

# A Blind Interference Canceling Technique for Two-Stage Harmonic Rejection in Down-mixers

Niels A. Moseley, Eric A.M. Klumperink, Bram Nauta

IC Design Group, CTIT Research Institute, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Mathematics and Computer Science, University of Twente, Drienerlolaan 5, 7522 NB Enschede, The Netherlands  
n.a.moseley@ewi.utwente.nl

**Abstract**—This paper presents practical experiments on a harmonic rejection down-mixer, which offers up to 75 dB of harmonic rejection, without an RF filter. The down-mixer uses a two-stage approach; the first stage is an analog multi-path/multi-phase harmonic rejection mixer followed by a second stage providing additional harmonic rejection based on blind adaptive interference canceling in the discrete-time domain. The aim is to show its functional operation. The canceler cannot cope with DC offsets. The DC offsets are removed by highpass filters. The signal paths used to obtain an estimate of the interference must be designed to provide as much attenuation of the desired signal as possible. Front-end nonlinearities and DC offsets are discussed.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Switching mixers have good high-level signal behavior but suffer from harmonic down-mixing. RF signals present at multiples of the local oscillator (LO) frequency, termed *harmonic images*, will be down-mixed to baseband thus causing interference to the desired signal. This lack of harmonic rejection (HR) needs to be addressed in the design of receivers. In traditional single-band direct-conversion receiver frontends, a fixed high-order RF filter is sufficient to attain good HR. Multi-band receivers require a tracking RF filter or a bank of switchable RF filters. Active RF tracking filters typically consume a lot of power. Furthermore, owing to the many tunable components, keeping the desired filter shape over a wide tuning range is very challenging. Both the tunable filter and the filterbank take up much die or board space, which makes both solutions unattractive for CMOS integration.

In direct-conversion receivers, the spectrum at the output of the mixer is the (frequency domain) convolution of the LO waveform spectrum with the RF spectrum at the mixer input. Thus, the harmonic content of the LO waveform determines which frequencies are mixed down to baseband. As the LO waveform (square wave) contains many strong harmonics, the mixer offers less HR compared to a multiplier with a sinusoidal LO. Still, square waves are preferred over sinusoids, especially for flexible spectrum access [1], because square waves are easier to produce over a wide frequency range in an IC using digital circuits.

Multi-band television tuners and upcoming cognitive radio receivers require more than 90 dB of harmonic rejection. A single switching mixer has only 9.5 dB of 3<sup>rd</sup>-order harmonic rejection and 14.0 dB of 5<sup>th</sup>-order harmonic rejection, owing to the harmonic content of its LO waveform. Fortunately, it

is possible to increase the HR while retaining the advantage of switching mixers by using multiple weighted switching mixers in parallel [2], see Fig. 1. The aim is to approximate a sinusoidal LO waveform, termed the *aggregate* LO waveform, using a weighted sum of switching (on/off) signals. The switching signals are generated by a multi-phase clock generator. In this architecture, the down-mixer requires an 8-phase clock generator, as the minimum duty cycle is 1/8 of the LO period.

The aggregate LO waveform of the down-mixer shown in Fig. 1 does not contain the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> harmonic. Nor does it contain the even-order harmonics by way of even-order symmetry. Therefore, the architecture shown in Fig. 1 is, in theory, able to reject the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and all even-order harmonic images completely. In practice, however, around 30 to 40 dB attenuation for the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> harmonic images has been reported in practice. This limitation is due to the amplitude and phase imbalance between the signal paths, arising from mismatches in component values. Timing errors in the multi-phase LO clock generator also cause imbalances, which further reduce the attenuation of the harmonic images.

Clearly, the 40 dB offered by the multi-path solution is not enough. In an attempt to solve this problem, we proposed a combined analog-digital down-mixer based on interference canceling to further attenuate a strong harmonic image [3], [4]. We evaluated the properties by measurements on a breadboarded harmonic rejection down-mixer circuit, where the aim was to demonstrate functionality.

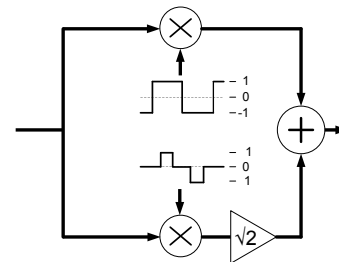


Fig. 1. A multi-path down-converter that uses two switching mixers in a  $1 : \sqrt{2}$  ratio to approximate a sinusoidal LO. Each switching mixer is fully differential and can therefore multiply by 1, -1 and 0.

