

## Research Article

# HIFSuite: Tools for HDL Code Conversion and Manipulation

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HIFSuite is a set of tools and application programming interfaces (APIs) that provide support for modeling and verification of HW/SW systems. The core of HIFSuite is the HDL Intermediate Format (HIF) language upon which a set of front-end and back-end tools have been developed to allow the conversion of HDL code into HIF code and vice versa. HIFSuite allows designers to manipulate and integrate heterogeneous components implemented by using different hardware description languages (HDLs). Moreover, HIFSuite includes tools, which rely on HIF APIs, for manipulating HIF descriptions in order to support code abstraction/refinement and postrefinement verification.

## 1. Introduction

The rapid development of modern embedded systems requires the use of flexible tools that allow designers and verification engineers to efficiently and automatically manipulate HDL descriptions throughout the design and verification steps.

From the modeling point of view, nowadays, it is common practice to define new systems by reusing previously developed components, that can be possibly modeled at different abstraction levels such as transaction-level modeling (TLM) and register-transfer level (RTL) by means of different hardware description languages like VHDL, SystemC, Verilog, and so forth. Such an heterogeneity requires to either use cosimulation and coverification techniques [1], or to convert different HDL pieces of code into an homogeneous description [2]. However, cosimulation techniques slow down the overall simulation, while manual conversion from an HDL representation to another, as well as manual abstraction/refinement from an abstraction level to another, is not valuable solutions, since they are error-prone and time consuming tasks. Thus, both cosimulation and manual refinement reduce the advantages provided by the adoption of a reuse-based design methodology.

To avoid such disadvantages, this paper presents HIFSuite, a closely integrated set of tools and APIs for reusing already developed components and verifying their integration into new designs. Relying on the HIF language, HIFSuite allows system designers to convert HW/SW design descriptions from an HDL to a different HDL and to manipulate them in a uniform and efficient way. In addition, from the verification point of view, HIFSuite is intended to provide a single framework that efficiently supports many fundamental activities like transactor-based verification [3, 4], mutation analysis[5], automatic test pattern generation, and so forth. Such activities generally require that designers and verification engineers define new components (e.g., transactors), or modify the design to introduce saboteurs [6], or represent the design by using mathematical models like extended finite state machines (EFSMs) [7]. To the best of our knowledge, there are no tools in the literature that integrate all the previous features in a single framework. HIFSuite is intended to fill in the gap.

The paper is organized as follows. Related work is described in Section 2. An overview of the main features of HIFSuite is presented in Section 3, while the HIF core-language is described in Section 4. The HIF-based conversion tools are presented in Section 5 while manipulation tools

for modeling and verification are summarized in Section 6. Section 7 reports some experimental results. Finally, remarks concluding the paper are discussed in Section 8.

## 2. Related Work

The issue of automatic translation and manipulation of HDL code has been addressed by different works.

VH2SC [8] is a translator utility from VHDL 87/93 to SystemC. It is not able to handle large designs and presents some known bugs. It is no more maintained and the author himself suggests that it is not suited for industrial designs.

Another tool to automatically convert VHDL into SystemC is VHDL-to-SystemC-Converter [9]. However, it is limited only RTL synthesizable constructs.

Some approaches provide the capability of converting HDL code into C++ to increase simulation performances. A methodology to translate synthesizable Verilog into C++ has been implemented in the VTOC [10] tool. The methodology is based on synthesis-like transformations, which is able to statically resolve almost all scheduling problems. Thus, the design simulation switches from an event-driven to a cycle-based-like algorithm.

VHDL2C [11] is a VHDL to C++ translator, which aims at fully VHDL'93 compliance. The project is at alpha stage, and thus, it is currently not suited for industrial applications.

The DVM [12] tool translates VHDL testbenches into C++. Testbenches are encompassed into a small simulable kernel which runs interconnected with the board. Running native C++ code avoids the overhead introduced by using an HDL simulator. Such a tool is restricted to only VHDL testbenches.

Verilator [13] is a Verilog simulator. It supports Verilog synthesizable and some PSL SystemVerilog and Synthesis assertions. To optimize the simulation, Verilator translates the design into an optimized C++ code, wrapped by a SystemC module. To achieve better performances, Verilator performs semantics manipulations which are not standard Verilog compliant. Thus, Verilator is meant to be used just as a simulator.

FreeHDL [14] is a simulator for VHDL, designed to run under Linux. The aim of the project is to create a simulator usable also with industrial designs. To improve performances, FreeHDL uses an internal tool, namely, FreeHDL-v2cc, which translates the original VHDL design into C++ code. Thus, FreeHDL presents limitations similar to Verilator.

All previous approaches are not based on an intermediate format, and they target only a point-to-point translation from one HDL to another HDL or C++. Thus, manipulation on the code before the translation is not supported. On the contrary, some works have been proposed which use an intermediate format to allow manipulation of the target code for simplifying design manipulation and verification. In this context, AIRE/CE [15], previously known as IIR, is an Object-Oriented intermediate format. A front-end parser, namely SAVANT, is available to translate VHDL designs into such a language. By using AIRE/CE APIs it is possible

to develop verification and manipulation tools for VHDL designs. In our previous work [16], we extend SAVANT to allow the translation of VHDL designs into SystemC. Unfortunately, the AIRE/CE language is strictly tailored for VHDL code, and thus, we experimented that it is not easy to extend the SAVANT environment for supporting other HDLs and particularly SystemC TLM.

To the best of our knowledge there is not a single comprehensive environment which integrates conversion capabilities from different HDLs at different abstraction levels and a powerful API to allow the development of manipulation tool required during the refinement and verification steps of a design.

The proposed HIF language has been designed to overcome limits and restrictions of previous works. In particular, HIF and the corresponding HIFSuite have been developed to address the following aspects:

- (1) supporting translation of several HDLs at both RTL and TLM level,
- (2) providing an object-oriented set of APIs for fast and easy implementation of manipulation and verification tools.

## 3. HIFSuite Overview

Figure 1 shows an overview of the HIFSuite features and components. The majority of HIFSuite components have been developed in the context of three European Projects (SYMBAD, VERTIGO, and COCONUT). HIFSuite is composed of the following

- (i) An *HIF core-language*: It is a set of HIF objects corresponding to traditional HDL constructs like, for example, processes, variable/signal declarations, sequential and concurrent statements, and so forth (see Section 4).
- (ii) Second is a set of front/back-end conversion tools (see Section 5).
  - (a) *HDL2HIF*. It is front-end tools that parse VHDL, Verilog and SystemC (RTL and TLM) descriptions and generate the corresponding HIF representations.
  - (b) *HIF2HDL*. It is back-end tools that convert HIF models into VHDL, Verilog or SystemC (RTL and TLM) code.
- (iii) Third is a set of APIs that allow designers to develop HIF-based tools to explore, manipulate, and extract information from HIF descriptions (see Section 4.3). The HIF code manipulated by such APIs can be converted back to the target HDLs by means of *HIF2HDL*.
- (iv) Fourth is a set of tools developed upon the HIF APIs that manipulate HIF code to support modeling and verification of HW/SW systems, such as the following.

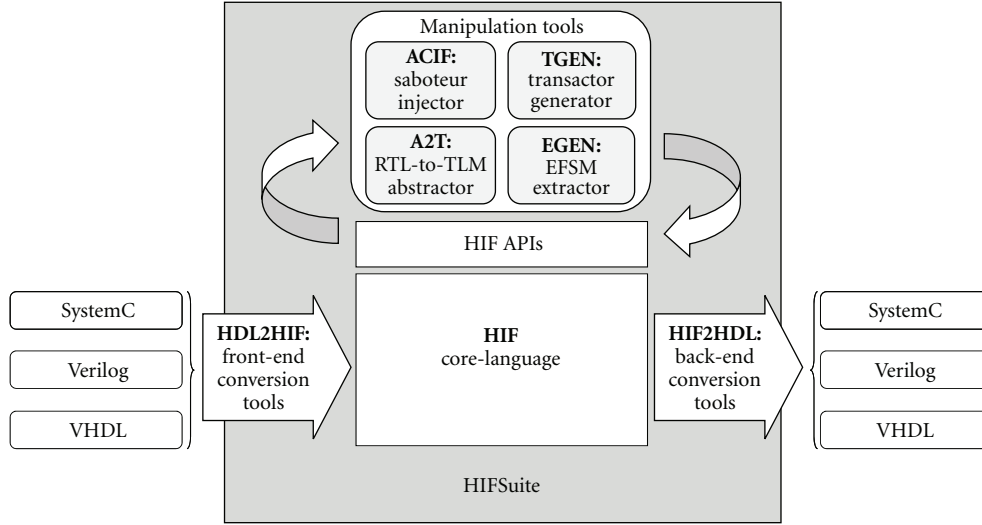


FIGURE 1: HIFSuite overview.

- (a) *EGEN*: it is a tool developed upon the HIF APIs that extracts an abstract model from HIF code (Section 6.1). Such a tool, namely, *EGEN*, automatically extracts EFSM models from HIF descriptions. EFSMs represent a compact way for modeling complex systems like, for example, communication protocols [17], buses [18], and controllers driving data-paths [19, 20]. Moreover, they represent an effective alternative to the traditional finite state machines (FSMs) for limiting the state explosion problem during test pattern generation [21].
- (b) *ACIF*: it is a tool that automatically injects saboteurs into HIF descriptions (Section 6.2). Saboteur injection is important to evaluate dependability of computer systems [22]. In particular, it is a key ingredient for verification tools that relies on fault models like, for example, automatic test pattern generators (ATPGs) [23], tools that measure the property coverage [24] or evaluate the quality of testbenches through mutation analysis [25], and so forth.
- (c) *TGEN*: it is a tool that automatically generates transactors (Section 6.3). Verification methodologies based on transactors allow an advantageous reuse of testbenches, properties, and IP-cores in TLM-RTL-mixed designs, thus guaranteeing a considerable saving of time [26]. Moreover, transactors are widely adopted for the refinement (and the subsequent verification) of TLM descriptions towards RTL components [27].
- (d) *A2T*: it is a tool that automatically abstracts RTL IPs into TLM models. Even if transactors allow designers to efficiently reuse RTL IPs at transaction level, mixed TLM-RTL designs

cannot always completely benefit of the effectiveness provided by TLM. In particular, the main drawback of IP reuse via transactor is that the RTL IP acts as a bottleneck of the mixed TLM-RTL design, thus slowing down the simulation of the whole system. Therefore, by using *A2T*, the RTL IPs can be automatically abstracted at the same transaction level of the other modules composing the TLM design, to preserve the simulation speed typical of TLM without incurring in tedious and error-prone manual abstraction [28, 29].

