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Demo: Nuberu - A Reliable DU Design Suitable for Virtualization Platforms

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ABSTRACT

We demonstrate `Nuberu` [3]. The scenario consists of a DU under test (DuT), and one or more DUs sharing computing resources. A dashboard lets us control (*i*) the type of DuT: "Baseline", implemented with a legacy full-fledged eNB, or `Nuberu`; (*ii*) the number of competing vDUs; and (*iii*) their SNR. A second screen shows real-time metrics: (*i*) the processing latency of the TBs from each vDU instance; (*ii*) the throughput performance of DuT; (*iii*) the processing latency of DU jobs from DuT; and (*iv*) the ratio of latency constraint violations of DuT jobs. We show how the throughput attained by the baseline DU approach collapses upon sufficiently high computing interference from the competing DUs. Conversely, we show that the DU design introduced in [3] preserves reliability irrespective of the computing interference.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The virtualization of radio access networks will become the spearhead of next-generation mobile systems beyond 5G [4, 7, 10]. Base stations are split into a central unit (CU), hosting the highest layers of the stack; a distributed unit (DU), hosting the physical layer (PHY); and a radio unit (RU), hosting basic radio functions such as amplification or sampling [1]. While CUs are amenable to virtualization in regional clouds, virtualized DUs (vDUs) require fast and predictable computing in edge clouds [2, 10].

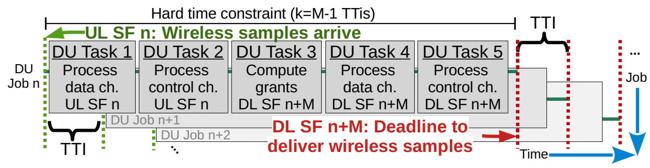

Figure 1: Every TTI (=1 ms), a worker executes a DU job, comprised of a pipeline of interdependent DU tasks to process UL SF n and DL SF $n+M$, within $M-1$ ms.

Shared computing platforms provide a harsh environment for DUs because they trade off the predictability supplied by dedicated platforms for higher flexibility and cost-efficiency. Indeed, research has shown that contention in shared computing infrastructure lead to performance degradation compared to dedicated platforms [9, 11]—the so-called *noisy neighbor* problem. This is an issue for network functions such as virtual switches or even CUs, where metrics such as tail latency are relevant. However, the requirements associated with DUs are harder: violating deadlines cause users to lose synchronization, which leads to connectivity collapse.

2 THE SCENARIO

We use frequency division duplex where uplink (UL) and downlink (DL) transmissions occur concurrently in different frequency bands, and 5G's baseline numerology ($\mu = 0$ in 3GPP TS 38.211), which yields one transmission time interval (TTI) per subframe (SF), and a SF has a duration of 1 ms.

Fig. 1 illustrates the basic operation of the baseline DU processor [5, 6, 10]. Every TTI n, a **worker** initiates a **DU job** comprised of a *pipeline* of tasks (hereafter referred to as **DU tasks**): (1) process data and (2) control channels carried by UL SF n, (3) schedule UL/DL radio *grants* to be transported by DL SF $n+M$, and (4) process data and (5) control channels for DL SF $n+M$. A worker executes a DU job in a thread, using computing resources allocated by a task scheduler; and multiple workers perform DU jobs in parallel to handle one DL SF and one UL SF every TTI, as shown in Fig. 1.

Some operations in DU tasks, such as forward error correction, are compute-intensive and hence are implemented with highly-optimized libraries such as Intel FlexRAN [8]. Fig. 2 shows the time required by FlexRAN to decode large transport blocks (TBs) with different signal-to-noise-ratios (SNR) regimes and in a dedicated CPU core. Importantly, given 3GPP specification, there is a hard constraint on M that *imposes a computing time budget of roughly* $M - 1$ *ms to process each DU job* (usually, $M = 4$). See details in [3].

