

Network Slicing and Resource Allocation in an Open RAN System

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Abstract—

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Main Contributions

In this paper, as depicted in Figure 1, we aim at solving the problem of dynamic network slicing in the O-RAN system. Here, we examine a single-cell downlink system involving multiple network slices that share existing radio sources. The main contributions of this research are summarized as follow:

- The system has a two-time scale and should be solved in two layers. On a large-time scale, the problem of obtaining an optimal number of VNFs and the VNF placement is performed. Also, the assignment of PRB to the slices is obtained. On a small-time scale, the problem of power allocation, O-RU association and the assignment of PRB to UE in each slice is applied.
- We consider three types of services that requires specific QoS: URLLC, which requires low latency and high reliability; eMBB, which needs high data rate; and mMTC, which demand short-packet connectivity support for a massive number of low-power devices. The problem of RAN slicing for different types of services is studied in this research.
- We consider an intelligent resource allocation in the O-RAN architecture for the different services. Since conventional models do not perform well here because of the heterogeneous QoS requirements of each service type and the complexity of dynamic RAN slicing. So we must switch to machine learning and dynamic methods and find the most suitable approach. A dynamic strategy of resource allocation is required to solve this problem to achieve the specific QoS for each type of service in the O-RAN architecture. In the small-time scale, the actor-critic algorithm such as DDPG is applied to the system that is based on control policy search. This method directly searches the optimal control policy by estimating of the gradient with respect to the parameters of the control policy. In the large-time scale, the deep Q-Network is implemented which is a value based algorithm and it can find best solution for discrete action-state.

II. CURRENT STATE OF THE RESEARCH

A. System Model

Assume we have S preallocated slices serving S services contains eMBB, URLLC, and mMTC services; There are

S_1 slices for the first service type (eMBB), S_2 slices for the second service type (URLLC), and S_3 slices for the third service type (mMTC), , thus $S = S_1 + S_2 + S_3$. Each Service $s \in \{1, 2, \dots, S\}$ consists of U_s single-antenna user equipments (UEs) which require certain QoS to be able to use the requested program. There are different application requests which fall into one of these service categories. Each application request requires specific QoS. Based on the request for the application and QoS, a UE may be admitted and allocated to the resources. Assume each slice $s \in \{1, 2, \dots, S\}$, consists of K_s , pre-allocated physical resource blocks (PRBs) obtained in the large-time scale, M_s^d VNFs for the processing of O-DU, M_s^c VNFs for the processing of O-CU-UP and M_s^u VNFs for the processing of UPF. Virtual network functions (VNFs) are functional blocks of the system. Each VNF instance is running on a virtual machine (VM) using resources from the data centers. Each VM, requires enough resources of CPU, memory, storage and network bandwidth.

In addition, there are R multi-antenna RU that are shared between slices. Each RU $r \in \{1, 2, \dots, R\}$ has J antenna for transmitting and receiving data. Moreover, all RUs, have access to PRBs.

B. The Achievable Rate

The SNR of i^{th} UE requesting served at slice s on PRB k is obtained from

$$\rho_{r,u(s,i)}^k = \frac{|p_{r,u(s,i)}^k \mathbf{h}_{r,u(s,i)}^H \mathbf{h}_{r,u(s,i)}^k \mathbf{w}_{r,u(s,i)}^k|^2}{BN_0 + I_{r,u(s,i)}^k}, \quad (1)$$

where $p_{r,u(s,i)}^k$ represents the transmission power from O-RU r to i^{th} UE served at slice s on PRB k . $\mathbf{h}_{r,u(s,i)}^k \in \mathbb{C}^J$ is the vector of channel gain of a wireless link from r^{th} RU to the i^{th} UE in s^{th} slice. In addition, $\mathbf{w}_{r,u(s,i)}^k \in \mathbb{C}^J$ depicts the transmit beamforming vector from r^{th} RU to the i^{th} UE in s^{th} slice that is the zero forcing beamforming vector to minimize the interference which is indicated as below

$$\mathbf{w}_{r,u(s,i)}^k = \mathbf{h}_{r,u(s,i)}^k (\mathbf{h}_{r,u(s,i)}^H \mathbf{h}_{r,u(s,i)}^k)^{-1} \quad (2)$$

