An adaptive low dimensional quasi-Newton Sum of Functions Optimizer

Abstract

We present an algorithm for minimizing a sum of functions that combines the computational efficiency of stochastic gradient descent (SGD) with powerful second order curvature information accessible by quasi-Newton methods. We achieve this unification of disparate approaches by maintaining an independent Hessian approximation for each contributing function in the sum. Moreover, we maintain computational tractability even for high dimensional optimization problems, by developing a novel adaptive scheme to store and manipulate these quadratic approximations in a shared, time evolving low dimensional subspace, determined by the recent history of gradient evaluations. This algorithm contrasts with earlier stochastic second order techniques, which treat the Hessian of each contributing function merely as a noisy approximation to the full Hessian, rather than as a target for direct estimation. Our approach reaps the benefits of both SGD and quasi-Newton methods; each update step requires only a single subfunction evaluation (like SGD but unlike previous stochastic second order methods), while little to no adjustment of hyperparameters is required (as is typical for quasi-Newton methods but not for SGD). For convex problems the convergence rate of the proposed technique is at least linear. We demonstrate improved convergence on four diverse optimization problems.

1. Introduction

A common problem in computer science is to find a vector $\mathbf{x}^* \in \mathcal{R}^M$ which minimizes a function $F(\mathbf{x})$, where $F(\mathbf{x})$ is a sum of N computationally cheaper differentiable subfunctions $f_i(\mathbf{x})$,

$$F(\mathbf{x}) = \sum_{i=1}^{N} f_i(\mathbf{x}), \tag{1}$$

$$\mathbf{x}^* = \underset{x}{\operatorname{argmin}} F(\mathbf{x}). \tag{2}$$

Many optimization tasks fit this form (Boyd & Vandenberghe, 2004), including training of autoencoders, support vector machines, and logistic regression algorithms, as well as parameter estimation in probabilistic models (Sohl-Dickstein et al., 2011). In statistics, x^* as defined by Equations 1 and 2 is referred to as an M-estimator (Huber, 1981).

There are two general approaches to efficiently optimizing a function of this form. The first is to use a quasi-Newton method (Dennis Jr & Moré, 1977), of which BFGS (Dennis Jr & Moré, 1977) or LBFGS (Liu & Nocedal, 1989) are the most common choice. Quasi-Newton methods use the history of gradient evaluations to build up an approximation to the inverse Hessian of the objective function $F(\mathbf{x})$. By making descent steps which are scaled by the approximate inverse Hessian, and which are therefore longer in directions of shallow curvature and shorter in directions of steep curvature, quasi-Newton methods can be orders of magnitude faster than steepest descent. Additionally, quasi-Newton techniques typically require adjusting few or no hyperparameters, because they use the measured curvature of the objective function to set step lengths and directions. However, direct application of quasi-Newton methods requires calculating the gradient of the full objective function $F(\mathbf{x})$ at every proposed parameter setting $\mathbf{x}$, which can be very computationally expensive, especially for large N.

The second approach is to use a variant of Stochastic Gradient Descent (SGD) (Robbins & Monro, 1951; Bottou, 1991). In SGD, only one subfunction's gradient is evaluated per update step, and a small step is taken in the negative gradient direction. More recent descent techniques like IAG (Blatt et al., 2007), SAG (Roux et al., 2012), and MISO (Mairal, 2013) instead take update steps in the average gradient direction. For each update step, they evaluate the gradient of one subfunction, and update the average gradient using its new value. If the subfunctions are similar, then SGD can also be orders of magnitude faster than steepest descent on the full batch. However, because a different subfunction is evaluated for each update step, the gradients for each update step cannot be combined in a

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straightforward way to estimate the inverse Hessian of the full objective function. Additionally, efficient optimization with SGD typically involves tuning a number of hyperparameters, which can be a painstaking and frustrating process. (Ngiam & Coates, 2011) compares the performance of stochastic gradient and quasi-Newton methods on neural network training, and finds both to be competitive.

