

On mixture approximations for differential equations with distributed time delays

Tobias K. S. Ritschel

Assistant Professor
tobk@dtu.dk, +45 4525 3315
Department of Applied Mathematics and Computer Science,
Technical University of Denmark

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Outline

1. What are mixture approximations?
 - ▶ Three different types of mixture approximations
 - ▶ Convergence
 - ▶ Practical implementation
 - ▶ What can you do with them?
2. Mixture approximations for delay differential equations (DDEs)
 - ▶ Examples of DDEs with distributed time delays
 - ▶ The linear chain trick (DDEs $\rightarrow$ ODEs)
 - ▶ Convergence
 - ▶ Simulation example (bifurcation analysis)
 - ▶ Kernel identification

Mixture approximations

Problem statement

Approximate the $L^1(\mathcal{D})$ function α with the following properties

1. Non-negative

$$\alpha(t) \geq 0, \quad t \in \mathcal{D}$$

2. Integrates to one

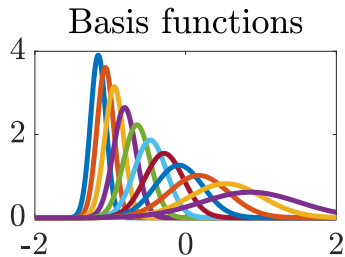
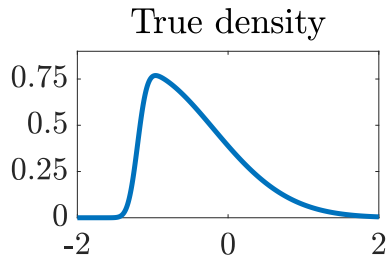
$$\int_{\mathcal{D}} \alpha(t) \, dt = 1$$

3. Continuous

The domain may be

- ▶ the real numbers, $\mathcal{D} = (-\infty, \infty)$,
- ▶ the non-negative real numbers, $\mathcal{D} = [0, \infty)$, or
- ▶ an interval, $\mathcal{D} = [a, b]$

Example for $\mathcal{D} = (-\infty, \infty)$



Mixture approximation

Approximate α by a sum of basis functions

$$\alpha(t) \approx \hat{\alpha}(t) = \sum_{m=0}^M c_m \ell_m(t)$$

Weight constraints

$$\sum_{m=0}^M c_m = 1, \quad 0 \leq c_m \leq 1, \quad m = 0, \dots, M$$

Non-negative basis functions

$$\ell_m(t) \geq 0, \quad m = 0, \dots, M$$

Basis functions integrate to one

$$\int_{\mathcal{D}} \ell_m(t) \, dt = 1, \quad m = 0, \dots, M$$

Gaussian, Erlang, and beta mixture approximations

Gaussian basis functions, $t \in \mathcal{D} = (-\infty, \infty)$

$$\ell_m(t) = b_m \exp \left(-\frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{t - \mu_m}{\sigma_m} \right)^2 \right), \quad b_m = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi\sigma_m^2}}$$

Erlang basis functions, $t \in \mathcal{D} = [0, \infty)$

$$\ell_m(t) = b_m t^m e^{-at}, \quad b_m = \frac{a^{m+1}}{m!}$$

Beta basis functions, $t \in \mathcal{D} = [0, \Delta t]$

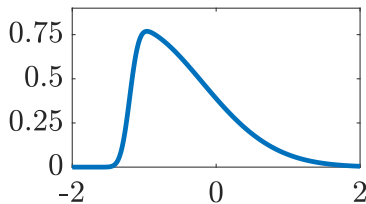
$$\ell_m(t) = b_m t^m (\Delta t - t)^{M-m}, \quad b_m = \frac{1}{\Delta t^{M+1}} \frac{(M+1)!}{m!(M-m)!}$$

Gaussian mixture approximation ($M = 10$)

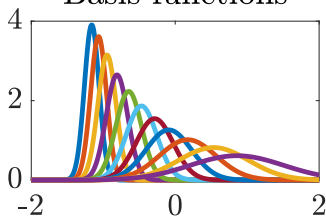
Skew normal distribution

$$\alpha(t) = \frac{2}{\omega} f\left(\frac{t - \xi}{\omega}\right) F\left(k \left(\frac{t - \xi}{\omega}\right)\right)$$

