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Investigating Compression Techniques For Integer Time Series Data For Low Power Applications

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*Abstract*—The

# INTRODUCTION

Compressing data to reduce its size has been important for a long time and its importance only continues to increase. With the ubiquity of mobile devices as well as the prevalence of the practice of collecting user and corporation data, compressing data even by small margins could result in large saving in the data that is stored on servers such as Amazon’s AWS.

The reduction in size of saved files is one benefit of creating better compression algorithms but it also provides benefits in regard to the transmission of data from one device to another. Transmitting data between devices consumes power and reducing the size of the data that is transferred between devices will result in lower power consumption and therefore longer operability if the device runs on a limited supply of energy such as a battery.

When considering compression for space probes, limiting the size of data transfer provides power savings as well as allowing for more bandwidth will be available. Due to the large distance between the probe and Earth, reducing the size of the data needed to be transmitted results in power savings which are more significant than savings that would be seen in household devices. Having more available bandwidth could enable the installation of more devices on the probe as they could have some reserved bandwidth due to the savings gained from compressing data further.

We will be investigating how much of the original data can be compressed using techniques such as Huffman coding and Golomb coding. Lossy compression techniques will result in uncertainties in the final data that is received so we will be only investigating lossless compression methods.

# Theory

Reducing the size of a file through compression relies on the ability of being able to decompress it without losing data. This principle means that all compressed objects should be able to be decompressed using an algorithm that can correctly interpret all parts of the file. This is known as encoding where an encoding scheme maps each character or symbol to a unique binary value. This set of binary values can then be transmitted, and the receiver can use the same encoding scheme to map the binary values back to the characters or symbols that are required.

Reducing the size of the binary file is the purpose of compression methods and they work in various ways. The main method of reducing the size of the data lies in exploiting patterns such as repetitions that may occur and assigning repetitive characters a smaller binary value will reduce the overall size of the binary data.

## Initial Value Encoding

The data is provided as integers which are magnetic field readings around the spacecraft. One of the simplest methods to compress will be to use the first value in the list of integers as an initial value and calculate all proceeding values as a difference from the initial value.

This technique works to reduce the number of bits that required to encode each integer to binary. If the integers in the original data require 10 bits to encode and the largest difference is 15, only 4 bits will be required to encode the difference hence resulting in 40% compression when not including the overhead (discussed below).

A glaring weakness of this method is that it requires the initial value to be transmitted separately from the rest of the data and any mistakes in the transmission of the initial value could render the entire data packet useless. If the initial value is included within the same packet as the data it can add a small overhead. This overhead is always present and becomes significant for small packets as the overhead represents a large part of the packet size when compared to sending a larger packet.

Despite the weakness, initial value encoding is a relatively simple compression method which can be used for devices with low computational power and is especially effective for lists of integers with large values but relatively small changes.

Initial value encoding is simple and as it does not control the encoding process of the integers, it can be combined with other techniques that are more efficient in the encoding process to further improve compression ratios.

1200

1205

1210

1190

1203

1200-1200

1205-1200

1210-1200

1190-1200

1203-1200

0

5

10

-10

3

Figure 1:

## Previous Value Encoding

This compression method builds upon the previously stated initial value encoding. Instead of listing the numbers as a difference from a static initial value, we could use the previous value within the list as a reference point when calculating the difference.

The effectiveness of initial value encoding is evident when dealing with a list of integers that doesn’t stray too far from the initial value. Once the list of readings from the magnetometer becomes long enough, there is a large possibility of having differences which rival the size of the initial value. With previous value encoding, the largest possible size of the difference between any two values will be the maximum change that the magnetometer will be able to measure.

1200

1205

1210

1190

1203

1200-1200

1205-1200

1210-1205

1190-1210

1203-1190

0

5

5

-20

13

Figure 2:

Whilst previous value encoding could possibly reduce the size further from initial value encoding, it still relies on the same overhead that initial value encoding was bound by. Due to this overhead, smaller packet sizes might still end up using a larger amount of transmission bandwidth over time.

