

Efficiently solving linear bilevel programming problems using off-the-shelf optimization software

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Bilevel programming

- Decentralized environments: multiple decisions maker with divergent objectives that interact with each other in a hierarchical organization
- Simplest case: one leader and one follower (Stackelberg game)
- A Stackelberg game can be mathematically formulated as a bilevel problem (BLP)

$$\min_x F(x, y) \quad (1a)$$

$$\text{s.t. } G_i(x, y) \geq 0, \quad \forall i \quad (1b)$$

$$\min_y f(x, y) \quad (1c)$$

$$\text{s.t. } g_j(x, y) \geq 0, \quad \forall j \quad (1d)$$

- Even if $F(x, y)$, $f(x, y)$, $G_i(x, y)$ and $g_j(x, y)$ are linear, the BLP is proven to be NP-hard¹

¹Jeroslow 1985; Bard 1991.

Bilevel programming applications

BLP is widely used in energy and power system applications:

- Electricity grid security analysis²
- Transmission expansion planning³
- Strategic bidding of power producers⁴
- Generation capacity expansion⁵
- Investment in wind power generation⁶
- Market equilibria models⁷

²Motto, Arroyo, and Galiana 2005.

³Garces et al. 2009; Jenabi, Fatemi Ghomi, and Smeers 2013.

⁴Ruiz and Conejo 2009; Zugno et al. 2013.

⁵Wogrin, Centeno, and Barquín 2011; Kazempour et al. 2011.

⁶Baringo and Conejo 2014; Maurovich-Horvat, Boomsma, and Siddiqui 2015.

⁷Pozo and Contreras 2011; Ruiz, Conejo, and Smeers 2012.

Methods to solve bilevel programming

Methods to solve BLP can be divided into two main categories:

- Dedicated methods⁸
 - Efficient and globally optimal
 - Hard to implement in commercial optimization software
- Plug-and-play methods⁹
 - Straightforward implementation in commercial optimization software
 - High computational burden and locally optimal
 - Most common: reformulate as single-level and Fortuny-Amat (bigM)

⁸Bialas and Karwan 1984; Shi, Lu, and Zhang 2005; Calvete, Galé, and Mateo 2008; Li and Fang 2012; Sinha, Malo, and Deb 2013; Jiang et al. 2013; Bard and Falk 1982; Bard and Moore 1990; Hansen, Jaumard, and Savard 1992; Shi et al. 2006.

⁹Fortuny-Amat and McCarl 1981; Ruiz and Conejo 2009; Gabriel and Leuthold 2010; Siddiqui and Gabriel 2012; Scholtes 2001; Ralph and Wright 2004; White and Anandalingam 1993; Hu and Ralph 2004; Lv et al. 2007; Fletcher and Leyffer 2004;

Linear bilevel problem

If all functions are linear, the resulting linear bilevel problem (LBLP) can be generally formulated as

$$\min_x \quad c_1x + d_1y \quad (2a)$$

$$\text{s.t.} \quad A_1x + B_1y \leq b_1 \quad (2b)$$

$$\min_y \quad c_2x + d_2y \quad (2c)$$

$$\text{s.t.} \quad A_2x + B_2y \leq b_2 \quad (\lambda) \quad (2d)$$

$B_1 \neq 0$ may lead to a disconnected feasible region¹⁰ for the upper-level variables x .

¹⁰Colson, Marcotte, and Savard 2005; Shi, Zhang, and Lu 2005.

Linear bilevel problem

Since the lower-level optimization problem is linear, it can be replaced with its KKT optimality conditions

$$\min_{x,y,\lambda} \quad c_1x + d_1y \quad (3a)$$

$$\text{s.t.} \quad A_1x + B_1y \leq b_1 \quad (3b)$$

$$d_2 + \lambda B_2 = 0 \quad (3c)$$

$$b_2 - A_2x - B_2y \geq 0 \quad (3d)$$

$$\lambda \geq 0 \quad (3e)$$

$$\lambda (b_2 - A_2x - B_2y) = 0 \quad (3f)$$

Without the complementarity conditions (11f), problem (3) would be linear. Thus, all the methods differ in how to deal with these constraints.

