An Overview of SystemVerilog for Design and Verification

Vighnesh Iyer, EECS 251B

Intention of this Lecture

- We use Chisel for all RTL written at Berkeley
  - Why bother with SystemVerilog?
- SystemVerilog is the de-facto industry standard
  - SV/UVM is used for (nearly) all industry verification
  - You will be asked about it in interviews
- Understand basic dynamic verification concepts
- Understand existing SystemVerilog code
- Inspire extensions to HDLs

SystemVerilog (SV) is an IEEE Standard 1800
https://standards.ieee.org/project/1800.html

Universal Verification Methodology (UVM)
is a standard maintained by Accellera
https://www.accellera.org/downloads/standards/uvm

What is SystemVerilog

- IEEE 1800 standard
- A massive extension of Verilog with new constructs for design and verification
  - New data types (for RTL and testbenches)
  - OOP support
  - Constrained random API
  - Specification language
  - Coverage specification API
- Fixing warts in Verilog
  - Synthesis - simulation mismatch
  - Verilog was initially developed as a simulation language; synthesis emerged later

SystemVerilog for Design

Ending the Wire vs. Reg Confusion

Verilog-2005

- **wire** for LHS of assign statements
- **reg** for LHS of code inside always @ blocks

```
wire   a;
reg  b, c;
assign   a  =  ____;
always   @(* ) b   =  ____;
always   @(posedge  clk) c    <=  ____;
```

SystemVerilog

- **logic** for LHS of assign statements
- **logic** for LHS of code inside always @ blocks

```
logic    a, b, c;
assign   a  =  ____;
always   @(* ) b   =  ____;
always   @(posedge  clk) c    <=  ____;
```

Both: the **containing statement** determines if the net is the direct output of a **register** or **combinational** logic

Signal Your Intent With Specific Always Blocks

Verilog-2005

```
always   @(* )  begin
    if   (x) b    =  a
    else      b  =  ! a;
end

always   @(posedge  clk)    begin
    if   (x) c    <=  ! a;
    else      c  <=  a;
end
```

Coding style is used to verify that c infers as a register and b as comb logic

SystemVerilog

```
always_comb   begin
    if   (x) b    =  a
    else      b  =  ! a;
end

always_ff    @(posedge  clk)    begin
    if   (x) c    <=  ! a;
    else      c  <=  a;
end
```

New **always_comb** and **always_ff** statements for safety

Autoconnect (Implicit Port Connections)

- How many times have you done this?

```
module   mod ( input    a, b,    output    c);   endmodule

reg   a, b;    wire    c;
mod x (.a(a), .b(b), .c(c));
```

- If the net names and their corresponding port names match, there's a **shortcut**

```
mod  x  ( . a,   . b,   . c ) ;
```

- In SystemVerilog, there's a concise **shortcut**

```
mod  x  ( . * ) ;
```

- Implicit connections only work if port names and widths match

Use Enums Over localparams

Verilog-2005

```
localparam    STATE_IDLE  =  2' b00;
localparam    STATE_A =  2' b01;
localparam    STATE_B =  2' b10;
reg   [ 1: 0] state;

always   @(posedge   clk)    begin
    case   (state)
        STATE_IDLE:   state    <=  STATE_A;
        STATE_A:  state    <=  STATE_B;
        STATE_B:  state    <=  STATE_IDLE;
    endcase
end
```

SystemVerilog

```
typedef    enum  logic    [ 1: 0] {
    STATE_IDLE,   STATE_A,   STATE_B
} state_t;
state_t state;

always_ff     @(posedge   clk)    begin
    case   (state)
        STATE_IDLE:   state    <=  STATE_A
        STATE_A:  state    <=  STATE_B;
        STATE_B:  state    <=  STATE_IDLE;
    endcase
end
```

Enums automatically check whether all values can fit. Can be used as a net type. Add **semantic meaning** to constants.

