Pseudo-Random Waveforms and Comb Calibration Signals Evans Paschal 9/12/05

This note describes a technique for generating a signal which has a comb spectrum. It contains many harmonics of a given base frequency, and the amplitudes of all the harmonics are equal. A signal like this is a useful calibration signal when applied to the input of an amplifier under test. As long as the amplifier passes the signal without distortion, we can measure the gain and frequency response of the amplifier in one step. That is, since the amplitude and frequency of each component of the input comb signal is known, by measuring the amplitudes of these components in the output we can find the gain of the amplifier as a function of frequency, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Using comb signal to measure amplifier frequency response.

Perhaps the simplest way to generate a comb signal is to use a short repetitive pulse. The pulse repetition frequency f_0 is the base frequency of the comb. As long as the width of the pulse is sufficiently narrow, the amplitudes of the harmonic components in the waveform at multiples of f_0 can be made as uniform as desired; that is, the envelope of the comb spectrum can be as flat as needed. This approach has a major limitation, however: all the power of the signal is contained in the short pulse; the rest of the time the waveform is zero. To obtain useful power in each of the comb components a very large pulse must be used, and such a pulse will be clipped in the amplifier. Once it's clipped, it can't be used to measure amplifier frequency response.

The approach we'll follow here is to generate a pseudo-random waveform. This is a signal whose waveform appears to be random over short intervals, but which is actually deterministic and repeats over a cycle time $t₀$. It has frequency components at multiples of $f_0 = 1/t_0$. And the peak to rms ratio of the waveform is low, meaning it is much less likely to be clipped in the amplifier.

A pseudo-random waveform, also known as pseudo-random noise, is the output of a psuedo-random binary sequence generator. This is often implemented as a shift register with feedback as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Shift register with feedback

The shift registers are clocked such that, at time p, $a_i(p) = a_{i-1}(p-1)$. That is, the previous state at a_{i-1} appears as state a_i after the clock pulse. State a_0 at the input to the shift register is some function of states $a_1, ..., a_n$, or, equivalently, of previous a_0 's, as

$$
a_0(k) = f(a_1(k), a_2(k), \dots, a_n(k)) = f(a_0(k-1), a_0(k-2), \dots, a_0(k-n)).
$$
\n(1)

The usual feedback is "linear" feedback of the form

$$
a_0(k) = c_1 a_1(k) \oplus c_2 a_2(k) \oplus \cdots \oplus c_n a_n(k), \qquad (2)
$$

where each c_i is 0 or 1, depending if state a_i is fed back or not, and \oplus indicates modulo-2 summation (that is, the XOR function).

With the proper choice of c_i 's we can generate a maximal length sequence, whose sequence length is $m = 2ⁿ$ -1, as shown in Figure 3. Note that an *n*-stage shift register has a total of 2^n different states, but that the all-zero state makes $a_0 = 0$, which gives the all-zero state again. Only at most 2^n -1 other states can be in a sequence. Our design must prevent the shift register from starting in the all-zero state.

Figure 3. Maximal length shift register sequence

A maximal length shift register sequence has several interesting statistical properties.* For instance, the number of zeros and ones is nearly equal (in fact, there is always exactly 1 more ones than zeros). There are two runs (of constant value) of length p for every run of length $p+1$. And, most important for our use, the autocorrelation function

$$
R(i) \equiv \frac{1}{m} \sum_{k=0}^{m-1} a_0(k) * a_0(i-k)
$$
\n(3)

is two-valued, with a peak at 0 phase (and multiples of the sequence length m) and a very small value elsewhere, as shown in Figure 4. (Note that we have considered the sequence to take on the values -1 and 1 here, rather than 0 and 1.)

