

Dynamic Detection and Removal of Inactive Clauses in SAT with Application in Image Computation

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we present a new technique for the efficient dynamic detection and removal of *inactive clauses*, i.e. clauses that do not affect the solutions of interest of a Boolean Satisfiability (SAT) problem. The algorithm is based on the extraction of gate connectivity information during generation of the Boolean formula from the circuit, and its use in the inner loop of a branch-and-bound SAT algorithm. The motivation for this optimization is to exploit the circuit structure information, which can be used to find unobservable gates at circuit outputs under dynamic conditions. It has the potential to speed up all applications of SAT in which the SAT formula is derived from a logic circuit. In particular, we find that it has considerable impact on an image computation algorithm based on SAT. We present practical results for benchmark circuits which show that the use of this optimization consistently improves the performance for reachability analysis, in some cases enabling the prototype tool to reach more states than otherwise possible.

1. INTRODUCTION

Checking Boolean Satisfiability (SAT) is at the core of a number of applications in VLSI CAD including combinational verification, ATPG, timing analysis, synthesis and, recently, reachability analysis and model checking. Acceleration of SAT can have significant impact in terms of improving the quality of these applications. SAT has received considerable attention in the recent past, focusing both on basic improvements in the SAT algorithms [7, 11, 14, 19], and on various applications like Automatic Test Pattern Generation (ATPG) [12], equivalence checking [5, 9], bounded model checking (BMC) [2]. Recently, combining SAT techniques with BDDs has been shown to be effective for image computation with application in state reachability analysis of sequential circuits [10].

Typical SAT solvers are based on a Davis-Putnam style branch-and-bound algorithm, and include considerable so-

phistication in heuristics for decision making, implication gathering, and backtracking [15, 18, 22]. However, missing from these efforts is exploitation of the fact that most SAT problems arising in VLSI CAD are derived from logic gate netlists. Logic gate netlists have some special properties related to how gates are connected together to realize circuit functionality. These include properties like the input-to-output flow of information, limitation on the fanout and fanin of each gate, and the connectivity and signal value dependence dynamically changing the controllability and observability of a gate. To the best of our knowledge, such properties have not been exploited in current SAT packages.

On the other hand, circuit structure has been effectively utilized in many SAT applications, e.g. ATPG [1], BMC [20]. However, this utilization has been mostly application-specific. For example, justification/propagation frontiers in ATPG, and unrolled transition relations in BMC, are used for more effective decision heuristics in the associated SAT procedures.

Our motivation is to exploit circuit structure in order to improve the performance of *generic* SAT applications arising in VLSI CAD. In particular, we use the notion of unobservability of gates at circuit outputs to reduce the size of the SAT sub-problems. Like all search algorithms, the effectiveness of a SAT algorithm is based on the amount of pruning of the search space it enables. The amount of pruning, in turn, is directly affected by the decision making heuristics and implication methods. Typically, their effectiveness is inversely proportional to the size of the SAT problem. Thus, the size of a SAT problem affects not only the size of the search space, but also the effectiveness of pruning methods.

1.1 Our Contributions

Our optimization technique for reducing the size of SAT sub-problems uses the notion of unobservability for the dynamic detection and removal of *inactive clauses*, i.e. clauses which do not affect the SAT solutions of interest. Rather than perform the analysis on the circuit structure, our proposed optimization works directly on the CNF (Conjunctive Normal Form) description of the circuit. Since, typical SAT solvers use a CNF description of the problem, this avoids the overhead of multiple representations.

We tag the variables and clauses of a CNF description with circuit connectivity information. This is done once at the time of generating the CNF description from the circuit structure. Later, this information is used repeatedly in the inner loop of a typical Davis-Putnam style branch-and-

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bound SAT algorithm [14] to perform a backward traversal in order to remove inactive clauses. Note that the connectivity information in the CNF description is adequate for any traversal of the corresponding circuit structure. This can be potentially used in other optimizations, besides detection of inactive clauses.