The main features of HIF core-language and HIF-based tools are summarized in next sections.

#### 4. HIF Core-Language and APIs

HIF is an HW/SW description language structured as a tree of objects, similarly to XML. Each object describes a specific functionality or component that is typically provided by HDL languages like VHDL, Verilog, and SystemC. However, even if HIF is quite intuitive to be read and manually written, it is not intended to be used for manually describing HW/SW systems. Rather, it is intended to provide designers with a convenient way for automatically manipulating HW/SW descriptions.

The requirements for HIF are manifold as it has to represent the following

- (i) system-level and TLM descriptions with abstract communication between system components,
- (ii) behavioral (algorithmic) hardware descriptions,
- (iii) RTL hardware descriptions,
- (iv) hardware structure descriptions,
- (v) software algorithms.

To meet these requirements, HIF includes several concepts that are inspired by different languages. Concerning RTL and behavioral hardware descriptions, HIF is very much inspired to VHDL. On the other hand, some constructs have been taken from C/C++ programming language for the representations of algorithms (e.g., pointers and templates). The combination of these different features makes HIF a powerful language for HW/SW system representations.

**4.1. HIF Basic Elements.** HIF is a description language structured as a tree of elements, similarly to XML (see Figure 2). It is very much like a classical programming language, that is, a typed language which allows the definition of new types, and includes operations like assignments, loops, conditional executions, and so forth. In addition, since HIF is intended to represent hardware descriptions, it also includes typical low-level HDL constructs (e.g., bit slices). Finally, concerning the possibility of structuring a design description, HIF allows the definition of components and subprograms.

To look at similarities between HIF and traditional HDLs, let us consider Figure 2. In Figure 2(a), a two-input parameterized adder/subtractor VHDL design is shown, while the corresponding HIF representation generated by the front-end tool *HDL2HIF* (see Section 5) is depicted in Figure 2(b).

As a special feature, HIF gives the possibility to add supplementary information to language constructs in form of so-called *properties*. A list of properties can be associated to almost every syntactic constructs of the HIF language. Properties allow designers to express information for which no syntactic constructs are included in the HIF grammar, and therefore they give a great flexibility to the HIF language. For example, the fact that a signal has to be considered as a clock signal can be expressed by adding a property `signal_type` to the signal declaration as follows:

```
(SIGNAL s(BIT) (PROPERTY signal_type
clock)).
```

**4.2. System Description by Using HIF.** The top-level element of a system represented by an HIF description is the `SYSTEM` construct (see Figure 2(b)). It may contain the definition of one or more *libraries* which define new data types, constants and subprograms, and the description of *design units*. An HIF description may also contain a list of *protocols*, which describe communication mechanisms between design units.

Design units are modeled by `DESIGNUNIT` objects, which define the actual components of the system. A design unit may use types, constants and subprograms defined in libraries included in the `SYSTEM` construct.

The same design unit can be modeled in different ways inside the same system by using *views*. For example, we can model different views of the same design unit at different abstraction levels. Thus, a `VIEW` object is a concrete description of a system component. It includes the definition of an `INTERFACE` by which the component communicates with the other parts of the system. Moreover, a view may include libraries and local declarations. The

internal structure of a view is described in details by means of the `CONTENTS` construct. To make a comparison with VHDL, a *view* can be seen as a generalization of VHDL *entity* and *architecture*.

An `INTERFACE` object gives the link between a design unit and the rest of the system. An *interface* can contain ports, and parameters.

A `CONTENTS` object can contain a list of local declarations, a list of state tables, which describe sequential processes, and a list of component instances and nets which connect such instances. Furthermore, a `CONTENTS` object can contain a set of *concurrent actions* (called `GLOBALACTIONs`), that is, assignments and procedure calls which assign values to a set of signals in a continuous manner.

**4.2.1. Sequential Processes.** In HIF, behaviors described by sequences of statements (i.e., processes) are expressed by *state tables*. A `STATETABLE` object defines a process, whose main control structure is an EFSM (see Section 6.1), and the related sensitivity list. The state tables can describe synchronous as well as combinational processes. The entry state of the state machine can be explicitly specified. Otherwise, the first state in the state list is considered as an entry state.

`STATE` objects included in the state table are identified by a unique name and they are associated to a list of instructions called *actions* (i.e., assignments, conditional statements, etc.) to be sequentially executed when the HIF model is converted into an HDL description for simulation.

**4.2.2. Components Instances.** Descriptions where one or more components are instantiated and connected each other are modeled by using the `INSTANCE` and the `NET` constructs. An `INSTANCE` object describes an instance of a design unit. More precisely, an `INSTANCE` object refers to a specific view of the instantiated design unit.

A `NET` object contains a list of port references. Nets are used to express connectivity between interface elements of different design unit instances (i.e., system components).

**4.2.3. Concurrent Actions.** They correspond to concurrent assignments and concurrent procedure calls of VHDL, and they are modeled by `GLOBALACTION` objects. Concurrent assignments are used to assign a new value to the target (which must be a signal or a port) each time the value of the assignment source changes. Similarly, concurrent procedure calls are used to assign a new value to signals mapped to the output parameters each time one of the input parameters changes its value.

**4.2.4. Support for TLM Constructs.** TLM is becoming a usual practice for simplifying system-level design and architecture exploration. It allows the designers to focus on the design functionality while abstracting away implementation details that will be added at lower abstraction levels. The HIF language supports the SystemC TLM constructs provided by OSCI [30], which mainly rely on C++ constructs such as *pointers* and *templates*. Figure 3 shows a typical TLM interface with socket channels for blocking and nonblocking

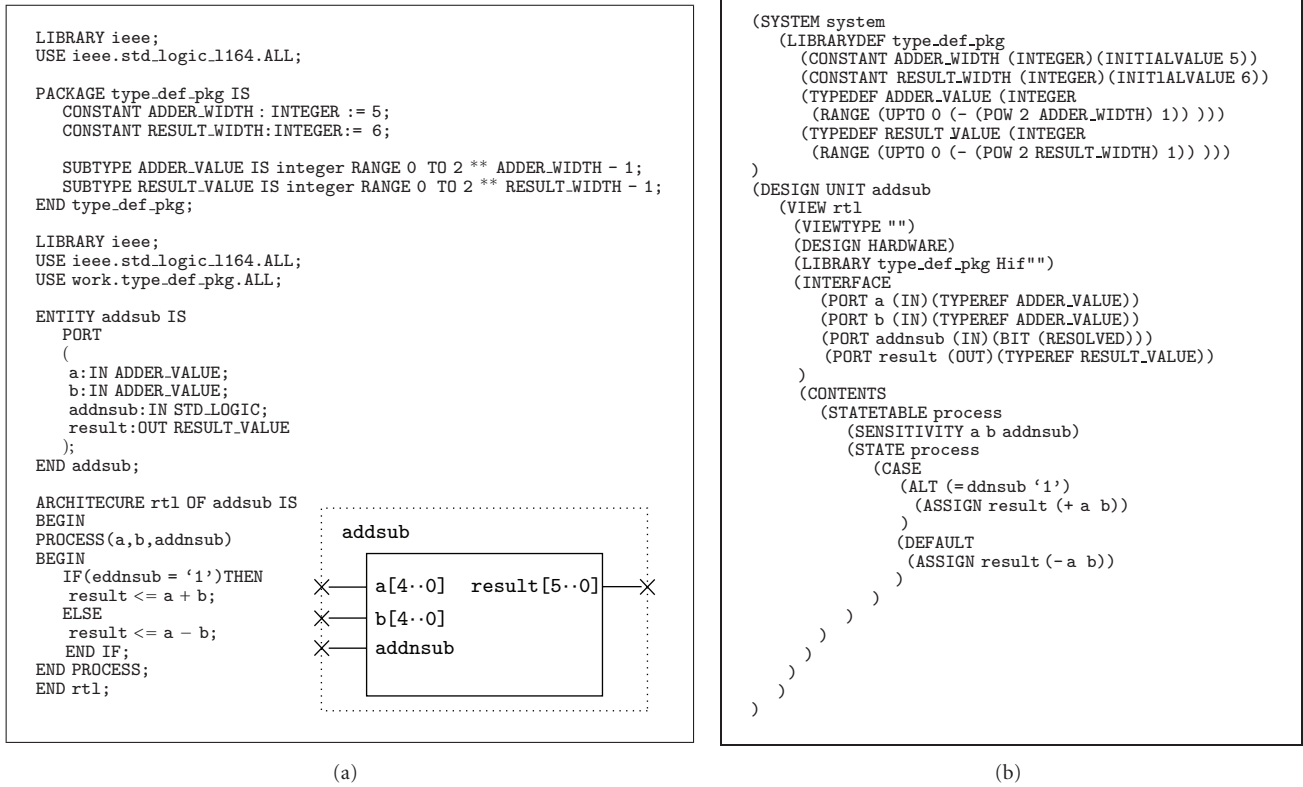


FIGURE 2: (a) A VHDL design description. (b) The textual format of the corresponding HIF representation.