Combining quasi-Newton and stochastic gradient methods could improve optimization time, and reduce the need to tweak optimization hyperparameters. This problem has been approached from a number of directions. In (Schraudolph et al., 2007; Sunehag et al., 2009) a stochastic variant of LBFGS is proposed. In (Martens, 2010), (Byrd et al., 2011), and (Vinyals & Povey, 2011) stochastic versions of Hessian-free optimization are implemented and applied to optimization of deep networks. In (Lin et al., 2008) a trust region Newton method is used to train logistic regression and linear SVMs using minibatches. Stochastic meta-descent (Schraudolph, 1999), AdaGrad (Duchi et al., 2010), and SGD-QN (Bordes et al., 2009) rescale the gradient independently for each dimension, and can be viewed as accumulating something similar to a diagonal approximation to the Hessian. All of these techniques treat the Hessian on a subset of the data as a noisy approximation to the full Hessian. To reduce noise, they rely on regularization and large minibatches to descend $F(\mathbf{x})$ despite these noisy Hessian observations. Thus, unfortunately, each update step requires the evaluation of many subfunctions and/or yields a highly regularized (i.e. diagonal) approximation to the full Hessian.

We develop a novel second-order quasi-Newton technique that only requires the evaluation of *a single* subfunction per update step. In order to achieve this substantial simplification, we treat the full Hessian of each subfunction as a direct target for estimation, thereby maintaining a separate quadratic approximation of each subfunction. This approach differs from all previous work, which in contrast treats the Hessian of each subfunction as a noisy approximation to the full Hessian. Our approach allows us to combine Hessian information from multiple subfunctions in a much more natural and efficient way than previous work, and avoid the use of large minibatches per update step to accurately estimate the full Hessian. Moreover, we develop a novel method to maintain computational tractability of this quasi-Newton method in the face of high dimensional optimization problems (large M), by storing and manipulating the subfunctions in a shared, adaptive low dimensional subspace, determined by the recent history of the gradients. Thus our optimization method can usefully estimate and utilize powerful second-order information inherent in the total function $F(\mathbf{x})$ while simultaneously combatting two potential sources of computational intractability: large numbers of subfunctions (large N) and a high-dimensional optimization domain (large M). Moreover, the use of a second order approximation means that minimal or no adjustment of hyperparameters is required. We refer to the resulting algorithm as Sum of Functions Optimizer (SFO). We demonstrate that the combination of techniques and new ideas inherent in SFO results in substantially faster optimization on four disparate example problems. Finally, we release the optimizer and the test suite as an open source Python package.

2. Algorithm

Our goal is to combine the benefits of stochastic and quasi-Newton optimization techniques. We first describe the general procedure by which we optimize the parameters $\mathbf{x}$. We then describe the process by which an independent online Hessian approximation is maintained for each subfunction. This is followed by an explanation of the construction of the shared low dimensional subspace which makes the algorithm tractable for large problems. Finally, we end this section with a review of implementation details.

2.1. Approximating Functions

We define a series of functions $G^t(\mathbf{x})$ intended to approximate $F(\mathbf{x})$,

$$G^t(\mathbf{x}) = \sum_{i=1}^{N} g_i^t(\mathbf{x}), \tag{3}$$

where the superscript t indicates the learning iteration. The functions $g_i^t(\mathbf{x})$ will be stored, and one of them will be updated per learning step. Each $g_i^t(\mathbf{x})$ serves as a quadratic approximation to the corresponding $f_i(\mathbf{x})$.

2.2. Update Steps

Learning is performed by repeating the steps:

1. Choose a vector $\mathbf{x}^t$ by minimizing the approximating objective function $G^t(\mathbf{x})$,

$$\mathbf{x}^t = \operatorname*{argmin}_{\mathbf{x}} G^t(\mathbf{x}). \tag{4}$$

   Note that $G^t(\mathbf{x})$ can be minimized in closed form, since it is a sum of quadratic functions $g_i^t(\mathbf{x})$.

