

Name of applicant: Yarib Israel Nevarez Esparza

Short title of proposal: Energy-efficient neural network processor for real-time deep learning applications.

1 Project idea

This project focuses on the research of design methodologies to improve the speed and energy efficiency of deep learning hardware processors. The motivation is to accelerate state-of-the-art deep neural networks in the edge to reduce the carbon footprint, the latency and the security-risks associated with the use of cloud-based AI solutions. In this research, hardware design methodologies based on approximation techniques are proposed to enhance processing efficiency of neural network algorithms. The research from this project is a fundamental part for future DFG proposals in the area of low-power design for neural network processors.

2 Summary

We have developed several concepts to use approximate techniques for neural networks [1], [2]. The purpose of this project is to implement and evaluate those concepts in practical state-of-the-art deep learning applications, specially those targeting edge-applications. As proof of concept, we select four practical applications to evaluate our implementation: (1) face mask detection [3],[4], (2) video surveillance [5], (3) advanced driver assistance system (ADAS) [6], [7], and (4) semantic segmentation for autonomous driving [8],[9]. These applications will be implemented by expanding our current research from embedded devices to edge devices with larger hardware resources. The results will be presented in conference and journal publications. This project will be available for the research community as an open source project; this includes hardware/software python interfaces, user documentation, and example designs to facilitate re-usability in user-made neural network applications.

3 Description of proposal

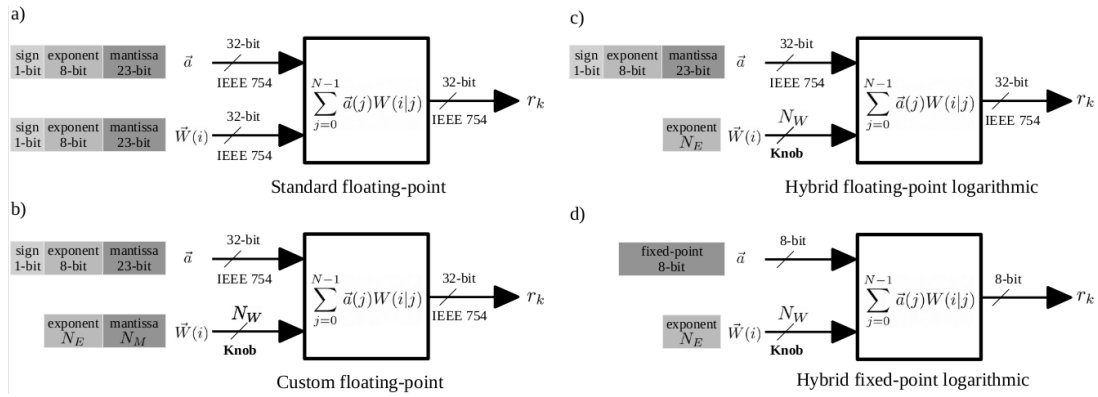
Deep convolutional neural networks (CNNs) are identified by their exceptional performance in computer vision in both research and industrial applications. For example, image-based disease detection in medical applications [10], inspection systems in agriculture [11], monitoring in smart industry [12], [13], and self-driving cars in automotive industry [14], [15]. However, the state-of-the-art of CNN-based algorithms, such as object detection models [16], [17], are characterized by their elevated memory and computational costs. Hence, the applicability of these algorithms is restricted to high performance computers equipped with power hungry processing units (e.g., GPUs and TPUs). This aspect represents the main constrain for efficient real-time performance of these algorithms in devices with limited resources [18], [19].

In order to enable real-time performance of state-of-the-art CNN-based algorithms in edge devices, we propose to use approximation techniques. Based on the intrinsic error-resilience of image processing and machine learning algorithms [20], [21], we propose approximate processing as the main optimization approach for this project.

Approximate computing has been used in a wide range of applications to optimize computational performance [22]. For neural network applications, two main optimization strategies are used, namely network compression and classical approximate computing [23]. The method known as *network compression* or *quantization* focuses on lowering the precision of weights and activation maps to shrink the memory footprint of the large number of parameters of neural networks [24], in addition to quantization, *network pruning* reduces the model size by removing structural portions of the parameters and its associated computations [25]. While on the other hand, the classical approximate computing consists of designing processing units that approximate their computation by employing simplified logic blocks [20], [22]. This technique accelerates computation and reduces energy consumption in error-resilient compute applications.

