

Opportunistic Splitting for Scheduling via Stochastic Approximation

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Abstract—We consider the problem of scheduling a wireless channel among multiple users. A slot is given to a user with a highest metric (e.g., channel gain) in that slot. The scheduler may not know the channel states of all the users at the beginning of each slot. In this scenario opportunistic splitting is an attractive solution. However this algorithm requires that the metrics of different users form independent, identically distributed (iid) sequences with same distribution and that their distribution and number be known to the scheduler. This limits the usefulness of opportunistic splitting. In this paper we develop a parametric version of this algorithm. The optimal parameters of the algorithm are learnt online through a stochastic approximation scheme. Our algorithm does not require the metrics of different users to have the same distribution. The statistics of these metrics and the number of users can be unknown and also vary with time. We prove the convergence of the algorithm and show its utility by scheduling the channel to maximize its throughput while satisfying some fairness and/or quality of service constraints.

Keywords: Quality of Service, Opportunistic Scheduling, Opportunistic Splitting, Stochastic Approximation, Multiple access channel.

I. INTRODUCTION

In a wireless network often the optimal policy chooses a node with the highest metric. The nodes may be distributed in space and the value of the metric for a node may be available only with the node. For instance, in a wireless Multiple Access Channel (MAC), scheduling a node with the maximum channel gain for transmission maximizes the throughput (provided we perform proper power control) when the nodes have infinite backlogs ([1]). The challenge lies in finding the node quickly using minimum resources.

This problem can be seen as one of decentralized contention resolution (CR) where, in each slot, several nodes want to transmit to a central node and we have to resolve the contention by opportunistically scheduling a node with the maximum value for some metric. A simple scheme is to let all the nodes feed back their metric to the central node following which the central node selects the node with the highest metric. But, when the number of nodes is large, the overhead required for the transmission of the control information from each node can become prohibitively large. An early work that addressed this problem was [2] in which a scheme was proposed which uses the idea of *opportunistic splitting*. The use of splitting for CR is not new ([3]). In [2], opportunistic splitting is used to split the set of contending nodes based on their metrics. We

refer to the splitting algorithm given in [2] for a *homogeneous setting* with iid metrics as ALGO-QB. In this setting, the channel gains of the nodes have the same distribution and for each node, the channel gains are iid from slot to slot. For this algorithm, it is shown in [2] that, independent of the fading distribution and the number of nodes, the average number of mini-slots required to find the best node is upper bounded by 2.51 which is close to an asymptotic lower bound. In a later work ([4]), the same authors have considered a *heterogeneous setting* where different nodes' channel gains have different distributions although they are still independent from slot to slot. But, they consider only one kind of metric that ensures temporal fairness. In the rest of the paper, the terms homogeneous setting and heterogeneous setting are used with the same meaning as described above.

Some other works on opportunistic CR are discussed next. In [5], a scheme called channel-aware Aloha is studied where users randomly transmit packets with probabilities that increase with their channel gain. Similar opportunistic extensions of ALOHA are also considered in [6] and [7]. In [8], a random access based feedback protocol which uses a fixed number of feedback slots for CR is presented. [9] also considers CR, and improves on and analyzes the policies presented in [2]. Further, [9] extends the algorithms for multiple node selection. However, [8] and [9] restrict themselves to the case in which the channel gains of all nodes are assumed to be iid. [10] presents algorithms for reducing feedback required for CR for a heterogeneous (and homogeneous) setting using *static splitting*. All these algorithms require the scheduler to know the distributions of the channel gains and the number of users.

In this paper, we propose decentralized opportunistic splitting algorithms whose parameters are learnt using stochastic approximation algorithms. The algorithms do not need the knowledge of distributions or the number of users, and perform well in heterogeneous settings too. Using these algorithms we will also provide certain Quality of Service (QoS) guarantees. Also, the algorithms can track the parameters if they change slowly with time. The tracking ability makes our algorithms very useful in dynamic systems. We prove the convergence of our stochastic algorithms used in learning the parameters, and illustrate this using simulations.

