

# Collecting French Smart Meter Data for Residential Flexibility

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**Abstract**—Most of western countries have successfully deployed Smart Meters and are now in a phase of exploration to regulate and leverage the use of smart meter data. In France, the Linky smart meter provides data locally to the end-users in close to real-time, whereas it also makes 30 minutes data available to third party servers on the following day, which is inappropriate for operational energy services applications. In this work we detail the design of a full plug and play solution named Linky TIC Reader (LTR) to locally collect data from the French smart meter and make it available to end-users and to third party energy services providers in close to real time. Although many products to read Linky TIC output are already commercialised, they are usually externally supplied, unlike the LTR described in this work. This work aims to democratise access to an interoperable solution to control and automatically limit households' overall consumption at a low cost and for all distribution board configurations. Furthermore, this article describes several potential applications of the data collected by the LTR, such as load management, non-intrusive load monitoring and load forecasting.

**Index Terms**—Load Analysis, load management, residential flexibility, smart grids, smart meter

## I. INTRODUCTION

The energy transition requires the shift of several residential usages for electric technologies, such as electric vehicles and heat pumps [1]. In parallel, the increase of gas prices has led many buildings, shared properties and homes to shift from gas based heating systems to electric heaters. However, electric distribution network operators (DNO) cannot always reinforce the grid locally to enable this power increase. In this case, end-users are often not allowed to increase their maximum power subscription, and the transition to electric heating requires them to manually switch off some other electric appliances when the heaters are turned on. Similarly, residential flexibility might also be required by the grid operators to prevent grid congestion. Such flexibility can be triggered either directly by the DNO, who can leverage the smart metering infrastructure to disconnect households that are in a highly constrained location, or by aggregators and energy services providers who can use smart devices at the households premises to provide energy services [2], [3]. Finally, residential flexibility can also be controlled directly by the end-users without any third party's intervention, in which case it can be done manually or automatically through smart devices. All these levels of

flexibility control require the use of a device such as a smart meter to monitor and communicate the house's overall power.

In this paper, we focus on the case of France, that has already deployed more than 35 millions of its smart meter *Linky*. As France is now working on regulations of smart meters' data usage [4], this paper first aims to describe a low-tech solution to collect smart meter's real time data. Second, the paper aims to discuss the potential benefits and usage of Linky's real-time data, especially in the context of residential flexibility procurement as required by the energy transition.

Section II describes the current context and need for flexibility at households level. Then, Section III presents a solution to collect and make available the French smart meter real-time data. Finally, Section IV discusses the experimental results and potential applications.

## II. SMART METER ENABLED FLEXIBILITY

### A. Needs for Residential Flexibility

The electrification of transport and heat will strongly impact the distribution network in terms of voltage excursion and excessive network cables heat at specific times of the day. To visualise these impacts, we ran power flow studies on the standard European Low Voltage network feeder [5] for different deployment rates of EVs and HP. Households and EVs load profiles used are minutely data that come from ReFLEX, the UK largest smart local energy system demonstrator in the Orkney Islands, that monitored over 140 EVs; whereas HP load profiles came from the large scale trial "Renewable Heat Premium Payment Scheme" [6] that monitored hundreds of heat pumps. The average daily number of minutes with voltage excursions (below the lower voltage limit) was recorded and is displayed in Fig. 1 as a function of the deployment rate of EV and HP. It shows that some neighbourhoods might experience more than one hour per day of local voltage constraints. These constraints could either be solved by expensive grid reinforcement, or by residential flexibility coordinated by a third parties (Distribution System Operators and aggregators).

Along with the energy transition, the gas prices' increase has led several households with gas heating to change for electric heating without being given the possibility to increase their maximum power subscription to cover the load increase in Winter. Therefore, several households have experienced

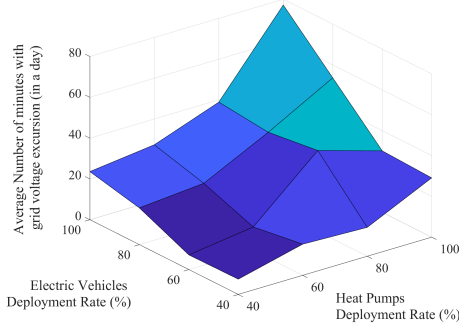


Fig. 1. Simulated average number of minutes in a day with Low Voltage network voltage excursions in a European neighbourhood.

instantaneous power cut due to excessive power consumption. This can be seen in Fig. 2 where an apartment with a 6kVA subscription was disconnected from the grid at 18:44 by the smart meter circuit breaker due to a power consumption excess from electric loads including water storage heater, space heaters and cooking plates. A similar issue could also be faced by households acquiring an EV, as shown by the purple curve in Fig. 2). Such situations could be avoided thanks to households flexibility enabled by real-time smart meter data.

