American International University- Bangladesh
Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering
EEE 3120: Digital Electronic Circuits Laboratory

Title:Design of a flash Analog to Digital Converter

Introduction:

Flash analog-to-digital converters, also known as parallel ADCs, are the fastest way to convert an analog signal to a digital signal. Flash ADCs are ideal for applications requiring very large bandwidth, but they consume more power than other ADC architectures and are generally limited to 8-bit resolution. This tutorial will discuss flash converters and compare them with other converter types.

In this experiment, students will learn how flash ADC works by implementing a 2 bit flash ADC.

Theory and Methodology:

Flash converters are extremely fast compared to many other types of ADCs which usually narrow in on the "correct" answer over a series of stages. Compared to these, a Flash converter is also quite simple and, apart from the analog comparators, only requires logic for the final conversion to binary.

For best accuracy often a sample-and-hold circuit is inserted in front of the ADC input. This is needed for many ADC types (like successive approximation ADC), but for Flash ADCs there is no real need for this, because the comparators are the sampling devices.

A Flash converter requires a huge number of comparators compared to other ADCs, especially as the precision increases. A Flash converter requires 2^n-1comparators for an *n*-bit conversion. The size, power consumption and cost of all those comparators make Flash converters generally impractical for precisions much greater than 8 bits (255 comparators). In place of these comparators, most other ADCs substitute more complex logic and/or analog circuitry which can be scaled more easily for increased precision.

Implementation:

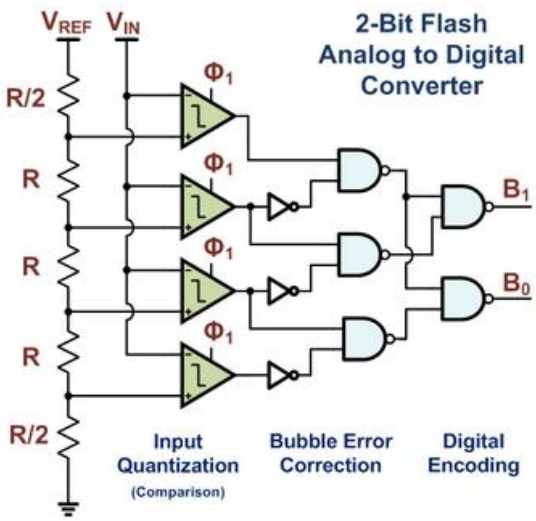


Fig1: A 2-bit Flash ADC Example Implementation with Bubble Error Correction and Digital Encoding

Flash ADCs have been implemented in many technologies, varying from silicon based bipolar (BJT) and complementary metal oxide FETs (CMOS) technologies to rarely used III-V technologies. Often this type of ADC is used as a first medium sized analog circuit verification.

The earliest implementations consisted of a reference ladder of well matched resistors connected to a reference voltage. Each tap at the resistor ladder is used for one comparator, possibly preceded by an amplification stage, and thus generates a logical '0' or '1' depending if the measured voltage is above or below the reference voltage of the resistor tap. The reason to add an amplifier is twofold: it amplifies the voltage difference and therefore suppresses the comparator offset, and the kick-back noise of the comparator towards the reference ladder is also strongly suppressed. Typically designs from 4-bit up to 6-bit, and sometimes 7-bit are produced.

Designs with power-saving capacitive reference ladders have been demonstrated. In addition to clocking the comparator(s), these systems also sample the reference value on the input stage. As the sampling is done at a very high rate, the leakage of the capacitors is negligible.

Recently, offset calibration has been introduced into flash ADC designs. Instead of high precision analog circuits (which increase component size to suppress variation) comparators with relatively large offset errors are measured and adjusted. A test signal is applied and the offset of each comparator is calibrated to below the LSB size of the ADC.

Another improvement to many flash ADCs is the inclusion of digital error correction. When the ADC is used in harsh environments or constructed from very small integrated circuit processes, there is a heightened risk a single comparator will randomly change state resulting in a wrong code. Bubble error correction is a digital correction mechanism that will prevent a comparator that has, for example, tripped high from reporting logic high if it is surrounded by comparators that are reporting logic low.

