

Sebastian Mai

Wireless Ranging in Swarm Robotics



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FAKULTÄT FÜR
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Wireless Ranging in Swarm Robotics

Author: Sebastian Mai

Professor: Professor Sanaz Mostaghim

Tutor: Diplom Informatiker Christoph Steup

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This paper evaluates how suitable the Atmel RTB ranging sensor is to be used in the FINken robots.



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TOC, List
of figures in
Caption

1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation

The FINken project aims to create a swarm of autonomously flying quad-copters to research swarm intelligence behaviour on robots. Many algorithms in swarm intelligence are based on distance values. On this occasion it is important to find a sensor that is capable to measure distances and to integrate it into the FINken robots. An obvious choice for this distance is measuring the spacial distance in between the robots¹.

source

There are basically three requirements for this sensor.

1. the ranging needs to be integrated into the copter
2. interaction between the copter and the ranging modules shall be minimal
3. the values yielded by ranging shall be of usable quality

Requirement 3 seems to be trivial but is actually the hardest requirement of all three. Integrating a sensor into the FINken might be a lot of effort but can be done. Hardware that interacts with the ranging might be substituted by other hardware that does not. However it is still sensible to pick a ranging method that does not break the current behaviour of the FINken.

1.2 The FINken Robot Platform

Goal of the FINken project is to do research on how swarm behaviour can be executed by flying robots. Therefore suitable robots need to be constructed.

¹ The mathematical distance-property might not actually need to be something as close to a physical property, but it is beneficial to be able to measure and watch the robots interacting with their physical environment.

The robots need to fly in an stable manner on their own and be capable of interacting without disrupting the operation of the other swarm members. Those robots shall perform given tasks defined to encourage swarm based interaction, their behaviour can be evaluated and compared to the theoretical models developed by swarm intelligence research.

1.2.1 Robot Description

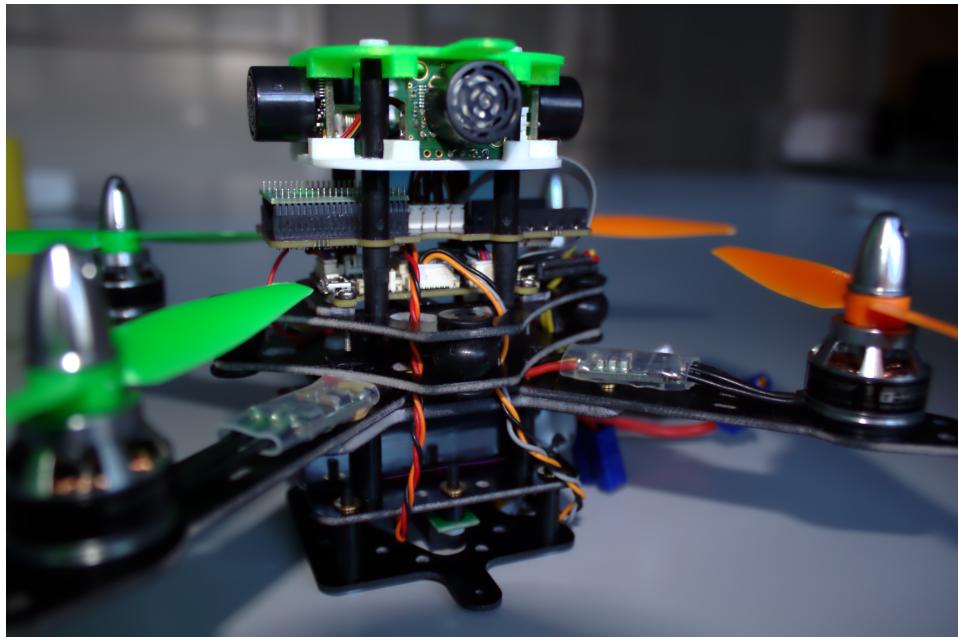


Figure 1.1: The FINken robot, revision 3

The robots are propelled by four rotors that are directly attached to a brushless motor. In combination the motors can be controlled to change the direction of the thrustvector (pitch and roll), to change the overall amount of lift generated (thrust) and to change the orientation of the airframe (yaw). The airframe houses all the actuators, processors and batteries needed for flight. Additionally it carries a multitude of sensors used for operating autonomously.

überleitung

The robots are capable of highly dynamic flight maneuvers—the robots have enough acceleration to leave the operating environment in any possible direction in under one second. This is mainly because the robots need lots of

payload capacity to carry different sensors and computing power, with enough headroom to make changes in the future. However the capability for dynamic behaviour is not useful for our research. Of course the high power of the motors can also be used to stabilize the copter better, which is exactly what is needed for the FINken research. If the copter is angled by only 6° and its height is kept stable it is accelerating at about 1 m s^{-2} if the height stays the same during that time. This means the copter reaches a velocity of over 2 m s^{-1} when travelling through the arena at this pretty small angle.

kleine
störung->
rel. großer
effekt

1.2.2 Environment

When doing research things do not always work perfectly. Therefore the environment for the FINken robots is designed to protect the robots from mechanical damage. It is also designed not to interfere with the function of the sensors the robot is using.

The FINken robots fly in an area of 2 m by 3 m that can be expanded to about 3 m by 4 m. The flight area is enclosed by netting and ultrasound-reflecting foil. These barriers act the same way a wall would without damaging the robots if they fail to elude them. Usually the altitude of operation is between 0.5 m to 1 m. To prevent damage when the quadcopters crash the floor is covered with mats that work well with ultrasound and infrared sensors. It is possible to create virtual environmental factors by using a projector and an RGB-sensor mounted on top of the robots. This virtual environment can be used to research the behaviour of the quadcopters if a certain task is assigned to the robot, e.g. finding the brightest spot.

foto

1.2.3 Sensor Concept

The sensors used by the FINken robots serve two purposes: To enable the robots to fly autonomously and to interact with other robots and the environment.

Autonomous Flying

To form a swarm the robots need to function as single individuals first—that means not crashing into walls, ceiling, floor or other robots. Of course the sensors needed for autonomous flight must not be disturbed by anything else.

The flight dynamics of the FINken robots shall be as simple as possible. The robots shall be able to fly at a given height and navigate in x-y-direction to perform their given tasks. Highly dynamic maneuvers are possible for the airframe, but are not realizable with the sensor data we currently get.

ref to
christophs
ba

For flying autonomously two major problems have to be solved: Height control and navigation. For controlling the height of the copters either the ultrasound distance measurement of the optical flow sensors are used, alternatively the height is measured by an infrared sensor that must be equipped when the optical flow sensors are not.

Navigating the x-y-plane is a much harder task. Because sensors are not perfect the copter will drift in any given direction and precise speed and position measurements are hard to get by. As a consequence implementing a position hold mode is simply not possible. Assuming that a stable position can not be kept there is still something that can be done to fly for longer time periods. With an ultrasound distance sensor in each direction the robot can sense its surroundings and avoid any obstacles in its vicinity. An essential precondition for navigating around obstacles that way is a certain level of stability and avoiding highly dynamic maneuvers.

Interaction

The FINken robots shall be able to do more than simply not crashing. Of course sensor values needed for autonomous flight can also be used to interact with the robots environment, but there are also sensors that are exclusively used for interaction.