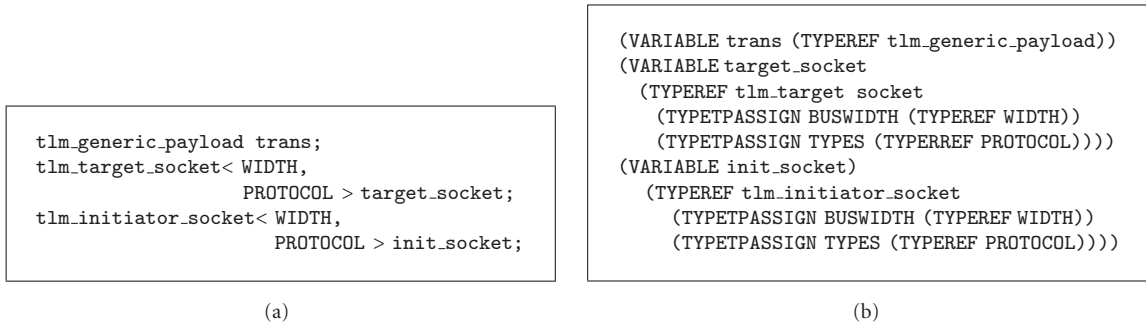


FIGURE 3: (a) Example of TLM interface with socket channels for blocking and nonblocking calls in SystemC. (b) The corresponding HIF representation.

calls in SystemC and the corresponding HIF representation. The SystemC interface definition exploits nested C++ templates, which are preserved in the HIF description. The HIF language provides two keywords to support templates: TYPETP and TYPETPASSIGN. TYPETP is used for declaration of objects of template type. Instead TYPETPASSIGN is used for instantiation of template object as shown in Figure 3(b). In HIF, the declaration of pointers is represented by using the POINTER object as follows:

(POINTER type property).

4.3. HIF Application Programming Interfaces. HIFSuite provides the HIF language with a set of powerful C++ APIs

which allow to explore, manipulate, and extract information from HIF descriptions. There are two different subsets in HIF APIs: the *HIF core-language APIs* and the *HIF manipulation APIs*.

4.3.1. HIF Core-Language APIs. Each HIF construct is mapped to a C++ class that describes specific properties and attributes of the corresponding HDL construct. Each class is provided with a set of methods for getting or setting such properties and attributes.

For example, each assignment in Figure 2(b) is mapped to an AssignObject which is derived from ActionObject (see Figure 4). This class describes the assignment of

an expression to a variable, a register, a signal, a parameter, or a port, and it has two member fields corresponding to the left-hand side (target) and the right-hand side (source) of the assignment.

The UML class diagram in Figure 4 presents a share of the HIF core-language APIs class diagram. Object is the root of the HIF class hierarchy. Every class in the HIF core-language APIs has Object as its ultimate parent.

**4.3.2. HIF Manipulation APIs.** The HIF manipulation APIs are used to manipulate the objects in HIF trees and they are exploited by the tools described in Section 6.

The first step of any HIF manipulation consists of reading the HIF description by the following function:

```
Object* Hif::File::ASCII::read
(const char* filename).
```

This function loads the file and builds the corresponding tree data structure in memory. An analogous writing function allows to dump the modified HIF tree on a file.

```
char Hif::File::ASCII::write
(const char* filename, Object* obj).
```

Once the HIF file is loaded in memory, many APIs are available to navigate the HIF description. The most important are the following.

- (i) *Search Function.* The search function finds the objects that match a criteria specified by the user. It searches the target objects starting from a given object until it reaches the bottom (or the max depth) of the HIF tree. For example, the search function can be used to find out all variables that match the name `state` starting from `base_object`, as in Algorithm 1.
- (ii) *Visitor Design Pattern.* In object-oriented programming and software engineering, the visitor design pattern is generally adopted as a way for separating an algorithm from an object structure. A practical result of this separation is the ability to add new operations to existing object structures without modifying these structures. The visitor design pattern is very useful when there is a tree-based hierarchy of objects and it is necessary to allow an easy implementation of new features to manipulate such a tree. The HIF APIs provide visitor techniques in two forms: as an interface which must be extended to provide visitor operators, and as an `apply()` function. In the first case, a virtual method is inserted inside the HIF object hierarchy, which simply calls a specific-implemented visiting method on the object passed as parameter. The passed object is called *visitor* and it is a pure interface. The programmer has to implement such a visitor to visit and manage the HIF tree, by defining the desired visiting methods. In contrast, the `apply()` function is useful to perform a user-defined function on all the objects contained in a subtree of a HIF description. The signature for the `apply` function is the following:

```
void Hif::apply (Object *o, char(*f)
(Object *,void *),void *data).
```

- (iii) *Compare Function.* It provides designers with a way to compare two HIF objects and the corresponding subtrees. Its signature is the following:

```
static char compare (Object *obj1,
Object *obj2)
```

- (iv) *Object Replacement Function.* It provides designers with a way for replacing an object and its subtree with a different object. Its signature is the following:

```
int Hif::replace(Object* from, Object*
to)
```

**4.4. HIF Semantics.** Handling different HDLs that have different semantics by using a single intermediate language rises the importance of defining carefully a semantics for such intermediate language. In particular, the definition of a sound semantics is necessary for guaranteeing the correctness of the conversion and manipulation tools.

We define a semantics for HIF that aims at supporting the representation of RTL designs for the main important and used HDLs (i.e., VHDL, Verilog, and SystemC) and the representation of TLM designs.

The main differences among VHDL, Verilog, and SystemC semantics that make hard the automatic conversion of designs between them can be summarized as follows.

- (i) *Data Types.* Not all the languages have the same type management. Thus, the conversion between different languages requires to make explicit (or to remove) some cast or calls to type conversion functions.
- (ii) *Concurrent Assignments.* The concurrent assignments of VHDL and Verilog do not have a direct mapping into a SystemC construct. They can be modeled in SystemC by converting each concurrent assignment into a concurrent process sensitive to the read signals and ports.
- (iii) *Operators.* The HDLs have different operators and different types on which such operators are defined. For example, VHDL uses the same operator symbol for both logic and bitwise operators while Verilog and SystemC have different symbols for them.
- (iv) *TLM Constructs.* SystemC allows TLM descriptions by using templates and pointers, while VHDL and Verilog support only RTL descriptions.
- (v) *Variable Declaration and Scoping.* The behavior of variables and their scoping rules are different among HDLs. For example, in VHDL variables declared inside a process will retain the last assigned value between two subsequent process executions. In SystemC, a variable declared inside a process such as `SC_METHOD` will get the initial value at each new process invocation. To map the VHDL variable semantics into the SystemC context, the variable declaration should be moved outside the process and inside the module interface.

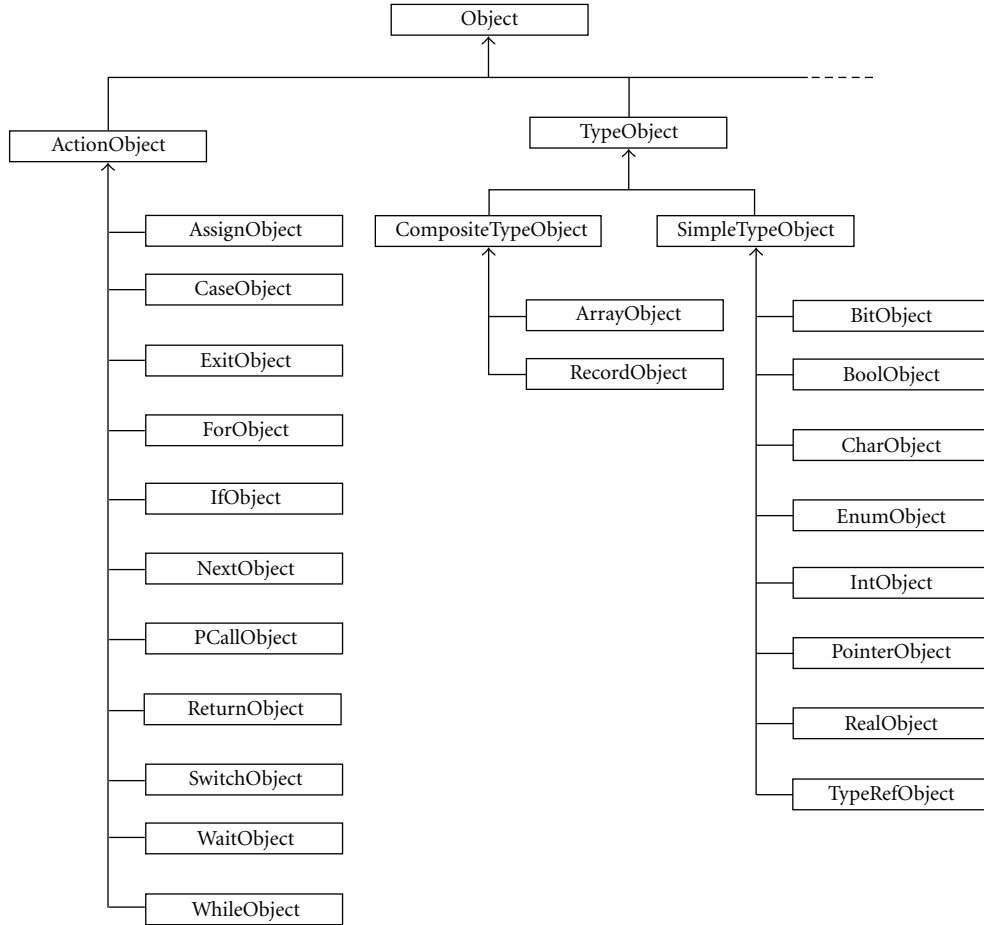


FIGURE 4: A share of the HIF core language class diagram.

```

Hif :: hif_query query;
query.set_object_type(NameNode);           //search for NameNode
query.set_name("state");                   //search for string "state"
std :: list<Node*>* found_object = Hif :: search(base_object, query);
    
```

ALGORITHM 1: Example of search function usage.

(vi) *Statements*. Some programming techniques and statements cannot be directly mapped into another HDL. As an example, the SystemC pre- and postincrement operators are not valid in VHDL.

In this context, we analyzed different semantics to be adopted for defining the HIF language.

- (i) *RTL HDL Specific Semantics*. The semantics of an already existing RTL HDL (i.e., the VHDL or Verilog semantics) would be already well defined and well known. Nevertheless, this choice would be a restrictive solution since such languages do not apply to TLM descriptions.
- (ii) *SystemC Semantics*. It would apply for both RTL and TLM designs. Nevertheless, SystemC is a C++ library and, hence, its semantics corresponds to

the C++ semantics. It is not the best solution for implementing the back-end tools, as they would reduce the set of HIF constructs into the smaller set of HDL RTL constructs.