Plug-and-play methods

- Special ordered sets type 1 (SOS1)
- Fortuny-Amat with big M (FA)
- Regularization (REG)
- Proposed method (REG-FA)

- This method declares Special Ordered Sets of Type 1 (SOS1)¹¹

$$s_j(1) = (b_2 - A_2x - B_2y)_j, \quad \forall j$$

$$s_j(2) = \lambda_j, \quad \forall j$$

- This method constructs a binary tree and explores all combinations of the complementarity constraints, thus ensuring global optimality.

¹¹Siddiqui and Gabriel 2012.

The complementarity constraints are reformulated as

$$\min_{x,y,\lambda,u} \quad F(x,y) = c_1x + d_1y \quad (5a)$$

$$\text{s.t.} \quad A_1x + B_1y \leq b_1 \quad (5b)$$

$$d_2 + \lambda B_2 = 0 \quad (5c)$$

$$b_2 - A_2x - B_2y \geq 0 \quad (5d)$$

$$\lambda \geq 0 \quad (5e)$$

$$b_2 - A_2x - B_2y \leq (1 - u)M_1 \quad (5f)$$

$$\lambda \leq uM_2 \quad (5g)$$

$$u \in \{0, 1\} \quad (5h)$$

where u is a vector of binary variables of appropriate size and M_1, M_2 are *large enough* scalars that need to be adjusted.

But...

How do we really know whether or not they are *large enough*?



Fortuny-Amat with big-M

The most widely used method in the PES literature to adjust the Big-Ms essentially relies on the following trial-and-error procedure:

- 1 Select initial values for M_1 and M_2 .
- 2 Solve model (5) using a MIP solver (e.g., CPLEX).
- 3 Find a j' such that $u_{j'} = 0$ and $(b_2 - A_2x - B_2y)_{j'} = M_{1j'}$. If such a j' exists, increase the value of $M_{1j'}$ and go to step 2). Otherwise, go to step 4).
- 4 Find a j' such that $u_{j'} = 1$ and $\lambda_{j'} = M_{2j'}$. If such a j' exists, increase the value of $M_{2j'}$ and go to step 2). Else, the solution to (5) *is assumed* to correspond to the optimal solution of the original bilevel problem (2).

This method may fail and provide highly suboptimal solutions!!

The curse of the Fortuny-Amat big-M reformulation

Let us consider the following linear bilevel problem:

$$\begin{aligned} \max_{x \in \mathbb{R}} \quad & z = x + y \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & 0 \leq x \leq 2 \\ & \min_{y \in \mathbb{R}} \quad y \\ & \text{s.t.} \quad y \geq 0 \quad (\lambda_1) \\ & \quad \quad x - 0.01y \leq 1 \quad (\lambda_2) \end{aligned}$$

The curse of the Fortuny-Amat big-M reformulation

Let us consider the following linear bilevel problem:

$$\begin{aligned} \max_{x \in \mathbb{R}} \quad & z = x + y \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & 0 \leq x \leq 2 \\ & \min_{y \in \mathbb{R}} \quad y \\ & \text{s.t.} \quad y \geq 0 \quad (\lambda_1) \\ & \quad \quad x - 0.01y \leq 1 \quad (\lambda_2) \end{aligned}$$

By simple inspection...

- $x - 0.01y \leq 1 \Leftrightarrow y \geq 100x - 100$.
- The upper-level problem aims to maximize the sum of x and y , while the lower-level problem is attempting to minimize y .
- ...

Therefore, it is very easy to verify that the optimal solution to this problem is $z^* = 102, x^* = 2, y^* = 100, \lambda_1^* = 0, \lambda_2^* = 100$.

