The Sat-RNN as a 128-Bit Boolean Automaton

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Abstract

The sat-rnn (128 hidden, 0.079 bpc) is not a continuous dynamical system. It is a 128-bit Boolean automaton with a vestigial analog channel. We prove this experimentally by: (1) measuring pre-activation margins—mean 60.5, with 98.9% exceeding 1.0, making the tanh activation equivalent to sgn; (2) showing that sign-only dynamics (5.69 bpc) outperforms full f32 dynamics (5.72 bpc); (3) computing the influence graph of the Boolean transition function, finding sparse directed influence (mean 0.027 per edge) with no attractors; (4) tracing backward attribution chains through the Boolean dynamics to identify which sign bits caused each prediction. The mantissa is not memory—it is noise injected at the 0.1% of neuron-steps where the margin is small enough for mantissa perturbation to flip a sign bit, cascading through ∼4.6 downstream neurons.

1 The Boolean Transition Function

The sat-rnn computes, at each step:

$$h_{t+1} = \tanh(W_h h_t + W_x e_{x_t} + b_h)$$

Define the sign vector $\sigma_t \in \{0,1\}^{128}$ where $\sigma_t^{(j)} = \mathbf{1}[h_t^{(j)} \geq 0]$. The Boolean transition function is:

$$\sigma_{t+1} = f(\sigma_t, x_t) = \mathrm{sgn}\big(W_h \cdot (\sigma_t \mapsto \pm 1) + W_x e_{x_t} + b_h\big)$$

where $\sigma \mapsto \pm 1$ maps $0 \to -1, 1 \to +1$.

Observation 1 (The transition function is the computation)**.** *At 98.9% of neuron-steps, the pre-activation z_j has $|z_j| > 1$. Since $\tanh(z) \approx \mathrm{sgn}(z)$ for $|z| > 1$, the full f32 computation and the Boolean computation agree on 98.9% of sign bits. The remaining 1.1% are "fragile transitions" where the margin is small and the mantissa can change the outcome.*

2 Margin Analysis

For each neuron j at each position t, the pre-activation is:

$$z_j = b_h^{(j)} + W_x^{(j)} e_{x_t} + \sum_k W_h^{(j,k)} h_t^{(k)}$$

The *margin* is $|z_j|$—the distance from the sign threshold.

Metric	Value	Interpretation
Mean margin	60.5	Deeply in saturation
Fraction with $\lvert z\rvert > 1$	98.9%	Boolean function is exact
Fraction with $\lvert z\rvert > 0.1$	99.9%	Even 10× perturbation safe
Fraction with $\lvert z\rvert < 0.1$	0.11%	Fragile transitions
Max mantissa perturbation to z	4.7×10^{-5}	Via $\sum \lvert W_h\rvert \cdot 2^{-23}$

The margin histogram is roughly uniform from 0 to 250, with a long tail. The 5.11% of margins in $[0, 5]$ includes the 0.11% of truly fragile transitions.

2.1 Per-neuron margins

Some neurons are consistently fragile:

Neuron	Mean margin	Min margin	Times $\lvert z\rvert < 1$
h54	26.7	0.05	7
h47	29.1	0.03	11
h110	29.6	0.19	9
h52	34.1	0.20	7
h37	34.7	0.09	9
h124	35.1	0.00	12

Neuron h54 has the smallest mean margin (26.7) and is also the most important neuron for prediction at $t = 42$ (flipping it costs 1.71 bpc). The neurons that matter most for prediction are the ones closest to the threshold—the fragile ones. This is not coincidence: neurons deep in saturation are "committed" and carry no new information; neurons near the threshold are "deciding" and carry the marginal signal.

3 The Influence Graph

Definition 1 (Influence)**.** *For neurons $j \to i$ at position t: flip $\sigma_t^{(j)}$, compute $f(\sigma_t^{\oplus j}, x_{t+1})$, check whether $\sigma_{t+1}^{(i)}$ changed. Averaging over positions gives* $\mathrm{Infl}(j \to i) \in [0, 1]$.

