

An analysis of bitstate hashing

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Abstract

The bitstate hashing, or supertrace, technique was introduced in 1987 as a method to increase the quality of verification by reachability analyses for applications that defeat analysis by traditional means because of their size. Since then, the technique has been included in many research verification tools, and was even adopted in some tools that are marketed commercially. It is therefore important that we understand well how and why the method works, what its limitations are, and how it compares with alternative schemes that attempt to solve the same problem.

The original motivation for the bitstate hashing technique was based on empirical evidence of its effectiveness. In this paper we provide the analytical argument. We compare the technique with two alternatives that have been proposed in the recent literature as potential improvements.

Keywords

Verification, concurrent systems, protocols, bitstate hashing, supertrace, SPIN

1. INTRODUCTION

The bitstate hashing technique, introduced in [H87] and elaborated in [H88] and [H91], can be shown to perform relatively high coverage verifications within a memory arena that may be orders of magnitude smaller than required for exhaustive verifications. The method has made it possible to apply formal verification techniques to problems that would normally have remained beyond the scope of automated tools, e.g. [C91], [C94], [L94], [H94a], [H94b].

This paper provides an analytical argument that explains the performance of the algorithm. The analysis is then extended to compare the method with two alternative techniques that have been proposed in the recent literature as potential improvements [WL93].

Problem Definition

In the following, let N be the total number of reachable states of the concurrent system, i.e., the number of distinct nodes in the reachability graph that describes its behavior. Let S be the number of *bits* required to store a single state from this set without loss of information (i.e., this could be in compressed form), and, finally, let M be the total number of *bits* in memory that is available for performing the reachability analysis.

Knowns and Unknowns

In typical applications, the maximum value for parameter M is hardware dependent and cannot be modified significantly. The parameters N and S are application dependent and can, to a certain extent, be manipulated by the user. In the remainder of this paper we will assume that they each have their lowest meaningful value, and are for all practical purposes also fixed constants that, together with parameter M , define the verification problem to be solved.

It is an inherent part of the problem that the value of parameter N cannot be predicted without performing the reachability analysis itself. For given M , we can also say that the ratio M/N should be considered unknown. In the worst case it may even be smaller than one. Such problems used to be considered beyond the reach of automated verifiers. The premise of the bitstate hashing methods is, however, that when a verification problem is too large to solve completely, even an approximate answer can be of great value to a designer. Our algorithm, therefore, should not presuppose a cutoff ratio for M/N below which it stops working. The quality of a general bitstate hashing method is determined by the range of values for M/N for which it can be used.

An upper-bound on N is trivially 2^S , but this is of little help since in practice N is always many orders of magnitude smaller. A value for S of 1024 bits, for example, would set the upper-bound at 2^{1024} distinct states.

Note that if a value for N could be predicted accurately, the problem we are considering would be simpler. If $S \leq M/N$ we can perform an exhaustive search and need not apply bitstate hashing.

The value for M is rarely larger than 10^{10} bits (1 Gbyte of RAM). For non-trivial problems, the value for S is typically in the order of 10^3 bits. This means that for these two parameters we can solve the verification problem exhaustively for values of N up to 10^7 states.

When N is larger, or in general when $S > M/N$, this strategy fails. It is usually not a realistic alternative to build the reachability graph on slower secondary storage, where M one to two orders of magnitude can be larger. The following subsection briefly explains the reasons.

On Using Disk Storage

If $N \cdot S$ bits of disk-space are available, we could attempt to construct the reachability graph on disk. Unavoidably, for every new state that is generated, sooner or later we must check in the existing graph whether that state is already present or must be added. There is no statistically significant relation that can be deduced from the order in which states are generated that could be exploited in a disk caching strategy. As far as disk access is concerned, each new state could be in any randomly chosen portion of the existing graph, and will require at least one true disk read-access to verify the presence or absence of the new state at that location. If each disk-access requires b seconds, it will cost in the order of $N \cdot b$ seconds to construct the reachability graph.

Typical values for b are in the order of 10^{-2} sec. This means that exploring 10^7 reachable states now consumes at least 24 hours of run-time. To store 10^9 states would take a very large disk, and months of dedicated computation.

