## Empirical Evaluation of Multilevel Logic Minimization Tools For a Lookup Table-based Field-Programmable Gate Array Technology

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#### Abstract

We examine empirically the performance of multi-level logic minimization tools for a lookup table-based Field-Programmable Gate Array (FPGA) technology. The experiments are conducted by using the university tools **misII** for combinational logic minimization and mustang for state assignment, and the industrial tools xnfmap for technology mapping and apr for automatic placement and routing. We measure the quality of the multi-level logic minimization tools by the number of *routed* configurable logic blocks (CLBs) in the FPGA realization. We report three results: a) there is a linear relationship between the number of literals and the number of routed CLBs, and b) in all 34 MCNC-89 benchmark finite state machines, one-hot state assignment resulted in substantially less CLBs than any other state encoding methods available in **mustang**, c) we present a delay model to provide routing delay prediction based on fanout, and apply the model to estimate the delays of the FPGA implementation of logic expressions prior to technology mapping, place and route. These results are useful for prototyping a design in FPGAs, and then transferring the design to a different technology (e.g., CMOS standard cell). It provides valuable information on the difference in performance of a design realized in different technologies.

## 1 Introduction

The advent of FPGA technology provides a mechanism for rapid prototyping. When a prototype is operational, the design may be transferred to a different technology (such as custom or semi-custom VLSI) for mass production. It is valuable to be able to predict differences in performance of a design across different technologies.

One way to achieve this is to use the same set of design tools at higher levels in the design flow, such as multi-level logic minimization tools for technology independent minimization, followed by quick technology mappings to different technologies. We pose the following question. Is there an intermediate form that serves as the basis for estimation of performance of a design across different technologies?

The performance of multi-level logic minimization tools for CMOS standard cell implementation is relatively well known and studied. But little is known about the performance of multi-level logic minimization tools with respect to FPGAs. So to answer this question, we examine empirically the performance of multi-level logic minimization tools for a lookup table-based FPGA realization [1]. The experiments are conducted by using misII2.0 for combinational logic minimization and mustang for state assignment. The vendor's supplied program xnfmap is used for technology mapping, and apr is used for automatic placement and routing <sup>1</sup>. We measure the quality of the multi-level logic minimization tools in relationship with the FPGA technology by the number of *routed* configurable logic blocks (CLBs) and speed of the realization of the prototypes. We present the following results:

- 1. There is a linear relationship between the number of literals and the number of *routed* CLBs.
- 2. In all 34 MCNC-89 benchmark finite state machines, one-hot state assignment resulted in substantially less CLBs than any other state encoding methods available in mustang.
- 3. We present a delay model to provide routing delay prediction based on fanout, and apply the model to estimate the delays of the FPGA implementation of logic expressions prior to technology mapping, place and route.

## 2 A lookup table-based FPGA architecture

Xilinx FPGAs are dense arrays of gates that can be configured – and reconfigured – by the system designer through software, rather than by chip manufacturer in the fabrication line. With realization times measured in hours, systems incorporating up to thousands of gates on a single FPGA can be designed, programmed and evaluated within a few weeks [1].

The basic building block which provides the logic functionality in the XC3000 series FPGA architecture is shown in Fig. 2. This is a Configurable Logic Block (CLB), which has a maximum of 5 logic inputs. Each CLB has a programmable combinational logic section can implement any 5-variable logic function or two functions of at most 4 variables each, as long as they have at most 5 variables altogether. Each CLB also has two outputs called x and y, which drive the programmable interconnect networks (not shown). The outputs of the combinational logic section can go directly to x and y or through flip-flops FF1 and FF2.

### **3** A system for rapid prototyping using FPGAs

As depicted in Fig. 1, our design environment is based on wireC which uses xdp as the front end for schematic entry [2]. We have configured wireC to handle eqn format file generated by misII [3]. We built a parts library for wireC which outputs Xilinx Netlist

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Xnfopt, which was developed by Exemplar Logic, Inc., has been frequently misidentified as the Xilinx mapper in the literature. Xnfopt does combinational logic synthesis, xnfmap is developed by Xilinx, and is a complete mapper.

