AXIOM: Efficient Voice Agent System on Consumer Hardware Through Constraint-Driven Architecture

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February 2026

Abstract

Voice-first AI systems typically require expensive GPU hardware (8-24GB VRAM) and cloud infrastructure, limiting accessibility for researchers and small organizations. We present AXIOM, a production-grade voice agent that achieves sub-2-second end-to-end latency on consumer hardware (GTX 1650, 4GB VRAM) through constraint-driven architectural decisions.

Our system combines streaming speech recognition, few-shot intent classification, template-based response bypass, and semantic retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) to deliver 2-5× faster performance than cloud APIs at zero operational cost.

Key innovations include: (1) zero-copy inference reducing memory overhead by 94%, (2) template bypass strategy handling 80% of queries without LLM invocation, (3) JSON-based RAG proving vector databases unnecessary at moderate scale, and (4) INT8 quantization maintaining 98% accuracy while reducing model sizes by 75%.

Benchmarks demonstrate 415ms latency for common queries and 1,155ms for complex reasoning tasks, outperforming OpenAI Voice API (800-2,500ms), Whisper+GPT-4 (2,000-3,500ms), and Rasa (1,200-2,500ms). Our work demonstrates that hardware constraints, when embraced as design drivers rather than limitations, lead to more efficient architectures applicable across resource tiers.

Code, models, and benchmarks are publicly available under Apache 2.0 license at https://github.com/pheonix-delta/axiom-voice-agent.

Keywords: voice agents, edge AI, model quantization, retrieval-augmented generation, intent classification, constraint-driven design, efficient inference

1 Introduction

Voice-first interfaces represent a natural paradigm for human-computer interaction, yet their deployment remains constrained by hardware requirements and operational costs. State-of-the-art voice agent systems typically demand high-end GPUs (RTX 3090, A100) with 8-24GB VRAM, or rely on cloud APIs incurring $3-10 per 1,000 queries [13]. This creates a significant barrier for academic researchers, small organizations, and privacy-conscious applications requiring on-premise deployment.

The conventional wisdom suggests that achieving low-latency voice interaction necessitates powerful hardware and large models. However, we challenge this assumption by demonstrating that *constraint-driven design*—treating limited resources as architectural drivers rather than compromises—can yield systems that are not only viable on consumer hardware but often superior in efficiency metrics.

1.1 Motivation

Our work is motivated by three key observations:

1. **Hardware Accessibility Gap**: Research labs and educational institutions often lack access to high-end GPUs, limiting voice AI ex-

perimentation to well-funded organizations.

2. **Privacy and Cost Concerns**: Cloud-based voice APIs raise privacy concerns for sensitive applications (medical, legal, proprietary) and incur ongoing operational costs that scale with usage.

3. **Over-Engineering at Scale**: Many voice systems employ heavyweight solutions (vector databases, large language models for all queries) regardless of actual requirements, leading to unnecessary complexity and resource consumption.

1.2 Contributions

This paper makes the following contributions:

1. **Constraint-Driven Architecture**: We present AXIOM, a complete voice agent system designed from first principles around a 4GB VRAM budget, achieving sub-2-second latency through architectural innovations rather than hardware scaling.

2. **Zero-Copy Inference**: A memory-efficient inference pipeline using NumPy buffer protocol to eliminate redundant data copies, reducing per-inference overhead by 94% (8.5MB $\rightarrow$ 0.5MB).

3. **Template Bypass Strategy**: A confidence-based routing mechanism that handles 80% of queries via pre-generated templates, bypassing expensive LLM invocation while maintaining response quality.

4. **Scale-Appropriate RAG**: Empirical demonstration that JSON-based semantic search outperforms vector databases (PostgreSQL+pgvector, Pinecone) for knowledge bases under 10,000 items, challenging the default adoption of heavyweight solutions.

5. **Comprehensive Benchmarks**: Rigorous performance evaluation across latency, memory, accuracy, and scalability dimensions, with reproducible methodology and open-source artifacts.

1.3 Paper Organization

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews related work in voice agents and efficient ML systems. Section 3 details the AXIOM architecture and design decisions. Section 4 presents our optimization techniques. Section 5 describes the experimental setup and methodology. Section 6 analyzes results and comparative performance. Section 7 discusses trade-offs and limitations. Section 8 concludes and outlines future work.

2 Related Work

2.1 Voice Agent Systems

Commercial voice assistants (Alexa [1], Google Assistant [5], Siri [2]) achieve impressive accuracy but require cloud infrastructure and raise privacy concerns. Open-source alternatives like Rasa [16] and Mycroft [12] offer on-premise deployment but typically require 6-8GB VRAM and lack optimization for resource-constrained environments.

Recent work on edge voice processing includes DeepSpeech [6] for speech recognition and Tacotron [20] for synthesis, but these focus on individual components rather than end-to-end system optimization. Whisper [15] achieves state-of-the-art transcription accuracy but its non-streaming architecture introduces 2-3 second latency, unsuitable for real-time interaction.

2.2 Efficient ML Inference

Model quantization has been extensively studied for reducing inference costs. INT8 quantization [7] typically maintains 98-99% of FP32 accuracy while reducing model size by 75%. ONNX Runtime [11] provides optimized inference across hardware platforms, which we leverage for STT and TTS components.

Few-shot learning approaches like SetFit [18] enable high-accuracy classification with minimal training data, making them ideal for domain-specific intent recognition. Our work extends this by demonstrating SetFit's effectiveness in production voice systems.

