An Exact Schedulability Test for Non-Preemptive Self-Suspending Real-Time Tasks

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Abstract—Exact schedulability analysis of limited-preemptive (or non-preemptive) real-time workloads with variable execution costs and release jitter is a notoriously difficult challenge due to the scheduling anomalies inherent in non-preemptive execution. Furthermore, the presence of self-suspending tasks is well-understood to add tremendous complications to an already difficult problem. By mapping the schedulability problem to the reachability problem in timed automata (TA), this paper provides the first exact schedulability test for this challenging model. Specifically, using TA extensions available in UPPAAL, this paper presents an exact schedulability test for sets of periodic and sporadic self-suspending tasks with fixed preemption points that are scheduled upon a multiprocessor under a global fixed-priority scheduling policy. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first exact schedulability test for non- and limited-preemptive self-suspending tasks (for both uniprocessor and multiprocessor systems), and thus also the first exact schedulability test for the special case of global non-preemptive fixed-priority scheduling (for either periodic or sporadic tasks). Additionally, the paper highlights some subtle pitfalls and limitations in existing TA-based schedulability tests for non-preemptive workloads.

I. INTRODUCTION

The current state of the art in worst-case execution time analysis (WCET) favors non-preemptive execution due to its inherent predictability advantages [1]. To counteract latency spikes that may arise from long-running jobs, it is common practice to insert fixed preemption points to break jobs into a sequence of segments, where each such segment is executed non-preemptively, but the job overall is limited-preemptive (i.e., the job can be preempted, but only at well-known points in its control-flow graph, which aids WCET analysis). Furthermore, when jobs engage in synchronous I/O (e.g., network communication, storage devices), synchronize via semaphores, or offload computation to accelerators such as GPUs, DSPs, or other coprocessors, segments may be separated by self-suspensions (i.e., after one segment completes, the next segment may not immediately be available for execution) [2].

A sound schedulability analysis of this practically relevant class of workloads, on either uni- or multiprocessors, is however presently beyond the reach of the state of the art, due to a number of challenges. For one, the analysis of limited-preemptive (or non-preemptive) real-time workloads is already on uniprocessors a notoriously difficult problem due to the scheduling anomalies that arise from non-preemptive execution. Additionally, the complex effects of self-suspensions cause further timing anomalies that, if not carefully handled, may result in unsound schedulability tests (as explained in detail in Chen et al.’s recent survey [2]). In fact, as we show in this paper, non-preemptive self-suspending tasks (either periodic or sporadic) suffer from anomalies that render it unsafe to treat suspensions as execution segments (i.e., to simply over-approximate processor demand). This is in contrast to the preemptive case, in which such a suspension-oblivious approach is commonly used and has been shown to be safe [2,3].

This paper. We provide the first exact schedulability test for this difficult setting, that is, a test that decides whether a set of segmented, self-suspending tasks scheduled non-preemptively upon either uni- or multiprocessors will meet all deadlines. By extension, our test also applies to limited-preemptive tasks (i.e., non-suspending tasks with preemption points). This is also the first exact test for the special case of global non-preemptive scheduling (without suspensions or preemption points).

Our test models the system as a synchronized network of timed automata (TA) [4] and maps the schedulability problem to a reachability query. In extensive experiments that evaluate the scalability of the solution with regard to the number of cores, tasks, segments, magnitude of release jitter, and system utilization, it is shown to scale up to 60 periodic tasks scheduled on 2 cores, 24 tasks on 4 cores, and 12 tasks on 8 cores.

Besides scaling to small- and even moderately-sized workloads, the proposed test also provides the first exact baseline against which future, more efficient, but inexact schedulability tests can be compared and thus lays an important foundation for future research into self-suspending and limited-preemptive models. Additionally, the paper highlights some subtle pitfalls and limitations in existing TA-based schedulability tests for non-preemptive workloads.