Moreover, $g_{u(s,i)}^r \in \{0, 1\}$ is a binary variable that illustrates whether RU r is mapped to the i^{th} UE allocated to s^{th} slice or not. Also, BN_0 denotes the power of Gaussian

push all the packets into the fiber link. Moreover, it can be formulated as $T = \frac{\alpha}{R}$, where R is the sum-rate of the packet transmission in each link and α is the mean arrival data rate of each link. So the total transmission delay (T^{tr}) is the sum of the transmission delay in the fronthaul $T^{fr,t}$, the midhaul $T^{mid,t}$, and the backhaul $T^{b,t}$. In this paper, we focus only on the processing delays to find the optimal number of VNFs, and we ignore the other two delays for simplification; So, we assume that the total delay is approximate to the processing delay.

$$T^{\text{tot}} \approx T^{\text{proc}} \quad (7)$$

1) Processing Delay: Assume the packet arrival of UEs follows a Poisson process with arrival rate $\lambda_{u(s,i)}$ for the i^{th} UE of the s^{th} service (or slice). Therefore, the mean arrival data rate of the s^{th} slice in the UPF layer is $\alpha_s^U = \sum_{u=1}^{U_s} \lambda_{u(s,i)}$. Assume the mean arrival data rate of the UPF layer for slice s (α_s^U) is approximately equal to the mean arrival data rate of the O-CU-UP layer (α_s^C) and the O-DU (α_s^D). so $\alpha_s = \alpha_s^U \approx \alpha_s^C \approx \alpha_s^D$. Because the amount of data traffic transferred along the route (regardless of frame changes) is constant. Since, by using Burkes theorem, the mean arrival data rate of the second and third layers, which are processed in the first layer, is still poisson with rate α_s . It is assumed that there are load balancers in each layer for each service to divide the incoming traffic to VNFs equally. Suppose the baseband processing of each VNF is depicted as M/M/1 processing queue. Each packet is processed by one of the VNFs of a slice. So, the mean delay for the s^{th} slice in the O-DU, the O-CU, and the UPF is modeled as M/M/1 queue, is formulated as follows, respectively [17]–[19],

$$\begin{aligned} T_s^{DU} &= \frac{1}{\mu_s^d - \alpha_s/M_s^d}, \\ T_s^{CU} &= \frac{1}{\mu_s^c - \alpha_s/M_s^c}, \\ T_s^{UPF} &= \frac{1}{\mu_s^u - \alpha_s/M_s^u}, \end{aligned} \quad (8)$$

where M_s^d , M_s^c and M_s^u are the variables that depict the number of VNFs in O-DU, O-CU-UP and UPF, respectively. Moreover, $1/\mu_s^d$, $1/\mu_s^c$, and $1/\mu_s^u$ are the mean service time of the O-DU, O-CU, and the UPF layers, respectively. Besides, α_s is the arrival rate which is divided by load balancer before arriving to the VNFs. The arrival rate of each VNF in each layer for each slice s is α_s/M_s^i $i \in \{d, c, u\}$.

$T_{u(s,i)}^{RU}$ is the mean transmission delay of the i^{th} UE of the s^{th} service on the wireless link. The arrival data rate of wireless link for each UE i of service s is $\lambda_{u(s,i)}$. As a result, we have $\sum_{i=1}^{U_s} \lambda_{u(s,i)} = \alpha_s$. Moreover, The service time of transmission queue for UE i requesting service s has an exponential distribution with mean $1/R_{u(s,i)}$ and can be modeled as a M/M/1 queue [17]–[19].

Therefore, the mean delay of the transmission layer for UE i in slice s is

$$T_{u(s,i)}^{RU} = \frac{1}{R_{u(s,i)} - \lambda_{u(s,i)}}. \quad (9)$$

So, the mean processing delay for UE i in slice s is

$$T_{u(s,i)}^{\text{proc}} = T_{u(s,i)}^{RU} + T_s^{DU} + T_s^{CU} + T_s^{UPF}. \quad (10)$$

Hence, for the simplification and focusing on the processing delay, we assume $T_{u(s,i)}^{\text{tot}} \approx T_{u(s,i)}^{\text{proc}}$.