## II. OVERVIEW OF THE HARMONIC REJECTION SYSTEM

The harmonic rejection down-mixer comprises an analog multi-path mixer built from off-the-shelf components, a four-

channel A/D board and PC running the interference cancellation algorithm. The use of off-the-shelf components calls for a down-scaling of the frequencies. The aim is not to produce a circuit that is directly applicable, but to learn about the general circuit properties before designing a high-frequency chip. A system diagram of the down-mixer is shown in Fig. 3.

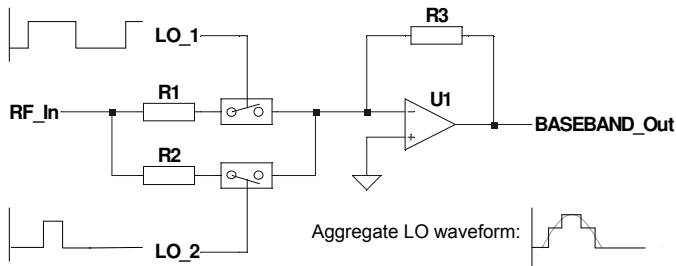


Fig. 2. One half of a differential mixer circuit. The resistors R1 and R2 are used to provide the necessary  $1 : \sqrt{2}$  weighting ratio of the RF. Also shown is the resulting aggregate LO waveform.

The antenna signal is split into two paths, an I channel and a Q channel. Each channel consists of two 74HC4066-based switching mixers, each with a different LO waveform as indicated in Fig. 3. One half of the switching mixer is shown in Fig. 2. Note that the aggregate LO waveform, which is also shown in Fig. 2, approximates the first half-period of a sine wave. The  $1 : \sqrt{2}$  weighting ratio is implemented by the resistors R1 and R2. The other half of the switching mixer (which is not shown) takes care of the second half-period of the sine wave.

The output of the mixers are added to form the signal  $r$  and subtracted to form the signal  $v$ . Both operations are done using CMOS opamps. The addition leads to the rejection of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> harmonic images leaving the desired signal, while the subtraction leads to the rejection of the desired signal, leaving the aforementioned harmonic images. Amplitude and phase imbalances cause the rejection to be around 30 dB in case of the breadboarded system.

In other words,  $r$  contains the desired signal and some residual harmonic image signals, while  $v$  contains the harmonic image signals and some residual of the desired signal. In effect,  $v$  forms an estimate of the interference contained in  $r$ . This fact is exploited by the digital interference canceler.

The multi-phase LO clock generator consists of parallel-loadable 8-bit shift registers (74HC166). Each distinct LO waveform is made by one shift register of which the output is routed to its serial input. The parallel loading feature is used to load the desired switching pattern into the register at startup. The shift registers are clocked at 8 MHz making the base period of the eight-phase clock 1 MHz. Therefore, the down-mixer is tuned to 1 MHz, the scaled LO frequency.

The signals are converted to the discrete-time domain by four 12-bit A/D converters (AD9342) running at 500 ksamples/s. Their data streams are read by a PC, which performs the digital signal processing. The 'added' I/Q and 'subtracted' I/Q signals are combined into two complex-valued signals,

$r(n)$  and  $v(n)$ , from which two highpass filters (HP) remove any DC offsets and reduce the LF self-mixing noise.

### A. The Interference Canceler

The interference cancellation (IC) algorithm, which is based on least mean squares (LMS) adaptive filter theory [5], consists of two complex weighting coefficients  $w_1$  and  $w_2$ , as shown in Fig. 3. The coefficients scale and rotate  $v(n)$  and its complex conjugate  $v^*(n)$ . The need for  $v^*(n)$  in the canceler arises from I/Q imbalance in  $v$  and  $r$ . The reader is referred to [6] for a more thorough treatment on I/Q imbalance and its relation to this complex conjugate.

The IC is performed by the following equation:

$$e(n) = r(n) - w_1^*(n)v(n) - w_2^*(n)v^*(n) \quad (1)$$

,where  $e(n)$  is the interference-reduced output.

