

# Neural Network Based Decoding over Molecular Communication Channels

Peter Hartig

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## **Abstract**

Estimation of the distribution function characterizing a communication channel is considered. Pilot symbol sequences may be used to estimate an unknown distribution function or when the function is difficult to parameterize. This work focuses using pilot sequences to train a neural network and mixture model whose output supplies the necessary metrics for the Viterbi algorithm. We investigate the detection performance for estimation of non-linear channels. A proposal is then made to reduce the complexity of the resulting detection using unsupervised clustering of channel states for the Viterbi algorithm.

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Notation</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1	MLSE and the Viterbi Algorithm . . . . .	4
3.2	ViterbiNet . . . . .	5
3.3	A Reduced State ViterbiNet . . . . .	7
3.4	The Molecular Communication Channel . . . . .	8
<b>4</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>8</b>
4.1	A supervised equalization benchmark . . . . .	8
4.2	Simulation Details . . . . .	9
4.2.1	System Model . . . . .	9
4.2.2	Algorithm Parameters . . . . .	9
4.3	Simulation Results . . . . .	10
4.3.1	LTI + Quantizer Channel . . . . .	11
4.3.2	Molecular Communication Channel . . . . .	12
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>12</b>
5.1	Future Work . . . . .	13

# 1 Notation

The following notation is used throughout this work.  $p(x)$  is the probability of an event  $x$ .  $p(x|y)$  is the conditional probability of  $x$  given  $y$ .  $E[x]$  is the expected value of a random variable  $x$ .

Vectors are denoted by bold font ( $\mathbf{x}$ ) and are assumed column vectors. The vector  $\mathbf{x}_i^j$  denotes a vector containing elements  $i \rightarrow j$  of  $\mathbf{x}$ .  $|\mathcal{A}|$  denotes the cardinality of the set  $\mathcal{A}$ .  $\underset{x}{\operatorname{argmin}} f(x)$  is the value of variable  $x$  which minimizes  $f(x)$ .

# 2 Introduction

Characterizing and obtaining information about the probability distribution governing communication channels is a fundamental barrier to communication. While optimal and sub-optimal strategies for overcoming this barrier have enabled vast and effective communication infrastructure, this barrier still limits communication in many contexts. One such context is the Molecular Communication channel which may be non-linear, time variant, and dependent on the specific transmitted information.

Communication contexts, such as wireless, use "pilot" symbol-streams obtain channel information to parameterize a chosen channel model. The overhead of transmitting pilot sequences is, however, incompatible with the low symbol rate (and relative coherence time?) of Molecular Communication channels. The success of this data-driven technique in wireless channels suggest that perhaps an alternative, data-driven method may be successful for detection over Molecular Communication channels. One potential data-driven method for characterizing these channels is a neural network. Neural networks have shown to be an effective tool in data-driven approximation of probability distributions.

The general communication channel is equivalent to a conditional probability  $p(x|y)$ , with transmitted information  $x$  and received information  $y$ .  $p(x|y)$  takes into account the (potentially random) channel through which the information  $x$  passes. The communication problem entails a form of the optimization  $\underset{x \in \mathcal{A}}{\operatorname{argmin}} p(x|y)$ , in which  $\mathcal{A}$  is the set of possible  $x$ . In general, sub-optimal solutions do not require perfect knowledge of the distribution  $p(x|y)$  and may be used when the true  $p(x|y)$  is unknown or impractical to obtain. This work investigates a neural network estimate of  $p(x|y)$ .

### 3 Background

#### 3.1 MLSE and the Viterbi Algorithm

The optimization problem

$$\underset{x \in \mathcal{A}}{\operatorname{argmin}} p(y|x), \quad (1)$$

with transmitted information  $x$  and received information  $y$ , is also known as Maximum Likelihood Sequence Estimation (MLSE). The size of the search space  $|\mathcal{A}|$  grows exponentially in the length of  $x$ , the number of the transmitted symbols. Additional information about the communication channel can reduce the complexity of this search as illustrated in the following example.

