Differential Space-Time Turbo Codes

Christian Schlegel and Alex Grant

***Abstract*— Serial concatenation of simple error control codes and differential space-time modulation is considered. Decoding is performed iteratively by passing symbol-wise *a-posteriori* probability values between the decoders of the inner space-time code and the outer code. An extrinsic information transfer analysis is used to predict thresholds for outer convolutional codes of various memory orders and a simple outer parity check code. This parity check code is well matched to the inner differential space-time code and achieves a bit error rate of 10^{-6} less than 2 dB from the Shannon capacity of the fast fading multiple antenna channel. The differential space-time code can also be used to generate *a-priori* information in the absence of channel knowledge. This information can be exploited by a channel estimator inserted into the decoding iteration. It is demonstrated that the inner space-time code provides soft training symbols from periodically inserted training symbols. The reliability of these soft training symbols does not depend on the speed of the channel variations, but on the structure of the inner code and the signal-to-noise ratio. Simulation studies confirm these findings and show that the proposed system with no initial channel knowledge achieves a performance very close to that of the system with perfect channel knowledge.**

***Index Terms*— differential modulation, space-time codes, iterative decoding, channel estimation**

I. INTRODUCTION

The tremendous growth of wireless communications services over the past decade motivates the design of power and frequency efficient portable communications devices. Applications such as mobile computing, video transmission to mobile devices and other high-speed data services have increased the demand for higher data rates, from 64bits/s in enhancements to current second generation cellular systems, to 2Mbit/s in next generation mobile services, and beyond.

Regardless of advanced coding techniques such as turbo-codes [1], channel capacity remains an unmovable barrier. The need for higher and higher data rates can no longer be supported by simply allocating wider frequency bands, and thus other methods of capacity increase have been researched heavily in the past decade. One promising technique is the use of multiple transmit and receive antennas. Such systems can theoretically increase capacity by up to a factor equaling the number of transmit and receive antennas in the array [2–6].

Spatial diversity has been proposed for support of very high rate data users within third generation wide-band Code-Division Multiple Access (CDMA) systems such as cdma2000 [7]. Using multiple antennas, these systems achieve gains in link quality and therefore capacity. Classically, diversity has been exploited through the use of either beam-steering (for antenna arrays with correlated elements), or through diversity combining (for independent antenna arrays) [8, 9]. Use of these array processing techniques can achieve any combination of the following: (a) Reduction of multiple access interference through the "nulling" of strong interferers. Such techniques are complementary to (and share the mathematical formulations of) multiple-user receivers such as the decorrelator and MMSE filter [10]; (b) Mitigation of fading effects by averaging over the spatial properties of the fading process. This is a dual of interleaving techniques which average over the temporal properties of the fading process; (c) Increased link margins by simply collecting more of the transmitted energy at the receiver.

More recently it has been realized that coordinated use of diversity can be achieved through the use of space-time codes. Rather than relying solely on array processing of uncoded transmissions, forward error correction codes which add redundancy in both the temporal and spatial domains are designed specifically for channels with multiple transmit and receive antennas. There are currently two main approaches to realizing the capacity potential of these channels: *coordinated* space-time codes and *layered* space-time codes.

Coordinated space-time block codes [11–13] and trellis codes [14–18] are designed for coordinated use in space and time. The data is encoded using multi-dimensional codes that span the transmit array. Trellis codes are typically decoded using the Viterbi algorithm. Such codes are efficient for small arrays, and can achieve within 3 dB of the 90% outage capacity rate calculated in [3]. A serious obstacle to extension to larger arrays however is the rapid growth of decoder complexity with array size and data rate: the number of states in a full-diversity space-time trellis code for t transmit antennas with rate R is $2^{(t-1)R}$. The other approach uses layered space-time codes [19–21], where the channel is decomposed into parallel single-input, single-output channels. The receiver successively decodes these layers by using antenna array techniques and linear or non-linear cancellation methods. Both approaches show much promise, but the latter is more scalable. It also has the advantage that available technology such as standard error control codes can be more easily integrated.

Much of the space-time coding literature assumes the availability of good channel estimates, which are required for decoding. In the absence of channel knowledge, the capacity gains to be achieved depend upon the coherence time of the channel [22–25]. More recently, there has been considerable effort to design space-time codes that operate in the absence of channel state information [26–54]. Typically, these codes are coordinated space-time block codes whose symbols are unitary matrices. Such codes may also be used as part of differential

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space-time modulation schemes. Codes for use in differential schemes have been designed both using a group structure on the code and without such algebraic constraints.

Since space-time codes necessarily become rapidly very complex, there have been a number of papers proposing the concatenation of error control codes, mostly turbo codes, with a space-time code or space-time modulation [55–63]. This line of research is also motivated by the near-capacity achieving performance of such concatenated codes on other channels. An overview in the area of concatenated space-time codes may be found in [64].

In [57], serial concatenation of an outer standard space-time trellis codes and with a bank of inner rate 1 recursive codes was considered. The outer code produces symbol vectors which are separately symbol interleaved. Each stream is sent through a separate inner recursive code with polynomial $1 + D$. A quasi-static channel was used, which was assumed to be perfectly known at the receiver.

In [60], the authors consider space-time codes for 2-transmit, 2-receive antenna systems based on serial and parallel turbo codes. They develop a rank criteria for determination of the resulting diversity. They consider a parallel concatenation based approach in which a parallel turbo code is followed by puncturing and interleaving of each branch and transmission over separate antennas. For the serial approach [57], each output of a space time trellis code is separately interleaved and fed into separate recursive encoders and transmitted over separate antennas. They consider both quasi-static fading and time-varying fading channel (0.001 and 0.01 normalized Doppler) and achieve 2 bits/sec/Hz at 2.5 dB from outage capacity. Perfect channel knowledge was assumed.