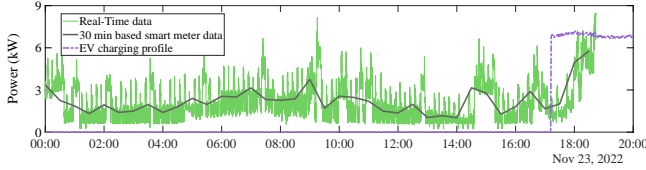


Fig. 2. Example of an EV charger load curve and of a winter's household electric load with a power subscription of 6kVA, and disconnection at 18:44.

### B. French Smart Meter Characteristics

The French smart meter Linky provides two types of data that are shown in Fig. 2. One (in grey) with a 30minutes time interval, that is automatically sent at a remote concentrator of the French DSO through power line communication [7], and that is made available to the end-users on the following day, making it inappropriate for use in operational decisions for electric flexibility. The other type of data is real-time data available locally at a time granularity below 5 seconds through connectors of the smart meter named the TIC (Tele-Information Client) and visible in Fig. 4. However, collecting this data requires an additional electronic device to decode the TIC data and send it to a back-end that would be able to inform the end-users of load power excess or to control smart appliances. Although such device can theoretically be supplied directly by the smart meter itself, it is made complicated by the fact that Linky only provides an AC signal of  $6V_{rms}$  at 50kHz with a minimum power of 130mW [8], which is very low to supply an electronic device that aims to send data in real-time to a web service through an internet or a LoRa connection.

This section demonstrated the need for real-time monitoring of households' load consumption in order to provide residential flexibility. In the case of the French infrastructure, it was shown that such monitoring can be done by the smart meter Linky, but it requires the integration of an additional electronic device. The next section will describe the design of such a device aiming to automatically read the household's power consumption from the smart meter, send data to third party services, and provide real-time control of local assets such as heating devices or electric vehicles.

## III. SOLUTION FOR FRENCH SMART METER DATA COLLECTION

This section describes the details of a Linky TIC Reader (LTR). The main constraints are the low power supply available at the Linky connection, and the space limitation to integrate such a device into Linky's casing. The power supplied by Linky for a LTR is slightly greater than 130mW, whereas the minimal power requirement to send any message is between 400 and 560mW over a few seconds for WIFI protocol, and between 60 and 400mW for LoRa communication. Therefore, the main approach for a LTR is to store energy in a large supercapacitor, and to power up the LTR when there is enough energy to read Linky's data. Then, if the energy is large enough for data transmission, the LTR can send data to a third party web service through an API. It is therefore necessary to consider four main operations: first, the charging phase of a supercapacitor, that occurs every time the other operations have emptied the capacitor, second the recording phase, that aims to read data from the smart meter. Third, the action phase, that consists in switching on or off flexible assets directly connected to the LTR in case of high household power consumption, and finally the communication phase that sends data to a remote third party for energy or non-energy services.

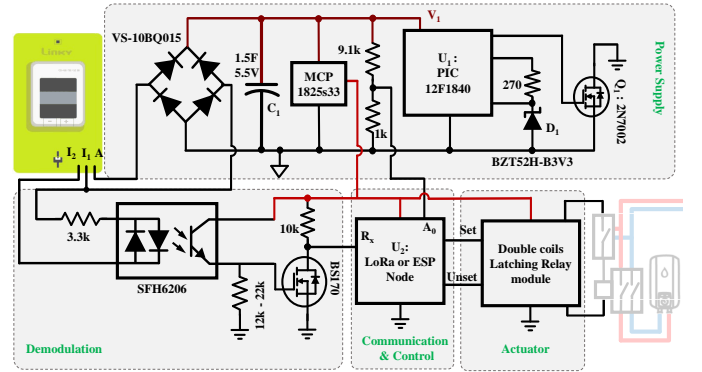


Fig. 3. Global schematic of the LTR that controls a water storage heater.