Maximizing Coverage

If also the use of secondary storage is impossible or impractical, we can attempt to use an approximate strategy. If, for the moment, we still assume that we know a value for N , we can build the complete reachability graph in-core by exploiting the fact that up to M/N bits can be used per state, of course, with a minimum of 1 bit. We can then maximize the coverage by

fine-tuning a compression method for the specific N we know about, to convert the S bits of input into M/N bits of output with minimal loss of information, and optimal coverage.

The Goal of Bitstate Hashing

In the problem we consider here no reliable prior knowledge of the ratio M/N is assumed. It should be carefully noted that in the selected domain of application, where $S > M/N$, no algorithm can *guarantee* complete coverage of the reachability graph. Since we can only store less information than the minimum that is required to encode a state (S), loss of information is inevitable. The goal of the bitstate hashing technique is to minimize the loss and maximize the coverage, for as large a range of relative values for M and N as possible.

Occam's Razor

For an analysis of the expected effect of the bitstate hashing techniques we have to make assumptions about the typical structure of a reachability graph that are inherently problem dependent (see *Approximation Error* below). These dependencies limit the amount of precision that will be meaningful in any analysis. Our intent in Section 2 is, therefore, to include no more detail than is necessary to explain the empirical evidence (cf. Section 4).

2. ANALYSIS

For this analysis it is convenient to stick to powers of two. We will therefore use the symbols n , m , and s , with the following meaning.

$$N = 2^n, \quad M = 2^m, \quad S = 2^s$$

For every state of S bits, a hash value of m bits is computed, which is associated with a unique bit position within a large bit array of size 2^m . If we convert N distinct states into their corresponding hash values, what is the probability of a hash collision within that set? The procedure we will consider is the following. The initial value of all 2^m bits is zero. For every new hash value generated we inspect the current value of the bit that corresponds to the hash value, and if it is zero we set it to one. If the bit is already set, we count this as a hash collision. We consider two cases separately: $N < M$ and $N \geq M$.

Single-Bit Hashing

When $N < M$, the first state for which we enter a value into the bit array has zero probability of collision, and the last state has a maximum probability of collision of $(N-1)/M$. The average probability over all N states is therefore

$$P_1 \leq \frac{1}{N \cdot M} \sum_{i=0}^{N-1} i = \frac{N-1}{2M} \leq 2^{n-m-1}. \quad [1]$$

The expected coverage of the search is $(1 - P_1) \cdot 100\%$, so we would like P_1 to be as small as possible.

When $N \geq M$, i.e., the number of states is larger than the number of available bits, the minimum number of hash collisions will be $(N - M)$ and hence the smallest possible value for the probability of collision becomes:

$$P_1 \geq 1 - \frac{M}{N} = 1 - 2^{m-n}. \quad [2]$$

This simple approximation will be more accurate as $N \gg M$ or $n \gg m$, which is the domain targeted by the bitstate hashing technique.

Multi-Bit Hashing

The performance of the single bitstate hashing technique described above can be improved by using multiple hash functions [H91]. The verification tool SPIN, for instance, by default uses two hash functions, and stores two bits in the bit array for every state. A hash collision now requires a collision on both bits.

Note carefully that this does not mean that each state is hashed down from S to 2 bits of information. Each state is hashed down to two bit *positions* in the bit-array M , thus encoding $2 \cdot \log(M)$ bits of information. Because of the bit-array, only 2 bits of memory are required to store this information.

To estimate the expected probability of collision for h simultaneous hash functions, we again distinguish two cases: $h \cdot N < M$ and $h \cdot N \geq M$.

When $h \cdot N < M$, the probability of collision with h independent hash functions is maximally:

$$P_h \leq \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=0}^{N-1} \left(\frac{h \cdot i}{M} \right)^h \leq \frac{(2h)^h}{(h+1)} (P_1)^h \quad [3]$$

which for $h = 2$ reduces to:

$$P_2 \leq \frac{16}{3} 2^{2(n-m-1)} \quad [4]$$

The number of states N that can be accommodated in memory is minimally M/h , assuming no overlap in any of the h -tuples that are generated for the N states, and it is maximally $M - h + 1$, if all tuples overlap in a maximum of $h - 1$ places (i.e., the first state occupies h unique bit positions, and each subsequent state then claims just one extra bit). When $h \cdot N \geq M$, the average probability of collisions can therefore be no worse than:

$$P_h \leq 1 - \frac{M}{h \cdot N} = 1 - \frac{1}{h} 2^{m-n}. \quad [5]$$

and it can be no better than given by equation [2]. With increasing N (or shrinking M) the overlap between h -tuples must increase, and with that the value for P_h can be expected to move away from [3] and [5] towards the bounds predicted by [1] and [2].