To interact with an environment a solution is necessary that works well in the laboratory. The environment of the robots shall be changed without changing the physical layout of the lab. An environmental factor that can be easily changed is the lighting of the flying area. In the swarmlab a projector can be used to affect the quadcopters. To measure the current lighting situation an rgb color sensor is mounted on top of the copter.

The range-sensor is also mainly used for interaction. Ranging values enable the FINken robots to implement attraction-repulsion-beheaviour.

1.2.4 Hardware Description

There are different ranging technologies that might be used in a FINken quadcopter. However there are different components that can interfere with the new sensor that shall be integrated e.g. by disturbing the measurements made by the new sensor.

Part	Description
Frame	The Frame is made of GFK material and plastic and rotor to rotor distance is 10 cm
Propellers	The FINken use 5" x 3" propellers
Motors	Four brushless motors that may cause RF-interference and noise
Power-Supply	Lithium polymer batteries with nominally 11.1 V output voltage that is converted to 5V and 3.3V by the power distribution hardware
Sonar Sensors	Sonar sensors to measure distances of the nearest object in four directions (front, back, left, right)
Optical Flow	PX4 Optical flow sensor to measure x- and y- velocity and distance to ground
IR-Sensor	IR-Distance sensor measuring distance to ground, alternativ to optical flow sensor
Telemetry	BTLE-/Zigbee modules to exchange data with the ground station
RC-Control	2.4GHz based Radio Control to manually control the robots

Table 1.1: Hardware Components of the FIKen 3 robots

1.3 Evaluation of Existing Ranging Solutions

Keeping that in mind there are some technologies that can be used for ranging. The usual application for most of those technologies in research is positioning,

mehr fokus
auf andere
copter pro-
jekte

which makes it difficult to find comparable numbers for ranging-only applications.

It is still interesting to search for positioning applications that use range measurements, however many of those positioning technologies are base on other principles than multilateration². [3]

keep it or
throw it
away?

1.3.1 Indoor Time of Flight

The obvious approach for replacing the GPS signal is to use a simmilar approach indoors.

wording

The problem is that very short timespans have to be measured accurately, because radio waves are so damn fast. [12] states, that standard errors of 2.6 m_{RMS} and 1.8 m_{RMS} was measured in different indoor scenarios. With an operating area only 3m wide this approach is not suited for our robots.

wording

blabla

A project that looks more promising is decaWave. According to [11] the measurement error is generally under 1m and with filtering can be brought to below 15 cm. The proposed method of filtering needs 27 measurements to compute one range value. However the decaWave project was unkown to us when we started looking for ranging possibilities so

1.3.2 Cricket / Active Bat

A very clever approach to ranging is used by ranging solutions like cricket[16] and active bat[20]. RF-Signals travel at the speed of light and therefore you need to be able to measure very short timings in time of flight scenarios. Sound however travels at a speed much slower than radio waves. The same principle can be applied when you measuring the distance of a lightning strike by measuring the time between thunder and lightning. Cricket and Active Bat also measure the time difference an RF-signal and an ultrasound pulse need to travel from transmitter to reciever to calculate the range between two sensor nodes.

²The usual methods for positioning are: *multilateral*—which is what we are interested in because only ranging measurments are used, *multiangular*—which is no use to us, because angle measurements are used and by *orientating in a map* with different factors like beacon-positions—which is also no use to us.

A bad side effect of using sound as medium to the ranging method is that there is an upper bound to the update frequency for all nodes sharing the medium (i.e. close enough to sense each other). [20] claims that one ranging measurement can be done in a 20 ms slot. That means we can have 50 range updates per second. Assuming we have a swarm of five robots that form a fully connected graph we would need at least ten range measurements to get all swarm distances. So the upper boundary for ranging update frequency in a swarm of five robots is 5 Hz. Considering that this is the upper limit this is a solid disadvantage of this method. Furthermore the FINken robots currently use sonar based distance sensor to measure the distance to the nearest object in some direction so either the update frequency would be diminished much further or the sonar sensors needed to be replaced

Ultrasonic ranging on quadcopters is done by [8]

Another problem is the noise created by motors and propellers. The sound made by the quadcopters is not ending in the hearable spectrum but also extends to the ultrasound range. In conclusion ultrasound based ranging is a very neat approach that could be integrated into the FINken robots, but the current setup that already includes sonar sensors make this approach impractical.

accuracy /
price, moving
objects

1.3.3 RSSI-based ranging

A property that can be used to do RF-based ranging is signal strength. The further the source of the signal is away the weaker the signal gets. RSSI-based ranging is done for several different technologies: Bluetooth, WLAN, RFID— There are even approaches using maps created of different RSSI-ranging sources. http://www.gnss.com.au/JoGPS/v9n2/JoGPS_v9n2p122-130.pdf

The main factor that rules out RSSI-based ranging is that radio-waves are not propagated equally in every direction. Antenna-orientation might have a much bigger impact on signal strength than distance. Additionally radio waves might be weakened when travelling through the FINken robots and by doing so passing wires and electronic components.

quelle
quelle
quelle
quellify
typical
propagation
pattern
picture

1.3.4 External Tracking

Most projects use external tracking to measure the position and orientation of the quadcopters. The most common optical tracking systems are very costly in

refs

comparison to the other ranging methods described here. This price is justified by the superior performance of this method.

This means tracking accuracy as well as the possibility to measure orientation.
All that at a high update frequency.

A huge drawback to this method is that many components are used that need to be integrated into the environment and cannot be carried by the robots themselves. For swarm robotics this is not an ideal solution as using external tracking would mean communicating with some kind of centralized tracking interface-destroying the scalability and the principle of local interaction leading to global behaviour.

research
performance
statistics
for ranging
solutions

ETH, track-
ing, sensorik
foo

price

quelle

1.3.5 Atmel RTB, Dresden Elektronik, Meterionic

Another thing that can be measured phase shift. This is a principle that is used by some of the ultrasonic methods. However the phase difference can also be measured in radio waves. This is utilized by the ranging hardware from the Atmel Ranging Toolbox. Multiple frequencies are used to measure a phase difference. Because the wave length changes with different frequencies you can take all of the measured phase differences and compute a distance. Similar hardware using the same software stack is also sold by *Dresden Elektronik* and *Meterionic*.

Using phase differences in RF discards the medium access problems of ultrasonic methods as well as the wave propagation problems of RSSI-based methods. Therefore it seems like a feasible approach for the FINken robots.

2 Concept

2.1 Hardware

2.1.1 Ranging Hardware

There are several different possible hardware platforms for the Atmel ranging software. At the time this thesis started however we only had a precompiled library for the Atmel ranging modules. For the evaluation scenario those modules are quite useable, but there are better options available with the binaries for other hardware platforms. On the copters we want to use \$Module from dresden elektronik which is already integrated into the new hardware revision of the FINken robots.

exact name

The disadvantage of the Atmel sensors is that they are not designed for production use but as development platforms and therefore are quite big and heavy and not really suited to be used on the FINken quadcopters. It is possible however to build a similar hardware setup that is much smaller by using smaller packages of the same chips, leaving lots of unused PCB area and unused connectors.

