Design Document

**Interleaving in Amateur Radio Satellite Telemetry**

Submitted To:

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Senior Design Project I and II

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**Executive Summary**

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# Problem

## Overall Objectives

It has been shown that channel coding yields a threefold reliability advantage over amateur packet radio satellite telemetry links that do not use channel coding (McGuire, 2007). This senior design project aims to demonstrate how interleaving techniques can further improve the reliability of these telemetry links. Consequently, this senior design project advocates for improved robustness in amateur packet radio communication systems, specifically in those systems dealing with satellite telemetry. Amateur packet radio satellite telemetry is often unidirectional and does not benefit from packet re-transmission via the AX.25 data link layer protocol like in most other amateur packet radio communications (McGuire, 2006). If even one bit of the AX.25 telemetry packet is received in error, the entire packet is discarded and cannot be re-transmitted (Karn, 1994). This means that beacon signals from the amateur satellites must be transmitted with enough power to ensure that the embedded telemetry packet is received without error (Goode, 1984). Error correction via channel coding and interleaving could drastically improve both network reliability and power-efficiency. This cuts the cost of satellite construction and makes amateur telemetry satellites more accessible to amateur radio operators by “reducing size, cost, and complexity of the ground antennas“ (Karn, 2011).

The ultimate goal of this senior design project is to encourage amateur packet radio satellite designers to use the FX.25 protocol, which was developed to extend AX.25 with forward error correction (FEC) capabilities. AX.25 is widely used in amateur radio satellite communications, but some amateur radio operators argue that AX.25 is not robust enough because it lacks both data compression and error correction technologies like FEC (Karn, 1994). The FX.25 protocol currently addresses the error correction part. FX.25 has received interest by at least one design team of an amateur telemetry satellites, but it has not gained a lot of support by the amateur radio community as a whole. According to the Tucson Amateur Packet Radio (TAPR) archives, one amateur radio operator thinks the FX.25 frame is too lengthy and that the protocol itself is too complicated to implement, another would like FX.25 to have embedded support for several terminal node controllers and associated software, and another questions whether the threefold reliability advantage over AX.25 is significant enough. As amateur radio continues to transition to software-based technologies (Lee, 2012), we believe the first three concerns soon will no longer be valid. This senior design project hopes to tackle the fourth concern by exhaustively demonstrating how interleaving technologies can further improve FX.25. We believe that FX.25 can establish a robust standard for amateur packet radio satellite communications going forward.

**EVERYTHING FOLLOWING THIS SECTION (1.1) MUST BE MODERATELY MODIFIED TO REFLECT THE NEW OVERALL OBJECTIVE (EFFECTIVE: 11/01/13). PLEASE BE AWARE OF THIS WHEN READING THE REST OF THIS DOCUMENT.**

## Historical and Economic Perspective

During the last century, the combined efforts of missile and wireless communication technology has brought us what we now call satellites. The development done in wireless communication and controls engineering has enabled engineers to use satellites for a wide range of applications, and essentially provides an economical advantage compare to the conventional wired communication. The use of satellites has been the essence of several innovative technologies in less than 30 years, satellites have been applied for relaying digital information across the earth and also has been used for to provide information directly an individual using appropriate antennas in term of size. Those two applications of the satellites accounted for a total of 35 billion dollars in 2000 [1], and is a number that is still increasing due to the numerous applications of digital communications.

Amateur Radio operators have also followed the trend of satellites for communication purposes. Although their vantage point in terms of bandwidth and also orbits, Amateur Radio operators have used Low-Earth Orbiting satellites to develop several applications which consist of the Slow-Scan Television, Automatic Packet Reporting System for weather reports and telemetry and several others organized by Radio Amateur Satellite Corporation (AMSAT.) The communication between the satellite and the earth stations is established through the modulation of a carrier signal with the desired digital data, several modulation schemes have researched, the dominant ones are Amplitude Shift Keying (ASK), Frequency Shift Keying (FSK) and Phase Shift Keying (PSK), where in each of the those modulation schemes, the amplitude A, frequency f and phase \theta are modulated to represent the digital information. PSK in particular has shown to be the most effective modulation scheme for establishing communication with spatial vehicles such as satellites. So much so that the Global Positioning System (GPS) also uses a sophisticated Phase Shift Keying technique.

