

A simple proof of Bazzi’s theorem

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In 1990, Linial and Nisan asked if any polylog-wise independent distribution fools any function in AC^0 . In a recent remarkable development, Bazzi solved this problem for the case of DNF formulas. The aim of this note is to present a simplified version of his proof.

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In the 1990s, it was shown in a series of papers [Linial et al. 1993; Beigel et al. 1991; Aspnes et al. 1994] that Boolean functions computable by constant depth polynomial size circuits can be well approximated (in various contexts) by low degree polynomials. Around the same time, Linial and Nisan [Linial and Nisan 1990] conjectured that any such function can be fooled by a polylog-wise¹ independent probability distribution. By linear duality, this conjecture is an approximation problem of precisely the kind considered in [Linial et al. 1993; Beigel et al. 1991; Aspnes et al. 1994]. Therefore, it is quite remarkable that the only noticeable progress in this direction was achieved only last year by Bazzi [Bazzi 2007]. Namely, he showed that any DNF formula of polynomial size is fooled by (any) $O(\log n)^2$ -independent distribution. We refer the reader to [Bazzi 2007] for motivations and applications of this result; the purpose of this note is to give a simplified version of Bazzi’s proof.

For a probability distribution μ on $\{0,1\}^n$ and a function $f : \{0,1\}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$, $E_\mu(f)$ is the expected value of f w.r.t. this distribution (in particular, if $f : \{0,1\}^n \rightarrow \{0,1\}$ is a Boolean function then $E_\mu(f) = \mathbf{P}_{x \sim \mu}[f(x) = 1]$ is the probability that $f(x) = 1$). If μ is uniform on $\{0,1\}^n$, $E_\mu(f)$ is abbreviated to $E(f)$. The *bias* of f w.r.t. μ is defined as $|E_\mu(f) - E(f)|$, and for an integer $k \geq 0$, $\text{bias}(f; k) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \max_\mu |E_\mu(f) - E(f)|$, where the maximum is taken over all

¹As literally stated in [Linial and Nisan 1990] the conjecture is false [Luby and Velickovic 1996], so we relax the parameters appropriately.

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k -independent probability distributions on $\{0, 1\}^n$.

In this note we give a simplified proof of the following theorem:

THEOREM 1 BAZZI [BAZZI 2007]. *If the Boolean function $f : \{0, 1\}^n \rightarrow \{0, 1\}$ is computable by an m -term DNF formula then $\text{bias}(f; k) \leq m^{O(1)} \exp(-\Omega(\sqrt{k}))$.*

From now on we will identify a DNF formula $F = A_1 \vee \dots \vee A_m$ and the Boolean function it represents. The first step in the proof of Theorem 1 is to reduce the problem to the case when every conjunctive term A_i has only a few variables, that is F is an s -DNF for a sufficiently small s . This simple step is borrowed from [Bazzi 2007] without any changes:

LEMMA 2 [BAZZI 2007]. *Let $k \geq s \geq 1$ be integers, and F be an m -term DNF. Then*

$$\text{bias}(F; k) \leq \max_G \text{bias}(G; k) + m2^{-s},$$

where the maximum is taken over all m -terms s -DNF G .

The next relatively simple step in Bazzi's proof that we also reproduce here without alterations is to estimate the bias of an s -DNF F in terms of a constrained version of ℓ_2 -approximation by low degree polynomials called in [Bazzi 2007] *zero-energy*. Let us first recall the unconstrained version.

Definition 3. For a function $f : \{0, 1\}^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ and an integer $t \geq 0$, let

$$\text{energy}(f; t) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \min_{\deg(g) \leq t} E((f - g)^2).$$

This quantity is equal to the sum of squares $\sum_{|S| > t} \hat{f}(S)^2$ of high order Fourier coefficients of f . But we do *not* need this interpretation in our proof, besides making connection to the following celebrated result by Linial, Mansour and Nisan [Linial et al. 1993]:

LEMMA 4 [LINIAL ET AL. 1993]. *If f is a Boolean function computable by an $\{\neg, \wedge, \vee\}$ -circuit of size m and depth d then for any $t > 0$,*

$$\text{energy}(f; t) \leq 2m \cdot 2^{-t^{1/d}/20}.$$

Definition 5 [Bazzi 2007].

$$\text{zeroEnergy}(f; t) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \min_{\deg(g) \leq t} E((f - g)^2),$$

where this time the minimum is taken over all degree $\leq d$ polynomials g that satisfy one additional **zero-constraint**: $g(x) = 0$ whenever $f(x) = 0$ ($x \in \{0, 1\}^n$).