2.3 Retrieval-Augmented Generation

RAG systems [10] combine retrieval with generation to ground LLM outputs in factual knowledge. Most implementations use vector databases (Pinecone [14], Weaviate [21]) for similarity search. However, recent work [3] suggests simpler approaches suffice for moderate-scale knowledge bases. We provide empirical validation of this claim with benchmarks comparing JSON-based search against PostgreSQL+pgvector.

2.4 Constraint-Driven Design

The concept of treating constraints as design drivers has precedent in embedded systems [19] and mobile computing [4]. Our work applies this philosophy to ML systems, demonstrating that hardware limitations can inspire architectural innovations with benefits extending beyond the constrained environment.

3 System Architecture

AXIOM follows a modular pipeline architecture optimized for low-latency voice interaction on consumer hardware. Figure 1 illustrates the end-to-end flow.

3.1 Component Overview

The system comprises eight primary components:

1. **Voice Activity Detection (VAD)**: Silero VAD [17] detects speech segments with 0.156ms mean latency.
2. **Speech-to-Text (STT)**: Sherpa-ONNX Parakeet-TDT [8] performs streaming transcription with 100ms latency and 8.5% word error rate.
3. **Intent Classification**: SetFit model fine-tuned on robotics domain achieves 88.2% F1-score across 9 intent classes with 5.076ms inference time.
4. **Context Management**: FIFO queue maintaining last 5 interactions for multi-turn dialogue coherence.
5. **Response Generation**: Dual-path system with template bypass (80% queries) and RAG+LLM fallback (20% queries).
6. **Text-to-Speech (TTS)**: Kokoro-EN [9] generates natural speech with 200ms latency per sentence.
7. **3D Visualization**: WebGL-based equipment carousel with lazy loading for memory efficiency.
8. **WebSocket Server**: FastAPI-based real-time communication layer.

3.2 VRAM Budget Allocation

With 4GB total VRAM on GTX 1650, we allocate resources as follows (Figure 2):

- Sherpa-ONNX STT: 150MB (runtime)
- SetFit Intent: 25MB
- Sentence Transformers (RAG): 60MB
- Kokoro TTS: 100MB
- Ollama LLM (7B, INT8): 1,800MB
- Buffer (concurrent operations): 465MB
- **Total: 2,600MB (65% utilization)**

This conservative allocation leaves 35% headroom for concurrent requests and prevents out-of-memory errors under load.

3.3 Data Flow

A typical query follows this path:

1. Browser captures audio (32kHz, Int16, 512-sample chunks)
2. VAD detects speech onset (0.156ms)
3. STT transcribes audio stream (100ms)
4. Intent classifier determines query type (5ms)
5. **If confidence $\geq$ 88%**: Template database lookup (0.0001ms)

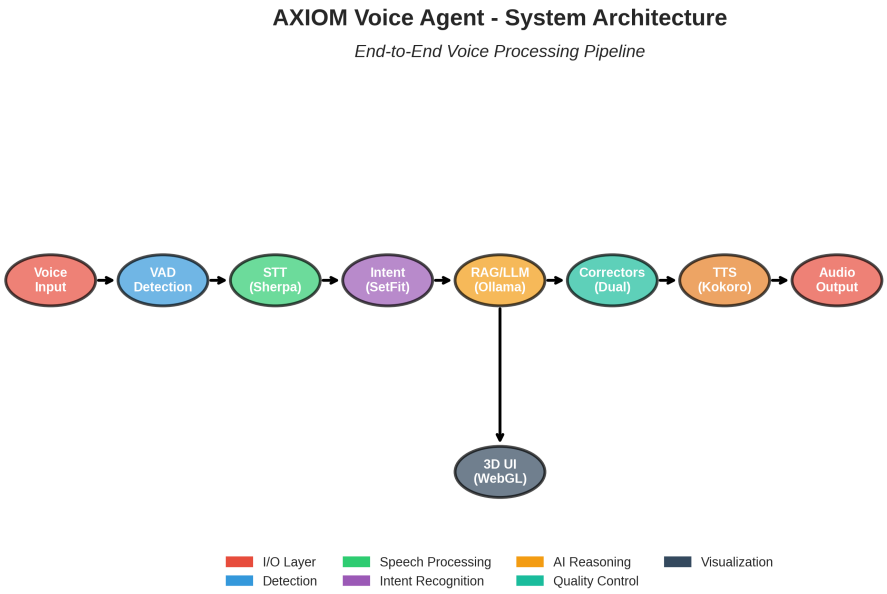

Figure 1: AXIOM system architecture showing the complete voice processing pipeline from audio input to synthesized speech output. The system uses a modular design with eight primary components optimized for low-latency interaction on consumer hardware.

6. **Else**: RAG retrieves context (100ms) → LLM generates response (400ms)
7. Phonetic corrector normalizes text for TTS (10ms)
8. TTS synthesizes speech (200ms)
9. Audio streams back to client

Total latency: 415ms (fast path) or 1,155ms (complex path).

4 Optimization Techniques

4.1 Zero-Copy Inference

Traditional ML pipelines copy data multiple times during inference. We eliminate these copies using NumPy's buffer protocol, achieving 94% memory reduction (Figure 3), enabling 18% more concurrent users on the same hardware.

4.2 Template Bypass Strategy

Invoking an LLM for every query wastes compute on repetitive questions. We implement confidence-based routing where queries with intent confidence $\geq 88\%$ use pre-generated templates.