With the benefits of PSK modulations, Amateur Radio operators have taken advantage of its robustness against the effects of Doppler shift. Since PSK has been a fairly new modulation scheme, in contrast to ASK and FSK, most Amateur Radio operators do not own hardware compatible for communication. One of the designs that has allowed the implementation of BPSK communication in early 90’s is described by John Magliacane who in 1993 implemented a 1200bit/s modem for PACSAT communication [3]. The modem was a breakthrough design for Amateur Radio operators which has encouraged radio operators, including the PGC to implement modern satellite communication using BPSK modulation scheme.

Regarding the cost of owning an active amateur satellite station is assumed to be an expensive but on the other hand, it could be affordable to be equipped with a station. A current operator Steve Primer has published the adequacy of having a radio satellite station and listed the cost of setting such station to range between $150-3000, where the cost would include Yagi antennas, an azimuth and elevator rotator (AZ\EL Rotator) which is an essential equipment to follow the position of the satellite, a VHF/UHF transceiver, and finally a receiver amplifier and pre-amplifier [2].

With the commitment of several operators, Amateur Radio satellites have played a very important role to the community during natural disasters. In the events of disasters similar to Katrina in Louisiana and Sandy in East Coast, Amateur Radio operators have benevolently used their station to communicate distress messages.

## Candidate Solutions

The LEO-AMSAT’s that we are interested in communicating with are also known as packet satellites (PACSAT). This is because they use the AX.25 protocol which transmits packets of data. Packets are also known as frames and each frame consists of several fields. These fields include flag, control, and address information in addition to the data to be sent. Since Terminal Node Controllers (TNC) are responsible for AX.25 encoding and already contain a modem within, we originally considered an FPGA implementation of a TNC. However, the complexity and depth of the AX.25 protocol in addition to a modem design wash determined to be too ambitious given the time constraint of two semesters. Instead, we simply chose to design an FPGA modem that would interface with the TNC and transceiver.

### BPSK modulator

The design of any modem requires two fundamental components, a modulator and demodulator. The modulator is responsible for taking baseband data and either source encoding it, or translating it to passband levels necessary for radio transmission. In the history of digital communication, there are many line codes that have been developed. Each of them has their own benefits as far as bandwidth requirements or self-clocking characteristics. Listed below are just a few of the more common line codes typically encountered in a communication systems:

1. Return to Zero (RZ)
2. Non-Return to Zero (NRZ)
3. Non-Return to Zero-Inverted (NRZI)
4. Bi-phase Manchester

Our modem was designed to interface between the TNC and the transceiver. This means our modem will only perform baseband modulation. From the TNC, the modem receives AX.25 data streams and further processes them using a bi-phase Manchester encoder. The benefit of bi-phase Manchester code is that it is self-clocking which makes timing synchronization easier on the receiving end.

### BPSK demodulator

The demodulator is responsible for providing either coherent or non-coherent demodulation. Coherent demodulators require phase synchronization between the received signal and the locally generated oscillator. Conversely, Non-coherent demodulation does not require synchronization and makes no attempt to estimate the phase of the received signal. The advantage of non-coherent modulation is that it does not require additional hardware like phase-locked loops which are used to lock onto the incoming carrier phase. However, the LEO-AMSAT’s we are interested in communicating with use BPSK for downlink and thus requires the design of a coherent demodulator.

The successful extraction of information from a received signal in a coherent demodulator requires both carrier and timing synchronization. Figure 1 illustrates the architecture of a typical coherent demodulator.



Figure 1. Received waveform takes two paths. First path extracts carrier for coherent demodulation and the second path recovers timing information. This architecture is based on the optimum binary receiver

The received signal from the transceiver is first processed by a band pass filter to remove as much noise as possible and then sent to the carrier recovery circuit. Recovering the carrier is done in one of two ways, the squaring loop or the Costas loop. Each method utilizes phase-lock concepts and has its own advantages and disadvantages in terms of complexity and performance.