2.1.2 Autopilot

The FINken robots use the LISA/MX autopilot board in hardware revision 2.1. This board is used for higher level auto pilot functions as well as pure stabilization—unlike other UAV projects where there are different units for stabilization control and higher level functions like pathfinding. This means that all sensors are connected to this board; every computation from evaluation of sensor input to the output of PWM signals to the motors controllers is done on this board.

2.2 Interconnect

There are different solutions to connecting the ranging board to the Paparazzi autopilot. All of the following methods of connecting hardware are supported by the LISA/MX board and one has to be chosen for the new ranging sensors.

2.2.1 Pulse width modulation / Analog value

Using a single GPIO pin or analog value is completely impractical, but a good example to explain the problems the honest solutions need to address.

First of all there is a limited number of GPIO or ADC-pins on both boards. On the autopilot board those pins are quite rare, especially because they cannot be shared easily between components. The second problem is that we do not only need to read a range value from the sensor but we also need to tell the sensor which value to fetch. Therefore some kind of bidirectional communication between autopilot and sensor need to take place. The big advantage of using a GPIO pin would be that only one single wire¹ would be needed to connect autopilot and sensor.

2.2.2 UART

The "Universal Asynchronous Receiver/Transmitter"-Protocol uses two wires to establish communication between devices. [19]

The Disadvantage of UART-style Protocols is that it is a bidirectional connection. That two pins are needed on sender and receiver side and if another device should be connected two new pins are needed. On the Lisa/MX autopilot there are four dedicated UART connections that might be used, but already three of them are used.

2.2.3 SPI

6 Pins, Clocked, Chainable, DMA

¹Plus two wires for voltage supply

2.2.4 CAN bus

Would be ok, no can device yet, pins for canbus already in use, would be solvable, but not easy to implement on ranging nodes

2.2.5 I2C

I2C is a two wired bus protocol that can be used to connect multiple slave devices to one master device. There already are multiple sensors connected to the autopilot via I2C. All of the ultrasound-sensors and also the optional color sensor use I2C to communicate with the autopilot. The autopilot board also supports to have two independent i2c-networks.

Especially the fact that there already is a sensor network on the FINken makes it the best choice as a communication protocol for the new sensor.

problem:
slaves can
block the
bus

3 Implementation

Somehow the sensordata needs to find its way into the control loops of the autopilot. We have established that i2c is the hardware solution to transmit the data.

Now it is important to pin down in which way the measurements get triggered and when and how the result is transmitted back.

3.1 Communication Protocol

There are two possible ways to talk to the sensor. You can define independent commands to start a measurement and retrieve data. The obvious disadvantage of this method is, that there is a bit of communication overhead and the master device won't read the data from the sensor as soon as it is possible—the master might even start a new measurement without even reading the result at all.

The other way to do things is that the slave device writes the data onto the bus as soon as it is arriving. This way of sending results however has disadvantages that are far worse than reading measurements a bit later and even missing some measurements. Those disadvantages are caused by the way i2c handles slave writes.

The sensor has different functions described by i2c-registers that can be written to by the master device. The registers and the format of the range response are described by *i2c_interface.h*.

Another design decision that has to be made is how the data structure for ranging results should look like. Obviously the measured distance needs to be included in the message, but instead of the original 32-Bit value only a 16-Bit value is used, as distances up to more than 60m can be expressed that way.

status, dqc,
range, ad-
dresses,
message id

Byte	Name	Description
0x0	ECHO	return payload byte
0x1	START_RANGING	trigger range measurement
0x3	START_REMOTE_RANGING	trigger remote measurement
0x2	READ_LAST_RANGING	read measured distance
0xFE	SET_I2C_ADDRESS	set new i2c address
0xFD	SET_SHORT_ADDRESS	set new ranging short address
0xFC	SET_REFLECTOR_ADDRESS	set reflector address
0xFB	SET_INITIATOR_ADDRESS	set initiator address
0xED	GET_SHORT_ADDRESS	get ranging address
0xEC	GET_REFLECTOR_ADDRESS	get reflector address
0xEB	GET_INITIATOR_ADDRESS	get initiator address
0xFF	CLEAR_BUFFER	clear i2c write buffer
0xCA	SET_FREQ_START	set lower ranging frequency
0xCB	SET_FREQ_STEP	set ranging frequency spacing
0xCC	I2C_SET_FREQ_STOP	set upper frequency
0xCD	SET_DIVERSITY	turn on/off antenna bdiversity

Table 3.1: Implemented I2C-Commands and Description

The dqc value also needs to be transmitted, as the sensor node can not decide in which way the values should be used by the master device, i.e. making application dependent filtering more accurate¹. In scenarios with multiple ranging nodes or remote ranging the addresses of both nodes taking part in the range measurement also need to be included into the message. This information enables the master device to assign the range values to the right pair of devices, even if one of the messages gets lost or the order of measurements changes.

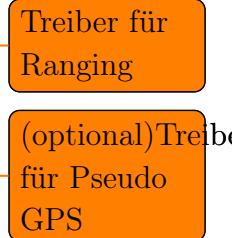
Depending on the setup the sensor nodes do not communicate measurement failures, but retransmit the old values again. As a consequence two more values should be transmitted: The status of the measurement and a message id. Those values enable the client to discard erroneous measurements and duplicate readings.

"TWI",
"Phillips-
I2C", "..."

¹ An application where the dqc-value is of much use is a Kalman-State-Filter, which could gain accuracy by using the dqc value to estimate the reliability of the range values.

3.2 Paparazzi Module for Ranging

Addressing is done using the unique aircraft id of the individual robots. Because the short addresses for the ranging nodes are 16 bit long and the aircraft ids are 8 bit values it is feasible to use a fixed prefix together with the ac-id as node addresses.



3.3 Python Scripts

For testing the sensor nodes and also for acquiring the data for evaluating the sensors I set up a RaspberryPi minicomputer as I2C master. Using this setup for testing has proven really effective even before integrating attaching the sensor nodes to one of the finken robots. Python might also be a very powerful tool to prototype mathematical processing of the sensor inputs like filtering and fusion of different ranging results.

i2cranging.py contains functions for the master side of I2C communication. Those can either be used from the python PEPL or by other scripts. *poll_range.py* contains a convenient method to take continuous range readings from the unix shell and is mainly used to generate csv-files with ranging values.

4 Evaluation

4.1 Robustness of Implementation

For use in the FINken robots not only the quality of the measurements is relevant. The sensor also needs to be well integrated into the autopilot framework.

With the current hardware this integration can not be done completely, because the current hardware platform is simply too big to fly. This step of integration will be done with the .

de-modules

4.1.1 Bus hangup

I2C is an easy to implement and use bus protocol. One of the drawbacks of I2C is that misbehaving clients are able to block the whole bus. As a consequence a malfunctioning sensor might render the other sensors useless, in worst case crashing the copter.

At the moment the ranging sensors cause bus hangups, when rangings are requested to often.

measure

4.1.2 i2c errors per time

Another problem that may occur is that i2c data packets can get lost. This would mean the autopilot has to rely on expired data and it might break any kind of derivative computed from the range value. .

jaja, als ob
man da was
sinnvolles
ausrechnen
könnte :(

measure

4.1.3 Integration Test for Quadcopter

4.2 Ranging Accuracy

The most important question for the FINken project is: “Can the ranging values be used by the FINken robots”. To answer this question some understanding of the magnitude and distribution of the ranging error is needed.

