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A 0.6V 2.9μW Mixed-Signal Front-End for ECG Monitoring

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Abstract

This paper presents a mixed-signal ECG front-end that uses aggressive voltage scaling to maximize power-efficiency and facilitate integration with low-voltage DSPs. 50/60Hz interference is canceled using mixed-signal feedback, enabling ultralow-voltage operation by reducing dynamic range requirements. Analog circuits are optimized for ultra-low-voltage, and a SAR ADC with a dual-DAC architecture eliminates the need for a power-hungry ADC buffer. Oversampling and ∆Σ-modulation leveraging near-VT digital processing are used to achieve ultralow-power operation without sacrificing noise performance and dynamic range. The fully-integrated front-end is implemented in a 0.18μm CMOS process and consumes 2.9μW from 0.6V.

Introduction

Symptoms of cardiovascular disease are often very intermittent, necessitating ultra-low-power wearable ECG monitors with long lifetimes. In order to minimize system power, digital signal processing (DSP) can accomplish feature extraction and data compression which reduces the power burden of data transmission or storage. Recent biomedical DSPs leverage voltage scaling (down to 0.5V) to improve energy-efficiency [1]. Additional size and power benefits can be obtained by integrating the analog front-end (AFE) with the DSP back-end [2]. However, current AFEs rely on high supply voltages [3, 4] to perform signal conditioning and accommodate aggressors like electrode offset (EO) and power-line interference (PLI), limiting their compatibility with low-voltage DSPs. Therefore, this paper presents a mixed-signal front-end (MSFE) that leverages a highly-digital architecture in order to operate from a 0.6V supply which improves power-efficiency through voltage scaling, and facilitates integration with low-voltage DSPs. This work focuses on the design of ultra-low-voltage front-end analog circuits aided by configurable and energy-efficient digital processing at near-VT operation. A highly-integrated solution is presented to demonstrate feasibility of a 0.6V system.

System Description

Supply voltage scaling is an effective way to achieve linear and quadratic power reduction in analog and digital circuits respectively. However, for ECG acquisition, PLI can be a limiting factor for voltage scaling. For example, 5mVp-p of PLI with 40dB of front-end gain could easily saturate a sub-1V system before digitization by the ADC. Therefore, the system architecture in this work is based on [4], but uses ∆Σ-modulation to simultaneously achieve a larger PLI cancellation range and low-noise performance as a key enabler for ultra-low-voltage operation. The burden of signal processing is shifted to the digital domain which is suitable for low-voltage systems. Compared to [4], this work reduces the supply voltage from 1.5V to 0.6V and optimizes analog circuits for ultra-low-voltage operation.

Shown in Fig. 1, a low-noise amplifier (LNA) gains the input by 34.5dB, and ac-coupling achieves greater than ±300mV of EO rejection as required [5]. A sinc anti-aliasing filter (SAAF) provides an integrate-and-dump function at a sampling frequency of fs=10kHz, resulting in a sinc frequency response with notches placed at multiples of fs which are precisely in the center of the aliasing bands. At the end of each integration period, the signal is digitized by a 9b dual-DAC SAR ADC.

Any PLI in the signal is captured by a programmable digital band-pass filter (BPF) and fed back to the input with an 8b charge-redistribution DAC, cancelling PLI right at the input to enable low-voltage operation. Moreover, this mixed-signal topology creates an extremely sharp and tunable notch without large passives required in purely analog systems. Since the frequency content of ECGs is well below 100Hz, ∆Σ-modulation and oversampling at 10kS/s are exploited to achieve greater than 12mVp-p of PLI cancellation without introducing significant quantization noise with an 8b DAC. A decimation filter removes out-of-band noise and reduces the data rate down to 32.55S/s, providing up to 10.8 ENOB at the output. All reference voltages are generated by 2b R-string DACs whose reference comes from a 400mV supply-independent reference, and an on-chip oscillator and clock generator produce all clock phases.