The coefficients  $w_1^*(n)$  and  $w_2^*(n)$  approach the optimal (LMS) values as  $n$  goes to infinity, by applying the following multiple-input single-output (MISO) update algorithm [7]:

$$\begin{aligned} w_1(n+1) &= w_1(n) + \mu v(n) e^*(n) \\ w_2(n+1) &= w_2(n) + \mu v^*(n) e^*(n) \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

,where  $\mu = \frac{10^{-4}}{\sigma_v^2}$  is a learning coefficient and  $\sigma_v^2$  denotes the power of the interference estimate  $v(n)$ . The value of  $\mu$  is small enough that (2) is stable and large enough for rapid convergence. In [3], the algorithm is described in greater detail.

## III. MEASUREMENTS

To show that the HR concept works in practice, the spectrum of  $r(n)$  and  $e(n)$  were determined. A 1.01 MHz sinusoidal signal of 10 mV peak-peak was used as the desired signal and a 412 mV peak-peak 3.02 MHz sinusoid was used as a third harmonic image; a 32.3 dB power difference. The 412 mV swing was chosen so the nonlinearities of the CMOS switches were below -85 dBFS, where 0 dBFS corresponds to the full-scale of the ADC.

The spectrum of  $r(n)$  and  $e(n)$  are shown in Fig. 4. The plots were produced by performing a 256-point FFT on  $r(n)$  and  $e(n)$  after decimation-by-four to reduce the sampling rate to 125kHz. Decimation was needed to meet the real-time constraints of the PC.

The desired signal and 3<sup>rd</sup> harmonic image appear at -34.8 dBFS (-10 kHz baseband) and -34.0 dBFS (20 kHz baseband) respectively, in  $r(n)$ . The analog HR stage is able to reduce the 32.3 dB difference to 0.8 dB, indicating a harmonic rejection figure of 31.5 dB. At the output of the canceler,  $e(n)$ , the third harmonic image signal appears at -72.2 dBFS. Therefore, the canceler is able to increase the harmonic rejection by 37.4 dB to a total of 68.9 dB.

The spectrum of  $e(n)$  shows that the third harmonic image, at  $\pm 20$  kHz, is not completely removed. The interference estimate  $v(n)$  not only contains the interference, but also energy from the desired signal due to a finite amount of analog rejection, 28.50 dB in our case. Because of this, the attainable HR by the IC is also limited [8]; less desired signal

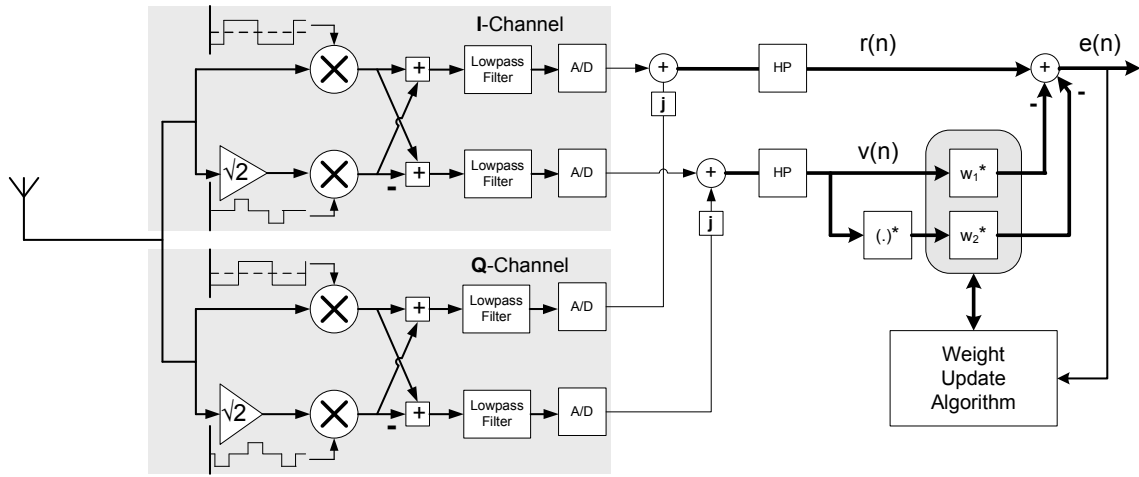


Fig. 3. A two-stage harmonic rejection down-mixer.

energy (with respect to the interference energy) in  $v(n)$  leads to greater HR of the harmonic image in  $e(n)$ . Therefore, the analog signal paths used to generate  $v(n)$  should be designed to maximize the rejection of the desired signal.