Prior work. To the best of our knowledge, no exact schedulability test for non-preemptive (or limited-preemptive) self-suspending tasks has been proposed to date (for either uniprocessor or multiprocessor platforms).

Several exact schedulability tests have been introduced for preemptively scheduled uni- and multiprocessor platforms (i.e., for global fixed-priority scheduling) [5]–[8] and for non-preemptive scheduling upon uniprocessor platforms for both sporadic [9,10] and periodic tasks [11]. None of these tests supports self-suspending tasks. Further, even for the special case of non-preemptive global scheduling without self-suspensions or preemption points, no exact test has been proposed to date.

The TA formalism has been previously leveraged in a number of schedulability tests for preemptive tasks scheduled by a global scheduling policy upon a multiprocessor platform [12]–[18]. These tests, however, are not designed for self-suspending
tasks, cannot handle blocking times caused by non-preemptive execution, and some use stopwatches (e.g., [14,17,18]) that render the TA reachability problem undecidable [19]. As we discuss in Sec. III, the use of stopwatches significantly limits the practical applicability of the tests. There are further a few TA-based schedulability tests for global non-preemptive scheduling that target either sporadic [22]–[25] or periodic tasks [26], but these tests do not support self-suspensions or preemption points. Finally, prior work has yielded several sufficient schedulability tests for global non-preemptive scheduling that target either sporadic [22]–[25] or periodic tasks [26], but these tests do not support self-suspending or limited-preemptive tasks.

II. SYSTEM MODEL AND BACKGROUND

We consider a multiprocessor system with $m$ identical processors and a set of $n$ independent, self-suspending tasks $T = \{T_1, T_2, \ldots, T_n\}$. Each task $T_i$ is represented by a tuple $(D_i, C_i, P_i, k_i, S_i)$, where $D_i$ is the period (or equivalently, the minimum inter-arrival time), $C_i$ is the relative deadline, $P_i$ is the priority, $k_i$ is the number of segments, and $S_i$ is the vector of segments of the task. Smaller values of $P_i$ indicate higher priorities. We assume global fixed-priority scheduling and that $P_1 < \ldots < P_n$.

The $j^{th}$ segment of a task $T_i$ is denoted by a tuple $S_{i,j} = (s_{i,j}^{min}, s_{i,j}^{max}, C_{i,j}^{min}, C_{i,j}^{max})$, where $s_{i,j}^{min}$ and $s_{i,j}^{max}$ are the best-case suspension time (BCST) and worst-case suspension time (WCST), and $C_{i,j}^{min}$ and $C_{i,j}^{max}$ are the best-case execution time (BCET) and worst-case execution time (WCET) of the segment, respectively. Our model implicitly supports release jitter, i.e., the first suspension prior to the first execution segment represents the release jitter of the task. Both the BCST and WCST can be zero for any or all of the segments, which turns such a segment boundary into a fixed preemption point (i.e., for a limited-preemptive task, $s_{i,j}^{min} = s_{i,j}^{max} = 0$ for $1 < j \leq k_i$). Once a segment starts execution it is not preempted until it finishes. If $k_i = 1$ for every $T_i \in T$, then the problem reduces to non-preemptive global scheduling.

We assume $C_i + X_i \leq D_i$, where $C_i = \sum_{j=1}^{k_i} C_{i,j}^{max}$ is the total execution time and $X_i = \sum_{j=1}^{k_i} s_{i,j}^{max}$ is the total suspension time of task $T_i$. The system utilization is given by $U = \sum_{i=1}^{n} u_i$, where $u_i = C_i / T_i$ is the utilization of task $T_i$. The execution time ratio of $T_i$ is given by $\beta_i = C_i / (C_i + X_i)$.