Figure 4. Autocorrelation of maximal length sequence

Figure 5. Shift register output viewed as a voltage waveform

Now consider the output of the shift register as a voltage waveform $v(t)$ as a function of time, as shown in Figure 5. The shift register is clocked every t_c seconds. The waveform $v(t)$ can have two values, either +V_p or -V_p, and can change only at clock transitions. The waveform repeats every $m t_c$ seconds. The autocorrelation $R(\tau)$ of this waveform is given by Equation 4, where

$$
R(\tau) = \lim_{T \to \infty} \frac{1}{T} \int_{-T/2}^{T/2} v(t)v(\tau - t)dt
$$

$$
= V_p^2 \left[(1 + \frac{1}{m})\Lambda(\frac{\tau}{t_c}) - \frac{1}{m} \Pi(\frac{\tau}{mt_c}) \right] * \sum_{k=-\infty}^{\infty} \delta(\tau - kmt_c)
$$
(4)

the $*$ operator indicates convolution. $R(\tau)$ is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Autocorrelation of shift register output

Note that this is the same as the autocorrelation of a short repetitive pulse, except for the small negative value - $V_p^{\,2}/m$. The power spectrum of the shift register output $G(f)$ is the Fourier transform of the autocorrelation function, as

$$
G(f) = F\{R(\tau)\}\
$$

= $V_p^2 \left[\left(\frac{m+1}{m^2}\right) \mathrm{sinc}^2 (ft_c) - \frac{1}{m} \mathrm{sinc} (fmt_c) \right] \cdot \sum_{k=-\infty}^{\infty} \delta(f - \frac{k}{mt_c}),$ (5)

where the sinc function is defined by $\text{sinc}(x) \equiv \sin(\pi x)/\pi x$. The power spectrum $G(f)$ is zero everywhere except at multiples of $1/m t_c$, that is, at harmonics of the sequence repetition rate. If we filter the signal around one of these harmonics (including power at negative as well as positive frequency), we find the rms voltage of the spectral component at a given harmonic frequency is

$$
V(0) = V_p/m, \tag{6}
$$

and
$$
V(kf_0) = V_p \frac{\sqrt{2}(m+1)^{1/2}}{m} \operatorname{sinc}(k/m), \qquad k = 1, 2, ...,
$$
 (7)

where $f_0 = 1/mt_c$ is the sequence repetition rate. The term $V(0)$ is a small dc voltage, which we can ignore (use capacitive coupling to the rest of the circuit). The other components are all multiples of the comb frequency f_0 . (Note: while we know the rms amplitudes of the comb components, we don't know their relative phases, which have no simple relationship.)

Design Procedure

1. The bandwidth of the amplifier to calibrate is known. Choose the frequency f_0 and factor k such that the frequency comb from f_0 to kf_0 spans the frequency interval of interest. (If a finer comb spacing is desired, choose the comb spacing f_0 and find integers j and k such that jf_0 to kf_0 spans the interval of interest.) For example, assume we want to measure our amplifier response from 100 Hz to 30 kHz. If we chose f_0 = 100 Hz, then the comb component at 30 kHz will be the 300th component, or $k = 300$.

2. Decide how flat the comb needs to be. The rms voltage of higher-frequency components is proportional to $sin(k/m)$. For example, assume we want the 300th component to be down no more than 0.5 dB (0.944) from the first component. We need sinc $(k/m) > 0.944$. For k = 300 we find $m > = 1613$.

3. The sequence length m must be of the form 2^n -1. Find the integer n that gives an m greater than the minimum found in the previous step. (Making n even bigger will, of course, make the comb even flatter, but at the expense of a greater peak voltage for a given component rms voltage.) For example, for $m > 1613$ we find $n = 11$, giving $m = 2047$, and sinc(300/m) = $0.965 = -0.31$ dB.

4. Calculate the shift register clock frequency $f_c = mf_o$. For example, 2047x100Hz = 204.700 kHz. This may not be a convenient frequency. Depending on how much effort we want to go to, we may need to compromise our original specifications and adjust f_0 to give a better clock frequency.

5. Finally, calculate the rms voltage of each comb component using Equation 7. For example, assume we use the capacitivecoupled output of a shift register built with 5-volt logic. The output swings from 0 to +5 V, so the ac signal after the capacitor will swing from -2.5 V to +2.5 V, or $V_p = 2.5$ V. For m = 2047, we find V(100 Hz) = 78.1 mV (and V(30 kHz) = 75.4 mV). We may need to amplify or attenuate the 2.5 V "square-wave" output of the shift register to get the amplitude we need.