Finding out how accurate the range values actually are proves rather difficult, because there are lots of interdependend variables that influence ranging accuracy.

4.2.1 Frequency Selection

move to implementation?

The frequencys used by the ranging can be chosen by the user of the ranging nodes, however frequency selection greatly influences the quality of the measurements. This is especially because normal 2.4 GHz wifi and serveral other technologies are using the same frequencys as the ranging modules the selection of a well working one is crucial to ranging performance. In section 4.2.1 there is an analysis on the frequency utilization on wifi channel 6. A download was started and then ended which is noticeable in the waterfall plot.

Comparing the utilization on this channel with the frequency range shown in Figure 4.2.1 which is right next to the first frequency used by the ranging modules several things can be noticed. The noise in the frequency range for ranging is much lower then on frequencys with used for wifi—about 15 dB in average and 20 dB in peak. You can also see the peak generated by the ranging modules. The line at the center frequency 2.4831 GHz is an artifact created by the SDR that was used, but the line at 2.483 GHz is created by the ranging modules (which is exactly why the center frequency was chosen right next to the actual frequency). You can already see that the peak can still be lost in noise like it is shown in the FFT plot but is very stable over time as you can see in the waterfall plot.

Because of the lower utilization of those frequencys a range of 2.480 GHz to 2.500 GHz has been chosen. All the frequencys in this range look quite simmilar to the sample taken at Figure 4.2.1. This values have to be taken with a grain

of salt. It is really hard to reproduce what kind of RF-noise interfering with the nodes is currently generated in the swarmlab.

There are other factors that impact ranging quality that can not be measured that easily – at least the quality of the antennas for different frequencies and the impact of the number of available channels in the frequency range and channel spacing are variables that can not be directly measured in our lab¹. In the end this means finding the right parameters for ranging frequency settings is a really hard problem, especially because measuring the ranging error over many frequencies takes lots of labtime. It is not viable to measure all available combinations for those parameters.

Find out antenna measurements / calibrated antennas

wording

labtime + lab utilization ... ? or is this to mimimi

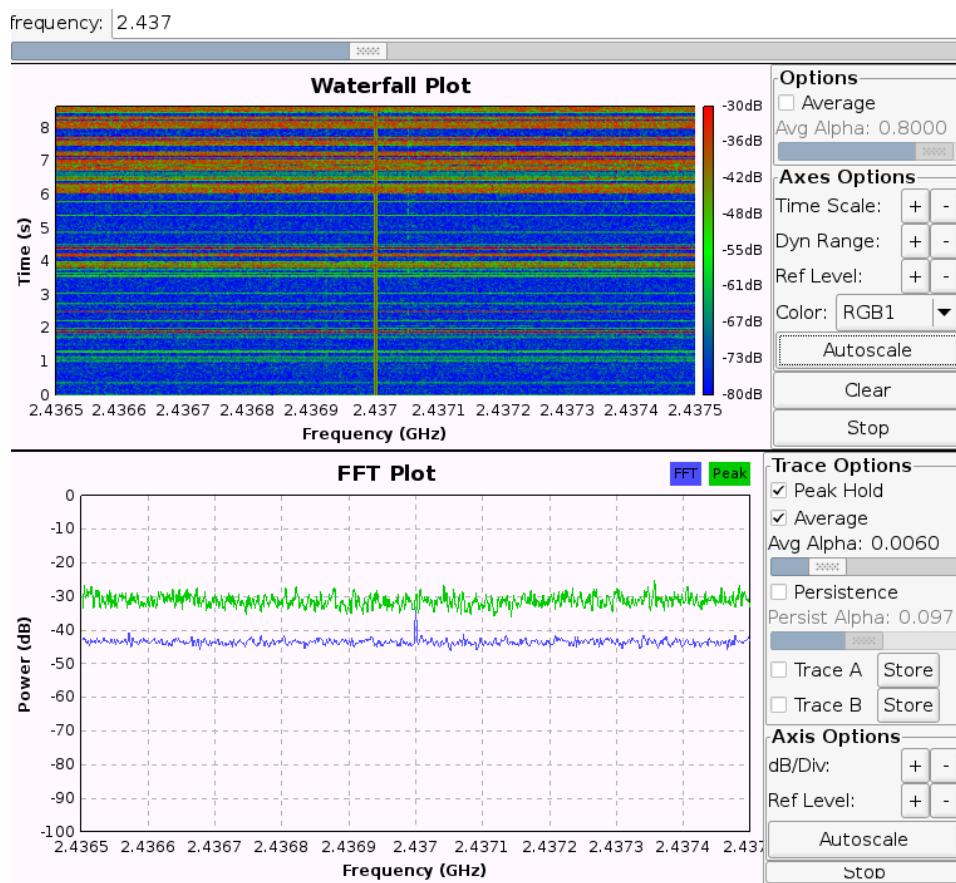


Figure 4.1: RF-Spectrum on 2.437 GHz

¹The sourcecode and algorithms used by the modules is closed source, so we are not able to infer the effect of channel spacing and number of channels from that.