- (iii) *Union Semantics*. It is the semantics obtained from the union of VHDL, Verilog and SystemC semantics. This solution would allow both TLM and RTL designs, and it also would simplify the translation from an HDL to HIF. On the other hand, it would require a greater effort for translating HIF descriptions to HDL descriptions, as not all constructs have an immediate mapping in every language.
- (iv) *Intersection Semantics*. It is obtained from the intersection of the Verilog, VHDL and SystemC semantics. It would simplify the translation from HIF to

an HDL, as only constructs shared by all the HDLs would belong to HIF. Nevertheless, this choice would be too restrictive since only few RTL designs and no TLM description would be supported.

- (v) *Dynamic Semantics*. In this case HIF would not have a predefined semantics. Instead, each HIF description would keep track of the source HDL, thus importing also the semantics of such HDL. This choice simplifies the translation from an HDL to HIF, but it implies a great effort in developing the back-end tools. Moreover, the HIF descriptions would be too complex for the manipulation tools since each tool should have a different behavior according to the design specific semantics.

For all these reasons, we have chosen to define the HIF semantics as the VHDL semantics enriched to support TLM constructs. The main advantages of such semantics are the following.

- (1) The intermediate language is strongly typed (like VHDL).
- (2) There is a simple RTL-to-RTL compatibility between different HDLs. The fact that VHDL is strongly typed makes easier to map its semantics into other HDL semantics.
- (3) It supports TLM.

## 5. Conversion Tools

In this section we report the main characteristics of the conversion tools, by starting from an overview of the tool structures and, then, by showing the translation semantics such tools rely on.

*5.1. The Front-End and Back-End Conversion Tools.* The conversion tools are organized into front-end (*HDL2HIF*) and back-end (*HIF2HDL*) tool sets.

*5.1.1. HDL2HIF.* They convert HDL implementations into HIF. *HDL2HIF* supports conversions from VHDL, Verilog, and SystemC, which are implemented in the submodules *VHDL2HIF*, *VERILOG2HIF*, and *SC2HIF*, respectively.

The *VHDL2HIF* and *VERILOG2HIF* tools have a common structure, which is composed of the following modules.

- (a) First is a pre-parsing module, which performs basic configuration operations and parameter parsing, and which selects the output format (readable plain text or binary).
- (b) Second is a parser based on GNU *Bison* [31], which directly creates an HIF-objects tree. The conversion process is based on a recursive algorithm that exploits a pre-ordered visit strategy on the syntax tree nodes.
- (c) Third is a postconversion visitor, which refines the generated HIF tree according to the input language.
- (d) Fourth is a final routine, which dumps the HIF tree on a file.

The *SC2HIF* tool has the structure composed of the following modules:

- (a) a preparising module, which performs basic configuration operations and parameter parsing, and which selects the output format (readable plain text or binary);
- (b) a parser based on GNU *Bison*, which creates an abstract syntax tree (AST) of the input code; such an AST is composed of XML objects with dedicated tags;
- (c) a core module, which converts the AST into an HIF-object tree; The conversion process is based on a recursive algorithm that exploits a preordered visit strategy on the tree nodes;
- (d) a postconversion visitor, which refines the generated HIF tree;
- (e) a final routine, which dumps the HIF tree on a file.

An intermediate XML tree has been preferred for translating SystemC descriptions to HIF as the SystemC language is much more complex than other HDLs. The translation requires different checks in order to perform a correct mapping. This intermediate operation has been performed by using KaSCPar [32], an open source tool which has been improved to support TLM.

*5.1.2. HIF2HDL.* They convert HIF code back to VHDL (*HIF2VHDL*), Verilog (*HIF2VERILOG*) or SystemC (*HIF2SC*). The structure of *HIF2HDL* tools includes the following modules.

- (a) First is a preparising module, which sets up the conversion environment, performs basic configuration operations, parses the parameters, and sets the output language.
- (b) Second is a set of refinement visitors, which perform operations to allow an easier translation of HIF trees, according to the output language. For instance, in VHDL it is possible to specify the bit value 1 by writing '1'. On the other hand, in SystemC, '1' is interpreted as a character and, thus, a cast to the *sc\_logic* type is required. To solve this problem, a visitor has been implemented to wrap the constant object '1' with an *sc\_logic* cast object into the HIF tree.
- (c) Third is a module that dumps a partial conversion of the HIF code into temporary files. Such a module has been implemented to solve problems of consistency between the order adopted to visit the HIF AST and the order needed to print out the code in the target language. To avoid many complex checks, the tools firstly dump the output code directly in temporary files and then they merge the content of temporary files together in the correct order.
- (d) Fourth is a postvisit module, which merges together the temporary files and creates the final output.



In the following subsections, we show how the implementation of most meaningful and critical HDL statements is matched among VHDL, Verilog, and SystemC, and how they are represented in HIF. The HIFSuite conversion tools rely on these matching for converting designs among different HDL languages.

**5.2. HDL Types.** Table 1 depicts the matching of the most important HDL types. In this work, we consider all the VHDL types implemented into the VHDL IEEE libraries as native VHDL types (e.g., the VHDL `std_logic_vector` and `std_logic` which are defined inside the library `std_logic_1164` are considered native types).

In Table 1, the mapping of the Verilog types is not fully specified. In fact, it is possible to know the correct mapping into a `reg` or into a `wire` only during the conversion phase, by checking if the corresponding identifier is used as a signal or as a memory element.

Another issue about Verilog is that both *resolved* and *unresolved* logic types are mapped into the same Verilog constructs. This is forced by the fact that Verilog has only *resolved* types.

For the INTEGER type, it is worth to note that, in HIF, it is possible to specify a RANGE of values, the number of bits on which is represented, whether it is *signed* or *unsigned*, and whether the range is *upto* or *downto* (e.g., in VHDL a `natural` has a different range from SystemC `unsigned`).

**5.3. HDL Cast and Type Conversion Functions.** Every HDL language has three possible type conversion methods.

- (i) *Implicit Cast.* The language allows to convert a general type into another. The translation is thus automatically performed by the compiler. As an example, in SystemC it is possible to implicitly cast a `char` to an `int`.
- (ii) *Explicit Cast.* The language supports the type translation, even if it requires the designer to use a special language construct (i.e., a *cast*).
- (iii) *Conversion Function.* The language does not support the type conversion and, thus, a manual conversion is required. To simplify the designer's task, many predefined conversion functions are usually supplied by supporting libraries (e.g., the VHDL IEEE library).

Since the HIF semantics is an extension of the VHDL semantics, the HIF type conversion rules are inherited from VHDL. As a consequence, since the implicit casts are not allowed in VHDL, they are not allowed neither in HIF. On the other hand, the explicit cast is represented by the `CAST` object, while the conversion functions are mapped into `CONV` objects. The set of conversion functions include all the conversion functions implemented into the VHDL IEEE library.

Tables 2 and 3 report the matching of some cast and conversion functions, when they are implemented in VHDL, Verilog, and SystemC and how they are represented in HIF. We assume the following.

- (i) `I` is the generic expression on which the cast or conversion is performed.
- (ii) `t_RANGE` is a range as intended into the HIF syntax.
- (iii) `size` is the size in bits needed to represent the values in `t_RANGE`.

In Verilog there are only two casting directives (`$signed()` and `$unsigned()`), since it is a loosely typed language. Thus, it requires only conversion tasks from signed to unsigned types and vice versa.

**5.4. HDL Operators.** The HIF language has a VHDL-like set of native operators with the exception that, in HIF, the difference between logic and bitwise operators is preserved. In addition, HIF has some operators that have not translation into VHDL or Verilog, as they are related to TLM designs (e.g., the pointer dereferencing operator, which is available only in SystemC).

Table 4 reports the matching among several operators. The shift operator is a meaningful example of operator conversion. The shift operator of Verilog is *arithmetic* if the operand is signed; otherwise it is logic. In contrast, the right shift semantics of C++ is platform dependent, since the *logic* or *arithmetic* shift is not specified by the standard. Thus, the mapping from SystemC to HIF is a platform-dependent code, and the equivalence cannot be guaranteed when converting HIF designs to SystemC. For this reasons, in this case, warnings are raised to the users by the conversion tools.

**5.5. HDL Structural Statements.** Table 5 shows how the structural statements are matched among HDLs. Note 1 indicates that in HIF each design unit can have one or more `VIEW` objects, each one containing one `INTERFACE` and one `CONTENTS` object. In contrast, in VHDL, it is possible to attach one or more architectures to a single interface. To achieve such behavior in HIF, we create more `VIEW` objects each one having the same interface.

Note 2 is related to the description of a process into different HDLs. For SystemC, there are three kinds of process constructs (i.e., `SC_METHOD`, `SC_THREAD`, and `SC_CTHREAD`), while HIF has only one type of processes (like VHDL). Thus, during the conversion from and to SystemC, the conversion tools recognize the SystemC process type and perform the code analysis for the correct mapping.

Note 3 is related to the management of assignments. There are two syntax for VHDL assignments (i.e., one for signals and one for variables) and two assignment operators in Verilog (i.e., blocking and continuous). In SystemC, a single assignment applies for both signals and variables.

Notes 4 and 5 are related to constructs `FORGENERATE` and `IFGENERATE`. They are typical of VHDL and Verilog languages while they have not a corresponding native construct in SystemC. Their conversion is achieved by inserting a loop (or a conditional statement) into the SystemC module constructor.

Note 6 is related to the syntax mapping for a variable declaration. In this case, a simple syntax-based translation

TABLE 1: Matching of HDL types.

HIF	VHDL	SystemC	Verilog
BIT	bit	sc_bit	wire or reg
BOOLEAN	boolean	bool	wire or reg
CHAR	char	char	
INTEGER	integer	int	integer
(ARRAY (PACKED) (INTEGER) (OF (BIT)) (RANGE))	bit_vector (RANGE)	sc_bv <RANGE>	wire[RANGE] or reg[RANGE]
(ARRAY (PACKED) (INTEGER) (OF (BIT (RESOLVED))) (RANGE))	std_logic_vector (RANGE)	sc_lv <RANGE>	wire[RANGE] or reg[RANGE]
BIT (RESOLVED)	std_logic	sc_logic	wire or reg
REAL	real	double (float)	real

TABLE 2: Matching of HDL explicit cast.