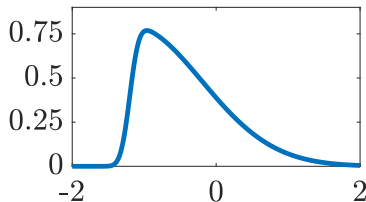
True density



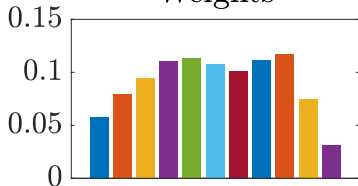
Basis functions



Approximate density



Weights

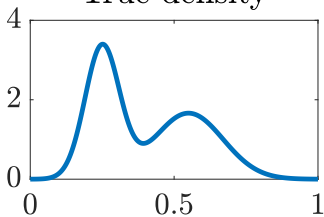


Example: Erlang mixture approximation ($M = 90$)

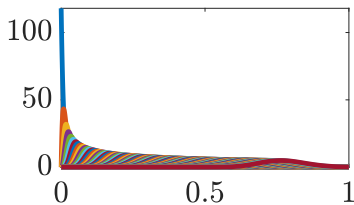
$$\alpha(t) = \frac{1}{2}(f(t; \mu_1, \sigma_1) + f(t; \mu_2, \sigma_2)),$$

$$f(t; \mu, \sigma) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi\sigma^2}} \left(\exp\left(-\frac{1}{2} \frac{(t - \mu)^2}{\sigma^2}\right) + \exp\left(-\frac{1}{2} \frac{(t + \mu)^2}{\sigma^2}\right) \right)$$

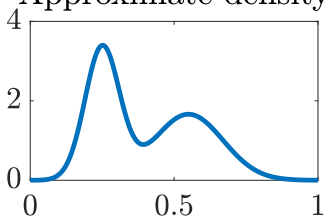
True density



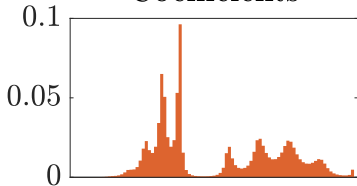
Basis functions



Approximate density



Coefficients



Is convergence guaranteed?

1. Beta mixture approximations, $\mathcal{D} = [0, 1]$

- ▶ ℓ_m is a Bernstein polynomial scaled by $M + 1$
- ▶ pointwise convergence is guaranteed by Weierstrass' approximation theorem [1] as $M \rightarrow \infty$

$$c_m = \frac{1}{M+1} \alpha(s_m), \quad s_m = m\Delta s, \quad \Delta s = 1/M,$$
$$c_m = \int_{s_m}^{s_{m+1}} \alpha(s) \, ds, \quad s_m = m\Delta s, \quad \Delta s = 1/(M+1)$$

2. Gaussian mixture approximations, $\mathcal{D} = (-\infty, \infty)$

- ▶ Error analysis by Maz'ya and Schmidt [2]
- ▶ Convergence proof by Sorenson and Alspach [3]

Convergence of Erlang mixture approximations

Weak convergence (Tijms [4, 5])

$$\int_0^t \hat{\alpha}(s) \, ds \rightarrow \int_0^t \alpha(s) \, ds \quad \text{as } a \rightarrow \infty$$

Pointwise convergence (based on delta families [6])

$$\hat{\alpha}(t) \rightarrow \alpha(t) \quad \text{as } a \rightarrow \infty$$

Vitali's convergence lemma

$$\int_0^\infty |\hat{\alpha}(s) - \alpha(s)| \, ds \rightarrow 0 \quad \text{as } a \rightarrow \infty$$

if

- ▶ $\hat{\alpha}$ converges pointwise ✓
- ▶ $\hat{\alpha}$ is tight ✓
- ▶ $\hat{\alpha}$ is uniformly integrable ✓

Extend proof to Gaussian basis functions for $\mathcal{D} = (-\infty, \infty)$

Optimal coefficients and rate parameter

Time domain ($k = 0, \dots, N - 1$)

$$\int_0^{t_h} \alpha(s) \, ds = 1 - \epsilon, \quad t_k = k/t_h$$

Least-squares optimization problem

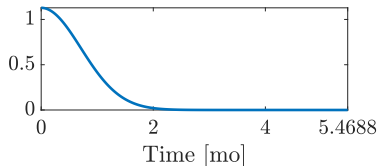
$$\begin{aligned} \min_{\{c_m\}_{m=0}^M, a} \quad & \phi = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{k=0}^{N-1} (\alpha(t_k) - \hat{\alpha}(t_k))^2 \Delta t, \\ \text{subject to} \quad & \sum_{m=0}^M c_m = 1, \\ & 0 \leq c_m \leq 1, \quad m = 0, \dots, M, \\ & a_{\min} \leq a \end{aligned}$$

