

Systems and Control Engineering Laboratory (SC 626)
Kilobotics

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Overview

Kilobots(Figure 1.1) are low cost robots designed at Harvard University's Self-Organizing Systems Research Lab <http://www.eecs.harvard.edu/ssr>. The robots are designed to make testing collective algorithms on hundreds or thousands of robots accessible to robotics researchers.



Figure 1.1: Kilobot

Though the Kilobots are low-cost, they maintain abilities similar to other collective robots. These abilities include differential drive locomotion, on-board computation power, neighbor-to-neighbor communication, neighbor-to-neighbor distance sensing, and ambient light sensing. Additionally they are designed to operate such that no robot requires any individual attention by a human operator. This makes controlling a group of Kilobots easy, whether there are 10 or 1000 in the group.

1.2 Features of Kilobot

- Processor : ATmega 328p (8bit @ 8MHz)

- Memory :
 - 32 KB Flash used for both user program and bootloader
 - 1KB EEPROM for storing calibration values and other non-volatile data and 2KB SRAM.
- Battery : Rechargeable Li-Ion 3.7V, for a 3 months autonomy in sleep mode. Each Kilobot has a built-in charger circuit, which charges the onboard battery when +6 volts is applied to any of the legs, and GND is applied to the charging tab.
- Charging : Kilobot charger for 10 robots simultaneously (optional).
- Communication : Kilobots can communicate with neighbors up to 7 cm away by reflecting infrared (IR) light off the ground surface.(Figure:1.2)
- Sensing : 1 IR and 1 light intensity.
 - When receiving a message, distance to the transmitting Kilobot can be determined using received signal strength. The distance depends on the surface used as the light intensity is used to compute the value.
 - The brightness of the ambient light shining on a Kilobot can be detected.
 - A Kilobot can sense its own battery voltage.
- Movement : Each Kilobot has 2 vibration motors, which are independently controllable, allowing for differential drive of the robot. Each motor can be set to 255 different power levels.
- Light : Each Kilobot has a red/green/blue (RGB) LED pointed upward, and each color has 3 levels of brightness control.
- Software : The Kilobot Controller software (kiloGUI) is available for controlling the controller board, sending program files to the robots and controlling them.
- Programming : For programming, the open source development software WinAVR combined with Eclipse gives a C programming environment. An API with basic functions such as motor speed, led control, distance measurement is available and some examples are provided.
- Dimensions : diameter: 33 mm, height 34 mm (including the legs, without recharge antenna).

1.3 Requirements

- Hardware :
 - Computer with Microsoft Windows and an USB port (not included)
 - Kilobot robot
 - Over-head controller (OHC)
 - Kilobot charger

- Software : To start programming the Kilobot with the new version from kilobotics, we have two solutions.
 - Online editor <https://www.kilobotics.com/editor>
 - Install WinAVR and Eclipse to compile the whole library on your computer https://github.com/mgauci/kilobot_notes/blob/master/eclipse_winavr_setup/eclipse_winavr_setup.md

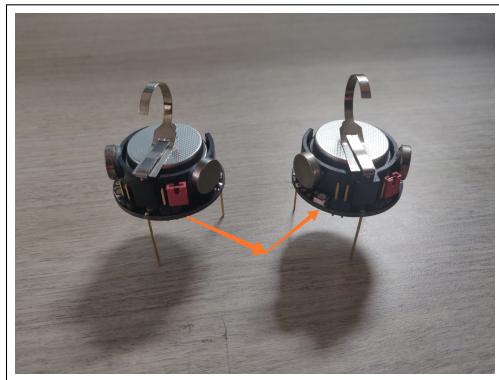


Figure 1.2: IR sensing

1.4 Over-Head Controller(OHC)

In case of Kilobots, instead of plugging in a charging cable for each robot in order to update its program, each can receive a program via an IR communication channel. This allows an over head IR transmitter to program all the robots in the collective in a fixed amount of time, independent of the number of robots.



Figure 1.3: Overhead Controller

1.5 Motor Calibration

Kilobot should be operated on a smooth, flat surface to ensure proper robot mobility. Only one Kilobot can be calibrated at the same time.

1. Place the Kilobot in PAUSE mode.
2. Open KiloGUI interface and then open Calibration mode.(Figure 1.4)
3. The first line (Unique ID) can be used to save an ID in your Kilobot. This can be useful if you want to save all calibration value for each Kilobot.
4. The second line (Turn Left) will configure the kilo_turn_left parameter to set the CCW movement. Set a value for the motor (approximately 70) and press the Test button. Adjust the value to obtain a smooth move.
5. Do the same as explain in point 4, for the right motor (Turn Right line).
6. Next is to set the straight move parameters. Start with the same value for the left and right motor (approximately 60) and press the Test button. Now adjust the two value to move the Kilobot as straight as possible.
7. Finally, when all the parameters are fine, you can press the Save button to write the parameters in the EEPROM of the Robot.