2. Choose an index $j \in \{1...N\}$, and update the approximating subfunctions as

$$g_i^{t+1}(\mathbf{x}) = \begin{cases} g_i^t(\mathbf{x}) & i \neq j \\ \left[\begin{array}{l} f_i(\mathbf{x}^t) \\ \quad + (\mathbf{x}-\mathbf{x}^t)^T f_i'(\mathbf{x}^t) \\ \quad + \frac{1}{2}(\mathbf{x}-\mathbf{x}^t)^T \mathbf{H}_i^t (\mathbf{x}-\mathbf{x}^t) \end{array}\right] & i = j \end{cases} \tag{5}$$

2.3. Online Hessian Approximation

We set the quadratic term $\mathbf{H}_j^t$ in Equation 5 by using the BFGS (Dennis Jr & Moré, 1977) algorithm to generate an online approximation to the true Hessian $\mathbf{H}_j^{true}$ of subfunction j[1].

For the subfunction j, we construct two matrices, $\Delta f'$ and $\Delta \mathbf{x}$. Each column of $\Delta f'$ holds the change in the gradient of subfunction j between successive evaluations of that subfunction, including all evaluations up until the present time. Each column of $\Delta \mathbf{x}$ holds the corresponding change in the position $\mathbf{x}$ between successive evaluations. Both matrices are truncated after a number of columns L, meaning that they include information from only the prior $L+1$ gradient evaluations for each subfunction. For all results in this paper, $L = 10$ (identical to the default history length for the LBFGS implementation used in Section 4).

2.3.1. BFGS Updates

The BFGS algorithm functions by iterating through the columns in $\Delta f'$ and $\Delta \mathbf{x}$, from oldest to most recent. Let s be the column index, and $\mathbf{B}_s$ be the approximate Hessian for subfunction j after processing column s. For each s, the approximate Hessian matrix $\mathbf{B}_s$ is set so that it obeys the secant equation $\Delta f'_s = \mathbf{B}_s \Delta \mathbf{x}_s$ for the corresponding columns, where $\Delta f'_s$ and $\Delta \mathbf{x}_s$ are taken to refer to the sth columns of the gradient difference and position difference matrix respectively.

In addition to satisfying the secant equation, $\mathbf{B}_s$ is chosen such that the difference between it and the prior estimate $\mathbf{B}_{s-1}$ has the smallest Frobenius norm. This produces the update equation

$$\mathbf{B}_s = \mathbf{B}_{s-1} + \frac{\Delta f'_s \Delta f'^T_s}{\Delta f'^T_s \Delta \mathbf{x}_s} - \frac{\mathbf{B}_{s-1} \Delta \mathbf{x}_s \Delta \mathbf{x}_s^T \mathbf{B}_{s-1}}{\Delta \mathbf{x}_s^T \mathbf{B}_{s-1} \Delta \mathbf{x}_s}. \quad (6)$$

The final update is used as the approximate Hessian for subfunction j, $\mathbf{H}_j^t = \mathbf{B}_{\max(s)}$.

2.3.2. The First BFGS Step

The initial approximate Hessian matrix used in BFGS is set to a scaled identity matrix, so that $\mathbf{B}_0 = \beta \mathbf{I}$. The scaling factor β is set to the smallest non-zero eigenvalue of a matrix $\mathbf{Q}$,

$$\beta = \min_{\lambda_Q > 0} \lambda_Q. \quad (7)$$

where λ_Q indicates the eigenvalues of $\mathbf{Q}$. $\mathbf{Q}$ is the matrix with the smallest Frobenius norm which is consistent with the squared secant equations for the full gradient and position history. That is,

$$\mathbf{Q} = \left[(\Delta \mathbf{x})^{+T} (\Delta f')^T \Delta f' (\Delta \mathbf{x})^+ \right]^{\frac{1}{2}}, \quad (8)$$

where $^+$ indicates the pseudoinverse, and $\frac{1}{2}$ indicates the matrix square root. All of the eigenvalues of $\mathbf{Q}$ are non-negative. Equations 7 and 8 are computed in the subspace defined by $\Delta f'$ and $\Delta \mathbf{x}$ reducing computational cost (see Table 1).