Consider the communication channel for which each received symbol in the sequence  $\mathbf{y}$  is a causal, linear, and time invariant (LTI) combination of a set of the transmitted symbol sequence  $\mathbf{x}$  with coefficients  $\mathbf{a}$ .

$$y[k] = \sum_{l=1}^L a[l]x[k-l].$$

In this case,

$$p(\mathbf{y}|\mathbf{x}) = \sum_{i=1}^N \log(p(y_i|\mathbf{x}_{i-L+1}^i)).$$

Noting that terms in this sum are independent, and that the set of possible transmitted sequences  $\mathbf{x}_{i-L+1}^i$  is equivalent to a set of channel states, problem (1) is equivalent finding the shortest path through a trellis with edges weighted by  $\log(p(y_i|\mathbf{x}_{i-L+1}^i))$  as in figure 1.

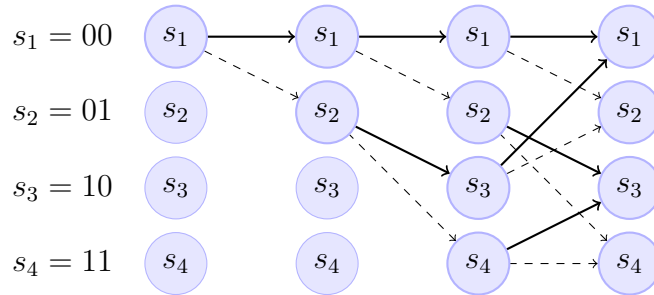


Figure 1: MLSE decoding for  $\mathcal{A} = \{0, 1\}$  and  $L = 2$

For finite state, causal channels, MLSE reduces to the Viterbi Algorithm over a trellis of states.

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### Viterbi Algorithm:

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**given**  $p(y_i|x_{i-L+1}^i) \forall i \in 1..N$  .  
**for**  $i = 1..N$   
     **for each state**  $s \in \mathcal{A}_{i-L+1}^i$   
         1. Let  $cost_s^i = -\log(p(y_i|x_{i-L+1}^i)) + \min_s\{incoming\ cost_s^{i-1}\}$   
**return** Symbols corresponding to path of argmin <sub>$s$</sub>  survivor  $cost_s$

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Note that the Viterbi algorithm is *exponentially* complex in the number of channel states  $|\mathcal{A}_{i-L+1}^i|$ , but *linearly* complex in the length of the transmitted sequence  $\mathbf{x}$  ( $N$  in the algorithm above).

## 3.2 ViterbiNet

Despite the reduction in complexity offered by the Viterbi Algorithm for MLSE, the individual metrics used in each step of the algorithm,  $p(y_i|\mathbf{x}_{i-L+1}^i)$ , require knowledge of the channel probability distribution. This may be difficult or costly to obtain. Instead, we decompose using Baye's theorem,

$$p(y_i|\mathbf{x}_{i-L+1}^i) = \frac{p(\mathbf{x}_{i-L+1}^i|y_i)p(y_i)}{p(\mathbf{x}_{i-L+1}^i)},$$

and estimate the individual terms as:

- $p(\mathbf{x}_{i-L+1}^i|y_i)$  : The probability of being in channel state  $\mathbf{x}_{i-L+1}^i$  given the corresponding received symbol  $y_i$ . If the number of states is finite, the probability mass function over  $\mathbf{x}_{i-L+1}^i \in |\mathcal{A}_{i-L+1}^i|$  can be estimated using a neural network for classification as in figure 2.

