Non-uniform 2-slot Constellations for Bidirectional Relaying in Fading Channels

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Abstract—In this paper we introduce the constellation alphabets suitable for bidirectional relaying in parametric wireless channels. Based on the analysis of hierarchical minimum distance, we present a simple design algorithm for the non-uniform 2-slot constellation alphabets. These novel constellation alphabets outperform traditional linear modulation schemes in Hierarchical-Decode-and-Forward and Denoise-and-Forward relaying strategies in fading channels without sacrificing the overall system throughput.

Index Terms—Bidirectional relaying, hierarchical-decode-and-forward, wireless network coding.

I. INTRODUCTION

Bidirectional relaying strategies based on a wireless-domain extension of the traditional Network Coding (NC) [1] principles offer a great potential to improve communication in 2-Way Relay Channels (2-WRC). Significant performance benefits were observed mainly for the Denoise and Forward (DNF) [2] and Hierarchical Decode and Forward (HDF) [3] strategies (Fig. 1).

While the HDF/DNF strategies are mature in the traditional AWGN channel, their performance in fading channels could be seriously degraded due to the inherent wireless channel parameterization (e.g. complex channel gain) [2], [3]. This performance degradation could be avoided by phase pre-rotation of both source node transmissions [2], [4] or by adapting the relay eXclusive output symbol mapping [3] to the actual channel conditions [2]. However, both these approaches have several drawbacks, including a practical infeasibility of (synchronized) multi-node transmission phase pre-rotation (in fading channels) or a sensitivity to channel estimation errors of adaptive solutions (inaccurate channel estimate results in an improper choice of relay output symbol mapper). Although the novel $C^2$ constellation alphabets (introduced in [5]) are quite robust to channel parameterization, this robustness is redeemed by a reduction of the potential throughput.

In this paper we target a constellation alphabet parametric-design problem from a different way. The scope is to design the alphabet robust to channel parameterization effects while avoiding the requirement of phase pre-rotation (or adaptive processing) but still preserving the $C^1$ (per symbol slot) dimensionality constraint (to avoid the throughput reduction). Based on the analysis of the hierarchical (Euclidean) distance [6], we introduce the non-uniform 2-slot constellations and compare their Symbol Error Rate (SER) performance to that of the traditional linear modulation constellations.

II. 2-WRC WITH HDF STRATEGY

A parametric wireless 2-WRC system (Fig. 1) with 3 physically separated nodes (sources $A, B$ and relay $R$) is considered in this paper. Data $A$ source is co-located with the destination for data $B$ (and vice versa). A signal space representation (with an orthonormal basis) of the transmitted channel symbols is $s_A(c_A), s_B(c_B)$ ($s_A, s_B \in A, C^N, |A| = M$), where $c_A, c_B$ are source node code symbols, $A, C$ is a channel symbol memoryless mapper and $M$ is the alphabet cardinality.

The constellation space signal received at the relay in MAC phase is

$$x = h_A s_A + h_B s_B + w$$

where $w$ is the circularly symmetric complex Gaussian noise (variance $\sigma^2_w$ per complex dimension) and $h_A, h_B$ are scalar complex channel coefficients (constant during the observation and known at the relay). The useful signal ($h_A s_A + h_B s_B$) can be equivalently expressed (after a rescaling by $1/h_A$)

$$u(s_A, s_B) = s_A + h s_B$$

where $h = h_B/h_A$, $h_A, h_B, h \in C^1$ [5]. As shown in [7], it is sufficient to consider only $|h| \leq 1$ for further analysis, since the problem is symmetrical around $|h| = 1$ (for $|h_B| > |h_A|$ the useful signal can be equivalently rescaled by $1/h_B$ to obtain $u' = h's_A + s_B$, where $|h'| \leq 1$).