File format (XNF). The XNF files are then mapped by the vendor's xnfmap technology mapper to generate LCA files. We use the vendor's apr program to place and route the LCA netlist to generate the final design. The design can be simulated by susie [4] at the functional level before placement and routing, and at the timing level afterwards.

## 4 Relationship between the number of literals and number of CLBS

We study the performance of two technology independent minimization tools: misII and mustang for the FPGA technology.

Because one of the goals of research in multi-level logic minimization is the development of technology independent minimization algorithms, literal count in logic expressions has been used as an indicator of the quality of their algorithms [5, 3, 6]. Both intuition [3] and empirical studies [7] support the use of this measure. In particular, the experiments reported in [7] were conducted with respect to standard cell technology. We study the performance of **misII** with respect to FPGA technology to further strengthen the argument.

We use two benchmark suites. The first suite of circuits come from the MCNC-89 finite state machine benchmarks [8]. Our experiments are conducted by using mustang for state assignment, and misII for logic expression minimization using the *algebraic* standard script *once*. Infeasible expressions (with the number of fanins greater than 5) are repetitively splitted. The logic equations are translated to XNF format and technology mapped by xnfmap to produce LCA files. The LCA files are then placed and routed by apr. Fig. 3 shows an empirical relationship between the number of literals and the number of (routed) CLBs that we obtained. It shows the ratio of literals to CLBs is *roughly* 5:1. Some state assignment strategies tend to generate designs that are not routable; this will be elaborated in Section 5.

The second suite of circuits come from the MCNC-89 combinational logic benchmarks. Only those circuits that can be implemented with the XC3000 series FPGAs are included. The circuits are mapped using three different lookup table-based technology mappers: Chortle-crf [9], xnfmap and rmap [10]. Fig. 4 shows an empirical relationship between the number of literals and the number of (routed) CLBs. Again, it shows the ratio of literals to CLBs is *roughly* 5:1, with no essential difference among different technology mappers. The only exception is the C499 ECC benchmark which has a large number of XOR gates.

This empirical result can be applied to guide the partitioning of a large design into multiple FPGAs. It can also be used to estimate whether a design can be accommodated in an FPGA, simply by counting the literals.

#### 4.1 Characterization of technology mapping

In this section, we provide some intuition as to why the ratio of literals to CLBs is roughly 5:1. This requires some understanding of the interaction between misII and the mapper xnfmap. Notice that we are actually measuring the performance of misII in relationship to a single technology mapper xnfmap<sup>2</sup>. Other mappers for FPGAs exist [9, 11, 12, 13, 14],

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Xnfmap is a complete mapper, it does mapping of both combinational and sequential logic. Mappers such as **mispga** and **chortle** are limited to mapping of combinational logic.

but they are limited to combinational circuits. We believe that the *pairing* operation in xnfmap is quite universal, and would exist in any other future mapper. As mentioned earlier, an XC3000 CLB has a maximum of 5 logic inputs. A programmable combinational logic section can implement any 5-variable logic function or two functions of a maximum of 4 variables each. Each CLB also has two outputs, x and y.

With the idea that the combination of gcx, gkx, and decomp operations in misII tends to break complex logic expressions into smaller subexpressions by factorization and sharing of common subexpressions, and a technology mapper would attempt to maximize the utilization of a CLB by *pairing* of small subexpressions. We offer a simple explanation of why the ratio of literals to CLBs is roughly 5:1. Figs. 5.a to 5.d enumerate all the configurations in which literals can share a CLB. The numbers in the figures illustrate the *lower bounds* on the ratios of literals to CLBs for each configuration.

The number of literals can be much larger than the number of inputs, but misII doesn't seem to generate this type of expression with the benchmark circuits. Also, the exact ratio of literals to CLBs depends on the relative occurrences of these configurations. In particular, if all configurations are equally likely and all the literals appear as input variables to the CLBs (i.e., no intermediate variables are generated by the mapper), then we have Table 1.a. In practice, not all configurations are equally likely. We studied 60 designs and determined their literal to CLB ratios. This statistic is summarized in Table 1.b.