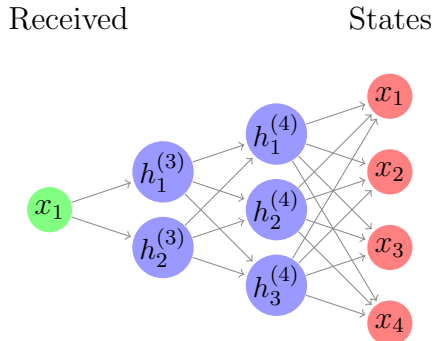


Figure 2: State classification Neural Network

- $p(y_i) = \sum_{s \in \mathcal{S}} p(s, y_i)$  : The joint probability of channel state  $s$  and received signal  $y_i$  marginalized over all channel states  $\mathcal{S}$ . For the case of the LTI channel above, each state  $s$  corresponds to a possible symbol sequence  $\mathbf{x}_{i-L+1}^i$ . This probability distribution function can be estimated using a mixture-model (figure 3) based on training data of received signals (in this case the same data used to train the neural network) and a model for channel noise. The Expectation Maximization Algorithm [Ng00] is used with a chosen model for the channel states and noise. In the case of Gaussian noise used here, the states are modeled as a mixture of Gaussians.

As  $p(y_i)$  is constant over all states in a given step of the Viterbi algorithm, this term in the Baye's decomposition may be interpreted as a weighting factor for the cost of one received symbol in the total path cost. (More detail on this or enough?)

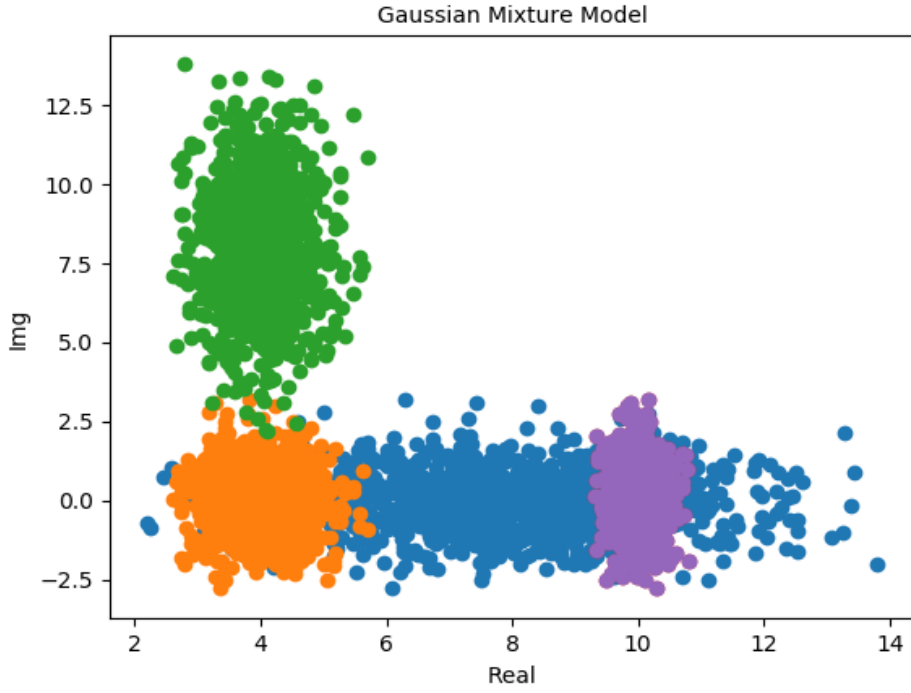


Figure 3: Mixture of complex, Gaussian sources

- $p(\mathbf{x}_{i-L+1}^i)$  : The probability of a given transmitted sequence can be neglected in the case of equiprobable symbols.

In summary, the metrics  $p(y_i|\mathbf{x}_{i-L+1}^i)$  required by the Viterbi algorithm can be estimated using a neural network and a mixture model.

### 3.3 A Reduced State ViterbiNet

While the Viterbi Algorithm complexity scales exponentially in the number of states possible in each step of the algorithm, in some cases this complexity can be reduced without significant degradation of performance. In particular, if the system is such that some states are redundant, these can be combined. The following, relevant example with state redundancy is posed and one potential method of reducing the number of states is considered.

Consider a received signal

$$y[k] = \sum_{l=1}^L a[l]x[k-l] + n[k], \quad n[k] \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 1)$$

with  $x[k-l] \in \{-1, +1\}$  and  $n[k] \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 1)$ .