The last part of the analysis we need is an estimate of the probability of lost states with a traditional exhaustive search. This probability is trivially zero when $N \leq M/S$, and for larger values of N it equals:

$$P_{\text{irad}} = 1 - \frac{M}{N \cdot S}. \quad [6]$$

Approximation Error

Many factors can affect the accuracy of analytical estimates of the effects of the bitstate hashing techniques. If, for instance, a state s is reached during the search that produces a hash value colliding with the value for a previous, and distinct, state t , then we count this as a hash collision, even though neither state s nor state t were lost as a result of the collision. The loss may occur only on the *successors* of s , which will now not be explored starting from s itself.

If the state space is well connected [H87] there is likely to be more than one path through the reachability tree that leads to any given state. So a successor of state s may remain reachable from its other ancestors in the reachability tree. It is therefore unpredictable what the net effect of a hash collision will be. Assuming an average of one lost state for every hash collision is in itself an approximation of which the accuracy can only be validated with empirical tests. Introducing greater precision in the formulas, though tempting, is largely self-defeating

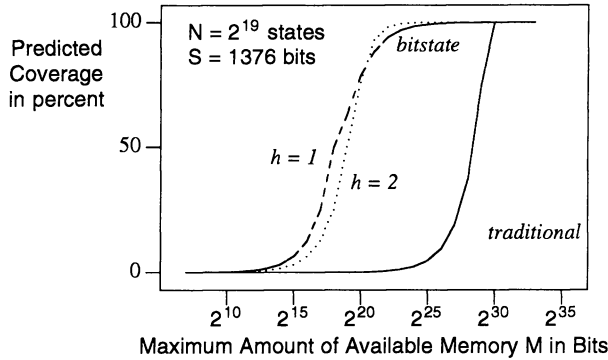


Figure 1 Bitstate Hashing Compared with Traditional Storage.

since the effect of the underlying assumptions about the typical applications of these techniques will soon dominate.

The accuracy of our upper- and lower-bound estimates for the probabilities of hash collision with single or multiple hash functions can only be verified with accurate empirical tests. We will present these tests in Section 4 and confirm that the first order approximations we have made above are reasonable.

Predicted Coverage

The coverages realized for $N = 2^{19}$ and $S = 1376$ bits, and M shrinking from 2^{33} (sufficient to store all states exhaustively) to 2^7 (insufficient to store even one state) as predicted by equations [1] — [6], are plotted in Figure 1. Except for the estimate for $h = 1$ with $N \geq M$, the curves are based on upper-bound estimates for the probability of collision (equations [1], [3], and [4]) and thus give conservative lower-bound estimates for the coverage. The lower part of the curve for $h = 1$ (from equation [2]) gives an upper-bound on the coverage, that is predicted to increase in precision with shrinking M .

Note again that for all coverage predictions only the *relative* values of M and N are important. Equivalent coverage plots can be produced if instead of the memory-size M the number of states N is varied. We have chosen to vary M , and use fixed values for N and S that match the values for which we will collect precise empirical evidence in Section 4.

For all three methods, the coverage is 100% when sufficient memory is available, and eventually shrinks to 0%. The three methods differ in how the coverage drops with shrinking M . The double bit hashing scheme ($h = 2$) is superior when $2N < M$. Above that limit, the single-bit strategy is predicted to perform slightly better.

Increasing the number of simultaneous hash functions h has two effects.

1. It increases the coverage for higher values of M , and decreases it for lower values.
2. It reduces the range of values of M for which optimal coverage is reached.

The effect is illustrated in Figure 2, which plots the lower-bound estimates for the coverage realized derived from equations [3] and [5].