Even with the requirement of the overhead, previous value encoding still holds the advantage of being able to be combined with other encoding techniques just like initial value encoding.

## Huffman Encoding

Both initial value encoding and previous value encoding work on the manipulation of the integer data but Huffman encoding delves into the full encoding process and creates a binary packet.

Huffman encoding is used for strings and works based on reducing the bits required for more repetitive characters while allocating larger bit representations for sparse characters. The allocation of the number of bits for each character is built upon a tree structure. The two least frequent characters are combined to form a node and each branch represents a 0 or 1. The next least frequent character and the node are combined to form another node. This process of combining the least frequent terms continues until all the frequencies of the characters add together to the length of the full string. The binary packet for each character is formed by following the branches until you reach the desired character. The binary packet can be decompressed by using the same tree to follow the branches based on the binary packet.

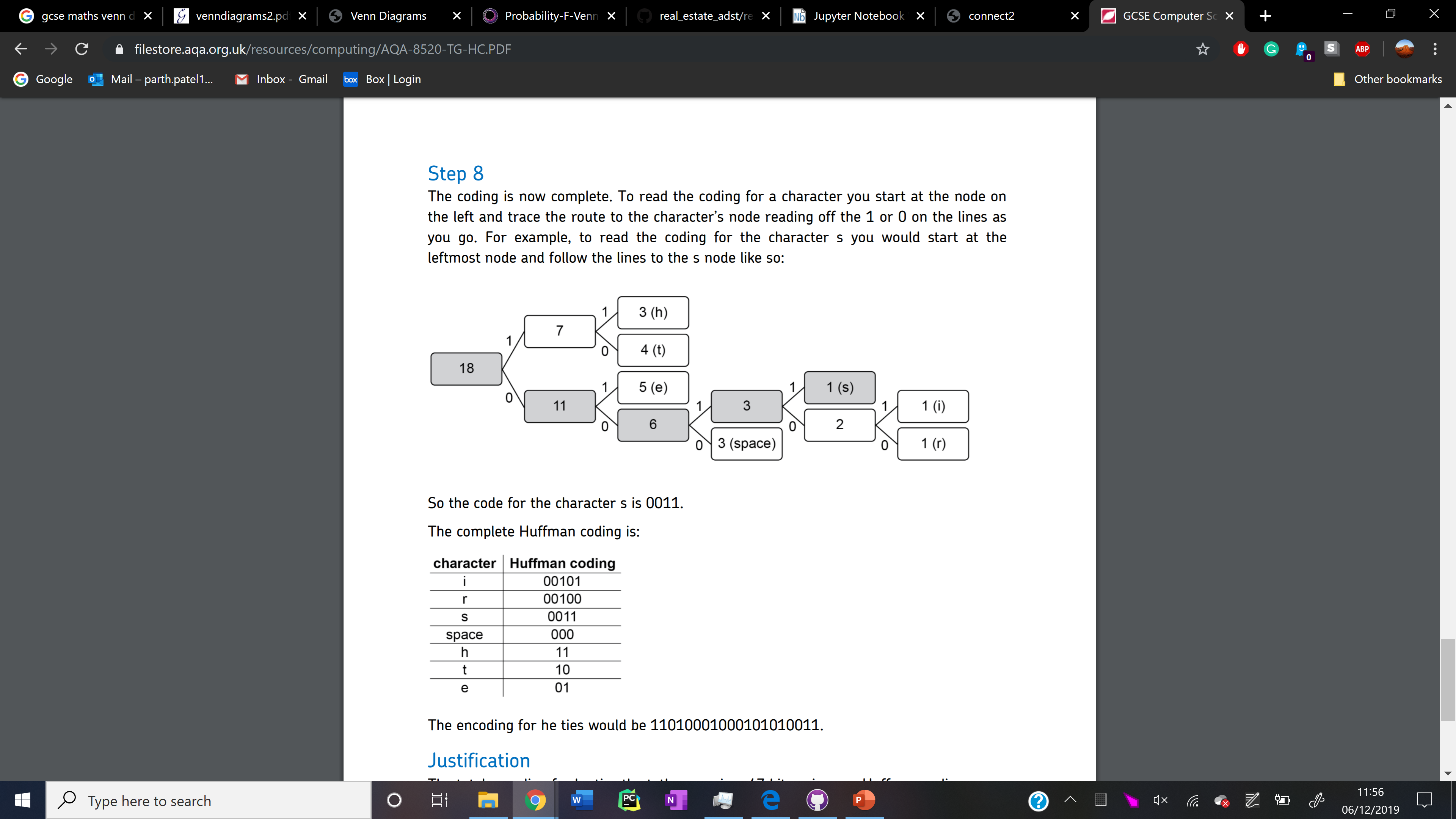


Figure 3:

Creating a tree for encoding each integer for the data is far more complex than the initial and previous value encodings that were discussed before. This will create a much larger load for the processor and will result in more time being required to form the full binary packet which needs to be transmitted.

In addition to the increased computational power that is required, the overhead that is created is far larger than the initial value which is required for initial and previous value encodings. This larger overhead means that this method will likely provide better compression for longer lists of integers rather than small lists.

Huffman encoding is used for string encodings whereas our data is based on integers so instead of being able to fully encode a number in one go, each digit will need to be separately encoded (eg. 3 separate encodings will be required for the number 184). Furthermore, it will not be sufficient to encode all the values directly using Huffman as a separator symbol is required to differentiate which number belong to which reading. This will increase the final packet size but it is required to ensure the data is separable.

The full list of integer readings from the magnetometer can be directly encoded using Huffman but we can also use the simple number manipulation provided by initial and previous value encodings before applying Huffman to possibly reduce the size of the final binary packet even further.