More on Enums

- Common to use enums for attaching semantic strings to values

```
typedef enum logic {
    READ, WRITE
} mem_op_t;

module memory (
    input [4:0] addr,
    input mem_op_t op,
    input [31:0] din,
    output logic [31:0] dout
);
```

- Note that input/output net types are by default 'wire', you can override them as logic

Even More on Enums

- You can force enum values to be associated with a specific value
  - To help match up literals for a port that doesn't use enums

```
typedef enum logic [1:0] { STATE_IDLE=3, STATE_A=2, STATE_B=1 } state_t
```

- You can generate N enum values without typing them out

```
typedef enum logic [1:0] { STATE[3] } state_t
// STATE0 = 0, STATE1 = 1, STATE2 = 2
```

- You can generate N enum values in a particular range

```
typedef enum logic [1:0] { STATE[3:5] } state_t
// STATE3 = 0, STATE4 = 1, STATE5 = 2
```

Even More on Enums

- Enums are a first-class datatype in SystemVerilog
  - Enum instances have native functions defined on them
    - next(): next value from current value
    - prev(): previous value from current value
    - num(): number of elements in enum
    - name(): returns a string with the enum's name (useful for printing using $display)
- They are weakly typechecked
  - You can't assign a binary literal to a enum type net
- They show up in waveforms
  - No more confusion trying to correlate literals to a semantic name

Multidimensional Packed Arrays

- **Packed** dimensions are to the **left** of the variable name
  - Packed dimensions are contiguous (e.g. logic [7:0] a)
- **Unpacked** dimensions are to the **right** of the variable name
  - Unpacked dimensions are non-contiguous (e.g. logic a [8])

```
logic [31:0] memory [32];
// memory[0] is 32 bits wide
// cannot represent more than 1 dimension in memory[0]
// can't easily byte address the memory

logic [3:0][7:0] memory [32];
// memory[0] is 32 bits wide
// memory[0][0] is 8 bits wide
// memory[0][1] is 8 bits wide
```

Structs

- Similar to Bundle in Chisel
  - Allows designer to group nets together, helps encapsulation of signals, easy declaration
  - Can be used within a module or in a module's ports
  - Structs themselves can't be parameterized
    - but can be created inside a parameterized module/interface

```
typedef struct packed {
    logic [31:0] din,
    logic [7:0] addr,
    logic [3:0] wen,
    mem_op op
} ram_cmd;

module ram (
    ram_cmd cmd,
    logic [31:0] dout
);
```

```
ram_cmd a;
always_ff @(posedge clk) begin
    din <= ____
    addr <= ____
    wen <= ____
    op <= ____
end
```

Interfaces

- Interfaces allow designers to group together ports
  - Can be parameterized
  - Can contain structs, initial blocks with assertions, and other verification collateral
  - **Simplify connections** between parent and child modules

```
interface ram_if #( int addr_bits, data_bits)
( input clk);
    logic [addr_bits - 1:0] addr;
    logic [data_bits - 1:0] din;
    logic [data_bits - 1:0] dout;
    mem_op op;
endinterface
```

```
module ram (
    ram_if intf
);
    always_ff @(posedge intf.clk)
        intf.dout <= ram[intf.addr];
endmodule

module top();
    ram_if #(.addr_bits(8), .data_bits(32)) intf();
    ram r (.intf(intf));
    assign intf.din = ____
endmodule
```

Modports

- But I didn't specify the direction (input/output) of the interface ports!
  - This can cause multi-driver issues with improper connections
- Solution: use modports

```
interface ram_if #( int addr_bits, data_bits)
( input clk);
    modport slave (
        input addr, din, op, clk,
        output dout
    );

    modport master (
        output addr, din, op,
        input dout, clk
    );
endinterface
```

```
module ram (
    ram_if.slave intf
);
    always_ff @(posedge intf.clk)
        intf.dout <= ram[intf.addr];
endmodule
```

Typedefs (Type Aliases)

- You probably saw 'typedef' everywhere
  - typedef is used to expose user-defined types
- Just like with enums, they help **attach semantic meaning** to your design
- They are just type aliases

```
typedef signed logic [7:0] sgn_byte;
typedef unsigned logic [3:0] cache_idx;
```