Our proposed algorithms for generating the connectivity information, and its use for detection of inactive clauses are efficient. In particular, the algorithm for detecting inactive clauses involves marking all clauses and variables in the worst case. Depending upon the application, this cost can be either incurred at every decision level, or amortized over several decision levels within the SAT search. The important point to note is that our optimization provides a uniform way to exploit circuit connectivity information, and has the potential to accelerate all SAT applications in which the SAT formula is derived from a logic circuit representation. In this paper, we focus on a SAT-based image computation application for reachability analysis [10]. For this application, the overhead of detecting inactive clauses at every decision level is negligible. Our experimental results show that the use of this technique consistently improves the performance of our prototype tool, in some cases enabling it to reach more states than otherwise possible.

1.2 Related Work

While our technique provides a clear benefit to SAT algorithms, it is also important to put our ideas in the context of the large body of work in combinational ATPG [1]. Unlike traditional SAT, conventional ATPG algorithms operate on data structures at the level of the circuit structure itself. As a result, all circuit information, including gate connectivity, is directly available to these algorithms. Indeed, dynamic detection of inactive circuit regions is performed by the justification-propagation operations, which are at the core of ATPG algorithms. However, there is no explicit removal of these inactive regions. In particular, the overhead of propagating values through inactive regions is not avoided. In contrast, our proposed technique effectively removes the inactive regions (clauses) from further consideration. Furthermore, it provides a way to exploit the gate connectivity information within a traditional SAT formulation based on CNF formulas. Our ideas are also peripherally related to, but go beyond, the notion of dominators in ATPG. This is clarified further in Section 2.

In terms of detecting redundant clauses in a SAT formula, a recent effort [13] proposed the use of clause dominance in the inner loop of the SAT algorithm. Unfortunately, the effort required for detection of dominating clauses is high, and it typically negates the gains arising out of clause removal.

2. INACTIVE CLAUSES

As a motivating example, consider the circuit shown in Figure 1(a). Suppose, the signal a has been set to 0, say, within the branch-and-bound SAT search. This implies a 0 on signal c at the output of the AND gate. As a result, signal b becomes unobservable at the output. In addition, any gate which fans out only to the transitive fanin cone of signal b , i.e. is dominated by b , also becomes unobservable at the output. As a result, all clauses associated with such gates are *inactive*, in that they can be safely removed without affecting the SAT solution for the output. Note that the status of these clauses, i.e. whether or not they are inactive,

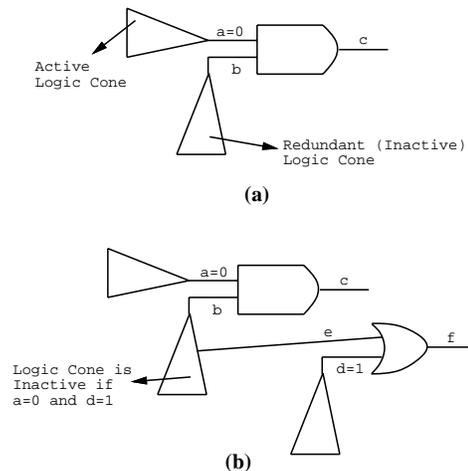


Figure 1: Circuit Example

depends on the values taken by variables a and b . In other words, it is determined dynamically within the SAT search which assigns/implies values for these variables.

Now, consider a similar example shown in Figure 1(b). Again, let signal a be set to 0, implying a 0 on signal c , and making signal b unobservable. Note that signal b does not statically dominate all gates in its fanin cone, since the shown signal e fans out to another gate. Consider the case where signal e is also unobservable, due to signal d being 1, thereby implying a 1 on the output signal f of that OR gate. In this case again, the clauses associated with all gates in cone of b are inactive, since these gates fan out to unobservable signals only.