Low-Voltage Mixed-Signal Circuit Design

The LNA is fully-differential to maximize signal range, and uses passive feedback to accurately set gain and ensure good linearity at 0.6V. Although the CMRR is limited to 70dB by using passive feedback, the CMRR requirements are relaxed since the mixed-signal notch in this system filters out PLI. Switched-capacitor common-mode feedback (SC-CMFB) is used to avoid distortion from the CMFB loop with large signal swing at low voltage. Although SC-CMFB introduces spikes at the switching frequency of 10kHz, the SAAF in this system also acts as a spike reduction filter.

In addition to anti-aliasing and spike reduction, the SAAF shown in Fig. 2 also provides a gain of GS = GM/(2fsCINT) which is digitally tunable through GM and CINT. The SAAF uses negative feedback to implement a linear transconductor and avoids cascoding in order to operate at 0.6V. CINT is the sum of a 4b switched-capacitor CD, and the sampling capacitance CS, of the SAR ADC whose block diagram is shown in
The ADC uses dual capacitive DACs, where switches S1 and S2 are complementary such that DAC1 and DAC2 alternate between bit cycling and sampling so that only one of them adds $C_S$ to $C_D$ during any given period. The interleaved dual-DAC architecture effectively merges the ADC sampling capacitance with the SAAF integrating capacitor, eliminating the need for a power-hungry ADC buffer which is usually needed to drive the input capacitance of a conventional SAR ADC. Finally, the ADC full-scale is digitally tunable, providing up to 4.9dB of embedded gain.

Fig. 3 shows the block diagram of the programmable digital BPF based on [4], but optimized for area and integrated for near-$V_T$ operation. The BPF takes the form of a frequency-translated accumulator, and its center frequency and width are tunable through $\omega_0$ and $G_{PLI}$ respectively. In this work, the sinusoids required for frequency translation are generated on-chip using a direct-digital synthesizer (DDS) with 9b outputs, comprising a phase accumulator and a LUT as a phase to waveform generator. The number of bits in the LUT is reduced by over 5x when compared to [4] by storing only a quarter period and using the sine-phase difference technique [6], requiring only 4Kgates. The cosine phase is generated by adding an offset of $\pi/2$ and the LUT is used for both sine and cosine by time-multiplexing.

### Measurement Results

A prototype was fabricated in a 0.18µm CMOS process. The closed-loop frequency response of the SAAF output shown in Fig. 3 demonstrates the digital programmability of the PLI notch frequency and width. The total gain of the system can be set between 34.5dB and 69.4dB by selecting one of the 60 SAAF and 4 ADC gain settings. At the lowest gain setting, the MSFE can accommodate PLI up to 12.6m$V_{p-p}$ and an input of 8m$V_{p-p}$ with 1% THD, meeting the requirement in [5]. The LNA alone achieves a noise-efficiency-factor (NEF) of 5.32 using a 3dB bandwidth of 2.93kHz and 9.26µV rms noise integrated from 0.5Hz to 50kHz. Using the power-efficiency-factor (PEF) introduced in [7] to account for the impact of supply voltage scaling, the LNA achieves a PEF of 17. By including the entire signal chain (LNA/SAAF/ADC/decimator), the MSFE achieves an input-referred noise of 3.44µV rms in a 156Hz bandwidth, well within the 50µV$V_{p-p}$ specification [5]. This corresponds to a signal dynamic range of 58dB despite 0.6V operation, made possible by oversampling and $\Delta\Sigma$-modulation. The ADC INL/DNL, SNDR at Nyquist, and FOM are 0.55/0.48LSB, 50dB, and 37.3fJ/conversion-step respectively.

### Conclusion

Fig. 6 shows the chip summary, die photo, and comparison table. At 0.6V, the single-channel MSFE consumes 1.15µW, and the integrated peripheral circuits consume 1.71µW. In comparison, the same implementation at a supply of 1.5V as in [4] would require greater than 5µW of additional power. The combination of a mixed-signal architecture and circuit optimizations at scaled voltages helps to achieve ultra-low-power operation at 0.6V, demonstrating compatibility with ultra-low-voltage DSPs.

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