### Carrier Recovery using Squaring Loop

The squaring loop is a popular choice for coherent demodulation of BPSK waveforms. It’s mathematically easy to analyze and its hardware implementation is not as complex as the Costas loop. As the name implies, the received signal is squared to remove any phase offsets and then processed by a bandpass filter to remove as much noise as possible. After the band pass filter, the signal is fed to a phase-lock loop (PLL) for phase and frequency tracking. Once the output of the voltage controlled oscillator (VCO) is locked in phase and frequency with the received signal, its frequency is divided by two. The resulting carrier is fed back to the mixer where it is mixed with the received waveform and the timing can be recovered. The operation of the squaring is shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Squaring loop used for carrier recovery in the coherent demodulator. The Phase-Lock Loop utilizes feedback to track and lock onto in the received waveforms suppressed carrier

### Carrier Recovery using Costas Loop

Another method for carrier recovery was proposed by John P. Costas in his 1957 paper, *Synchronous Communication*. Unlike the squaring loop whose only purpose is suppressed carrier reconstruction, the Costas loop is capable of synchronous data detection in addition to suppressed carrier reconstruction. One of its disadvantages is its mathematical complexity compared to the squaring loop, but in terms of hardware components needed for complete coherent demodulation, they both require approximately the same amount.



Figure 3. Costas loop used for suppressed carrier reconstruction as well as synchronous data detection.

Coherent modulation utilizing the Costas loop would require one band-pass filter, three low-pass filters, three multipliers and a VCO. Likewise, the squaring loop would also require one band-pass filter, three multipliers (including the squarer) and a VCO. Instead of three low-pass filters needed by the Costas, the squaring loop only requires two. Note also that the squaring loop requires a flip-flop for frequency division, but with today’s FPGA’s, a single flip-flop is negligible. The decision for implementing the squaring loop versus the Costas loop will ultimately be decided by their tracking and locking performance in the presence of noise and Doppler shifts (See section 1.5, Major Design and Implementation Challenges).

### Timing Recovery

### BFSK Modulation

The BFSK modem abides by the Bell 202 standard which uses frequencies of 1200 Hz for mark (*b0*) and 2200 Hz for space (*b1*). Following this protocol, the phase of the signal can implemented either coherently or non-coherently. A coherent modulation (continuous phase modulation) implies that the phases of the two signals are always equal, which inherently prevents discontinuous jumps between a Mark and Space. Conversely, non-coherent FSK modulates the two signal waveforms without any effort to match the two signals’ phase, hence the modulated signal may experience discontinuous jumps in phase.

Non-coherent FSK modulation is simpler to implement and is commonly used in several modems. The Bell 202 modem for BFSK modulation is quite inefficient due to the frequency deviation and the ratio between the data rate and carrier frequency. The frequencies selected to represented two symbols result in a signal space that is difficult to optimize since the frequencies are not orthogonal. The minimum frequency separation is denoted in equations (1) and (2) below (Nguyen, 2009).

As previously mentioned, coherent modulation requires continuous phase of the modulated signal, which can involve complicated hardware or algorithms. As a result, it is common to ignore the phase of the signals and directly modulate the two signals. This implies that the phase modulated signal will be subject of random variations. The non-coherent modulator can be implemented using the two sinusoidal wave generators (sine functions) and a multiplexer controlled by the input data *m(t)*. Switching between the frequencies will generate a BFSK waveform with a bit period equal to the periodicity of the switches.



Figure 4. BFSK modulator used in non-coherent modulators. The data *m(t)* controls the output of the multiplexer at data’s baud rate.

### BFSK Demodulation

In the case of the coherent modulator, implementing a continuous phase BFSK waveform may involve complicated elements to track the phase; however, a continuous phase waveform or (glitch free) will enhance error performance compared to the non-coherent modulator. It is very common to implement the coherent modulator using a Voltage Controlled Oscillator (VCO) to output the sinusoidal corresponding to the Mark and Space. Since the VCO is dictated by Eq. only one sinusoidal wave generator is necessary to create two signals.



Figure 5. Coherent modulator for BFSK. The data *m(t)* controls the output of the VCO through Eq.