Our ideas are peripherally related to dominators in combinational ATPG [1]. A gate G is called a structural dominator of a gate H if all paths from H to an output must pass through G . If gate G is a dominator of all gates and primary inputs in its transitive fanin, the justification process [1] in ATPG can stop at G . It must be separately checked that both 0/1 values can be generated at G for some input combinations. Our ideas go beyond the way dominators are used in ATPG. First off, the notion of structural dominators in testing is purely static. On the other hand, our notion of inactive clauses is a function of dynamic values on variables, i.e. whether or not a clause is inactive changes dynamically during the SAT search. Secondly, inactive clauses can be completely removed from the sub-problem at that point in the SAT search. In contrast, ATPG algorithms use the dominators only to partition the overall problem into one for the dominated portion of the circuit, and another for the rest.

Given a gate-level circuit description, a simple backward traversal starting from circuit outputs can be performed in order to identify unobservable gates, and all clauses associated with such gates are guaranteed to be inactive. However, this requires switching back and forth between a circuit structure description and a CNF description. Since our goal is to use inactive clause detection in the inner loop of a SAT search, it is desirable to reduce this overhead. Our proposed technique is to perform the analysis on the CNF description itself. *The key is to associate the connectivity information between signals and gates of the circuit structure description, with the variables and clauses of the CNF description.* This

information is generated statically at the time of generating the CNF formula from the circuit structure, and is used dynamically within the SAT search to detect and remove inactive clauses. The next two subsections describe these algorithms in detail.

2.1 Structural Information for CNF

Typically, the signals of a circuit are represented as variables, and the functionality of each gate is expressed as clauses for generation of a CNF formula from a circuit structure [12]. To capture the circuit structural connectivity for a backward traversal, we associate the set of clauses for each gate as the *fanin list* for the variable which denotes the output of that gate. Thus, each variable (except a primary input variable) is associated with a fanin list of clauses. Note also that the other clauses which a variable might appear in, e.g. clauses for gates in its fanout, are not required for backward traversal. (For a forward traversal, we could similarly associate a fanout list of clauses with each variable.)

The pseudo-code of our algorithm for generating these fanin lists along with CNF generation is shown in Figure 2. Here, we assume the availability of a gate-level circuit description in terms of simple Boolean gates.

```

generate_cnf_circuit()
{
    foreach output node n {
        generate_cnf_node(n);
    }
}

generate_cnf_node(n)
{
    // termination condition
    if (n is a primary input)
        return;
    if (n is visited)
        return;
    mark n is visited;
    // generate clauses for the simple gate
    g = get_gate_of_node(n);
    cList = generate_cnf_gate(g);
    // add fanin information for CNF variable
    v = satVarId(n);
    foreach clause c in cList {
        add clauseId(c) to faninList(v);
    }
    // recursively handle gate's inputs
    foreach input w of gate g {
        generate_cnf_node(w);
    }
}

```

Figure 2: Pseudo-code for CNF Generation

We can easily handle complex combinational gates as well. A typical format for such gates is that of a *table*, where each row of the table identifies a tuple of allowable inputs and output(s), such as that used in VIS [3]. An example of CNF generation and structural information for such a table is shown in Figure 3. It also demonstrates how multi-valued variables such as x, y , and equality constraints such as $(= y), (= z)$ are handled. Since complex gates usually result in introduction of many extra CNF variables, we use a post-processing phase of compacting the CNF description.

Inputs : x, y, z
Output : o
Value Ranges :
 $x, y: \{0,1,2,3\}$
 $z, o: \{0,1\}$

Table:

x	y	z	\rightarrow	o
default	0			
1	2	1		1
$=y$	-	0		1
2	3	-		$=z$

Each multi-valued variable is encoded by binary variables.
 $x : x_0 x_1$ (LSB)
 $y : y_0 y_1$ (LSB)

CNF Generation for Given Table:
A new variable is introduced for each row of table (v_1, v_2, v_3). An equality constraint at the inputs also introduces new variables – one per Boolean variable (v_4, v_5).