Chapter 2

Orbiting of Kilobots

2.1 Objective

Our objective is to make a Kilobot(planet) orbit around

- one stationary Kilobot(star)
- multiple stationary Kilobots.

2.2 With single stationary Kilobot

The algorithm for the planet motion with a single star is as follows:

1. Check for the message signal from star Kilobot.
2. If message not received go to step 1.
3. If message is received, calculate the distance.
4. If the distance is greater than Threshold value(fixed radius), move right. Else, move left.
5. Go to step 1.

Flowchart to the corresponding algorithm is illustrated in Figure 2.1.

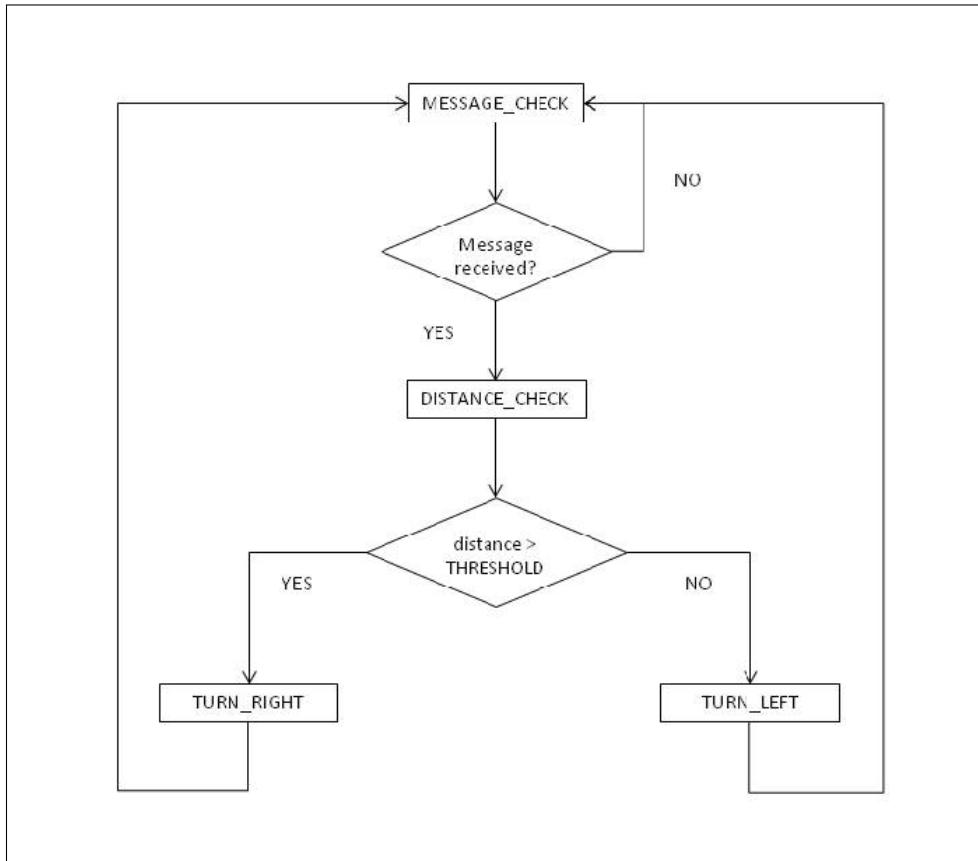


Figure 2.1: Flowchart for orbiting a Kilobot(Single star)

Results and Demonstration

As per the Kilobots manual, the maximum and minimum communication ranges are 110mm and 33mm respectively. So we have taken the orbit radius (*THRESHOLD*) as 50mm, which falls within good communication range. Also, we have given motor on time (*MOTOR_ON_DURATION*) as 500ms.

Video of working demo of problem statement can be accessed from the link in Figure 2.2.



Figure 2.2: [Orbiting of Kilobot \(Single Star\)](#)

2.3 With multiple stationary Kilobots

We have placed one more Kilobot within the communication range of the planet and star. It was observed that the planet collides with one of the star due to communication delay between them.

Video of working demo can be accessed from the link in Figure 2.3.



Figure 2.3: Planet colliding with one of the stars

To avoid collision, we have modified the above algorithm by checking the message from the neighbor Kilobots for multiple times. The algorithm is as follows:

1. First initialize a variable (*distance*) corresponding to distance between star and planet to 1000 (or to any other value which is greater than the range of Kilobots).
2. Check for message from neighbor Kilobots. If you receive the message, estimate the distance, then compare it with the value in the *distance* variable and replace the variable with the lowest value.
3. Go to step 2, until the number of messages received are equal to *TOTAL_NUM_COMMUNICATION*.