In [55, 59], a form of turbo-coded space-time modulation is considered. The scheme uses serial concatenation of a standard turbo code with an interleaver, serial-parallel converter and a space-time modulator. The quasi-static fading channel is used and points 4 dB from capacity are achieved for a 2-transmit, 2-receive system. This is improved by about 2 dB with use of iterative demodulation. Separate channel estimation based on pilot sequences was also considered with a loss of about 1.5 dB.

In [65], the authors consider the parallel concatenation of recursive systematic space-time trellis codes to operate at 2 bits/sec/Hz over a 2-transmit 2-receive antenna quasi-static fading channel. Antenna 1 transmits systematic symbol and antenna 2 transmits alternating parity symbols. Channel estimation was not considered and points 2.5 dB from outage capacity were achieved.

In [66] a rank criteria is developed and they consider the rate $1/3$ parallel turbo code from [67]. They design the interleaver to ensure full diversity and use BPSK modulation to achieve 1 bit/sec/Hz with either two or three transmit antennas and a single receive antenna. Channel estimation using pilot symbol aided modulation was considered resulting in a 2-3 dB loss in performance on fast fading channel with .01 and .001 normalized Doppler rates.

In [61], the authors design parallel concatenated space-time turbo codes based on constituent space-time trellis codes (in their recursive form). These codes are simulated over both fast fading and quasi-static fading channels with perfect channel knowledge.

In [63], a concatenation of standard convolutional codes with simple space-time block codes is considered, using bit interleaving. Perfect channel estimation is assumed and results are presented for quasi-static channels as well as fast fading channels with 0.01 and 0.05 normalized Doppler.

All of the approaches just described either assume perfectly known channel state information, or use simple channel estimation techniques in conjunction with training sequences or pilot symbols. Apart from rank criteria, no particular efforts are made to optimize the error control codes in these concatenated schemes.

In this paper we show that the serial concatenation of a simple error control code and a differential space-time code of moderate size can practically achieve capacity on low signal-to-noise ratio channels. This defines a decoder structure with manageable complexity and near-optimal performance. We pursue an approach motivated by turbo decoding methods. The main idea is to use a serially concatenated coding system in which the inner code is a short differential (recursive) space-time code. The outer code consists of a simple high-rate code, such as a convolutional code or even a parity check code. Exploiting the turbo principle through iterative decoding, this arrangement can virtually achieve the Shannon limit of the multiple antenna channel, even with an outer code so weak that it cannot correct single errors, and an inner code that is catastrophic. We further exploit the differential property of the inner code to provide *a-priori* estimates of the fading channel, for use in an iterative channel estimation scheme. As the decoder iterates, both the quality of the data estimates and the channel estimates are improved. We find that this technique requires very few pilot symbols (since the transmitted data itself acts as soft, or uncertain training) and results in very little degradation compared to perfect channel knowledge.

Related independent work appearing subsequent to the initial publication of our methods [68, 69] can be found in [49, 50, 70–76]. Related independent prior work [77], using a similar serial concatenation of convolutional codes and differential space-time modulation, in conjunction with iterative decoding and per-survivor processing [78] was brought to our attention in the latter stages of the preparation of this paper.

The paper is organized as follows. In Section II we introduce our mathematical model of the space-time channel. In Section III we discuss the differential space-time modulation that will be used as an inner code in our concatenated system. Iterative decoding with perfect channel estimates is described in Section IV. In Section V, we use extrinsic information transfer charts to determine operation thresholds for these concatenated codes, which are compared with simulation in Section VI. In Section VII we show how the differential space-time code can be used to provide initial *a-priori* symbol estimates which are then used by an integrated channel estimator to refine channel estimates successively with the iterations of the decoder. The performance of this technique is shown using simulation in Section VIII. Section IX contains concluding remarks.

II. System Model

Transmission takes place over a channel with t transmit antennas and r receive antennas, as shown in Figure 1. At time $k = 1, \ldots, n$, each transmit antenna $i = 1, \ldots, t$ selects a complex symbol c_{ik}, which is modulated onto a pulse waveform and transmitted over the channel. The vector $[c_{1k}, c_{2k}, \ldots, c_{tk}]$ is referred to as a *space-time symbol*. At each receive antenna $j = 1, \ldots, r$, the signal is passed through a filter matched to the pulse waveform and sampled synchronously. If the channel delay spread is negligible and fading conditions are approximately constant over n symbols, the samples taken by receive antenna j can be modelled as $y_{jk} = \sqrt{\rho/t} \sum_{i=1}^{t} H_{ji} c_{ik} + n_{jk}$, where H_{ji} is the complex fading path gain from transmit antenna i to receive antenna j, n_{jk} is a complex circularly symmetric Gaussian noise sample, and ρ is the signal-to-noise ratio per receive antenna.

It is customary to collect the transmitted space-time symbols into a codeword matrix, $\mathbf{C} \in \mathbb{C}^{t \times n}$ with elements c_{ik}, in which the rows correspond to different transmit antennas and the columns correspond to different symbol times. Considering a sequence of L codeword transmissions $\mathbf{C}_1, \mathbf{C}_2, \ldots, \mathbf{C}_L$, the channel can be written as

$$\mathbf{Y}_l = \sqrt{\frac{\rho}{t}} \mathbf{H}_l \mathbf{C}_l + \mathbf{N}_l, \tag{1}$$

where $\mathbf{Y}_l \in \mathbb{C}^{r \times n}$ is the l-th received matrix, $\mathbf{H}_l \in \mathbb{C}^{r \times t}$ is the matrix of fading path gains, and $\mathbf{N}_l \in \mathbb{C}^{r \times n}$ is a matrix of noise samples.