- ▶ Use Matlab's `fmincon`
- ▶ Provide analytical first- and second-order derivatives

Example: Gaussian kernel

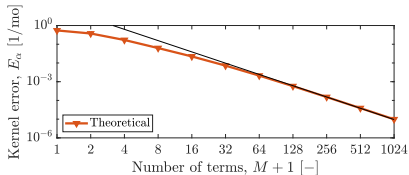
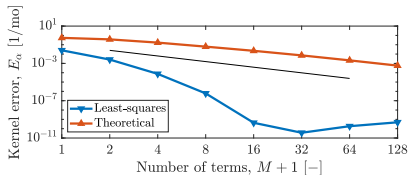
Kernel

$$\alpha(t) = \frac{2}{\sqrt{\pi}} e^{-t^2}$$



Error

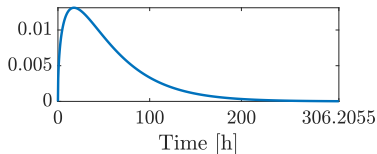
$$E_{\alpha} = \sum_{k=0}^{N_{\alpha}-1} (\hat{\alpha}(t_k) - \alpha(t_k))^2 \Delta t$$



Example: Gamma kernel

Kernel ($\lambda = -0.46$, $\kappa = 0.0263$)

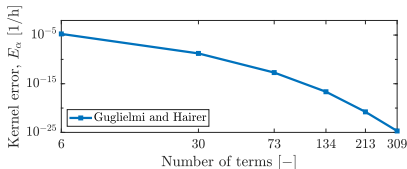
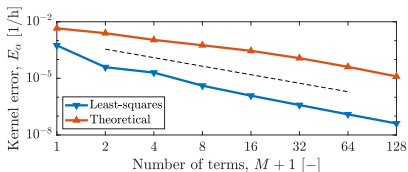
$$\alpha(t) = bt^{-\lambda}e^{-\kappa t}, \quad b = \frac{\kappa^{1-\lambda}}{\Gamma(1-\lambda)}$$



Exponential mixture approximation by Guglielmi and Hairer [7]

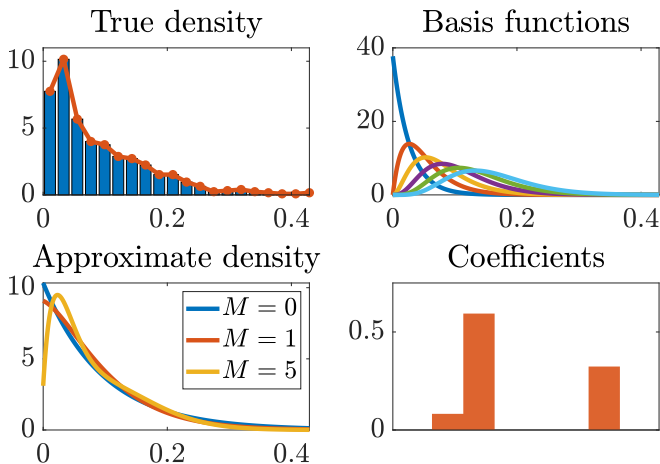
$$\hat{\alpha}(t) = t \sum_{m=M}^{N-1} c_m \ell_m(t), \quad \ell_m(t) = b_m e^{-a_m t}, \quad b_m = a_m,$$

$$c_m = \frac{h}{\Gamma(\lambda + 1)} e^{\lambda m h}, \quad a_m = e^{m h}$$



What can you do with mixture approximations?

Model of concavity from breast cancer data set¹



¹Link to data set on Kaggle.

