

Encoding scheme minimizes errors in photonic converters

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A new scheme with an inherent integer Gray code property reduces photonic analog-to-digital converter errors while enhancing resolution.

Digitizing wideband radio frequency (RF) signals directly at the antenna is important in defense systems such as electronic warfare digital receivers and electronic signal intelligence collectors. It can eliminate the need for down-conversion to intermediate frequencies that cause spurious signals at the output of the receiver's analog-to-digital converter (ADC). Digitization also can

hide any low power signals of interest. Integrated optical ADCs that use a parallel arrangement of wideband (bandwidth >50GHz) Mach-Zehnder modulators (MZMs) provide a solution by efficiently coupling the high-frequency RF energy into the optical domain without requiring down-conversion.¹ Using mode-locked lasers for sampling (pulse repetition frequency >300Gb/s) and having wideband photodetectors at the MZM output allows direct digitization of the high-frequency signals.²

Traditionally, each MZM in the parallel arrangement folds the RF input signal symmetrically, with each subsequent folding period doubled.³ The electrical output from each detector is then quantized with a single comparator. When the detector output voltage crosses the comparator's matching

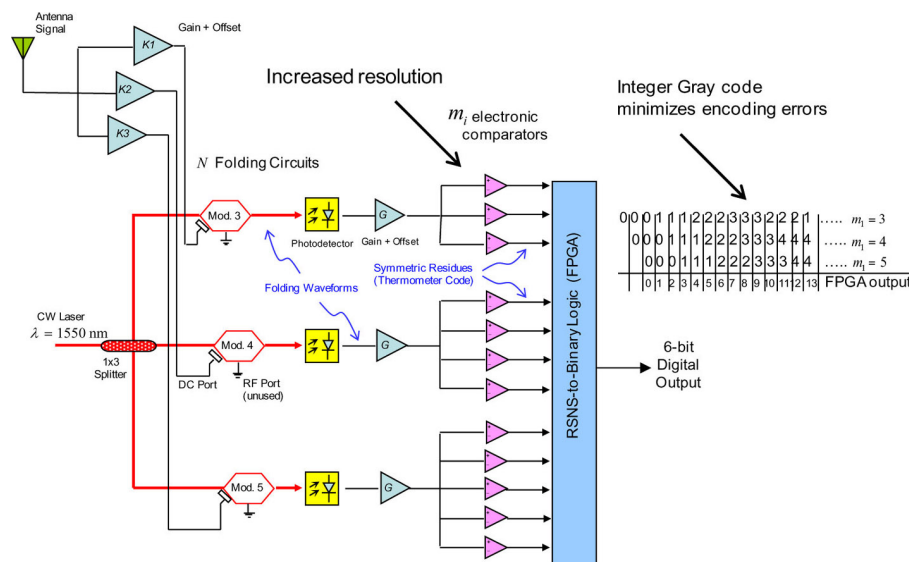


Figure 1. Robust symmetrical number system photonic analog-to-digital converter with greater than 1 bit per interferometer. FPGA: Field programmable gate array. K1, K2, K3: Amplifiers to supply gain and offset voltages. CW laser: Continuous wave laser. G: Post-detection amplifier gain. Mod., m_i : Modulus. RSNS: Robust symmetrical number system.

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 2011		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2011 to 00-00-2011	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Encoding Scheme Minimizes Errors In Photonic Converters				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Surface Warfare Center (NSWC), Port Hueneme, CA, 93041				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES SPIE Newsroom, 10.1117/2.1201112.003950, 3 pages					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 4	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

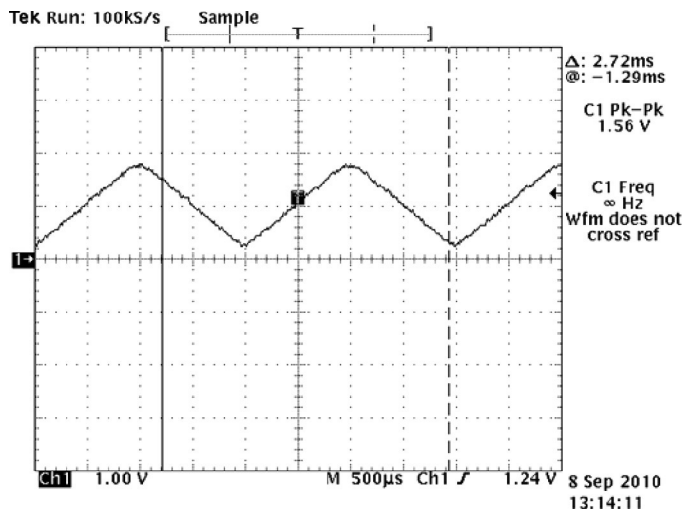


Figure 2. Digital-to-analog converter output using the prototype device with a triangular input. This is an oscilloscope trace. C1: Trace one on the scope. Pk-Pk: Peak-to-peak. Ch1: Channel one. Wfm: Waveform.

threshold voltage, the comparator output changes from a logic 0 to a logic 1. Together, the comparators represent the RF voltage in a binary format with one-bit per MZM/detector combination. Unfortunately, the achievable resolution is limited to 3 or 4 bits because of the MZM device capacitance.

We have developed a new modular preprocessing technique based on the robust symmetrical number system (RSNS) that can both increase the devices' resolution and minimize encoding errors.^{4,5} The RSNS is composed of $N \geq 2$ moduli m_i that are co-prime (that is, the greatest common divisor is one). The RSNS preprocessing folds the signal in accordance with the modulus m_i . Instead of one comparator at each MZM detector's output, we used a parallel array of m_i comparators to analyze the detector's output amplitude.

Figure 1 shows the RSNS photonic ADC for $N = 3$ with $m_i \in \{3, 4, 5\}$, as well as integer values within each modulus (or comparator states), including a left shift. An example of the decimal output h from a field programmable gate array is also shown.⁶ For this example, the length of paired terms without ambiguities (dynamic range) is $\hat{M} = 43$, and the position begins at the decimal value of $h = 61$ (not shown). The paired terms in each vector change one at a time at the next code position, resulting in an integer Gray (reflected binary) code property. That is, only one comparator changes state between any two code transitions.

The input signal's novel folding and the m_i comparators at the detector output extend the photonic MZM resolution beyond 1 bit per interferometer. The inherent Gray code property

also makes it particularly attractive for error control. With the RSNS preprocessing, encoding errors resulting from comparator thresholds not being crossed simultaneously are eliminated, and interpolation circuitry can be removed.

We built a prototype device following this design. The input was a triangular waveform and the output was provided as input to a digital-to-analog converter (see Figure 2). To increase the resolution of a photonic ADC—while minimizing the encoding errors—we introduced a new technique based on a robust symmetrical number system encoding. We designed and constructed a prototype ADC to evaluate the concept's feasibility. Instead of one comparator at each detector's output, we used several comparators. The comparator states, when considered together, change one at a time at the next code position (integer Gray code property) and make the concept particularly attractive for error control. As a result, the RSNS has the important property that the largest nonlinearity is always less than a least significant bit. Our next step is to build a wideband, high-resolution device capable of achieving 12 bits of resolution over a 10GHz bandwidth.

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