The paper is organized as follows. Section II explains the problem scenario. In Section III we present our opportunistic

tic splitting algorithms and Stochastic Approximation (SA) algorithms needed to learn the parameters of the splitting algorithms. Section IV proves the convergence of the SA algorithms. Section V provides a few opportunistic scheduling algorithms which use the opportunistic splitting algorithms to show their utility and versatility. Section VI provides simulation results to show the efficiency of our algorithms. Section VII concludes the paper.

II. PROBLEM SETTING

We consider N nodes each of which has data to transmit to a common receiver R via a shared wireless channel. The system is slotted with each slot being of length T . Let $U_k(i)$ denote the metric associated with node i in slot k . We consider the cases when $\{U_k(i), k \geq 0\}$ form an *iid* sequence. We assume that each node knows its metric at the beginning of slot k but not of the other nodes. We also assume that the metrics are non-negative.

At the beginning of each slot k , a node i_k^* is to be selected based on a metric for transmission during the slot. An important metric of interest is $U_k(i) = h_k(i)$ where $h_k(i)$ is the channel gain of the i^{th} node in k^{th} slot. For this metric,

$$i_k^* = \arg \max_i h_k(i) \quad (1)$$

maximizes the throughput when the nodes have infinite backlog ([1]).

Since all the $U_k(i)$ may not be known at a central controller, i_k^* will be found via a CR algorithm. The initial part of a slot is used for CR. Once a node is selected in the CR phase, the rest of the slot is made available to that node for data transmission. We further divide the CR phase into mini-slots. Only small control packets are transmitted during a mini-slot and hence, length of a mini-slot T_{MS} can be much less than that of a slot. The number of minislots in a frame is $N_1 = \lfloor \frac{T}{T_{MS}} \rfloor$. The receiver R can decode a control packet only if exactly one node transmits in a mini-slot.

In the next section, we develop a stochastic approximation based algorithm for selecting the node with the highest metric.

III. CR-ALGORITHM

In this section, we present the algorithm BASIC. It consists of two parts: BASIC-IS and BASIC-SA. We use BASIC-IS during the CR phase. The parameters $\theta_m \triangleq [t_m \ \alpha_m^+ \ \alpha_m^- \ \beta_m^+ \ \beta_m^-]$ of BASIC-IS are learnt using the stochastic approximation algorithm in BASIC-SA.

BASIC-IS operates as follows. At the beginning of each slot, the algorithm sets a threshold τ_1 for the metric and the nodes with metric greater than this threshold transmit a small control packet (containing only the node id) during the first mini-slot. The BS sends the feedback $f_b \in \{0, 1, e\}$ where 0, 1 and e indicate that in the last mini-slot there was zero, one and more than one transmission respectively. The event $f_b = 1$ denotes a success, i.e., the base station has received only one control packet and it will schedule the node that sent the control packet to send the data packet in that slot. Each

node listens to the broadcast from R containing the feedback and decides on the next step of the algorithm.

In the event of a collision (i.e., feedback = e) in the first mini-slot, a new threshold $\tau_2 > \tau_1$ is evaluated for the second mini-slot. The increase in threshold is decided by the parameter α^+ (see line 7 of BASIC-IS). In the following mini-slot, the nodes with their metric greater than new threshold transmit the control packet. Similarly, if the first mini-slot is idle (feedback = 0), we use the parameter α^- to reduce the threshold (see line 15 of BASIC-IS). The algorithm stops in a slot when a node has been identified for transmission or when it reaches the end of the slot.

Note that when there is a collision or an idle mini-slot, we obtain a lower or upper bound respectively on the highest metric among the nodes. In BASIC-IS, the variables t_{lower} and t_{upper} denote these bounds. Once these bounds are obtained, we then use the parameters β^+ and β^- to update the threshold (see lines 9 and 18 of BASIC-IS).

We now present BASIC-IS.