Independent Rayleigh fading may be modelled by selecting the elements of $\mathbf{H}_l$ as unit variance complex Gaussian random variables with i.i.d. real and imaginary parts. We distinguish between *fast* fading, in which the $\mathbf{H}_l$ evolve according to process whose dominant frequency is much faster than $1/L$, but slower than $1/n$, and *quasi-static* fading, in which $\mathbf{H}_l$ is selected independently and then held constant for groups of L code matrices (corresponding to a single packet). In the fast fading case, it is mutual information averaged over the channel statistics that is used to calculate channel capacity, whereas for the quasi-static case, it is outage capacity that is of interest.

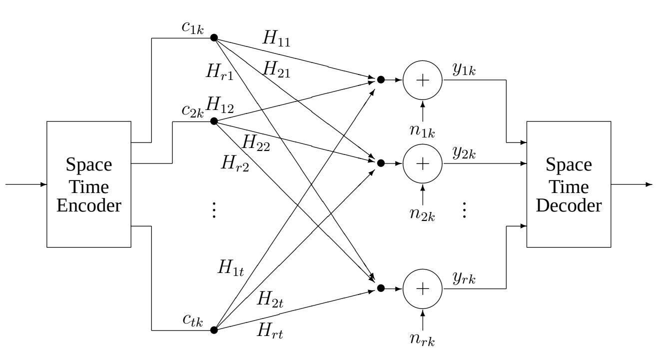

Fig. 1. A fading channel with multiple transmit and receive antennas.

III. Differential Space-Time Turbo Codes

We shall focus on the differential space-time codes (DSTC) of Hughes [32–35], which can be demodulated without channel knowledge, at a loss of 3dB in signal-to-noise ratio with respect to decoding these codes with complete channel knowledge. These DSTCs are based on unitary matrices with a group structure, forming a space-time group code[1]. In such a code, each codeword takes the form $\mathbf{C} = \mathbf{D}\mathbf{Q}$, where $\mathbf{D}$ is a fixed $t \times n$ matrix and $\mathbf{Q} \in \mathcal{Q}$ belongs to a group (under matrix multiplication) of unitary matrices, $\mathbf{Q}\mathbf{Q}^* = \mathbf{I}$. The n columns of $\mathbf{C}$ are transmitted as n consecutive space-time symbols.

In particular, we shall illustrate the basic ideas for $t = n = 2$. For convenience, define the matrices

$$\mathbf{Q}^{(0)} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \qquad \mathbf{Q}^{(2)} = \begin{pmatrix} j & 0 \\ 0 & -j \end{pmatrix}$$
$$\mathbf{Q}^{(4)} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ -1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \qquad \mathbf{Q}^{(6)} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & j \\ j & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

and correspondingly $\mathbf{Q}^{(1)} = -\mathbf{Q}^{(0)}$, $\mathbf{Q}^{(3)} = -\mathbf{Q}^{(2)}$, $\mathbf{Q}^{(5)} = -\mathbf{Q}^{(4)}$ and $\mathbf{Q}^{(7)} = -\mathbf{Q}^{(6)}$. Then the following defines a quaternary phase shift keyed (QPSK) group code[2]

$$\mathcal{Q} = \left\{ \mathbf{Q}^{(0)}, \mathbf{Q}^{(1)}, \ldots, \mathbf{Q}^{(7)} \right\} \tag{2}$$

$$\mathbf{D} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & -1 \\ 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \tag{3}$$

DSTCs can be differentially encoded and decoded in a way very similar to PSK. At the start of transmission, the transmitter sends the code matrix $\mathbf{C}_0 = \mathbf{D}$. Thereafter messages are differentially-encoded: to send the information symbol $\mathbf{G}_l \in \mathcal{Q}$ during symbol time $l = 1, 2, \ldots$ the transmitter sends

$$\mathbf{C}_l = \mathbf{C}_{l-1} \mathbf{G}_l. \tag{4}$$

The group property guarantees that $\mathbf{C}_l$ is a codeword if $\mathbf{C}_{l-1}$ is a codeword. Like differential PSK, there is a simple differential receiver [33] for $\mathbf{G}_l$ based on the two most recent blocks. This receiver computes

$$\hat{\mathbf{G}} = \max_{\mathbf{G} \in \mathcal{Q}} \Re \operatorname{tr} \mathbf{G} \mathbf{Y}_l^* \mathbf{Y}_{l-1}, \tag{5}$$

Performance results for the *quaternion code* (2) can be found in [33].

DSTCs provide an essential building block for space-time systems that can operate with or without channel estimates at the receiver. Thus far, most work on space-time coding has assumed that perfect channel estimates are available at the receiver [11, 19, 79–81]. In certain situations, however, the channel may change so rapidly as to make reliable estimation of the channel difficult, or may require too much overhead in terms of pilot symbols, or perhaps we want to avoid channel estimation in order to reduce the cost and complexity of the handset.

Figure 2 shows the structure of the proposed serially concatenated code. For convenience, encoding is performed on a symbol by symbol level.

For each 4-ary input symbol, the rate $2/3$ outer code $\mathcal{C}$ outputs a single 8-ary symbol. For convenience we shall consider these symbols to be members of $\mathbb{Z}_4 = \{0, 1, 2, 3\}$ and

[1] Group structure is not necessary for the design of a DSTC, and is not required for the decoding methods that we describe.

[2] As described in [33], $\mathcal{Q}$ is isomorphic to Hamilton's quaternion group.