The use of the smallest non-zero eigenvalue can be motived by observing that β sets the approximate Hessian in all unexplored directions in parameter space. Gradient descent routines tend to progress from directions with large slopes and curvatures, and correspondingly large eigenvalues, to directions with shallow slopes and curvatures, and smaller eigenvalues. The typical eigenvalue in an unexplored direction is thus expected to be smaller than in the previously explored directions. Equation 7 sets β to the smallest eigenvalue of $\mathbf{Q}$ in an explored direction, and may thus be a reasonable guess for the curvature in unexplored directions.

2.3.3. Enforcing Positive Definiteness

It is typical in quasi-Newton techniques to enforce that the Hessian approximation remain positive definite. In SFO each $\mathbf{H}_i^t$ is constrained to be positive definite by performing an eigendecomposition, and setting any non-positive eigenvalues to the median value of the positive eigenvalues. (The algorithm appears to be fairly insensitive to the choice of positive value, though it demonstrates some instability if the negative eigenvalues are simply rectified to 0.)

2.3.4. Properties

If the Hessian is constant, then BFGS will eventually converge to the true Hessian (Dennis Jr & Moré, 1977). However, the updates in Equation 6 can make $\mathbf{B}_s$ inconsistent with the secant equation for earlier steps r, $r < s$. This makes BFGS particularly effective in settings where the Hessian is changing over the course of the learning trajectory, since more recent gradient evaluations tend to overwrite older evaluations.

2.4. A Shared, Adaptive Low-Dimensional Representation

The dimensionality M of $\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{R}^M$ is typically large. As a result, the memory and computational cost of working directly with the matrices $\mathbf{H}_i^t \in \mathcal{R}^{M \times M}$ and the history terms for each subfunction $\Delta f'$ and $\Delta \mathbf{x}$ is typically prohibitive. To reduce the dimensionality M to a tractable value, all history is stored and all updates computed in a

[1] We additionally experimented with Symmetric Rank 1 (Dennis Jr & Moré, 1977) updates to the approximate Hessian, but found they performed consistently worse than BFGS.

lower dimensional subspace, with dimensionality between K_{min} and K_{max}. The subspace is constructed such that it includes the most recent gradient and position for every subfunction. By construction, it therefore includes the steepest gradient descent direction.

For the results in this paper, $K_{min} = 2N$ and $K_{max} = 3N$. The subspace is stored as a matrix $\mathbf{P}^t \in \mathcal{R}^{M \times K^t}$ with orthonormal columns, $\left(\mathbf{P}^t\right)^T \mathbf{P}^t = \mathbf{I}$. K^t is the subspace dimensionality at time t.

2.4.1. Expanding the Subspace with a New Observation

At each time step, an additional column is added to the subspace, expanding it to include the most recent gradient direction. This is done by first finding the component in the gradient vector which lies outside the existing subspace, and then appending that component to the current subspace,

$$\mathbf{q}_{\text{orth}} = f_j'\left(\mathbf{x}^t\right) - \mathbf{P}^{t-1}\left(\mathbf{P}^{t-1}\right)^T f_j'\left(\mathbf{x}^t\right), \tag{9}$$

$$\mathbf{P}^t = \left[\mathbf{P}^{t-1} \quad \frac{\mathbf{q}_{\text{orth}}}{||\mathbf{q}_{\text{orth}}||}\right], \tag{10}$$

where j is the subfunction updated at time t. The new position $\mathbf{x}^t$ is included automatically, since the position update was computed within the subspace $\mathbf{P}^{t-1}$. Vectors embedded in the subspace $\mathbf{P}^{t-1}$ can be updated to lie in $\mathbf{P}^t$ simply by appending a 0, since the first K^{t-1} dimensions of $\mathbf{P}^t$ consist of $\mathbf{P}^{t-1}$.