## Golomb Encoding

Through the use of a divider, Golomb encoding uses manipulation of divisors and logarithms to create an encoding scheme that is specific to the chosen divider. A divider is a positive integer that is chosen by the user or algorithm that enables the encoding scheme to be built and the divider impacts the final size of the compressed packet.

A small divider results in fewer bits being required to encode numbers close the size of the divider but for numbers far larger than the divider, the binary representation can be much larger. A large divider results in longer binary representation for smaller numbers but far fewer bits are required to represent larger values. For a list of integers with larger values such as the spinning axis of the magnetometer, a larger divider is ideal despite the overall larger representation of the smaller values. For the axis that is relatively stationary with regard to the magnetic field, a smaller divider is ideal as the numbers will rarely reach far above the value of the divider.

Creating the encoding scheme is more complex than Huffman and it relies on the divider not the dataset as is the case with Huffman. A quotient *q* is formed from the number to be encoded and the divider. The remainder *r* from the quotient is also required after which the full binary representation relies on the size of the remainder.

(1)

The quotient is converted to binary using unary encoding and the remainder is encoded using a number of bits which is specified based on the size of the remainder. If the remainder is less than *2b-m*, *b-1* bits are used to represent *r*, else *b* bits are used to represent *r+2b-m*. The full representation is a combination of the unary code followed by the binary representation of the remainder. The full process is shown in FIGURE 5.

(2)

Quotient values, remainders and the use of a divider make this process very complicated and thus it will require more computational power or more time with the same processor than any of the previous methods. Despite its complexity, all values calculated in the process such as *b*, *q* or *r* are all integers due to the floor and ceiling functions. This means that this compression technique can still be carried out on any processor as only integer calculations are carried out.

N

q=

r=N-qM

If r<2b-M

Unary code

b=

Else

b-1 bits for r

b bits for r+2b-M

Full Binary Form

N=14

q=2

r=4

If r<3

110

b=3

Else

2 bits

3 bits for 4+3 (111)

110111

M=5

Figure 4:

This method is a full encoding method like Huffman and can therefore be combined with initial or previous value encoding. Unlike Huffman which requires each integer in a number to be separately encoded, Golomb coding works with the entire number and so each value can be encoded in its entirety.

