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DOI

[10.1109/ICASSP39728.2021.9414275](https://doi.org/10.1109/ICASSP39728.2021.9414275)

Publication date

2021

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

ICASSP 2021 - 2021 IEEE International Conference on Acoustics, Speech and Signal Processing (ICASSP)

Citation (APA)

Leus, G., Yang, M., Coutino, M., & Isufi, E. (2021). Topological Volterra Filters. In *ICASSP 2021 - 2021 IEEE International Conference on Acoustics, Speech and Signal Processing (ICASSP)* (pp. 5385-5389). [9414275] IEEE . <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICASSP39728.2021.9414275>

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TOPOLOGICAL VOLTERRA FILTERS

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ABSTRACT

To deal with high-dimensional data, graph filters have shown their power in both graph signal processing and data science. However, graph filters process signals exploiting only pairwise interactions between the nodes, and they are not able to exploit more complicated topological structures. Graph Volterra models, on the other hand, are also able to exploit relations between triplets, quadruplets and so on. However, they have only been exploited for topology identification and are only based on one-hop relations. In this paper, we first review graph filters and graph Volterra models and then merge the two concepts resulting in so-called topological Volterra filters (TVFs). TVFs process signals over multiple hops of higher-level topological structures. First-level TVFs are basically similar to traditional graph filters, yet higher-level TVFs provide a more general processing framework. We apply TVFs to inverse filtering and recommender systems.

Index Terms— Graph Volterra model, Graph filters, Higher-level interactions, Graph signal processing

1. INTRODUCTION

Filters are central in signal processing and machine learning to manipulate signals and extract patterns. When these signals reside in irregular and complex spaces, such as networks, e.g., social, biological, and financial networks, conventional filtering techniques cannot be applied anymore [1]. In these instances, filtering tools capable of leveraging the signal-topology coupling are necessary. Such tools have recently been developed in the field of graph signal processing (GSP) and they are known under the term *graph filters* [1, 2].

Graph filters process the signal by manipulating its variability w.r.t. pairwise relationships encoded in the graph edges. This has been widely studied from both the graph vertex and graph spectral domain in recent years [2, 3, 4]. There are different ways of implementing a graph filter as an interaction between the graph nodes, with the most popular ones including the finite impulse response (FIR) graph filters [3, 4], the autoregressive moving average (ARMA) graph filters [5], as well as their node-varying [6] and edge-varying [7, 8] counterparts. All these implementations are based on nodes aggregating local information from their neighbors, potentially improving their expressive power by *differently* weighting the aggregation per node or the information coming from different neighbors. Nonlinear graph filters have also been proposed, such as median graph filters [9] or graph filters living in a reproducing kernel Hilbert space [10].

M. Yang is supported by the AIDU program at the Delft University of Technology in the Aidrolab call. Mario Coutino is partially supported by CONACYT. E-mails: {g.j.t.leus; m.yang-2; m.a.coutinominguez; e.isufi-1}@tudelft.nl

The common aspect of current graph filter implementations is that they process the signal by leveraging only pairwise relationships between the nodes. However, pairwise representations are often insufficient to capture the irregular structure that is often present in data. Therefore, in [11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16], signals defined over a topological space, i.e., a set of points along with a set of neighborhood relations, are analyzed. For instance, in co-authorship networks, many papers are written by more than two authors and hence just considering pairs of authors does not provide enough information [17]; or in social networks, pairwise friend relationships are not able to identify the group relationship structure [18]. In these situations, higher-level topological relations, such as proximity between nodes and groups of nodes (tuples), are needed to extract relevant information from the signal-topology coupling. From this perspective, conventional FIR graph filters can be seen as topological filters of level one; i.e., working only with pairwise topological information.

Altogether, the above works build up towards the extension of graph filters to topological spaces. To successfully process these signals there is the need to extract two types of information from the data: *i*) the incidence matrices at the different topological levels; and *ii*) the topological signals on each level, both of which are open research directions. In many applications, the topological information is directly visible in the data, e.g., in co-authorship or social networks, the groups that interact and how strong they interact can be determined. Alternatively, it can be estimated from topological signals that might be available at different levels, by exploiting the signal-topology coupling. This is similar to the works that build a graph (i.e., pairwise relationships) from signals that are available at the node level [19, 20]. An example of such a higher-level topology inference approach relies on the so-called graph Volterra model [21, 22]. This approach is also based on node-level signals and attempts to explain the signal value on one node by a superposition of linear, quadratic, cubic, etc. combinations of the signal values on the other nodes. The trained Volterra kernels then reveal the topological information at the different levels. Approaches that also exploit higher-level topological signals remain limited since such information is often not available.