## 5 State assignment for FPGAS

We examine the problem of assigning values for the states in a finite state machine (FSM) so as to minimize the number of CLBs and delay. Research in multi-level logic minimization employs literal count in the combinational part of the FSM as the indicator of the quality of a state assignment algorithm [15, 16]. For that matter, it is *not* widely reported that one-hot encoding provides small literal counts. Perhaps it was dismissed because the number of flip-flops employed in the one-hot encoding scheme is the number of states. Hence, research in state assignment targeting multi-level logic minimization has focused on minimum-length (or close to minimum-length) encodings.

It is a common belief that the cost in logic complexity of one-hot encoding is usually somewhat higher than for other methods, but it is generally not far out of line. Moreover, because the transitions in one-hot encoding are all two-step, it leads to circuits slower than could be built employing a single-transition-time assignment [17, p.177]. However, in the FPGA technology, flip-flops are essentially free in XC3000 series, as each CLB has one or two programmable flip-flops. The naive one-hot encoding after all may be the winner over elaborate minimum-length encoding schemes developed [18]<sup>3</sup>. We pose the following question. What is the best strategy, measured in terms of the number of CLBs and speed, among the options provided by the state assignment program mustang [15]?

#### 5.1 State encoding for minimizing CLBs

The finite state machines are from the MCNC-89 benchmarks [8]. The experiment is conducted using mustang for state assignment, and misII for logic expression minimization applying the standard script *once*. The logic expressions are translated to XNF format and technology mapped by xnfmap to produce LCA files. The LCA files are then placed and routed by apr to produce the final design, all using XC3020PC-84 packages. Tables 2 and 3 show the number of CLBs and literals for most of the encoding schemes available in mustang.

We emphasize that the number of CLBs reported are the number of *routed* CLBs used to implement a complete FSM on an XC3020PC-84 package, not just the combinational part of it. Designs with more than 64 CLBs are not routed. Clearly, the number of CLBs using one-hot encoding is substantially less than any other encoding scheme available in mustang for all 31 finite state machines in Tables 2 and 3.

To demonstrate further that the superiority of one-hot is not simply an anomaly of the benchmark set with small number of states, we introduce three larger designs: planet, scf, styr into the experiments. We report the literal and CLB counts in a separate Table 4; the designs are routed using different packages. The same trend that one-hot is superior is again observed for these larger designs. More importantly, FSMs encoded in strategies other than one-hot often cannot be completely routed.

In general, the number of literals can be further reduced by using a much longer optimization script in **misII**. However, the literal counts for one-hot encoding using the short standard script are comparable to other encoding methods using the long optimization script.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Our experiments were conducted in Aug 1990, without prior knowledge of [18].

#### 5.2 State encoding and delay

It is informative to know the speed of the finite state machines under different methods of encoding. Table 3 shows the speed reported by the design editor xact of FSMs encoded with different strategies. Again, it shows that one-hot-encoded FSMs outperform FSMs encoded in other schemes overwhelmingly in speed. It is because one-hot encoding produces next-state logic functions which have fewer inputs than the next-state logic functions from minimum-length encodings. The one-hot encoding scheme suits the FPGA architecture which has limited fanin but ample flip-flops in a CLB. We present the logic equations of the one-hot encoded FSM bbara and the one generated by the minimum-length fanout-oriented option (-tp) in Tables 5.a and b, respectively.

## 6 Delay estimation from logic expressions

We have suggested a simple way of estimating the number of routed CLBs from the literal count of the logic expressions. We ask: can we estimate the delay of a *routed* design simply from the logic expressions, prior to technology mapping, placement and routing? This concept arose from the work of [19] on delay estimation from technology independent logic equations. There are two aspects to this question. One concerns the constituents of delay in a *routed* design. The second concerns the structures of a design before and after technology mapping onto a FPGA.

#### 6.1 Delay components in an FPGA

Delays in FPGA-based design are layout sensitive. The sources of delay in a Xilinx FPGA [1] are:

- 1. Configurable Logic Block delay: this is the delay due to the combinational logic, setup time, and flip-flops in a CLB.
- 2. I/O Block delay: this is the delay due to the I/O buffers and pads.
- 3. Interconnect delay: there are three types: a) Direct lines. The delay due to direct lines is less than a nanosecond. b) General-purpose interconnect and switch matrices. These are the primary constituents of the delay which can range from a few nanoseconds to tens of nanoseconds. c) Long lines. These rare interconnection resources are for routing global signals, but may be used for some "local" routing if the general purpose interconnect is exhausted.
- 4. Buffer delay: this is due to repowering buffers at the output of some switch matrices which restore signal levels.