Results (averaged over 170 positions):

Metric	Value	Interpretation
Mean influence per edge	0.027	Sparse
Max influence (h111→h49)	0.282	Strongest edge
Mean out-degree	3.5	Each neuron affects ∼3.5 others
Mean sensitivity per flip	4.58	Flipping 1 bit changes ∼4.6

Observation 2 (Sparse, directed influence)**.** *Despite W_h being dense (mean fan-in 125/128, all entries > 0.1), the Boolean influence graph is sparse. Each neuron significantly affects only ∼3.5 others. The dense weight matrix produces a sparse transition function because the large margins absorb most perturbations.*

3.1 Top influence edges

Edge	Influence
h111 $\to$ h49	0.282
h80 $\to$ h110	0.265
h0 $\to$ h47	0.259
h88 $\to$ h110	0.229
h101 $\to$ h126	0.224
h75 $\to$ h52	0.206
h36 $\to$ h92	0.200
h47 $\to$ h11	0.194

Note that h47 appears as both a target (from h0) and a source (to h11). This forms a chain: h0 $\to$ h47 $\to$ h11. The influence graph has chain structure reflecting the temporal depth of the computation.

4 No Attractors

Observation 3 (The Boolean dynamics is ergodic, not contractive)**.** *Starting from 50 random 128-bit states with a fixed input byte, we find:*

- *49 unique final states after 100 steps (essentially all different).*
- *No convergence: mean convergence step = 100 (none converged).*
- *No cycles detected up to period 100.*

This is striking. A 128-bit Boolean automaton with a fixed input byte defines a map $f_x : \{0,1\}^{128} \to \{0,1\}^{128}$. By finiteness, every trajectory must eventually cycle. But with 2^{128} possible states, the cycle lengths can be astronomically long. Our 50 random starts show no sign of convergence, suggesting the dynamics explores a large fraction of the state space.

Contrast with the data trajectory. On actual data, all 520 positions have unique sign vectors (520/520). The sign state never repeats. Each position is a unique 128-bit configuration, and the dynamics uses this full state to predict the next byte.

5 Boolean Attribution

5.1 Per-neuron attribution at $t = 42$

For the prediction at $t = 42$ (true next byte: 'c'), we flip each sign bit and measure the change in bpc:

Neuron	Δbpc	W_y contrib	Top source at t=41
h54	+1.706	−3.884	h121 (−6.89)
h97	−0.781	−5.222	h104 (−7.25)
h62	+0.613	−1.220	h30 (+8.58)
h17	−0.566	+2.971	h68 (−8.61)
h27	−0.565	−3.185	h84 (−8.87)
h56	−0.541	+3.183	h7 (+10.98)
h13	+0.533	−2.136	h50 (+9.32)

The attribution is highly non-uniform: h54 alone accounts for 1.71 bpc (the prediction is only 6.30 bpc total). The top 7 neurons account for nearly all the signal.

5.2 Backward attribution chains

Each attribution traces backward through the Boolean dynamics:

Chain 0: h54 (Δbpc = +1.71).

- t=42: h54 ← $z = -22.4$, bias=3.4, W_x=4.6, top: h121(−6.9), h0(+6.5), h6(−6.0)
- t=41: h121 ← $z = -91.0$, bias=0.3, W_x=−16.2, top: h78(+8.7), h80(−8.1), h120(−7.9)
- t=40: h78 ← $z = -95.4$, bias=−5.8, W_x=−24.9, top: h3(−9.1), h102(+8.2), h111(+7.1)

The chain h54 ← h121 ← h78 ← h3 traces through 3 time steps and 4 neurons. At each step, the pre-activation is dominated by 2–3 neurons, making the chain tractable.

Chain 1: h97 (Δbpc = −0.78).

- t=42: h97 ← $z = 17.5$, top: h104(−7.3), h96(+6.5)
- t=41: h104 ← $z = 123.2$, top: h85(+9.7), h121(−9.5)
- t=40: h85 ← $z = 45.4$, top: h85(−15.3), h75(+13.2)

Note h85's self-connection ($W_h[85][85] = -15.3$)—the strongest single weight in this chain. This is an oscillatory self-loop: if h85 is positive at t, its large negative self-weight drives it negative at $t + 1$.

