

# Pipelined Error-detecting Codes in FPGA Testing

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**Abstract**—This article approaches the solution of FPGA testing and research of characteristics at early development stages. The approach offers error-detection code based on universal test firmware. The performed test firmware based on CRC and Hamming codes detect single and multiple faults, and locate fault place (for Hamming code based test firmware).

**Index Terms**—Field programmable gate arrays, Design for testability, Automatic testing, Cyclic redundancy check codes, Error correction codes

## I. INTRODUCTION

FPGA (Field-Programmable Gate Array) based system design ensures a variety of tasks among which the FPGA environment testing. At some stage, these tasks may require not only error detection but also the determination of the location of the error. Existing approaches do not guarantee identification of multiple failures, and do not allow accurate finding of a failure place. In addition, they require the creation of a separate firmware for each development stage and do not meet the scalability requirements.

In this paper, a new approach for creation of the test firmware base on pipelined error-detection code generator realization is proposed. It allows detecting failures and their occurrence place.

## II. REQUIREMENTS TO THE TEST FIRMWARE

We introduce the definitions of target firmware and test firmware. Test firmware is intended to perform a test or test group. Target firmware is intended to perform all functions that are specified in the assignment for the development of a system.

In addition, we introduce the definition of input vector concept. It is set of binary values transmitted on system inputs at this moment.

Test firmware is used in the following stages of the system testing:

- hardware platform selection;
- FPGA chips grading (selection the most suitable chips);
- FPGA environment testing (system board and its subsystems).

Existing approaches described in [1] and [2] have the following disadvantages:

- cannot guarantee detection of single or multiple failures;
- do not provide precise location of failure;
- require the development of the test firmware for each of the testing phases;
- do not guarantee the correct handling of multiple failures.

The test firmware must meet the following requirements:

1. being synthesizable – the functional description must precede synthesis, tracing and firmware generation successfully, i.e. ensuring FPGA platform restrictions;
2. fault sensitivity – providing maximum sensitivity of faults, including multiple faults;
3. scalability - allowing to change easily the degree of FPGA resources utilization;
4. predictability - values obtained as a result of testing device operations can be calculated in advance. These values can also be compared.

## III. PIPELINED ERROR-DETECTING CODES GENERATORS

More precisely, these requirements meet the pipeline computer systems. Each stage consists of register and logical elements that implement a selected function. These systems are scaled by varying the number of pipeline stages. Values of the FPGA inputs can be used as initial values. The regular structure is another advantage of pipeline computer systems. It simplifies the placing stage of FPGA development.

As basic test functions, generator error-detecting codes are proposed. The input data for these generators is the input data of the test system. Output data consists of error detection bits calculated for this input data. The result of pipeline's each stage operation is the intermediate value of error detection bits, which is computed for  $i$  bits of the input data stream. Here,  $i$  is the number of the current stage of the pipeline. In addition, intermediate values and signs that are used to perform the next step of the algorithm can be passed between stages.

The input bit array is called the input stream. We separate the concept of the reference input stream and the actual input stream. Reference input stream is the set of binary values, which were forwarded to the inputs of the test system or calculated as the result of self-test nodes correct work. The actual input stream is the set of binary values adopted by the device or received from internal hosts. The pipelined generator performs the calculation of the error detection code for the actual input stream. Failure occurrence causes the difference between reference input stream and actual input stream, or distort error detection bits. The combination of the reference input stream and the corresponding error detection bits is called the reference error detection code.

Reference input stream can be set constant or variable values. Constant values are set to the entrances of the test system before starting the test, and do not change before the end of the test.

The input stream from the variable values is an array of

multiple input vectors. The new input vector is sent to the inputs of the system under test at each step. The result of system work is a set of error detection codes calculated for different input vectors. We consider that the input vector is sent to all inputs simultaneously, so the new input value will be obtained by all stages of the pipeline.

Let there be a reference input stream  $S$ . So, by definition:

$$S = \{V_1, V_2, \dots, V_t\} \quad (1)$$

$V_1, V_2, \dots, V_t$  - input vectors, and:

$$V_i = \{b_{i,1}, b_{i,2}, \dots, b_{i,n}\} \quad (2)$$

where  $b_{i,1}, b_{i,2}, \dots, b_{i,n}$  are bits of the input vector  $V_i$ , i.e. these bits will be transmitted to the inputs of the system under test at  $i^{th}$  step.