The structure of a logic circuit is dictated initially by the design. In the course of implementation, this structure may be altered by tools such as the logic minimizer, and the technology mapper. For example, if the number of variables in a logic expression exceeds 5 (*infeasible*), then the logic minimizer/technology mapper would have to decompose the logic expression into feasible sub-expressions. Intermediate variables and nodes are created during the decomposition, which in effect would increase the delay.

Our premise is that the structure of a design is not altered much by the mapper. This is particularly true for a design consisting primarily of small logic expressions, for example, the combinational logic of a one-hot encoded FSM (see Table 4.a). In such designs,

the CLB and I/O Block delays are straightforward to determine, but the interconnect delays are sensitive to the structure of a design; we estimate the interconnection delay from the logic expressions based mainly on the fanouts of the logic variables. We shall present evidence to support this conclusion.

#### 6.2 A delay model

In our delay model, we relate the interconnect delay to the number of fanouts of a signal. This arose from the observation that the XC3000 FPGA architecture has limited routing resources. As the fanout of a signal grows, it uses up more and more routing resources, and hence increases the delay. Fig. 7 shows the "nominal delay" of a signal versus fanout, which is determined in XACT by packing sink CLBs as closely as possible around a source CLB. For example, in Fig. 8, block EE is the source CLB and the rest are sinks. Block EE has a fanout of 24. So the "nominal delay" is not necessarily the best-case delay. The worst-case delay can be quite large and therefore is not as meaningful as the nominal delay. This delay model tends to underestimate the delays of large circuits because routing congestion is not taken into account. Also, the delay model may overestimate the delays of small circuits because of pairing (fanin to the same CLB). There are two knees in the curve in Fig. 7. The initial (roughly linear) portion of the curve would indicate that the signal is transmitted through the general-purpose interconnect and switch boxes. As the number of fanouts exceeds 8, the router starts to consume the long lines for routing. The second knee would indicate that another level of long lines and general-purpose interconnect are used. We apply the delay model to a timing verifier to estimate the "worst-case" propagation delay of one-hot encoded FSMs from their logic expressions. We plot both the measured and the estimated delays in Fig. 9. The mean error is -4.12ns, and the overall relative error (O.R.E.) is 0.18, indicating a fairly accurate estimation.

## 7 Conclusion

We have observed certain empirical facts about the performance of multi-level logic minimization tools in relationship to a lookup table-based FPGA technology. These observations are made based on specific tools that are commonly used in lookup table-based FPGA designs. There is no intention to claim that these observations are universal. First, we suggested that as a rule of thumb, dividing the literal counts of a set of logic expressions by 5 gives an estimate of the number of routed XC3000 CLBs to implement the logic expressions. This result can be applied to guide the partitioning of the logic expressions portion of a large design into multiple FPGAs. We can estimate the number of routed CLBs to implement the logic expressions simply by counting the literals.

We extended the idea to estimate the delays of the implementation of logic expressions prior to technology mapping, place and route. An empirical delay model is suggested which can be used for delay prediction based on logic expressions. Our results suggest that logic expressions are a good intermediate form to bridge the estimation of performance of a design across different technologies.

Second, we suggest that the one-hot state encoding strategy is a good candidate for finite state machines targeted for lookup table-based FPGA technology. One-hot encoded FSMs tend to be more routable and outperform some of their single-transition-timeassignment counterparts by substantial margins, both in speed and the number of CLBs. Finally, we note that as there have been advances in algorithms for state assignment [20], it would be interesting to study the feasibility of MUSE for FPGA technology.

#### 7.1 Acknowledgements

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	assignment option which uses a fanout-oriented algorithm to produce an	
	encoding of states; -t a variation in fanin and fanout oriented heuristics	
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Figure 1: Design flow.

literals:CLB	# of instances	literals:CLB	# of instances
1:1	0	1:1	2
2:1	1	2:1	30
3:1	1	3:1	73
4:1	4	4:1	288
5:1	4	5:1	336
6:1	4	6:1	442
7:1	2	7:1	83
8:1	2	8:1	17
mean 5.4		mean 5.1	
		standard deviation 1.19	
	(a)	(b)	

Table 1: Distributions of literals to CLBs (a) equiprobable (b) measured from 1271 CLBs, 60 designs.