2.4.2. Restricting the Size of the Subspace

In order to prevent the dimensionality K^t of the subspace from growing too large, whenever $K^t > K_{max}$, the subspace is collapsed to only include the most recent gradient and position measurements from each subfunction. This collapsed orthonormal subspace is computed by a QR decomposition on the most recent gradients and positions. A new collapsed subspace is thus computed as,

$$\mathbf{P}' = \text{orth}\left(\left[f_1'\left(\mathbf{x}^{\tau_1^t}\right) \cdots f_N'\left(\mathbf{x}^{\tau_N^t}\right) \quad \mathbf{x}^{\tau_1^t} \cdots \mathbf{x}^{\tau_N^t}\right]\right), \tag{11}$$

where τ_i^t indicates the learning step at which the ith subfunction was most recently evaluated, prior to the current learning step t. Vectors embedded in the prior subspace $\mathbf{P}$ are projected into the new subspace $\mathbf{P}'$ by multiplication with a projection matrix $\mathbf{T} = \left(\mathbf{P}'\right)^T \mathbf{P}$.

Note that the subspace $\mathbf{P}'$ lies within the subspace $\mathbf{P}$. The QR decomposition and the projection matrix $\mathbf{T}$ are thus both computed within $\mathbf{P}$, reducing the computational cost (see Section 3.1).

2.5. Choosing a Target Subfunction

The subfunction j to update in Equation 5 is chosen as,

$$j = \underset{i}{\text{argmax}} \left[\mathbf{x}^t - \mathbf{x}^{\tau_i}\right]^T \mathbf{H}^t \left[\mathbf{x}^t - \mathbf{x}^{\tau_i}\right], \tag{12}$$

where τ_i indicates the time at which subfunction i was last evaluated.

That is, the updated subfunction is the one which was last evaluated farthest from the current location, using the approximate Hessian as a metric. This is motivated by the observation that the approximating functions which were computed farthest from the current location tend to be the functions which are least accurate at the current location, and therefore the most useful to update. This contrasts with the cyclic choice of subfunction in (Blatt et al., 2007), and the random choice of subfunction in (Roux et al., 2012).

Experimentally, we have found that choosing a function to evaluate based on distance leads to better optimization. For instance, for the protein logistic regression objective in Section 4, the objective value after 25 passes through the data is 1.045 for SFO using the distance metric. Using the random function ordering however it is only 1.066, and using cyclic function ordering it is 1.191.

2.6. Growing the Batch Size

For many problems of the form in Equation 1, the gradient information is nearly identical between the different subfunctions early in learning. In order to achieve faster initial convergence we begin with a small number of active subfunctions. We then increment the number of subfunctions every time the average gradient shrinks to within a factor α of the standard error in the average gradient. This comparison is performed using the inverse approximate Hessian as the metric. That is, we increment the batch size by one whenever

$$\left(\bar{f}'^t\right)^T \mathbf{H}^{t^{-1}} \bar{f}'^t < \alpha \frac{\sum_i \left(f_i'^t\right)^T \mathbf{H}^{t^{-1}} f_i'^t}{\left(N^t - 1\right) N^t}, \tag{13}$$

where N^t is the active batch size at time t, $\mathbf{H}^t$ is the full Hessian, and $\bar{f}'^t$ is the average gradient,

$$\bar{f}'^t = \frac{1}{N^t} \sum_i f_i'\left(\mathbf{x}_i^t\right). \tag{14}$$

For all the experiments shown here, $\alpha = 1$, and the initial batch size is $N^1 = 2$.