Let  $R$  be the set of output vectors:

$$R = \{R_1, R_2, \dots, R_t\} \quad (3)$$

and  $R_1, R_2, \dots, R_t$  is the set of error detection codes in the corresponding moments of time. Then:

$$R_i = \{r_{i,1}, r_{i,2}, \dots, r_{i,k}\} \quad (4)$$

where  $r_{i,1}, r_{i,2}, \dots, r_{i,k}$  are error detection bits that make up the  $i^{th}$  error detection code.

We can say that:

$$R = F(s) \quad (5)$$

So, the test system is a pipeline and none of its stages has elements of long-term data storage (it is using data received from the inputs or calculated in the previous stage).  $R_i$  depends on all input vectors  $V$  that were transmitted to the entrances of the test system during  $n$  steps before the  $i^{th}$  step, and  $n$  is the number of pipeline stages. The last input vector used for  $R_i$  calculation has been read from the input for one step before  $R_i$  calculation has been finished. So:

$$R_i = F(V_{i-n-1}, V_{i-n}, \dots, V_{i-1}) \quad (6)$$

At each step in the calculation of  $R_i$  only one bit of the input stream was used, and all intermediate values were calculated in the appropriate steps (number of intermediate value of  $R_i$  equal to the number of pipeline stage for which it was calculated). Thus, we have:

$$R_i = F(b_{i-n-1,1}, b_{i-n,2}, \dots, b_{i-1,n}) \quad (7)$$

Bits of input array  $S$ , included in the  $V_i$  vectors and used in calculation of  $R_i$  are shown in Table I.

Any generation algorithm of the error detection codes working with the incoming input data stream can be used to solve the testing problem. Typically, these algorithms are cyclical and should be converted.

TABLE I. DYNAMIC INPUT STREAM PIPELINE'S INPUT DATA

	Input 1	Input 2	Input 3			Input n
$V_1$	$b_{i-n-1,1}$					
$V_2$		$b_{i-n-1+1,2}$				
$V_n$						$b_{i-1,n}$
$V_t$						

The algorithm is converted into a pipeline structure, and each stage of the pipeline is allocated the corresponding bit of the input stream. The main element of the test system is

the unit that implements the selected algorithm of the error-detection code generator.

For failure place detection, test firmware must rely on algorithms of self-corrected codes generator.

### A. Algorithm of device testing

We determine the method of input values generation and value of the input stream bits. Flow chart of the device testing algorithm is shown in Figure 1.

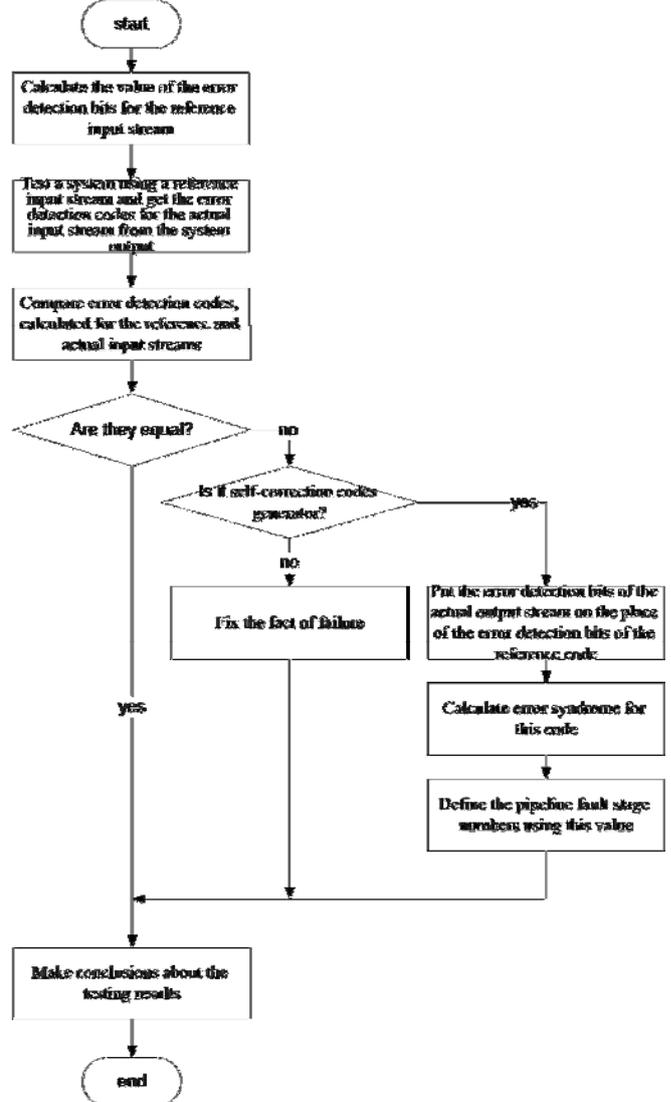


Figure 1. Algorithm of device testing.