D. Physical Data Center Resource

Each VNF requires physical resources that include memory, storage, CPU and Network Bandwidth. Let the required resources for VNF f in slice s is represented by a tuple as

$$\bar{\Omega}_s^f = \{\Omega_{M,s}^f, \Omega_{S,s}^f, \Omega_{C,s}^f, \Omega_{N,s}^f\}, \quad (11)$$

where $\bar{\Omega}_s^f \in \mathbb{C}^4$ and $\Omega_{M,s}^f, \Omega_{S,s}^f, \Omega_{C,s}^f, \Omega_{N,s}^f$ indicate the amount of required memory, storage, CPU and Network Bandwidth, respectively. Moreover, the total amount of required memory, storage, CPU and Network Bandwidth of all VNFs of a slice in DU, CU and UPF is defined respectively as follows

$$\begin{aligned} \bar{\Omega}_{3,s}^{\text{tot},d} &= \sum_{f=1}^{M_s^d} \bar{\Omega}_{3,s}^{f,d}, \\ \bar{\Omega}_{3,s}^{\text{tot},c} &= \sum_{f=1}^{M_s^c} \bar{\Omega}_{3,s}^{f,c}, \\ \bar{\Omega}_{3,s}^{\text{tot},u} &= \sum_{f=1}^{M_s^u} \bar{\Omega}_{3,s}^{f,u}, \end{aligned} \quad (12)$$

$\forall \mathfrak{z} \in \{M, S, C, N\}$, where, $\bar{\Omega}_{3,s}^{f,d}$, $\bar{\Omega}_{3,s}^{f,c}$ and $\bar{\Omega}_{3,s}^{f,u}$ are the amount of resource that a VNF required in DU, CU and UPF, respectively. Then,

$$\bar{\Omega}_{3,s}^{\text{tot}} = \bar{\Omega}_{3,s}^{\text{tot},d} + \bar{\Omega}_{3,s}^{\text{tot},c} + \bar{\Omega}_{3,s}^{\text{tot},u} \quad (13)$$

Also, there are D_c data centers (DC), serving the VNFs. Each DC contains several servers that supply VNF requirements. The amount of memory, storage, CPU and Network Bandwidth is denoted by τ_{M_j} , τ_{S_j} , τ_{C_j} and τ_{N_j} for the j^{th} DC, respectively

$$\tau_j = \{\tau_{M_j}, \tau_{S_j}, \tau_{C_j}, \tau_{N_j}\},$$

In this system model, the assignment of physical DC resources to VNFs is considered. Let $y_{s,d}$ be a binary variable indicating whether the d^{th} DC is allocated the resources to the VNFs of s^{th} slice or not.

E. Power of the O-RU and the Fronthaul Capacity

Let P_r denote the power of the transmitted signal from the r^{th} O-RU to UEs served by it. We have,

$$P_r = \sum_{s=1}^S \sum_{k=1}^{K_s} \sum_{i=1}^{U_s} |\mathbf{w}_{r,u(s,i)}^k|^2 p_{r,u(s,i)}^k g_{u(s,i)}^r e_{r,u(s,i)}^k + \sigma_q^2. \quad (14)$$

Since we have a fiber link between O-RU and O-DU, the rate of users on the fronthaul link between O-DU and the r^{th} O-RU is formulated as

$$C_r = \log \left(1 + \frac{\sum_{s=1}^S \sum_{k=1}^{K_s} \sum_{i=1}^{U_s} |\mathbf{w}_{r,u(s,i)}^k|^2 \alpha_{r,u(s,i)}^k}{\sigma_q^2} \right), \quad (15)$$

where $\alpha_{r,u(s,i)}^k = p_{r,u(s,i)}^k g_{u(s,i)}^r e_{r,u(s,i)}^k$ and σ_q^2 is the power of quantization noise.