This circuit is the simplest to understand. It is constructed from a series of comparators, each one comparing the input signal to a unique reference voltage. The comparator outputs connect to the inputs of a priority encoder circuit, which then produces a binary output. The following illustration shows a Flash ADC 2-bit circuit:

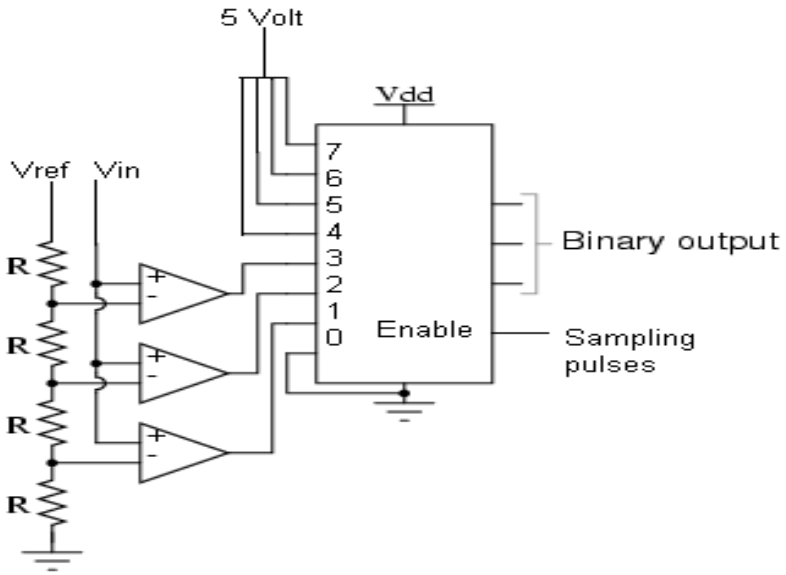
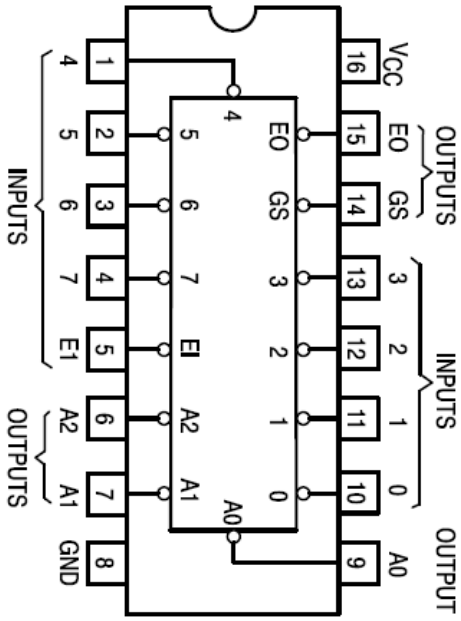


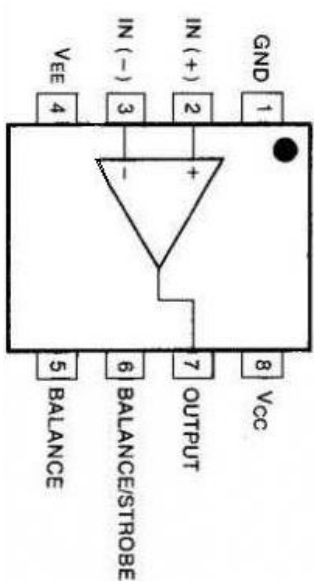
Fig 2: A 2 bit flash ADC.

An N bit flash ADC requires 2N – 1 number of comparators.

Vref is a stable reference voltage provided by a precision voltage regulator as part of the converter circuit, not shown in the schematic. As the analog input voltage exceeds the reference voltage at each comparator, the comparator outputs will sequentially saturate to a high state. The priority encoder generates a binary number based on the highest-order active input, ignoring all other active inputs.

IC Pin Configurations:





Pre-Lab Homework:

Students must study flash Analog to Digital Converter; perform simulation of the circuits mentioned in the lab manual using PSPICE and MUST present the simulation results to the instructor before the start of the experiment.

Apparatus:

1) Trainer Board :
2) Op-Amp : IC741
3) Resistors : 1KΩ
4) 8 to 3 bit priority encoder : IC74148

Precautions:

Have your instructor check all your connections after you are done setting up the circuit and make sure that you apply only enough voltage to turn on the chip, otherwise it may get damaged.

Experimental Procedure:

Construct a 2 bit flash ADC. Document the output values for different input values. Draw the output wave shapes for different inputs.

Simulation and Measurement:

Compare the simulation results with your experimental data and comment on the differences (if any).

Discussion:

Interpret the data/findings and determine the extent to which the experiment was successful in complying with the goal that was initially set. Discuss any mistake you might have made while conducting the investigation and describe ways the study could have been improved.

Questions with answers for report writing:

Draw the wave shapes for binary output lines against analog input and sampling pulses.

Reference(s):

1. Thomas L. Floyd, *Digital Fundamentals*, 9th Edition, 2006, Prentice Hall.