Clauses for introduced variables:

$v_1 = (x_0' \wedge x_1 \wedge y_0 \wedge y_1' \wedge z)$	(c1)
$v_2 = (v_4 \wedge v_5 \wedge z')$	(c2)
$v_3 = (x_0 \wedge x_1' \wedge y_0 \wedge y_1)$	(c3)
$v_4 = (x_0 = y_0)$	(c4)
$v_5 = (x_1 = y_1)$	(c5)

Clauses for output per row:

$v_1 \rightarrow o$	(c6)
$v_2 \rightarrow o$	(c7)
$v_3 \rightarrow (o = z)$	(c8)

Negation of all row variables implies default value of output:
 $(v_1' \wedge v_2' \wedge v_3') \rightarrow o'$ (c9)

Clauses are created for (c1)-(c9) using standard methods, without introducing any other variables.

Structural Information for Given Table

CNF Variable	Fanin List of Clauses
v_1	(c1)
v_2	(c2)
v_3	(c3)
v_4	(c4)
v_5	(c5)
o	(c6), (c7), (c8), (c9)

Figure 3: Example for CNF Generation

2.2 Detecting Inactive Clauses

The pseudo-code for our procedure for detecting inactive clauses is shown in Figure 4. A recursive backward traversal is performed over all variables, starting from each variable denoting a circuit output. For each variable, we loop over the clauses in its fanin list, each of which is marked “active”. If the clause is unsatisfied, then a recursive traversal is invoked for each of the variables appearing in the clause. This is because each of these variables, whether assigned or unassigned, is “observable” in the sense that it can affect the satisfiability status of the clause. On the other hand, if the clause is satisfied, then only its assigned variables are “observable”. Indeed, each unassigned variable of a satisfied clause is “unobservable” in the sense that it cannot affect its satisfiability status. Therefore, we do not invoke backward traversal for such variables. Our marking procedure is safe, i.e. any clause which is unmarked at the end is guaranteed to be inactive. (The simple connectivity information we use

```

mark_active_cnf()
{
  foreach output node variable v {
    // start the recursive marking procedure
    mark_cnf_var(v);
  }
  // at the end clauses that are not marked are
  inactive
}

mark_cnf_var(v)
{
  // termination condition
  if (v is visited)
    return;
  mark v is visited;
  // loop over each clause in its fanin list
  foreach cId in faninList(v) {
    c = clause[cId];
    // mark the clause as active
    mark_active_clause(c);
    // handle each variable in the clause
    foreach variable u in clause c {
      if (satisfied(c) && notAssigned(u))
        // variable is unobservable
        continue;
      else
        // recursively mark from variable
        mark_cnf_var(u);
    }
  }
}

```

Figure 4: Pseudo-code for CNF Marking

is not enough to make an exact determination of all unobservable gates. For simple gates, the additional information required is identification of controlling input values, but this is hard to generalize for complex combinational gates described earlier.)

In terms of complexity, note that the traversal involves marking all clauses and variables in the worst case. Depending on the application, this cost can be either incurred at every decision level, or amortized over multiple decision levels within the SAT search. All clauses which are marked inactive need not be considered for satisfaction or for decision heuristics in the sub-tree rooted at that decision level. Note that these clauses may again become active after backtracking from this decision level.

3. IMAGE COMPUTATION USING SAT

Historically, symbolic state space traversal [6, 8] has relied on efficient algorithms based on BDDs [4] for carrying out an image computation, shown below:

$$Image(P, T)(y) = \exists_{x,i} T(x, i, y) \wedge P(x) \tag{1}$$

Here, x/y denote present/next state variables, i denotes primary input variables, T denotes the transition relation, and P denotes the input state set. BDDs are used to represent the characteristic function of the transition relation, as well as the input/image sets. As an example application, the set of reachable states can be computed by starting from a set P which denotes the set of initial states of a system, and using image computation iteratively, until a fixpoint is

reached. The BDD-based approaches work well when it is possible to represent the sets of states and the transition relation (as a whole, or in a usefully partitioned form) using BDDs. Unfortunately, BDD size is very sensitive to the number of variables, variable ordering, and the nature of the logic expressions being represented.