$\mathbb{Z}_8 = \{0, 1, \ldots, 7\}$ respectively (although we do not invoke the ring axioms usually implied by this notation). We shall consider the standard maximal free distance convolutional codes [82, p. 495] with 4, 16 and 64 states (corresponding to $\nu = 1, 2$ and 3) as well as the simple $(3, 2)$ parity check code. The mapping from binary to $\mathbb{Z}_4$ and $\mathbb{Z}_8$ is not a topic of this paper and the natural mappings are used.

The stream of $\mathbb{Z}_8$ symbols are passed through a length L symbol interleaver π. These interleaved symbols are then input to the differential space-time encoder (the interleaved symbols $z \in \mathbb{Z}_8$ are mapped $\mathbb{Z}_8 \mapsto \mathcal{Q}$ according to $z \mapsto \mathbf{Q}^{(z)}$). In the case of the $(3, 2)$ parity code, bit interleaving must be used since the code has no dependencies between symbols. The mapper takes each 2×2 matrix output by the inner differential code and transmits it using two consecutive space-time symbols, as described earlier.

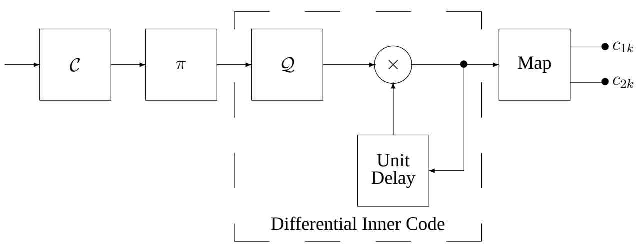

Fig. 2. Concatenation of an outer code with a differential space-time modulator.

IV. Iterative Decoding with Channel Information

Since the differential space-time modulator is an infinite impulse response filter, it fits the requirements of an inner code for a serially concatenated coding system [83]. We now describe a symbol-wise turbo decoder [1] for the differential space-time turbo code, in the case that the receiver has perfect knowledge of the channel matrices $\mathbf{H}_l$. This decoder is of independent interest, since it forms the basis of the decoder for the case in which the channel matrices are unknown. We shall also see that using very simple constituent codes, we may achieve performance very close to the fast-fading ergodic capacity for low signal to noise ratios.

The decoder is shown in Figure 3. The inner *a-posteriori* probability (APP) decoder operates on the (fully connected) trellis of the DSTC. This is followed by deinterleaving and APP decoding of the outer code. Extrinsic information on the space-time symbols is fed back to the DSTC decoder, which uses it as *a-priori* information in a new decoding cycle. Such turbo decoding systems have been studied for the concatenation of standard convolutional codes with differential PSK, and very good error performance, rivaling that of turbo codes, have been reported [84, 85]. The inner decoder for the space-time differential code takes two inputs, the sequence of channel values $\{\mathbf{Y}_l\} = \{\mathbf{Y}_0, \mathbf{Y}_1, \ldots\}$, and *a-priori* information on the input symbols in the form of a sequence of probability vectors $\{\mathbf{p}_l^A\}$, where $\mathbf{p}_l^A = [\Pr(\mathbf{G}_l = \mathbf{Q}^{(0)}), \cdots, \Pr(\mathbf{G}_l = \mathbf{Q}^{(M-1)})]$, and $M = |\mathcal{Q}|$. It calculates the sequence of output *a-posteriori*

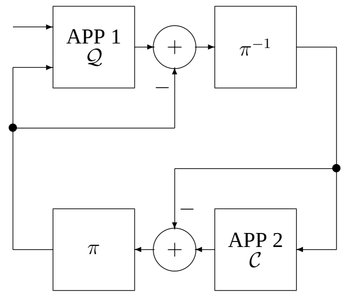

Fig. 3. Symbol-wise iterative decoder.

probability vectors $\{\mathbf{p}_l\}$,

$$\mathbf{p}_l = [\Pr(\mathbf{G}_l = \mathbf{Q}^{(0)}|\{\mathbf{Y}_l\}), \cdots, \Pr(\mathbf{G}_l = \mathbf{Q}^{(M-1)}|\{\mathbf{Y}_l\})], \tag{6}$$

using an adaptation of the standard implementation of the APP algorithm [86] (the differential constraint is represented in the usual way using the trellis upon which the decoder operates). Similarly, the APP algorithm can produce *a-posteriori* probabilities on the coded symbols $\mathbf{C}_l$.

Given perfect channel knowledge, the algorithm uses the coherent branch metrics,

$$\Pr(\mathbf{Y}_l \mid \mathbf{Q}) = \alpha \exp\left(-\|\mathbf{Y}_l - \mathbf{H}_l \mathbf{D} \mathbf{Q}\|_F^2\right) \tag{7}$$

where $\|\cdot\|_F$ is the Frobenius norm and α is a normalization factor.

The *a-priori* information is removed from the output by element-wise division. The resulting "extrinsic" information $\{\mathbf{p}_l^E\}$ is given as

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{p}_l^E &= \alpha \left[\mathbf{p}_l(1)/\mathbf{p}_l^A(1), \mathbf{p}_l(2)/\mathbf{p}_l^A(2), \ldots, \mathbf{p}_l(M)/\mathbf{p}_l^A(M)\right] \\ \alpha^{-1} &= \sum_{i=1}^{M} \mathbf{p}_l(i)/\mathbf{p}_l^A(i). \end{aligned} \tag{8}$$

The extrinsic probabilities are deinterleaved in order to coincide with the symbols entering the outer APP decoder. This second decoder operates on the outer code $\mathcal{C}$. It uses $\{\mathbf{p}_l^E\}$ as *a-priori* information, and calculates new *a-posteriori* probabilities on the encoded symbols $\mathbf{G}_k$, according to the APP rule. The new extrinsic probabilities are calculated using (8). This process is iterated until a certain stopping criterion is reached.

