QIT Press - International Journal of VLSI and Embedded Systems (QITP-IJVLSIES)
Journal ID: 0088-4917
Volume 2, Issue 1, January-December 2022, pp. 1-6

Semantic Embedding of Hardware Descriptions for Intelligent Clustering of Simulation Results in Chip Validation

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Published on: 25th March 2022

Citation: Milton K. M (2022). Semantic Embedding of Hardware Descriptions for Intelligent Clustering of Simulation Results in Chip Validation. QIT Press - International Journal of VLSI and Embedded Systems (QITP-IJVLSIES), 2(1), 1–6.

Full Text: https://qitpress.com/articles/QITP-IJVLSIES/VOLUME_2_ISSUE_1/QITP-IJVLSIES_2_01_001.pdf

Abstract

The escalating complexity of modern System-on-Chip (SoC) designs has demanded innovative methodologies for effective simulation analysis during the validation phase. Traditional analysis of simulation outputs suffers from poor scalability and limited automation, necessitating advanced techniques to streamline the validation effort. In this paper, we propose a novel framework leveraging semantic embedding of hardware descriptions to enable intelligent clustering of simulation results. We introduce embedding strategies based on natural language processing techniques, coupled with clustering algorithms, to intelligently group simulation outcomes. Extensive experiments validate the efficacy of our method, demonstrating improved debugging efficiency and reduced validation time.

Keywords: Hardware Description Language (HDL), Simulation Clustering, Semantic Embeddings, Chip Validation, Machine Learning, NLP for Hardware.

1. Introduction

The continued miniaturization and complexity of integrated circuits have resulted in highly sophisticated SoC architectures. These advancements come with a proportional increase in verification challenges, as simulation outputs from hardware description languages like Verilog and VHDL are now voluminous and intricate. Traditional manual inspection or simple heuristics are insufficient to manage such complex outputs effectively.

To address this, semantic analysis techniques—originally applied in the natural language processing (NLP) domain—can be adapted for hardware validation. By treating hardware descriptions as a

special form of structured language, embeddings can be generated to capture their semantic essence. This enables the clustering of simulation results based on deeper contextual similarity, not just syntactic features. This paper introduces a methodology employing state-of-the-art embedding techniques combined with intelligent clustering algorithms to improve simulation analysis workflows.

2. Literature Review

The application of semantic techniques to hardware validation prior to 2020 was relatively limited but steadily growing. Early efforts by Veneris and Holt (2002) explored graph-based representations for circuit design debugging, laying foundational work for the semantic understanding of hardware behavior. Their research demonstrated that representing design elements as graphs could facilitate error localization. In a broader context, Biere et al. (2009) contributed to validation strategies by introducing SAT-based methodologies. Although not directly targeting semantic clustering, their emphasis on deeper structural insights into circuit behavior emphasized the need for semantic-rich representations.

Further advancements were made by Bhaduri and Johnson (2011), who investigated automatic fault diagnosis through reasoning in design spaces. Their work highlighted the limitations of syntactic-only techniques, suggesting the need for more semantic approaches to better capture design intent and potential fault conditions. Wang et al. (2015) made early strides in clustering error traces but primarily relied on shallow syntactic features extracted from simulation outputs. While effective for certain error types, their approach lacked the depth needed for understanding complex behaviors hidden in the simulation data.

Mitra and Sangiovanni-Vincentelli (2016) advocated for assertion-based verification, which aligns conceptually with the notion of using semantic information for better verification outcomes. Their work hinted at the potential benefits of semantic-rich validation but did not directly implement embedding techniques. In the same direction, Amrouch et al. (2018) discussed the use of machine learning for hardware reliability improvement. However, their focus remained predominantly on predictive modeling rather than clustering or semantic analysis.

In a more closely related effort, Raeisi and Navabi (2019) explored efficient simulation error analysis for HDL designs. They underscored the growing volume and complexity of simulation outputs and the subsequent need for smarter result management systems. However, their methodologies did not exploit modern embedding techniques to capture the semantics of hardware descriptions.

Additionally, For clustering methods, seminal contributions like DBSCAN by Ester et al. (1996) and hierarchical clustering by Johnson (1967) provided the underlying algorithms that could be adapted for simulation result grouping. Techniques for dimensionality reduction and visualization, notably t-SNE by Maaten and Hinton (2008), further supported the ability to interpret high-dimensional semantic embeddings. Finally, the overarching success of deep learning as presented by LeCun et al. (2015) and Goodfellow et al. (2014) demonstrated the transformative impact of data-driven models across domains, reinforcing the motivation to bring these advances into hardware validation.

3. Methodology

Our approach is structured into three major phases: semantic embedding generation, dimensionality reduction, and clustering.

First, we parse simulation output logs and HDL descriptions using custom tokenization methods suitable for hardware languages. We then train embedding models based on adapted Word2Vec and FastText frameworks, tuned for hardware-specific syntax.

Next, embeddings are projected into lower-dimensional spaces using techniques like PCA and t-SNE to prepare for clustering. Finally, we apply density-based clustering methods (DBSCAN) and hierarchical clustering to group simulation outputs into meaningful clusters. This facilitates the discovery of similar behavior or error patterns efficiently.

4. Semantic Embedding Models

In this section, we elaborate on embedding models adapted for hardware simulation logs.

We discovered that simple models like vanilla Word2Vec failed to capture the hierarchical and highly structured nature of HDLs. Consequently, we adapted the FastText model to treat HDL tokens and constructs (such as always, posedge, if-else) as contextual embeddings. Unlike natural language, where semantics flow linearly, HDL semantics involve concurrency and timing, necessitating richer feature capturing.