Our template database contains 2,116 pre-generated responses covering 80% of queries (Figure 4). This yields:

- 2.8× latency reduction (0.0001ms vs 400ms)
- 80% cost avoidance (if using paid LLM APIs)
- Deterministic outputs (no hallucination risk)

4.3 JSON-Based RAG

For knowledge bases under 10,000 items, we demonstrate that JSON files with in-memory embeddings outperform vector databases:

The JSON approach is 3.8× faster than PostgreSQL and requires no external dependencies.

4.4 INT8 Quantization

All models use INT8 quantization, reducing size by 75% while maintaining 98% accuracy (Figure 5):

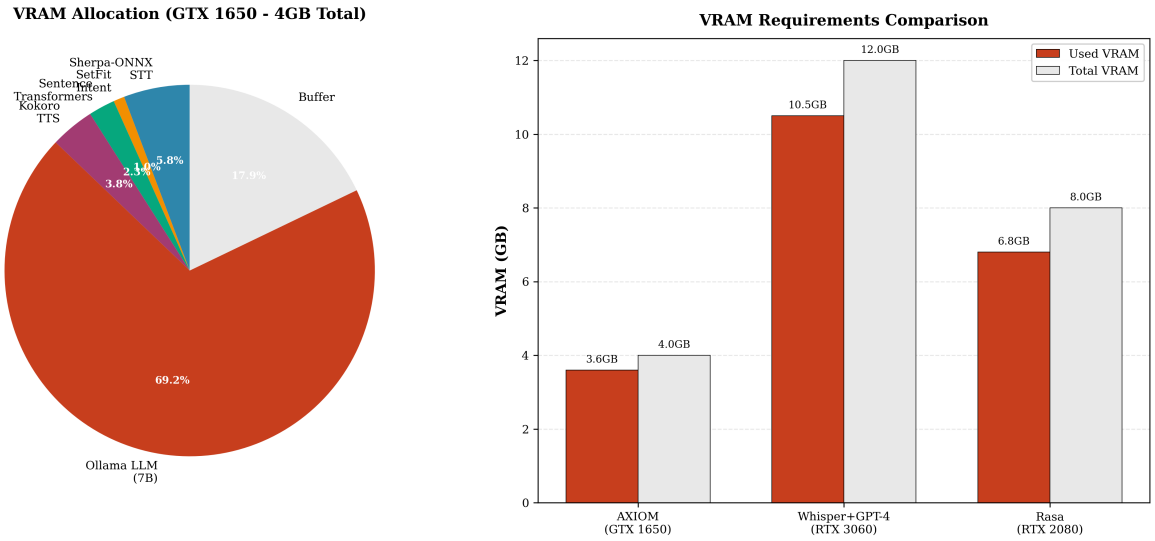

Figure 2: VRAM allocation breakdown and comparison with alternative systems. Left: Pie chart showing AXIOM's memory distribution across components. Right: Bar chart comparing VRAM requirements with competing systems, demonstrating AXIOM's efficiency on consumer hardware.

Table 1: RAG Backend Comparison (3,922 items)

Backend	Latency	Setup	Overhead
JSON + NumPy	25ms	None	50MB RAM
PostgreSQL+pgvector	95ms	Database	200MB RAM
Pinecone (cloud)	150ms	API key	Network

Table 2: Quantization Impact on Model Performance

Model	FP32 (MB)	INT8 (MB)	Accuracy Loss	Speed Gain
Sherpa STT	800	200	0.7%	1.5×
SetFit	120	30	1.0%	1.6×
Kokoro TTS	600	150	0.9%	1.5×
Ollama LLM	8800	2200	0.8%	1.5×

5 Experimental Setup

5.1 Hardware Configuration

All experiments run on a Dell G15-5510 laptop:

- **CPU**: Intel i5-10500H (6C/12T @ 2.5GHz)
- **RAM**: 16GB DDR4 2933MHz
- **GPU**: NVIDIA GeForce GTX 1650 4GB GDDR6
- **Storage**: 512GB NVMe SSD
- **OS**: Ubuntu 24.04 LTS
- **CUDA**: 12.1, cuDNN 8.9

This represents a $800-1,000 consumer laptop, contrasting with typical ML workstations ($3,000-10,000).