Timed automata. A timed automaton is a finite-state machine extended with a finite set of real-valued clocks that progress monotonically at the same rate and measure the time spent after their latest resets [4]. UPPAAL [3] extends the formal definition of timed automata with integer variables, structured data types, C-like programming constructs, specialized locations, and synchronization channels for modeling, simulating, and verifying real-time systems by defining them as networks of timed automata. In UPPAAL, the state of a system, i.e., a network of timed automata, is defined by the present locations of all timed automata, the values of all clocks, and the values of any discrete variables. Hence, the number of locations, clocks, and discrete variables has a significant effect on the size of the state space as well as the verification time.

Our schedulability test uses three special features of UPPAAL: committed locations, urgent channels, and broadcast channels. Whenever a state includes a committed location, the next transition must be one of the outgoing transitions of (one of) the committed location(s). Whenever a transition with an urgent channel is enabled, it must be taken without any time delay. Finally, a broadcast channel is used for synchronizing more than two timed automata: whenever a transition with a broadcast channel is taken, all other enabled transitions that use the same channel must be taken, too. When one location has multiple enabled transitions that use the same broadcast channel, UPPAAL selects one of them non-deterministically.

III. MOTIVATION AND PITFALLS

In this section, we discuss a few potential pitfalls and challenges related to the design of TA-based schedulability tests and the analysis of non-preemptive self-suspending tasks.

Stopwatch limitations. Since UPPAAL introduced stopwatches in version 4.1, several TA-based schedulability tests have been used stopwatches for the analysis of preemptive and non-preemptive tasks [14,17,18]. However, in our experiments (Sec. V), we found that stopwatch-based tests are unable to provide any concrete schedulability answer even for very simple task sets. That is, due to the underlying undecidability result [19], instead of concluding that a task set is “schedulable” or “not schedulable,” the evaluated stopwatch-based tests yield “may not be schedulable” as the analysis result for almost all task sets, unless the task set has only two tasks and the total sum of WCETs is less than the shortest period. To the best of our knowledge, this is a new observation; prior work on stopwatch-based tests [14,17,18] did not report on empirical evaluations of the tests in the context of non-preemptive workloads.

Impossible event ordering. The ordering of the start times of jobs plays a crucial role in the analysis of non-preemptive tasks since it determines the amount of blocking incurred by high-priority tasks. To be exact, a schedulability test must hence discount any impossible orderings. However, some previous studies (e.g., [14,21]) have modeled tasks as independent TAs without synchronizing transitions related to their respective job releases. Consequently, tasks with the same release time could be scheduled in any order, including in orders contrary to their assigned priorities, which is actually impossible when a deterministic scheduling algorithm such as fixed-priority scheduling is used. As a concrete example, consider the following periodic task set, which is schedulable on a uniprocessor under non-preemptive fixed-priority scheduling, which is however deemed not schedulable by David et al.’s analysis [21] due to the inclusion of impossible event orderings.

Counterexample 1. When applying David et al.’s test [21] to the periodic task set $T_1 = (3, 3, 0, 1, 1, \{(0, 0), (1, 1)\})$ and $T_2 = (6, 6, 0, 2, 1, \{(0, 0), (3, 3)\})$, UPPAAL reports the following scenario to result in a deadline miss: at time 0, $\tau_2$
enters its ready location before $\tau_1$.

Next, UPPAAL activates the scheduler, which dispatches the only job in the ready queue, i.e., $\tau_2$, at time 0. This is allowed as the scheduler and task automata are independent of each other [21], i.e., UPPAAL is allowed to non-deterministically pick any enabled transition, including the scheduler transition. Finally, $\tau_1$ also moves to its ready location (still at time 0). However, the processor has already been allocated, so $\tau_2$ blocks $\tau_1$ for three unit times. Consequently, $\tau_1$ is reported to miss its deadline at time 3. This, however, is actually impossible, since a fixed-priority scheduler will always select the higher-priority task $\tau_1$ if both $\tau_1$ and $\tau_2$ release a job at exactly the same time (note the absence of release jitter). The problem can be avoided if, at time 0, both tasks are forced to synchronously move to their ready locations before the scheduler can be called.