Recently, an integration of SAT and BDDs has been proposed for image computation [10], which represents the transition relation as a CNF formula, and organizes the search for solutions as a top-level SAT search. BDD-based sub-problems are invoked on-the-fly, in order to obtain multiple solutions simultaneously. The next section describes experimental results for reachability analysis based on this image computation engine.

4. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

There has been significant progress made in symbolic reachability analysis in recent years. We compare the SAT-based image computation with and without the *inactive clause removal* (ICR) optimization, to state of the art techniques in VIS [3], a public domain tool. Our prototype implementation of the SAT-based image computation algorithm uses the GRASP SAT solver [15] and the CUDD BDD package [21], and has been integrated within VIS. All reported experiments were run on an UltraSparc machine, with a 296 MHz processor, and 1 GB memory. Dynamic variable reordering was enabled throughout. Unless noted otherwise, a time limit of 10 hours was used, and a “TT” in the results tables indicates a timeout, while an “SS” indicates a spaceout.

4.1 Reachability Analysis

Results for reachability analysis on the benchmark circuits are shown in Table 1. The name of the circuit appears in Column 1, and number of latches in Column 2 (marked #L). The number of CNF variables and clauses are shown, respectively in Column 3 (marked #V/#C). Column 4 shows the number of image steps completed, and a “(C)” after the number of steps indicates that the traversal was complete, i.e. a fixpoint was reached. Column 5 shows the CPU time (in seconds) for standard VIS [3], which uses only BDDs for image computation. The remaining columns report the results for the SAT-based image computation method, which is labeled (VIS: SAT+BDDs) in the table. Columns 6 and 7 report the CPU time (in seconds) without and with ICR, respectively. Column 8 reports the speedup factor as a ratio of (time without ICR)/(time with ICR). Finally, Columns 9 and 10 report the percentage of clauses that were found inactive, and the percentage of clauses that were found inactive *and* unsatisfied. While the former number indicates the occurrence of inactive clauses, the latter number is a more useful figure of merit, since unsatisfied clauses critically affect SAT search in the sub-tree rooted at a decision level.

4.2 Discussion

Broadly speaking, the SAT-based image computation method does well in majority of the circuits when compared with standard VIS. It should be noted that our current contribution, i.e. the use of ICR, improves this method even further. In particular, the method with ICR performs better in 9 of the 10 benchmarks circuits compared to the SAT-based method without this optimization (Column 8). This clearly demonstrates that detecting inactive clauses and their re-

Circuit Name	#L	#V/#C	Image Steps	VIS (Standard) Time(s)	SAT-based Method (VIS: SAT+BDDs)				
					No ICR		With ICR		
					Time(s)	Time(s)	Speedup Ratio	% Inactive Clauses	% Inactive and Unsat Clauses
s1269	37	456/1244	10(C)	3269	2688	2164	1.24	60.9	14.9
s1512	57	496/1301	1024(C)	2647	5753	5768	1.00	18.7	0.9
s3271	116	1183/3219	17(C)	17933	14793	14036	1.05	48.7	28.6
s3330	132	846/2114	9(C)	20029	3967	2029	1.96	41.2	15.7
prolog	136	1027/2607	4	25003	765	674	2.38	36.8	12.8
			9(C)	TT	11175	4697			
s5378	164	1012/2819	8	57986	5957	6016	0.67	28.3	5.3
			45(C)	SS > 30h	60500	90337			
s1423	74	574/1464	11	8791	3010	3318	1.77	32.7	4.7
			12	TT	9577	5423			
			13	TT	TT	13151			
s3384	183	1187/2853	4	24875	787	557	2.63	24.0	0
			5	TT	2882	1095			
			6	TT	TT	7801			
s9234.1	211	2316/6548	7	2360	8030	4569	1.76	31.1	9.3
			9	11577	TT	22777			
s13207.1	638	3464/8773	8	2285	28025	5061	5.54	29.9	5.6
			10	4906	TT	8340			
			14	28600	TT	TT			

Table 1: Reachability Results for Benchmark Circuits

removal is beneficial to the underlying search. Not surprisingly, the benefit seems to be greater when more inactive clauses are found, as indicated by a higher number in Column 9. Though not shown in the table, the overhead of applying ICR is minimal, constituting less than 10 seconds of CPU time in the largest experiment.