The kernels of a graph Volterra model describe how a specific node is connected to individual nodes, pairs of nodes, triplets of nodes, etc. Viewing these relations as one-hop connections, we aim to answer *how to extend such one-hop connections to a processing platform that can filter a node-level signal over multiple hops of a topological structure*. The answer will be provided by the so-called topological Volterra filter (TVF), which extends traditional graph filters *i*) by processing node-level signals not only over multiple hops of pairwise connections, but also over multiple hops of higher-level interactions, and *ii*) by introducing nonlinear combinations of the node-level signal values to define higher-level signal values. We show the potential of TVFs in solving a simple inverse problem on a graph and for rating prediction in recommender systems.

2. PRELIMINARIES

2.1. Graph Signal Processing

GSP relies on the assumption that data lives in an irregular domain described by a graph $\mathcal{G} = \{\mathcal{V}, \mathcal{E}\}$, where $\mathcal{V} = \{1, \dots, N\}$ and $\mathcal{E} \subseteq \mathcal{V} \times \mathcal{V}$ are the vertex (node) and edge set, respectively. We can then associate to each node $i \in \mathcal{V}$ the datum x_i and collect them all in the vector $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^N$, which is called a *graph signal*. The graph wherein the data is defined is typically represented by the so-called graph shift operator (GSO) [3], which is an $N \times N$ matrix $\mathbf{S}$ that captures the graph structure; that is, the entries $[\mathbf{S}]_{i,j}$ for $i \neq j$ are nonzero only if node j is connected to node i by an edge. Typical choices for the GSO are the (weighted) adjacency matrix $\mathbf{W}$ and the graph Laplacian $\mathbf{L}$ as they provide a natural way to extend the notion of *frequencies* to graphs [3, 4].

Similar to traditional signal processing, the workhorse of GSP is *graph filtering* [2, 3, 4]. The most common graph filters are linear operators that process the graph signal. They can be represented by means of a polynomial of the GSO of order K , i.e.,

$$\mathbf{y} = \sum_{k=0}^K h_k \mathbf{S}^k \mathbf{x}, \quad (1)$$

with scalar coefficients $h_0, \dots, h_K$. Graph filters have found success in several applications such as anomaly detection in sensor networks, data classification [4], and high-dimensional data denoising [2], to name a few. However, structures of the form (1) only exploit the pairwise relationships between the nodes encoded by the edges of the graph, but not any higher-level connections such as triplets or quadruples of nodes that interact.

2.2. Graph Volterra Models

A model that addresses higher-level topological interactions is the *graph Volterra model*, which was introduced in [21, 22]. Every value of the graph signal (also called a *node-level signal* in this context) for a particular node is then expressed as a function of the signal values on all the nodes that are involved in higher-level interactions with that node. More specifically, similar to a Volterra series, the signal value of node i is expressed as a linear combination of terms at different topological levels. At level p , if node i is involved in a $(p+1)$ -tuple together with nodes $(j_1, j_2, \dots, j_p)$, one of the terms will be the product of the signal values at these nodes, i.e., $x_{j_1} x_{j_2} \dots x_{j_p}$, thereby implicitly introducing some higher-level topological signal. Considering then a scalar offset $s_{i,0} \in \mathbb{R}$ relative to node i and a vector $\mathbf{s}_{i,p} \in \mathbb{R}^{N^p \times 1}$ describing the influence of all p -tuples of nodes on node i , for $p = 1, 2, \dots, P$, we can express the signal value x_i of node i as

$$x_i = s_{i,0} + \sum_{p=1}^P \mathbf{s}_{i,p}^\top \mathbf{x}^{\otimes p}, \quad (2)$$

where we define the Kronecker product powers $\mathbf{x}^{\otimes(p)} = \mathbf{x}^{\otimes(p-1)} \otimes \mathbf{x}$ with $\mathbf{x}^{\otimes 1} = \mathbf{x}$ and $\otimes$ the Kronecker product. We call (2) a P -th-level graph Volterra model as it accounts for the influence of at most P -tuples. By stacking the x_i s of all nodes, we obtain

$$\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{s}_0 + \sum_{p=1}^P \mathbf{S}_p \mathbf{x}^{\otimes p}, \quad (3)$$

where $[\mathbf{s}_0]_i = s_{i,0}$ and $[\mathbf{S}_p]_{i,:} = \mathbf{s}_{i,p}^\top$. Here $\mathbf{s}_0$ is the global offset signal and $\mathbf{S}_p$ describes how every p -tuple of nodes influences every

Fig. 1. Illustration of first-level GSO $\mathbf{S}_1$ for a set of 5 active pairwise interactions (in black), i.e., $(1, 2)$, $(1, 3)$, $(2, 3)$, $(2, 4)$, and $(3, 4)$. Thus, node 1 is connected to the nodes 2 and 3 (in blue).

