

Low Density Parity Check Codes over $GF(q)$

David J.C. MacKay

Cavendish Laboratory,
Madingley Road,
Cambridge, CB3 0HE.
United Kingdom.

Email: mackay@mrao.cam.ac.uk

Abstract — Gallager's low density parity check codes over $GF(2)$ have been shown to have near Shannon limit performance when decoded using a probabilistic decoding algorithm. In this paper we report the empirical performance of the analogous codes defined over $GF(q)$ for $q > 2$.

I. BACKGROUND

Codes defined in terms of a non-systematic low density parity check matrix [1, 2] are asymptotically good, and can be practically decoded with Gallager's belief propagation algorithm [3, 4, 5]. Our proof in [5] shows that they are asymptotically good codes for a wide class of channels, not just for the memoryless binary symmetric channel.

We expect the generalization of these codes to finite fields $GF(q)$ for $q > 2$ to be useful for the q -ary symmetric channel, and possibly for other channels such as the binary symmetric channel.

Definition 1 *The weight of a vector or matrix is the number of non-zero elements in it. We denote the weight of a vector \mathbf{x} by $w(\mathbf{x})$. The density of a source of random elements is the expected fraction of non-zero bits. A source of elements drawn from $GF(q)$ is sparse if its density is less than $(q - 1)/q$. A vector \mathbf{v} is very sparse if its density vanishes as its length increases, for example, if a constant number t of its elements are non-zero. The overlap between two vectors is the number of non-zero elements in common between them.*

II. CONSTRUCTION

The code is defined in terms of a very sparse, non-systematic, random parity check matrix \mathbf{A} . A transmitted block length N and a source block length K are selected. We define $M = N - K$ to be the number of parity checks. We select a column weight t , which is an integer greater than or equal to 3. We create a rectangular $M \times N$ matrix [M rows and N columns] \mathbf{A} at random with exactly weight t per column and a weight per row as uniform as possible, and with the overlap between any two columns being either zero or one. If N/M is chosen to be an appropriate ratio of integers then the number per row can be constrained to be exactly tN/M . The non-zero elements are either drawn randomly from the non-zero elements of $GF(q)$ or according to a carefully chosen distribution. We then use Gaussian elimination and reordering of columns to derive an equivalent parity check matrix in systematic form $[\mathbf{P} \ \mathbf{I}_M]$, from which the generator matrix of the code can be obtained. There is a possibility that the rows of \mathbf{A} are not independent (though for odd t , this has small probability); in this case, \mathbf{A} is a parity check matrix for a code with the same N and with smaller M , that is, a code with greater rate than assumed in the following.

III. VARIATIONS FOR BINARY SYMMETRIC CHANNELS

The issue of the choice of the non-zero elements in each row of the matrix \mathbf{A} can be explored theoretically by computing bounds on the entropy of the parity check vector given by $\mathbf{z} = \mathbf{Ax}$, where \mathbf{x} is a sample from the assumed channel noise model. The larger the entropy of \mathbf{z} , the closer the code might be able to get to capacity [5]. In the case of the q -ary symmetric channel, the entropy of one bit of \mathbf{z} is independent of the choice of the elements in the corresponding row of \mathbf{A} . But in the case where the noise is that of a binary symmetric channel (assuming $q = 2^p$), some choices of the elements in a row of \mathbf{A} are superior to others. We have found optimal selections for $GF(4)$, $GF(8)$ and $GF(16)$ by exhaustive search.

IV. DECODING

The decoding algorithm is an appropriate generalization of the belief propagation algorithm used by Gallager [1] and MacKay and Neal [3, 4, 5]. The complexity of decoding scales as Ntq^2 .

V. RESULTS

We expect in early 1997 to have empirical results for codes over $GF(4)$, $GF(8)$ and $GF(16)$, applied to the q -ary symmetric channel, the binary symmetric channel, and the binary-input Gaussian channel.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank R.J. McEliece and R.M. Neal for helpful discussions, and G.E. Hinton for generously supporting my visits to the University of Toronto. This work was supported by the Gatsby charitable foundation.

REFERENCES

- [1] R. G. Gallager, "Low density parity check codes", *IRE Trans. Info. Theory*, vol. IT-8, pp. 21–28, Jan 1962.
- [2] R. G. Gallager, *Low Density Parity Check Codes*, Number 21 in Research monograph series. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1963.
- [3] D. J. C. MacKay and R. M. Neal, "Good codes based on very sparse matrices", in *Cryptography and Coding, 5th IMA Conference*, Colin Boyd, Ed., number 1025 in Lecture Notes in Computer Science, pp. 100–111. Springer, Berlin, 1995.
- [4] D. J. C. MacKay and R. M. Neal, "Near Shannon limit performance of low density parity check codes", *Electronics Letters*, vol. 32, no. 18, pp. 1645–1646, August 1996.
- [5] D. J. C. MacKay, "Good error correcting codes based on very sparse matrices", To be submitted to IEEE transactions on Information Theory. Available from <http://wol.ra.phy.cam.ac.uk/>, 1996.