In case of very short outer codes such as the $(3, 2)$ parity check code, bit interleaving needs to be used, and hence extrinsic probabilities for the information bits are generated by marginalizing the values obtained in (8). Likewise, the output bit probabilities of the outer code are combined into symbol probabilities.

V. EXIT Analysis

In this section we modify and apply the extrinsic information transfer analysis [87–90] to our serially concatenated system. This will give us a tool to predict the "turbo cliff" of our system and let us design and choose the outer code required for best performance.

Consider a single APP decoder. It operates on two inputs, the channel outputs $\mathbf{Y}_l$, (which may be absent if we consider the outer decoder), and *a-priori* input information $\mathbf{p}_l^A$. The decoder generates extrinsic probabilities $\mathbf{p}_l^E$ according to (6) and (8).

Let the i.i.d sequence of random variables $V_1, V_2, \ldots, V_L$ be the transmitted symbols. Under the assumption of long random interleavers, the corresponding sequence of random vectors $\mathbf{p}_l^A$ are i.i.d, as are the $\mathbf{p}_l^E$. Define the random variables V, A and E according to $p(V, A) = p(V_l, \mathbf{p}_l^A)$ and $p(V, E) = p(V_l, \mathbf{p}_l^E)$ (note that these distributions are independent of l, due to the independence assumption). We can now define mutual informations $I(V; A)$ between the "true" symbols V and the input *a-priori* probability vectors, and $I(V; E)$ between V and the output extrinsic probability vectors. Note that this amounts to treating the prior and extrinsic probability vectors themselves as the random vectors of interest (as opposed to considering the random variables taking these vectors as their distributions). This makes sense, since it is from these vectors that the final decisions will be made.

The plot of $I(V, A)$ versus $I(V, E)$ is known as extrinsic information transfer (EXIT) chart. By plotting the EXIT charts for the inner and outer code on the same axes, the convergence properties of the concatenated system may be predicted, as described in [87–90].

Due to the non-linear operation of the APP decoder, the multi-dimensional distributions $p(V, A)$ and $p(V, E)$ are difficult to obtain analytically. We therefore estimate these measures using monte-carlo simulation of the individual codes of interest (the DSTC and the convolutional code). Further details regarding symbol-wise EXIT analysis may be found in [91].

Figure 4 shows the EXIT chart for our system using the DSTC as the inner code ($I_A = I(V, A)$ on the horizontal axis, $I_E = I(V, E)$ on the vertical axis) and 4, 16 and 64 state maximal free distance rate $2/3$ convolutional codes [82, p. 495] as the outer code (thick lines) (I_A on the vertical axis, I_E on the horizontal axis). The DSTC curves (thin lines) are for various signal-to-noise ratios, ranging from -1.5 dB to -1.0 dB in steps of 0.1 dB. From the figure, we see that we expect the turbo threshold to occur at about -1.2 dB for the 64 state outer code, -1.3 dB for the 16 code and -1 dB for the 4 state code. We also expect that the 16 and 64 state outer codes to result in faster convergence, since the path between the inner and outer curves are more open for these codes.

The $(3, 2)$ parity check code (dashed line) has an even lower turbo cliff at about -1.4 dB. Its curve is very well matched to the shallow curve of the inner decoder. Furthermore, the APP decoder for this parity check code is extremely simple, and can be implemented by a simple lookup table. From the parity check constraint it is quite straight forward to calculate the output extrinsic bit log-likelihood ratio as

$$\lambda^E(b_1) = \lambda^A(b_2) + \log\left(\frac{1 + \exp(\lambda^A(b_3) - \lambda^A(b_2))}{1 + \exp(\lambda^A(b_3) + \lambda^A(b_2))}\right), \quad (9)$$

where b_1, b_2, b_3 are the bits that make up a single parity check codeword. It is clear however that many iterations may be required for convergence.

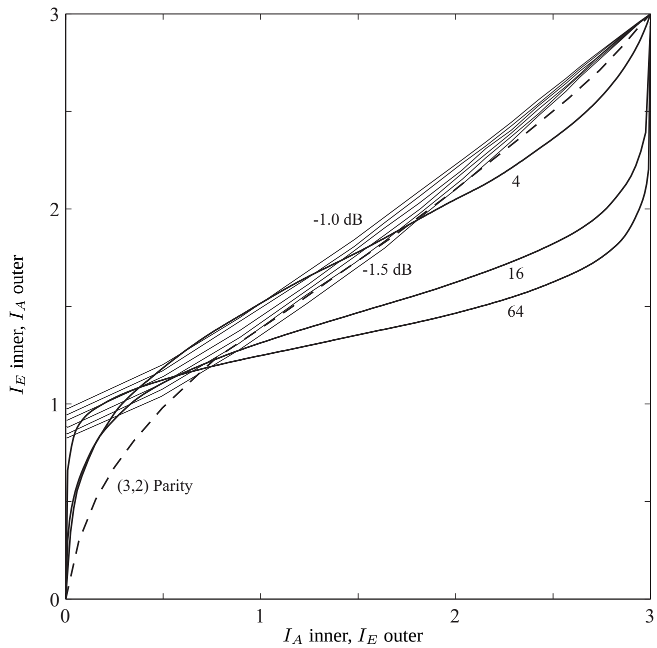

Fig. 4. Extrinsic information transfer chart for serial concatenation of 4, 16, 64-state convolutional codes and the $(3, 2)$ parity check code with the differential space-time code.

VI. Simulation Results

Figure 5 compares the performance of the differential space-time turbo coded system using the various outer codes discussed above. The channel used is assumed to be a $t = r = 2$ uncorrelated fast Rayleigh fading channel, i.e., each channel matrix $\mathbf{H}_l$ is independently drawn from a 2×2 matrix of independent complex Gaussian distributions, and the decoder is furnished with ideal channel side information. The interleaver length was 100,000 symbols, and 100 decoding iterations were performed (smaller numbers of iterations result in less steep curves).