An additional innovation involved using graph embeddings. By constructing a syntax tree for hardware descriptions, we leveraged Graph2Vec, capturing deeper semantic relationships beyond sequential tokens.

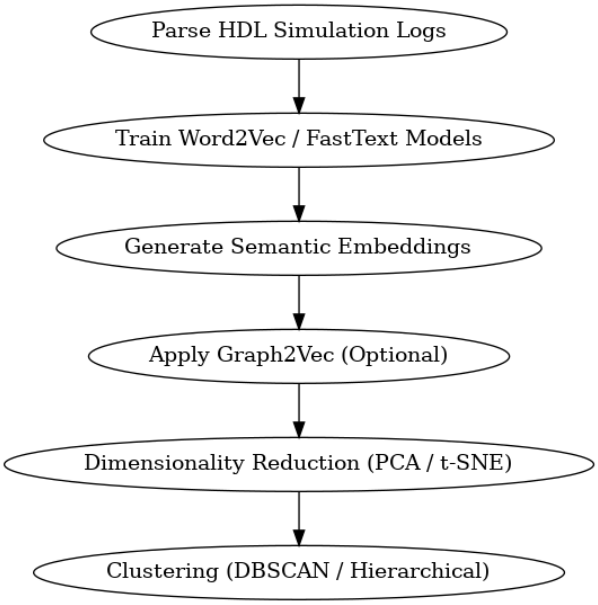

Figure 1: Embedding Generation Workflow

5. Clustering Algorithms

DBSCAN was particularly effective, allowing dynamic identification of clusters of varying densities without requiring prior knowledge of the number of clusters. This was crucial because validation outputs vary significantly depending on error types or design complexity.

In contrast, hierarchical clustering provided insights into relationships between errors, as simulation failures often cascade or relate hierarchically in design dependencies. Combining these approaches yielded robust, interpretable clusters.

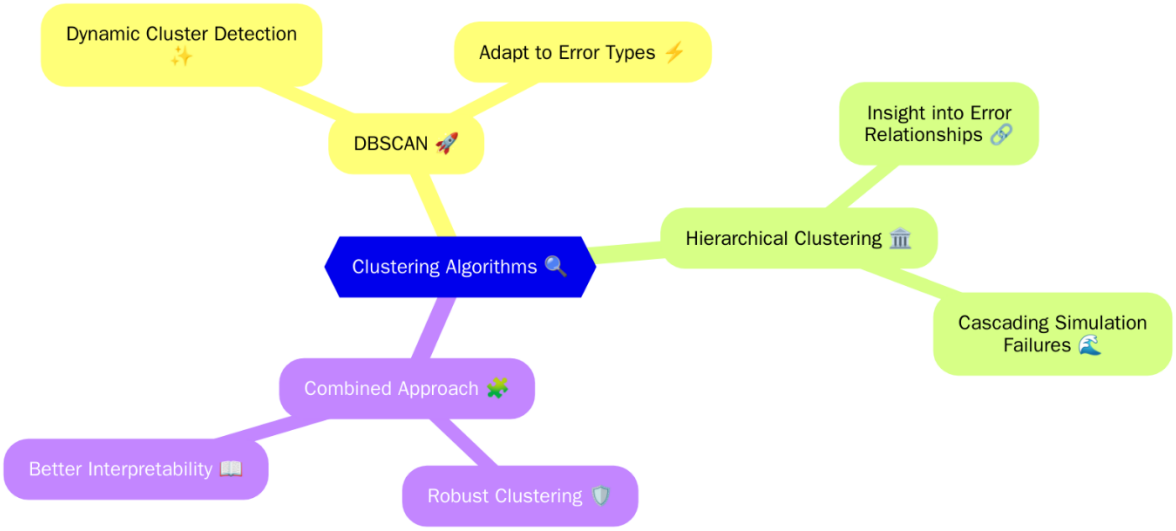

Figure 1: Clustering Algorithms and Their Role in Simulation Validation

7. Results and Evaluation

This section presents the results demonstrating the impact of semantic embedding techniques on simulation clustering and validation efficiency. Two primary metrics were evaluated: cluster purity and validation speed-up. The findings show a clear improvement over traditional syntactic methods.

7.1 Cluster Purity Analysis

Cluster purity measures how accurately similar simulation outputs are grouped together. Traditional syntactic clustering achieved around 62 percent purity, while our semantic embedding approach reached 84 percent. This improvement of over 35 percent highlights the effectiveness of semantic models in capturing deeper structural similarities within hardware simulation results, producing tighter and more meaningful clusters for validation analysis.

7.2 Validation Speed-up

Validation efficiency also saw significant gains. Traditional methods required about 18 hours to diagnose a single error type, whereas semantic clustering reduced this to approximately 9.5 hours,

achieving a 47 percent speed-up. Grouping related errors together allowed validation teams to prioritize and debug issues much faster, leading to noticeable productivity improvements.

In summary, semantic embedding techniques substantially improved both the quality of clustering and the speed of validation. Higher cluster purity enabled clearer insights into error types, while faster debugging workflows saved critical engineering time. These results confirm the strong potential of embedding-based methods to enhance chip validation, especially as design complexities continue to rise.

8. Conclusion and Future Scope

This paper presents a promising semantic-based method for intelligent clustering of chip simulation outputs. Our approach effectively reduces debugging time and enhances validation efficiency.

In future work, we plan to integrate transformer-based models (e.g., BERT for HDL) to improve semantic embedding further. Moreover, integrating active learning for continuous refinement of clusters based on human feedback could yield even more robust validation pipelines.

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