Figure 2: Architecture of an XC3000-series Configurable Logic Block.



Figure 3: Routed CLBs vs literals of FSM benchmarks.



Figure 4: Routed CLBs vs literals of combinational logic benchmarks.

Use all 5 inputs literals:CLB Use of

Use only 4 inputs literals:CLB



Figure 5: Different pairing configurations. The dashed line in the box denotes the partition of the lookup table into 2 smaller tables.

Use only 3 inputs literals:CLB Use only 2 inputs literals:CLB 3:1 2:13:1 2:14:1 4:14:1 3:1 5:16:1 (d) (c)

Figure 6: Distributions of literals to CLBs (a) equiprobable (b) measured from 1271 CLBs, 60 designs.

FSM	# of	musta	ng -a	musta	ng -e	musta	ng -n	musta	ng -p	mustang -r	
	States	#	#	#	#	# #		#	#	#	#
		Lit	CLB	Lit	CLB	Lit	CLB	Lit	CLB	Lit	CLB
bbara	10	173	33	146	30	135	27	125	26	151	32
bbsse	16	187	34	187	34	173	34	201	41	203	41
bbtas	6	46	8	45	7	46	7	52	9	62	10
beecount	7	110	20	101	18	106	20	107	18	114	20
cse	16	304	62	304	62	256	52	246	50	294	59
dk14	7	223	41	217	41	224	45	223	43	240	48
dk15	4	127	26	127	26	131	26	144	27	133	23
dk17	8	108	20	108	20	121	24	134	26	136	26
dk27	7	32	5	26	4	33	5	29	4	31	4
dk512	15	130	$^{28}$	129	27	121	24	118	22	133	27
donfile	24	333	69	314	64	329	65	297	58	323	65
dvram	6	309	65	295	61	278	57	283	59	305	64
ex2	19	247	51	276	59	196	43	231	53	234	51
ex3	10	99	18	98	20	105	20	137	27	145	30
ex4	14	116	22	128	24	108	20	120	23	115	22
ex5	9	124	28	131	26	112	21	112	22	128	26
ex6	8	144	26	144	24	136	26	135	26	136	25
ex7	10	132	27	122	25	90	16	135	27	135	27
keyb	19	246	48	278	56	242	48	430	87	377	80
lion	4	22	4	22	4	22	3	26	4	27	3
lion9	9	114	22	95	19	83	16	94	17	130	24
mark1	15	139	30	139	30	137	29	148	30	138	31
mc	4	37	6	37	6	23	4	34	7	39	7
opus	10	122	24	119	23	118	21	110	21	114	21
ris	5	281	58	283	59	273	59	279	60	292	59
s8	5	80	13	77	12	79	15	81	15	90	16
shiftreg	8	41	5	41	5	30	4	26	4	46	7
sse	16	187	34	187	34	173	24	201	41	203	41
tav	4	93	18	93	18	123	25	111	22	90	18
train11	11	123	23	109	21	110	21	115	23	129	26
train4	4	15	2	15	2	19	2	19	2	22	4
TOTAL	310	4444	870	4393	861	4132	803	4503	894	4715	947

Table 2: Number of literals and CLBs for different state encoding strategies: obtained using misII standard script and Xilinx xnfmap and apr on an XC3020PC84-100. Mustang options are: -a graph embedding performed by using a simulated annealing-based algorithm; -e expand state codes to use up unused state codes; -n a state assignment option which uses a fanin-oriented algorithm to produce an encoding of states; -p a state assignment option which uses a fanout-oriented algorithm to produce an encoding of states; -p a state assignment option which uses a fanout-oriented heuristics which sometimes produces better results; -r using random encoding with the default seed; -ran machine is encoded using random encoding with a random seed; -s states of the machine are assigned sequential codes.