2.7. Detecting bad updates

A crude heuristic detects extremely bad updates, and resets $\mathbf{x}^t$ to its previous value $\mathbf{x}^{t-1}$ when they are detected. This is triggered whenever the value of a subfunction increases since its previous evaluation by more than the standard deviation in most recent values across all subfunctions.

2.8. Initialization

An approximate Hessian can only be computed as described in Section 2.3 after multiple gradient evaluations. If a subfunction j only has one gradient evaluation, then its approximate Hessian $\mathbf{H}_j^t$ is set to the identity times the average eigenvalue of the previously evaluated subfunctions. If j is the very first subfunction to be evaluated, it is initialized with the identity matrix times a large positive constant (10^6).

3. Properties

3.1. Computational Cost

The computational cost per full pass through the data for each portion of the algorithm is given in Table 1. Typically the largest terms are the $\mathcal{O}(QN)$ term from evaluating the objective and gradient for all N subfunctions, and the $\mathcal{O}\left(MN^2\right)$ term resulting from projecting positions and gradients into and out of the low dimensional subspace. This algorithm is thus suited to the case that the $\mathbf{O}(Q)$ cost of a single subfunction evaluation is larger than the $\mathbf{O}(MN)$ cost of projecting an M dimensional vector into an $\mathbf{O}(N)$ dimensional subspace. Note that N can be reduced, and the algorithm accelerated, by merging subfunctions or choosing larger minibatches. Without the use of the low dimensional subspace, the leading term in the computational cost of SFO would be $\mathbf{O}\left(M^2N\right)$ per pass. On a 6 core 3.5 GHz Intel i7, with $N = 100$ and $M = 201,744$, the SFO overhead per learning iteration is 0.44 sec.

For many problems the cost of a single subfunction evaluation is proportional to the minibatch size, $\mathbf{O}(Q) = \mathbf{O}\left(M\frac{D}{N}\right)$, where D is the size of the full data batch. In this case, the ideal minibatch size to minimize total computational cost per iteration is $N \sim \sqrt{D}$.

3.2. Convergence

Concurrent work by (Mairal, 2013) considers a similar algorithm to that described in 2.2, but with $\mathbf{H}_i^t$ a scalar constant rather than a matrix. Proposition 6.1 in (Mairal, 2013) shows that in the case that each g_i majorizes its respective f_i, and subject to some additional smoothness constraints, $G^t(\mathbf{x})$ monotonically decreases, and $\mathbf{x}^*$ is an asymptotic stationary point. Proposition 6.2 in (Mairal, 2013) further shows that for strongly convex f_i, the algorithm exhibits a linear convergence rate to $\mathbf{x}^*$.

The same convergence results hold for SFO, with near-identical proofs, subject to some constraints on the algorithm. For the proofs to hold: The eigenvalues of $\mathbf{H}_i^t$ must be bounded from above by some constant. It must be possible for g_i to majorize f_i, and $\mathbf{H}_i^t$ must be chosen so as to guarantee this majorization (eg, by addition of diagonal regularizer). The subfunction update order (Section 2.5) must be made random, rather than the current choice of the most distant subfunction in Section 2.5.

We conjecture that the convergence rate for SFO is superlinear. This is because in addition to matching function value and gradient at the current location (Equation 5), we additionally converge on the true Hessian in our approximating functions.

4. Experimental Results

We compared our optimization technique to several competing optimization techniques for four objective functions. The results are illustrated in Figure 1, and the objectives are described below. For all four problems our method outperformed all other techniques in the comparison. Code generating the plots in Figure 1 is included in the Supplementary Material[2]. For all experiments we chose a number of subfunctions $N = 100$.