Packages / Namespacing

- Verilog has a global namespace
  - Often naming conflicts in large projects
  - `include is hacky and requires `ifdef guards
- SystemVerilog allows you to encapsulate constructs in a package
  - modules, functions, structs, typedefs, classes

```
package my_pkg;
    typedef enum logic [1:0] { STATE[4] } state_t;
    function show_vals();
        state_t s = STATE0;
        for (int i = 0; i < s.num; i = i + 1) begin
            $display(s.name());
            s = s.next();
        end
    endfunction
endpackage
```

```
import my_pkg::* ;

module ex ( input clk);
    state_t s;
    always_ff @(posedge clk) begin
        s <= STATE0;
    end
endmodule
```

SystemVerilog for Verification

Overview

- The SystemVerilog spec for verification is massive
  - We can't cover everything in one lecture
- New data structures for writing testbenches
  - Parity with PHP
- OOP
- SystemVerilog Assertions
- Coverage API
- Constrained random

New Data Types

- bit, shortint, int, longint
  - 2-state types
- string
  - Now natively supported, some helper methods are defined on string (e.g. substr)

Dynamic Arrays

- Typical Verilog arrays are fixed length at compile time

```
bit [3:0] arr [3];   // a 3 element array of 4 bit values
arr = '{12, 10, 3};  // a literal array assignment
```

- Dynamic arrays are sized at runtime
  - Useful for generating variable length stimulus

```
bit [3:0] arr []; // a dynamic array of 4 bit values
initial begin
    arr = new[2]; // size the array for 2 elements
    arr = '{12, 10}; // literal assignment

    arr = new[10];
    arr[3] = 4;
end
```

Queues

- Similar to lists in Scala and Python
  - Useful for hardware modeling (FIFO, stack) - process transactions sequentially

```
bit [3:0] data [$];   // a queue of 4 - bit elements
bit [3:0] data [$] = '{1, 2, 3, 4};   // initialized queue
data[0]   // first element
data[$]   // last element
data.insert(1)   // append element
data[1:$]   // queue slice excluding first element
x = data.pop_front()   // pops first element of queue and returns it
data = {}   // clear the queue
```

Associative Arrays

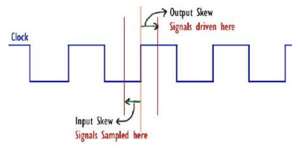
- Similar to Python dicts or Scala Maps
  - Can be used to model a CAM or lookup testbench component settings

```
int fruits [string];
fruits = '{"apple": 4, "orange": 10};

fruits["apple"]
fruits.exists("lemon")
fruits.delete("orange")
```

Clocking Blocks

- There is often confusion when you should drive DUT inputs and sample DUT outputs relative to the clock edge
  - Solution: encode the correct behavior in the interface by using clocking blocks

```
interface ram_if #( int addr_bits, data_bits)
( input clk);
    logic [addr_bits - 1:0] addr;
    logic [data_bits - 1:0] din;
    logic [data_bits - 1:0] dout;
    mem_op op;

    clocking ckb @( posedge clk)
        default input #1step output negedge ;
        input dout;
        output din, dout, op;
    endclocking
endinterface
```



- Input/output is from the perspective of the testbench
- Can use any delay value or edge event as skew
- intf.ckb.din = 32'd100; @(intf.ckb); x = intf.ckb.dout;

OOP in SystemVerilog

- SystemVerilog has your typical object-oriented programming (OOP) constructs
  - Classes, constructors, type generics, inheritance, virtual methods/classes, polymorphism

```
class   Message;
    bit   [ 31: 0] addr;
    bit   [ 3: 0] wr_strobe;
    bit   [ 3: 0] burst_mode;
    bit   [ 31: 0] data [    4];

    function    new  ( bit   [ 31: 0] addr,     bit   [ 3: 0] wr_strobe     =
4' d0);
        this  .addr   =  addr;
        this  .wr_mode  =  wr_mode;
        this  .burst_mode    =  4' b1010;
        this  .data   =  ' { 0,  0,  0,  0};
    endfunction
endclass
```

```
initial      begin
    msg  =  new  Message( 32' d4,
4' b1111);
    $display   (msg.burst_mode);
end
```