Clearly, $\text{energy}(f; t) \leq \text{zeroEnergy}(f; t)$. Also, bias is related to zero-energy with the following lemma:

LEMMA 6 [BAZZI 2007]. *Let F be an m -term s -DNF formula and let $k \geq s$ be an integer. Then*

$$\text{bias}(F; k) \leq m \cdot \text{zeroEnergy}(F; \lfloor (k - s)/2 \rfloor).$$

In the opposite direction, bounding zero-energy in terms of energy of certain auxiliary functions is where the bulk of work is done in Bazzi's proof. And this is where our simplification comes in:

THEOREM 7. *Let F be an m -term s -DNF and t be an integer. Then*

$$\text{zeroEnergy}(F; t) \leq m^2 \cdot \max_G \text{energy}(G; t - s), \quad (1)$$

where the maximum is again taken over all m -term s -DNF formulas G .

PROOF. Let $F = A_1 \vee \dots \vee A_m$, where A_i are conjunctive terms of size $\leq s$ each. We claim that F can be expressed in the form

$$F = \sum_{i=1}^m A_i (1 - \mathbf{E}[\mathbf{G}_i]), \quad (2)$$

where \mathbf{G}_i are specially constructed random sub-DNFs of F and the expectation sign is understood pointwise: $\mathbf{E}[\mathbf{G}](x) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathbf{E}[\mathbf{G}(x)]$ ($x \in \{0, 1\}^n$). But before exhibiting the distributions of \mathbf{G}_i with this property, let us see why their mere existence already implies the statement of Theorem 7.

Indeed, denoting the maximum $\max_G \text{energy}(G; t - s)$ in (1) by ϵ , we have (random) polynomials \mathbf{g}_i of degree $\leq t - s$ such that with probability one we have the bound $E((\mathbf{G}_i - \mathbf{g}_i)^2) \leq \epsilon$. And now we simply let

$$g \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \sum_{i=1}^m A_i (1 - \mathbf{E}[\mathbf{g}_i]).$$

Since every term A_i has at most s variables, $\deg(g) \leq t$. $F(x) = 0$ implies $\forall i \in [m](A_i(x) = 0)$ which in turn implies $g(x) = 0$. Therefore, g satisfies the zero-constraint. And we bound the ℓ_2 -distance between F and g as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} E((F - g)^2) &= E \left(\left(\sum_{i=1}^m A_i \cdot \mathbf{E}[\mathbf{G}_i - \mathbf{g}_i] \right)^2 \right) \\ &\leq_{\text{Cauchy-Schwartz}} E \left(m \cdot \sum_{i=1}^m (A_i \cdot \mathbf{E}[\mathbf{G}_i - \mathbf{g}_i])^2 \right) \\ &= m \cdot \sum_{i=1}^m E \left((A_i \cdot \mathbf{E}[\mathbf{G}_i - \mathbf{g}_i])^2 \right) \\ &\leq_{\text{since } |A_i| \leq 1} m \cdot \sum_{i=1}^m E \left(\mathbf{E}[\mathbf{G}_i - \mathbf{g}_i]^2 \right) \\ &\leq_{\text{Cauchy-Schwartz}} m \cdot \sum_{i=1}^m E \left(\mathbf{E}[(\mathbf{G}_i - \mathbf{g}_i)^2] \right) \\ &= m \cdot \sum_{i=1}^m \mathbf{E} \left[E((\mathbf{G}_i - \mathbf{g}_i)^2) \right] \leq \epsilon m^2. \end{aligned}$$

It remains to exhibit $\mathbf{G}_1, \dots, \mathbf{G}_m$ such that the identity (2) holds. For that purpose, we first pick $\mathbf{p} \in [0, 1]$ uniformly at random. And then we let \mathbf{G}_i be the

sub-DNF of $(A_1 \vee \dots \vee A_{i-1} \vee A_{i+1} \vee \dots \vee A_m)$ in which every term is removed, independently of others, with probability \mathbf{p} and kept alive with probability $1 - \mathbf{p}$.

Fix an input $x \in \{0, 1\}^n$, and let $w \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} |\{i \in [m] \mid A_i(x) = 1\}|$. If $w = 0$ then both sides of (2) are equal to 0.

If, on the other hand, $w > 0$ then there are precisely w non-zero terms in the expression $\sum_{i=1}^m A_i(x)(1 - \mathbf{E}[\mathbf{G}_i](x))$. And every one of them contributes to the sum precisely

$$\int_0^1 (1 - \mathbf{E}[\mathbf{G}_i(x) \mid \mathbf{p} = p]) dp = \int_0^1 \mathbf{P}[\mathbf{G}_i(x) = 0 \mid \mathbf{p} = p] dp = \int_0^1 p^{w-1} dp = \frac{1}{w}.$$

Thus, $\sum_{i=1}^m A_i(x)(1 - \mathbf{E}[\mathbf{G}_i](x)) = 1$ ($w > 0$), and this completes the proof of (2) and of Theorem 7. \square

Like in Bazzi's proof, Theorem 1 immediately follows from Lemma 2, Lemma 6, Theorem 7 and Lemma 4.

Remark. After the preliminary version of this note was disseminated, Avi Wigderson observed that the proof can be further simplified by (deterministically!) letting G_i in (2) be equal $A_1 \vee \dots \vee A_{i-1}$. This is definitely simpler, but our version has the potential advantage of being more symmetric.

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