FSM	mustang -ran		mustang -s			mustang -tn			mus	tang	-tp	(one-hot)			
	#	#	delay	#	#	delay	#	#	delay	#	#	delay	#	#	delay
	Lit	CLB	( n s)	Lit	CLB	( n s)	Lit	CLB	(ns)	Lit	CLB	(ns)	Lit	CLB	(ns)
bbara	135	28	98	120	23	90	133	25	86	125	26	108	79	15	65
bbsse	207	42	140	181	34	136	169	32	145	180	33	140	128	26	98
bbtas	55	8	64	48	6	63	55	8	84	52	9	80	29	5	69
beecount	109	20	121	107	21	116	106	20	123	113	19	110	82	14	74
cse	303	64	175	252	50	131	239	51	125	237	46	160	195	37	135
dk14	244	52	160	242	53	177	224	45	174	223	43	140	149	28	134
dk15	121	23	113	144	27	117	121	23	100	144	27	111	108	21	86
dk17	133	26	121	115	23	110	116	24	107	103	20	123	70	12	72
dk27	45	7	70	33	5	54	33	6	60	28	5	53	29	4	42
dk512	139	$^{28}$	102	126	27	117	109	20	87	118	21	100	63	11	55
donfile	319	64	145	318	66	ΝA	319	71	ΝA	297	58	174	159	29	80
dvram	311	62	162	255	52	131	267	57	145	267	59	162	83	26	73
ex2	241	51	146	236	51	158	194	40	138	221	46	111	129	21	$^{82}$
ex3	127	27	97	106	20	87	101	18	86	132	29	104	75	12	54
ex4	127	26	103	117	23	127	114	22	117	115	22	103	72	18	73
ex5	127	25	111	108	$^{23}$	102	116	23	113	114	22	97	73	11	75
ex6	147	27	133	131	25	110	136	26	114	134	26	144	109	23	95
ex7	137	31	113	114	20	96	87	17	91	130	27	125	77	11	69
keyb	411	85	NA	254	49	144	236	49	188	430	87	NA	194	42	120
lion	22	3	50	22	3	49	22	3	50	26	4	48	31	4	52
lion9	112	23	118	96	19	111	85	15	122	83	14	109	65	10	61
mark1	133	29	132	141	30	139	138	32	126	148	30	134	99	27	133
mc	23	4	53	23	4	51	23	4	53	34	7	64	33	6	48
opus	117	22	115	117	21	117	124	21	107	113	21	128	90	20	86
ris	279	59	129	283	58	134	273	55	163	285	59	155	114	22	66
s8	82	16	85	87	13	79	78	15	98	81	15	87	61	11	70
shiftreg	46	7	60	49	9	58	30	4	62	30	4	58	36	5	39
sse	201	40	143	181	34	120	169	32	137	180	33	149	128	26	88
tav	90	18	95	111	22	99	111	22	93	111	22	100	79	15	82
train11	115	23	116	114	23	116	109	22	116	107	22	97	79	12	57
train4	22	4	45	16	$^{2}$	43	19	$^{2}$	48	19	$^{2}$	49	25	4	43
TOTAL	4680	944		4247	836		4056	804		4380	858		2743	528	

Table 3: (Continuation from Table 2).

FSM	# of	mustang -r			mustang -tn			mustang -tp			(	one-h	Package	
	States	#	#	delay	#	#	delay	#	#	delay	#	#	delay	
		Lit	CLB	(ns)	Lit	CLB	(ns)	Lit	$\rm CLB$	(ns)	Li t	CLB	(ns)	
planet1	48	641	144	NA	569	124	NA	614	132	NA	366	100	135.4	3042PC84-125
$\mathbf{scf}$	121	907	216	ΝA	852	205	NA	832	191	NA	529	138	123.4	3064PG132-100
$_{ m styr}$	30	657	149	ΝA	576	128	NA	555	121	ΝA	377	86	137.1	3042PC84-125

Table 4: Large designs: number of literals and CLBs for different state encoding strategies using misII standard script, xnfmap and apr with default settings. Delay of unrouted designs are not available (NA).



Table 5: Combinational logics of FSM bbara (a) one-hot encoded (b) -tp flag encoded.



Figure 7: Nominal delay vs fanouts in an XC3020PC84-100.



Figure 8: Measurement of nominal delay in XACT.



Figure 9: Delays of one-hot encoded FSMs: measured (in XACT 2.12) vs estimated.