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Differential equations with distributed time delays

Delay differential equations

Logistic equation

$$\dot{x}(t) = x(t) (1 - x(t))$$

General form (ODE)

$$\dot{x}(t) = f(x(t))$$

Logistic equation w. absolute time delay

$$\dot{x}(t) = x(t) (1 - x(t - \tau))$$

General form (DDE)

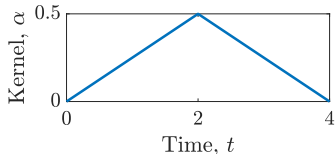
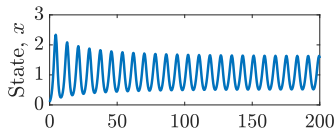
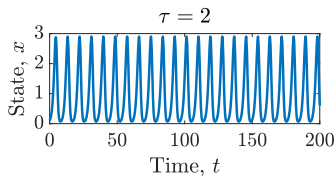
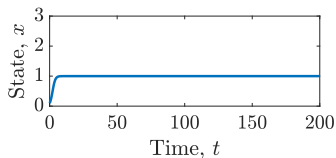
$$\dot{x}(t) = f(x(t), x(t - \tau))$$

Logistic equation w. distributed time delay

$$\dot{x}(t) = x(t) \left(1 - \int_{-\infty}^t \alpha(t-s)x(s) ds \right)$$

General form (DDDE)

$$\dot{x}(t) = f(x(t), \int_{-\infty}^t \alpha(t-s)x(s) ds)$$



Epidemiology

SIR model without delays

$$\dot{S}(t) = -\beta S(t)I(t),$$

$$\dot{I}(t) = \beta S(t)I(t) - \eta I(t),$$

$$\dot{R}(t) = \eta I(t)$$

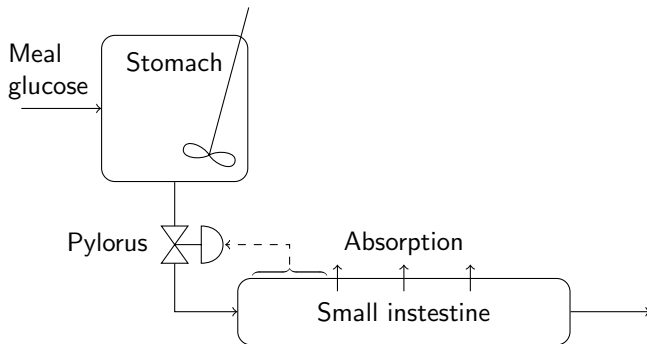
SIR model with distributed time delay

$$\dot{S}(t) = -\beta S(t) \int_{-\infty}^t \alpha(t-s)I(s) \, ds,$$

$$\dot{I}(t) = \beta S(t) \int_{-\infty}^t \alpha(t-s)I(s) \, ds - \eta I(t),$$

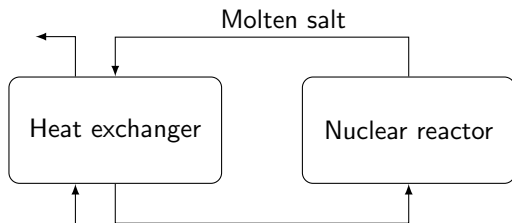
$$\dot{R}(t) = \eta I(t)$$

Diabetes

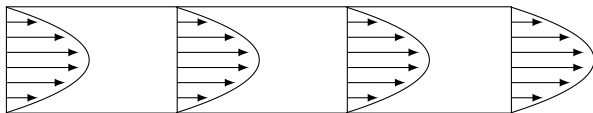


Ritschel, T.K.S., Reenberg, A.T., Carstensen, P.E., Bendsen, J., Jørgensen, J.B., 2023. Mathematical Meal Models for Simulation of Human Metabolism. arXiv: 2307.16444.

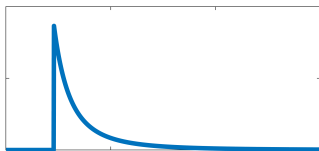
Molten salt nuclear reactor and nonuniform flow in pipes



Non-uniform velocity profile



Kernel for Hagen-Poiseuille flow (quadratic velocity profile)



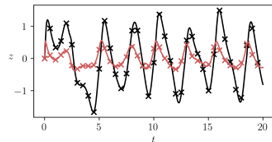
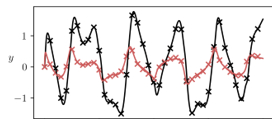
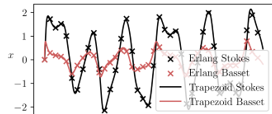
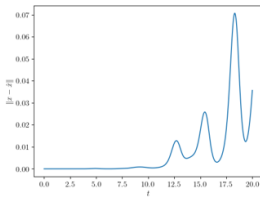
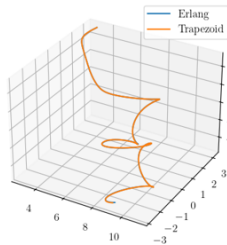
Ritschel, T.K.S., 2025. Numerical Optimal Control for Distributed Delay Differential Equations: A Simultaneous Approach based on Linearization of the Delayed Variables. In: Proceedings of the 2025 European Control Conference (ECC), June 24-27, Thessaloniki, Greece. arXiv: 2410.15083.