Based on the observations made earlier at equation [5], an improved estimate for $h = 20$ may be obtained by defining an interpolation function of the two curves shown in Figure 2:

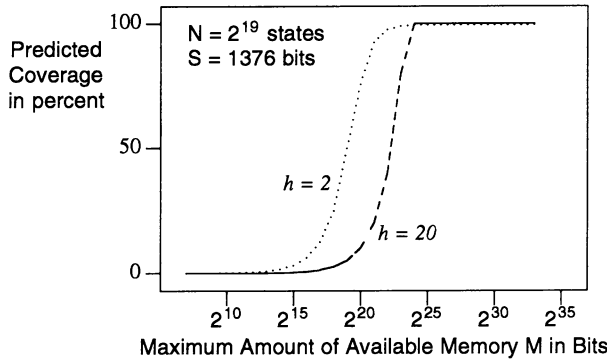


Figure 2 Coverage for Growing Numbers of Hash-Functions.

starting at the upper knee in the right curve, and ending at the lower knee in the left curve. (More precisely, the end point for the interpolation lies on the curve for $h = 1$, not $h = 2$, but as Figure 1 illustrates, these two curves merge in the area of interest. The accuracy of this approximation is confirmed by the measurements that will be shown in Figure 6.)

Choosing h

In the absence of reliable prior knowledge of the value of the ratio M/N there cannot be a fixed optimal choice for the value of h . Lower values of h produce a higher predicted coverage over a longer range of possible ratios than higher values. To first order of approximation, in a well tuned verifier, the runtime requirements of the verification depend linearly on the product of h and S [H88]. Increasing the value of h can cause a linear increase in runtimes, but produces only an improvement in coverage within an exponentially shrinking range.

First note that, using ordinary hash functions, the performance of a reachability analyzer must *minimally* depend linearly on $h \cdot S$, since every state of S bits requires the calculation of h statistically independent hash values. It turns out that all other runtime expenses can be tuned to be smaller than this unavoidable expense. SPIN comes reasonably close to the lower limit, and uses optimized hash functions that avoid (expensive) multiplication and division operations. In principle it would be possible to come still closer, by using the strategies outlined in [H88].

The value $h = 2$ was adopted in SPIN as a compromise between runtime expense and coverage.

3. ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES

A search strategy based on the value $h = 20$ was discussed in [WL93], and named the *multi-hash method*. As noted above, the runtime requirements of this type of search can be ten times than that of a bitstate search with $h = 2$. The expected coverage of a multihash search can exceed that of the double bit hash within a band of applications that is limited on the right-hand side at the point where exhaustive searching becomes possible, and on the left-hand side at the point where there is insufficient memory to store 20 bits per state. This limits the domain of application to $20 \leq M/N \leq S$. When $M/N > 20$ a single or double bit hashing method will exceed the coverage realized by a multihash method.

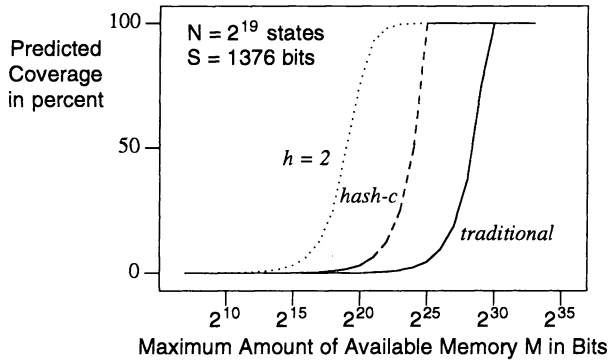


Figure 3 Hash-Compact Compared with Traditional Storage and Bitstate Hashing.

With N unknown, we cannot predict which algorithm will perform best in practice. A compromise between the multihash method and the single or double bit hash method appears to be possible though, combining the advantages of both. In Section 6 we consider a method that uses the sequential instead of the simultaneous use of h independent hash functions. This *sequential multihash* method incurs the same runtime costs as the simultaneous multihash method, but can increase the benefit for a wider range of possible applications.

The Hashcompact Method

An alternative strategy recommended in [WL93] is called *hashcompact*. In the hashcompact method the state descriptor is compressed from S bits to 64 bits, using a single hash function. The resulting 64-bit values are then stored in a normal lookup table with collision resolution.

The largest number of states that can be stored with the hashcompact method is unavoidably $M/64$. For values of $M < 64N$ the effective coverage is maximally:

$$\frac{M}{64N} \cdot 100\% = 2^{m-n-6} \cdot 100\% \quad [7]$$

If we assume that the hash values for the storage of the 64 bit keys are not derived from the 64 bits themselves (as would be the normal procedure), but from the original S bits of the state descriptor, with an *independent* hash function [SD95], the effective number of bits of information stored with this method is $64 + \log(H)$, where H is the number of slots in the conventional hash table.