BASIC-IS:

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00: Initialize:  $collisioncheck = 0, idlecheck = 0, k = 1, \tau_1 = t_m, t_{up} = t_{max}, t_{lower} = 0$ 
01:  $f_b = (0, 1, e)$  feedback from last mini-slot;
02:  $k = k + 1$ ;
03: while ( $f_b \neq 1$  OR  $k \leq \lfloor \frac{T}{T_{MS}} \rfloor$ ) {
04:   if( $f_b = e$ ) {
05:      $collisioncheck = 1, t_{lower} = \tau_{k-1}$ ;
06:     if( $idlecheck = 0$ ) {
07:        $\tau_k = \tau_{k-1} + \frac{\alpha_m^+}{c_{scale}} \tau_{k-1}$ ;
08:     } else {
09:        $\tau_k = \tau_{k-1} + \frac{\beta_m^+}{c_{scale}} (t_{upper} - \tau_{k-1})$ ;
10:     }
11:   }
12:   if( $f_b = 0$ ) {
13:      $idlecheck = 1, t_{upper} = \tau_{k-1}$ ;
14:     if( $collisioncheck = 0$ ) {
15:        $\tau_k = \tau_{k-1} - \frac{\alpha_m^-}{c_{scale}} \tau_{k-1}$ ;
16:     } else {
17:        $\tau_k = \tau_{k-1} - \frac{\beta_m^-}{c_{scale}} (\tau_{k-1} - t_{lower})$ ;
18:     }
19:   }
20: }
21:  $f_b = (0, 1, e)$  feedback from last mini-slot;
22:  $k = k + 1$ ;
23: }

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Our algorithm is inspired by ALGO-QB. But, motivated by QoS applications we want an algorithm that does not require N and the distribution F_U^i of metric $U_k(i), i = 1, \dots, N$, and can also track the changing dynamics of the system. This could be done via stochastic approximation if the algorithm has a finite number of (possibly unknown) parameters. We used the insight from ALGO-QB and our intuition to develop the parametric structure of our algorithm. Too few parameters lower the

performance and too many slow down the convergence rate. Also, in our algorithm, our objective (approximately) is to minimize mean CR time (see BASIC-SA) instead of greedily maximizing the probability of success in the next slot as done in [2].

We execute the following projected stochastic approximation algorithm for learning the parameters of the filter θ_n in slot n .

BASIC-SA:

$$\theta_{n+6N_{upd}+1} = P_H \left[\theta_{n+1} - \epsilon \left(\frac{\mathbf{Y}_n^{\theta_n+\delta} - \mathbf{Y}_n^{\theta_n}}{\delta} \right) \right] \quad (2)$$

and $\theta_m = \theta_{6MN_{upd}+1}$ for an M with

$$6MN_{upd} + 1 \leq m \leq 6(M+1)N_{upd}$$

for some $\epsilon > 0$ and $\delta > 0$, where the i th component of the vectors $\mathbf{Y}_n^{\theta_n+\delta}$ and $\mathbf{Y}_n^{\theta_n}$ are given by

$$\mathbf{Y}_n^{\theta_n+\delta}(i) = \sum_{m=6(n-1)N_{upd}+i}^{6(n-1)N_{upd}+(i+1)N_{upd}} N_{CR}(\theta_m + \delta \mathbf{e}_i), \quad (3)$$

and

$$\mathbf{Y}_n^{\theta_n}(i) = \sum_{m=6(n-1)N_{upd}+1}^{6(n-1)N_{upd}+N_{upd}} N_{CR}(\theta_m), \quad (4)$$

respectively, for $i = 1, 2, 3, 4, 5$, $N_{CR}(\theta)$ is the random variable denoting the number of mini-slots required for CR given that θ is the value of the filter in that slot, and \mathbf{e}_i is the standard unit vector in the i -th coordinate direction. Also, P_H is the projection onto the constraint set $H = \{\theta : \mathbf{a}(i) \leq \theta(i) \leq \mathbf{b}(i)\}$ where $\theta(i)$ denotes the i -th element of the vector θ and the vectors \mathbf{a} and \mathbf{b} are decided by using some rough estimates of statistics of channel gain.