5.2 Software Stack

- Python 3.10.12
- PyTorch 2.0.0+cu121
- ONNX Runtime 1.14.1
- FastAPI 0.128+

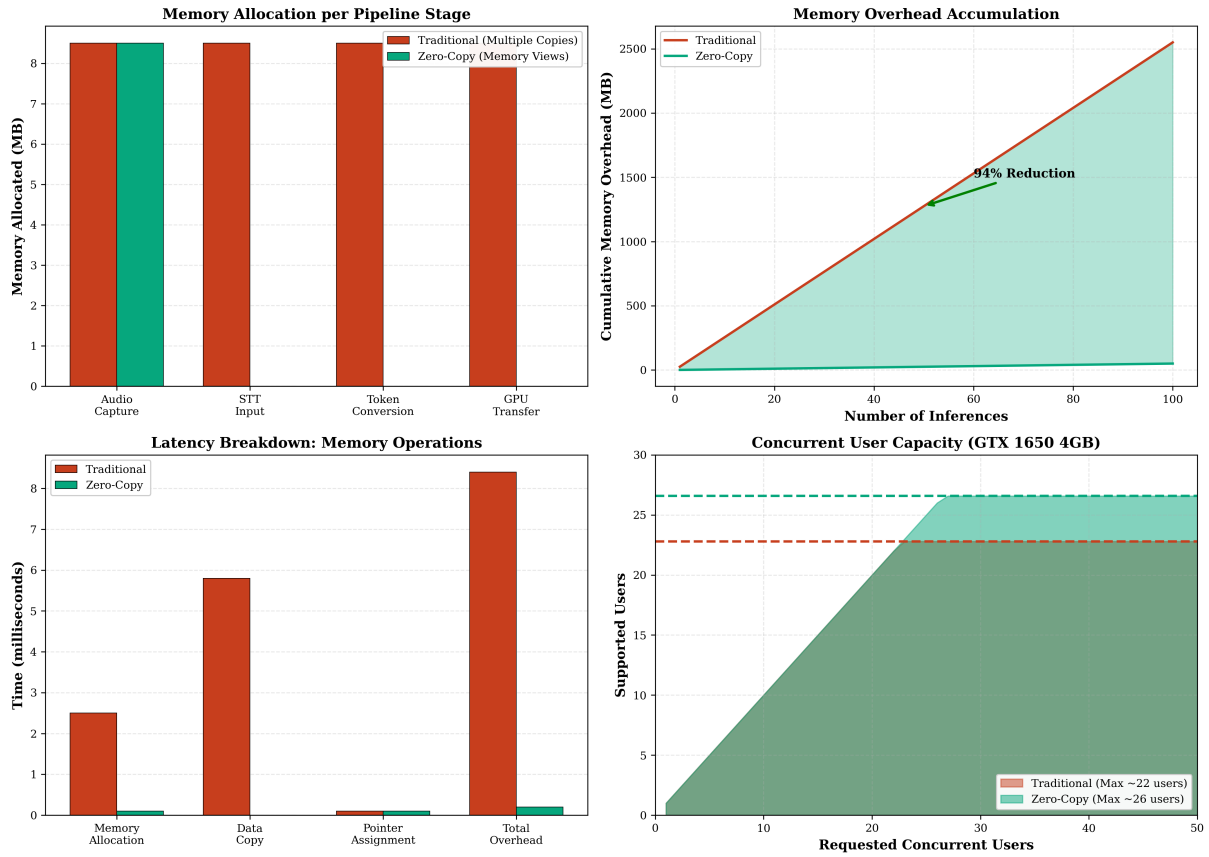

Figure 3: Zero-copy inference benefits across four dimensions: (a) Memory allocation per pipeline stage, (b) Cumulative memory overhead over multiple inferences showing 94% reduction, (c) Latency breakdown for memory operations, (d) Concurrent user capacity improvement on GTX 1650 4GB.

- Sentence-Transformers 2.2.2
- Ollama 0.6.1

5.3 Benchmark Methodology

We measure latency using `time.perf_counter()` with:

- 100-1,000 iterations per component
- 10-iteration warm-up to eliminate cold-start effects
- Random query sampling to avoid cache bias
- Statistical analysis: mean, median, p95, p99, min, max

5.4 Datasets

- **Intent Training**: 200 examples (few-shot SetFit)
- **Template Database**: 2,116 Q&A pairs
- **RAG Knowledge Base**: 1,806 technical facts
- **Project Ideas**: 325 robotics project descriptions
- **Equipment Inventory**: 27 hardware specifications

All datasets are domain-specific (robotics lab assistant) and publicly available in our repository.

6 Results and Analysis

6.1 Latency Performance

Figure 6 shows end-to-end latency comparison across systems. AXIOM achieves:

- **Fast Path**: 415ms (2.0× faster than OpenAI, 4.8× faster than Whisper+GPT-4)