Particle flow in velocity field

Particle subject to Stoke's drag force and Basset history force

$$\dot{x}_p = u_p,$$

$$\dot{u}_p = \underbrace{\frac{1}{St} \mathcal{F}(a)(u_p - u_f)}_{\text{Nonlinear drag}} + \underbrace{C \int_0^t \frac{1}{\sqrt{t-s}} (\dot{u}_p - \dot{u}_f) ds}_{\text{Basset history force}}$$



Collaboration with PhD candidate Zejian You, Asst. Prof. Qi Wang, and Prof. Gustaaf Jacobs from San Diego State University.

Linear chain trick (DDE $\rightarrow$ ODE)

Linear chain trick

DDE with distributed time delay

$$\dot{x}(t) = f(x(t), z(t)), \quad z(t) = \int_{-\infty}^t \alpha(t-s)x(s) \, ds$$

Approximate kernel

$$\alpha(t) \approx \hat{\alpha}(t) = \sum_{m=0}^M c_m \ell_m(t)$$

Substitute into integral

$$z(t) \approx \hat{z}(t) = \sum_{m=0}^M c_m \int_{-\infty}^t \ell_m(t-s)x(s) \, ds = \sum_{m=0}^M c_m z_m(t)$$

Differentiate z_m

$$\begin{aligned} \dot{z}_m(t) &= \ell_m(0)x(t) + \int_{-\infty}^t \dot{\ell}_m(t-s)x(s) \, ds \\ &= \begin{cases} a(x(t) - z_0(t)), & m = 0, \\ a(z_{m-1}(t) - z_m(t)), & m > 0 \end{cases} \end{aligned}$$

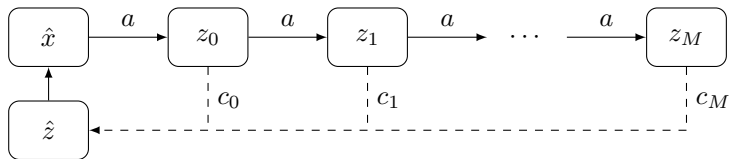
Approximate ODEs

System

$$\dot{\hat{x}}(t) = f(\hat{x}(t), \hat{z}(t)), \quad \hat{z}(t) = \sum_{m=0}^M c_m z_m(t)$$

Auxiliary memory states

$$\begin{aligned} \dot{z}_0(t) &= a(\hat{x}(t) - z_0(t)), \\ \dot{z}_m(t) &= a(z_{m-1}(t) - z_m(t)), \quad m = 1, \dots, M \end{aligned}$$



Approximate ODEs

Approximate ODEs

$$\begin{aligned}\dot{\hat{x}}(t) &= f(\hat{x}(t), \hat{z}(t)), \\ \dot{Z}(t) &= AZ(t) + B\hat{x}(t), \\ \hat{z}(t) &= CZ(t)\end{aligned}$$

Matrices

$$A = a \begin{bmatrix} 1 & & & \\ -1 & 1 & & \\ & \ddots & \ddots & \\ & & -1 & 1 \end{bmatrix}, \quad B = a \begin{bmatrix} 1 \\ \\ \\ \end{bmatrix},$$
$$C = [c_0 \quad c_1 \quad \cdots \quad c_M]$$

Does the approximate state converge?

Bound on state error [7, Thm. 1] when f is Lipschitz and x is bounded

$$\int_0^\infty |\hat{\alpha}(t) - \alpha(t)| dt < \epsilon \quad \Rightarrow \quad |\hat{x}(t) - x(t)| \leq \epsilon w(t) \leq \epsilon w(t_f)$$

Auxiliary function

$$w(t) = 0, \quad t \in (-\infty, t_0],$$

$$\dot{w}(t) = L_z K_x + L_x w(t) + L_z \int_{-\infty}^t \hat{\alpha}(t-s) w(s) ds, \quad t \in [t_0, t_f]$$

- ▶ The steady state of the approximate ODEs and the DDEs is the same
- ▶ The eigenvalues converge to the roots for the DDEs (Hurwitz' convergence theorem)
- ▶ Error dynamics are locally stable if the DDEs and ODEs are locally stable

Ritschel, T.K.S., 2025. On Erlang Mixture Approximations for Differential Equations with Distributed Time Delays. arXiv: 2502.12984. In submission.

