

Backscatter RFID Chip

ECE 429 course project

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1 Introduction

1.1 Terminology

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in [RFC-2119].

NOTE: The .rst version of this document SHALL be considered the canonical version, the .pdf is merely a convenience. Discrepancies MUST resolve to the .rst version.

1.2 Radio-frequency identification

Radio-frequency identification (RFID) is a wireless communication scheme where a Reader transmits a strong signal towards a device (Tag) and the Tag responds by sending back data. This communication from the Tag to Reader is accomplished by the Tag varying the impedance of its antenna. The energy impinging on the Tag's antenna is absorbed and reflected ("scattered") in some proportion depending on the antenna's impedance characteristics.

If the Tag changes its antenna impedance rapidly, the back-scattered energy will change also, resulting in the scattered wave having double-sideband modulation components in addition to the original frequency. The Reader can detect these sidebands and demodulate the data that the Tag sent.

The most common method for modulating these back-scattered sidebands is to vary the frequency of the impedance changes between two frequencies. Bits are therefore able to be assigned to each unique frequency. In other words, the Tag switches the antenna impedance between two levels (usually open- / short-circuit) at frequency #1 or frequency #2 depending on the current bit to be sent.

Such a communication method requires extremely little power consumption on the Tag side of the link. With careful design, the Tag can even extract enough

[RFC-2119] <https://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc2119.txt>

energy from the incoming signal from the Reader to power itself and operate the antenna switch.

1.3 Synchronous Serial Communication

The two most common interfaces to connect peripheral devices to a central processor both use serial data connections, SPI and I2C. It is possible, and even somewhat common, to find devices which are compatible with both formats using the same pins.

- SPI : Serial Peripheral Interface bus
- I2C : Inter-Integrated-Circuit bus

The details and timing diagrams for each of these formats are easily found on the internet.

2 Project Specifications

The project for ECE 429 is to design and layout an integrated circuit in the On Semiconductor C5N 0.5um CMOS process that implements the major subsystems of an RFID tag. A complete design would be capable of transmitting arbitrary data on programmable backscatter channel frequencies in the 915 MHz ISM band and also possibly in the 2.4 GHz ISM band.

2.1 Processor interface specification

The processor interface to this chip SHALL be via an SPI slave port. From the view of the processor, the SPI port is viewed as an **N**-bit shift register. Updating any bit of the device's configuration requires sending the entire **N**-bit set of data in a single bus transaction.

Pins participating in the SPI interface SHALL be named:

- *SCLK*
- *MOSI*
- *MISO*
- *CS*

The chip datasheet SHALL clearly specify the SPI mode in terms of C_{POL} and C_{PHA} as used in reference [WP-SPI].

Data SHALL transferred beginning with the most-significant bit of the entire bit string. Data being returned from the slave to the master SHALL be shifted out of at the same time, also beginning with the *msb*.

Data bits that are applied to internal circuitry such as the NCO and DataOut register SHALL NOT change until the rising edge of the chip's CS pin.

Example of a transaction:

1. The Master initiates a bus transaction and shifts out the N-bit data string `data0[N-1:0]` most-significant bit first to the slave on the MOSI pin. The slave shifts out the current state of the data string on the MISO pin, also most-significant bit first.
 - After the rising edge of the CS pin, the Master will have received N-bits of data from the slave.
2. The Master initiates a second bus transaction and shifts out the N-bit data string `data1[N-1:0]` most-significant bit first to the slave on the MOSI pin. The slave shifts out the current state of the data string on the MISO pin, also most-significant bit first.
 - After the transaction, the Master will have again received N-bits of data from the slave.
 - This data MUST be identical to `data0[N-1:0]`.

A consequence of this protocol definition is that the Slave behaves as a write-only device. The Slave SHALL NOT send data back to the Master other than the data received from the Master in the previous bus transaction.

An asynchronous and active-low *reset* pin SHALL be provided by the chip. At the falling edge of the *reset* pin, every register and flip-flop SHALL immediately set their *Q* outputs to a default value immediately. This default register output state SHALL be clearly documented in the chip datasheet for EVERY register and EVERY flip-flop.

While the *reset* pin is low, every register MUST continually output the default state and ignore all input signals or clocks. After the rising edge of the *reset* pin, the chip SHALL resume normal operation.