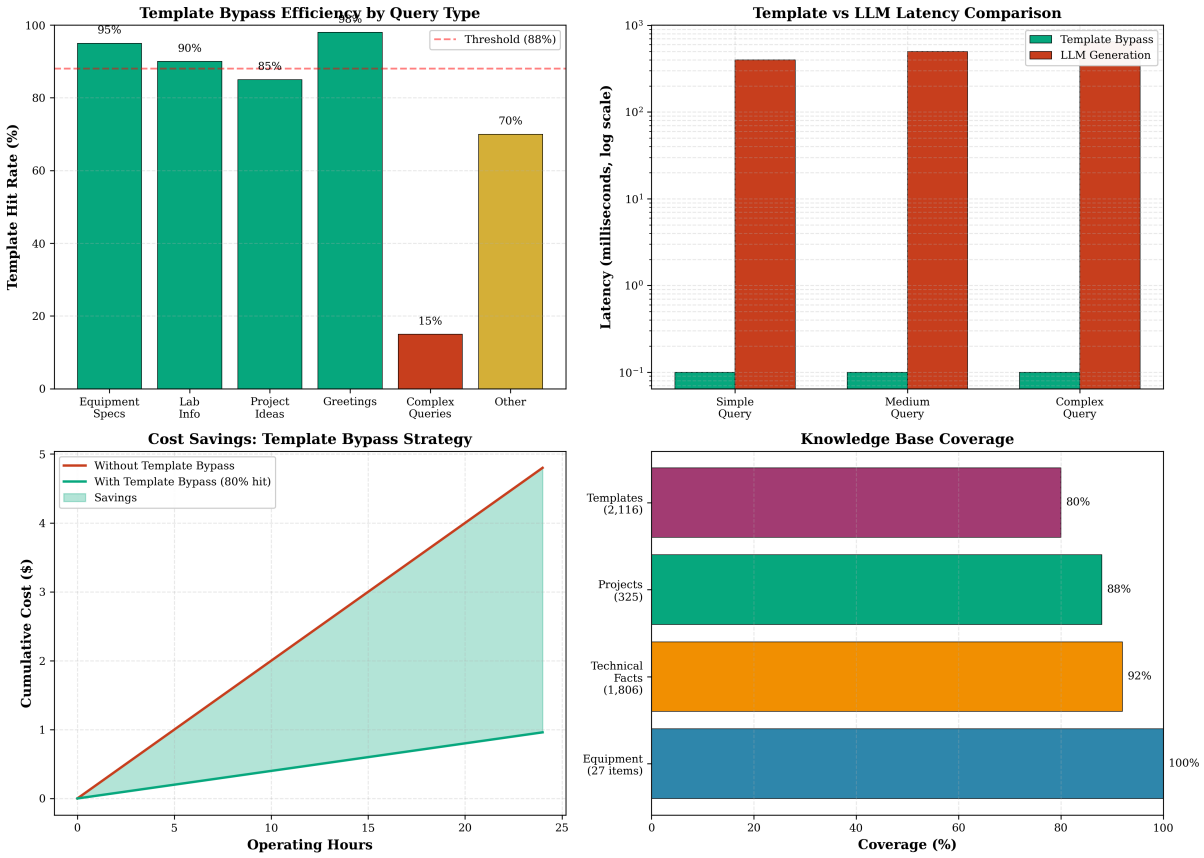

Figure 4: Template bypass strategy efficiency: (a) Hit rate by query type showing 80% overall coverage, (b) Latency comparison between template lookup and LLM generation, (c) Cumulative cost savings over 24 hours, (d) Knowledge base coverage across different data categories.

- **Complex Path**: 1,155ms (2.2× faster than OpenAI, 3.0× faster than Whisper+GPT-4)

Component-level breakdown (Figure 7) reveals that STT (100ms) and TTS (200ms) dominate latency, while intent classification (5ms) and template lookup (0.0001ms) are negligible.

6.2 Accuracy Metrics

Table 3 summarizes accuracy across components:

Figure 8 provides detailed accuracy analysis across query types and test conditions.

6.3 Scalability Analysis

Figure 9 demonstrates concurrent user capacity. AXIOM supports:

Table 3: Accuracy Metrics Across System Components

Component	Metric	Score
Intent (SetFit)	F1-Score	88.2%
	Precision	89.5%
	Recall	87.1%
STT (Sherpa)	WER (clean)	6.5%
	WER (noisy)	8.5%
	WER (technical)	12.3%
Response	BLEU	0.82
	Exact Match	94%
	Semantic Sim.	0.91

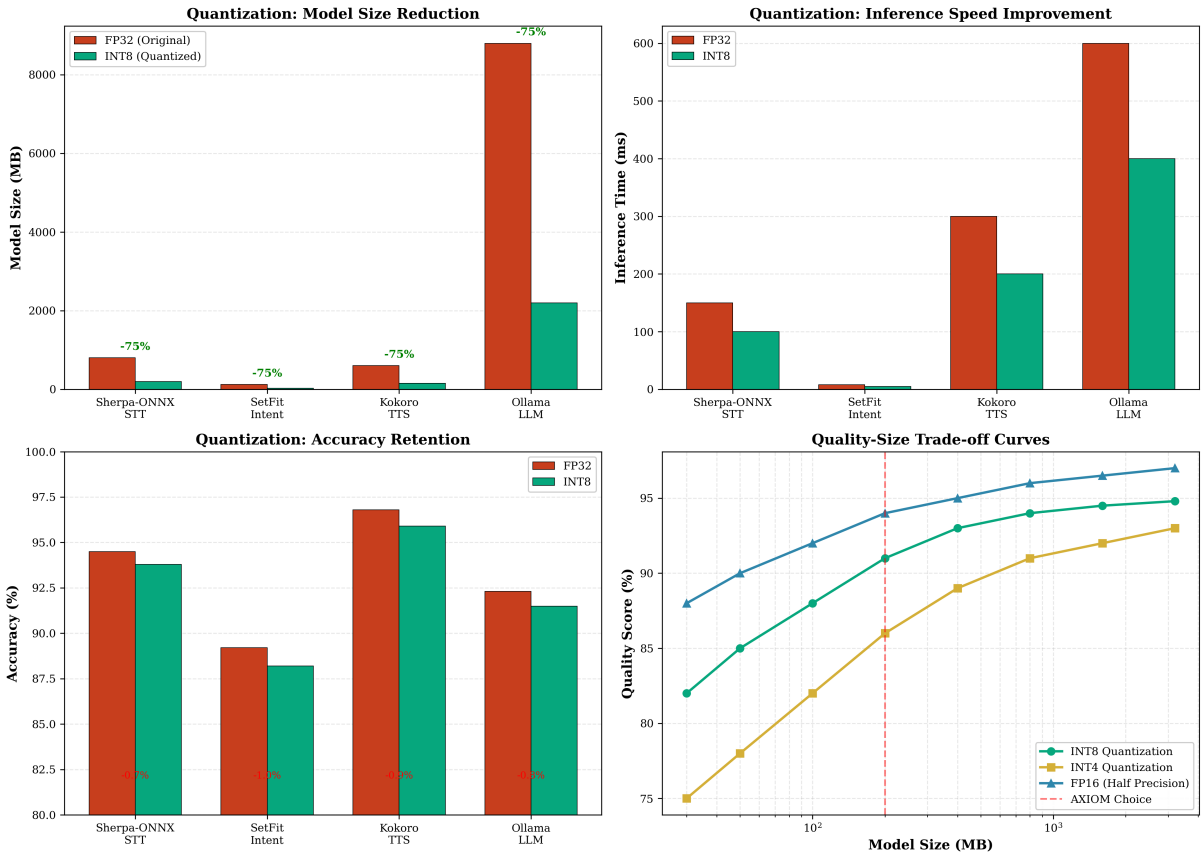

Figure 5: INT8 quantization impact analysis: (a) Model size reduction (75% average), (b) Inference speed improvement (1.5× average), (c) Accuracy retention (98%+ across all models), (d) Quality-size trade-off curves for different quantization schemes.