3 THE PROBLEM

Violating this constraint has critical consequences on DUs. To illustrate this, we will present a scenario with one full-fledged 3GPP-compliant DU-under-test (DuT), virtualized over a Docker container over 5 Intel Xeon x86 cores @ 1.9GHz, constantly transmitting and receiving large TBs with high SNR (the worst case in terms of computing workload). Concurrently, we will emulate additional vDUs (vDU 1, vDU 2, etc.) by deploying instances of Intel FlexRAN processing TBs over the same CPU pool. We use Ubuntu's default CPU scheduler and assign the same priority to all threads.

We first use a legacy DuT ("Baseline"), implemented with vanilla srsRAN [5], with a gradually increasing number of competing DUs. As we do this, we will observe higher latency when processing jobs for all the DUs and the DuT, and the latency constraint will be violated at some point, collapsing the DUT's throughput, as depicted in yellow in Fig. 3.

4 THE SOLUTION

Nuberu [3] is a novel pipeline architecture for 4G/5G DUs that is suitable for shared computing platforms. Nuberu's design follows one objective: *to guarantee a minimum viable subframe (MVSF) for every TTI during moments of shortage in computing capacity to provide reliability and, provided this, maximize network throughput.* During such shortages, an MVSF encodes those signals and control information required to preserve user synchronization by temporarily holding off data delivery and relying on predictions.

To this end, there is a deadline within every DU job to begin building an MVSF even if data processing tasks are

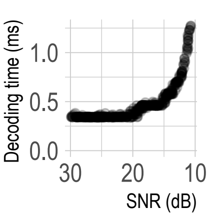

Figure 2: Decoding time of one TB in a dedicated CPU core.

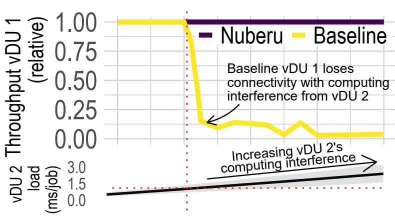

Figure 3: Two vDUs competing for computing resources. The UL/DL data load of the DuT is the highest possible while vDU 1's is variable.

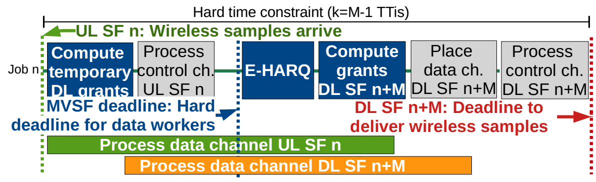

Figure 4: To provide reliability, Nuberu decouples data tasks from the rest of the pipeline by integrating a 2-stage DL scheduler, E-HARQ, and congestion control.

unfinished. This deadline, depicted in blue in Fig. 4, is set such that there is enough time to process an MVSF before the final job completion deadline (in red in the figure). To do this efficiently, data processing tasks need to be decoupled:

(1) To process DL data channel tasks:
- Nuberu adopts a two-stage DL scheduling approach:
  - *Temporary* DL grants are issued as early as possible in the pipeline, as shown in Fig. 4. Dedicated workers process (encode, modulate, etc.) these grants in threads and store the result in a buffer.
  - Upon the MVSF deadline, *final* DL data grants are computed based on those already processed (available in the buffer). Grants generated in a job n that are not processed on time are hence *delayed* for a later job.
- To mitigate the number of delayed DL data grants, the amount of DL data granted by the temporary scheduler is regulated by a *congestion controller* that adapts the flow to the availability of computing resources.

(2) To process UL data channel tasks:
- Dedicated workers process (demodulate, decode, etc.) UL data carried by each UL SF in separated threads.
- Upon the MVSF deadline, an *early HARQ* (E-HARQ) mechanism infers the *decodability* of UL data based on feedback from the workers, as shown in Fig. 4. This enables Nuberu to estimate the radio information that is required to build an MVSF even if UL data processing tasks have not finished on time.
- To maximize the performance of E-HARQ, which depends on the amount of work done before the MVSF deadline, another *congestion controller* adapts the UL data grants to the available computing capacity.

The details of Nuberu are presented in [3]. In this demonstration, we let the audience interact with the dashboard by modifying the number of instances of competing vDUs. In this way, we will demonstrate that Nuberu is resilient to computing capacity fluctuations, as shown by the purple line in Fig. 3, and hence is suitable for virtualization platforms.

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