### A. Architecture of the LTR

The LTR is composed of 4 main elements. The power supply, the demodulation, the communication and control, and the actuator modules. The links between all of these elements and their schematic is proposed in Fig. 3. Because WIFI constraints are higher than for other protocols, the rest of the

paper focusses on a Wifi version that is fully replicable in a LoRa or GSM configuration. Each one of the four elements presented in Fig. 3 are described in the next subsections.

### B. Demodulation Module

The demodulation module aims to demodulate the signal that is made available by the Tele-information Client (TIC) connector of Linky smart meter. It adopts a well-adopted optocoupler based architecture that is already available to purchase on the market, and will therefore not be described here. We highlight however that there are two versions of the French smart meter, that communicate either at 1200bps or at 9600bps, which require a demodulator resistor value of 22k $\Omega$  or 12k $\Omega$  respectively, as shown in Fig. 3.

### C. Actuator

The actuator aims to connect or disconnect a flexible load depending on the household's power consumption. It consists of a latching relay similar to the one in [9] with two coils in order to limit the power consumption from the control module. Small loads can directly be connected to the relay, whereas large loads require the use of an intermediary circuit breaker as it is done for peak/off-peak hours circuit breakers [10] and shown in Fig. 3.

### D. Power Supply Module

Although it is possible to directly supply the demodulation and communication modules using a USB power adaptor with an electric plug from the house distribution board, this paper focusses on the design of an integrated solution that directly powers from the smart meter and that would fit in any household configuration. The power supply aims to rectify the AC power available, to charge a supercapacitor that acts as an energy tank and to connect this supercapacitor to the rest of the circuit (i.e. the demodulation, communication and actuator module) through the MOSFET  $Q_1$  (right side of Fig. 3) when  $C_1$  is enough charged. The indication that the supercapacitor is charged enough is given by its voltage ( $V_1 = \sqrt{\frac{2E}{C_1}}$ ), which is monitored by the power supply module and used to decide to supply or cut off the rest of the circuit. Although there are not many other options, using  $V_1$  as the main indicator to supply or not the rest of the circuit brings a great challenge: indeed, although  $V_1$  increases when the rest of the circuit is not connected, it will then directly decrease rapidly once the circuit is connected, which will lead to a disconnection of the rest of the circuit before it was able to finish its operation. Therefore, there is the need for a hysteresis control loop such that the connection of the rest of the circuit through  $Q_1$  is triggered at a high voltage threshold for  $V_1$ , and it should be kept switched on until  $V_1$  decreases below a much lower voltage threshold.

Although a Schmitt trigger could provide such hysteresis control in theory, it can not work correctly in the case of Linky as the trigger's input voltage would be directly proportional to its supply voltage (i.e.  $V_1$ , the voltage at  $C_1$  output). Therefore, we chose to use a low power microcontroller  $U_1$  to control the

voltage of the hysteresis and to control the supply of the rest of the circuit through the switching of  $Q_1$ . The microcontroller implements the following logic: if the capacitor voltage has been above 4.5V for at least 20 consecutive cycles (with a low clock frequency of 1MHz), the switch  $Q_1$  is switched on. This connects the ground voltage level of the communication module with the ground level of  $V_1$ , which will supply the communication and control module with the 3.3V voltage regulator (MCP1825). The switch  $Q_1$  is kept switched on until the voltage  $V_1$  drops below a threshold of 4.1V for at least 200 cycles. As the microcontroller  $U_1$  is directly supplied by  $V_1$ , which is also the voltage that it aims to monitor, this voltage measurement has to be done by an analog input of  $U_1$  that measures the voltage at the end of a 3.3V Zener diode  $D_1$ . The total cost for a single power supply module is below 13€.

### E. Communication and Control Module

In normal operation, the communication module of the LTR achieves three main purposes. First, it wakes up from sleep mode and reads Linky data made available at the output of the demodulation module and stores it in an internal EEPROM memory before going back to sleep mode to save energy. Second, before going back to sleep: 1. If a load is connected to its actuator, the LTR takes the decision to switch on or off the actuator (which connects/disconnects the flexible electric appliance such as water storage heater or EV) based on the instant power consumption measured by the smart meter: if the house power consumption is greater than a predetermined threshold based on the household's power subscription, it is urgent to switch off flexible appliances. 2. Similarly, in the case where some flexible appliances are remotely controlled by a third party service, the communication module will send a *switch off* request through WIFI or LoRa to the third party web service regardless of the energy quantity stored into the supercapacitor  $C_1$ . This will allow the third party service to put back the household to safe electric consumption by remotely switching off their smart appliances such as EV chargers. Finally, regardless of the household power consumption value, if the voltage  $V_1$  is high enough, the communication module connects to a registered WIFI network and sends all the previously recorded data to a remote server (e.g. third party web service).