UPPAAL's scheduling framework [14], which uses stopwatches, reports "may not be schedulable" for this example.

**Suspension-oblivious analysis is unsound.** The following example shows that, given a self-suspending task set (either periodic or sporadic), if suspension segments are analyzed as if they were execution segments (i.e., using a suspension-oblivious approach [2]), then the resulting task set may be deemed schedulable while the original task set is in fact not schedulable. Hence, naively accounting for suspensions as execution time is not safe for limited-preemptive self-suspending tasks.

**Counterexample 2.** Consider three tasks $\tau_1 = (20, 6, 1, 1, 2, \{(0, 0), (1, 1), (1, 1)\})$, $\tau_2 = (20, 2, 2, 1, \{(0, 0), [3, 3]\})$, and $\tau_3 = (20, 0, 3, 1, \{(0, 0), [3, 3]\})$. Fig. 1(a) shows that the task set is schedulable if suspension time is treated as execution time since $\tau_1$ can only suffer from one low-priority blocking, while in reality it can suffer from two such blockings and hence is not schedulable as shown in Fig. 1(b). This counterexample holds also for sporadic tasks.

**(a) suspension oblivious**

**Task automata.** The system is schedulable if, in any reachable state, no TASK automaton resides in its Missed location.

**Task.** This automaton models a periodic, segmented, self-suspending task with initial offset and release jitter. Each TASK automaton uses two clocks: $t$ keeps track of the arrival time (and deadline) of the task, while $x$ keeps track of the execution and suspension time of each segment. The initial offset of the task is enacted in the Start location, in which the automaton is forced to stay for offset time units. Next, the automaton enters the Suspended location, which realizes both release jitter and suspensions. A task stays Suspended nondeterministically for $x$ units of time, where $s_{\text{min}}(t) \leq x \leq s_{\text{max}}(t)$. The functions $s_{\text{min}}(t)$ and $s_{\text{max}}(t)$ return the minimum and maximum suspension duration of the current segment of the task (indicated by seg_idx), respectively.

When the suspension time (or initial jitter delay) has passed, the task enters the Ready location, where it waits until it receives a run signal from the scheduler to start its execution and enter the Running location. During this transition, it decreases the number of available processors by one as it starts executing on one of the processors. The task remains in the Running location until some time within the minimum and maximum execution time of the current segment, denoted by $c_{\text{min}}(t)$ and $c_{\text{max}}(t)$, respectively. When the task completes the execution of its current segment, it either enters the Completed location (if seg_idx indicates the last segment of the task), or goes back to the Suspended location to model the next suspension. Whenever the task leaves the Running location, it increments the current segment index as well as the number of available processors. If a task is not completed before its deadline, i.e., it is still in the Suspended, Ready, or Running location when $t$ exceeds $x$, then it enters the Missed location. A task enters the Completed location when it completes the execution of its last segment, and stays there until the next arrival time (i.e., the end of its period, as is indicated by $t = \text{period}(i)$).

The TASK automaton can be easily modified to realize a sporadic task by (i) adding a self-loop to the Completed location with guard "synch?" and removing the location invariant "$t = \text{period}(i)$", and (ii) replacing "$t = \text{period}(i)$" with "$t = \text{period}(i)$" on the transition from Completed to Suspended.

**SCED.** This automaton is similar to the scheduler model used by David et al. [14,21] and realizes a global work-conserving fixed-priority scheduler using a priority queue that stores a sorted list of tasks whose current segment is ready for execution. The first task in the list has the highest priority among all ready tasks. This automaton schedules a task as soon as there is a ready task in the queue and at least one processor available, in which case it sends a run signal to the highest-priority task.

**Sync.** The purpose of Sync is to synchronize the TASK automata such that all tasks that release a segment at a given time $t'$ enter their Ready location at the same time before the scheduler is triggered. This construct serves to avoid the impossible event ordering problem mentioned in Sec. III.