The curse of the Fortuny-Amat big-M reformulation

Let us recast this small bilevel program into a single-level one using the KKT conditions of the lower-level problem:

$$\max_{x,y} \quad z = x + y$$

$$\text{s.t.} \quad 0 \leq x \leq 2$$

$$x - 0.01y \leq 1$$

$$1 - \lambda_1 - 0.01\lambda_2 = 0$$

$$y, \lambda_1, \lambda_2 \geq 0$$

$$\lambda_1 y_1 = 0$$

$$\lambda_2(-x + 0.01y + 1) = 0$$

The curse of the Fortuny-Amat big-M reformulation

Finally, we use the Fortuny-Amat big-M reformulation to deal with the complementarity conditions:

$$\begin{aligned} \max_{x,y} \quad & z = x + y \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & 0 \leq x \leq 2 \\ & x - 0.01y \leq 1 \\ & 1 - \lambda_1 - 0.01\lambda_2 = 0 \\ & y, \lambda_1, \lambda_2 \geq 0 \\ & \lambda_1 \leq u_1 M_1^D \\ & y \leq (1 - u_1) M_1^P \\ & \lambda_2 \leq u_2 M_2^D \\ & -x + 0.01y + 1 \leq (1 - u_2) M_2^P \\ & u_1, u_2 \in \{0, 1\} \end{aligned}$$

The curse of the Fortuny-Amat big-M reformulation

Instance 1: We select $M_1^P = M_2^P = M_1^D = M_2^D = 200$

$$\max_{x,y,\lambda_1,\lambda_2,u_1,u_2} z = x + y$$

$$\text{s.t. } 0 \leq x \leq 2$$

$$x - 0.01y \leq 1$$

$$1 - \lambda_1 - 0.01\lambda_2 = 0$$

$$y, \lambda_1, \lambda_2 \geq 0$$

$$\lambda_1 \leq u_1 M_1^D$$

$$y \leq (1 - u_1) M_1^P$$

$$\lambda_2 \leq u_2 M_2^D$$

$$-x + 0.01y + 1 \leq (1 - u_2) M_2^P$$

$$u_1, u_2 \in \{0, 1\}$$

Case	u_1	u_2	x	y	λ_1	λ_2	z
1	0	1	2	100	0	100	102
2	1	1	1	0	Multiple		1
3	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
4	0	0	Infeasible				

- Case 1: $\lambda_2 = 100 < 200$;
 $y = 100 < 200$.
- The MIP solver renders the solution that is globally optimal.

The curse of the Fortuny-Amat big-M reformulation

Instance 2: We select $M_1^P = M_2^P$; $M_1^D = M_2^D = 50$

$$\max_{x,y} \quad z = x + y$$

$$\text{s.t.} \quad 0 \leq x \leq 2$$

$$x - 0.01y \leq 1$$

$$1 - \lambda_1 - 0.01\lambda_2 = 0$$

$$y, \lambda_1, \lambda_2 \geq 0$$

$$\lambda_1 \leq u_1 M_1^D$$

$$y \leq (1 - u_1) M_1^P$$

$$\lambda_2 \leq u_2 M_2^D$$

$$-x + 0.01y + 1 \leq (1 - u_2) M_2^P$$

$$u_1, u_2 \in \{0, 1\}$$

Case	u_1	u_2	x	y	λ_1	λ_2	z
1	0	1	Infeasible				
2	1	1	1	0	Multiple ^(*)		1
3	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
4	0	0	Infeasible				

(*) $0 \leq \lambda_1 \leq 50, 0 \leq \lambda_2 \leq 50, 1 - \lambda_1 - 0.01\lambda_2 = 0$

- Case 2 includes $\lambda_1 = 0.5, \lambda_2 = 50$
- CPLEX always provides Case 3!
- Since $\lambda_1 < 50, \lambda_2 < 50$, Case 3 is assumed to be globally optimal!!

Loose Big-M constraints do not imply global optimality!

Checking non-tightness is misleading



Our example is very illustrative, but a bit “silly”, because LP duality already tells us that

$$0.01\lambda_2 \leq 1 \Leftrightarrow \lambda_2 \leq 100$$

Of course, the problem is with complex large-scale bilevel programs.