VHDL	HIF	SystemC	Verilog
unsigned(I)	(CAST I (UNSIGNED_TYPE (t_RANGE)))	to_unsigned(I, size)	\$unsigned(I)
signed(I)	(CAST I (SIGNED_TYPE (t_RANGE)))	to_signed(I, size)	\$signed(I)
std_logic_vector(I)	(CAST I (ARRAY (PACKED) (t_RANGE) (OF (BIT (RESOLVED)))))	sc_lv <size> (I)	

is not enough since the declarations have different semantics depending on the HDL. This translation issue is addressed in detail in Section 5.6.

**5.6. HDL Declaration Semantics.** Converting declarations from different languages is challenging, because each HDL has different default initialization values, different scoping rules, different visibility, and different lifetime rules. As an example, a simple `int` in SystemC has not a default value while in VHDL an `INTEGER` takes the leftmost value of the type range.

HIF, like VHDL, does not allow default values. Instead, each declaration has an explicit initialization value. In this way, there are not initialization problems when converting from HIF to another HDL. The HIFSuite front-end tools that translate from an HDL to HIF are demanded to recognize any declaration and to explicit the initialization value, according to the source HDL.

For the sake of clarity, we separate the matching of declarations between HDLs related to the front-end tools from those related to the back-end tools. Considering the front-end tools, Table 6 reports the matching of the semantics between SystemC and VHDL declarations. VHDL and HIF declarations have the same semantics. Table 7 shows the matching between Verilog and VHDL (HIF) declarations.

Considering the back-end tools, Table 8 reports the matching between VHDL (HIF) and SystemC or Verilog declarations.

For allowing a correct conversion, the conversion tools can change the declaration scope (e.g., to have a correct lifetime). In this case, the translation tools automatically rename such a declaration and each of its occurrences, in order to avoid identifiers conflicts.

## 6. Manipulation Tools

This section presents a set of tools (i.e., *EGEN*, *ACIF*, *TGen*, and *A2T*) that have been developed upon the HIF core language and APIs for manipulating HW/SW descriptions. Such tools are intended to support modeling and verification tasks such as fault simulation, test pattern generation, TLM transactor generation, and RTL-to-TLM code abstraction.

**6.1. EGEN: the EFSM Extractor.** All the tools of HIFSuite implement methodologies that rely on a common and well-defined formal model. Among different alternatives, we select the Extended Finite State Machine (EFSM) [7] since it captures the main characteristics of the state-oriented, activity-oriented, and structure-oriented model [33].

EFSMs are transition systems that allow a more compact representation of the design states with respect to traditional FSMs. In fact, EFSMs represent the functionality of systems without requiring the explicit enumeration of all the design states. In this way, the risk of state explosion is sensibly reduced. For this reason, EFSMs are efficiently exploited in many modeling and verification strategies (e.g., test pattern generation, code abstraction, transactor generation, etc.) that require to traverse the state space of the considered system.

A simple example of EFSM is reported in Figure 5.

**Definition 1.** An EFSM is defined as a 5-tuple  $M = \langle S, I, O, D, T \rangle$  where  $S$  is a set of states,  $I$  is a set of input symbols,  $O$  is a set of output symbols,  $D$  is an  $n$ -dimensional linear space  $D_1 \times \dots \times D_n$ , and  $T$  is a transition relation such that  $T: S \times D \times I \rightarrow S \times D \times O$ . A generic point in  $D$  is described by a  $n$ -tuple  $x = (x_1, \dots, x_n)$ . It models the values of the registers of the DUV. A pair  $\langle s, x \rangle \in S \times D$  is called configuration of  $M$ .

TABLE 3: Matching of HDL conversion functions.

VHDL	HIF	SystemC	Verilog
to_unsigned(I)	(CONV I (UNSIGNED_TYPE (t.RANGE)))	to_unsigned(I, size)	\$unsigned(I)
to_signed(I)	(CONV I (SIGNED_TYPE (t.RANGE)))	to_signed(I, size)	\$signed(I)

TABLE 4: Translation of HDL operators.

HIF	VHDL	SystemC	Verilog
Arithmetic operators			
+	+	+	+
-	-	-	-
*	*	*	*
/	/	/	/
MOD	mod	(%)	%
CONCAT	&	(a, b)	{a, b}
Bitwise operators			
&&	and	&	&
—	or	—	—
^^	xor	^	^
!!	not	~	~
Logic operators			
—	or	—	—
&	and	&&	&&
!	not	!	!
Comparison operators			
=	=	==	==
/=	/=	!=	!=
<=	<=	<=	<=
<	<	<	<
>=	>=	>=	>=
>	>	>	>
Arithmetic shift operators			
SLA	sla	<<	<<<
SRA	sra	>>	>>>
Logic shift operators			
SLL	sll	<<	<<
SRL	srl	>>	>>

An operation on an EFSM,  $M$ , is defined in this way: if  $M$  is in a configuration  $\langle s, x \rangle$  and it receives an input  $i \in I$ , it moves to the configuration  $\langle t, y \rangle$  if and only if  $((s, x, i), (t, y, o)) \in T$  for  $o \in O$ .

The EFSM differs from the classical FSM, since each transition does not present only a label in the classical form  $(i)/(o)$ , but it takes care of the register values too.

Transitions are labeled with an *enabling* function  $e$  and an *update* function  $u$  defined as follows.

**Definition 2.** Given an EFSM  $M = \langle S, I, O, D, T \rangle$ ,  $s \in S$ ,  $t \in T$ ,  $i \in I$ ,  $o \in O$ , and the sets  $X = \{x \mid ((s, x, i), (t, y, o)) \in T \text{ for } y \in D\}$  and  $Y = \{y \mid ((s, x, i), (t, y, o)) \in T \text{ for } x \in X\}$ , the *enabling* and *update* functions are defined,

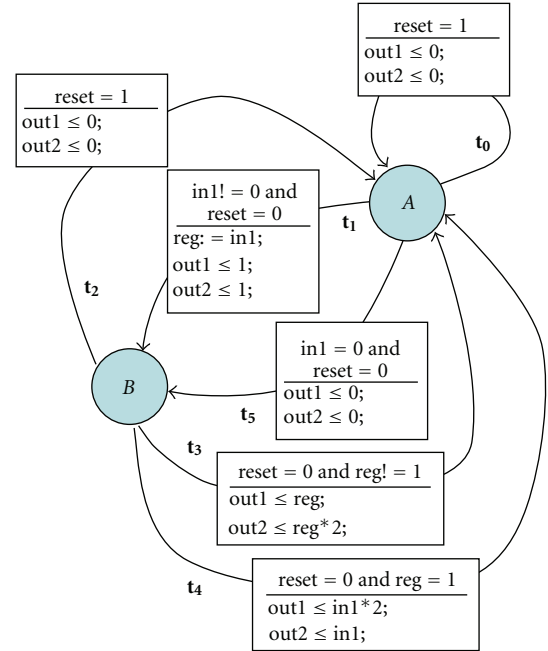


FIGURE 5: Example of EFSM.

respectively, as

$$e(x, i) = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } x \in X, \\ 0, & \text{otherwise,} \end{cases}$$

$$u(x, i) = \begin{cases} (y, o), & \text{if } e(x, i) = 1, \\ ((s, x, i), (t, y, o)) \in T, \\ \text{undef.}, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

An update function  $u(x, i)$  can be applied to a configuration  $\langle s_1, x \rangle$  if there is a transition  $t : s_1 \rightarrow s_2$ , labeled  $e/u$ , such that  $e(x, i) = 1$ . In this case we say that  $t$  can be *fired* by applying the input  $i$ .

**6.2. ACIF: The Saboteur Injector.** In the context of design verification, many activities (e.g., validating fault tolerant systems, developing fault simulators and ATPGs, measuring testbenches quality and property coverage, etc.) require the adoption of techniques to modify the behavior of a design in order to simulate the effect of a potential fault/error. In these cases, the faulty behavior is explicitly induced by the artificial modification of the design behavior by using techniques that are generally classified in three main categories.

(i) *Hardware Implemented Fault Injection.* It is performed directly at physical level of HW components

TABLE 5: Matching of HDL structural statements.

Note	HIF	VHDL	SystemC	Verilog
1	DESIGNUNIT	entity, architecture	SC_MODULE	module
2	STATETABLE	process	SC_METHOD	always
3	ASSIGN	<= or =	=	<= or =
4	IFGENERATE	if (cond) generate	#if (cond) concurrent_statement #end if	generate if (cond) concurrent_statement
5	FORGENERATE	for (cond) generate concurrent_statement end generate;	for (cond) {concurrent_statement}	generate for (cond) concurrent_statement end endgenerate
6	VARIABLE <i>id type</i>	VARIABLE <i>id: type</i> ;	<i>type id</i> ;	<i>type id</i> ;

TABLE 6: Matching of SystemC and VHDL (HIF) declarations.

SystemC	VHDL (HIF)
SC_MODULE	
Static constants	<i>CONSTANT</i> declared and initialized inside the <i>architecture</i>
Input/output ports	<i>PORT</i> declared inside the <i>entity</i>
Variable	<i>SHARED VARIABLE</i> declared inside the <i>architecture</i>
Static variable	<i>SHARED VARIABLE</i> declared inside the <i>architecture</i>
SC_METHOD	
Constant	<i>CONSTANT</i> declared and initialized inside the <i>process</i>
Static constant	<i>CONSTANT</i> declared and initialized inside the <i>process</i>
Variable	<i>VARIABLE</i> declared and initialized inside the <i>process</i>
Static variable	<i>VARIABLE</i> declared inside the <i>process</i>
SC_THREAD	
Constant	<i>CONSTANT</i> declared and initialized inside the <i>process</i>
Static constant	<i>CONSTANT</i> declared and initialized inside the <i>process</i>
Variable	<i>VARIABLE</i> declared inside the <i>process</i>
Static variable	<i>VARIABLE</i> declared inside the <i>process</i>

TABLE 7: Matching of verilog and VHDL (HIF) declarations.

VERILOG	VHDL (HIF)
Module	
parameter	added a <i>generic</i> declaration inside the <i>entity</i>
localparam	<i>constant</i> declared inside the <i>architecture</i>
input/output	<i>port</i> declared into the <i>entity</i>
wire	<i>signal</i> declared into the <i>architecture</i>
reg	<i>signal</i> or <i>variable</i> (code specific analysis required) declared inside the <i>architecture</i>

by either modifying the environment surrounding the hardware (e.g., heavy ion radiation, electronic

interference, etc.) or altering the values on the design pins [34].

