Design of a Prototype Communication System for the CubeSTAR Nano-satellite

Master presentation
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24th Aug. 2010

The CubeSTAR Project

- Student satellite project at the University of Oslo
- Scientific motivation:
  - Demonstrate a new "Space weather" satellite
- Academic motivation:
  - Recruit students to space science and engineering
- Built by graduate and under-graduate students
The CubeSTAR Project

- Satellite systems built by students
  - Electronic Power System (EPS)
  - Attitude Determination and Control System (ADCS)
  - Communication system (COMM)
  - On-Board Data and Handling (OBDH)
  - Ground Station (GS)
- Project time frame, 2008-2012/13
- 2nd satellite in the ANSAT program
- CubeSTAR is built after the Cubesat satellite standard

The Cubesat-standard

- Pico-/Nano-satellite size
- Developed by Calpoly and Stanford University
- Designed for “piggy-backing” on commercial satellite launches
- “1U”
  - Dimensions: 10x10x10cm
  - Weight < 1.33kg
- The CubeSTAR satellite
  - “2U”
  - 10x10x20cm
Scientific Experiment

- Space weather
  - Solar storms and "North-light"
  - Impacts the satellite operation
  - Communication and navigation is affected

- Langmuir probes is used to measure electron density
  - Sweep bias probe
  - Fixed bias probe

- Multiple-Needle Langmuir Probes (m-NLP)
  - New concept developed at UiO
  - 4 fixed bias langmuir probes
  - Measure electron density
  - High spatial resolution

CubeSTAR Communication Group

COMM group is responsible for:

- Ground station
  - De-/encoding equipment
  - Radio
  - Antennas

- Space segment
  - Transceiver system
  - Antenna

- Communication protocol
  - A version of the AX25 packet protocol
Thesis Goals

- Define the requirements of the CubeSTAR communication system (space segment)
  - Functional
  - Communication
  - Regulations
  - Space environment
- Design and implement the system
- Develop firmware drivers to interface the system with the CubeSTAR communication protocol
- Discuss and identify an antenna solution for the CubeSTAR satellite

Functional Requirements

- Data link
  - Uplink, transmit commands from the ground station to the satellite
  - Downlink, transmit telemetry and housekeeping data from the satellite to the ground station
- Tracking signal
  - Beacon, transmit a tracking signal containing housekeeping data
  - Help the ground station team to locate the satellite
  - Transmit satellite status in the event that the data link cannot be established
The Global Educational Network for Satellite Operations (GENSO)

- A software standard designed to connect ground stations and satellites of educational space missions
- Allows for teams to operate amateur satellite ground stations through the internet
- Designed for the amateur and academic community
- The CubeSTAR ground station is designed after the GENSO reference ground station

Communication Scheme

- GENSO has recommended frequency bands:
  - Amateur satellite bands, greatly simplifies the application process for frequency band
  - VHF, UHF, S-band
- and radio configurations:
  - 9600bps / Gaussian Frequency Shift Keying (FSK) modulation scheme
  - 1200bps / Audio Frequency Shift Keying (AFSK) modulation scheme
  - Neither was applicable due to bandwidth and technical constraints
Radio configuration

- Frequency band
  - 434.5-438MHz
  - Amateur satellite band

- Data link
  - 4800 bps
  - Frequency Shift Keying
  - Gaussian filtering

- Beacon
  - Morse code, a common communication protocol, no decoding equipment is required
  - On-Off Keying (OOK) / Continuous Wave (CW)
  - requires less output power
  - 10-15 Words per Minute (WPM)

Inter-/National Regulations

- International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
  - Makes recommendations to regional and national regulatory bodies

- Norwegian Post and Telecommunication Agency (NPT)
  - amateur satellite frequencies
  - available bandwidth

- International Amateur Radio union (IARU)
  - responsible for coordination of amateur satellite frequencies
Space Environment

- Radiation
  - Total Ionization Dose, performance degradation caused by accumulated radiation dose
  - Singel Event Upset, software corruption caused by a high energy particle
  - Single Event Latchup, electric shortcut caused by a high energy particle