In the case of a causal, LTI system with inter-symbol-interference characterized by  $\mathbf{a} = [a[1] \dots a[5]] = [1, 0, .2, .2, .4]$  ( $\|\mathbf{a}\|_2^2 = 1$ ), the received signal (Fig.??) has fewer than the potential  $|\mathcal{A}_{i-L+1}^i| = 2^5$  states. As one of the channel taps is 0, this will have no impact and thus 16 of the potential 32 states are removed. Further, as there are two taps of value 0.2, these together represent only 3 states rather than 4.

One way to exploit state redundancy is to cluster the original states  $|\mathcal{A}_{i-L+1}^i|$  states into a set of  $k$  clusters using training data. The K-Means algorithm is proposed as one such method.

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#### K-Means Clustering Algorithm: A method for unsupervised classification

**given** initial location  $L_c, \forall c \in \{1..K\}$  of K centroids.

**for** Number of Iterations.

**for each training data point**  $x_i, i \in \{1..N\}$

        1. Label  $x_i$  with the index  $c$  of the closest centroid using  $\|x_i - L_c\|_2^2$ .

**for centroid**  $L_c, \forall c \in \{1..K\}$

        1. Move  $L_c$  to the average location of all training points with label  $.c$

**return** Centroid locations.

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Choosing an appropriate number of clusters will influence the performance of the resulting decoder (Have figure showing this).

An implementation point to note is that after clustering the training data, the number of states must be increased by  $|\mathcal{A}_i|$ . The Viterbi algorithm selects a symbol sequence corresponding to a path of state transitions through the trellis. In order to make the correspondence between a unique path and a symbol sequence, each state transition must represent a transmitted symbol. *Each* resulting centroid from the k-means clustering is associated to *each* potential transmit symbol in order to create a "shorter" trellis for which each state transition still represents a transmitted symbol.

Discuss minimum phase representations for channels and why this might be an advantage.

### 3.4 The Molecular Communication Channel

Provide necessary background for any nano-particle data shown in results.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 A supervised equalization benchmark

The Linear Minimum Mean-Squared Error (LMMSE) equalizer derived below is used provide a linear equalization reference to the non-linearity of the proposed neural network, mixture model equalization.

The convex and continuously differentiable optimization problem

$$\underset{\mathbf{h} \in \mathcal{C}_{lengthx1}}{\operatorname{argmin}} E[\|x - \mathbf{h}^T \mathbf{y}\|^2],$$

minimizing the squared error of the linearly detected symbol  $\mathbf{h}^T \mathbf{y}$  and true symbol  $x$  is solved using

$$\frac{\partial E[\|x - \mathbf{h}^T \mathbf{y}\|^2]}{\partial \mathbf{h}} = 0$$

to give the optimal LMMSE equalizer

$$\mathbf{h} = E[\mathbf{R}_{yy}]^{-1} E[\mathbf{r}_{yx}].$$

$E[\mathbf{R}_{yy}]$  and  $E[\mathbf{r}_{yx}]$  are estimated by

$$E[\mathbf{R}_{yy}] = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \mathbf{y} \mathbf{y}^H$$



and

$$E[\mathbf{r}_{yx}] = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \mathbf{y}x;$$

using the same training data as the neural network and mixture model. Note that just as with the neural network, making this estimate requires knowledge (or estimation) of the channel memory length  $L$ .

## 4.2 Simulation Details

### 4.2.1 System Model

Verification and further testing of the implementation and integration of the algorithms described above is performed using the following system model.

$$y[k] = f(\mathbf{x}) + n[k].$$

With  $x[k] \in \{-1, +1\}$ , independent  $n[k] \sim \mathcal{N}(0, 1)$  and

$$\text{SNR} = \frac{E\{|x[k]|^2\}}{\sigma^2}.$$

Note that each received signal  $y[k]$  is potentially a function of all input symbols (assume causality?). Decoding performance for realizations of the channel function  $f()$  will be evaluated.

### 4.2.2 Algorithm Parameters

The parameters for the algorithms used in this work are detailed below.