More OOP

- You can extend a class as usual
  - class ALUMessage extends Message
  - call .super() to access superclass functions
  - Polymorphic dynamic dispatch works as usual
- You can declare classes and functions 'virtual'
  - Forces subclasses to provide an implementation
  - Prevents instantiation of abstract parent class
- Class members can be declared 'static'
  - The member is shared among all class instances
- OOP constructs are used to:
  - Model transactions
  - Model hardware components (hierarchically and compositionally)

Type Generic Classes

- Classes can have parameters, just like modules
  - They can be ints, strings, or **types**
  - Parameters concretize the class prototype; constructor binds each class member
  - Can't define type bounds on T

```
class   FIFO  #( type   T  =  int  ,   int    entries    =  8);
    T  items [entries];
    int    ptr;

    function     void   push( T  entry);
    function     T  pull();
endclass
```

SystemVerilog Assertions (SVA)

SystemVerilog Assertions (SVA)

- The most complex component of SystemVerilog
  - Entire books written on just this topic
- SVA: a temporal property specification language
  - Allows you to formally specify expected behavior of RTL
- You are already familiar with 'assert' (so-called 'immediate assertions')

```
module   testbench();
    dut d (.addr, .dout);

    initial      begin
        addr   =  'h40;
        assert    (dout    ==  'hDEADBEEF);
    end
endmodule
```

- But how do I express properties that involve the uArch of the RTL?
- Can I express these properties (e.g. req-ack) in a concise way?

Concurrent Assertions

- Concurrent assertions are constantly monitored by the RTL simulator
  - Often embedded in the DUT RTL or an interface

```
module   cpu();
    assert   property    @(posedge   clk) mem_addr[    1: 0]   !=   2' d0  &&  load_word    | - >  unaligned_load
    assert   property    @(posedge   clk) opcode      ==  0  | - >  take_exception
    assert   property    @(posedge   clk) mem_stall       |=>   $stable(pc)
endmodule
```

- Properties are evaluated on a clock edge
- | - >: same-cycle implication
- | =>: next-cycle implication
- These properties can also be formally verified

System Functions

- You can call a system function in an SVA expression to simplify checking historical properties
  - $stable(x)   : indicates if x was unchanged from the previous clock cycle
  - $rose(x)
  - $fell(x)
  - $past(x) : gives you the value of x from 1 cycle ago
    - rs1_mem == $past(rs1_ex)

Sequences

- Properties are made up of sequences + an implication
  - Many interfaces come with sequence libraries you can use to build complex properties

```
module   cpu();
    sequence    stall
        mem_stall;
    endsequence

    sequence    unchanged_pc
        ##1  $stable(pc);
    endsequence

    property    stall_holds_pc
        @(posedge   clk) stall       | - >  unchanged_pc;
    endproperty

    assert    property     (stall_holds_pc);
endmodule
```

Sequence Combinators

- Sequences are the core of SVA: they describe temporal RTL behavior
- Sequences can be combined with temporal operators

```
a ## 1 b // a then b on the next cycle
a ##N b // a then b on the Nth cycle
a ##[1:4] b // a then b on the 1-4th subsequent cycle
a ##[2:$] b // a then b after 2 or more cycles

s1 and s2 // sequence s1 and s2 succeed
s1 intersect s2 // sequence s1 and s2 succeed and end at the same time
s1 or s2 // sequence s1 or s2 succeeds
```

- Sequences are combined with an implication to form a property
  - There's a lot more to SVA