Before achieving this normal operation mode, the communication module must be configured in order to connect to the right WIFI SSID and to store the web addresses to which data should be sent. This is done at the initialisation phase of the LTR by having the communication module set up in Access Point mode with an internal web server stored to get the user's inputs to successfully connect to an existing WIFI.

In order to propose an open source design that anyone could reproduce and install at their household, we worked with the compact, fully democratised and easy to use ESP8266 based WEMO D1 mini Lite boards, that can be purchased for less than 10€. One of the main advantage of such boards is that many libraries have been developed to help the implementation. More specifically, such boards have all

the Transport Layer Security protocols available in dedicated libraries. Therefore, this choice allows an easy implementation of security layers to safely connect to https servers. For what concerns security aspects, we have configured a Wifclient secure instance to set trust anchors (third party servers) using their real https certificates delivered by a root SSL certification authority. The drawbacks of using secure connection to remote servers are discussed in Section IV.

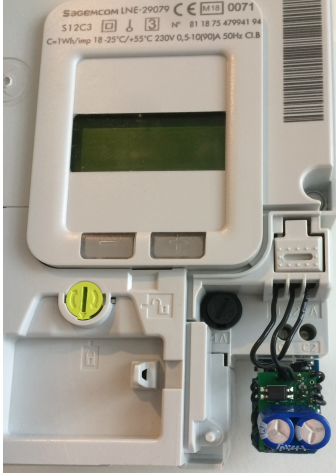


Fig. 4. Integration of the WIFI based Linky TIC Reader (LTR) device for Linky local data collection and transmission to third party energy services.

The final result of an LTR implementation is displayed without packaging in Fig. 4, with a single unit price below 30€. All the schematics and codes to reproduce this Linky TIC Reader (LTR) are available as open source documentation from the github repository referenced in [11].

#### IV. USE OF LTR FOR ENERGY SERVICES

In this section, we describe the experimental results of the LTR testing phase, and discuss several usages of this device.

##### A. Experimental results

The LTR was implemented, tested and deployed in several households for a period of over 6 months. Fig. 2 displays the data captured by one of the LTR in green, and in grey is displayed the associated smart meter data. The main learning from this implementation mostly concerns the time interval between two consecutive data transmission, as it is the only characteristics that depends on the external environment (power available at the smart meter's end). Table I shows the time interval between two consecutive transmission events to a remote server. We can see that because of the low power supply and the high energy requirements for the communication module, the time between two consecutive transmission of data by the LTR is always above 19 seconds. However, we also note that for custom applications, it is possible to send data as a bunch, instead of one data per transmission, which can be a workaround of this limitation. However, for third party services, the data might have to be sent individually

and can be the average of all recorded values since the last transmission.

TABLE I  
IMPACTS OF SECURITY LAYERS ON LTR DATA TRANSMISSION.

| Operation mode       | time interval between 2 transmissions |         |         |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                      | mean (s)                              | max (s) | min (s) |
| with security layers | 54.6                                  | 140     | 20      |
| without security     | 33                                    | 68      | 19      |

Also, we can compare the case of a secure connection to the remote server(through https), and the case without any security considerations. Because of the required security handshake and encryption, the energy consumed by the LTR to send data with a secure connection is much higher than for a simple http connection. As a result, it takes more time for the LTR supercapacitor to retrieve an acceptable voltage level allowing the LTR to send data again (see Table I). Therefore, a lower frequency in data collection is the price to pay for a secure connection with encrypted data and effective authentication of the device and the server. In the rest of the paper, we discuss the potential use of LTR collected data for energy and non-energy services.

##### B. Use cases for LTR data

LTR data consist in Linky smart meter data that is made available at a much higher frequency than the DNO does (less than 1min data for the LTR against 30 min data for the DNO services). However, it is not full real-time data as remote servers will receive data only once every 30-55 seconds. We discuss here the potential use of such data, following the list of applications proposed in [12].