Signal $u(s_A, s_B)$ is a superposition of symbols from $A, B$, and hence it will be called a compound symbol. After receiving the signal $x = h_A u + w$, the relay performs an eXclusive mapping operation (see [3] for details) to map the received compound symbol to the relay output symbol $s_R(c_{AB})$, where
The exclusive mapping operator \( \mathcal{E}(\cdot) \) guarantees a fulfillment of the exclusive law \([3]\), i.e. the invertibility of the exclusive mapping at the destinations (provided that the C-SI is known). In the rest of the paper we will use a slightly relaxed notation: \( \mathcal{E}(i,j) = \mathcal{E}(c^i_A, c^j_B) \).

### A. Hierarchical Minimum Distance Analysis

The (squared) hierarchical minimum distance represents an approximation of the hierarchical decoder exact metric \([2], [5]\). The analysis of the constellation space (Euclidean) distance properties of alphabets in the 2-WRC with HDF strategy was presented in \([6]\). The (squared) Euclidean distance \( d^2_{u,i,j,u',c'}(h) \) of a general pair of compound symbols \((u^i,j = s^i_A + h z^i_A, u'^{i,j} = s^j_B + h z^j_B)\) is defined therein as

\[
  d^2_{u,i,j,u',c'}(h) = ||\Delta A||^2 + ||\Delta B||^2 + 2R (h^* z) \tag{3}
\]

where \( z = (\Delta A;\Delta B), \Delta A = s^j - s^i, \Delta B = s^j - s^i \) and \( i,j,i',j' \in \{1,2,\ldots,M\} \).

As shown in \([6]\), the hierarchical minimum distance

\[
  d^2_{\text{min}}(h) = \min_{(i,j,i',j') \neq \mathcal{E}(i,j),\mathcal{E}(i',j')} d^2_{u,i,j,u',c'}(h) \tag{4}
\]

is (for the worst case phase \( \angle h \)) lower bounded by a set of parabolas \( \mathcal{P} = \{p_{i,j,i',j'}\} \mathcal{E}(i,j) \neq \mathcal{E}(i',j') \), where each particular parabola is given by

\[
  p_{i,j,i',j'}(h) = \min_{h} d^2_{u,i,j,u',c'}(h)
  = ||\Delta B||^2 - 2|z| ||\Delta A||^2. \tag{5}
\]

The lower bound defined by \( \mathcal{P} \) is always achieved for some specific \( \angle h \) \([6]\) and hence

\[
  d^2_{\text{min}}(h) = \min_{\mathcal{E}(i,j) \neq \mathcal{E}(i',j')} p_{i,j,i',j'}(h). \tag{6}
\]

This parabolic behaviour of the hierarchical min-distance (see an example in Fig. 2) results necessarily in exclusive law failures \((d^2_{\text{min}}(h) \to 0)\), and consequently in destination decoding errors, since the relay cannot unambiguously determine the output symbol \([6]\).

### III. Non-uniform 2-slot Alphabets

As proved in \([6]\), the parabolic behaviour of hierarchical min-distance cannot be fully avoided for traditional linear modulation constellations in \( \mathbb{C}^1 \) (excepting the binary alphabets). However, as we will show in the following section, in case of Rician fading channels it is possible to suppress this harmful behaviour by a suitable design of 2-slot constellation alphabets \( \mathcal{A}_A^r, \mathcal{A}_B^r \).

### A. Parabolic Behaviour Analysis

It can be shown that for Rician source-relay channels \((|h_A|, |h_B|)\), the probability distribution of channel parameter \( |h| = |h_A|/|h_B| \) is diminishing as \( |h| \to 0 \) (see Fig. 3). Considering the hierarchical min-distance \( d_{\text{min}}^2(|h|) \) of QPSK (Fig. 2) along with the probability distribution of \( |h| \) (Fig. 3) it is obvious that the performance of HDF/DNF system with QPSK alphabets will be poor. Fortunately, it is possible to decrease the negative impact of this parabolic min-distance behaviour by shifting the min-distance parabolas \( (5) \) towards the less probable values of \( |h| \).