Specifically, the Sync automaton uses a broadcast channel to synchronize the TASK automata. In UPPAAL, any receiver of

![Fig. 1](image-url)
Fig. 2. The (a) SYNCH, (b) TASK, and (c) SCHED automata with (d) key declarations. Locations marked with a ‘C’ are committed locations. Initial locations are indicated by an inner circle. The declarations of front(), enqueue(), and dequeue() have been omitted as they implement a standard priority queue.

V. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

This section answers the following questions: (i) How is the proposed test’s runtime affected by various system parameters, such as the number of cores, tasks, etc., and (ii) to what extent does it improve schedulability gain w.r.t. the state of the art?

We compared the proposed test against existing schedulability tests for global non-preemptive (G-NP) and global limited-preemptive (G-LP) scheduling in terms of average runtime and schedulability ratio (i.e., the fraction of task sets deemed schedulable for a particular set of parameters). We considered the following baselines: Guan et al.’s test [24] for any work-conserving G-NP policy (Guan-G-NP-WC), three tests for fixed-priority G-NP scheduling by Guan et al. [24], Lee et al. [25], and Nasri et al. [26] (denoted Guan-G-NP-FP, Lee-G-NP, and Nasri-G-NP, respectively), and Serrano et al.’s test for limited-preemptive scheduling [28] (Serrano-G-LP).

It should be noted that, with the exception of Nasri-G-NP [26], all baseline tests were designed specifically for sporadic tasks. We hence expect them to exhibit some degree of inherent pessimism when applied to periodic workloads (i.e., some feasible periodic workloads become infeasible if tasks exhibit sporadic arrivals). Due to space constraints, we focus on periodic tasks in the following and report on experiments involving sporadic tasks in an online appendix [29].

We generated periodic task sets following the guidelines of the Autosar benchmark introduced by Kramer et al. [30]. Specifically, for a given number of tasks $n$, we sampled the (non-uniform) distribution of common periods $\{1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 1000\}$ms reported by Kramer et al. [30] to randomly draw a realistic period for each task. Due to UPPAAL’s restricted support for integer variables and parameters, we multiplied each period by ten to obtain integer lines of the Autosar benchmark introduced by Kramer et al. [30].

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obtained $C_i$ as $u_i \cdot T_i$. We took $k_i$ and $\beta_i$ as input parameters for each experiment and derived $X_i = \left( C_i - \beta_i C_i \right) / \beta_i$. Based on $C_i$ and $X_i$, we used the RandFixSum algorithm [31] to distribute $C_i$ among the $C_{max}$ values and $X_i$ among the $s_{max}$ values, respectively. Finally, for each segment, we assigned $C_{min} = 0.1 \cdot C_{max}$ and $s_{min} = 0.1 \cdot s_{max}$, respectively. Tasks were assumed to have implicit deadlines and to not have release jitter, and were assigned rate-monotonic priorities. Moreover, we discarded task sets that did not pass even a trivial simulation-based necessary test that considers only one execution scenario in which each task executes for $C_i$ time units and suspends for $X_i$ time units (i.e., where all job parameters are maximal).

We performed four experiments by varying (Exp1) the number of cores and total utilization $U$ (for $U \in \{0.3m, 0.5m, 0.7m\}$, $n = 10$, one segment per task, and no suspensions); (Exp2) the number of tasks $n$ (for $m \in \{1, 2, 4, 8\}$, $U=0.3 \cdot m$, one segment per task, and no suspensions); (Exp3) the maximum suspension ratio $\beta$ (for $m \in \{1, 2\}$, $U' \in \{0.5m, 0.7m, 0.9m\}$, where $U'= (C_i + X_i) / T_j$, $n = 5$, and up to 5 segments separated by suspensions); and (Exp4) the maximum number of execution segments (for $m = 2$, $n = 10$, $U=0.3m$, and no suspensions). For each parameter combination, we generated and analyzed at least 100 task sets. For instance, Exp2 evaluated 27,000 task sets for all parameter values, with 1,300 jobs per hyperperiod on average (with a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 10,728 jobs).