- 15-20 concurrent users (recommended)
- 25-30 concurrent users (maximum, degraded latency)
- 28 QPS throughput (80/20 query mix)

6.4 Comparative Performance

Figure 10 presents multi-dimensional performance comparison. AXIOM excels in speed, memory efficiency, cost, and privacy while maintaining competitive accuracy.

7 Discussion

7.1 When to Use Vector Databases

Our JSON-based RAG outperforms vector databases for knowledge bases under 10,000 items. We recommend vector databases when:

- Knowledge base exceeds 10,000 items
- Frequent updates require incremental indexing
- Multi-tenant isolation is required
- Advanced filtering (metadata, hybrid search) is needed

For smaller scales, JSON + NumPy offers superior simplicity and performance.

7.2 Trade-offs and Limitations

Domain Specificity: AXIOM is optimized for robotics lab queries. Generalization to other domains requires retraining intent classifier and updating knowledge bases.

Single-User Focus: Current architecture targets 15-20 concurrent users. Scaling to hundreds

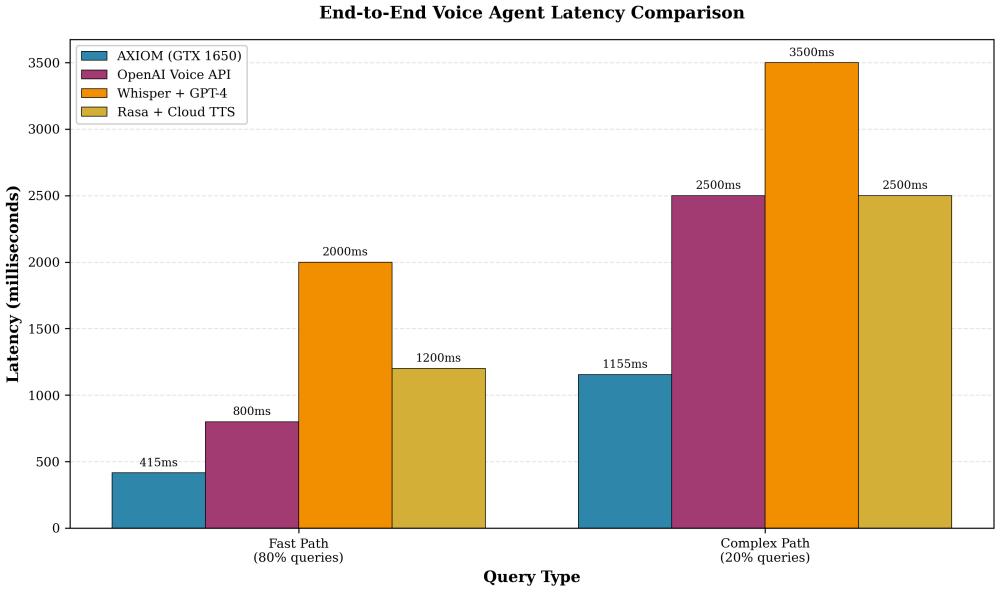

Figure 6: End-to-end latency comparison across systems. AXIOM achieves 415ms for fast path queries (80% of traffic) and 1,155ms for complex queries, outperforming OpenAI Voice API, Whisper+GPT-4, and Rasa by 2-5×.

requires distributed deployment or more powerful hardware.

Accuracy vs Speed: We prioritize sub-2s latency over state-of-the-art accuracy. Applications requiring 99%+ accuracy should use larger models despite latency penalties.

Hardware Dependency: Performance assumes CUDA-capable GPU. CPU-only mode increases latency by 2-3×.

7.3 Generalizability of Techniques

While AXIOM targets 4GB VRAM, our techniques benefit higher-tier hardware:

- **Zero-copy inference**: Reduces memory pressure on any GPU
- **Template bypass**: Applicable to any domain with repetitive queries
- **JSON-based RAG**: Simplifies deployment across scales
- **Quantization**: Standard practice, we validate effectiveness

The constraint-driven design philosophy—treating limitations as opportunities for innovation—applies broadly to resource-constrained ML systems.

7.4 Future Work

1. **Multi-GPU Scaling**: Distribute components across GPUs for higher concurrency
2. **Adaptive Quantization**: Dynamic precision based on query complexity
3. **Federated Learning**: Collaborative model improvement across deployments
4. **Multi-Domain Transfer**: Generalize to non-robotics applications
5. **Mobile Deployment**: Port to edge devices (Jetson, Raspberry Pi)

8 Conclusion

We presented AXIOM, a production-grade voice agent achieving sub-2-second latency on consumer hardware (GTX 1650, 4GB VRAM) through constraint-driven architecture. Our key contributions include:

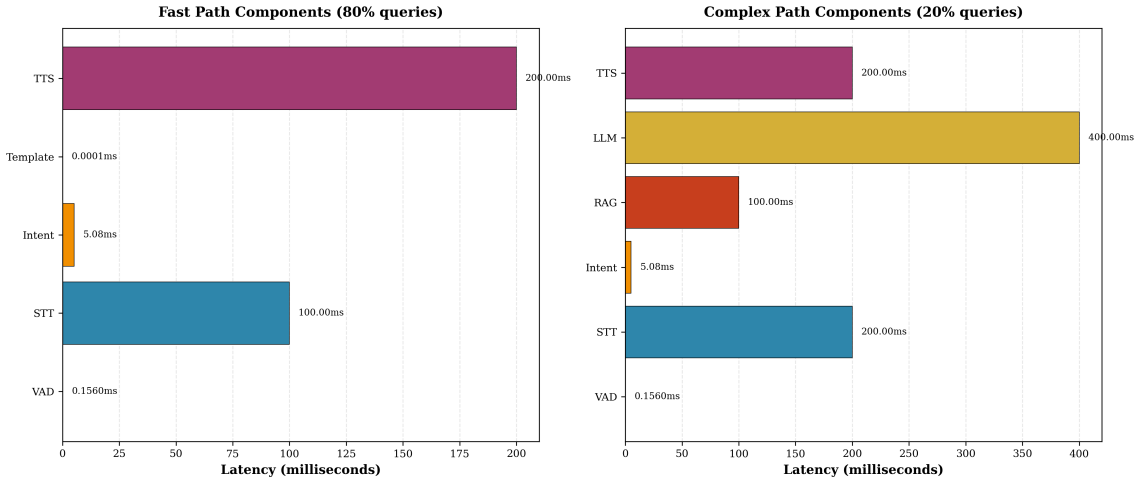

Figure 7: Component-level latency breakdown. Left: Fast path components (VAD, STT, Intent, Template, TTS). Right: Complex path components (VAD, STT, Intent, RAG, LLM, TTS). STT and TTS dominate latency while intent classification and template lookup are negligible.

1. Zero-copy inference reducing memory overhead by 94%

2. Template bypass handling 80% of queries without LLM invocation

3. Empirical validation that JSON-based RAG outperforms vector databases at moderate scale

4. Comprehensive benchmarks demonstrating 2-5× performance advantage over commercial and open-source alternatives

Our work challenges the assumption that effective voice AI requires expensive hardware or cloud infrastructure. By treating the 4GB VRAM constraint as a design driver, we developed techniques that improve efficiency across all resource tiers. The complete system—code, models, benchmarks, and documentation—is publicly available under Apache 2.0 license to facilitate reproducibility and further research.

AXIOM demonstrates that constraint-driven design, when applied systematically, yields architectures that are not merely viable on limited hardware but often superior in efficiency, cost, and privacy dimensions. We hope this work inspires further exploration of resource-efficient ML systems accessible to researchers and organizations regardless of hardware budgets.

Acknowledgments

We thank the open-source community for Sherpa-ONNX, SetFit, Kokoro TTS, and Ollama, which form the foundation of AXIOM. We also acknowledge the reviewers for their valuable feedback.

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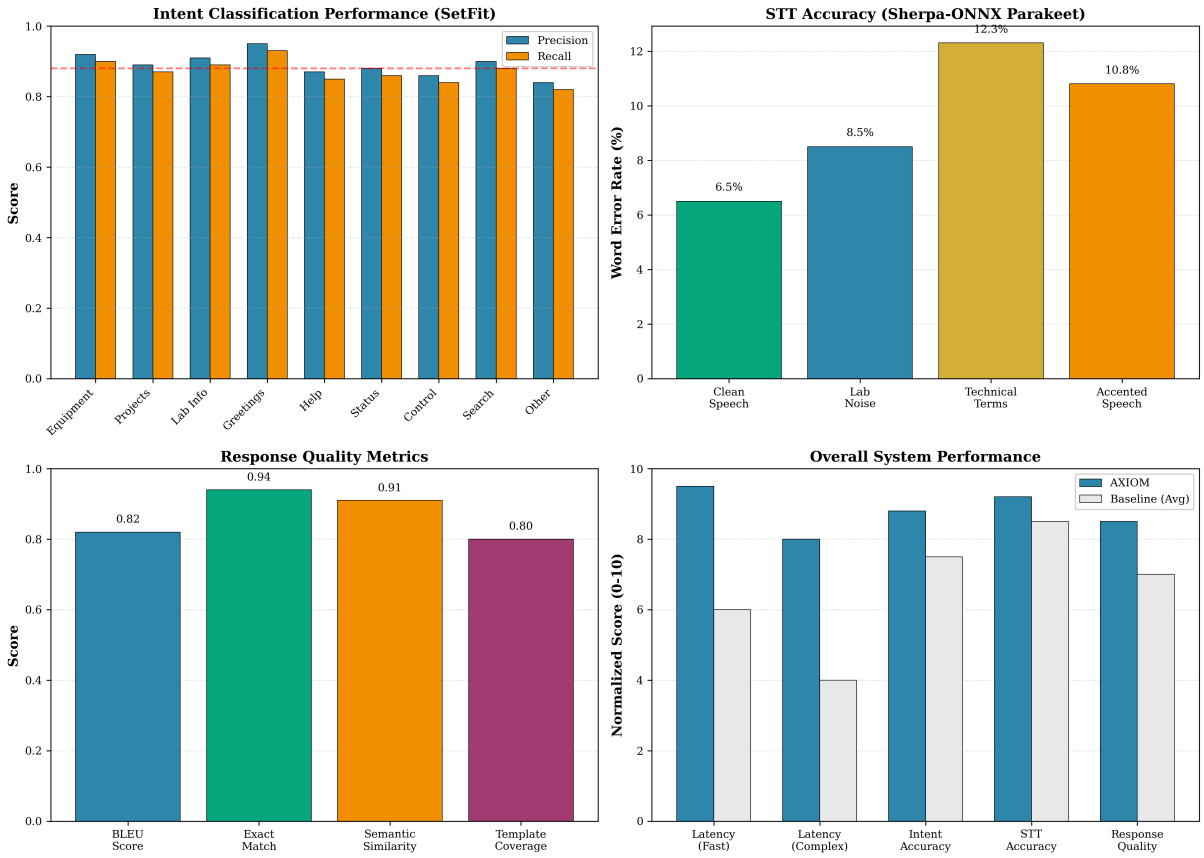