Coverage APIs

Coverage

- You're probably familiar with software coverage tools
  - Track if a line of source code is hit by the unit tests
- Coverage is used to measure the thoroughness of the test suite
  - Are all the interesting cases in the code exercised?
- RTL coverage comes in two forms
  - Structural coverage: line, toggle, condition
  - Functional coverage: did a particular uArch feature specified by the DV engineer get exercised?
    - e.g. cache eviction, misaligned memory access, interrupt, all opcodes executed

Property Coverage

- Any SVA property can be tracked for coverage
  - Instead of 'assert property' use 'cover property'

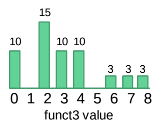
```
property req_ack;
    req ##[1:10] ack
endproperty
cover property (req_ack)
```

- Property covers are used in RTL to check that some **multi-cycle** uArch behavior is exercised
  - e.g. did this req-ack handshake ever occur?
  - e.g. did a branch mispredict and predictor update happen?

Coverpoints and Covergroups

- Coverpoints track coverage of a single net
  - e.g. FSM state, control signals, data buses
- Covergroups group together coverpoints
  - Each coverpoint refers to a net whose value is tracked at every covergroup event
  - Can be used in RTL and in testbench code

```
module cpu ();
    logic [5:0] rs1, rs2;
    logic [2:0] funct3;

    covergroup c @(posedge clk);
        coverpoint rs1;
        coverpoint funct3;
    endgroup

endmodule
```



Coverpoint Bins

- Sometimes we don't want to track each value a net can take on individually
  - Use the bins API to group some values together

```
module alu( input [31:0] a, input [31:0] b, input [3:0] op, output [31:0] out);
    covergroup c();
        coverpoint a {
            bins zero = {0};
            bins max = {32'hffff_ffff};
            // automatically allocate 100 uniformly sized bins for the remaining numbers
            bins in_the_middle[100] = {[1:32'hffff_ffff - 1]};
        }
    endgroup
endmodule
```

Transaction-Level Modeling

Transactions

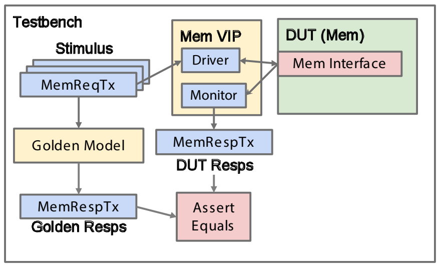
- Our testbenches are usually written at cycle-granularity
  - Leads to mixing of driving/monitoring protocols, timing details, golden modeling, and stimulus
  - Each of these concerns should be separated
- Model a single interaction with the DUT as a 'transaction'
  - It can take multiple cycles
- We can build a stimulus generator and golden model at transaction-level

```
class MemReqTx();
    bit [31:0] addr;
    bit [31:0] wr_data;
    mem_op op;
endclass

class MemRespTx();
    bit [31:0] rd_data;
endclass
```

```
class Mem();
    bit [31:0] ram [];
    function MemRespTx processTx(MemReqTx tx);
endclass
```

VIPs and Testbench Architecture

- Verification IPs consist of tasks that encode
  - How to drive transactions into an interface at cycle granularity
  - How to translate cycle granularity interface activity into transactions
- A testbench
  - Generates stimulus
  - Generates golden DUT behavior
  - Simulates actual DUT behavior
  - Checks correctness



Random Transaction Generation

- How do we generate transaction-level stimulus?
- SystemVerilog class members can be prefixed with the ‘rand’ keyword
  - These fields are marked as randomizable

```
class MemReqTx();
    rand bit [31:0] addr;
    rand bit [31:0] wr_data;
    rand mem_op op;
endclass
```

```
initial begin
    MemReqTx tx = new();
    tx.randomize();
end
```

Constrained Random

- You can constrain the random fields of a class inside or outside the class
  - You can add ad-hoc constraints when calling .randomize

```
class cls;
    rand bit [7:0] min, typ, max;

    constraint range {
        0 < min; typ < max; typ > min; max < 128;
    }
    extern constraint extra;
endclass

constraint cls::extra { min > 5; };
initial begin
    cls = new();
    cls.randomize() with { min == 10; };
end
```