- (ii) *Software Implemented Fault Injection*. The goal of these techniques is to reproduce at software level the faulty behavior deriving from software or hardware faults [35]. These faults can be induced by the modification of the memory data or the modification of the executed code.
- (iii) *Simulated Fault Injection*. The logic values of the simulated design are altered by modifying the simulator logic [36].

In this context, the HIF-based tool ACIF relates to simulated fault injection techniques. In particular, ACIF allows us to automatically inject *saboteurs* [6] in RTL/TLM descriptions according to the selected fault model. A saboteur is an artificial HDL component added to the original design whose goal consists of perturbing the properties of the target object (e.g., a variable value, the timing response of an assignment, etc.) when the corresponding fault is injected, while its presence does not affect the design behavior during the normal operation of the system.

ACIF is composed of the following modules:

- (i) *Saboteur List Generator*. It analyzes the HIF description to extract the saboteur list according to the selected fault model.
- (ii) *Saboteur Injector*. It gets the saboteur list either from the previous module or from file and produces an HIF description with injected saboteurs.
- (iii) *Saboteur Comment Injector*. It inserts comments close to the injected statements to inform about the behavior of the injected saboteurs.

The current version of ACIF injects saboteurs in accordance with the *bit coverage* fault model [37]. Thus the injected code can be directly linked to the Laerte++ functional ATPG which adopts bit coverage. However, the tool is independent from the fault model, since the bit coverage saboteurs can be replaced by functions which implement other kinds of perturbations.

The general structure of saboteurs injected by ACIF is shown in Algorithm 2. Each saboteur is a function whose parameters are the following.

TABLE 8: Matching of VHDL (HIF) and SystemC or Verilog declarations.

VHDL (HIF)	SystemC	Verilog
Entity		
Port	<i>sc_in/out</i> declared into SC_MODULE	<i>input/output</i> declared at the beginning of the <i>module</i>
Shared variable	variable declared inside the module and initialized into the constructor	<i>reg</i> declared at the beginning of the <i>module</i>
Constant	<i>const</i> declared inside the class	<i>parameter</i> declared at the beginning of the <i>module</i>
Signal	<i>sc_signal</i> declared inside the SC_MODULE	<i>wire</i> declared at the beginning of the <i>module</i>
Architecture		
Constant	Static constant declared and initialized inside the SC_MODULE	<i>parameter</i> declared and assigned inside the <i>module</i>
Shared variable	class variable declared inside the SC_MODULE	<i>reg</i> declared at the beginning of the <i>module</i>
Signal	<i>sc_signal</i> declared inside the SC_MODULE	<i>wire</i> declared at the beginning of the <i>module</i>
Process		
Variable	Variable declared inside the SC_MODULE	<i>reg</i> declared before the process which uses it
Constant	constant declared inside the <i>process</i>	constant declared inside the <i>module</i>

```

inject_fault (type object; int fault_port; int start_range; int end_range)
{
    if (fault_port >= start && fault_port <= end)
        return the faculty behaviour of object according to fault number ‘‘fault_port’’
    else
        return object
}

```

ALGORITHM 2: General structure of a saboteur.

- (i) First is the object targeted by faults, that is, a variable, the condition of a conditional statement, and so forth. Each object can be affected by one or more faults, for example, the bit constant “0” can be affected only by a single fault (i.e., a stuck-at 1), but a 32-bit\_vector variable can be affected by many faults (e.g., a stuck-at 0 and a stuck-at 1 for each bit).
- (ii) Second is a fault port to drive fault activation/deactivation during fault simulation. Each fault is identified by a numeric code. The fault port must be fixed at value  $i$  for activating fault number  $i$ .
- (iii) Third is a range to control fault activation/deactivation. If the value of the fault port is included in the range, the corresponding fault will be activated during fault simulation; otherwise the target object will behave as free of faults. ACIF assumes that only one fault is active per simulation cycle during fault simulation.

ACIF navigates the HIF description and it substitutes each variable/signal, condition, and return value of every functions with a corresponding saboteur as shown in Algorithm 3. The HIFSuite back-end tools preserve saboteur injection when the modified HIF code is converted to VHDL, Verilog or SystemC code.

6.3. *TGEN: The Automatic Transactor Generator.* EDA companies and academic researchers have proposed modeling and verification methodologies based on transactors [3, 4, 38]. Despite technical differences, all of them exploit the concept of a *transactor* to allow the mixed TLM-RTL coverification based on simulation.

Nevertheless, their implementation is still manual, tedious and error-prone. In this context, *TGEN* is an HIF-based tool that automatically generates transactors exploiting the EFSM model presented in Section 6.1, thus aiming to reach their correct-by-construction implementation.

*TGEN* implements the methodology proposed in [39], which is depicted in Figure 6. We assume that an RTL testbench is available together with the RTL IP. The RTL testbench actually sends testvectors to and receives results from the IP core by performing an ordered sequence of *write* and *read* operations in compliance with the IP communication protocol. We call *RTL driver* that sequence of write and read operations on the PIs and POs of the IP interface. The proposed methodology exploits the RTL driver information to implement the RTL side of transactors while the TLM side is settled by exploiting any standard TLM API (e.g., the OSCI TLM 2.0 [30]).

The generation algorithm is composed of the following five steps.

```

An assignment statement before saboteur injection
a = b + c;
The same assignment after saboteur injection
a = inject fault (
inject fault(b, fault port, 0, 31) + // fault injection for the return value of +
inject fault(c, fault port, 32, 63), // fault injection for b
64, 95 // fault injection for c
);

```

ALGORITHM 3: An assignment statement before and after saboteur injection by ACIF.

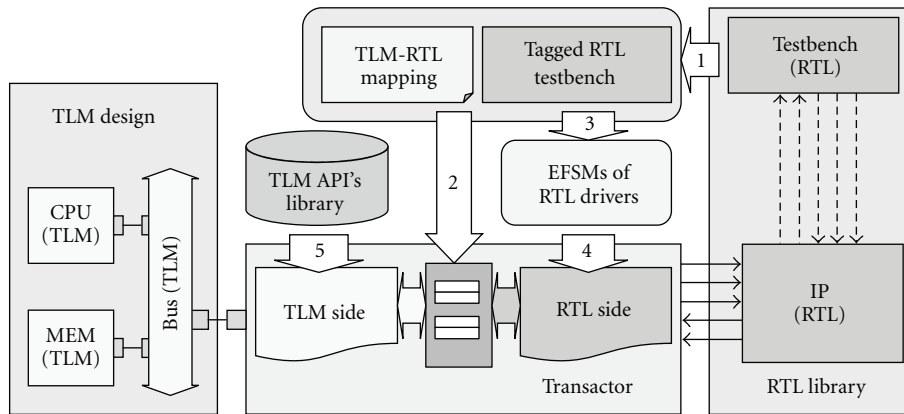


FIGURE 6: Testbench-centric methodology.

6.3.1. *Preliminary Step (Step 1)*. A preprocessing stage is required to provide those information which cannot be automatically determined, and it represents the only necessary manual task. Once the preliminary information is settled, a fully functional transactor is generated without needing any additional manual modification. Two types of information are needed:

- (i) *EFSM Borders*. EFSMs of the RTL drivers representing *WRITE* and *READ* operations are identified in the testbench by tagging the initial and final states visited during an access for sending data to or receiving data from the RTL IP. This provides the necessary support to extract information of the RTL protocol encapsulated in the testbench.
- (ii) *Mapping between TLM Values and RTL Ports*. A set of “relevant” I/O objects is settled for representing data shared between the TLM and RTL sides. Any object of this set corresponds to a PI or a PO that is present in both the TLM interface (i.e., as function call parameter) and the RTL interface (i.e., as input or output port). For example, data ports (i.e., input ports, result ports) of the RTL IP core can be considered relevant rather than control ports specific to the RTL protocol (i.e., ports for enabling flags, ports for acknowledgment, etc.). This provides the support to generate the *data-exchange structures*

which ensure a proper communication between the TLM and RTL sides.

6.3.2. *Data-Exchange Structure Generation (Step 2)*. Data structures providing support for exchanging data between TLM and RTL side are generated by exploiting the mapping functions defined in the preliminary step. It is composed of the following parts:

- (i) a *request extension* record whose field names correspond to the names of RTL ports involved in sending data operations.
- (ii) a *response extension* record whose field names correspond to the names of RTL ports involved in receiving data operations.

Figure 7 shows an example in which three shared I/O objects compose the TLM-RTL mapping table. Variables *address*, *data* and *result* of the TLM request are, respectively, mapped into RTL ports *ADDR*, *IN\_DATA* and *OUT\_DATA*. The *Request extension* record with fields *ADDR* and *DATA*, and the *Response extension* records with fields *ADDR* and *RES* are thus generated.

It is important to note that these data structures compose the actual border layer between TLM and RTL. Thus, even if this step adds a degree of redundancy concerning the exchanged data, it ensures modularity in the generation process of transactors. In fact, different TLM interfaces can

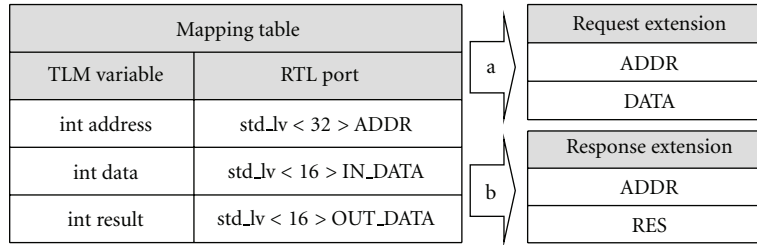


FIGURE 7: Generation examples of request extension (a) and response extension (b).

be chosen for composing the TLM side of the transactors, as explained in Section 6.3.4.

6.3.3. *RTL Side Generation (Steps 3 and 4)*. The RTL side is composed of the following parts, that are automatically generated from the tagged RTL testbench:

- (i) the set of input and output ports composing the *RTL interface*: they correspond to the testbench ports that are directly linked to the RTL IP core.
- (ii) the EFSMs implementing *write* and *read* operations through the RTL interface: they correspond to the EFSM subgraphs included into the EFSMs of the testbench, which perform the corresponding write and read operations.