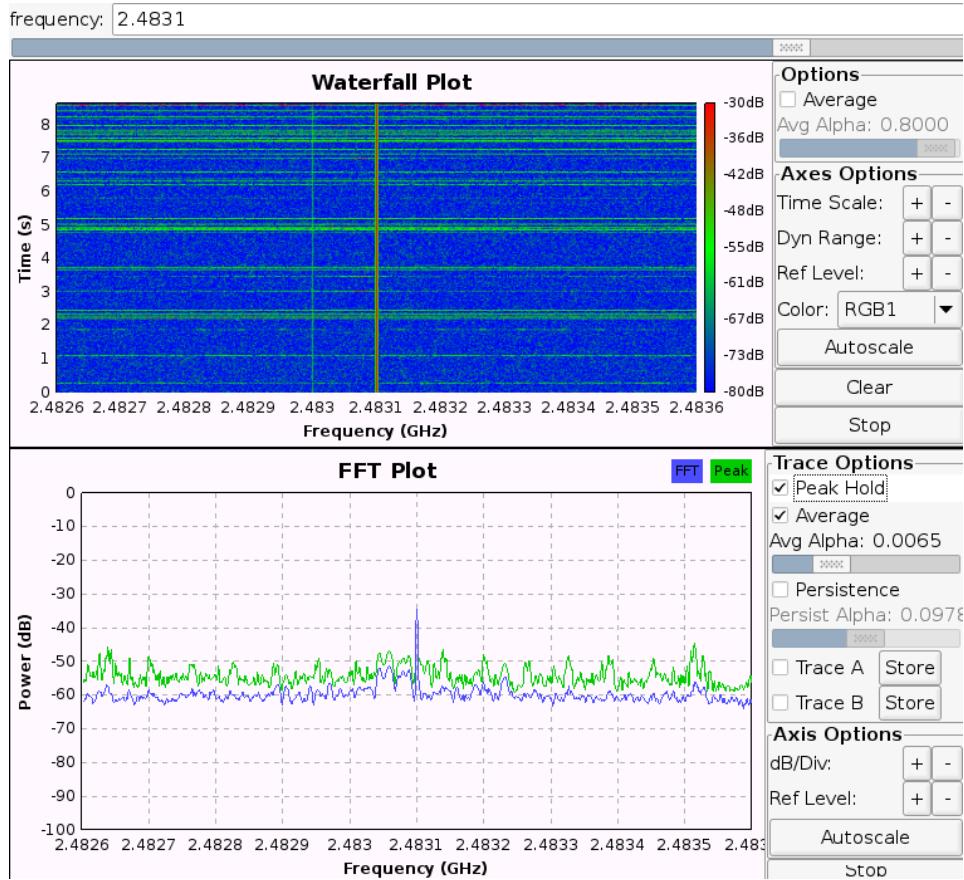


Figure 4.2: RF-Spectrum on 2.483 GHz

Even with those frequencies the measurement is only really working when the lab is empty, as basically every person in the lab uses several devices that use the 2.4 GHz frequency range. To create a usefull evaluation all the following measurements have been made with an empty lab out of the working hours of the people in the buliding. However this problem must be addressed before the sensors can be used in a real world application. This is especially true because the remote control is causing the worst interference with the ranging nodes observed so far.

There are two possible solutions to the general problem: Either the noise in the environment needs to be reduced or the ranging nodes need to use different frequencies.

4.2.2 Measurement Setup

All the following evaluation is done by analysing data gathered by the ranging nodes. However the measurements are done in a very specific manner to improve the quality of the measured data.

- the nodes are lifted from the table to minimize multipath effects
- a stable 3.3V input voltage is provided by different voltage regulators, the battery slots are not used
- antennas are always used in the same orientation
- measurements are not taken in the working hours of the faculty (mostly deep at night) when the least amount of RF interference by 2.4 GHz devices can be expected

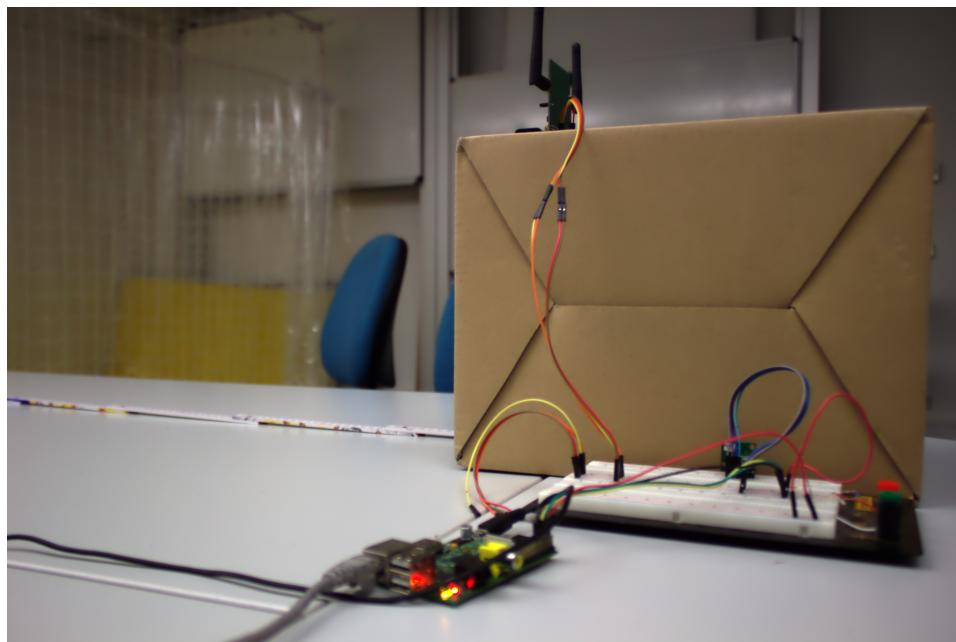


Figure 4.3: Measurement Setup

4.2.3 Influence of DQF on Range Values

One value the ranging api provides is the DQF²-value. It is reasonable to expect a huge amount of scatter for lower DQF values. As Figure 4.4 shows this is not how the range value behaves.

For the values measured with 1m real distance we can see that the values measured with lower quality do not have the same mean value as those with higher quality. Also values measured with lower quality are closer to each other than those with higher signal quality. As long as we only look at the values taken at 1m real distance it seems like we could be able to improve the range estimate by including the dqc value into the computation of the distance. To do that this behaviour would need to be stable across different distances, i.e. no matter if the measurement is taken at 1m or 3m distance the when the dqc is low the measured range is lower and if dqc is high the measured range is higher.

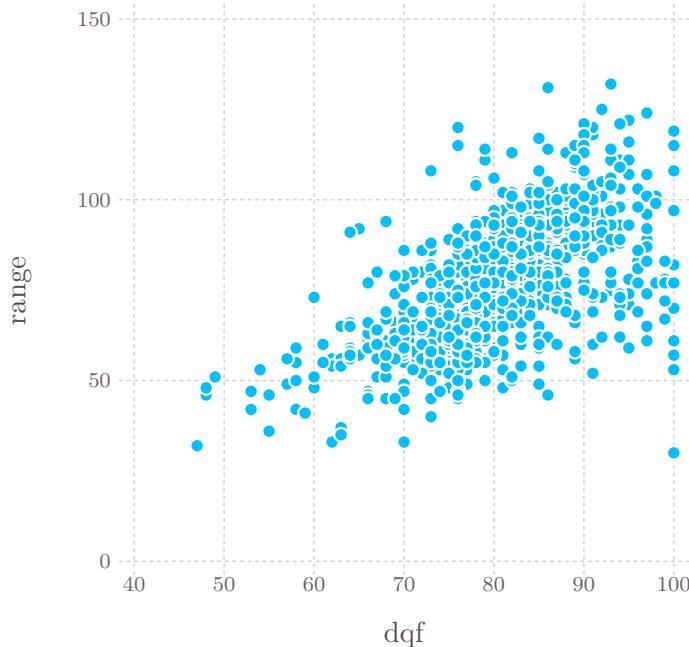


Figure 4.4: 1000 values measured at 1 m distance

²Data Quality Factor

Figure 4.5 shows measurements taken at different distances. The values for further distances have far more noise than values for lower distances. This leads to bad consequences.