Note the advantage of the pseudo-random comb generator in the example above. If we had generated the comb signal using a short rectangular pulse, we would have used a pulse 4.89 µs wide $(1/mf_0)$, repeated every 10 ms. To get the same 78 mV component amplitude, however, the short pulse would need an amplitude of $m^{1/2}V_p$ or 113 V! Our amplifier would need an additional 33 dB of headroom to pass this pulse without distortion. The problem with a short pulse, of course, is that all the energy of the signal is contained in the pulse, whereas the pseudo-random waveform spreads the energy out and is always running at constant power. In terms of the peak voltage required for a given component amplitude, the pseudo-random waveform is the optimum solution.

Sample Designs

Figures 7 and 8 show two comb filter designs that are currently used at field stations for calibrating ELF and VLF receivers. The circuit in Figure 7 is used in the Noise Survey project receivers (Tony Fraser-Smith's experiment). The comb generator is implemented in 4000-series CMOS logic running from a 15-volt supply. Three 4015 4-stage shift registers are wired in series to give a 12-bit shift register; only the first 11 bits are used ($m = 2047$). Note that the feedback logic here uses XNOR (inverting XOR) logic. This works because, while we're loading the inverse feedback into the shift register, and thus looking at the Q-bar outputs instead of the Q outputs, the XOR of two Q-bar outputs gives the same result as the XOR of two Q outputs. We're really generating the inverse of the sequence. In this design, the all-ones state is the state to be avoided. This is accomplished by using the 4015 reset inputs to be sure the shift register starts off in the all-zeros state. The clock frequency required is synthesized using a divide-by-m counter and a phase-locked-loop referenced to an external standard. Since this circuit is designed to calibrate ELF as well as VLF receivers, with the ELF comb going as low as 10 Hz, dc coupling is used for the comb signal. The Disable Offset input to the low-pass filter compensates for the dc offset while the shift register is held off in its all-zeros state.

Figure 8 shows the comb calibrator in the new HAIL2 preamps currently being deployed by Stanford. In this circuit the pseudo-random sequence is generated by a PIC12F629 microprocessor. The microprocessor generates the maximum length sequence of a 10-stage shift register (m = 1023). With a crystal oscillator input of f_x = 8.192 MHz, the internal microprocessor clock runs at $f_x/4 = 2.048 \text{ MHz}$. The cycle time for the shift register is 8 microprocessor instructions, so the virtual shift register clock is $f_c = f_x/32 = 256$ kHz. With a sequence length of m = 1023, the comb components are spaced every 250.244 Hz, and the spectral envelope is down by 0.22 dB at 32 kHz. The desired comb spacing was f_0 = 250.000 Hz. This would have required a crystal oscillator frequency of 8.184 MHz. This is not available in an off-the-shelf oscillator, so the closest available frequency was used. Rather than using XOR (or XNOR) feedback of the register contents to determine the next input bit to the shift register, the program in the microprocessor tests the shift register output and, if zero, XORs the feedback value into the register (broadside, as it were). We can think of this as running the circuit in Figure 2 in time-reversed order.

Figure 7. Comb generator using 15-volt 4000-series CMOS logic.

^{6. 0.1} uF capacitors X7R (not Z5U) ceramic 5%, any voltage.

Figure 8. Comb generator implemented with a microprocessor.