In terms of details, the SAT-based methods performs fairly well for the first 4 "easy" circuits where all methods complete traversal. In particular, for s3330, the method with ICR outperforms standard VIS by an order of magnitude. Recently, other improvements over standard VIS have also been reported for these circuits [16, 17]. However, since these implementations are not publicly available, we were unable to conduct comparison experiments within our environment.

The real benefit of SAT-based image computation is demonstrated by the next two circuits – prolog, and s5378. The SAT-based method is successful in performing a complete traversal, both with and without ICR, whereas VIS is not. For these circuits, and the next two circuits – s1423, and s3384 – the SAT method is consistently faster, sometimes by two orders of magnitude, and completes more steps through use of ICR. Finally, the last two circuits – s9234, and s13207 – have a bigger CNF representation than the other circuits, making the SAT-based method less effective. For these two circuits, the use of ICR improves the SAT-based method by greater than factors of 2, and 5, respectively. This has the benefit of closing the performance gap between the SAT-based method and standard VIS.

In the SAT-based image computation application, ICR affects both the decision making in SAT, as well as size of the BDD sub-problems which is directly related to the number of unsatisfied clauses. The result in Column 10 for circuit s3384 is very interesting for this reason. Since there are no inactive unsatisfied clauses, the size of the BDD sub-

problems does not change. However, it is due to the different decision making in SAT (leading perhaps to different BDD sub-problems) that we get a speedup factor of 2.63. To demonstrate this effect of ICR, we present details of the experimental results for the prolog circuit in Table 2, where labels of the Columns are similar to Table 1. Note that use of ICR results in less number of BDD leaves (sub-problems) in most image computation steps of the complete traversal. Also, the fraction of inactive clauses and inactive unsatisfied clauses remains consistently high in all steps. More tellingly, the overall peak BDD nodes and the maximum live BDD nodes (as reported by the CUDD package) are considerably lower with the use of ICR.

5. CONCLUSIONS

We have proposed an optimization technique which incorporates circuit-specific knowledge in order to improve performance of SAT algorithms on problems arising in VLSI CAD. This optimization is based on detection and removal of inactive clauses in the SAT formula, thereby reducing the size of the sub-problems. We also provide efficient algorithms for implementing this optimization within a CNF framework. We highlighted the impact of this optimization on a recently proposed application – SAT-based image computation for reachability analysis. We presented practical results for a number of benchmark circuits, which show a consistent performance improvement due to our optimization. We believe that more domain-specific optimizations of this nature are possible for SAT.

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prolog circuit		No ICR		With ICR			
Step	Reached States	Time (s)	# BDD Leaves	Time (s)	# BDD Leaves	% Inactive Clauses	% Inactive and Unsat Clauses
1	3.77487e+07	18.1	2	17.2	2	31.8	14.5
2	4.93249e+09	7.4	3	7.1	3	32.9	14.3
3	5.95738e+14	35.1	11	55.2	12	38.8	16.0
4	1.29149e+16	705.2	24	595.0	22	36.9	12.4
5	1.7276e+17	1872.9	24	2671.3	22	36.9	12.4
6	5.99378e+17	2814.7	26	645.8	22	36.9	12.4
7	7.22992e+17	2108.5	26	380.2	22	36.9	12.4
8	7.2778e+17	3485.1	40	293.6	22	36.9	12.4
9	7.2778e+17	128.1	23	32.0	22	36.9	12.4
Total	7.2778e+17	11175.0	179	4697.5	149	36.8	12.8
		Peak BDDs= 8.7M Live BDDs= 2.7M		Peak BDDs= 2.7M Live BDDs= 0.9M			

Table 2: Details of Results for prolog circuit

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