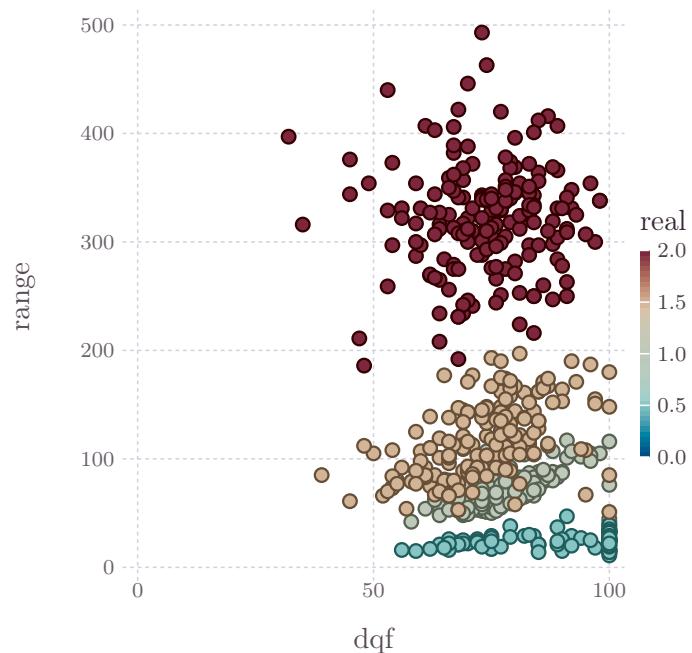


Figure 4.5: values measured at 0.5 m to 2 m real distance

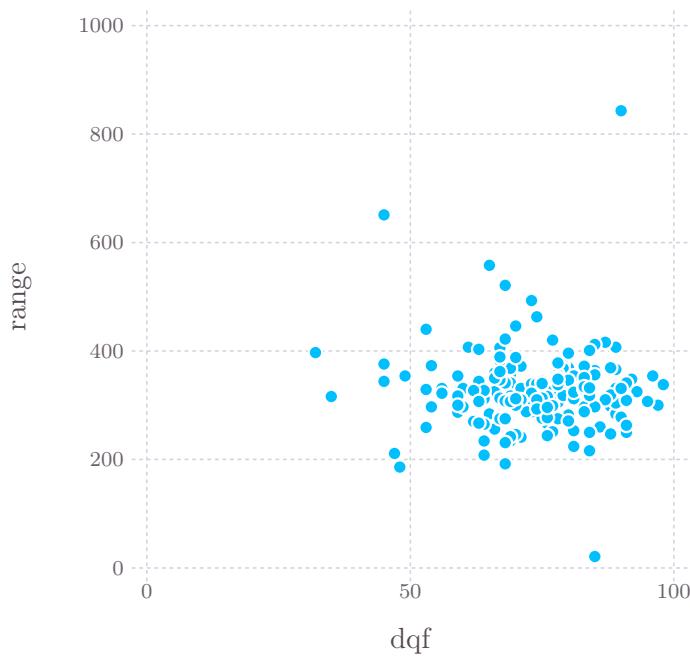


Figure 4.6: 100 values measured at 2 m distance

4.2.4 Influence of Distance

It is important to know how the ranging nodes behave at different distances. In Figure 4.7 this relationship is shown. The results are not what was hoped for when the hardware was selected. As you can see in Figure 4.7 the lower values yielded for any given distance might be in the intervall yielded for pretty much all distances. Additionally the mean values are not even nearly monotone, there are some irregularities in the values where a higher distance leads to lower range values.