Numerical example: Simulation

Numerical example

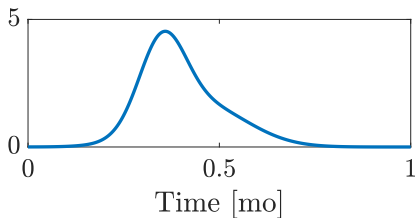
► System

$$\dot{N}(t) = \kappa N(t) \left(1 - \frac{1}{K} \int_{-\infty}^t \alpha(t-s) N(s) \, ds \right)$$

► Kernel

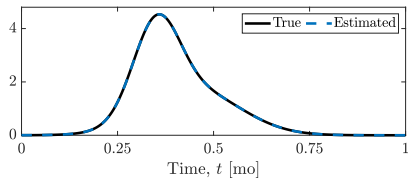
$$\alpha(t) = \gamma_1 F(t; \mu_1, \sigma_1) + \gamma_2 F(t; \mu_2, \sigma_2),$$

$$F(t; \mu, \sigma) = \frac{\exp\left(-\frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{t-\mu}{\sigma}\right)^2\right) + \exp\left(-\frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{t+\mu}{\sigma}\right)^2\right)}{\sqrt{2\pi}\sigma}$$

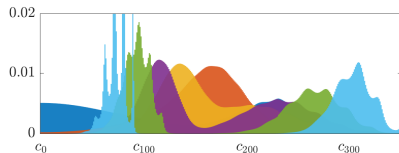
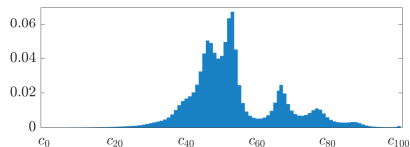
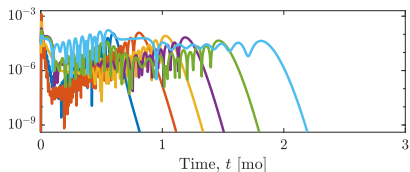
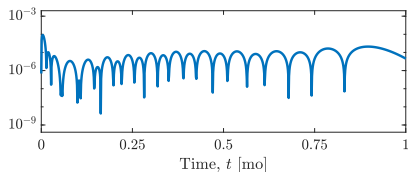
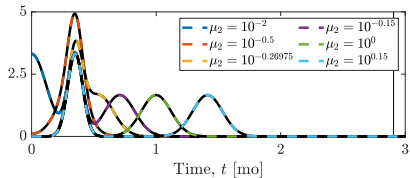