- Vacuum
  - Outgassing
  - Deformation

- Temperature
  - Operating temperature
    - $\frac{\pm 40 \, ^{\circ} C}{30 \, ^{\circ} C} \leq T \leq 40 \, ^{\circ} C \rightarrow 85 \, ^{\circ} C$

Link Budget

- Used to evaluate a wireless communication link given parameters like:
  - Transmitted power
  - Frequency
  - Bandwidth
  - Path loss
  - Modulation

- A budget for gain and attenuation of a radio signal
- Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SNR)
- Bit Error Rate (BER)
- Link margin, an error margin to account for unexpected attenuation in the link

\[
\frac{S}{N} [dB] = \left( \frac{P_t + G_t - L_{Path} - L_{ant} + G_r}{\text{Signal}} \right) - \left( k_{\text{Boltzmann}} + T_{\text{Noise}} + \text{Bandwidth} \right)
\]

\[
\frac{S}{N} - \frac{S}{N_{req}} = \text{Link margin} \geq 10 - 12 dB
\]
System Design

The CubeSTAR communication system

Transceiver Chip

- TI CC1101 Sub-1GHz transceiver chip
- Frequency band: 387-464MHz
- Modulation schemes
  - Frequency Shift Keying (FSK)
  - On-Off Keying (OOK)
  - Minimum Shift Keying (MSK)
- Operational mode
  - Serial mode
  - Packet handling mode

TI CC1101 transceiver chip
PCB

- Top signal layer
- Ground
- Power
- Bottom signal layer

RF Design Methods

- Optimal power transfer
- Characteristic impedance, 
  - (50 +/- j0) ohm
- 2-port network
- Shielding to protect RF circuit from external EMI and reduce EMI emissions
Hardware Abstraction Layer (HAL)

- HAL package is a library of system drivers for the communication system.
- Used by the protocol layer to interface with the hardware
- Interface
  - Send_packet(type, buffer, nr_bytes)
  - New_command
  - Command_buffer

The HAL architecture

Antenna Considerations

- Omni-directional vs directional
- Polarization
- Simple mechanical design
- Small size
- 2 alternatives
  - Dipole antenna
  - Turnstile antenna

Radiation pattern of a dipole and a isotropic antenna

Linear, circular and elliptical polarized waves

Radiation pattern of a Yagi antenna
Antenna - two alternatives

ISIS Turnstile Antenna
- Configurable
  ● 2 dipol
  ● Turnstile
- Tested
- Acquired

UIO produced antenna
- Configurable
  ● 2 dipol
  ● Turnstile
- Gain knowledge of antenna design
- Produce papers

Test of Downlink and Beacon

CubeSTAR transceiver
Control and debug equipment
MixW Software TNC
Ground station radio
Remaining work

- **Firmware development**
  - The data link must be able to handle packets longer than 64 byte
  - Develop an I2C driver for the internal CubeSTAR bus
  - Integrate the HAL driver into the protocol layer

- **Testing**
  - RF testing using network and spectrum analyser
  - EMC testing and antenna integration using an anechoic chamber (is external bandpass filter needed?)
Recommendations

- Consider the current modulation scheme against other modulation schemes with a higher spectral efficiency (bps/Hz)
- Operational redundancy, to increase the chance of mission success
  - An extra transceiver system for redundancy
  - Mitigate antenna problems and electrical malfunction
- Adaptive radio
  - Range between satellite and ground station may vary between from 600km to 1900km
  - Current link budget assumes max distance 1900 km
  - The transmitter output power may be reduced as the distance between satellite and ground station closes and conserve power
  - Important to maintain a constant S/N

Conclusion

- Identified the key requirements for a CubeSTAR communication system
- Analysed the link through a link budget and verified that the link closes
- Designed and implemented a prototype system
- Transmitted an AX25 data packet from the communication system to the ground station
- Transmitted a beacon from the communication system
- Remaining work:
  - Consider using a more spectral efficient modulation scheme to increase the data throughput
  - Verify through testing that the system upholds the current EMC regulations and if not modify the design
  - Integrate the HAL driver into the protocol layer
Questions?