prettyfy

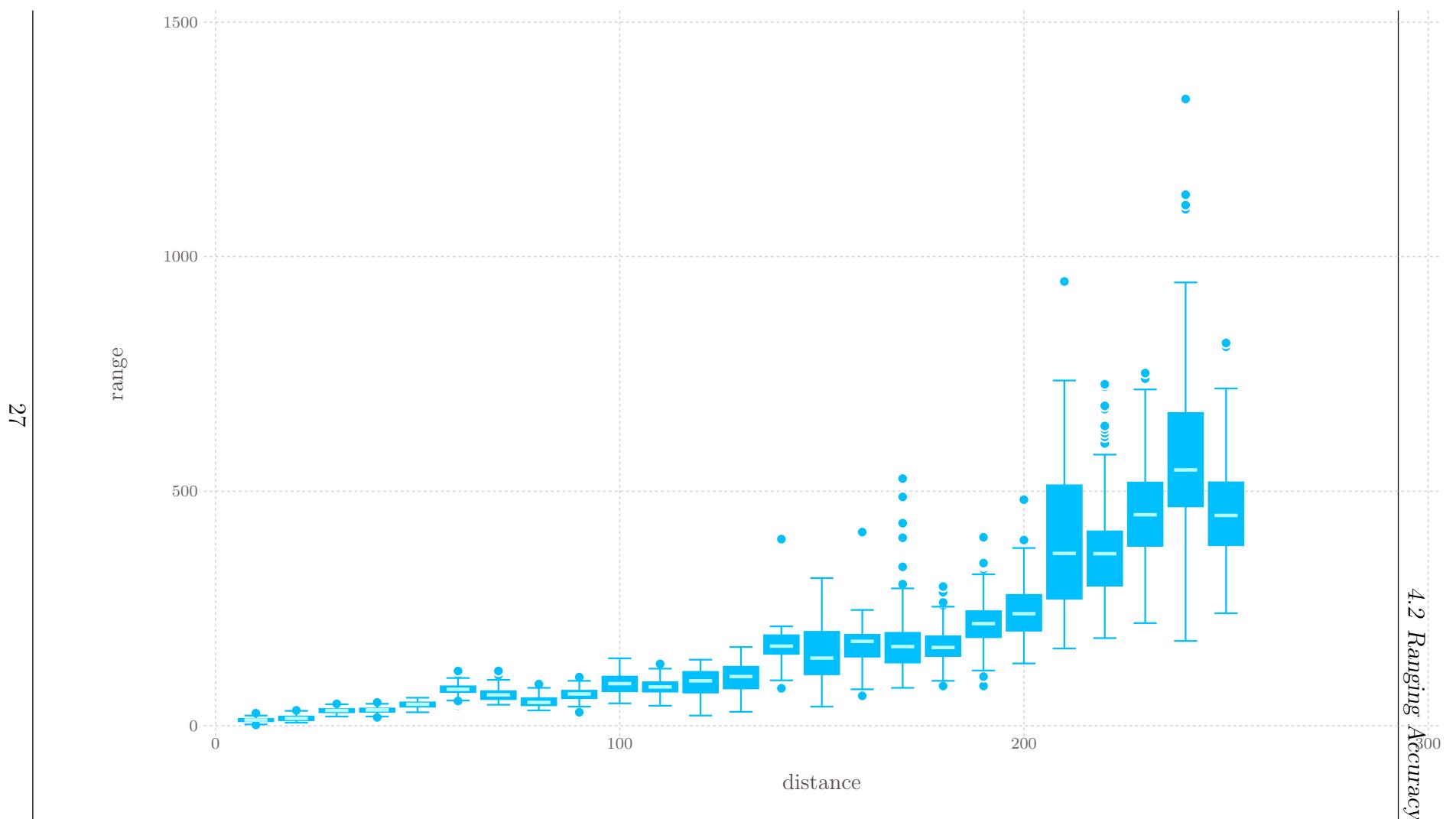


Figure 4.7: range values and real distance

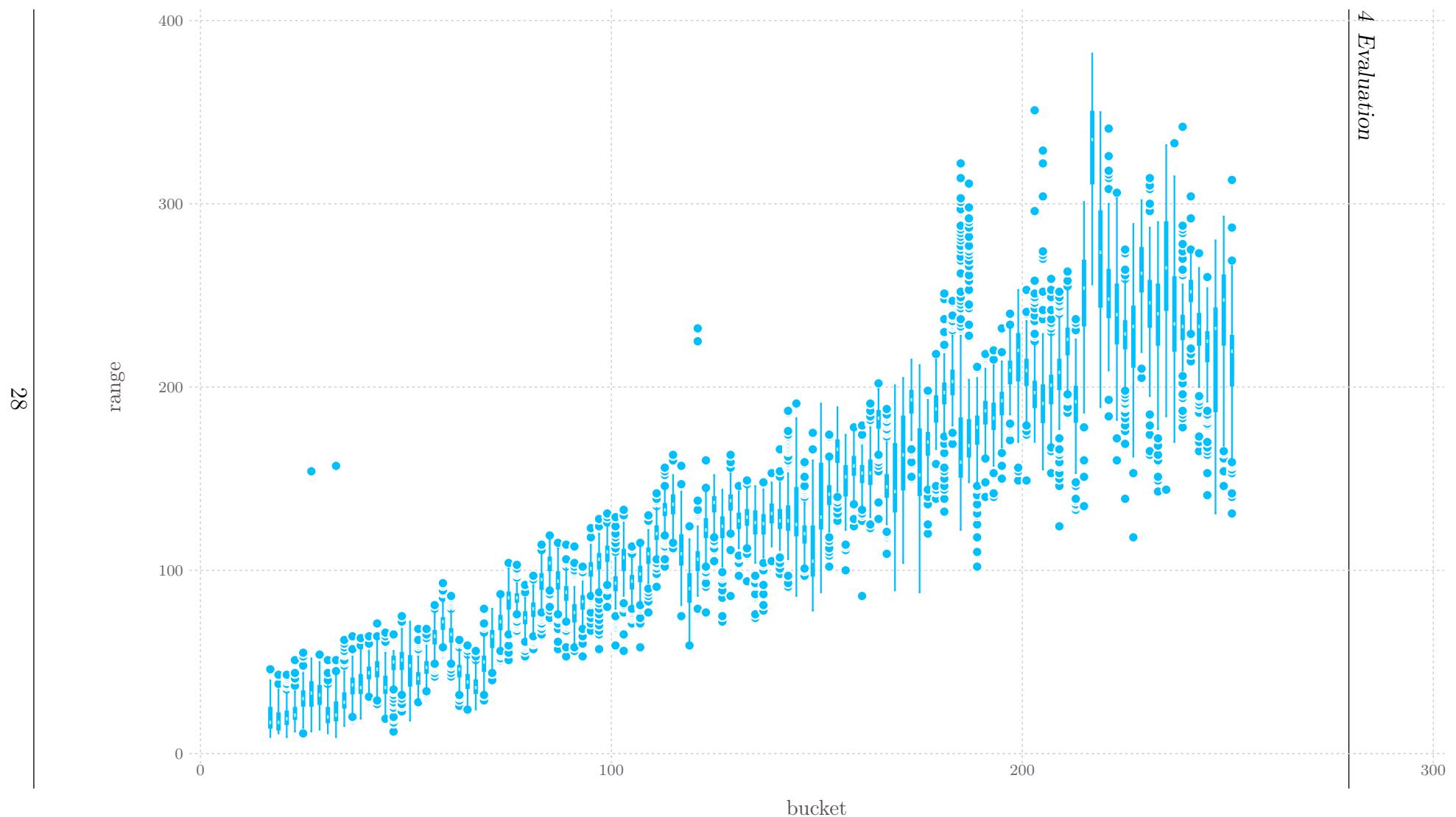


Figure 4.8: Range values with 2 cm resolution

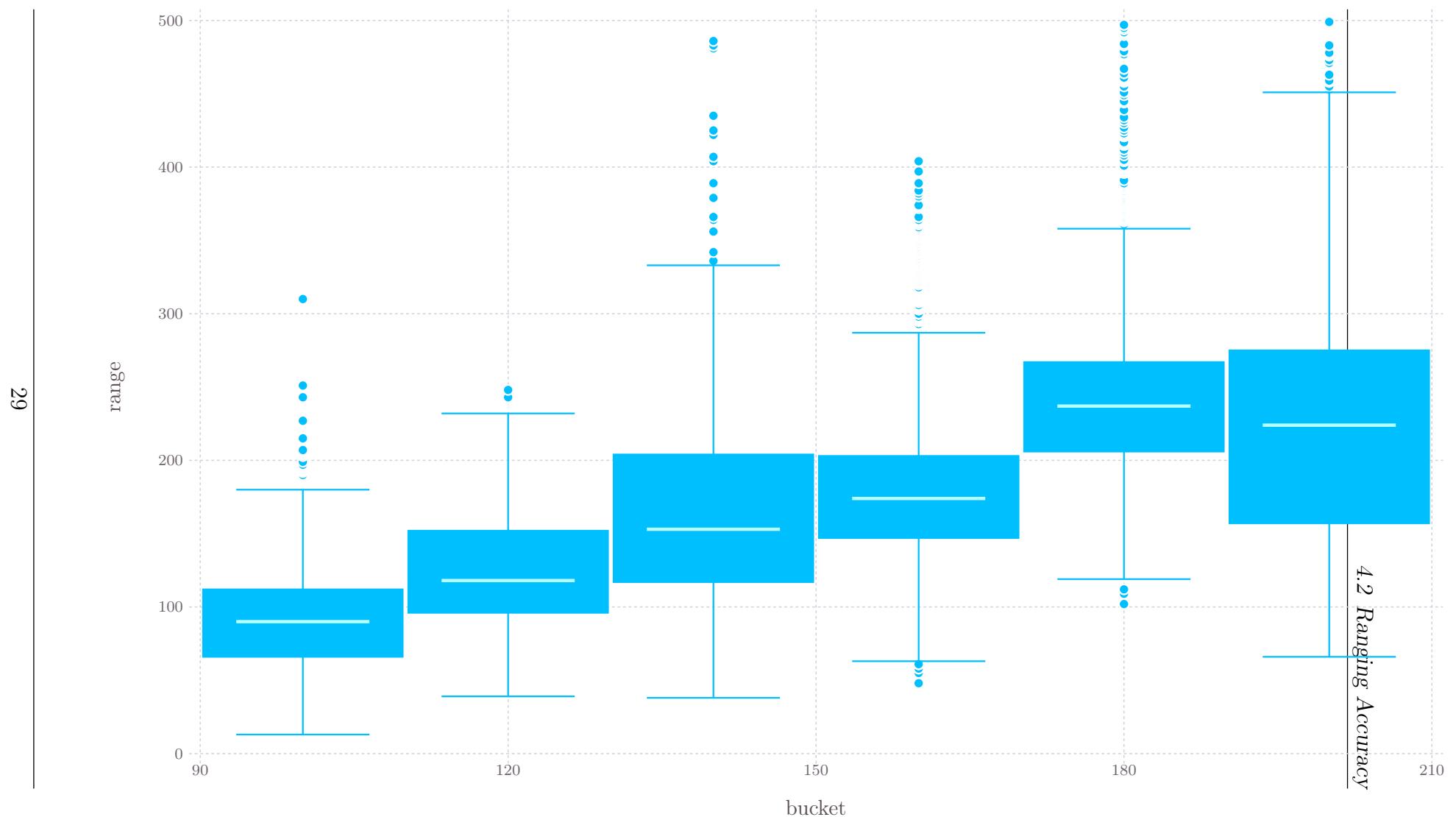


Figure 4.9: Range values with 1 cm resolution each bar represents all the values in the range, with bucket size of 20 cm

caption for
buckets
(wording)

Looking at a smaller resolution of distance values you can see exactly the same thing. This seems very bad at first glance. However the values look much better when multiple readings are combined. The result of this approach is shown in Figure 4.9.