The automatically extracted EFSMs are elaborated to support communication with the TLM side, by exploiting the data-exchange structures generated at the previous step. Thus, request values are received by the TLM side of the transactor and they are available to the RTL side through the *request extension* record. Similarly, the values of RTL ports are available to the TLM side through the *response extension* record.

In this context, only transaction-specific values (e.g., address, data, result, etc.) are considered in the data-exchanged structures, as they represent the only information which flows between the TLM and RTL sides through the communication layer.

On the other hand, protocol details specific to the RTL interface (i.e., handshaking sequences, pipelining, burst cycles, etc.) are extracted from the RTL testbench and preserved in the RTL side. Thus, from the TLM point of view, data exchanging is performed disregarding these details, since they are inherited from the testbench and transparently handled by the transactor.

6.3.4. *TLM Side Generation (Step 5)*. TGEN generates three different communication protocols (i.e., Untimed, Loosely-timed, and Approximately-timed) as TLM side of the transactors. Each communication protocol complies with the coding styles proposed by OSCI for the IEEE standard [30].

6.4. *A2T: The RTL-to-TLM Abtractor*. Reuse of previously developed IP cores is a key strategy which guarantees considerable saving of time in TLM. In fact, modeling a complex system completely at transaction level could

be inconvenient when IP cores are already available on the market, usually modeled at RTL. Thus, the concept of transactor has been proposed to allow simulation and verification of TLM-RTL mixed designs. Even if transactors allow designers to efficiently reuse RTL IP cores into TLM systems, mixed TLM-RTL designs cannot completely benefit from the effectiveness provided by TLM. In particular, the main problems of reusing an IP model via transactor are two: firstly, correctness of the reused IP relies on correctness of the transactor implementation. Nevertheless, the reused RTL IP core slows down the simulation speed of the whole mixed design. Thus, the RTL IP core should be abstracted at the same transaction level of the other modules composing the design, to preserve the simulation speed typical of TLM. On the other hand, RTL-to-TLM manual abstraction is an error-prone and tedious activity that may discourage the reuse of RTL IP cores. In particular, beside the time consuming activity of manual abstraction, the main difficulty in the abstraction task consists in verifying that the obtained TLM implementation is equivalent to the golden model RTL IP.

In this context, *A2T* is a tool built on the top of HIF-Suite, which automatically abstracts RTL IPs towards TLM descriptions. *A2T* implements the methodology presented in [28, 29], which relies on the following main idea.

- (i) A *computational phase* is a particular sequence of EFSM states composing the IP model that must be consistently traversed to get the input data (input subphase), elaborate them (elaboration subphase), and finally provide the related output result (output subphase).
- (ii) During the input subphase, input data and control lines are read, without performing any further elaboration. Then, data is manipulated in the elaboration subphase without reading new values from inputs neither writing on outputs. Finally, in the output subphase, the computation result is not modified anymore, while control and data output lines are written according to the communication protocol selected for the interaction between the IP module and the environment where it is embedded. Input, elaboration and output subphases on an EFSM can be automatically identified.
- (iii) Each computational phase is composed of three different sets of adjacent states, that can be recognized by parsing the EFSM transitions.

TABLE 9: ACIF results.

Design	PIs	POs	FFs	Gates	Trns.	GT (sec.)	BC
ex1	66	32	130	10754	7	0.1	907
b00	66	64	99	1692	7	0.1	1182
b04	13	8	66	650	20	0.3	408
b10	13	6	17	264	35	0.3	216
b11m	9	6	31	715	20	0.2	725
b00z	66	64	99	11874	9	0.2	1439
fr	34	32	100	1475	10	0.2	1041
dlx	29	31	25	232	28	0.3	1167
diffeq	161	96	289	33510	4	0.9	3017
am2910	23	16	145	1598	543	3.1	5236
prawn	11	23	84	1996	191	1.5	3716

TABLE 10: TGEN results.

Design	Testbench (loc)	RTL ports (#)	Relevant I/O objects (#)	READ RTL driver #states	#trans	WRITE RTL driver #states	#trans	RTL side (loc)	TLM side (loc)	Transactor (loc)
AMBA AHB	79	15	4	3	3	3	3	110	26	237
STBus t2	89	9	4	3	3	3	3	56	26	187
FFT	244	10	4	2	2	2	2	75	26	208
FIR	280	8	2	1	1	1	1	24	26	139

A2T generates a correct-by-construction transaction-based TLM description from the cycle-accurate RTL design, by collapsing the RTL computational as described in the following.

Considering the EFSM model presented in Section 6.1, and given the cycle accurate (CA) RTL model

$$M_{CA} = \langle S_{CA}, I_{CA}, O_{CA}, D_{CA}, T_{CA} \rangle, \quad (2)$$

we define the abstracted TB model

$$M_{TB} = \langle S_{TB}, I_{TB}, O_{TB}, D_{TB}, T_{TB} \rangle, \quad (3)$$

where  $I_{TB} = I_{CA}$ ,  $O_{TB} = O_{CA}$ , while  $S_{TB}, D_{TB}$ , and  $T_{TB}$  are defined by the following rules.

**6.4.1. Input and Output Rules.** For each input state  $I \in S_{CA}^I$  of the CA model  $M_{CA}$ , one state  $G$  is generated for the TB model  $M_{TB}$  (see Figure 8(a)). The guard on the clock event and the enabling function  $ef_0$  of the CA model are mapped into the guard on the function call (i.e., the TLM primitive called by the initiator) and on the same enabling function  $ef_0$  of the TB model, respectively. The update function  $uf_0$  of the CA model which performs read operations on input ports is mapped into  $uf'_0$  which is the sequence of statements for getting data from the data structure passed as function parameter. This corresponds to translate reading operations on the PIs in the RTL context at the clock event to read data on the passed parameters at the time the TLM primitive is called in TLM.

CA output states are abstracted similarly to CA input states. Thus, for each output state  $O \in S_{CA}^O$  of the CA model  $M_{CA}$ , one state  $P$  is generated for the TB model  $M_{TB}$  (see Figure 8(b)). The CA update function  $uf_0$  which corresponds

to write data on output ports is mapped into a sequence of statements ( $uf'_0$ ) that write the result data on the data structure passed as parameter and return to the caller.

**6.4.2. Elaboration Rule.** Each sequence of states ( $s_1, \dots, s_n$ ) belonging to the same elaboration subphase (i.e., so that  $s_i \in S_{CA}^E$ ,  $i = 1, \dots, n$ ) of the CA model  $M_{CA}$  is substituted by a single elaboration state  $E$  on the TB model  $M_{TB}$ . The state  $E$  and the corresponding in-coming and out-going transitions are generated by recursively collapsing the CA states in accordance with the following rules (depicted in Figure 9).

- (i) If a state  $A$  in the CA model has a single outgoing transition to a state  $B$  (i.e.,  $A \rightarrow B$ ) whose enabling function is always true, then  $A$  and  $B$  are collapsed into a single state  $A'$ , whose incoming transition has  $ef_0$  as enabling function and the sequence of instructions included in  $uf_0$  and  $uf_1$  as update function (Figure 9(a)). Further transitions incoming in  $B$  become incoming transition of  $A'$ .
- (ii) If a state  $A$  in the CA model has an outgoing transition towards a state  $B$  and a transition incoming into the same state  $A$ , then  $A$  and  $B$  are still collapsed into a single state  $A'$ . However, in this case, the transition incoming into  $A'$  has a more complex form. The enabling function is  $ef_0$  while the update function sequentializes  $uf_0$ ,  $uf_2$ , and  $uf_1$  provided that  $uf_2$  is iteratively executed while  $ef_1$  is false. In this way, the looping transition  $A \rightarrow A$  in the CA model is implicitly represented by a while loop, as showed in Figure 9(b). Further incoming transitions to  $B$  become incoming transition to  $A'$ .



TABLE 11: A2T results.

Design	RTL			A2T TLM				Manual TLM					
	#States	#Trans	#loc	#States	#Trans	#P-G	#loc	Abstr. t.(s)	#States	#Trans	#P-G	#loc	Impl. t.(d/m)
ROOT	6	7	192	3	5	1	309	3.55	1	1	1	271	≈2
DIV	15	21	425	3	5	1	541	3.72	1	1	1	293	≈2
DIST	7	8	325	3	5	1	462	3.60	1	1	1	350	≈3
ECC	6	8	320	3	5	1	350	3.61	1	1	1	338	≈3
ADPCM	8	15	309	6	12	10,001	338	3.65	6	10	1	279	≈3
CRC	24	36	848	8	12	129	982	3.80	8	10	1	622	≈4
B01	8	17	195	3	5	1	198	3.51	8	12	1	147	≈1
B10	11	14	245	3	5	1	238	3.55	10	11	1	195	≈2

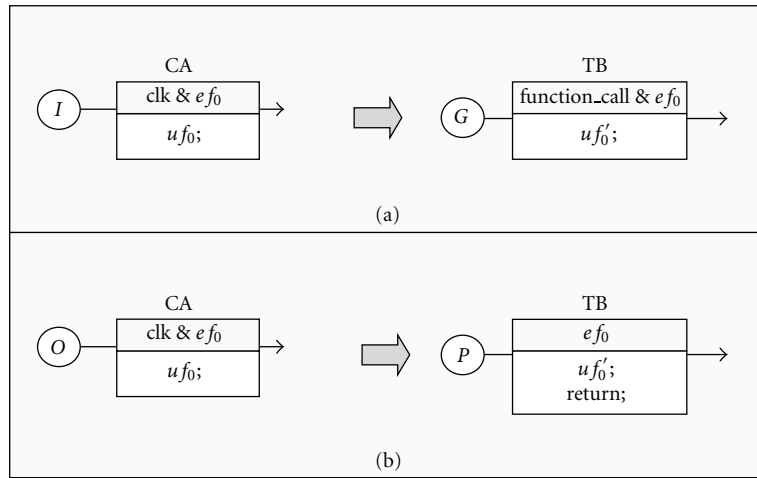


FIGURE 8: Abstraction of I/O states.