SFO refers to Sum of Functions Optimizer, and is the new algorithm presented in this paper. *SAG* refers to Stochastic Average Gradient method, with the trailing number providing the Lipschitz constant. *SGD* refers to Stochastic Gradient Descent, with the trailing number indicating the step size. *ADAGrad* indicates the AdaGrad algorithm, with the trailing number indicating the initial step size. *LBFGS* refers to the limited memory BFGS algorithm. *LBFGS minibatch* repeatedly chooses one tenth of the subfunctions, and runs LBFGS for ten iterations on them.

4.1. Logistic Regression

We chose the logistic regression objective, L2 regularization penalty, and training dataset to be identical to the protein homology test case in the recent Stochastic Average Gradient paper (Roux et al., 2012), to allow for direct comparison of techniques.

4.2. Independent Component Analysis

4.3. Autoencoder

We trained a contractive autoencoder, which penalizes the Frobenius norm of the Jacobian of the encoder function, on MNIST digits. Autoencoders of this form have been successfully used for learning deep representations in neural networks (Rifai et al., 2011). Sigmoid nonlinearities were used for both encoder and decoder. The regularization penalty was set to 1, and did not depend on the number of hidden units. The reconstruction error was divided by the number of training examples. There were 784 visible units,

[2] All figures in the paper can be reproduced simply by typing "python figures.py", and then waiting several days for all optimizers to run on all objective functions.

Operation	*One time cost*	*Repeats per pass*	*Cost per pass*
Function and gradient computation	$\mathcal{O}(Q)$	$\mathcal{O}(N)$	$\mathcal{O}(QN)$
Minimize $G^t(\mathbf{x})$	$\mathcal{O}(N^2)$	$\mathcal{O}(N)$	$\mathcal{O}(N^3)$
BFGS	$\mathcal{O}(NL^{1.4} + L^{2.4})$	$\mathcal{O}(N)$	$\mathcal{O}(N^2L^{1.4} + NL^{2.4})$
Subspace projection	$\mathcal{O}(MN)$	$\mathcal{O}(N)$	$\mathcal{O}(MN^2)$
Subspace shrinkage	$\mathcal{O}(MN^{1.4})$	$\mathcal{O}(1)$	$\mathcal{O}(MN^{1.4})$
Total			$\mathcal{O}(QN + MN^2 + N^3 + N^2L^{1.4} + NL^{2.4})$

Table 1. Computational cost for components of the algorithm. Q is the cost of evaluating the objective function and gradient for a single subfunction, M is the number of data dimensions, N is the number of subfunctions, L is the number of history terms kept per subfunction. Typically, $M >> N >> L$, and the number of subfunctions can be chosen such that $Q \approx MN$.