To examine the dependence of the digital rejection on the signal-to-interference (SIR) ratio in  $v(n)$ , the third harmonic image signal was varied between 800 mVpp and 10 mVpp. The desired signal was kept at 10 mVpp. The same test was repeated for a 5<sup>th</sup> harmonic image signal at 5.02 MHz. As the SIR of  $v(n)$  is related to the SIR of  $r(n)$ , we need only focus on  $r(n)$ .

The SIR of  $e(n)$  against the SIR of  $r(n)$  is shown in Fig. 5. As the SIR of  $r(n)$  decreases, owing to a power increase in the third harmonic image, more harmonic image signal energy is present in  $v(n)$  while the desired signal's energy remains the same. As the SIR of  $r(n)$  decreases, the interference estimate  $v(n)$  produces a better estimate. Thus, an increase in rejection is expected in  $e(n)$  [3]. This remarkable trend is clearly visible in Fig. 5 for both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> harmonic images. However, when the SIR of  $r(n)$  is more than about 23 dB, the canceller makes the SIR of  $e(n)$  worse. This feature can be avoided by bypassing the canceller when there is no improvement. Detecting this situation requires additional knowledge, such as the bit-error rate or signal power estimates. This is a topic for further research.

When the SIR of  $r(n)$  is smaller than 0 dB, a droop in the SIR of  $e(n)$  is visible. This coincides with an interferer voltage of 412 mVpp or higher, a region where the CMOS switches in the mixer circuit become nonlinear. As a result, the I/Q imbalance in  $v(n)$  increases and more desired signal energy is found in  $v(n)$ . As discussed above, this has a detrimental effect on the harmonic rejection, hence the lower SIR of  $e(n)$ .

The total harmonic rejection was determined to show the system's performance, see Fig. 6. As expected, the harmonic rejection increases with increased harmonic image power, a favorable trend indeed! The harmonic rejection reaches its maximum when the down-mixer becomes nonlinear, indicating resilience to intermodulation products. The maximum har-

monic rejection attained by the down-mixer is 75.4 dB, its minimum is 13.8 dB. The analog stage offers around 32 dB of rejection, irrespective of the harmonic image power. Switching off the canceller, as suggested above, makes the attainable harmonic rejection range from 32 to 75 dB. Note that the aforementioned range is without an RF filter.

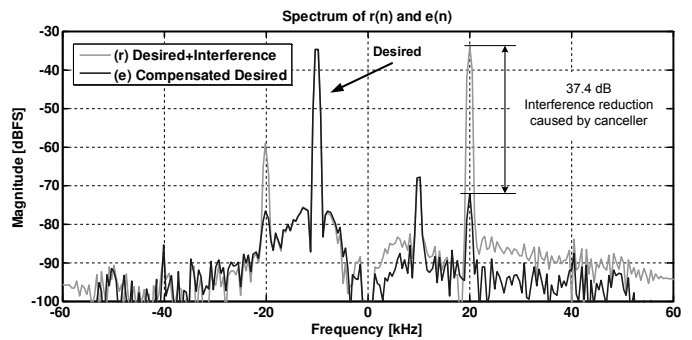


Fig. 4. Magnitude spectrum of  $r(n)$  and  $e(n)$ . The desired signal (1.01 MHz RF, -10 kHz baseband) is 10 mVpp at the antenna, the third harmonic image signal (3.01 MHz RF, 20 kHz baseband) is 412mVpp at the antenna. Both signals are sinusoidal. Decimate-by-four and a 256-point FFT were used to obtain the spectrum.