Alternatively, the states can be compressed from S down to $64 + \log(H)$ bits with a single hash function. The first $\log(H)$ bits are then used to index the hash table, and the remaining 64 bits are stored.

The coverage achieved by the hashcompact method, assuming *perfect* coverage for all values of $M \geq 64N$, is compared with both traditional storage and with bitstate hashing for $h=2$ in Figure 3.

For a range of values of M , between the knees in the two right-most curves of Figure 3, the hashcompact method can realize an improvement in coverage. For values $M < 64N$, however, a double bit hashing method is predicted to produce better results.

We can also use a different argument to compare the expected performance of the

hashcompact method and double bit hashing. As the ratio of M/N approaches unity, clearly, all storage method must suffer a loss of coverage. The double bit hashing method works optimally up to a ratio for M/N of roughly 100, and then smoothly degrades (cf. Section 5, see also [H91]). This means that in a bit array of M bits, we can reliably store up to $M/100$ states, and gradually lose coverage for $N > M/100$. The hashcompact method can reliably store up to $M/64$ states, and loses coverage quickly for $N > M/64$.

This means that the hashcompact method should be expected to improve over the double bit hashing method in the range

$$\frac{M}{100} \leq N \leq \frac{M}{64}$$

or, equivalently:

$$64.N \leq M \leq 100.N$$

which for $N = 2^{19}$ means:

$$2^{25} \leq M < 2^{26}$$

For other values of M the advantage of a hashcompact method disappears, and, for smaller ratios of M/N , can turn into a disadvantage, as also illustrated in Figure 3.

4. MEASUREMENTS

The effect of the hashcompact method was measured in [WL93] with two experiments, which are reproduced below in Table I.

Table I (Reproduced from Fig. 7, 'Experimental Results,' in [WL93])

Protocols	Algorithm	Stored States	Memory use	States missed?
DTP	exhaustive	427,567	73 Mbytes	No
	bitstate	427,446	33.8 Mbytes	Yes
	hashcompact	427,567	3.6 Mbytes	No
PFPT	exhaustive	409,257	34 Mbytes	No
	bitstate	405,969	33.9 Mbytes	Yes
	hashcompact	409,257	3.6 Mbytes	No

For the first of these experiments, the DTP protocol from [HGP92] was first modified as follows. In the original version of the protocol there are 251,409 reachable states [HGP92]. By doubling the number of slots in the message channels, the number of reachable states is increased to 427,567. For the second experiment, the number of reachable states is also close to 450,000 states.

The hashcompact test in each case consumed $M = 3.6$ Mbyte (= 28.8 Mbit), or approximately 450,000 times 64 bits. For optimal performance, the hashcompact method also requires that M is slightly above the value $64.N$, which is matched in these experiments. All approximation techniques further assume that $M < S.N$ (see Section 1), and therefore the domain of application for the hashcompact method is restricted to

$$64.N \leq M < S.N \quad [8]$$

when compared to an exhaustive storage technique. In general, the ratio M/N is not known, and the left-hand side of [8] cannot be guaranteed to hold.

Although the data from Table I looks conclusive, it presents only part of the range of possible applications of the algorithms. The measurements in Table II compare the coverage realized

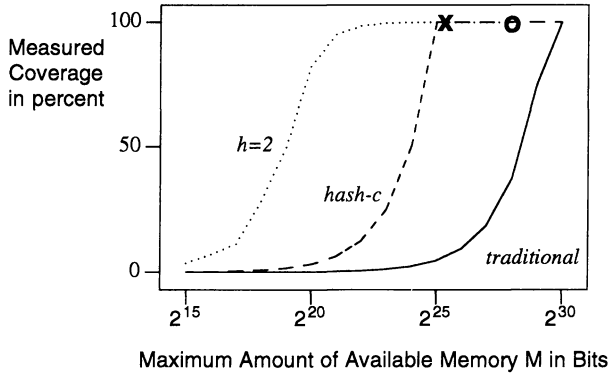


Figure 4 Measured Coverage of Hash-Compact (hc) and Double Bitstate Hashing (h=2), DTP Protocol. With Data-Points **■** and **●** from Table I.

with bitstate hashing and with hashcompact for equal amounts of memory M , within a more complete domain of application. For these measurements, the amount of memory M was reduced in five steps from $M=2^{28}$ bits (2^{25} bytes) to $M=2^{21}$ bits (2^{18} bytes). To facilitate the comparison with the data in Table I, the memory size is specified in Mbytes. The data in Table II is for the same version of the DTP protocol as tested in Table I. The measurements for the PFTP protocol yield equivalent results.