Observe that BASIC-SA is a modified version of the classical Kiefer-Wolfowitz algorithm (see [11]). The filter is updated once every $(5+1)N_{upd}$ slots which are required for obtaining the components of vectors $\mathbf{Y}_n^{\theta_n+\delta}$ and $\mathbf{Y}_n^{\theta_n}$. By using a small $\delta > 0$, we obtain the finite difference approximation of the partial derivatives which is then used in the approximation of the gradient. We use the averaged value of observations over N_{upd} slots (see (3) and (4)) when approximating the partial derivatives in the gradient with the corresponding finite differences.

Our algorithm could be easily extended to cases where the metrics take values in a discrete set. Note that in such a case, if there are two nodes that have the highest metric, then our algorithm will not be able to resolve the contention (this happens with probability zero when the metrics are continuous). To disambiguate discrete metrics, we can map them to suitable probabilistically chosen continuous values.

IV. CONVERGENCE OF THE STOCHASTIC APPROXIMATION ALGORITHM

In this section, we provide the conditions for convergence of the stochastic approximation algorithm BASIC-SA discussed in the previous section using the Ordinary Differential Equation (ODE) method ([12], [11]).

Theorem 1: Assume that the metrics for each node form iid sequences. Suppose that F_U^i is continuous for each i . Then, for any nondecreasing sequence of integers s_ϵ , for each subsequence of $\{\theta(\epsilon s_\epsilon + \cdot), \epsilon > 0\}$, there exists a further subsequence and a process $\{\theta(\cdot)\}$ such that $\{\theta(\epsilon s_\epsilon + \cdot)\} \Rightarrow \{\theta(\cdot)\}$ as $\epsilon \rightarrow 0$ through the convergent subsequence, where

$$\theta(t) = \theta(0) + \int_0^t \bar{g}(\theta(s)) ds + Z(t), \quad (5)$$

\Rightarrow denotes weak convergence and $Z(t)$ corresponds to errors obtained when projecting θ_n onto the constraint set H (See [11] for details). The function $\bar{g} = \left(\frac{E[\mathbf{Y}_n^{\theta_n+\delta}] - E[\mathbf{Y}_n^{\theta_n}]}{\delta} \right)$.

Proof: The proof is provided in [14]. It is omitted here due to lack of space.

The theorem says that, by using our algorithm, the filter θ_n tracks the ODE given by (5). Thus, asymptotically θ_n will be close to a zero of the gradient of expected number of slots required for CR with a high probability when ϵ is small (i.e., will be close to a local minimum of the cost function). We have observed via simulations that the function \bar{g} has several zeros. Hence, proper initialization of the filter is important to obtain good performance. Some of them may not provide good performance.

V. OPPORTUNISTIC SCHEDULING

In this section, we discuss some opportunistic scheduling schemes for which we can use our CR algorithms. We will evaluate the performance of our algorithms when used along with these schemes in Section VI.

Let $R_k(i)$ denote the rate at which node i can transmit in time slot k if it is scheduled. We consider three opportunistic schedulers in the rest of the paper.

A. Scheduler 1:

We consider the scheduler in [1] with $U_k(i) = h_k(i)$:
Schedule node

$$i_k^* = \operatorname{argmax}_i (h_k(i))$$

in slot k .

This scheme maximizes the throughput (provided we do proper power control) when the nodes have infinite backlogs. However it can be unfair to users and may provide large delays.

B. Scheduler 2:

We consider a scheduling scheme given in [13] where we schedule node

$$i_k^* = \operatorname{argmax}_i (R_k(i) + v^*(i))$$

where $v^*(i)$ are real parameters such that:

- (a) $\min_i v^*(i) = 0$,
- (b) For all i , $P(i_k^* = i) \geq f_i$,
- (c) For all i , if $P(i_k^* = i) > f_i$, then $v^*(i) = 0$.

This policy maximizes the average system throughput subject to the fairness constraint that each node i transmits for a minimum fraction of time f_i on the channel. The fraction f_i is ensured by providing an offset $v^*(i)$ in the rates if needed. We learn the parameters $v^*(i)$ using the stochastic approximation algorithm

$$v_{k+1}(i)^* = v_k(i)^* + \epsilon_{fair} \left(f_i - I_{\{i_k^*=i\}} \right) I_{\{v_k(i)^* > 0\}}$$

where ϵ_{fair} is a small positive constant.