Randomization of Variable Length Data Structures

```
class Packet;
    rand bit [3:0] data [];

    constraint size { data.size() > 5; data.size < 10; }

    constraint values {
        foreach (data[i]) {
            data[i] == i + 1;
            data[i] inside {[0:8]};
        }
    }
endclass
```

- Many things I haven’t discussed
  - Biasing and distributions, soft constraints, disables, solve before, implications, dynamic constraint on/off

Mailboxes for Safe Inter-Thread Communication

- Mailboxes are like golang channels
  - Bounded queues that allow one thread to send data to another

```
module example;
    mailbox #(int) m = new(100);

    initial begin
        for (int i = 0; i < 200; i++)
            #1 m.put(i);
    end

    initial begin
        for (int i = 0; i < 200; i++) begin
            int i; #2 m.get(i);
            $display (i, m.num());
        end
    end
endmodule
```

Testbench Example

Register Bank

- Let’s test a simple register bank
  - Works like a memory
  - Multi-cycle (potentially variable) read/write latency
  - Uses a ready signal to indicate when a new operation (read/write) can begin

```
interface reg_if (input clk);
    logic rst;
    logic [7:0] addr;
    logic [15:0] wdata;
    logic [15:0] rdata;
    mem_op op;
    logic en;
    logic ready;
    // primary/secondary modports
    // drv_cb/mon_cb clocking blocks
endinterface
```

```
module regbank (reg_if.slave if);
    // implementation
endmodule

// Regbank transaction
class regbank_tx;
    rand bit [7:0] addr;
    rand bit [15:0] wdata;
    bit [15:0] rdata;
    rand bit wr;
endclass
```

VIP Implementation

```
class driver;
    virtual reg_if vif;
    mailbox drv_mbx;

    task run();
        @(vif.drv_cb);
        forever begin
            regbank_tx tx;
            drv_mbx.get(tx);
            vif.drv_cb.en <= 1;
            vif.drv_cb.addr <= tx.addr;
            // assign op and wdata
            @(vif.drv_cb);
            while (! vif.drv_cb.ready)
                @(vif.drv_cb)
        end
    endtask
endclass
```

```
class monitor;
    virtual reg_if vif;
    mailbox mon_mbx;

    task run();
        @(vif.mon_cb);
        if (vif.en) begin
            regbank_tx tx = new();
            tx.addr = vif.mon_cb.addr;
            // assign op and wdata
            if (vif.mon_cb.op == READ) begin
                @(vif.mon_cb);
                tx.rdata = vif.mon_cb.rdata;
            end
            mon_mbx.put(tx);
        end
    endtask
endclass
```

Top-Level

- A rough sketch of the testbench top

```
module tb();
    regbank dut (.*);
    initial begin
        // initialize driver/monitor classes
        regbank_tx stim [100];
        stim.randomize();
        fork
            drv.run();  mon.run();
        join_none
        drv.drv_mbx.put(stim);
        while (mon.mon_mbx.size < 100)
            @(dut.drv_cb);
        // Pull tx from mon_mbx and check correctness
    end
endmodule
```

Conclusion

- SystemVerilog makes design easier and clearer than plain Verilog
- SystemVerilog has many useful verification features not found in open-source environments
  - SVA, coverpoints, constrained random
- I've only scratched the surface
  - UVM
  - Hardware modeling
  - IPC
- Play around: https://www.edaplayground.com/x/CK
  - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SystemVerilog

References

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SystemVerilog

https://verificationguide.com/systemverilog/systemverilog-tutorial/

https://www.chipverify.com/systemverilog/systemverilog-tutorial

https://www.doulos.com/knowhow/systemverilog/systemverilog-tutorials/systemverilog-assertions-tutorial/

https://www.systemverilog.io/sva-basics

Advanced notes on SystemVerilog covergroups: https://staging.doulos.com/media/1600/dvclub_austin.pdf