General view of the test system is shown in Fig. 1

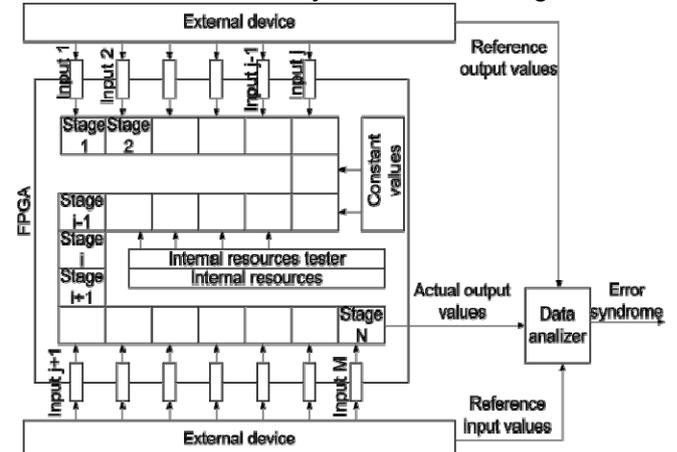


Figure 2. General view of test system.

Fig. 3 (A) and (B) show a general view of the reference and pipelined algorithms.

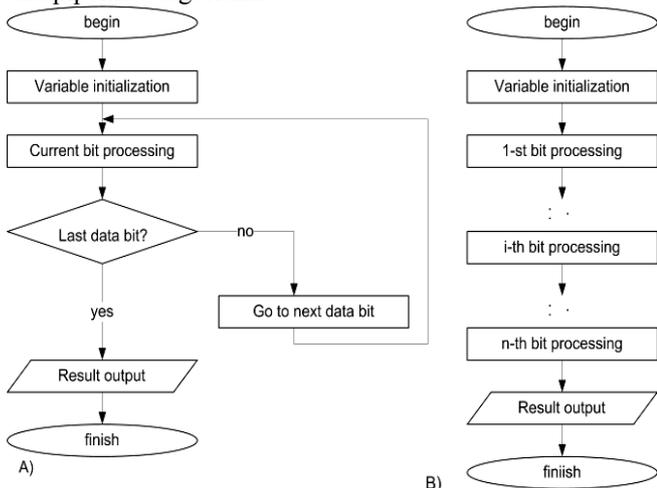


Figure 3. Reference (A) and pipelined (B) algorithms.

The block diagrams of devices, and the implementation of reference and pipelined algorithms are presented in Fig. 4 and Fig. 5, respectively.

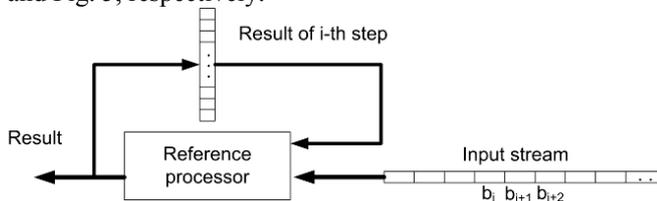


Figure 4. Reference algorithm realization.

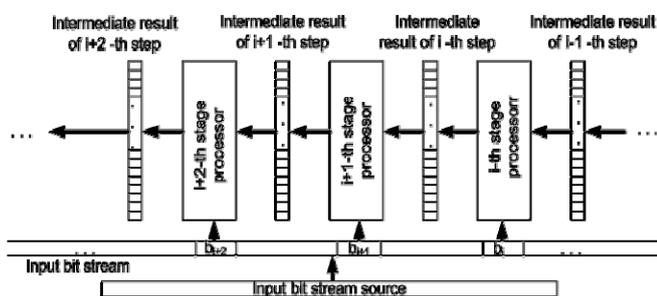
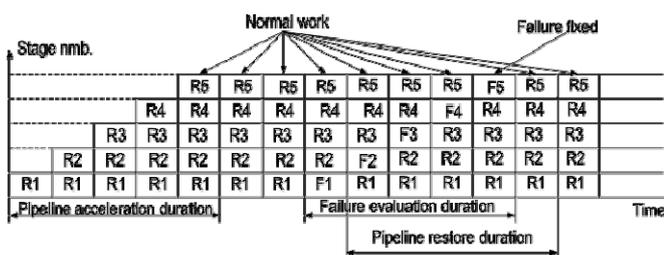


Figure 5. Pipelined algorithm realization.