Numerical example: Bifurcation analysis

Model parameter

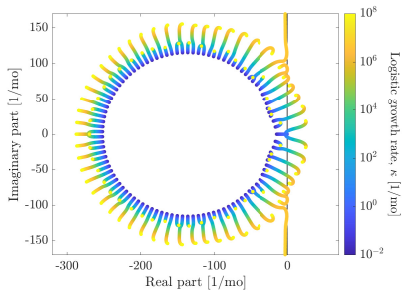


Kernel parameter

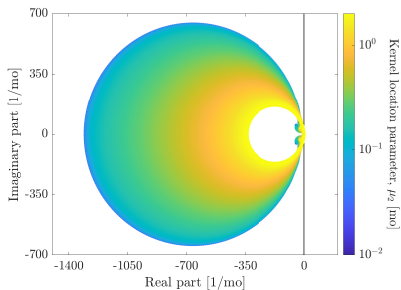


Numerical example: Bifurcation analysis

Model parameter

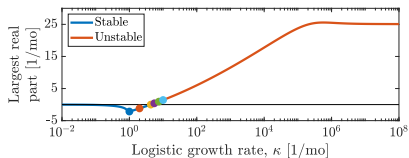


Kernel parameter

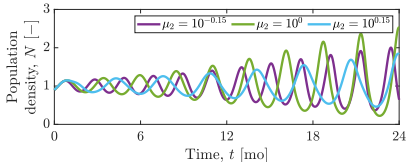
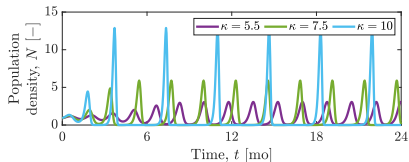
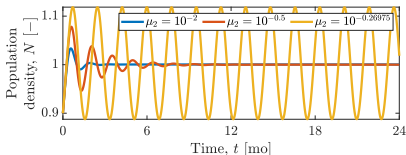
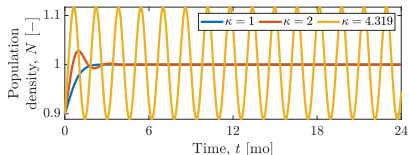
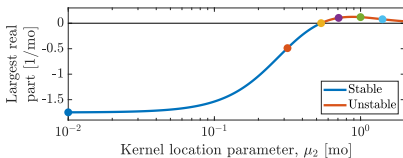


Numerical example: Bifurcation analysis

Model parameter



Kernel parameter

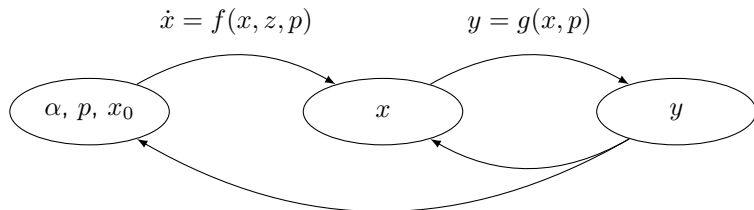


The numerical simulations are obtained with Euler's implicit method and a right rectangle rule for approximating the integral.

Kernel identification

Kernel identification (with John Wyller, NMBU, Norway)

Forward problem



Inverse problem

Ritschel, T.K.S., Wyller, J., 2025. An Algorithm for Distributed Time Delay Identification without A Priori Knowledge of the Kernel. *Automatica* 178, pp. 112382. DOI: 10.1016/j.automatica.2025.112382.

Dynamical least-squares problem

$$\min_{\{c_m\}_{m=0}^M, a, p, x_0} \frac{1}{2} \sum_{k=0}^N \|y_k - y(t_k)\|_2^2$$

subject to

$$x(t_0) = x_0,$$

$$Z(t_0) = Z_0(x_0, p),$$

$$\dot{x}(t) = f(x(t), z(t), p), \quad t \in [t_0, t_f],$$

$$\dot{Z}(t) = AZ(t) + Bx(t), \quad t \in [t_0, t_f],$$

$$z(t) = CZ(t), \quad t \in [t_0, t_f],$$

$$y(t_k) = g(x(t_k), p), \quad k = 0, \dots, N,$$

$$\sum_{m=0}^M c_m = 1,$$

$$a_{\min} \leq a,$$

$$p_{\min} \leq p \leq p_{\max},$$

$$x_{\min} \leq x_0 \leq x_{\max}$$

Example

► System

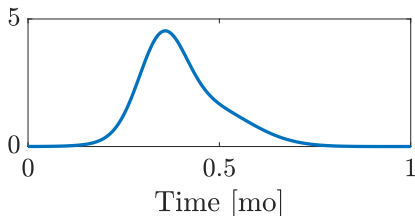
$$\dot{N}(t) = \kappa N(t) \left(1 - \frac{1}{K(t)} \int_{-\infty}^t \alpha(t-s) N(s) \, ds \right),$$