In previous research, we applied approximate processing to accelerate Spike-by-Spike (SbS) neural networks on embedded FPGA. We implemented a dedicated hardware module for vector dot-product computation, this hardware implements approximate computing with hybrid custom floating-point and logarithmic number representations. This design is configurable based on the bit truncation of the synaptic-weight vectors. **Fig. 1.** illustrates the vector dot-product hardware module with standard floating-point (IEEE 754) arithmetic and our approach with hybrid custom floating-point as well as logarithmic approximations. As a design parameter, the mantissa bit-width of the weight vector provides a tunable knob to trade-off between efficiency and quality of result (QoR). Since the lower-order bits have smaller significance than the higher-order bits, truncating them may have only a minor impact on QoR [20]. Further on, we can remove completely the mantissa bits in order to use only the exponent of a floating-point representation. Therefore, the most efficient setup becomes a logarithmic representation, which consequently leads to significant architectural hardware level optimizations using only adders and barrel shifters for vector dot-product approximation. Moreover, since approximations and noise have qualitatively the same effect [26], we apply noise tolerance plots as an intuitive visual measure to provide insights into the quality degradation of neural networks under approximate processing effects. In a previous research, our design accelerates SbS neural network computation by 20.5× and reduces the weight memory by 8×, with less than 0.5% of accuracy loss in the machine learning task.

Fig. 1. Dot-product hardware module with (a) standard floating-point (IEEE 754) arithmetic, (b) hybrid custom floating-point approximation, (c) hybrid floating-point logarithmic approximation,



and (d) hybrid fixed-point logarithmic approximation.

3.1 Purpose of Impulse application

The purpose of this project is to evaluate the implementation of energy-efficient neural network processors for custom applications. As one of the objectives of my PhD project, I developed a fully functional and scalable hardware architecture for computing SbS networks in embedded systems [1]. This hardware architecture is optimized with a computational module with hybrid custom floating-point and logarithmic vector dot-product approximation. The vector dot-product is a computational block widely used in neural networks and in image/video processing algorithms [27], [28]. The purpose of this project is to implement and evaluate the performance of neural network processors with optimized hardware in practical state-of-the-art deep learning applications.

Aside from my doctoral project, the evaluation of our proven hardware design techniques on practical CNN applications represents a promising contribution to the field of hardware architectures for machine learning on edge devices. We selected four practical applications to evaluate our design, this will be carried out as doctoral research. The results will be reviewed and remarkable findings will be presented in conference and journal publications. This will contribute to my doctoral dissertation, to state-of-the-art knowledge, and to the research community.

3.2 Project implementation

For the project implementation, we initially design a neural network processor with our hardware optimization techniques (approximate computing). This hardware design is implemented in the edge FPGA. To use the neural network processor on the edge FPGA, we implement a python software infrastructure to facilitate user interface and usability. Afterwards, we evaluate the performance of our hardware implementation with focus on speed and power dissipation. Finally, we present remarkable findings in conference and journal publications, and we release the project for the community as an open source project. The start date is on 15/Jun/2021 and the end date is on 27/May/2022.

4 Cooperations

There is no third party cooperation.

5 Links to other projects receiving third-party funding

My Ph.D. is sponsored by the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnologia – CONACYT (the Mexican National Council for Science and Technology).

6 Costs

Additional experiments incur in the following costs for specialized-equipment.

6.1 Outline of costs

Item	Quantity	Description	Unit price	Amount
1	1	Zynq UltraScale+ MPSoC ZCU104 Evaluation Kit https://www.xilinx.com/products/boards-and-kits/zcu104.html	€1,062.63	€1,062.63
2	1	Ultra96-V2 Zynq UltraScale+ ZU3EG Dev. board. https://de.farnell.com/avnet/aes-ultra96-v2-g/sbc-arm-cortex-a53-cortex-r5/dp/3050481	€202.67	€202.67
3	1	USB to JTAG/UART adapter for Ultra96 Dev. board. https://de.farnell.com/yageo/aes-acc-u96-jtag/usb-zu-jtag-uart-pod/dp/2915522?MER=sy-me-pd-mi-acce	€36.06	€36.06
4	1	Power supply kit, 12 V, 4 A, for Ultra96 Dev. boards. https://de.farnell.com/votoo/vp-1204000/netzteil-kit-12v-4a/dp/2921438?MER=sy-me-pd-mi-acce	€19.95	€19.95
5	2	Webcam, HD Pro, 1280 x 720p resolution, 3MP. https://de.farnell.com/en-DE/logitech/960-001063/hd-pro-webcam-3mp-720p/dp/2675982?st=webcam	€34.79	€69.58
Total				€1,390.89

7 References

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Yarib Israel Nevárez Esparza.