Regularization approach

All feasible points of (11) are nonregular (nonlinear solvers fail even to find a local optimal solution).

$$\min_{x,y,\lambda} \quad c_1x + d_1y \quad (11a)$$

$$\text{s.t.} \quad A_1x + B_1y \leq b_1 \quad (11b)$$

$$d_2 + \lambda B_2 = 0 \quad (11c)$$

$$b_2 - A_2x - B_2y \geq 0 \quad (11d)$$

$$\lambda \geq 0 \quad (11e)$$

$$\lambda(b_2 - A_2x - B_2y) = 0 \quad (11f)$$

¹²Scholtes 2001; Ralph and Wright 2004.

¹³Scholtes 2001.

Regularization approach

All feasible points of (11) are nonregular (nonlinear solvers fail even to find a local optimal solution). This problem can be regularized as follows¹²:

$$\min_{x,y,\lambda} \quad c_1x + d_1y \quad (11a) \qquad \min_{x,y,\lambda} \quad F(x,y) = c_1x + d_1y \quad (12a)$$

$$\text{s.t.} \quad A_1x + B_1y \leq b_1 \quad (11b) \qquad \text{s.t.} \quad A_1x + B_1y \leq b_1 \quad (12b)$$

$$d_2 + \lambda B_2 = 0 \quad (11c) \qquad d_2 + \lambda B_2 = 0 \quad (12c)$$

$$b_2 - A_2x - B_2y \geq 0 \quad (11d) \qquad b_2 - A_2x - B_2y \geq 0 \quad (12d)$$

$$\lambda \geq 0 \quad (11e) \qquad \lambda \geq 0 \quad (12e)$$

$$\lambda(b_2 - A_2x - B_2y) = 0 \quad (11f) \qquad \lambda(b_2 - A_2x - B_2y) \leq t \quad (12f)$$

- Parameter t is iteratively decreased to 0
- Strong theoretical and empirical convergence properties¹³
- Only guaranteed to provide local optimal solutions

¹²Scholtes 2001; Ralph and Wright 2004.

¹³Scholtes 2001.

Neither the one nor the other

- The regularization method is very **fast** and numerically **stable**, but only provides **local** optimal solutions.
- The big-M method achieves **global optimality** provided that large constants are set to proper values, but it is often very **slow** and suffers from numerical **instability** if the big-Ms are too large.

Why do we not combine both approaches somehow?

Proposed approach

We propose leveraging information about the local optimal solution provided by the regularization method to set the **large constants** and warm-start the **binary variables** of the Fortuny-Amat MIP reformulation as follows:

- 1 Solve (11) using regularization to obtain a local optimal solution
- 2 Select a value of $\mathcal{M} > 1$
- 3 Set $M_1 \leftarrow \mathcal{M} \max_j \{(b_2 - A_2x - B_2y)_j\}$ and $M_2 \leftarrow \mathcal{M} \max_j \{(\lambda)_j\}$
- 4 Set initial values of binary variables u as follows. If $(b_2 - A_2x - B_2y)_j > 0$, then $u_j = 0$. If $\lambda_j > 0$, then $u_j = 1$
- 5 Solve the Fortuny-Amat MIP reformulation (5)

Computational results

We compare the proposed method with existing ones using 300 randomly generated examples of different sizes (100 per size):

$$\min_x \quad c_1x + d_1y$$

$$\text{s.t.} \quad A_1x + B_1y \leq b_1$$

$$\min_y \quad c_2x + d_2y$$

$$\text{s.t.} \quad A_2x + B_2y \leq b_2$$

	n	m	p	q	r
Small	50	50	25	25	25
Medium	100	100	50	50	50
Large	200	200	100	100	100

$$\begin{aligned} c_1 &= |\mathcal{N}(1, n)| \\ d_1 &= |\mathcal{N}(1, m)| \end{aligned} \quad A_1 = \begin{pmatrix} \mathcal{N}(p, n) \\ -I_n \end{pmatrix} \quad B_1 = \begin{pmatrix} \mathbf{0} \\ \mathbf{0} \end{pmatrix} \quad b_1 = \begin{pmatrix} \mathcal{N}(p, 1) \\ \mathbf{0} \end{pmatrix}$$