The 4, 16 and 64 state outer convolutional codes result in thresholds of approximately -1 dB, -1.35 dB and -1.25 dB respectively, which agree with the predictions of the EXIT analysis. The threshold for the $(3, 2)$ parity code is similar to that of the 16 state convolutional code, at about -1.35 dB.

At this code rate (1 bit per channel use), and for $t = r = 2$ capacity is at -3.1dB [2]. Thus the concatenated coding system can achieve bit error rates of 10^{-6} at about 1.75dB from capacity (for the parity outer code). However, this code also requires the most iterations as predicted by the EXIT analysis. By way of comparison, the 16 state convolutional code achieves a BER of 10^{-6} at $E_b/N_0 = -1.3$ dB after 25 iterations, whereas the parity code requires 45 iterations to achieve the same point.

We may also compare these results to those for (non-concatenated) space-time block codes. As reported in [64, Fig. 10], the 1 bit/sec/Hz BPSK Alamouti code [11] with $t = r = 2$ achieves BER 10^{-3} at $E_b/N_0 = 7$ dB. The corresponding 1 bit/sec/Hz QPSK code with $t = 4$, $r = 2$ from [12] achieves BER 10^{-3} at about $E_b/N_0 = 5$ dB.

In [64, Fig. 26], results are given for turbo space-time codes formed by the concatenation of standard convolutional codes with the QPSK Almouti code [11] resulting in 1/bit/sec/Hz. Using a constraint length 5 outer code, BER 10^{-3} is achieved at

$E_b/N_0 = 4.5$ dB. Increasing the constraint length of the outer code to 9 improves this result to $E_b/N_0 = 3.25$ dB.

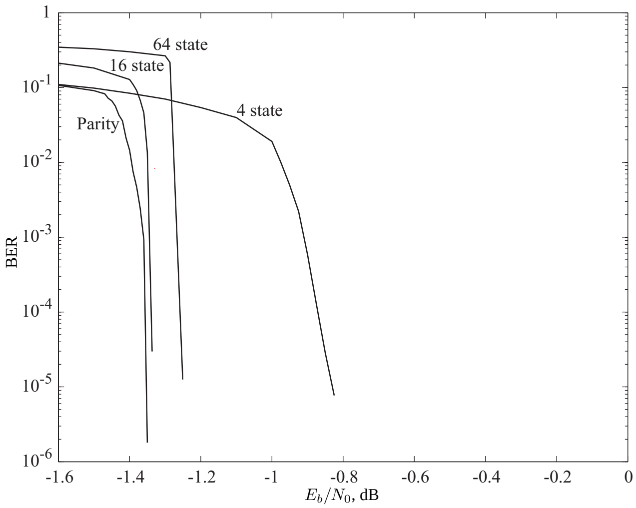

Fig. 5. Performance of the serially concatenated system with several outer codes for a fast fading channel.

VII. Iterative Decoding without Channel Information

We now describe an iterative decoder that makes use of the differential property of the inner code to begin. This iterative decoder is shown in Figure 6.

In the case that the channel is not known, the differential property of the inner code may be used to provide initial (non-uniform) priors to the inner APP decoder on the space-time symbols $\mathbf{G}_l$ via

$$P(\mathbf{G}_l|\mathbf{Y}_l) \propto \exp\left(\Re\,\mathrm{tr}\,\mathbf{G}\mathbf{Y}_l^*\mathbf{Y}_{l-1}\right). \tag{10}$$

This is the function of the Soft Differential Decoder in Figure 6.

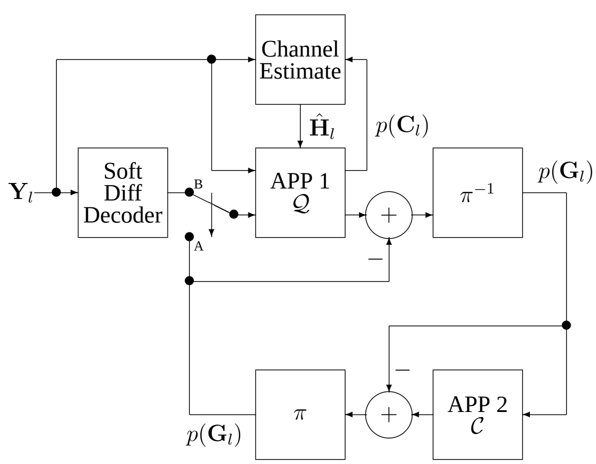

Fig. 6. Symbol-wise iterative decoder with integrated channel estimation.

With reference to Figure 6, the switch is held at position B for the first iteration and the inner APP decoder operates on the symbol priors (10), ignoring the channel symbols $\mathbf{Y}_l$, since these contain no useful information without channel knowledge. The decoder APP 1 generates channel symbol posteriors $p(\mathbf{C}_l)$ which are used to form channel estimates to be used in subsequent iterations by a channel estimator discussed below.

It is easy to see that the symbol posteriors $p(\mathbf{G}_l)$ at the output of decoder APP 1 are identical to its input (10), i.e., without channel knowledge APP 1 cannot improve the symbol probabilities. These are deinterleaved and fed into the outer decoder APP 2, which generates new symbol priors $p(\mathbf{G}_l)$. At this point, further reuse of the differential decoder can be shown to be of no use, and the system switches to "coherent" operation in the next iteration. With the switch in position A, priors $p(\mathbf{G}_l)$ are used from the previous iteration, together with the channel estimates $\hat{\mathbf{H}}_l$ using the coherent metric (7) (treating the channel estimates as if they were exact). At each iteration improved values $p(\mathbf{C}_l)$ are also generated by the inner decoder APP 1 which in turn generates improved channel estimates $\hat{\mathbf{H}}_l$.

