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<th>Song, Sanquan, Byungsub Kim, and Vladimir Stojanovic. “A fractionally spaced linear receive equalizer with voltage-to-time conversion.” VLSI Circuits, 2009 Symposium on. 2009. 222-223. ©2009 IEEE.</th>
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<td>Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers</td>
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<td>Version</td>
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A Fractionally Spaced Linear Equalizer with Voltage-to-Time Conversion

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Abstract
Based on voltage-to-time conversion technique, a pseudo-differential two-way-interleaved adaptive linear receive equalizer with two 2x-oversampled feed-forward taps has been designed in a 90 nm CMOS process. It integrates equalization and phase interpolation functions into one unit to simultaneously address inter-symbol-interference (ISI) cancellation and phase synchronization in a link receiver. It operates at 4 Gbps with 8 mW power consumption, and linearity of 4.3 effective bits at 1.2 V supply.

Keywords: fractionally spaced receiver equalizer

Introduction
Intersymbol-interference (ISI) is becoming an increasingly severe issue as target data rates increase in link applications, challenging both the equalization and synchronization sub-systems. Traditionally, adaptation loops in these two sub-systems derive the error information from different performance metrics (voltage errors at data sampling points and error information at edge crossings). This discrepancy results in sub-optimal link performance due to the interaction of the two loops, especially in situations where received signals are significantly asymmetrical and distorted by ISI [1,2] (e.g. loop-unrolled decision-feedback equalizers).

Fractionally spaced equalizers enable controlled ISI reduction at arbitrary sampling phase with a single adaptation loop [3]. In this paper we describe an implementation of a two 2x oversampled feed-forward taps receiver equalizer structure. Apart from oversampling speed challenges, implementation of linear receiver equalizers has been a difficult problem due to process mismatch and speed-power-linearity trade-offs in current-mode implementations in scaled, low-supply voltage CMOS processes [4].

Architecture
To overcome these issues with good energy-efficiency, and achieve 4–5 bit linearity required by the adaptive algorithm the FSE design is based on voltage-to-time and time-to-voltage conversion techniques [5]. Due to the process speed limitation, half-rate time interleaving technique is also applied, Fig. 1. Four sampling phases (Φ₀, Φ₁, Φ₂, Φ₃) with 25% duty cycle are generated locally from Φ and another pair of quadrature clocks. A voltage-to-time (V2T) block converts the sampled signal into a delayed digital signal, transferring the sampled information into time-domain. All four V2T converters are followed by a time-to-voltage (T2V) stage to realize summing, subtraction and multiplication.

Equalizer tap weights are implemented as two programmable reference currents I₁, I₂ biasing T2V blocks. Two slicers with tunable thresholds are added to sense the signs of the input signal and output error of the FSE, respectively, and enable tap weight adaptation with external adaptive engine.

Implementation

A. V2T Converter

The V2T converter is shown in Fig. 2. When clock Φ₀ is low, nodes Vₓᵣ+Vₓᵣ⁻ are pre-charged to VDD. Simultaneously, the sampling capacitors Cₓₐ+Cₓ₋ track the input signals. The following edge of Φ₀ pulls the sampled voltages on nodes Vₓ₊/Vₓ₋ down by the same amount so that they are lower than the threshold voltage at the initial state. Afterwards, two identical currents Iₓᵣ₊/₋ charge Vₓ₊/Vₓ₋ respectively. The nodes Vₓ₊/Vₓ₋ will reach the threshold of Nᵦ₋ at different times and trigger two pairs of edges (Eₓᵣ₊/₋ and Eₓᵣ₊/₋). To shorten the decision time, Pₓ₋/₋ provide positive feedback, improving the design speed by roughly 30%, for target time dynamic range. The timing Δt between Eₓᵣ₊/₋ and Eₓᵣ₊/₋ is proportional to the differential input Vₓᵣ.

B. T2V Converter

The T2V converter operation is shown in Fig. 3, with waveforms for Iₓₛ=0 for simplicity. When Φ₀ is low, output nodes Vₓₒ₊/₋ are pre-charged to VDD. After the rising edge of Φ₀, nodes Vₒ₊/₋ are discharged with current I₁ since E₁₊/₋ are high and E₁₋/₋ are low. After the arrival of E₁₊/₋ edges, the discharge current by M₁ switches from Vₒ₊ to Vₒ₋. Therefore, the discharge current of Vₒ₊ becomes zero and that of Vₒ₋ is doubled. Thus, the difference between Vₒ₊ and Vₒ₋ increases from zero till the arrival of E₁₋/₋ edges. Afterwards, the current by M₋ is rerouted to Vo+ and the discharge currents for both are I₁ again, and Vₒ₊/₋ decrease with the same slope until the falling edge of Φ₋. The voltage output ΔVₒ is proportional to Vₓᵣ₊/₋ and Vₓᵣ₋/₋, implementing the multiplication and summing operations. Changing the sign multiplexer control will realize a subtraction. T2V integrator has significantly improved linearity over the traditional GmC stage since its inputs are always full swing signals.

Measurements
The design is fabricated in a 90 nm CMOS process. The chip layout is shown in Fig. 4, with additional support blocks like scan chain and high-speed data snapshots to enable link tuning and in-situ performance characterization. The FSE receiver area is 65 μm x 130 μm. At 4 Gbps rate, tuning the tap weights guarantees a flat open eye within +/-5% for any delay between data and clock, compared to the eyes visible by symbol-spaced slicers, Fig. 5b. Due to larger than predicted parasitic capacitance at the Vₓ node in the V2T converter, the design exhibits about 2x attenuation at Vₒ with respect to the input signal, Fig. 5a, but achieves target linearity of 4.3 effective bits with monotonic gain in tap weights, Fig. 6.

Conclusion
Leveraging the speed of advanced digital processes, a voltage-to-time conversion techniques provide an effective way to overcome the linearity issues in high-speed link receive filters and enable the implementation of fractionally-spaced filters that simultaneously address the phase synchronization and equalization tasks with good energy-efficiency.
The authors thank Jim Wieser, Jerry Socci, Ali Djabbari, Hsinho Wu and Mounir Bohsali of National Semiconductor and Fred Chen of MIT for the fruitful discussion and support and FCRP Interconnect Focus Center and Trusted Foundry for design fabrication.

References