Table II — More Complete Comparison of Bitstate Hashing and Hashcompact (DTP)

Algorithm	Stored States	Memory use (Mbytes)	Coverage (%)
exhaustive	427,567	71.83	100
bitstate	427,446	26.84	99.9
hashcompact	427,567	26.84	100
bitstate	427,459	4.19	99.9
hashcompact	427,567	4.19	100
bitstate	427,097	2.09	99.9
hashcompact	262,144	2.09	61.3
bitstate	425,576	1.05	99.5
hashcompact	131,072	1.05	30.6
bitstate	420,961	0.524	98.5
hashcompact	65,536	0.524	15.3
bitstate	366,438	0.262	85.7
hashcompact	32,768	0.262	7.7

The data from Table II is included in Figure 4, which also indicates the location of the two data points (**■** and **●**) selected in [WL93] for Table I. For the DTP protocol, for instance, the performance of the hashcompact method under optimal conditions (at the knee in the middle curve) was compared with the performance of the bitstate method under suboptimal conditions (well to the right of the knee in the leftmost curve). Moving the data point for the bitstate algorithm (the circle) across the horizontal part of the curve can produce both better and

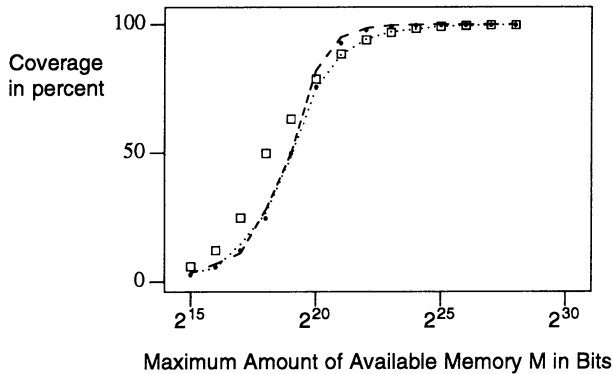


Figure 5 Measured and Estimated Coverage, DTP Protocol.
 (A) $h=2$, Measured: Dashed Line, Calculated: Bullets •.
 (B) $h=1$, Measured: Dotted Line, Calculated: Squares □.

worse results than the hashcompact method. An assessment of the relative performance of the two methods, therefore can only be based on a side by side comparison of the two methods under equal memory constraints, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Hashcompact, then, can be seen to improve over the bitstate hash method when $M \geq 64N$, i.e., in the first part of the curve to the right of the point marked with "x" in Figure 4. To the left of the "x" the bitstate hash method works better. Since it is not possible to predict if the value of N will be within the domain targeted by the hashcompact method, we cannot know *a priori* whether the hashcompact method will improve or degrade performance.

With the data from a larger set of measurements, we can also verify the accuracy of the analysis from Section 2. First, in Figure 5 we show data for measurements with $h=1$ and $h=2$, compared with the estimates from, respectively equations [1]-[2], and [4]-[5].

The estimates for the double bit hashing method ($h=2$) are quite accurate. Those for the single bit method ($h=1$) can be seen to overestimate the coverage realized for especially the lower part of the curves. The measurement indicates, however, that double bit hashing improves the coverage for a longer range of applications than predicted.

Figure 6 compares estimated and measured coverages for the values $h=2$, and $h=20$, based on equations [3]-[5]. It confirms that a relatively accurate prediction for the coverage of a multihash method with $h=20$ may be obtained by defining an interpolation function between the calculated values for $h=2$ and $h=20$.

5. THE HASH-FACTOR

When a bitstate search has been completed, it is of value to have a reliable indication of the coverage that was realized. The only true measure would, of course, be to compare the number of states that is reached with the bitstate methods to those that are reached with a traditional exhaustive search, but in cases of interest the latter will generally be infeasible. Does there exist a function that can give a reliable prediction of coverage, based on only the results of a bitstate search?