Work cart of pipeline with constant input data is shown in Figure 6. This figure shows the beginning of the work process and error processing. The values of  $R1...R5$  are intermediate values, when working without failures.  $R1...R5$  values are the result of the work stages 1 to 5 in processing the error values. The last calculated value (here, it is  $R5$ ) is transmitted to test system outputs. In case of normal operation, the  $R5$  value is set by the test system output, which is compared with a reference value.



$R1, R2, R3, R4, R5$  is result of 1..5-th stages correct data evaluation  
 $F1, F2, F3, F4, F5$  is result of failure evaluation at 1..5-th stages

Figure 6. Timing diagram of the pipelined test system work.

If  $R5$  and reference values are equal, then we assume that no errors were detected in the tested system. If a system error occurs, the outputs will be set to 5 (not equal to  $P5$ ), and such value does not match reference value. At the end of the external impact, pipeline work will be restored, and the outputs of the test system will be set to  $R5$  again.

B. Test system based on pipelined CRC-generator

Cyclic redundancy check (CRC) generators are often used for the failure detection during data transmission. The following example shows CRC-based test system creation. General scheme of the reference CRC generator is shown in Figure 7.

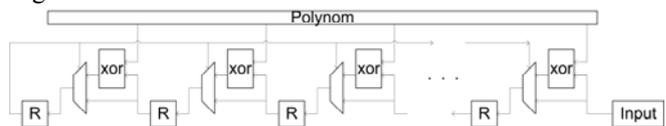


Figure 7. CRC generator scheme.

This scheme allows processing of the input data stream received from the block "input". Current value of the CRC code is stored in the register formed by storage elements  $R$ . After receiving the next bit from the input stream, the register value is shifted to the left by one position. Value in upper bit of the register determines the action, which is done at this step ("shift left" or "XOR data in register and polynomial and shift left"). The value obtained from the input stream after the calculation is written in the lowest bit of the register.

FPGA testing requires simultaneous receiving of the current input vector bits at all stages of the pipeline. Test system should provide new error detection code at each step after the end of the pipeline acceleration.

Pipeline consists of the following stages: register (the length is equal to the degree of a polynomial), and XOR logical element.

The number of bits of the input stream is equal to the number of stages in the pipeline. At each step during operation, each stage (of the test system pipeline) receives an intermediate value of the error detection code from previous stage, and then executes the current action, defined by the intermediate value and the corresponding bit of the input stream. Stage block diagram is shown in Figure 8.

Since this scheme is an advanced implementation of the CRC generator, it preserves all properties of the basic CRC generator scheme. The result of the pipeline work is the correct value of CRC for the test system outputs.

During testing, the emergence of failure will lead to a significant change in CRC. Depending on the subsequent behavior, we can make conclusions about the duration and failure type.

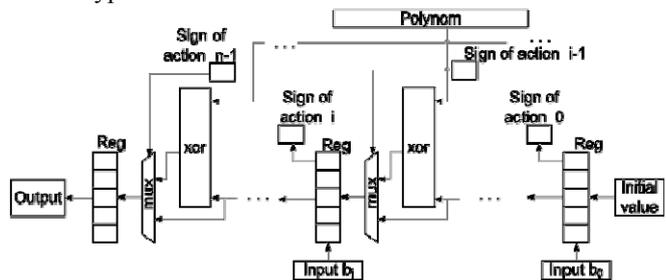


Figure 8. Pipelined CRC generator scheme.



So, at this stage, a new error detection group calculation begins and error detection bits from this error detection group were not previously used. Initial value of the error detection bit is 0.

For double failure evaluation, an overall error detection bit has been added. It checks parity of the overall error detection code and indicates (but does not correct) double failures.

The diagram of the pipeline stage (processing stage) is shown in Figure 10

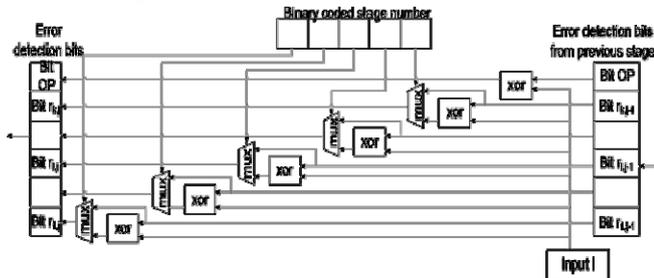


Figure 10. Pipelined Hamming code generator stage.