$$\begin{aligned} c_2 &= |\mathcal{N}(1, n)| \\ d_2 &= |\mathcal{N}(1, m)| \end{aligned} \quad A_2 = \begin{pmatrix} \mathcal{N}(q, n) \\ \mathbf{0} \\ \mathbf{0} \end{pmatrix} \quad B_2 = \begin{pmatrix} \mathcal{N}(q, m) \\ \mathcal{N}(r, m) \\ -I_m \end{pmatrix} \quad b_2 = \begin{pmatrix} \mathcal{N}(q, 1) \\ \mathcal{N}(r, 1) \\ \mathbf{0} \end{pmatrix}$$

Computational results

	Small (n=50)				Medium (n=100)				Large (n=200)			
	#opt	#inf	time (s)	gap(%)	#opt	#inf	time(s)	gap(%)	#opt	#inf	time(s)	gap(%)
SOS1	98	2	1	0.00	90	0	4656	0.27	27	0	17652	2.05
FA-5	11	24	12	7.65	8	7	5385	7.15	0	20	21415	4.57
FA-50	98	2	5	0.00	94	2	5495	0.04	53	1	16873	0.31
FA-100000	27	2	0	6.44	11	0	0	10.19	2	0	1	9.86
REG	61	2	0	0.55	41	0	1	0.52	30	1	14	0.29
REG-FA-10	98	2	5	0.00	99	0	2353	0.00	72	0	13258	0.10

- #opt: Number of problems solved to optimality (out of 100)
- #inf: Number of infeasible problems (out of 100)
- time: average time of 100 problems
- gap: average gap with respect to global optimal solution of 100 problems

Computational results

	Small (n=50)				Medium (n=100)				Large (n=200)			
	#opt	#inf	time (s)	gap(%)	#opt	#inf	time(s)	gap(%)	#opt	#inf	time(s)	gap(%)
SOS1	98	2	1	0.00	90	0	4656	0.27	27	0	17652	2.05
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FA-100000	27	2	0	6.44	11	0	0	10.19	2	0	1	9.86
REG	61	2	0	0.55	41	0	1	0.52	30	1	14	0.29
REG-FA-10	98	2	5	0.00	99	0	2353	0.00	72	0	13258	0.10

- SOS1 works fine for small-size problems.
- For large problems, SOS1 often reaches the maximum resource time of 6 h.

Computational results

	Small (n=50)				Medium (n=100)				Large (n=200)			
	#opt	#inf	time (s)	gap(%)	#opt	#inf	time(s)	gap(%)	#opt	#inf	time(s)	gap(%)
SOS1	98	2	1	0.00	90	0	4656	0.27	27	0	17652	2.05
FA-5	11	24	12	7.65	8	7	5385	7.15	0	20	21415	4.57
FA-50	98	2	5	0.00	94	2	5495	0.04	53	1	16873	0.31
FA-100000	27	2	0	6.44	11	0	0	10.19	2	0	1	9.86
REG	61	2	0	0.55	41	0	1	0.52	30	1	14	0.29
REG-FA-10	98	2	5	0.00	99	0	2353	0.00	72	0	13258	0.10

- FA-5 leads to infeasible problems since the big-Ms are not large enough.
- Numerical instabilities occur for FA-100000.
- FA-50 provides the best results for this approach.

Computational results

	Small (n=50)				Medium (n=100)				Large (n=200)			
	#opt	#inf	time (s)	gap(%)	#opt	#inf	time(s)	gap(%)	#opt	#inf	time(s)	gap(%)
SOS1	98	2	1	0.00	90	0	4656	0.27	27	0	17652	2.05
FA-5	11	24	12	7.65	8	7	5385	7.15	0	20	21415	4.57
FA-50	98	2	5	0.00	94	2	5495	0.04	53	1	16873	0.31
FA-100000	27	2	0	6.44	11	0	0	10.19	2	0	1	9.86
REG	61	2	0	0.55	41	0	1	0.52	30	1	14	0.29
REG-FA-10	98	2	5	0.00	99	0	2353	0.00	72	0	13258	0.10

- The computational time for the FA approach dramatically increases with problem size.