$$K(t) = (1 + A_1 \sin(2\pi\omega_1 t) + A_2 \sin(2\pi\omega_2 t)) \bar{K}$$

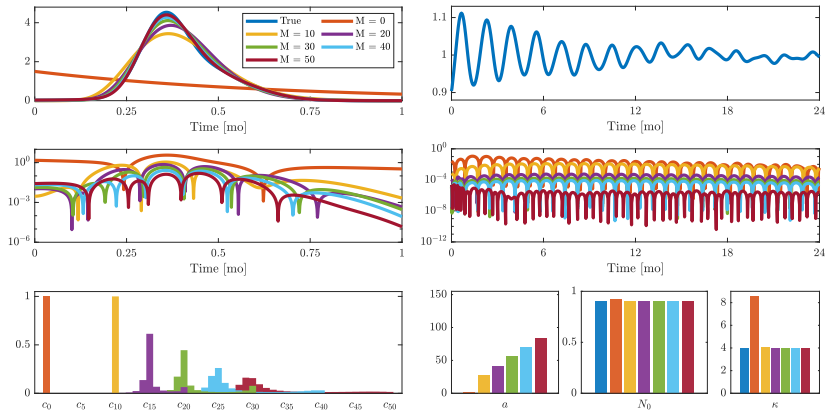
► Kernel

$$\alpha(t) = \gamma_1 F(t; \mu_1, \sigma_1) + \gamma_2 F(t; \mu_2, \sigma_2),$$

$$F(t; \mu, \sigma) = \frac{\exp\left(-\frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{t-\mu}{\sigma}\right)^2\right) + \exp\left(-\frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{t+\mu}{\sigma}\right)^2\right)}{\sqrt{2\pi}\sigma}$$



Example



Opportunities for model reduction?

Linear system

$$\begin{aligned}\dot{x}(t) &= Fx(t) + Ez(t) + Gu(t), \\ y(t) &= Hx(t)\end{aligned}$$

Approximation of integral term $z(t) = \int_{-\infty}^t \alpha(t-s)x(s) \, ds$

$$\begin{aligned}\dot{Z}(t) &= AZ(t) + Bx(t), \\ z(t) &= CZ(t)\end{aligned}$$

Can we reduce the combined system when Z is large?

Can we use model reduction to determine better basis functions, ℓ_m ?

Summary

1. Approximate $L^1(\mathcal{D})$ functions

$$\alpha(t) \approx \hat{\alpha}(t) = \sum_{m=0}^M c_m \ell_m(t), \quad t \in \mathcal{D}$$

2. Approximate solution to DDEs with distributed time delays

$$\dot{x}(t) = f(x(t), \int_{-\infty}^t \alpha(t-s)x(s) \, ds)$$

3. Many different applications/possible extensions

- ▶ Model reduction
- ▶ Stochastic differential equations
- ▶ Continuous thermodynamics (chemical phase/reaction equilibria)
- ▶ Optimal/feedback/adaptive control for DDEs
- ▶ Controllers with memory for ODEs (PID, LQR, MPC, etc.)

Model reduction

Thank you!

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Pointwise convergence based on delta families

Identity based on Dirac's delta, δ

$$\alpha(t) = \int_{\mathcal{D}} \delta(t-s)\alpha(s) \, ds$$

Express approximations in terms of delta family, δ_a

$$\hat{\alpha}(t) = \int_{\mathcal{D}} \delta_a(t-s)\alpha(s) \, ds$$

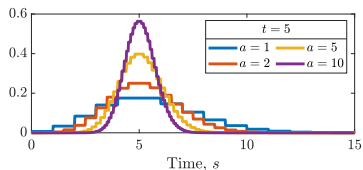
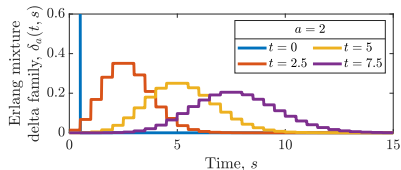
If δ_a “converges to” δ , then $\hat{\alpha}(t)$ converges to $\alpha(t)$

See, e.g., the book by Korevaar [6]

What should the delta family be?

Erlang mixture delta family

$$\delta_a(t, s) = \ell_m(t), \quad s \in [s_m, s_{m+1}), \quad s_m = m\Delta s, \quad \Delta s = 1/a,$$
$$\ell_m(t) = b_m t^m e^{-at}$$



Approximate controllers for DDEs

System

$$\dot{x}(t) = Fx(t) + Gu(t) + H \int_{-\infty}^t \alpha(t-s)x(s) \, ds$$

Control law

$$u(t_k) = -L_x x(t) - L_\gamma \int_{-\infty}^t \gamma(t-s)x(s) \, ds$$

- ▶ Optimal control
- ▶ State estimation
- ▶ Delay-adaptive optimal control

Controllers with memory for ODEs

PID controller with forgetting factor

$$u(t) = K_p e(t) + \int_0^t \alpha(t-s)e(s) \, ds + K_d \dot{e}(t)$$

Relation to fractional order PID controllers?

System

$$\dot{x}(t) = Fx(t) + Gu(t)$$

Control law

$$u(t_k) = -L_x x(t) - L_\gamma \int_{-\infty}^t \gamma(t-s)x(s) \, ds$$