Non-Coherent Demodulation

Similar to the modulator, the demodulator can be classed into a coherent modulator and a non-coherent demodulator. In the coherent demodulator, the phases of the modulated signal is either known or is extracted prior to demodulation. Several methods are used to extract the phase of the modulated waveform, such as the phase-lock loops or more complicated systems as illustrated in Figure 6

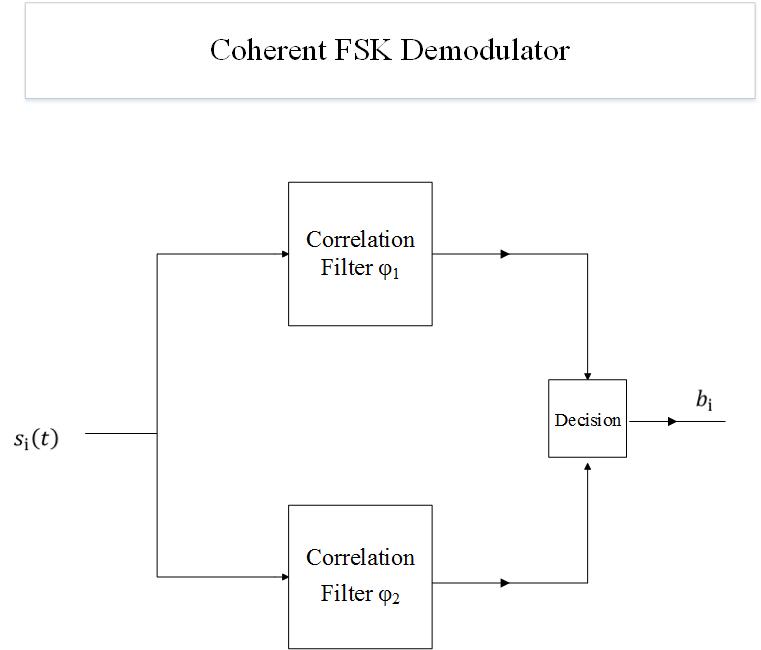


Figure 6. Coherent modulator for BFSK. The data *m(t)* controls the output of the VCO through Eq.

The coherent demodulator uses two parallel branches for matching the Space and Mark unto the two orthonormal basis functions. Finally, using the appropriate threshold, the bits can recovered using Maximum Likelihood. The correlation filters are designed to be orthonormal to each other, and at the same frequency corresponding the Mark and Space.

## Proposed Solution Concept

In order to provide Temple University’s radio club with a robust and reliable modem, it must be able to be interfaced with a transceiver and the TNC. This requires a single analog to digital converter for received signals and a single digital to analog converter for transmitted signals. Figure 7. Illustrates the how the 1200pbs modem fits into the system level model



Figure 7. System level diagram showing how the 1200bps modem interfaces with the transceiver and TNC.

The Xilinx Spartan-6 LX-9 Microboard was selected for our modem implementation because of its good performance and low cost. It also provides the two Pmod expansion ports needed for interfacing Digilent’s 12-bit AD1 ADC and 12-bit DA2 DAC.

It was determined through simulation that optimum coherent demodulation was achieved from the use of a (squaring or Costas) loop. The result is a modem design that incorporates a bi-phase Manchester encoder for baseband modulation of AX.25 data streams, and a (squaring or Costas) loop for coherent demodulation of BPSK signals.

## Major Design and Implementation Challenges

The biggest design challenge associated with this project is the development of a carrier reconstruction circuit that is capable of mitigating the effects of Doppler shift. The relative motion of satellites in orbit around earth with respect to the ground station can cause the received frequency to appear 20 kHz above or below its nominal downlink frequency. In John A. Maglicane’s 1993 design, he derived a control signal from the carrier recovery circuit that simulated a person tuning the transceivers frequency control button. In our design, Doppler shift correction will be done autonomously through the use of a type II PLL.

The challenge is designing a stable control loop that minimizes time to lock and inter-symbol interference but still has a narrow enough bandwidth to reduce noise and the bit error rate. Since the PLL is an inherently non-linear system, it must be linearized in terms of the phase of the received signal. This problem becomes more challenging if the Costas loop is implemented because the arm filters much be matched perfectly. However, the advantage of an all digital Costas loop is that designing two identical filters is much easier than if it were done with analog components.