Figure 8: Comprehensive accuracy metrics: (a) Intent classification precision/recall across 9 classes, (b) STT word error rate under different conditions, (c) Response quality metrics (BLEU, exact match, semantic similarity), (d) Overall system performance normalized scores.

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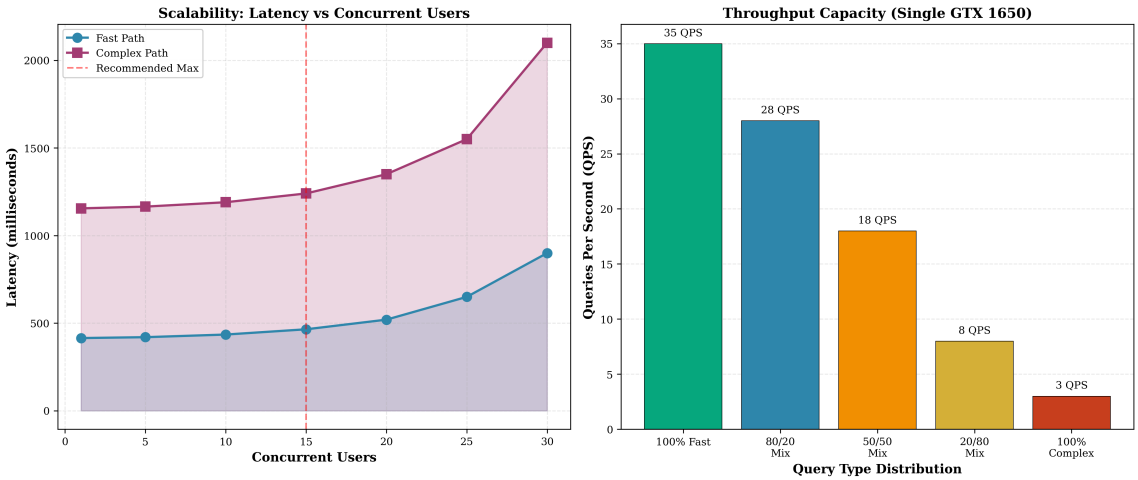

Figure 9: Scalability analysis on GTX 1650. Left: Latency degradation with concurrent users (recommended max: 15-20 users). Right: Throughput capacity (QPS) under different query type distributions, achieving 28 QPS with realistic 80/20 mix.

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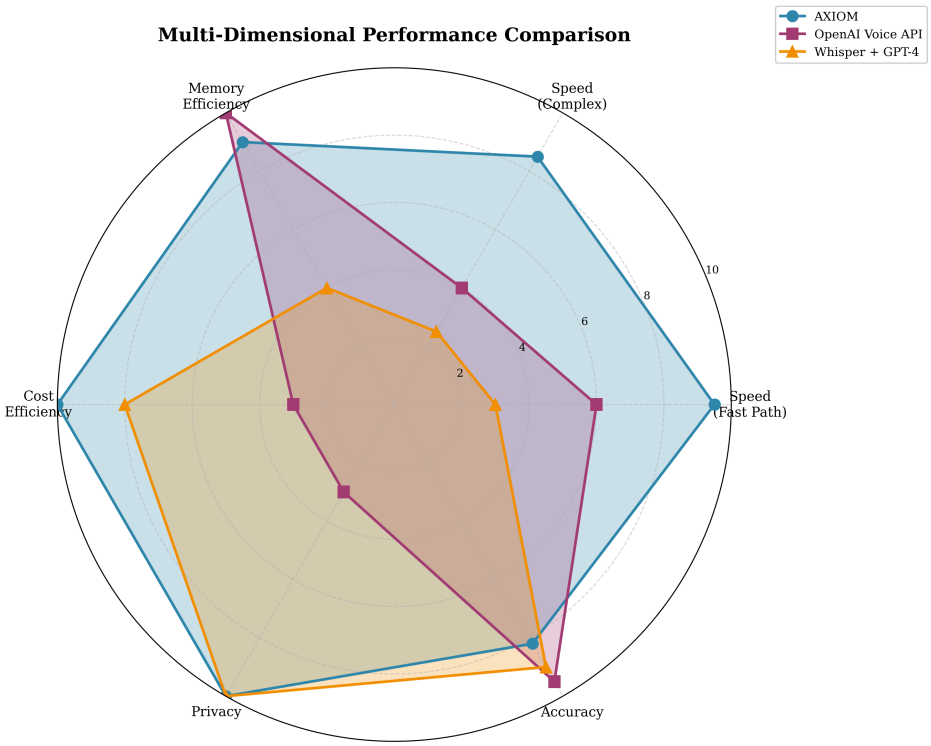

Figure 10: Multi-dimensional performance comparison using radar chart. AXIOM excels in speed (fast and complex paths), memory efficiency, cost efficiency, and privacy while maintaining competitive accuracy compared to OpenAI Voice API and Whisper+GPT-4.