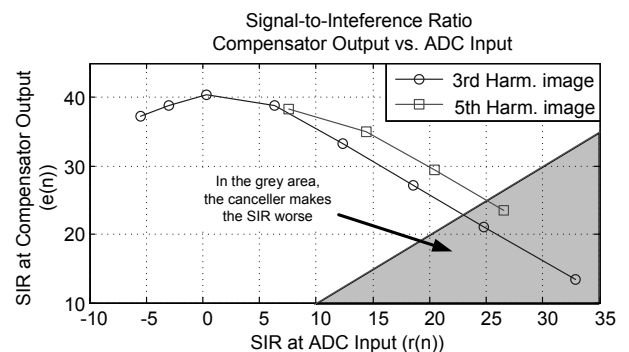


Fig. 5. Signal-to-interference ratio (SIR) of  $e(n)$  versus the SIR at the mixer output  $r(n)$ . The desired signal is 10 mVpp at the antenna, the harmonic image signals are between 10 and 800 mVpp at the antenna. Both signals are sinusoidal.

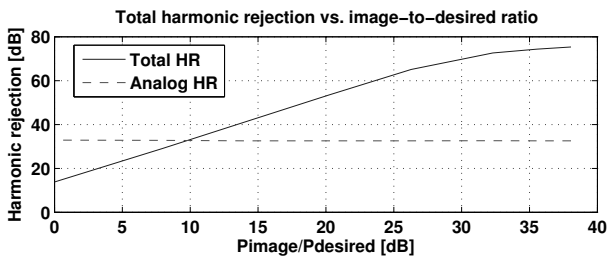


Fig. 6. Total harmonic rejection ratio (analog+digital) against the image-to-desired signal ratio.

#### IV. EFFECT OF CIRCUIT IMPERFECTIONS

Other factors besides the desired signal energy in  $v(n)$  determine the signal components at the output of the digital canceler. Two effects will be considered next; nonlinearities in the mixer frontend and DC offset & LO leakage.

##### A. Nonlinearities

When the the frontend is in a blocking condition, i.e. the signals are being clipped or heavily distorted, there is no way to recover the desired signal. However, given mildly nonlinear conditions, intermodulation products that are generated before the mixer, for instance, in a low-noise amplifier, will be rejected when they exist in the same band as the interferer being canceled; thus either in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or the 5<sup>th</sup> harmonic image band.

Intermodulation products generated after the mixers are generally not canceled as they are not common among the paths. Luckily, this separation also ensures that correlation between  $r(n)$  and  $v(n)$  cannot be attributed to these products. As the coefficients  $w_1$  and  $w_2$  of the digital compensator depend on the correlation between  $r(n)$  and  $v(n)$ , low-level intermodulation products do not affect the performance of the canceler. Note that these products can, of course, cause interference to the desired signal.

##### B. DC offset and LO leakage

Both DC offset and LO leakage are well-known problems of direct-conversion receivers [9].

A DC offset at the input of the IC algorithm will cause a run-away effect of the filter coefficients, in this case  $w_1$  and  $w_2$ . The reason for this is the accumulation that takes place in the coefficient update algorithm (2), in the presence of a DC term.

Direct-conversion receivers suffer from LO self-mixing. Self-mixing causes a slowly time-varying DC offset at the baseband output of the mixers. Energy radiates from the local oscillator and finds its way into the antenna or mixer, thereby mixing with itself to DC.

A practical solution to the DC offset problem is to include digital high-pass filters directly after the A/D converters.

However, not all modulation schemes are compatible with a notch at DC. For example, GMSK used in GSM cellphones, has most of its signal energy near DC when the receiver is operated in zero-IF mode.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

We presented measurements done on a two-stage harmonic rejection down-mixer built from off-the-shelf components. The down-mixer comprises a multi-path analog mixer, with approximately 32 dB of harmonic rejection, as a first stage and a digital harmonic rejection system based on adaptive blind interference canceling as a second stage.

The inclusion of the digital harmonic rejection stage does not pose any special requirements on the analog circuit other than two additional A/D converters and subtractors. The performance of the harmonic rejection algorithm depends mainly on the quality of the interference estimate  $v(n)$ . Therefore, careful design of the signal paths used to obtain  $v(n)$  with respect to rejection of the desired signal, is advantageous. Frontend nonlinearities do not affect the performance of the digital canceler, but intermodulation products are generally not canceled unless they are generated before the down-mixer. Digital highpass filters are needed to remove these offsets. The harmonic rejection of the down-mixer ranges from 32 to 75 dB, depending on the power of the harmonic image. A stronger harmonic image leads to more harmonic rejection; a very favorable trend indeed.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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