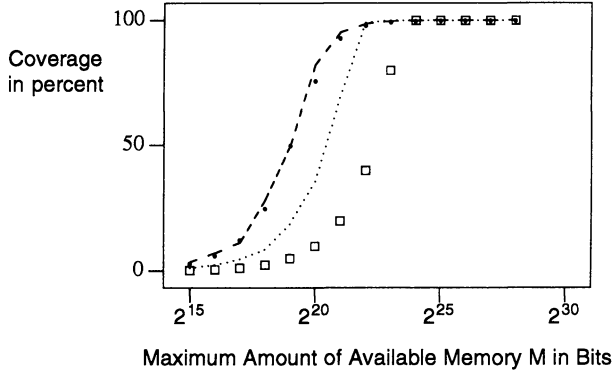


Figure 6 Measured and Estimated Coverage, DTP Protocol.
 (A) $h=2$, Measured: Dashed Line, Calculated: Bullets •.
 (B) $h=20$, Measured: Dotted Line, Calculated: Squares □.

SPIN uses a *hash-factor* to serve as a predictor function [H91]. Wolper and Leroy [WL93] calculated the probability of having precisely *zero* collisions when using a bitstate search. This probability can of course not reach unity in cases of interest, since the bitstate searches are applied only when there is insufficient memory available to complete a lossless search. Although the functions were not intended to serve this purpose, it is worthwhile to investigate if they could serve as predictor functions for coverage realized.

The probability of zero collisions for a single-bit ($h=1$) and a double bit ($h=2$) bit hash are approximated in [WL93] as:

$$P_1 = e^{-\frac{N^2}{M}} \quad \text{and} \quad P_2 = e^{-\frac{4N^3}{M^2}} \tag{9}$$

The hash-factor from [H91], used in SPIN, is defined as:

$$Hf = \frac{M}{N'} \tag{10}$$

where N' is the number of states that was effectively reached, i.e., $N' = (1 - P_h) \cdot N$.

Figure 7 compares P_2 from [9] with the hash-factor function [10], by plotting both against the coverage measured for the double bit hashing scheme, for the same application as before.

The dotted lines in Figure 7 track the two predictor functions. SPIN recommends to trust only results of bitstate searches for values of the hash-factor greater than 100. A hash-factor close to 100, but smaller, tends to underestimate the actual coverage realized. A coverage of 99.9% in Figure 7, for instance, corresponds to a hash-factor of 128. A coverage of 93% corresponds to a hash-factor of approximately 4. The hash-factor, however, is better correlated with coverage than the function based on [9].

6. SEQUENTIAL MULTIHASH

A strategy sketched in previous descriptions of the bitstate hashing technique ([H87], [H88], [H91]), though not implemented until now, is to perform reachability analysis with single- or double bit hashing repeatedly, each time with a different, and independent, hash function. If the probability of collision is p after the first run, under ideal circumstances (more about this

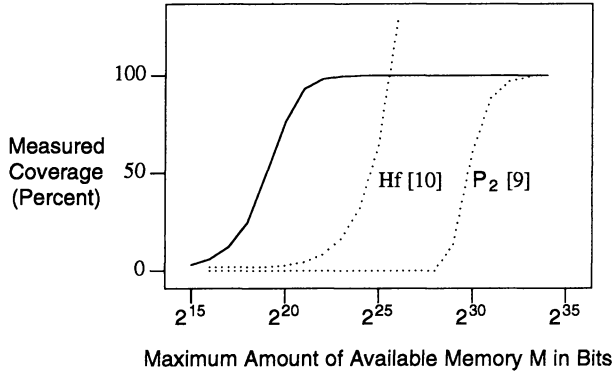


Figure 7 Comparison of Two Predictor Functions for Coverage Dotted Lines: Predictors. Solid Line: Measurement (h=2).

below) it reduces to p^2 after a second run, and to p^h after h runs with independent hash functions. Since $p < 1$., provided that $M > 0$ and $S < \infty$, ideally we have $p^h \rightarrow 0$ as $h \rightarrow \infty$.

For every hash-collision that occurs between distinct states in each of an initial series of runs with this algorithm, there must exist an independent hash-function that separates these states. Given a sufficiently large value of h , such a collision will be resolved.

This means that under ideal circumstances, for any value of N , and any desired coverage, there exists a value of h for which that coverage will be realized with a sequence of bitstate runs. As with the simultaneous multihash technique, which uses h hash functions in a single run of the algorithm, the expense of the sequential multihash technique is linear in h . Under ideal circumstances, then, the multiple hashings cannot conspire to limit the coverage. Each new application extends the coverage, and with that the range of the method, although even then only by an exponentially shrinking amount.