- **Neural Network**

- Architecture: 4 layers 1, 100 (Tanh activation), 50 (relu activation),  $M^L$  (Softmax  $\rightarrow$  Negative Log-Likelihood)
- Training Data Examples: 5000
- Neural Network Updates: Admm [KB14] with step size  $10^{-2}$
- Batch Size: 1000
- Backpropagation Updates (Epochs): 900
- Loss Function: Cross Entropy

- **Expectation Maximization Algorithm**

- Training Data Examples: 5000

- Mixture Model Source Types: Gaussian
- Number of Sources: Number of channel states
- **K-Means Algorithm (For Reduced State ViterbiNet)**
  - Training Data Examples: 5000

### 4.3 Simulation Results

We first evaluate the detector performance using the Linear Time Invariant channel

$$y[k] = \sum_{l=1}^L a[l]x[k-l] + n[k].$$

with impulse response  $a[l] = \dots$ . Simulation results are shown in fig 4

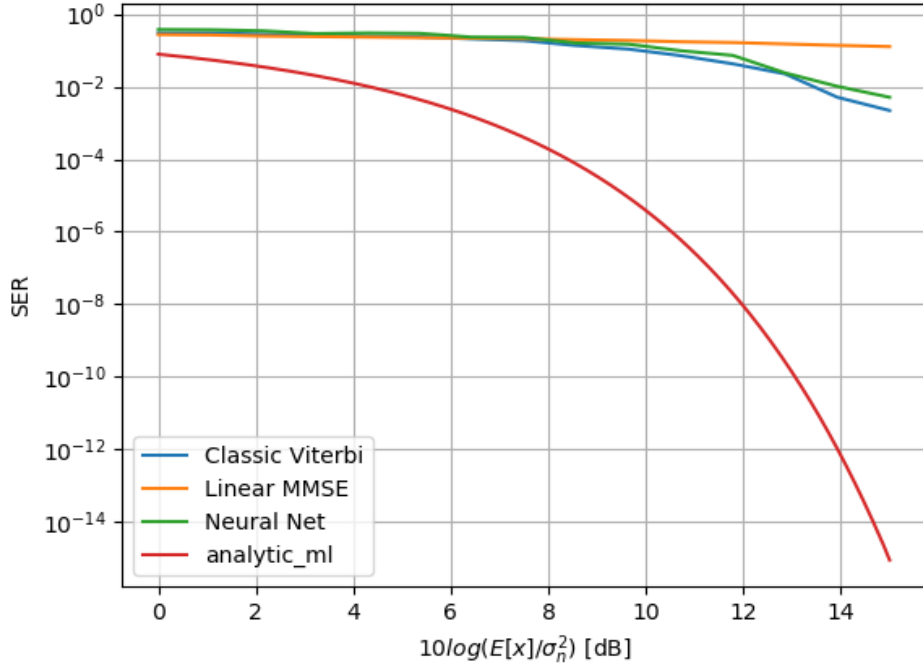


Figure 4: Detection performance over LTI channel with AWGN

### 4.3.1 LTI + Quantizer Channel

To evaluate decoder performance in the non-linear channel setting, we apply a quantizer,  $Q()$  to the output of the previous LTI + AWGN channel.

$$y[k] = Q\left(\sum_{l=1}^L a[l]x[k-l]\right) + n[k].$$

Here we evaluate performance under two levels of quantization severity: rounding channel output down to a given number of decimal places . Figure 5 depicts the quantizer and its impact on the received symbols from the LTI channel. The resulting performance is seen in figure 6.