F. Problem Statement

Assume the power consumption of baseband processing at each DC d that is connected to VNFs of a slice s is depicted as ϕ_s . So the total power of the system for all active DCs that are connected to slices can be represented as

$$\phi_{tot} = \sum_{s=1}^S \phi_s + \sum_{d=1}^{D_c} z_d \psi_d.$$

where, z_d is shown that whether the d^{th} DC is active or not and ψ_d is a static cost when a DC is active, i.e.,

$$z_d = \begin{cases} 1 & \sum_{s=1}^S y_{s,d} \geq 1 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (16)$$

Here, we assume that if any VNF placed in a server d is used, the server is on and active, otherwise, it is off. In addition, ϕ_s is obtained from below

$$\phi_s = M_s^u \phi_s^u + M_s^c \phi_s^c + M_s^d \phi_s^d \quad (17)$$

where, ϕ_s^u , ϕ_s^c and ϕ_s^d are the static cost of energy in UPF, CU and DU, respectively. Here, we want to maximize the energy efficiency η . So the optimization problem is formulated as follow

$$\max_{M, Y, E, P, G} \eta = \frac{\sum_{s=1}^{S_1} \sum_{i=1}^{U_s} R_{u(s,k)}}{\phi_{tot} + P_r} \quad (18a)$$

$$\text{subject to } P_r \leq P_{max} \quad \forall r \quad (18b)$$

$$\mathcal{R}_{u(s,i)} \geq \mathcal{R}_{min}^s \quad \forall s, \quad (18c)$$

$$\sum_{s=1}^S y_{s,d} \bar{\Omega}_{3,s}^{tot} \leq \tau_{3d}, \quad \mathcal{E} = \{M, S, C, N\}, \quad (18d)$$

$$p_{r,u(s,i)}^k \geq 0 \quad \forall i, \forall r, \forall s, \forall k, \quad (18e)$$

$$p_{r,u(s,i)}^k \leq P_s^{max} \quad \forall i, \forall r, \forall s, \forall k, \quad (18f)$$

$$C_r \leq C_r^{max} \quad \forall r, \quad (18g)$$

$$T_{u(s,i)}^{tot} \leq T_s^{max} \quad \forall i, \forall s, \quad (18h)$$

$$\mu_s \geq \alpha_s / M_s \quad \forall s, \quad (18i)$$

$$\mathcal{R}_{u(s,i)} \geq \lambda_{u(s,i)} \quad \forall i, \forall s, \quad (18j)$$

$$0 \leq M_s \leq M_s^{max} \quad \forall s, \quad (18k)$$

$$\sum_r g_{u(s,i)}^r = 1 \quad \forall s, \forall i, \quad (18l)$$

$$\sum_{k=1}^{K_s} g_{u(s,i)}^r e_{r,u(s,i)}^k \geq 1 \quad \forall s, \forall i, \forall r \quad (18m)$$

$$\sum_{s=1}^S \sum_{i=1}^{U_s} g_{u(s,i)}^r e_{r,u(s,i)}^k \leq 1 \quad \forall s, \forall i, \forall r \quad (18n)$$

$$\phi^{tot} \leq \phi^{max}, \quad (18o)$$

$$g_{u(s,i)}^r \in \{0, 1\} \quad \forall s, \forall i, \quad (18p)$$

$$e_{r,u(s,i)}^k \in \{0, 1\} \quad \forall s, \forall i, \quad (18q)$$

where $\mathbf{P} = [p_{r,u(s,i)}^k]$, $\forall s, \forall i, \forall r, \forall k$, is the matrix of power for UEs, $\mathbf{E} = [e_{r,u(s,i)}^k]$, $\forall s, \forall i, \forall r, \forall k$ indicate the binary variable for PRB association. Moreover,

$\mathbf{G} = [g_{u(s,i)}^r]$, $\forall s, \forall i, \forall r$ is a binary variable for O-RU association. Furthermore, $\mathbf{M} = [M_s^d, M_s^c, M_s^u]$, $\forall s$ is the matrix that shows the number of VNFs in each layer of slice. Also $\mathbf{Y} = [y_{s,d}]$ $\forall s, \forall d$ is a binary variable shown whether the physical DC is mapped to a VNFs of a slice or not. (18b), (18e) and (18f) indicate that the power of each O-RU does not exceed the maximum power, the power of each UE is a positive integer value, and the power of each UE in each service does not exceed the maximum power of each service, respectively. Also, (18c) shows that the rate of each UE requesting each type of service, i.e., eMBB, mMTC, and uRLLC, is more than a threshold, respectively. (18g) and (18h) expressed the limited fronthaul capacity and the limited end-to-end delay of the received signal, respectively. (18i) and (18j) denoted the stability of the M/M/1 queue model. (18k) restricted the number of VNF in each slice due to the limited resources. (18l) and (18m) guarantee that O-RU and PRB are associated with the UE, respectively. Also, (18n) ensures that each PRB can not be assigned to more than one UE associated with the same O-RU. In addition, (18o) indicates that the fixed cost of energy of VNFs in each slice does not exceed the threshold. Moreover, (18p) and (18q) depict that \mathbf{E} and \mathbf{G} are matrix of binary variables. In addition, in (18d), the constraint supports that we have enough physical resources for VNFs of each slice.