The 'ideal circumstances' alluded to above occur when states can be assumed to be generated more or less randomly. If the reachability graph is well connected, there will be many different paths that lead to the same state in the graph, and the truncation of a small number of paths due to hash-collisions cannot prevent states from the suffix of those paths from being reached. In typical applications the reachability graph represents the joined behavior of N asynchronously executing concurrent processes. The inherent nondeterminism of these applications makes that the assumption of well connectedness is not unreasonable [H87]. The ideal circumstances also require, however, that the total number of hash collisions will be small in comparison to the number of independent paths through the reachability graph.

If either of these two assumptions is not valid, the sequential multihash method clearly cannot extend the coverage arbitrarily far. In the worst case, for instance, all states appear in the reachability graph on a single path. The probability of reaching the $n - ih$ state along this path then equals the probability that none of the $n - 1$ earlier states were affected by hash-collisions. In general, then, it is not useful to explore sequential multihash techniques beyond a modest number of runs.

The hash functions used in SPIN are based an efficient implementation of a CRC-calculation, with a single predefined CRC-polynomial [cf. H91]. Two independent hash functions are created by applying the CRC calculations over the state vector in either increasing or decreasing

byte-order. The number of independent hash functions may be extended by supplying more CRC-polynomials. In the most recent release of SPIN (version 2), 32 additional hash functions have been provided for this purpose.*

Table III — Ideal Performance of Sequential Bitstate Hashing

p_1	h	$p_h (\times 10^{-6})$
0.0	1	0.00
0.1	6	1.00
0.2	9	0.51
0.3	11	1.77
0.4	15	1.07
0.5	19	1.91
0.6	26	1.71
0.7	37	1.86
0.8	59	1.92
0.9	124	2.12

Table III summarizes how many repetitions h of a bitstate search are *minimally* necessary to reduce the expected number of missed states due to hash collisions to less than 1 (that is to increase the expected coverage to 100%), for a given probability of collision for a single run of p_1 ranging from 0.0 to 0.9, and assuming a state space size equal to 427,567 states, as in Table II. The requirement for h translates into:

$$p_h \leq \frac{1}{427567} \approx 2.34 \cdot 10^{-6}. \quad [10]$$

A good choice for h for sequential bitstate hashing, is again a tradeoff between expected precision and runtime costs. If necessary, the number of hash functions provided in SPIN could be increased to any number desired. The required CRC polynomials can be generated mechanically.

7. CONCLUSION

The performance of the bitstate hashing method has been documented and reproduced many times since the technique was first introduced in 1987. In this paper we calculated the expected coverage of the bitstate hashing method and compared it with two alternative strategies. The alternatives can be shown to improve over the bitstate hashing method only in a limited domain of applications. The original bitstate hashing scheme, however, tends to make fewer assumptions about its domain of application, and can outperform its competitors for large problem sizes and/or small memory bounds.

Once a first bitstate analysis of a given problem has been performed, it is often possible to derive an approximation for the actual number of reachable states N . For values in the range $M/2 < N < M/S$ it can be profitable to use a compression scheme that reduces each state from S down to exactly M/N bits. Repeating the analysis with that setting can then be used to maximize the coverage of the run. In general, it should not be expected that compression to a fixed number of bits (such as 20 or 64 bits as proposed in [WL93], 32 or 40 bits as proposed in [SD95], or indeed 1 or 2 bits as proposed in [H87]) can achieve the same effect in a single run of the algorithm.

We have also shown that a sequentially repeated bitstate hash technique may in principle

* SPIN is available via anonymous ftp from the machine netlib.att.com, in directory /netlib/spin.

outperform all other hashing methods. No method, of course, can remove the fundamental computational complexity of the reachability analysis problem itself. Sequential bitstate hashing, like other memory management techniques such as state space caching (e.g., [GoHo92]) trades memory use for runtime, and in extreme cases incurs an exponentially increasing runtime cost to approximate the results of an exhaustive search in shrinking memory.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Doug McIlroy, Rob Pike, Jim Reeds, and Mihalis Yannakakis provided expert help with the analysis. Rob Gerth, Jean Charles Gregoire, and Ulrich Stern gave feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. The kind help of all above is gratefully acknowledged.

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