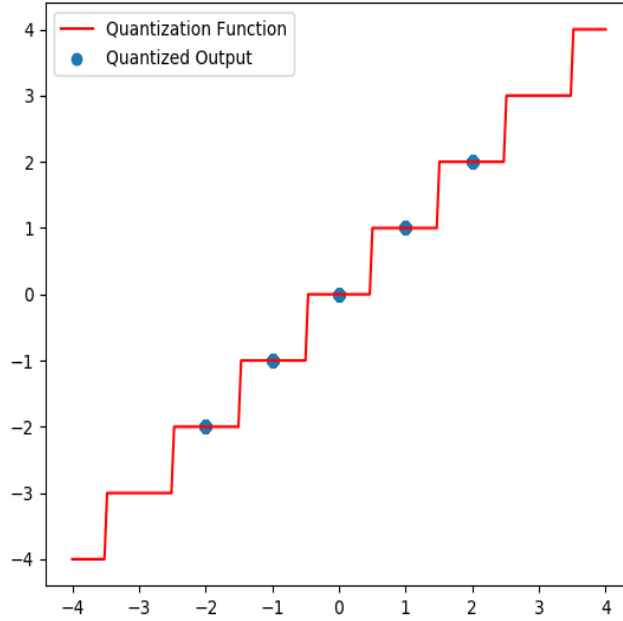


Figure 5: Simulation Channels: LTI Channel

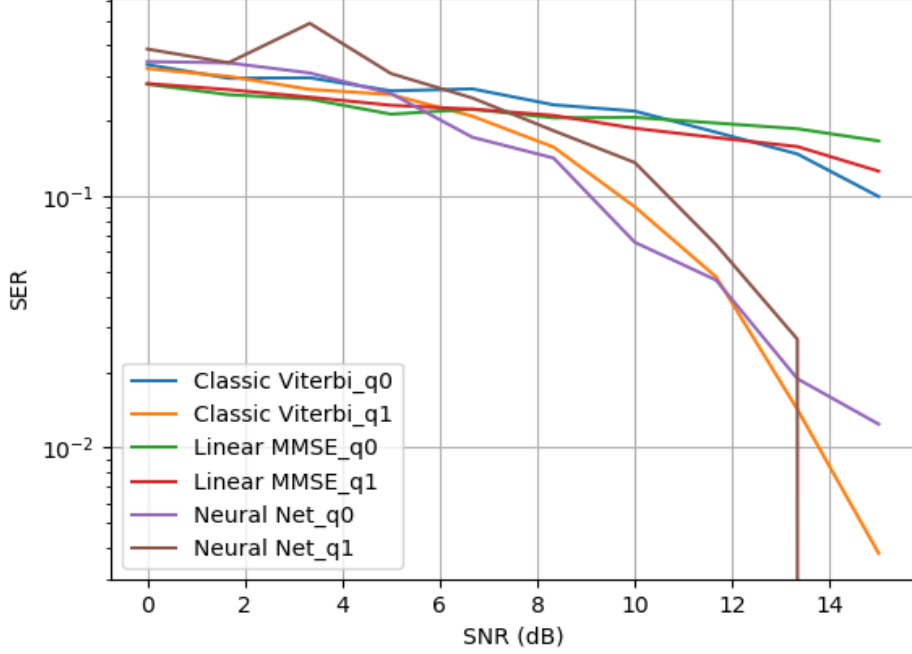


Figure 6: Detection performance over LTI channel with AWGN and quantization

#### 4.3.2 Molecular Communication Channel

Lastly, the performance of the neural network based detector is evaluated data collected from a molecular communication channel. ... Explain if there are any results to report.

## 5 Conclusion

The proposed detection method from [SEFG19] is evaluated in channels for which  $p(y_i|\mathbf{x}_{i-L+1}^i)$ , is unknown. Simulation results indicate that this detector can indeed learn  $p(y_i|\mathbf{x}_{i-L+1}^i)$  for non-linear channels. A method for reducing the complexity of the resulting Viterbi Algorithm is also proposed, however the method of state reduction for the channel needs to be further investigated to improve the poor performance observed with the proposed method.

## 5.1 Future Work

Extensions of specific work: More on reduced state. Using other channels and repeat online type of updates for dynamic channels for these more challenging channels.

General method extensions: In this work the MLSE is found using the Viterbi Algorithm. The same metrics can also be used in optimizing other performance metrics. In (CITE) these estimate metrics have been used to minimize bit error rate using the BCJR algorithm. Extend to other applications of factor graphs.

## References

- [KB14] Diederik P Kingma and Jimmy Ba. Adam: A method for stochastic optimization. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1412.6980*, 2014.
- [Ng00] Andrew Ng. Cs229 lecture notes. *CS229 Lecture notes*, 1(1), 2000.
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