C. Scheduler 3:

We consider another scheduling scheme given in [13]. Often the different nodes are concerned about the rates they get rather than the fraction of time they transmit. Suppose $\mathbf{r} = (r_1, r_2, \dots, r_N)$ is feasible, i.e., there exists some scheduling scheme using which each node can be provided a minimum average rate guarantee r_i . It is shown in [13] that the following policy maximizes the sum rate subject to guaranteeing these rates to the different nodes. Schedule node

$$i_k^* = \operatorname{argmax}_i (\alpha^*(i) R_k(i))$$

where $\alpha^*(i)$ are real parameters such that:

- (a) $\min_i \alpha^*(i) = 1$,
- (b) For all i , $E \left[R_k(i) I_{\{i_k^*=i\}} \right] \geq r_i$,
- (c) For all i , if $E \left[R_k(i) I_{\{i_k^*=i\}} \right] > r_i$, then $\alpha^*(i) = 1$.

We learn the parameters $\{\alpha_k^*(i)\}$ using stochastic approximation algorithm

$$\alpha_{k+1}^*(i) = \alpha_k^*(i) + \epsilon_{rate} (r_i - R_k(i)) \left(1 - I_{\{\alpha_k^*(i) \leq 1\}} I_{\{r_i \leq R_k(i)\}} \right)$$

where ϵ_{rate} is a small positive constant.

VI. SIMULATIONS

In this section, we evaluate the performance of BASIC.

First, we study the performance of BASIC used with Scheduler 1 for a homogeneous setting where we compare the performance of BASIC against the algorithm ALGO-QB given in [2]. Note that ALGO-QB can be used only in a homogeneous setting. Next, we consider BASIC when used in a heterogeneous setting.

For simulating BASIC, we use the following setting: $T = 100ms$ and $T_{MS} = 4ms$, $\epsilon = 10^{-6}$, $\delta = 0.01$, $N_{upd} = 10$ slots and $c_{scale} = 25$. We start with the filter initialized to [2 2.5 2.5 12.5 12.5]. We use $a=[0.1 \ 0.25 \ 0.25 \ 0.25 \ 0.25]$ and $b=[100 \ 50 \ 24.75 \ 50 \ 24.75]$.

Table I provides the average number of slots required for CR when the metric of each node has Rayleigh distribution with mean 1.253. Of course BASIC does not use knowledge

of the F_U^i and N , but learns its parameters. The learning of parameters does take a large number of slots. From the table we see that performance of BASIC is close to ALGO-QB at least for $N \geq 10$. We have found this to be true for some other parameter settings we tried.

TABLE I
COMPARISON OF BASIC AND ALGO-QB: HOMOGENEOUS SETTING;
RAYLEIGH DISTRIBUTED CHANNEL GAINS,

N	5	10	15	20	35	50	100
ALGO-QB	2.30	2.38	2.41	2.45	2.46	2.44	2.45
BASIC	2.51	2.42	2.44	2.46	2.50	2.49	2.52

Table II shows the average number of slots required for CR using BASIC with Scheduler 1 for a heterogeneous setting. The channel gains of the nodes have Rayleigh, Rician and Nakagami distributions with different parameters. We see that the performance of BASIC is comparable (infact a little better) to that in the homogeneous setting presented above. Note that we always choose the node with the maximum channel gain. Thus, if mean of the channel gain for one node is very small, then it will be allotted only a very small fraction of the slots. Thus Scheduler 1 may be unfair. The issue of fairness is taken care of by using Schedulers 2 and 3.

TABLE II
PERFORMANCE OF BASIC: HETEROGENEOUS SETTING

N	5	10	15	20	35	50
BASIC	2.16	2.37	2.41	2.48	2.60	2.46

Now, we study the performance of BASIC when used with Schedulers 2 and 3 under homogeneous and heterogeneous settings. The results show that our algorithms work well even with these schedulers that perform opportunistic scheduling subject to fairness or QoS constraints.

