Modular Verification of Timed Circuits Using Automatic Abstraction

Hao Zheng, Eric Mercer, *Member, IEEE*, and Chris Myers, *Member, IEEE*

Abstract—The major barrier that prevents the application of formal verification to large designs is state explosion. This paper presents a new approach for verification of timed circuits using automatic abstraction. This approach partitions the design into modules, each with constrained complexity. Before verification is applied to each individual module, irrelevant information to the behavior of the selected module is abstracted away. This approach converts a verification problem with big exponential complexity to a set of sub-problems, each with small exponential complexity. Experimental results are promising in that they indicate that our approach has the potential of completing much faster while using less memory than traditional flat analysis.

Index Terms—timed circuits, modular verification, abstraction.

I. INTRODUCTION

IN order to continue to produce circuits of increasing speed, designers are considering aggressive circuit styles such as self-resetting or delayed-reset domino circuits. These circuit styles can achieve a significant improvement in circuit speed as demonstrated by their use in a gigahertz research microprocessor (guTS) at IBM [1]. Designers are also considering asynchronous circuits due to their potential for higher performance and lower power consumption as demonstrated by the RAPPID instruction length decoder designed at Intel [2]. This design was 3 times faster while using only half the power of the synchronous design. The correctness of these *new timed circuit* styles is highly dependent upon their timing parameters, so extensive timing verification is necessary during the design process. Unfortunately, these new circuit styles cannot be efficiently and accurately verified using traditional static timing analysis methods. This lack of efficient analysis tools is one of the reasons for the lack of mainstream acceptance of these circuit styles.

In [3], a hierarchical approach to verification based on trace theory is proposed for the analysis of speed-independent circuits. In this approach, a model of a circuit at one level is regarded as the implementation of the model at the higher level and as the specification of the model at the lower level. The model at the higher level is more abstract and has less implementation details. A circuit is a correct implementation if it conforms to its specification. Trace theory has proved to be an excellent model for verifying circuits, and it is trace theory that this paper utilizes to justify its approach.

In [4], [5], trace theory is extended with a representation where time is modeled as multiples of a discretization constant. Unfortunately, the state space explodes if the delay ranges are large and the discretization constant is set small enough to ensure exact exploration of the state space. In [6], timed automata are introduced to model the behavior of real-time systems. It provides a simple and general way to annotate state-transition graphs with timing constraints using a finite number of real-valued *clocks*. Although this approach eliminates the need to discretize time, the number of timed states is dependent on the size of the delay ranges and number of concurrently enabled clocks which can quickly explode for even relatively small systems. Representing possible clock values with convex polygons, or zones, [7] alleviates this problem in practice. The zone based representation is the one used by most modern timing verifiers such as ATACS [8]–[10], VINAS-P [11], ORBITS [12], [13], KRONOS [14], and UPPAAL [15]. One feature common to these tools is that they require state space exploration which can explode even for modest size examples.

There do exist many methods and approaches to address the state explosion problem. In [16], [17], the state space of a transition system is represented symbolically using Bryant's *ordered binary decision diagram* [18]. The symbolic approach has been shown to be capable of representing systems with more than 10^{20} states. There has been some success at the verification of timed systems using binary decision diagrams [19], [20]. Asynchronous systems consist of concurrent processes without a global synchronizing clock. State explosion is particularly serious for asynchronous systems because all possible interleavings among concurrently executed events need to be explored. A number of techniques have been proposed to minimize the number of interleavings that are explored, including stubborn sets [21], partial orders [22], and unfoldings [23]. There has also been some success at applying partial orders to formal timing verification [11], [24]. Although the approaches described above have been successful in verifying systems with increased sizes, many realistic systems are still too large to be handled.

In practice, circuits often have inherent modular structures. Compositional verification methods based on assume-guarantee reasoning [25]–[27], exploit the modular structure of circuits. Verifying a circuit component in this approach necessitates behavioral assumptions on connecting components to reduce complexity in the model. The assumptions must later be discharged as part of the correctness proof for connecting

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