Fig. 2. Illustration of second-level GSO $\mathbf{S}_2$ for a set of 2 active triplets (in black), i.e., $(1, 2, 3)$ and $(1, 2, 4)$. Thus, node 1 is connected to the pairs $(2, 3)$, $(3, 2)$, $(2, 4)$, and $(4, 2)$ (in blue).

individual node because together they form a $(p+1)$ -tuple. As such, $\mathbf{S}_1 \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times N}$ connects nodes to nodes and thus could play the role of the traditional GSO. We label this here as a *first-level GSO*, since similarly $\mathbf{S}_p \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times N^p}$ connects p -tuples with nodes and can be viewed as a p -th-level GSO. An example illustrating the structure of $\mathbf{S}_1$ and $\mathbf{S}_2$ is shown in Figures 1 and 2, respectively. Following the hypergraph literature, we can basically use $\mathbf{S}_p$ to encode hyperedges of size $p+1$. Also note that not all p -tuples of an active $(p+1)$ -tuple should be active as in simplicial complexes. Such topological constraints can be included, but are not required here.

Graph Volterra models are self-driven, i.e., in contrast to (1) both the input and output are based on the signal $\mathbf{x}$, and have been successfully used to identify higher-level interactions from data [21, 22]. However, the identified connections between p -tuples and nodes only describe one-hop connections.

3. TOPOLOGICAL VOLTERRA FILTERS

In this section, we merge graph filters and graph Volterra models, leading to a processing framework for *node-level* signals that we refer to as a *topological Volterra filter* (TVF). On one hand, a TVF will extend graph filters from a multi-hop processing tool that exploits only pairwise connections to one that also considers higher-level interactions. On the other hand, a TVF will extend graph Volterra models from a higher-level topology identification tool inferring only one-hop connections to a higher-level processing tool exploiting also multi-hop connections. We will present the TVF in different steps, by looking at every term of the Volterra model separately.

Table 1. RMSE of 2nd-level TVF in inverse filtering of model (9), where row and column indices of each subtable are L_1 and L_2 .

$K = 0, L_1, L_2 = \{0, 1, 2\}$			$K = 1, L_1, L_2 = \{0, 1, 2\}$		
0.58	0.58	0.57	0.43	0.43	0.43
0.58	0.57	0.57	0.43	0.43	0.43
0.58	0.57	0.56	0.43	0.43	0.43
$K = 2, L_1, L_2 = \{0, 1, 2\}$			$K = 3, L_1, L_2 = \{0, 1, 2\}$		
0.43	0.43	0.42	0.43	0.43	0.43
0.43	0.42	0.42	0.43	0.42	0.42
0.43	0.42	0.42	0.43	0.42	0.42

Table 2. RMSE of 2nd-level TVF in inverse filtering of model (10), where row and column indices of each subtable are L_1 and L_2 .

$K = 0, L_1, L_2 = \{0, 1, 2\}$			$K = 1, L_1, L_2 = \{0, 1, 2\}$		
1.06	1.04	1.01	0.96	0.91	0.88
1.06	1.03	0.98	0.97	0.87	0.83
1.06	1.03	0.97	0.96	0.87	0.81
$K = 2, L_1, L_2 = \{0, 1, 2\}$			$K = 3, L_1, L_2 = \{0, 1, 2\}$		
0.82	0.79	0.76	0.80	0.76	0.74
0.82	0.76	0.73	0.80	0.74	0.70
0.82	0.76	0.72	0.80	0.74	0.68

where $\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{1}$, i.e., the all-one vector, and $\mathbf{n}$ follows a Gaussian distribution. For the 1st-level TVF, as the number of filter taps increases, the RMSE reduces, but it saturates at 0.75 (not shown). However, from Table 1, we observe that with a 2nd-level TVF, we can break this limit and obtain a smaller RMSE of 0.42 (44% improvement). It shows that a 2nd-level TVF can do much better than a 1st-level TVF, i.e., a conventional graph filter, in dealing with FIR modeled graph signals.

2nd-level forward model. We then generate the data following a 2n-level forward model:

$$\mathbf{y} = 0.05\mathbf{n} + 0.2\mathbf{x} + 0.3\mathbf{S}_1\mathbf{x} + 0.5\mathbf{S}_1^2\mathbf{x} + \mathbf{S}_1\mathbf{S}_2(0.2(\mathbf{x} \otimes \mathbf{x}) + 0.3(\mathbf{S}_1\mathbf{x} \otimes \mathbf{x}) + 0.3(\mathbf{S}_1\mathbf{x} \otimes \mathbf{S}_1\mathbf{x}) + 0.2(\mathbf{S}_1^2\mathbf{x} \otimes \mathbf{x})), \quad (10)$$

where $\mathbf{x}$ and $\mathbf{n}$ are defined as before. The RMSE of the 1st-level TVF fluctuates around 2.65 when K increases, and it reaches a lower bound of RMSE = 2.62 (not shown). If we contrast the latter with a 2nd-level TVF, we can see from Table 2 that the RMSE can be lowered by 74.1% via exploiting the relationships between node pairs and individual nodes.