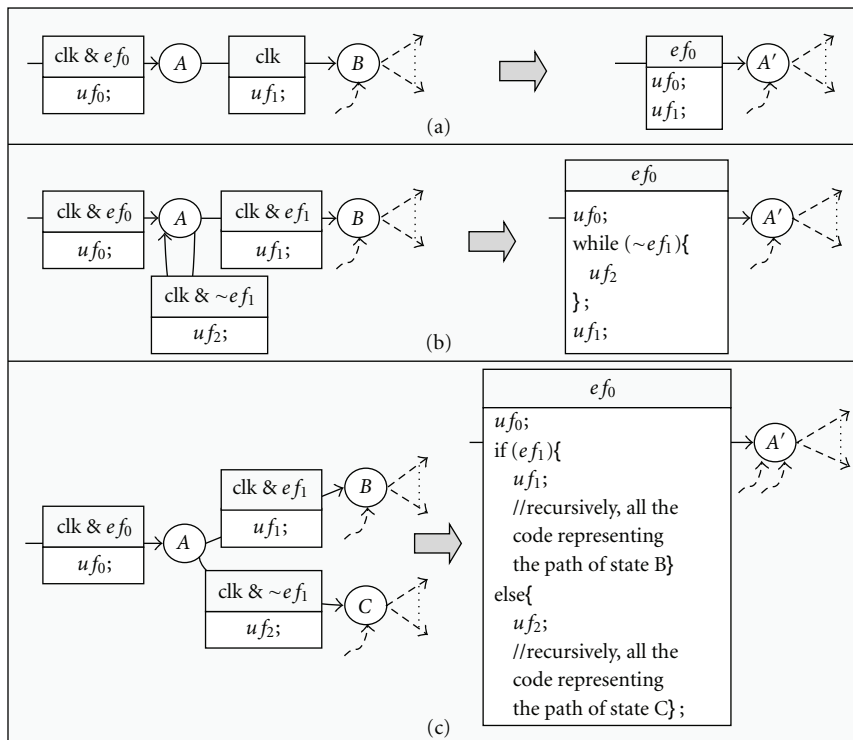


FIGURE 9: Basic steps for abstracting the elaboration subphases.

- (iii) If a state  $A$  in the CA model has two outgoing transitions towards states  $B$  and  $C$ , then  $A$ ,  $B$ , and  $C$  are collapsed in a single state  $A'$  in the TB model. The enabling function of the transition incoming into  $A'$  is  $ef_0$  while the update function is composed of  $uf_0$  followed by an *if-then-else* statement. The guard of such a statement is  $ef_1$  while the *then* and *else* branches are obtained by recursively composing, respectively,  $uf_1$  with the code that can be executed outgoing from  $B$ , and  $uf_2$  with the code that can be executed outgoing from  $C$ , as shown in Figure 9(c). Further incoming transitions to  $B$  and  $C$  become incoming transitions to  $A'$ .

## 7. Experimental Results

Experimental results have been conducted by applying the HIFSuite conversion and manipulation tools to several RTL IP designs, such as the following

- (i) *Root*, *Div*, and *Dist*: three VHDL IPs of an STMmicroelectronics SoC implementing a face recognition system [40],
- (ii) *ADPCM*: a VHDL model of the adaptive differential pulse code modulation module of a voice over IP system provided by STMmicroelectronics,
- (iii) the VHDL implementation of the AMBA AHB Bus and STBus type 2, which have been provided by STMmicroelectronics,
- (iv) *Bxx*: the VHDL benchmarks of the ITC-99 suite [41], and the corresponding Verilog implementation from VIS (Verification Interacting with Synthesis) package [42],
- (v) *ECC*, *CRC*, *DSPI*: three IPs of the Vertigo platform provided by STMmicroelectronics,
- (vi) *am2910*: a VHDL and a Verilog model of the high-performance 8-bit slice microprogram sequencer,
- (vii) the SystemC implementation of the Fast Fourier Transform (FFT) and the FIR filter provided with the example set of SystemC 2.2. [43].

Each benchmark has been converted by HIFSuite from the original HDL implementation to the other HDLs, and the result correctness has been proved in two different ways. We used Formality by Synopsys [44] to formally check the equivalence between VHDL versus Verilog, VHDL versus VHDL, and Verilog versus Verilog designs. We used an ATPG [45] combined with ModelSim by Mentor Graphics [46] to dynamically check the equivalence between SystemC versus VHDL and SystemC versus Verilog designs.

Then, the EFSM representation of each benchmark has been extracted by using *EGEN*, in order to apply all the manipulation tools presented in Section 6.

Tables 9, 10, and 11 report the experimental results obtained by applying *ACIF*, *TGEN*, and *A2T*, respectively, to a proper set of the benchmarks presented above. Each set

of benchmarks has been selected for representing different design characteristics, which allowed us to analyze and confirm the effectiveness of the HIFSuite tools.

Table 9 is related to *ACIF*. The columns report the number of primary inputs (*PIs*), primary outputs (*POs*), flip-flops (*FFs*) and gates (*Gates*) of each RTL IP. Column *Trns.* shows the number of transitions of the EFSM modeling the IP and *GT (sec.)* the time required to automatically generate the EFSM. Then, Column *BC* reports the number of bit coverage faults injected into the designs to check the fault coverage (see Section 6.2).

Table 10 shows the experimental results related to *TGEN*. Column *Testbench* shows the number of lines of code of the testbenches which have been analyzed by the TGEN parser for extracting the RTL drivers (see Section 6.3). Column *RTL ports* reports the number of I/O ports of the RTL design interface. The number of relevant objects manually settled for representing data shared between the TLM and RTL sides is reported in Column *Relevant I/O objects*. Columns *READ RTL driver* and *WRITE RTL driver* show the number of states and transitions of the EFSMs extracted from the RTL testbench, which model the read and write operations towards the design. Columns *RTL side* and *TLM side* report, respectively, the number of code lines of the RTL and TLM sides of the transactors. Finally, column *Transactor* shows the total number of code lines of the transactor implementations. For each design, few minutes of manual work have been spent for the preliminary step. Then, the automatic transactor generation has been instantaneously accomplished by the TGEN tool. On the other hand, 3 days/man have been spent for manually implementing the four transactors. Correctness of the obtained results has been proven by using testbenches provided by STMmicroelectronics.

Table 11 shows the experimental results related to *A2T*. The number of states and transitions of the EFSMs is shown in Columns *#States* and *#Trans.*, respectively. Then, the EFSMs have been automatically abstracted in order to generate the equivalent TLM implementations (column *A2T TLM*), according to the methodology presented in Section 6.4. For the generated TLM model, the characteristics of the functionality side that are number of states and transitions of the EFSMs are shown, respectively, in Columns *#States* and *#Trans.*. Column *#P-G* reports the number of TLM primitive calls (i.e., couples of writing and reading `b_transport()`/`nb_transport()`) executed by the initiator to get the final computation result of each abstracted module. Column *#loc* reports the lines of code generated by choosing the blocking untimed communication protocol [30]. Time spent by *A2T* for the automatic generation of each TLM implementations is reported in column *Abstr. t. (s)*.

Finally, a manual TLM description of each module has been implemented (column *Manual TLM*). In this case, the SystemC descriptions have been optimized by exploiting higher-level data types and C++ libraries, in addition to clock and driver abstractions. Their characteristics are reported in terms of number of states, transitions, writing/reading primitive couples (P/G) and lines of code. Column *Impl. t. (d/m)* shows the time spent for generating

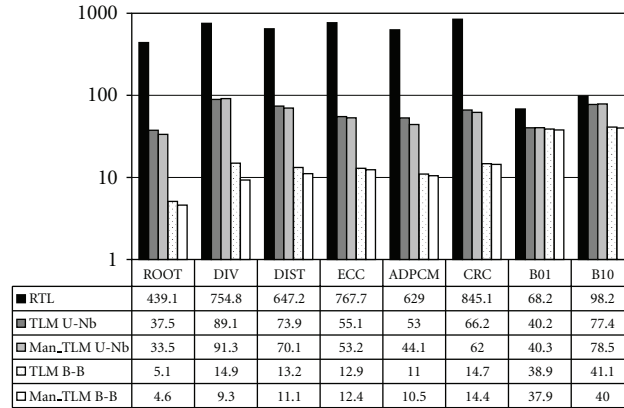


FIGURE 10: Simulation time.

the TLM description by hand of every module, expressed in days/man.

Figure 10 compares the simulation time measured for each considered design. Testbenches have been implemented at TLM and they have been applied to the RTL descriptions by means of transactors. Thus, RTL simulation time refers to the reuse of RTL IPs via transactor. Then, the simulation time is reported for two different TLM protocols, that are, nonblocking (*TLM U-Nb*) and blocking (*TLM B-B*) for both the automatically and manually abstracted TLM descriptions. The results show that, comparing the simulation time between the manually and the automatically abstracted implementations, there is a very small difference for all designs. Nevertheless, such a difference is balanced by the fact that automatic abstraction is correct by construction, less tedious, and faster than manual abstraction.

## 8. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we presented an overview of *HIFSuite*, a set of conversion and manipulation tools that rely on the HIF language. *HIFSuite* provides designers and verification engineers with the following features.

- (i) *Conversion from HDLs to HIF and vice versa.* Current front-end and back-end tools support a great number of RTL VHDL, Verilog, and SystemC constructs, and the core part of TLM SystemC. The extension for supporting further constructs is under development, and will be available soon. The HIF descriptions generated by the front-end tools are structured like syntax trees; thus it is easy to write algorithms that manipulate the nodes of the tree.
- (ii) *Merging of mixed HDL Descriptions.* Systems described partially in VHDL or Verilog or SystemC can be converted into the HIF representation and then merged to obtain a final model implemented into a unique HDL.
- (iii) *Extendibility.* The HIF library engine is structured to be easily extended. A special HIF object, called

*PropertyObject*, is provided to describe nonstandard or new features of other HIF objects.

- (iv) *HIF Code Manipulation.* A set of HIF-based manipulation tools are already available and they have been described in the previous sections. Such tools can be used into modeling or verification workflows that adopt different HDL languages. New tools can be easily implemented by means of a powerful APIs library, as they are implemented in C++.

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