G. Proposed Algorithm and Numerical Results

Problem (18), is a two-time scale problem, i.e., large time scale and small time scale. On a large-time scale, we aim to minimize the power of servers and obtain the QoS of slices. The assignment of PRB to slices is implemented in this time scale. In the small-time scale, the assignment of O-RU to UEs and the assignment of PRB of slices to UEs is executed, and the optimal power is obtained. In this research, we aim to use the machine learning methods such as deep reinforcement learning and deep learning to train the O-RAN system and have an intelligent system. The deep Q-learning is implemented for the large-time scale and the multi-agent deep reinforcement learning contains DDPG (actor-critic algorithm), correlated q-learning, and the priority proportional fairness algorithm will be implemented for the small-time scale. The deep learning algorithms contain LSTM and recurrent neural networks. Also, transfer learning is an exciting way to enhance the performance and convergence of the system. The proposed algorithm for the large-time scale is implemented in the following, and part of the numerical results is depicted.

1) *Proposed Algorithm:* Here we use the reinforcement learning method to solve the above two problems. In the Q-learning method for the large-time scale, an agent tries to find the optimal value in a specific environment. This interactive process is modeled as a Markov decision-making process that includes (S, A, R, P, γ) . S represents the state space matrix, and A represents the action vector. R is also the reward of action. $P(\cdot|S, a)$ is the probability of transfer and $\gamma \in (0, 1]$ is the discount factor. The $\Pi(\cdot|S)$ policy is a mapping of the state to the distribution of actions. The

value-state function for state s under policy $\Pi(\cdot|S)$ with $V^\Pi(s)$ indicates that the expected return value in state s under policy $\Pi(\cdot|S)$. The value of performing operation a in state s under the $\Pi(\cdot|S)$ policy is represented by $Q^\Pi(s, a)$. We have the following relations on this basis.

$$V^\Pi(s) = \mathbb{E}_{\Pi, P} \left[\sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \gamma^t R_t | S_0 = s \right] \quad (19)$$

The Q-value is as below.

$$Q^\Pi(s, a) = \mathbb{E}_{\Pi, P} \left[\sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \gamma^t R_t | S_0 = s, A_0 = a \right]. \quad (20)$$

\mathbb{E} represented the statistical average. Based on the Bellman equation we have

$$V^\Pi(s) = \mathbb{E}_{\Pi, P} [R + \gamma V^\Pi(s')] \quad (21)$$

and also,

$$Q^\Pi(s, a) = \mathbb{E}_{\Pi, P} [R + \gamma Q^\Pi(s', a')] \quad (22)$$

where, s' and a' can be obtained from $\Pi(\cdot|s')$ and $P(\cdot|s, a)$. The goal of reinforcement learnin is to obtain the optimal policy to maximize the $Q^\Pi(s, a)$. So, using Bellman equation, we have

$$Q^*(s, a) = \mathbb{E}_{\Pi^*, P} [R + \gamma Q^*(s', a')]. \quad (23)$$

Also, T^* is the Bellman operator

$$T^*Q(s, a) = \mathbb{E}_{\Pi^*, P} [R + \gamma Q(s', a')] \quad (24)$$

By using this operator iteratively, $Q_{t+1}(s, a) \leftarrow T^*Q(s, a)$ the algorithm can converge $Q_t(s, a) \rightarrow Q^*(s, a)$. $t \rightarrow \infty$ [20], [21]. In the Q-learning in each episode we have

$$Q(s_{t+1}, a_{t+1}) = Q(s_t, a_t) + \alpha [r_{t+1} + \gamma \max_{a \in A} Q(s_{t+1}, a) - Q(s_t, a_t)] \quad (25)$$

where, α is the learning rate.

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