Appendix 1: Program to List Maximal-Length Sequence Feedback Taps

The following C language program lists all XOR feedback taps that give maximal-length shift register sequences for $n = 3$ to $nmax$ (nominally 16). The (edited) output of this program is listed in Appendix 2.

```
/*PRSeqList.cpp
*
          Pseudo-random shift-register sequence feedback list program
          E. Paschal
          2/19/04*
         This program is used to list feedback taps for shift registers which
          * give maximal-length sequences using XOR feedback. The program lists
          all feedback taps for shift register lengths from 3 to nmax.
*/
#include <stdio.h>
\frac{7}{1} Global variables */<br>int nmax;
int mmax; \frac{1}{x} mmax; \frac{1}{x} maximum shift-register length, 3 to 31 int
int n; n; n /* current shift-register length unsigned long regist; /* shift register, up to 31 bits
unsigned long regist; \frac{1}{3} /* shift register, up to 31 bits unsigned long feedbk; \frac{1}{3} /* feedback taps
unsigned long feedbk; /* feedback taps */
unsigned long rmask; \frac{1}{2} /* register mask, 0s except n 1s on right end */
unsigned long m; \qquad /* (2 * n) - 1 = maximal length (= rmask) */
unsigned long m;<br>
\begin{array}{ccc} \n\text{unsigned long} & \text{m} \\
\text{using the original time} & \text{m} \\
\text{using the original time} & \text{m} \\
\text{using the original time} & \text{m} \\
\text{with the final time} & \text{m}unsigned long count; \frac{1}{1} \frac{1}{1} shift counter unsigned long soluts; \frac{1}{1} number of max.
                                       /* number of maximal-length solutions
FILE *listfile;
int main()
{
    listfile = fopen("Seqlist.txt","a");<br>nmax = 16;
 nmax = 16; /* don't make it too big unless you have
 a fast machine. must be 31 or less */
     for (n = 3; n \leq mmax; n++) { \uparrow \uparrow do next sequence length \uparrow \uparrow int i: \uparrow \uparrow loop counters \uparrow \uparrowi* loop counters
          rms<sub>k</sub> = 0;for (i = 0; i < n; i++) {<br>
rmask = (rmask \le 1) + 1;r shift in n 1s to mask \frac{r}{r}}
          m = \text{rmask};<br>
m = 1;<br>
m = m + 1;<br>
m = m + 1;<br>
m = m + 1;<br>
m = 1;<br>
m = 1;
          mp1 = m + 1;<br>soluts = 0;
                                                           y^* reset solution count for this n */
          printf("Registers n = %d, Sequence length m = %d\n",n,m);
          fprintf(listfile,"Registers n = %d, Sequence length m = %d\n",n,m);
 /* test all possible feedbk's */
                                                            /* first feedback mask is '1000..000' */
          for (feedbk = m/2; feedbk < mp1-1; feedbk++) {<br>regist = 0; /* sta
                                                          \frac{7}{1} is start with register clear */<br>++) {/* shift till back to 0 */
               for (count = 1; count <= mp1; count++) {/* shift till back to 0
                   unsigned long regtemp;
                     int bitct;
                    int j;
                    regtemp = regist & feedbk; \frac{1}{2} /* mask feedback bits */
                    bitct = 0;for (j = 0; j < n; j++) { \prime \star count masked bits set \star /
 if (regtemp & 1) bitct++;
                   regtemp = regtemp > > 1;<br>
regist = regist << 1;
                                                           /* shift register left
                                                            /* shift in a 1 if even feedback bits */
 if ((bitct & 1) == 0) regist++;
regist = regist & rmask; \frac{1}{2} /* mask to n bits */
                   if (regist == 0) break; \frac{1}{2} /* done when we're back to 0 */
           }
               if (count == m) {
                    soluts++;
printf ("Feedback %6x = ", feedbk);
 fprintf (listfile,"Feedback %6x = ",feedbk);
                     regist = feedbk;
                    for (i = 0; i < n; i++) regist = regist << 1;
printf ("%1x", (mp1 & regist) >> n);
                    fprintf (listfile,"%1x",(mp1 & regist) >> n);
} } } } } } }
                    printf ("\n");
                     fprintf (listfile,"\n");
               }
          }
          printf("Number of maximal-length solutions = %d\n\n",soluts);
          fprintf(listfile,"Number of maximal-length solutions = \dagger\n\n", soluts);
 }
     return(0);
}
```
Appendix 2: Partial Listing of Maximal-Length Sequence Feedback Taps

This listing shows feedback taps that will give maximal-length pseudo-random sequences for shift registers from 3 to 16 bits long. For instance, the feedback used in the comb generator in Figure 7 (bits a_2 and a_{11}) is shown below in bold as the first entry in the table for $n = 11$. Note that for many shift register lengths it is possible to generate a maximal-length sequence using only two feedback taps. However, for lengths $n = 8$, 12, 13, 14, and 16, four taps must be used.