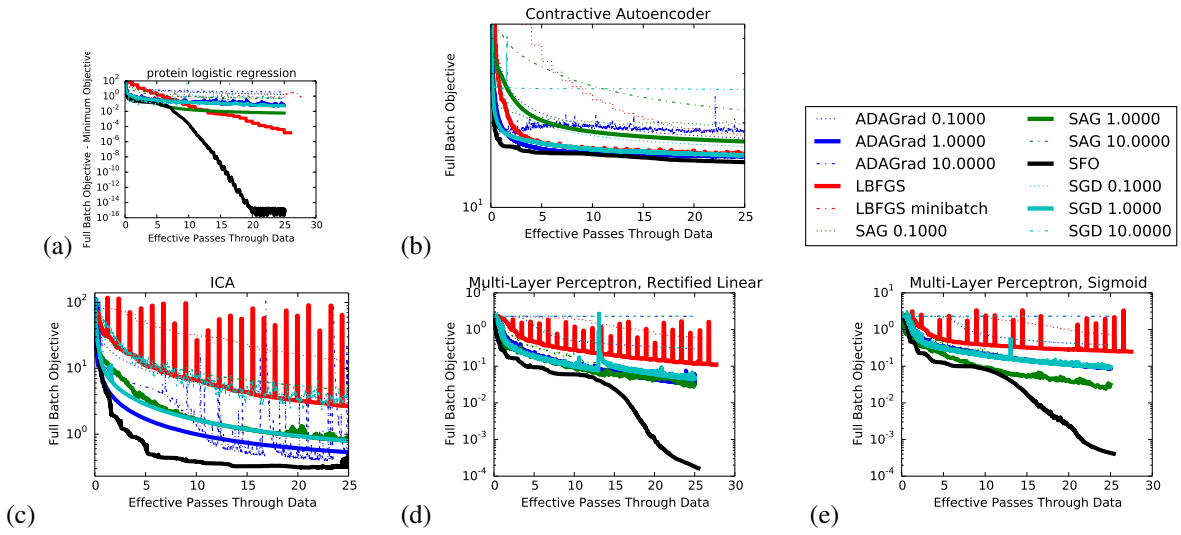

Figure 1. A comparison of the proposed Sum of Functions Optimizer (SFO) to competing techniques for several objective functions. The competing optimization techniques are described in Section 4. The bold lines indicate the best performing optimizer within each class. The objective functions shown are *(a)* a toy problem consisting of a sum of Euclidean norms raised to arbitrary powers, *(b)* a logistic regression problem, and *(c)* a contractive autoencoder trained on MNIST digits.

and 256 hidden units.

4.4. Independent Components Analysis

We train an Independent Components Analysis (ICA) (Bell & Sejnowski, 1995) model with Student's t-distribution prior on MNIST digits by minimizing the negative log likelihood of the ICA model under the digit images. Both the receptive fields and the Student's t shape parameter were estimated.

4.5. Multilayer Perceptron

We trained a deep neural network to classify digits on the MNIST digit recognition benchmark. We used a similar architecture as (Hinton et al., 2012), but with a smaller number of units to allow all competing optimizers time to run. Our network consisted of: 784 input units, one hidden layer of 120 units, one hidden layer of 12 units, and 10 output units. We experimented with rectified linear and sigmoidal units. The objective used was the standard softmax regression on the output units.

5. Future Directions

Most portions of the presented algorithm are naively parallelizable. The $g_i^t(\mathbf{x})$ functions can be updated asynchronously, and can be updated using old position information without harming convergence properties. Therefore, developing a parallelized version of this algorithm could make it a useful tool for massive scale optimization problems. Similarly, it may be possible to adapt this algorithm to an online / infinite data context by cycling through a finite set of active subfunctions.

Quadratic functions are often a poor match to the geom-

etry of the objective function (Pascanu et al., 2012). The majority of the framework presented here does not depend on the functional form of the approximating subfunction $g_i^t(\mathbf{x})$ which is fit to the true subfunction $f_i(\mathbf{x})$. Exploring non-quadratic approximating subfunctions could therefore greatly improve performance.

Section 2.3.2 initializes the approximate Hessian using a diagonal matrix. Instead, it might be effective to initialize the approximate Hessian for each subfunction using the average approximate Hessian from all subfunctions. Where the measurements from a single subfunction disagreed with this initialization they would overwrite it. However, it would take advantage of the fact that the Hessians for different subfunctions are very similar for many objective functions.

We perform optimization in an $\mathcal{O}(N)$ dimensional subspace. It may be possible, however, to drastically reduce the dimensionality of the active subspace without significantly reducing optimization performance. For instance, the subspace could be determined by accumulating, in an online fashion, the leading eigenvectors of the covariance matrix of the gradients of the subfunctions. This would allow the algorithm to run more quickly even for large numbers of subfunctions, and also reduce the memory requirements.

Finally, the natural gradient (Amari, 1998) can greatly accelerate optimization by removing the effect of dependencies and relative scalings between parameters. The natural gradient can be simply combined with other optimization methods by performing a change of variables, such that in the new parameter space the natural gradient and the ordinary gradient are identical (Sohl-Dickstein, 2012). It should be straightforward to incorporate this change-of-variables technique into SFO.

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