Stage number is a constant. DC bit is the overall parity bit for this Hamming code.

Here is an example: set the input stream 10111001. In this case, stage calculation results are the values shown in the first row of Table. If failure is caused during system test operation, the 3<sup>rd</sup> bit of input stream changes to 1. Stage calculation results are shown in the second row of Table. When the correction of the failure ends, pipeline operation will be restored. These values are shown in the third row of Table. The following example shows output value calculation.

Stage 1

It is a non-processing stage. First error detection bit has 0 value. At this stage, we do not know values of other error detection bits and suppose that they are equal to 0.

Stage 2

Similarly with the stage 1, it is a non-processing stage. Second error detection bit has value 0.

Stage 3

It is the first processing stage. Input bit value is 1. Binary coded stage number is 00011, so:

$$r_{1,3} = 0 \oplus 1 = 1$$

$$r_{2,3} = 0 \oplus 1 = 1$$

Overall parity bit is:

$$r_{OP,3} = 0 \oplus 1 = 1$$

Values of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> error detection bits were not changed.

Stage 4

It is a non-processing stage. Fourth error detection bit has value 0.

Stage 5

It is the second processing stage. Input bit value is 1. Binary coded stage number is 00101, so:

$$r_{1,5} = 1 \oplus 0 = 1$$

$$r_{2,5} = 1 = 1$$

$$r_{3,5} = 0 \oplus 0 = 0$$

$$r_{4,5} = 0 = 0$$

$$r_{OP,5} = 1 \oplus 0 = 1$$

After making similar calculations for the stages 6-12, calculations for changed input stream and for restored input stream, we can fill in Table III.

TABLE III. INTERMEDIATE VALUE OF THE ERROR DETECTION BITS AT EACH STAGES OUTPUT

Stage number	Input bits before failure	Error detection n bits before failure	Input bits after failure	Error detection n bits after failure	Input bits after restore	Error detection bits after restore
$1_{10} = (00001)_2$	-	00000	-	00000	-	00000
$2_{10} = (00010)_2$	-	00000	-	00000	-	00000
$3_{10} = (00011)_2$	1	10011	1	10011	1	10011
$4_{10} = (00100)_2$	-	10011	-	10011	-	10011
$5_{10} = (00101)_2$	0	10011	0	10011	0	10011
$6_{10} = (00110)_2$	0	10011	1	00101	0	10011
$7_{10} = (00111)_2$	1	00100	1	10010	1	00100
$8_{10} = (01000)_2$	-	00100	-	10010	-	00100
$9_{10} = (01001)_2$	1	11101	1	01011	1	11101
$10_{10} = (01010)_2$	1	00111	1	10001	1	00111
$11_{10} = (01011)_2$	0	00111	0	10001	0	00111
$12_{10} = (01100)_2$	1	11011	1	01101	1	11011

Note: overall parity bit in this table (calculated for input stream values only) does not consider error detection bits. Calculation of the error detection bit is not executed because the values at all stages (except the final one) are intermediate. The double-check bit (which is the part of error detection bits) is calculated for all bits of the actual input stream (excluding error detection bits itself). Before Hamming code decoding, it is necessary to update the overall parity bit value considering the final error detection code value. Therefore, for example, in Table III, the result values of overall parity bits are:

- Before failure - «0»
- After failure - «1»
- After restore - «0».

#### E. Result of CRC-based firmware implementation test

The source codes of the test system are written in SystemVerilog 2005 (IEEE 1800-2005) HDL language. The timing diagram for constant input stream with failure evaluation and restoring is shown in Figure 11.

Testing system consists of:

- module that implements a single stage of a testing pipeline;
- testing pipeline itself (predefined number of connected modules);
- it can also be supplemented by the nodes that implement checks of inner FPGA subsystems or realize any additional processing of input values.

#### F. Detecting a place of failure

To solve this problem, we replace the error detection code in the reference code with the Hamming code generated by the test system. After that, we calculate the error syndrome and the number of the segment where the failure occurred.

Reference Hamming code for this input stream is 0101111000111. After replacing error detection code, the result code is 101111001101. Error syndrome calculation gives the value 00110. It means that an error occurred in the 6<sup>th</sup> Hamming code bit, that corresponds to 3<sup>rd</sup> information (input stream) bit.