The transmission channel (1) is linear, and therefore well-documented optimal linear estimators exist. In particular the minimum mean square error (MMSE) estimator can be formulated as $\hat{\mathbf{H}} = \mathbf{R}_{HY}\mathbf{R}_{YY}^{-1}\mathbf{Y}$, where $\hat{\mathbf{H}} = [\hat{\mathbf{H}}_1, \ldots, \hat{\mathbf{H}}_L]$, and $\mathbf{Y} = [\mathbf{Y}_1, \ldots, \mathbf{Y}_L]$. The covariance matrices are given by $\mathbf{R}_{HY} = E[\mathbf{H}\mathbf{Y}^*]$ and $\mathbf{R}_{YY} = E[\mathbf{Y}\mathbf{Y}^*]$. These covariance matrices need to be estimated using not only the statistics of the channel, which are Gaussian, but also the statistics of the transmitted symbols $\mathbf{C}_l$, whose individual symbol probabilities are furnished by decoder APP 1 at each iteration.

Even a cursory complexity study of this MMSE filtering approach reveals that it would dominate the complexity of the entire receiver, especially given the very simple soft component decoders for the small error control codes used. Motivated by [92–94], we pursue a simpler estimator, in particular, we reason that from the first moment equation $E[\mathbf{Y}_l] = \sqrt{\rho/t}\,\mathbf{H}_l E[\mathbf{C}_l]$ an instantaneous symbol-wise estimate of the channel is found as

$$\sqrt{\frac{\rho}{t}}\tilde{\mathbf{H}}_l = \mathbf{Y}_l\tilde{\mathbf{C}}_l^{\,*}, \tag{11}$$

where $\tilde{\mathbf{C}}_l$ is the empirical mean according to $p(\mathbf{C}_l)$ generated by the inner decoder APP 1.

The symbol-wise estimates $\tilde{\mathbf{H}}_l$ are now treated as if they are in fact observations of $\mathbf{H}_l$ in i.i.d. additive Gaussian noise. The final channel estimates are obtained by LMMSE filtering the elements of $\tilde{\mathbf{H}}_l$ according to the known or estimated covariance of the fading process. In the case of quasi-static fading this amounts to averaging.

The *a posteriori* channel symbol probabilities used to generate the average symbol $\tilde{\mathbf{C}}_l$ used in (11) are provided by the inner decoder APP 1. However, due to the catastrophic nature of the quaternion code (and all differential codes) even completely reliable values of the input symbols $\mathbf{G}_l$ cannot give any information on the channel symbols $\mathbf{C}_l$. But if the quaternion code is started in a known state, non-uniform probabilities $p(\mathbf{C}_l)$ of the channel symbols are found by decoder APP 1. We show now that these probabilities "decay" to the uniform distribution with a decay rate that is a function of only the channel signal-to-noise ratio and the differential code used, but does not directly depend on the channel fluctuation speed.

The forward recursion of the inner APP decoder can be written in matrix notation as $\boldsymbol{\alpha}_{i+1} = \mathbf{P}_i\boldsymbol{\alpha}_i$, where $\boldsymbol{\alpha}_i$ is a state-size vector of s forward recursion values, and $\mathbf{P}_i$ is the transition probability matrix between the states, whose k, l-th entry is the transition probability between state k and state l given by $\Pr(\mathbf{Y}|\mathbf{C})p(\mathbf{G})$, where $\mathbf{G}$ is the input symbol and $\mathbf{C}$ the channel symbol on the branch from state k to l. After l steps we have

$$\boldsymbol{\alpha}_{i+l} = \left(\prod_{j=i}^{i+l} \mathbf{P}_i \right) \boldsymbol{\alpha}_i. \tag{12}$$

The product on the right hand side is dominated by the largest eigenvalues of the $\mathbf{P}_i$, and since $\mathbf{P}_i$ is a doubly stochastic matrix for the quaternion code, it has, independent of i, largest eigenvalue $\lambda_1 = 1$ with the all-ones eigenvector $\mathbf{e}$. Writing out the spectral decomposition of $\mathbf{P}_i$ as $\mathbf{P}_i = \mathbf{e}\,\mathbf{e}'/s + \sum_{r=2}^{s} \lambda_{i,r} \mathbf{u}_{i,r} \mathbf{v}_{i,r}^*$, where $\mathbf{u}_r$ and $\mathbf{v}_r$ are the left and right eigenvectors to λ_r, we see that, as $l \to \infty$, $\lambda_1 = 1$ will dominate in the matrix product (12), and $\boldsymbol{\alpha}_{i+l} \to [1/s, \cdots, 1/s]'$, regardless of the initial value of $\boldsymbol{\alpha}_i$. The speed with which this uniform distribution is approached is essentially determined by $\lambda_{i,2}$, the second largest eigenvalues of $\mathbf{P}_i$, and their values depend on the channel signal-to-noise ratio. This persistence of the initial state information in the form of non-uniform channel probabilities is called *training memory*.

Since the effects of an initial known state die out, periodical insertion of known input symbols can be used to force the encoder into a known state and thus refresh the training memory. To preserve rate, the channel symbols corresponding to these reset symbols are punctured. The required rate of these refresh symbols depends only on the channel SNR. As long as the training memory is never allowed to decay too much, fading processes with large bandwidth may be estimated using the memory of the code. In the case of quasi-static channels with high enough SNR, reset symbols may not be required at all, since the channel estimate obtained from the start of the packet may be used for the entire packet.