However we can not simply measure 20 values to compute a filtered value at once, especially as the values must not be measured at the same distance. As long as the quadcopter is moving measurements could be taken continuously.

4.2.5 Antenna Orientation

(diversity,
no diversity)
* (parallel,
perpendicu-
lar)

4.2.6 Orientation of Devices

4.2.7 Moving Nodes

Movement has an influence on the quality of the range values depending on the ranging method used. For the phase different measurements a moving node could mess up the range value if the phase differences measured at multiple frequencies don't match the same distance because the node moved in between.

wording

However moving the node in a defined way and taking a measurement at a fixed distance is a sophisticated task.

4.2.8 Ranging on FINken Robots

4.3 Properties of a Distance Function

The ranging sensor on the FINken robot shall be used to provide a distance between two quadcopters, similar to a distance measure used in swarm intelligence algorithms. In the pure mathematical sense a distance function has to fulfill certain properties.

If $f(x, y)$ is a distance function it has to have the following properties.

$$f(x, y) \geq 0 \quad (4.1)$$

$$f(x, y) = 0 \iff x = y \quad (4.2)$$

$$f(x, y) = f(y, x) \quad (4.3)$$

$$f(x, z) \leq f(x, y) + f(y, z) \quad (4.4)$$

Of course the value measured by any real sensor will not completely accomplish to satisfy those conditions. For use in swarm robotics it is therefore very interesting to know in which way the range values break the pattern of a mathematical distance function.

4.3.1 Non-negativity and Coincidence

The first property of a mathematical distance measure to look at is non-negativity. This is quite easy: The values yielded by the ranging modules are clearly positiv. Also the property of coincidence is always given. Each module has a unique address and is therefore able to check, if it is ranging itself. Having two modules occupy the same physical spot is obviosly not possible so there cannot be two different modules that are equivalent in a mathematical sense.

4.3.2 Symmetry

In this section the following notation will be used: $A \rightarrow B$ means a range reading is taken from node A with B as reflector node.

Symmetry is a property that can not be achieved by the ranging sensors because of noise. A range reading $A \rightarrow B$ will not be equal to the reading for $B \rightarrow A$ just because the two readings will be altered by noise. The question that remains is: Do we have the same error for both directions.

However the lack of symmetry might be utilized.

$$\frac{d(A \rightarrow B) + d(B \rightarrow A)}{2} \quad (4.5)$$

plot, evaluate, spoiler alert: Nope!

The remote ranging ability of the nodes can be exploited to gather both values $A \rightarrow B$ and $B \rightarrow A$ by averaging those values the error might be lowered. The new value shown in Equation 4.5 will be symmetric.

4.3.3 Triangle Inequality

The triangle inequality will also be broken by noise. I.e. if we measure $d(A, B) + X + d(B, C) + X$ and $d(A, C) + X$ the measurement error X might as well break the condition of the Triangle Inequality.

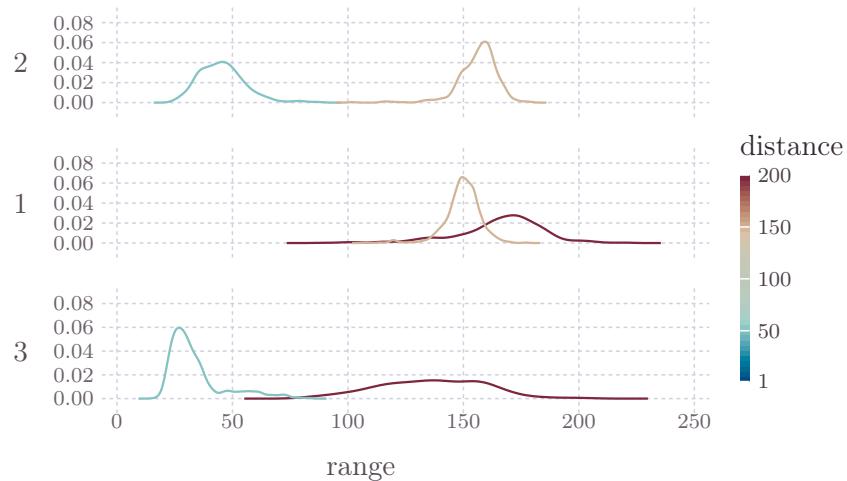


Figure 4.10: Density functions for 3 nodes, Nodes were placed in a straight line with numbers 1, 2, 3. Distance 1-2 was 150 cm, distance 2-3 was 50 cm.

4.4 Conclusion

The measured range values are not as good as was hoped for. A filter needs to be implemented to compute a usable range estimate should be given. This would introduce a time delay into the measurement which is not desireable.

If the right method for filtering is applied the sensor nodes can still be usefull for the FINken robots.

wording

5 Future Work

5.1 Misc

find better caption

5.1.1 Improve Range Values

Of course the range values can also be improved mathematically. In this work no filtering of valid measurements was performed. However the results might be improved by computing range values based on multiple measurements. A good way of doing this would be to find a “clever” way of filtering, that takes into consideration the distribution of the values. To exploit the distribution of the values a better theoretical model for this distribution would be needed.

filtering -> papers

5.1.2 Further Integration

integration testing, op-titrack

5.1.3 Flying with Pseudo-GPS

One of the things that can be done with ranging is position estimation via multilateration. Even if the FINken project is mainly interested in gaining a viable distance measure between individuals in a swarm a position estimate would be beneficial for the performance of the autopilot-especially as the normal use case for the Paparazzi autopilot is outdoors and with a GPS receiver attached.

To integrate positional data into the FINken two steps are needed: Implementing the multilateration algorithm on the sensors and writing a new GPS module that uses the data from the sensor. An additional benefit of using anchor nodes to compute a position estimate is that we can find out our current heading and the direction of other swarm entities much easier

5.1.4 Distance Based Bounding Box

Currently nets and ultrasound reflecting foil are used to enclose the flight area. Those could be replaced by ranging beacons that enclose the operating area, either by computing a position and defining coordinates which should not be left or by placing ranging nodes in the area and defining a minimum distance to the nearest node. This could be a nice setup for mobile deployment of the FINken robots.

5.2 Applications in Swarm Robotics

5.2.1 Direction

A value that the ranging sensors don't yield is the direction of the other sensor it is ranging with. For use in swarm algorithms this is a problem: Normally we compute a force towards or from the other swarm entities that is based on distance and direction. This way is still blocked for us as we can't measure direction.

5.2.2 Distance Based Swarm Objectives

Swarm behavior can be used for multi objective optimization. One of those objectives might be based on the measured distance i.e. stay close to a specific node or stay away from a specific node. Keeping a minimal distance and maximizing the distance between the robots might be used to avoid collisions between multiple robots. Avoiding collisions of course is one of the most important requirement for emergence of swarm behavior in a robotic swarm.

5.2.3 Formation Flying

One of the next steps is to algorithms from swarm intelligence to the FINken robots. The robots should be able to form a stable formation by using virtual attraction and repulsion forces to hold a given distance to their neighbors. If those distances are stable enough formations like triangle meshes can be formed.

get simulation data
übertragen

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