2nd-level AR forward model. Finally, we generate the data with an AR-type 2nd-level forward model:

$$\mathbf{y} = \mathbf{x} + 0.3\mathbf{S}_1\mathbf{S}_2(\mathbf{y} \otimes \mathbf{y}) + 0.6\mathbf{S}_2(\mathbf{y} \otimes \mathbf{S}_1\mathbf{y}). \quad (11)$$

where we set $\mathbf{y} = \mathbf{1}$ and obtain $\mathbf{x}$ from (11). The least-squares solution for the 2nd-level TVF coefficients will be $h_{0,0,0} = 1$, $h_{1,0,0} = -0.3$, $h_{0,0,1} = -0.6$ and the signal $\mathbf{x}$ can be perfectly recovered. For the 1st-level TVF this is never the case and the achieved minimum error is RMSE = 1.64. From Table 3, we observe that as long as $K \geq 1$, $L_1 \geq 0$, $L_2 \geq 1$, we can achieve a perfect inverse filtering with a 2nd-level TVF.

4.2. Application: Recommender Systems

We also applied the 2nd-level TVF for rating prediction in recommender systems using the MovieLens100K dataset. We compare

Table 3. RMSE of 2nd-level TVF in inverse filtering of model (11), where row and column indices of each subtable are L_1 and L_2 .

$K = 0, L_1, L_2 = \{0, 1, 2\}$			$K = 1, L_1, L_2 = \{0, 1, 2\}$		
1.16	0.40	0.38	0.37	0	0
1.16	0.39	0.36	0.37	0	0
1.16	0.39	0.36	0.37	0	0
$K = 2, L_1, L_2 = \{0, 1, 2\}$			$K = 3, L_1, L_2 = \{0, 1, 2\}$		
0.16	0	0	0.15	0	0
0.16	0	0	0.15	0	0
0.16	0	0	0.15	0	0

Table 4. RMSE of 2nd-level TVF in rating prediction, where K_1 is the number of hops in the 1st-level TVF, K_2 in the 2nd-level TVF.

K_1	2nd-level TVF with $K_2 = 2, (L_1, L_2)$					1st-level TVF
	(0, 0)	(1, 0)	(2, 0)	(2, 1)	(3, 1)	
1	0.769	0.764	0.762	0.760	0.760	0.801
2	0.752	0.746	0.746	0.743	0.743	0.796
3	0.752	0.747	0.746	0.744	0.743	0.796
4	0.752	0.747	0.746	0.744	0.743	0.796
5	0.752	0.747	0.746	0.743	0.743	0.796
6	0.753	0.746	0.746	0.743	0.743	0.796

the 2nd-level TVF with the item-based multi-hop graph collaborative filtering (1st-level TVF) in [26, Eq. 20]. We considered the first 4646 ratings from 150 users and 200 movies with 4546 ratings for training and 100 for testing. Matrix $\mathbf{S}_1$ is an item similarity graph constructed from the training set following [26, Eq. 6]. We built the 2nd-level GSO as in the synthetic experiments. If triplet (i, j, k) is active, we set $[\mathbf{S}_2]_{i,(j,k)} = 0.5([\mathbf{S}_1]_{i,j} + [\mathbf{S}_1]_{i,k})$. Ratings are predicted by a 1st- and 2nd-level TVF collaborative filter (replacing the FIR filter in [26, Eq. 20] by a 2nd-level TVF) for the results reported in Table 4.

We observe that for both filters, as the number of filter taps increases, the rating prediction becomes better (since we round the values to 3 digits after the decimal, it is not visible after $K_1 > 2$). But after a certain number of hops, the 1st-level TVF, i.e., the method in [26], is not able to further improve the prediction performance. However, a 2nd-level TVF can reduce the RMSE beyond this limit, even when K_2, L_1, L_2 are small (all under 3). This is because extra information between one movie and a pair of movies is explored by a 2nd-level TVF in the prediction.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have proposed topological Volterra filters (TVFs). TVFs generalize traditional graph filters to capture also the influence of higher-level interactions and they generalize graph Volterra models to capture also multi-hop interactions. TVFs are built following the principles of their temporal counterparts by accounting for higher-level topological connections, and consequently, they present themselves as a nonlinear model to process and represent graph signals. An interesting feature of TVFs is that they are linear in the filter coefficients, thus allowing for a simple least-squares design. We have showcased the performance of TVFs for solving inverse problems on graphs and for rating prediction in recommender systems. Future research will be principally based on providing a spectral analysis for TVFs and corroborating their benefits for more applications.

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