## Implications of Project Success

The successful design of a 1200bps modem will enable Temple University Amateur Radio club to communicate with LEO-AMSATs that use FSK for uplink and BPSK for downlink. Although software is available that will perform the modem functions, an FPGA modem demonstrates the potential for high speed processing in re-programmable logic circuitry.

# DESIGN REQUIREMENTS

## Functional Design Constraints

### Deriving the worst-case BER requirement

This modem is designed to communicate with any low-Earth orbiting (LEO) Amateur Radio satellite transmitting a 1200 bps BPSK downlink and receiving a 1200 bps AFSK uplink. Examples of LEO satellites capable of communicating with this downlink and uplink include the Fuji-Oscar 29 (FO-29) satellite and the AMRAD Oscar 16 (AO-16) satellite. Particularly, the FO-29 satellite transmits telemetry reports in a group packet. A group packet consists of two consecutively transmitted data packets. Each data packet is structured in its own unnumbered information (UI) frame as specified in the AX.25 data link layer protocol.

This modem is designed to accurately receive at least ten telemetry reports when the FO-29 satellite passes by. Hence, the modem is designed to receive at least ten group packets without error when the FO-29 satellite passes by. Each group packet consists of 186 bytes of telemetry data. Since each group packet consists of two separate, consecutive data packets, and since each data packet in its own UI frame, a total of 226 bytes are transmitted for one full telemetry report.

Assuming that we know the total amount of received group packets (FR) during a satellite pass and assuming that we know the amount of group packets (FC) we desire to accurately receive during the satellite pass, we can find the necessary worst-case BER () for the Modem:

where N is the number of consecutive bits to receive without error. This formula was realized using the following packet error rate equation ( and solving for :

=

As with any low-earth orbiting satellite, the FO-29 satellite passes will be between 6 and 18 minutes in duration. For finding the worst-case BER performance, let us consider the worst case of only 6 minutes before the satellite passes out of range. During a satellite pass, we aim to accurately receive at least ten telemetry reports from the satellite. Hence, during a satellite pass, we aim to accurately receive at least ten group packets. Each group packet consists of two consecutively transmitted data packets and each of these data packets are wrapped in its own UI frame. Put differently, the group packet is wrapped in a UI frame pair. There are 1808 bits (i.e. 226 bytes \* 8 bits/byte) per UI frame pair. At a data rate of 1200 bps, the modem is expected to receive 1.507 UI frame pairs per second. Hence, over the period of six minutes, the modem is expected to receive 542.4 UI frame pairs, or conservatively, 542 UI frame pairs. This information yields the worst-case BER requirement for this modem:

### Modem-to-Radio interface

The ADC and DAC of the modem saturate at the supply voltage of the FPGA board. The supply voltage of the FPGA board is 3.3 V, hence the modem will transmit and receive audio signals with voltage amplitudes no greater than 3.3 V p-p.

The modem expects 1200 bps BPSK signals at its receiver. Additionally, it will transmit 1200 bps AFSK signals at its transmitter. The modem is prepared to receive BPSK signals that are effected by Doppler shift. Consequently, the modem will be able to control a radio transceiver’s Doppler-correction circuitry via the “Up” and “Down” buttons.

The modem will interface with a radio as follows:

* Microphone audio
* Receive audio
* Up (AFC)
* Down (AFC)
* Push-to-talk (PTT)
* Ground (PTT and audio common)

### Modem-to-TNC interface

The Modem will replace the on-board modem of a terminal node controller (TNC). The Modem will interface with the TNC via its modem disconnect header. Specifically, the following five pins of the modem disconnect header will be used by the Modem:

* Carrier Detect Output
* Transmitter clock (16x) Input
* Receive Data Input
* Transmit Data Output
* Ground

At the modem disconnect header of the TNC, the Modem will send and receive signals at standard TTL interface levels. A ribbon cable for 20-pin headers will be linked between the Modem and the modem disconnect header.

## Non-Functional Design Constraints

# APPROACH

# EVALUATION

# SUMMARY AND FUTURE WORK

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1. Product SPECIFICATION
2. SOME INTERESTING RELEVANT DERIVATION