Place and date of birth: Durango, Mexico. 05/26/1986

Nationality: Mexican

Marital status: Single

Profession: Electronics engineer

Residence City: Bremen

Country: Germany

Address: Luisental 29 C, 6-123

Zip Code: 28359

Cell phone: +49 178 8936794

E-mail: nevarez@item.uni-bremen.de, yarib_007@hotmail.com

LinkedIn: [Yarib Nevarez Esparza](#)

GitHub portfolio: [YaribNevarez \(Yarib Nevarez\)](https://github.com/YaribNevarez) <https://github.com/YaribNevarez>

Education.

Spring 2009	Bachelor of Science in Electronics engineering Instituto Tecnológico de Durango (México)
Fall 2017	Master of Science in Embedded Systems Design University of Applied Sciences Bremerhaven (Germany)

Professional experience.

January 2009 – June 2011	Texas Instruments (<i>Embedded software engineer – contractor</i>) Support and development of embedded software for handling GUI, image, and color for TI – NSPIRE Graphic Calculator.
June 2011 – March 2012	IBM (<i>Software engineer – contractor</i>) Design and development of Qt application tools for Anaconda 4 th generation storage library, and support for MFC application tools for TS3500 storage library.
March 2012 – March 2013	Continental Automotive (<i>Embedded software engineer</i>) Development of low-level firmware drivers/bootloaders for automotive cluster panels (GM, Chrysler, Suzuki, and Toyota).
March 2013 – Sep 2015	IBM TOSHIBA TGCS (<i>Staff software engineer</i>) OS field defect support, Linux-4690 POS machines. Field defect support and development of customer applications for POS machines.
October 2015 – March 2017	University of Applied Sciences Bremerhaven (<i>Student - Master of Science In Embedded Systems Design</i>) Real-time software, model-based software development, digital systems - VHDL, AP SoC design, discrete control, DSP design, and analog-digital instrumentation.
May 2017 – October 2017	E.I.S. Electronics GmbH (<i>Master thesis intern</i>) Thesis: “Concept of smart avionics controller involving the integration of internet protocols, file systems, data acquisition, processing, and storage.”
January 2018 – May 2019	Carbon Robotics Inc (<i>Embedded Systems Engineer</i>) Hardware/Software co-design of embedded linux platform for robotic applications on embedded FPGA.
May 2019 – May 2022	Institute of Electrodynamics and Microelectronics, University of Bremen (Research assistant, PhD candidate) Dissertation: “Deep Neural Network Accelerators Based on Approximation Techniques for Energy-Efficient Industrial Internet-of-Things.”

Research publications.

Conference:

Y. Nevarez, A. Garcia-Ortiz, D. Rotermund and K. R. Pawelzik, "Accelerator Framework of Spike-By-Spike Neural Networks for Inference and Incremental Learning in Embedded Systems," *2020 9th International Conference on Modern Circuits and Systems Technologies (MOCAST)*, 2020, pp. 1-5, doi: 10.1109/MOCAST49295.2020.9200288.

Journal:

Y. Nevarez, D. Rotermund, K. R. Pawelzik and A. Garcia-Ortiz, "Accelerating Spike-by-Spike Neural Networks on FPGA with Hybrid Custom Floating-Point and Logarithmic Dot-Product Approximation," in *IEEE Access*, doi: 10.1109/ACCESS.2021.3085216.



Yarib Israel Nevárez Esparza
Jun 6th, 2021

Herrn
Yarib Nevarez
Luisental 29 C, App. 6-123

28359 Bremen

Bremen, d. 20.04.2021
Unser Zeichen: 465

Fachbereich 01
Physik / Elektrotechnik

Angela Jöstingmeier
Geschäftsstelle Promotionsausschuss Dr.-Ing.

NW 1 / S 2360
Otto-Hahn-Allee 1

28359 Bremen

Tel. 0421/218-62709

E-Mail: joestingmeier@fb1.uni-bremen.de
www.uni-bremen.de/fb1/studium/promotion

Annahme als Doktorand

Sehr geehrter Herr Nevarez,

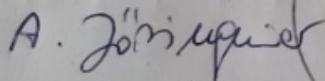
der Promotionsausschuss Dr.-Ing. beschloss am 16.04.2021 Ihre Annahme als Doktorand gem.
§ 5 der Promotionsordnung (Dr.-Ing.) v. 27.01.2015 mit dem Thema:

**„Deep Neural Network Accelerators Based on Approximation Techniques for Energy-
Efficient Industrial Internet-of-Things“**

unter der Betreuung von Herrn Prof. Dr.-Ing. García- Ortiz.

Nach § 5 (3) gilt die Annahme als Doktorand zunächst für 4 Jahre und kann auf begründeten
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