A position of each particular min-distance parabola \( (5) \) vertex (minimum) is given by

\[
  |h|^*_{\text{min}} = \arg \min_{|h|} p_{i,j,i',j'}(|h|) = \frac{||\Delta A^\prime||}{||\Delta B^\prime||}, \tag{7}
\]

which can be (in case of the constellation alphabets in \( \mathbb{C}^1 \)) further simplified to

\[
  |h|_{\text{min}}^* = \frac{||\Delta A||}{||\Delta B||} \frac{||\Delta A^\prime||}{||\Delta B^\prime||}, \tag{8}
\]

since any pair of vectors in \( \mathbb{C}^1 \) is always linearly dependent, which gives us the equality in the general Cauchy-Schwartz inequality.

### B. Alphabet Design Algorithm

As it is obvious from \( (8) \), a position of the minimum of each particular min-distance parabola \( p_{i,j,i',j'}(|h|) \) is given by the ratio of \( ||\Delta A^\prime|| \) and \( ||\Delta B^\prime|| \), i.e. by the corresponding min-distances of individual source alphabets \( \mathcal{A}_A^1, \mathcal{A}_B^1 \). Now it seems quite straightforward that it is possible to shift the particular min-distance parabola minimum towards \( |h| \to 0 \) by increasing \( ||\Delta A^\prime|| \) relatively to \( ||\Delta B^\prime|| \), which can be achieved by a suitable allocation of output power at both sources.

Since the average power constraint must be taken into account, it is not feasible to purely increase the output power
Algorithm 1: Non-uniform 2-slot constellation alphabet.

1) Pick a linear modulation constellation \( \mathcal{A}_s \).
2) Choose a power scaling factor \( s_f \in (0, 2) \).
3) Source A alphabet: \( \mathcal{A}^A_s = [\sqrt{s_f} \mathcal{A}_s, \sqrt{2 - s_f} \mathcal{A}_s] \).
4) Source B alphabet: \( \mathcal{A}^B_s = [\sqrt{2 - s_f} \mathcal{A}_s, \sqrt{s_f} \mathcal{A}_s] \).

IV. Concluding Remarks

Performance comparison of the proposed non-uniform 2-slot alphabets with \( \mathcal{A}^A_s = \text{QPSK} \) (with various \( s_f \)) and the traditional linear modulation (QPSK) is in Fig. 6. Since the source alphabets \( \mathcal{A}^A_s, \mathcal{A}^B_s \) are used only in the MAC phase, we analyze only the SER of Hierarchical (compound) symbols (H-SER) received by the relay.

Remarkable SNR gains can be observed for the proposed non-uniform 2-slot alphabets (\( \sim 10 - 15 \text{dB} \)) in Fig. 6) for moderately high SNR. It is important to note that the overall system throughput is not sacrificed, since the cardinality of one source relatively to the other one. We propose a design of novel 2-slot alphabets, where each 2-slot super-symbol is formed by pairing of two second source symbols. This gives us an additional degree of freedom, since it is possible to arbitrarily re-distribute the available power among the two slots of the super-symbol. If we denote this power as \( P_{2\text{slot}} = 2P_{1\text{slot}} \), it is obvious that the only restriction is that the power scaling coefficients for both slots in the super-symbol must sum up to 2, which gives us \( P_{2\text{slot}} = s_f P_{1\text{slot}} + (2-s_f) P_{1\text{slot}} \), where \( s_f \in (0, 2) \) defines the power scaling factor.

Based on this observation we propose a design algorithm for the non-uniform 2-slot constellation alphabets (Algorithm 1). The power is re-allocated non-uniformly among the 2-slots according to \( s_f \). Note that for \( s_f = 1 \) we get a pure 2-slot extension of a traditional linear modulation constellation with identical hierarchical min-distance properties (see Fig. 2). The hierarchical min-distance of a 2-slot alphabet with \( s_f = 0.25 \) is in Fig. 3. A comparison of the overall hierarchical min-distance \( d^2_{\text{min}}(h) \) properties (i.e. as a function of \( h \in \mathbb{C} \)) of the QPSK and the 2-slot alphabet with \( \mathcal{A}^A_s = \text{QPSK}, s_f = 0.25 \) is in Fig. 5.

References