B0, B1}, {Q0, Q1} due to the bitwise meaning of port signals. Ports C and CC have no pairs and remain dual-rail. Conversion using Algorithm 1 can be done in the following steps:

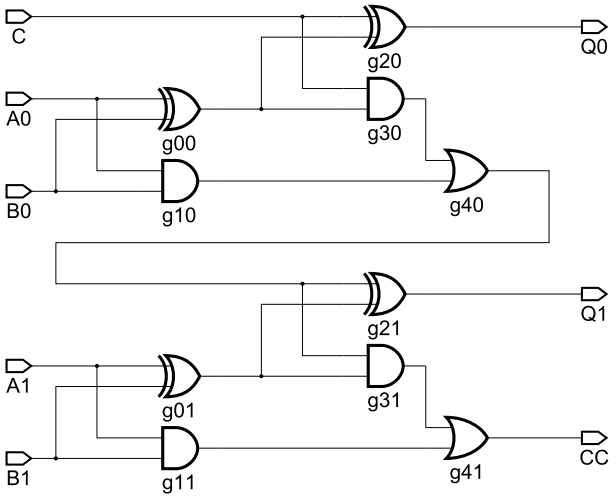

Figure 3. Example original single-rail circuit: 2-bit adder.

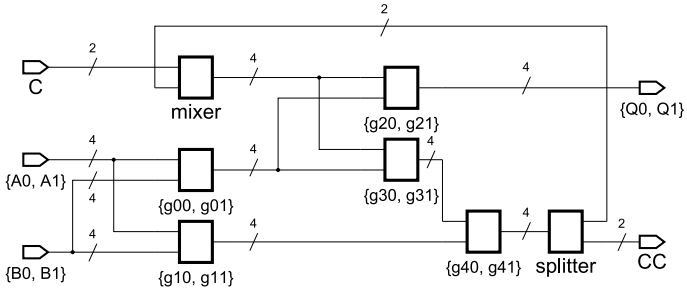

Figure 4. 2-bit adder converted using bitwise regularity approach; gates are shown as "black boxes".

Iter. 0 maximum regular pair is {g00, g01} – all inputs can form quaternary links with input ports.

Iter. 1 maximum regular pair is {g10, g11} – the same reason.

Iter. 2 {g20, g21} – it can form a quaternary connections with {g00, g01} and with output port {Q0, Q1}.

Iter. 3 {g30, g31} – it can form a quaternary connection with {g00, g01}.

Iter. 4 {g40, g41} – it can form a quaternary connection with {g10, g11}.

There are no unpaired gates remaining. Please note that each iteration here is the iteration of outer loop, which in its turn searches through $4N \log_2^2 N$ iterations. Resultant circuit after insertion of signal converters is shown in Figure 4.

The described example demonstrates another drawback of the bitwise approach: it can form combinational loops in the resultant circuit while the original circuit is free of combinational loops. Let's call these loops *"artificial" combinational loops*. The previous example has shown one of them.

Without special consideration and additional completion detection RTZ-aware components [13] cause a spacer deadlock in such loops. Consider the mixer in Figure 4. Assume that the whole circuit is initially reset to spacer value. Incoming data from the port C cannot pass through the mixer because a spacer from the looped wire (an internal carry) blocks it. On the other hand, if the mixer uses a protocol allowing the data to propagate regardless to spacers, the circuit will produce

invalid data output because a valid result is available only after the second pass through the cycle.

The problem of "artificial" combinational loops requires in-depth research. Few possible ways to solve the problem are suggested and described as follows:

1) Loops can be handled using additional latches. But at the moment the methodology for correct arbitration of the data in the described quaternary-based "artificial" cycles is not clear. Moreover the insertion of additional latches significantly complicates the converted circuit.
2) Loops can be discarded by transforming certain quaternary components back to binary. Such reverting can cause a large number of additional signal converters to be inserted. Or, if we restrict such insertions, it can cause reverting of other gates in a chain thus the greater part of the circuit will become binary. Both ways dramatically reduce the efficiency of the conversion.

IV. Conclusions

An algorithm supporting the CDD approach was described. The research revealed certain drawbacks, such as relatively high computational cost and the problem of "artificial" combinational loops.

Although a number disadvantages revealed in the approach, the grouping based on bitwise regularity shows several positive features:

- Port bits are not reshuffled with respect to bitwise meaning of input and output signals, which is useful from the large scale design view.
- Resultant circuits have a structure similar to the original, which allows using placement suggestions from the single-rail equivalent.

However the expediency of the further investigation of the bitwise grouping approach is questionable. Our research [14] revealed more efficient conversion algorithms.

All gate grouping algorithms work with technology independent (abstract) mixed radix components implying the component level of abstraction in addition to design level, gate level, and transistor level. Optimal component implementation is another important challenge in the conversion driven design approach.

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