Computational results

	Small (n=50)				Medium (n=100)				Large (n=200)			
	#opt	#inf	time (s)	gap(%)	#opt	#inf	time(s)	gap(%)	#opt	#inf	time(s)	gap(%)
SOS1	98	2	1	0.00	90	0	4656	0.27	27	0	17652	2.05
FA-5	11	24	12	7.65	8	7	5385	7.15	0	20	21415	4.57
FA-50	98	2	5	0.00	94	2	5495	0.04	53	1	16873	0.31
FA-100000	27	2	0	6.44	11	0	0	10.19	2	0	1	9.86
REG	61	2	0	0.55	41	0	1	0.52	30	1	14	0.29
REG-FA-10	98	2	5	0.00	99	0	2353	0.00	72	0	13258	0.10

- Local optimal solutions are quite close to the global ones.
- The size of the problem does not significantly affect computational time.

Computational results

	Small (n=50)				Medium (n=100)				Large (n=200)			
	#opt	#inf	time (s)	gap(%)	#opt	#inf	time(s)	gap(%)	#opt	#inf	time(s)	gap(%)
SOS1	98	2	1	0.00	90	0	4656	0.27	27	0	17652	2.05
FA-5	11	24	12	7.65	8	7	5385	7.15	0	20	21415	4.57
FA-50	98	2	5	0.00	94	2	5495	0.04	53	1	16873	0.31
FA-100000	27	2	0	6.44	11	0	0	10.19	2	0	1	9.86
REG	61	2	0	0.55	41	0	1	0.52	30	1	14	0.29
REG-FA-10	98	2	5	0.00	99	0	2353	0.00	72	0	13258	0.10

- The proposed approach achieves the optimal solution in most problems and the lowest average gap at reasonable computational times.

Computational results

For $n = 100$, we change the scaling and sparsity of matrices and vectors

	Full matrix, good scaled				Sparse matrix, good scaled				Full matrix, bad scaled			
	#opt	#inf	time (s)	gap(%)	#opt	#inf	time(s)	gap(%)	#opt	#inf	time(s)	gap(%)
SOS1	90	0	4656	0.27	86	0	4293	0.48	56	0	18419	7.02
FA-5	8	7	5385	7.15	7	12	4370	8.75	0	100	-	-
FA-50	94	2	5495	0.04	92	2	4283	0.02	0	100	-	-
FA-100000	11	0	0	10.19	10	0	0	10.58	3	0	1	202.40
REG	41	0	1	0.52	45	0	1	0.67	4	41	4	6.68
REG-FA-10	99	0	2353	0.00	97	1	1644	0.01	82	6	10702	0.16

- Sparsity does not qualitatively affect the conclusions from the comparison.
- The performance of FA is particularly poor for badly scaled problems for any value of the big-Ms.
- The proposed method remarkably outperforms existing ones in badly scaled problems.

Conclusions

When it comes to solving a linear bilevel problem, there are the following options:

- Dedicated methods: efficient but hard to code.
- SOS1: global optimality guarantee, but computational time is prohibitive.
- REG: fast, but only local optimal solutions are guaranteed.
- FA with big-Ms: easy to implement, but potentially very time consuming if big-Ms are not properly set. Furthermore, setting big-Ms by trial and error may provide suboptimal solutions.
- Try to find better ways to set large constants as the one we propose here.

Thanks for the attention!

Questions?

- S. Pineda, H. Bylling and J. M. Morales, "*Efficiently solving linear bilevel programming problems using off-the-shelf optimization software*", in **Optimization and Engineering**, 19(1), 187-211, 2018.
- S. Pineda and J. M. Morales, "*Solving Linear Bilevel Problems Using Big-Ms: Not All That Glitters Is Gold*", accepted for publication in **IEEE Transactions on Power Systems**. Also available on arXiv.



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