For the simulations, we use the following settings. The channel gains are independent from slot to slot and the rates are given by $R_k(i) = 1000h_k(i)$. For the homogeneous setting, channel gains of the nodes are Rayleigh distributed with mean 1. For the heterogeneous setting, channel gains of the nodes are Rayleigh distributed with means that are uniformly distributed in $[0.5, 1.5]$. We choose $\epsilon_{fair} = 10^{-3}$ and $\epsilon_{rate} = 10^{-5}$. We use a run length of 100 million slots. We also scale the metrics used by these schedulers by $c_{metric} = 1000$ so that the metric lies in the range $(0, 3)$ with high probability. This helps as we can now use the initialization and constraint set H used for simulations involving Scheduler 1. The remaining settings are same as used in Table I.

First, we consider performance with Scheduler 2. The average number of slots required for CR using BASIC for homogeneous and heterogeneous settings are shown in Table III. The fractions of time demanded by the nodes are obtained by scaling randomly obtained numbers lying in $[0.5/N, 1.5/N]$ so that the sum of the demanded fractions is one. We can see that the performance of BASIC is very similar to that seen for the earlier cases. In [4], an algorithm has been proposed for

a heterogeneous setting. But, they restrict themselves to one type of metric which performs scheduling similar to Scheduler 2. Their algorithm typically requires around 2.40-2.60 mini-slots on an average for CR. Even without the knowledge of the distribution of the channel gains, we see that our algorithm provides similar performance. Further, all the QoS demands are met with allocated fractions being very close to the demanded fractions. In the heterogeneous setting with $N = 10$, an allocated fraction of time is never less than 98% of the corresponding demanded fraction whereas with $N = 50$, it is never less than 90% of the corresponding demanded fraction. Less allocation of time is due to the slow convergence of the parameters of Scheduler 2 and still, we see that BASIC works well even here. The convergence is slower for large N . For homogeneous setting, the differences in allocation are less than 2% even for $N = 50$.

TABLE III
PERFORMANCE OF BASIC USED WITH SCHEDULER 2

N	5	10	15	20	25	50
Homogeneous Setting	2.34	2.44	2.45	2.48	2.48	2.51
Heterogeneous Setting	2.32	2.42	2.50	2.55	2.66	2.57

Next, we consider Scheduler 3. The average number of slots required for CR using BASIC for homogeneous and heterogeneous settings are shown in Table IV. For the simulations, the rate r_i demanded by each node i for homogeneous case, was set as 300, 175, 140, 90, 50 and 25 for the cases $N = 5, 10, 15, 25, 50$ and 100 respectively. We see that the performance of BASIC is comparable to that seen for the earlier cases. Further, the demands of all the users are met with the allocated rates never going below 98% of the demanded rates. Even this error reduces as we run the code longer.

For most of the cases considered above, we observed that the convergence of the EMA (Exponential Moving Average) of $N_{CR}(\theta)$ happens in about 10^6 slots. We have also studied the tracking performance of this algorithm when the metric distributions and/or number of users are changing with time. Due to lack of space this is not reported here. However see [14].

TABLE IV
PERFORMANCE OF BASIC USED WITH SCHEDULER 3

N	5	10	15	25	50	100
Homogeneous Setting	2.59	2.44	2.45	2.50	2.53	2.55
Heterogeneous Setting	2.44	2.48	2.54	2.56	2.57	2.61

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

We consider the problem of wireless channel allocation to a user with the highest metric via opportunistic scheduling. We have generalized the opportunistic splitting algorithm so that it can be used when the metric statistics and the number of users may not be known to the scheduler and the metric of different users have different statistics. The performance of the algorithm is close to the opportunistic splitting algorithms with

iid metrics and known statistics. In addition it can track the changing system parameters. We have proved the convergence of the algorithm and shown its utility by developing algorithms which maximize channel throughput while guaranteeing fairness and/or certain quality of service. This algorithm can be also used in other scenarios such as antenna/relay selection in cooperative communication. Currently we are working on generalizing the algorithm to the case of Markov metrics.

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