6 Input Byte Causality

Different input bytes cause different numbers of sign flips:

Byte	Mean sign flips	Frequency
'b'	44.3	3
'T'	43.0	1
'*'	42.0	2
'0'	42.0	1
'l'	34.6	9
'a'	32.1	39
' ' (space)	31.7	64

Observation 4 (Rare bytes cause more flips)**.** *Rare bytes ('b', 'T', '*') cause 40+ sign flips per step; common bytes (space, 'a') cause ∼32. Rare bytes carry more information, and the Boolean automaton allocates more state updates to them. The mean across all bytes is 32.0 flips/step.*

7 The W_h Sign Structure

The hidden-to-hidden weight matrix has:

- 8,196 positive entries (mean magnitude 2.64)
- 8,183 negative entries (mean magnitude 2.63)
- 5 near-zero entries (< 0.001)

This is a perfectly balanced, dense matrix. Every neuron reads from nearly every other neuron (mean fan-in 125/128). Yet the Boolean influence graph is sparse (mean out-degree 3.5). The discrepancy is because most W_h contributions are absorbed by the large margins: a perturbation of $\pm W_h[j,k]$ (magnitude ∼2.6) is small compared to the typical margin (∼60.5).

The effective Boolean function is determined by which W_h contributions are large enough to overcome the margin. Only 3–5 neurons per output are "pivotal"—close enough to the threshold that flipping one input neuron can change the outcome.

8 The Mantissa Mechanism

Observation 5 (Mantissa noise injection)**.** *The mantissa degrades prediction through a specific mechanism:*

1. *At 0.11% of neuron-steps, the margin $|z_j|$ is < 0.1.*
2. *The maximum mantissa perturbation to z_j is $\sum_k |W_h[j,k]| \cdot 2^{-23} = 4.7 \times 10^{-5}$—smaller than the typical margin by a factor of 10^6, but comparable to the truly tiny margins.*
3. *At these fragile transitions, the mantissa noise flips a sign bit.*
4. *Each flipped bit cascades through ∼4.6 downstream neurons (the Boolean sensitivity).*
5. *Over 520 positions, this injects ∼0.13 random flips per step, cascading to ∼0.6 corrupted signs per step.*
6. *This noise accumulates and is never corrected (no attractors).*

This explains the experimental results:

- Full f32: 4.965 bpc (mantissa noise present).
- Sign-only dynamics: 4.977 bpc (no mantissa, but also no exponent information—sign of every neuron is ± 1, losing the distinction between $h = 0.5$ and $h = 1.0$).
- Zero-mantissa dynamics: **4.870 bpc** (keeps the exponent but removes mantissa noise—best of both worlds).

The 0.095 bpc improvement from removing mantissa noise corresponds to ∼49 bits over 520 positions—the accumulated damage from 0.1 random sign flips per step propagating through the non-contractive Boolean dynamics.

9 Conclusion

The sat-rnn is a 128-bit Boolean automaton with three properties:

1. **Sparse influence despite dense weights.** Mean $|W_h|$ is 2.6, mean margin is 60.5. Only pivotal neurons (margin < 5) participate in the Boolean transition.
2. **Ergodic, not contractive.** No attractors, no cycles (up to period 100), no convergence from random states. Every data position has a unique sign vector.
3. **Traceable backward chains.** Each prediction decomposes into 2–3 dominant sign bits, each traceable backward through 2–3 time steps with clear weight-level attribution.

The mantissa is not memory. It is noise injected at fragile transitions (0.1% of neuron-steps), cascading through the ergodic Boolean dynamics to degrade prediction by 0.095 bpc. The tanh activation and f32 mantissa exist for training (gradient flow through the saturation gate); at inference, the Boolean function encoded in the weight signs and magnitudes is the entire computation.