VIII. Simulation Results without Channel Information

We now present the results of computer simulation for the case when the channel information $\mathbf{H}$ is unknown to the receiver. First, we demonstrate the training memory effect for the $t = r = 2$ quasi-static channel. Figure 7 shows how the *a posteriori* probabilities at the output of APP 1 decay as a function of the channel SNR. The horizontal axis is the symbol time and the vertical axis shows the sample average of the maximum *a posteriori* probability. Refresh symbols were inserted every 128 symbols. From the figure we see that at 0 dB (dashed line), the distribution decays very quickly to uniform (within a few symbols). In contrast, at 5 dB the training memory keeps the probability of the correct symbol from decaying below about 0.7.

Figure 8 shows simulation results for the decoder of Figure 6. The 16 state outer convolutional code was used, with blocks of 5000 symbols and 50 decoder iterations (using the parity code as the outer code results in similar performance). Three $t = r = 2$ fading channels have been simulated, a quasi-static channel, and two lowpass channels. For the lowpass channels,

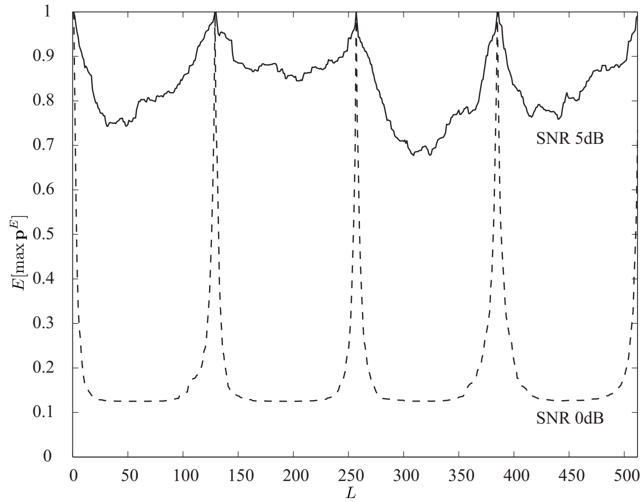

Fig. 7. Training memory effect.

the complex gains between each antenna pair is an independent lowpass filtered complex Gaussian process. Normalized (to the symbol rate) fading bandwidths of $f_c = 0.01$ and $f_c = 0.001$ were considered. For this channel model the LMMSE channel estimator described in the previous section amounts to individual filtering of the independent processes, according to the fading bandwidth and the noise variance (which are assumed known). For the quasi-static and $f_c = 0.001$ channels, the training memory was refreshed every 128 symbols. For the faster $f_c = 0.01$ channel, a refresh period of 32 symbols was used. Bear in mind that the operating point of this system is at a symbol SNR of about 0dB, and from Figure 7 we saw that for 0 dB, the extrinsic probability decays to uniform very quickly. The slower channels could make do with such a slow refresh rate because the few "good" symbols obtained from each refresh are enough to estimate the channel at that point, and the channel does not change too much prior to the next refresh. Profiting from the channel memory, fewer refresh symbols are need than required by training memory alone. For the faster channel, we need to make sure that the training memory does not decay much at all between refresh symbols.

For each case, the bit error rate performance of the iterative receiver with perfect channel knowledge is shown with a solid line, and the performance of the iterative receiver without channel knowledge is shown with a dashed line. In all cases, we see that the latter obtains a performance very close to that of the coherent receiver, within approximately 0.1 dB. This can be compared to the results of [66], where they reported a loss of 2-3 dB due to channel estimation using more standard techniques (for $r = 1$ and $t = 2, 3$ systems at 1 bit/sec/Hz).

IX. Conclusions

We have shown that the serial concatenation of simple convolutional or block codes with differential space-time modulation can provide outstanding performance over the multiple antenna channel, using symbol-based turbo decoding. We have presented an EXIT chart analysis which guides the choice of the optimal component codes for a given situation and demonstrated the tightness of this analysis with example simulations.

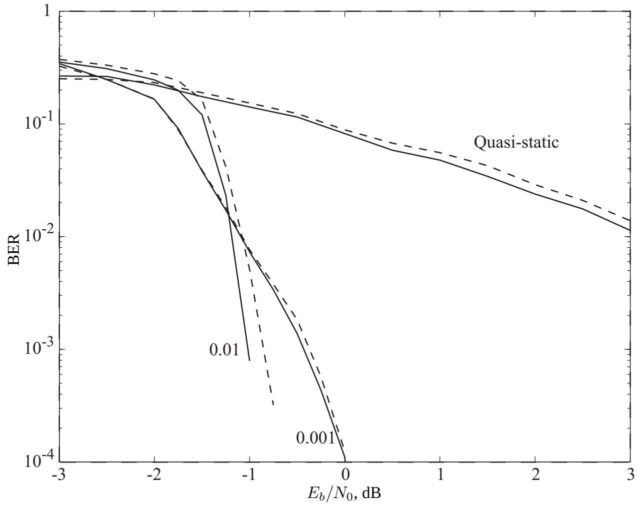

Fig. 8. Performance of the non-coherent iterative decoder.

The concatenation of standard convolutional and block codes with the inner differential code yields space-time turbo codes that are interesting in their own right. These codes provide a gain of over 8 dB compared to the Alamouti block space-time code [11] and over 6 dB compared to the Tarokh et al. code [12] (which uses twice as many transmit antennas).

We also have shown how the differential inner code can be exploited to provide a simple integrated channel estimator with soft information to generate channel estimates which are reliable enough to allow iterative decoding and channel estimation to start up. Performance results on both block fading and fast fading channels demonstrate that such a receiver with this integrated channel estimation is effective and can achieve the performance of a system with ideal channel information to within a fraction of a dB.

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