## Lempel-Ziv Encoding

# Method

As the main purpose for investigating these techniques is for use in the comet interceptor, we will need to consider the limitations of the hardware and software that will be deployed on the probe. All of the compression techniques will be implemented through Python. The probe will not have access to such a high level language as it is far slower compared to lower level languages and we do not require the full functionality of the Python language. The implementation is in Python to allow us to fully visualize and investigate how changing various aspects of the compression technique impacts the final binary packet.

The processor on-board the probe is not computationally powerful so it will not be able to do floating point calculations. This does not present a problem for us as none of the compression techniques requires any floating-point calculations.

To test the different compression methods, we will be using solar wind data which is provided as floating-point numbers. We converted this to the original 16-bit integers to simulate a data flow that is likely to be similar to the one seen on comet interceptor. The data accrued by the comet interceptor will be in the form of a 14-bit signed integer but this is accounted for in the comparison between original and compressed size. Another reason for using solar wind data is due to the nature of the axial rotation impacting the readings. The comet interceptor will have one axis of the magnetometer which is somewhat stationary relative to the magnetic field. This will result in one axis which has very small readings and deviations in the reading while the other two axes will rotate relative to the magnetic field. This produces a sinusoidal curve which is observed within the data used to test compression.

Initial exploration of the data shows that the x axis has the smallest magnitude readings and the smallest range of readings. This seems to suggest that this axis is stationary relative to the magnetic field. The y axis has the largest magnitude readings and the largest range followed by the z axis. Since the y axis precedes the z axis, both should have similar readings and deviations but this is not the case which implies a possible offset on one of the axis due to the instrument. This deviation and range of readings can be seen in FIGURE 7.

To understand how the binary packet sizes vary, we need to understand how the data is transmitted. With no compression, the transmission of the binary packet consists of a header followed by a block of binary which contains the magnetometer readings (eg.42 bits representing the first reading with 14 bits for each reading). We investigated how we could best compress the binary block as it will be the largest portion of the transmitted packet and this is the best opportunity to reduce the size of the overall transmission.

We did not investigate how each of the compression methods compares in terms of the time taken to produce the compressed binary packet. This is due to the unbalanced software and hardware being used. Processors in the computers that we are using are far more capable and thus can run operations very fast but Python is a slower language compared to the actual compression algorithm which will likely be programmed using C++. Investigating the time to compress will likely be very skewed and unreliable so only compression ratios will be compared.

Even though we will not investigate timings, we do need to ensure that the compressed binary packet can then be uncompressed. Each method that is utilized to compress will be run through a decompression algorithm to confirm the viability of the compression technique.

# Results

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# Conclusion

## Your report

Appendix

Appendixes, if

Acknowledgement

The acknowledgement section can

References and Footnotes

## References

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## Footnotes

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References

*Basic format**for theses (M.S.) and dissertations (Ph.D.):*

a) J. K. Author, “Title of thesis,” M.S. thesis, Abbrev. Dept., Abbrev. Univ., City of Univ., Abbrev. State, year.

b) J. K. Author, “Title of dissertation,” Ph.D. dissertation, Abbrev. Dept., Abbrev. Univ., City of Univ., Abbrev. State, year.

General notes:

* Overhead space (theory)
* Technical limitations of hardware (method)
* What is encoding? (theory)
* Difference encoding (theory)
* Huffman (theory)
* Other techniques like Lempel-ziv (theory)
* Golomb coding (theory)
* Extra bit for sign in front (method)
* Latency optimization (theory)
* Review and further work (results)
* Separator issue for Huffman (results?)
* Data used for testing is solar wind data (method)
* Include examples for all techniques (theory)
* Mention the use for this is for comet interceptor (intro)
* Diagram of packet + header? (method)
* Justify all text
* Initial value doesn’t include sign bit
* Source for Huffman diagram

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)