[WP-SPI] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serial_Peripheral_Interface_Bus

2.1.1 Protocol references

<https://learn.sparkfun.com/tutorials/serial-peripheral-interface-spi>
http://www.i2cchip.com/mix_spi_i2c.html

Other links:

<http://wavedrom.com/>
<http://www.timing-diagrams.com/>

2.2 Numerically-controlled oscillator (NCO)

A numerically-controlled oscillator forms the basis of the programmable backscatter frequency control for both channel selection and frequency-shift-keying (FSK) modulation. The NCO SHALL use two 8-bit frequency control words, $fcw0[7:0]$ and $fcw1[7:0]$, which are applied to a multiplexer whose output is selected by the state of $fsel$. The current state of the phase accumulator register and the selected frequency control word SHALL be added, ignoring the carry-out, and used to set the next state of the phase accumulator register. This causes the accumulator to increment its state by the value of the selected fcw at each clock cycle.

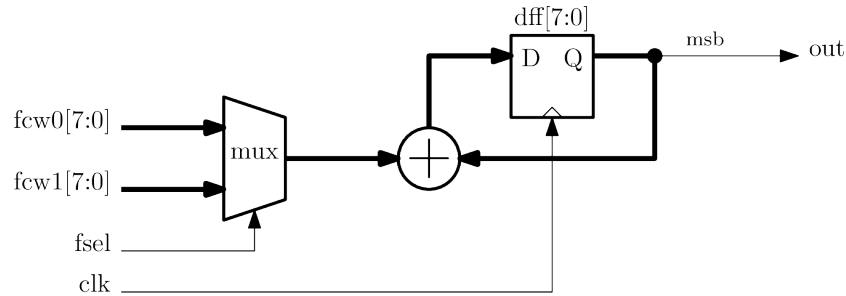


Figure 1: Numerically-controlled oscillator diagram and signals.

Only the most-significant bit of the phase accumulator SHALL be used as the output signal, which is a square wave at an average frequency of:

$$f_{out} = \frac{fcw}{256} f_{clk}$$

The smallest change in average output frequency for the NCO is given by:

$$f_{res} = \frac{f_{clk}}{256}$$

The duty cycle is not guaranteed to be 50% -- the high and low times may vary by ± 1 clock period. See reference [WP-NCO] for more information about NCO output characteristics.

2.3 Switch mapper

The switch mapper translates the mode of operation (FSK, or QAM) into appropriate antenna switch states. Switch states are translated as `switch[x] = 0`: NMOS off, and `switch[x] == 1`: NMOS on.

In FSK mode (`mode == 0`), the input *fmod* is directly passed to `switch[0]` while the other switches remain off. For QAM mode (`mode == 1`), the 2-bit input *symbol[1:0]* determines which single switch is on and the *fmod* input is ignored.

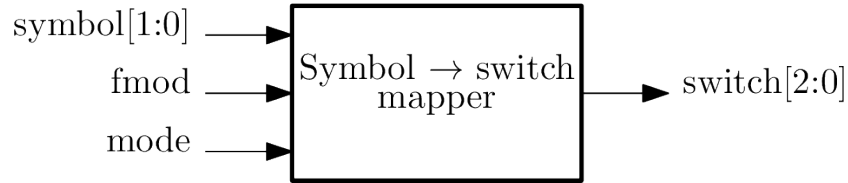


Figure 2: Switch state mapping block diagram. See the table "Symbol to antenna switch mapping table" for the decoding.

Table 1: Symbol to antenna switch mapping table.

mode	fmod	symbol[1:0]	switch[2:0]
0	0	XX	000
0	1	XX	001
1	X	00	000
1	X	01	001
1	X	10	010
1	X	11	100

[WP-NCO] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Numerically_controlled_oscillator

2.4 Antenna switches

These switch various impedances in parallel with the antenna to vary its net impedance and thence backscatter magnitude/phase.

Three N-type switches SHALL be have their gate terminals controlled by the signals `switch[2:0]`. The switches SHALL have their drain terminal directly connected to the *ANT* chip pin. Each switch transistors `switch[2]` and `switch[1]` SHALL be connected to separate resistors *R2* and *R1* of different values. Values for these resistors SHALL be determined through discussions with Professors White and Thomas. These resistor values SHALL be documented in the chip datasheet. The other terminal of the resistors SHALL be connected to node *antref* which SHALL also be connected to chip pin *ANTREF*. The source terminal of the `switch[0]` transistor SHALL be connected directly to the *antref* node. Pin *ANTREF* SHALL be assumed to be nominally at the system's lowest voltage, but the pin SHALL NOT be connected internally to any other "ground-like" node.

2.5 Charge pump

Accepts antenna input and outputs semi-regulated DC.