4. Now, the value of *distance* variable will be our distance between star and planet. If the distance is greater than required orbit radius (*THRESHOLD*) move right. Else, move left.
5. Go to step 1.

The flowchart for the corresponding algorithm is illustrated in Figure 2.4.

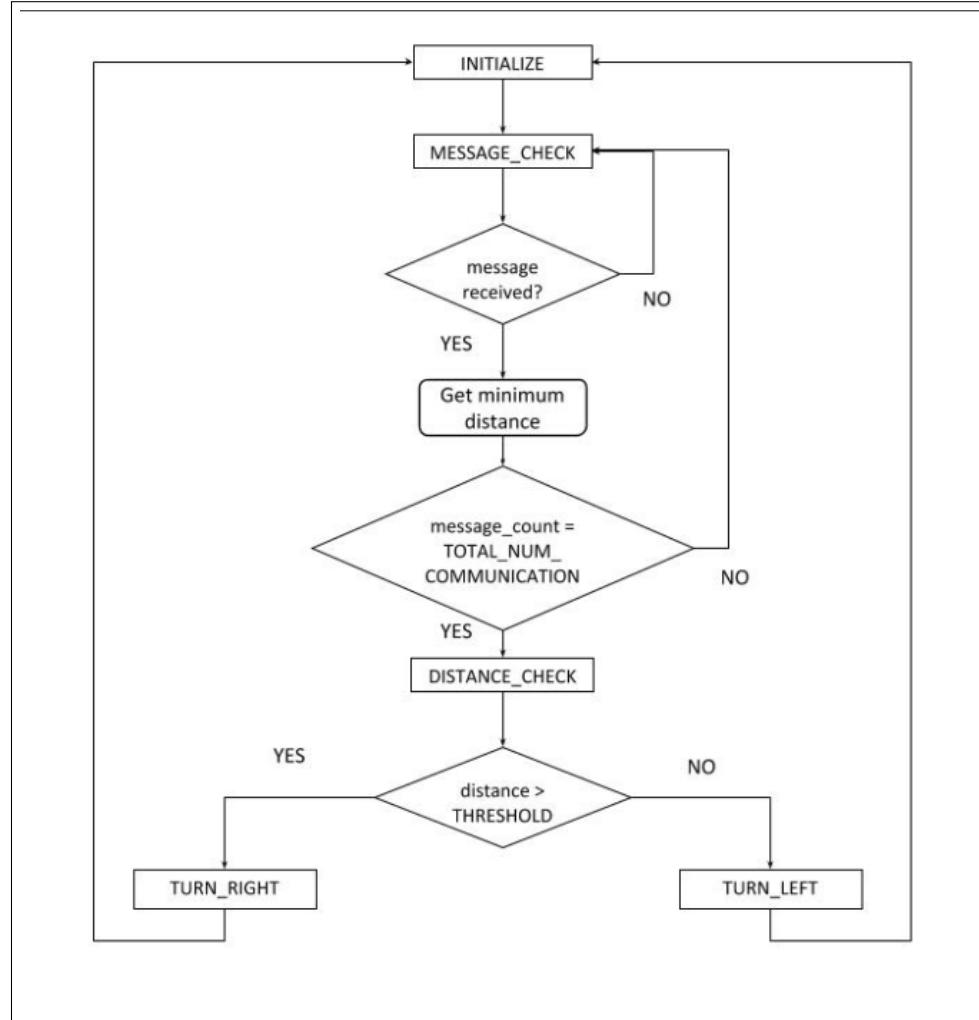


Figure 2.4: Flowchart for orbiting a Kilobot(Multiple star)

Results and Demonstration

We have used the same orbit radius ($THRESHOLD = 50$), and same motor on time ($MOTOR_ON_DURATION = 500$) as in the case of single star. To avoid collision between Kilobots we have checked for the message for multiple times i.e. $TOTAL_NUM_COMMUNICATION = 4$.

Video of working demo for this problem statement can be accessed from the link in Figure 2.5.



Figure 2.5: Orbiting of Kilobot (Multiple Star, $MOTOR_ON_DURATION = 500$, $TOTAL_NUM_COMMUNICATION = 4$)

It can be observed that in this case the speed of the planet Kilobot is less compared to the case with single stationary Kilobot. It can be increased by increasing the $MOTOR_ON_DURATION$ and decreasing the $TOTAL_NUM_COMMUNICATION$.

Video of working demo for this problem statement can be accessed from the link in Figure 2.4.



Figure 2.6: Orbiting of Kilobot (Multiple Star, $MOTOR_ON_DURATION = 800$, $TOTAL_NUM_COMMUNICATION = 3$)