For each task set, we ran an instance of UPPAAL’s verifyta tool (a mainly single-threaded computation) on an Intel Xeon E7-8857 v2 processor clocked at 3 GHz. A task set was deemed unschedulable either if it was rejected by the proposed test or if the proposed test could not reach a conclusion within one hour. We applied the same timeout to all other tests as well. Moreover, to avoid wasting compute resources, we stopped an experiment (e.g., in Exp2, stopped increasing $n$) when the analysis of more than 50% of the task sets timed out. Fig. 3 reports the results of our experiments. When reporting average runtimes, we consider only schedulable task sets (i.e., we exclude unschedulable task sets) to avoid biasing the results since tests can typically reject unschedulable task sets very quickly without exploring the whole state space.

**Schedulability.** Figs. 3(a,b,c) and (h) confirm that our exact test identifies many more schedulable task sets than prior G-NP and G-LP tests (when applied to periodic tasks). Our results show that, for the tested workloads, Nasri-G-NP is actually as precise as the exact test, even though it is technically only a sufficient test if $m \geq 1$ [26]. In fact, thanks to its efficient, interval-based state-space exploration approach, which in contrast to UPPAAL is tailored to the schedulability problem, Nasri-G-NP was able to identify more schedulable task sets than the exact test within the one-hour time limit. In future work, it would be promising to extend Nasri-G-NP to the full task model considered herein (i.e., limited-preemptive, self-suspending workloads).

**Runtime.** As expected and as shown in Figs. 3(d, e, g, i), the exact test’s runtime increases rapidly when $U$, $m$, the number of
execution segments, or the suspension ratio increase since each of these changes increases the number of execution scenarios that must be explored. We observed only two exceptions: the runtime for \( m=2 \) in Fig. 3(d) drops for \( n \geq 50 \) due to the decrease in average per-task utilization, which in turn reduces average busy-window lengths and hence improves the runtime. The other exception is Fig. 3(g) for \( m=2 \). If \( \beta \) (i.e., suspension ratio) is small, there is a chance of long busy windows with many possible interleavings. Similarly, large \( \beta \) values increase the number of possible interleavings of segments of different tasks. Finally, comparing Figs. 3(d) and (e), we observe that the proposed test’s runtime is more affected by joint increases in \( m \) and \( U \).

**Discussion.** While the proposed test suffers from the typical scalability limitations expected from TA-based analyses, we nonetheless found it to be able to scale to periodic workloads of nontrivial size: up to 60 tasks on 2 cores, 24 tasks on 4 cores, and 12 tasks on 8 cores. The test performs worse when the number of possible execution scenarios increases, e.g., when there are more segments or longer suspension times (see Fig. 3(g)). Similarly, its runtime grows very quickly in the presence of sporadic tasks (as reported in [29]).

Nonetheless, our exact test provides a useful baseline for evaluating the accuracy of other, only sufficient tests. For instance, in the special case of G-NP scheduling (i.e., no preemption points, no suspensions), Nasri-G-NP is as accurate as the exact test while scaling much better: Figs. 3(e) and (f) show the Nasri-G-NP test to be three orders of magnitude faster.

**VI. CONCLUSION**

We have proposed the first exact schedulability test for limited-preemptive (and non-preemptive) self-suspending real-time tasks scheduled upon a uniprocessor or multiprocessor platform (under a global fixed-priority scheduling policy). We mapped the schedulability problem to the TA reachability problem, discussed some subtle pitfalls and limitations of prior TA-based schedulability tests, and proposed task, scheduler, and event synchronizer automata to realize an exact test. In addition to scaling to nontrivial workload sizes before succumbing to the state-space explosion problem, our work also provides the first exact baseline against which sufficient schedulability tests can be compared and thus enables future research into self-susensions and limited-preemptive models.

**REFERENCES**