1) *Load Analysis* : Load analysis mostly consists in the identification of issues in the load profile of a households (bad data, non-technical loss, profiling) which can be achieved with LTR data. Moreover, using LTR data, it is also possible to analyse further households' consumption and possibly contribute in the identification of residential flexibility procurement in case of participation in a flexibility event. Residential flexibility settlement require an aggregator to compute the flexibility effort from households that participated in such event (i.e. the flexibility delivered by the household compared to a baseline). It currently consists in the comparison of the actual consumption with an average consumption (based on 30min data) over several days prior to the time of delivery, called the baseline [13]. Adding capabilities such as the ones described in Section IV-B3 could help to identify actual flexibility efforts based on assets switching and not only load reduction.

2) *Load Management*: LTR can be used for participation in demand response schemes, but also to identify itself the need to reduce an household's power consumption, and then to switch off one of the flexible assets (heating appliances, EV chargers, ...) either by direct control, as described in Fig. 3, or through remote control by sending the control request to a remote server able to control flexible assets.

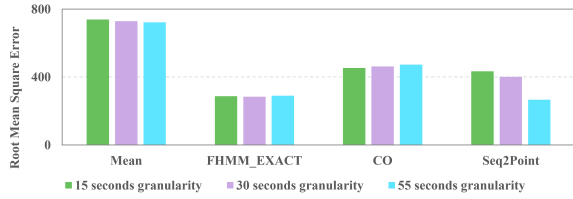


Fig. 5. Comparison of RMSE for 4 state of the art NILM algorithms used for different frequency of data transmission (15, 30 and 55 seconds).

3) *Non-Intrusive Load Monitoring*: Non-intrusive Load Monitoring (NILM) consists in the identification of appliances' switching (on or off) based only on the mains' measurement, which can give information about the households' members activities and could be used by families for home based elderly monitoring. Although it usually requires high frequency resolution monitoring data (seconds to sub-second), we implemented state of the art NILM algorithms with LTR data to compare the capability to identify appliances with and without security layers. Fig. 5 shows the Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) for identification of a water storage heater in an apartment based on 6 weeks of data with a short period of calibration during which only the water heater storage appliance was connected to the mains. We can see that for each algorithm, the identification error is similar for all data transmission time except in the case of the Sequence to Point algorithm for which 55 seconds between two data transmission provided even better results in our case than any other algorithm used with 15 seconds data granularity. This demonstrates that if the TLR was to be used for NILM purposes, the addition of security layers would a priori not reduce the accuracy of the disaggregation. However, the calibration process might not be compatible with residential use cases.

4) *Load Forecasting*: Finally, LTR can be used for load forecasting purposes. It was reminded in [12] that load forecasting algorithms for individual households provide very low accuracy, and thus high Mean Absolute Percentage Error, especially compared to the case of aggregation with many other households. In this paper, we used LTR data gathered from experimentations held by the French Chair *UX for Smart Life* coordinated by the Universite Cote d'Azur to determine the impact of data aggregation in time on load forecasting accuracy, i.e. comparing the accuracy of a forecast of an household energy consumption for each hour of the day to the accuracy of forecasting the average energy consumption per day using k-Nearest Neighbours algorithm.

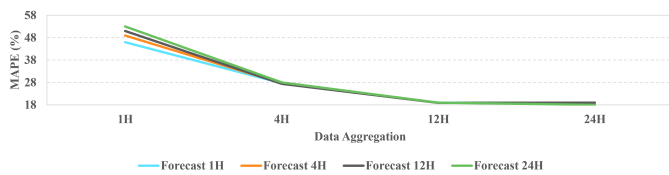


Fig. 6. MAPE accuracy for prediction of a single house load profile for different levels of data aggregation.

Fig. 6 shows that the accuracy increases considerably with the aggregation of data in time. It is indeed much more accurate to forecast energy consumption over a day than over an hour, mainly because of a reduction of data variability. This outcome could inform the design of local energy markets, as it shows that an individual household's load forecast with aggregation time below 4hours might lead to high load forecast errors, which makes it unsuited for local energy markets with clearing time intervals below 4H.

## V. CONCLUSION

This paper first described the relevance of smart meter data and residential flexibility to enable the energy transition. It then described an open-source plug-and-play solution to read and send French smart meter data to third party energy services to control flexible assets and provide flexibility services. The main aim of this paper was to provide a full access to such solution and to democratise access to residential flexibility, which could certainly help to support the necessary energy transition. Finally, several usages of LTR data were described, showing that it can seamlessly be used for energy and non-energy services, including load management, but also load analysis such as activity monitoring. Further work will include a more detailed study on the use of LTR data for elderly activity monitoring in the context of an ageing population.

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