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High Launch Switching Activity Reduction in At-Speed Scan Testing Using CTX: A Clock-Gating-Based Test Relaxation and X-Filling Scheme*

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SUMMARY   At-speed scan testing is susceptible to yield loss risk due to power supply noise caused by excessive launch switching activity. This paper proposes a novel two-stage scheme, namely CTX (Clock-Gating-Based Test Relaxation and X-Filling), for reducing switching activity when a test stimulus is launched. Test relaxation and X-filling are conducted (1) to make as many FFs as possible inactive by disabling corresponding clock control signals of clock-gating circuitry in Stage-1 (Clock-Disabling), and (2) to equalize the input and output values in Stage-2 of as many remaining active FFs as possible (FF-Silencing). CTX effectively reduces launch switching activity and thus yield loss risk even when only a small number of don't care (X) bits are present (as in test compression) without any impact on test data volume, fault coverage, performance, or circuit design.

key words: *power supply noise, test relaxation, X-filling, clock-gating, test compaction*

1.   Introduction

At-speed scan testing is necessary to improve timing-related test quality [1]. It is realized by *launching* a transition at the start-point of a path and *capturing* its response at the end-point of said path at the system speed. In practice, the *launch-on-capture* (*LOC*) clocking scheme is widely used for at-speed scan testing [1].

   Figure 1 shows the essence of the LOC clocking scheme: After a test vector is loaded through a series of shift clock pulses of which S_L is the last (where L: the length of the longest scan chain), transitions are launched by the first capture clock pulse, C_1, at the corresponding scan FFs. Transitions are caused by the difference between the values shifted-in by S_L and the values captured by C_1. The *test cycle* between the transitions launch (C_1) and the response capture (C_2) is the rated system clock period.

   Although at-speed scan testing is indispensable for improving timing-related test quality [1], its applicability is severely limited by *test-induced yield loss*, which occurs

when functionally good chips fail only during at-speed scan testing [2]–[4]. The major causes of this problem are power supply noise (i.e. IR-drop and ground bounce), which are caused by excessive *launch switching activity* at C_1 and result in an increase in delay. A 10% drop in power supply voltage has been shown to be capable of increasing path delay by 30% [5]. Obviously, this may result in capture failures at C_2 [4], thus leading to test-induced yield loss [6]–[8]. This problem is worsening rapidly amongst deep-submicron and low-power chips [6]. Therefore, there is an urgent need to reduce the yield loss risk induced by excessive power supply noise.

   Previous techniques for reducing launch switching activity are based on the following three approaches:

(1) **Hardware Limitation**: The number of capturing-FFs at C_1 (Fig. 1) can be reduced via circuit modification [9], one-hot clocking [1], or capture clock staggering [1]. However, this approach may cause significant ATPG change, test data inflation, and even fault coverage loss to be incurred.

(2) **Low-Capture-Power ATPG**: 0's and 1's in test vectors can be carefully generated through such techniques as input-output equalizing at FFs [10], clock-gating, etc. to reduce launch switching activity. However, this approach may cause significant test data inflation and/or take a long amount of CPU time.

(3) **Test Relaxation & X-Filling**: *Test relaxation* is to identify don't-care bits (*X*-bits) from a set of fully-specified test vectors while maintaining fault coverage [11], [12]. Once this has been done, *X-filling* is conducted on the resulting partially-specified test cubes
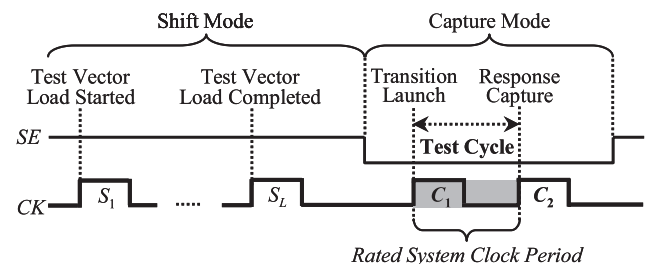

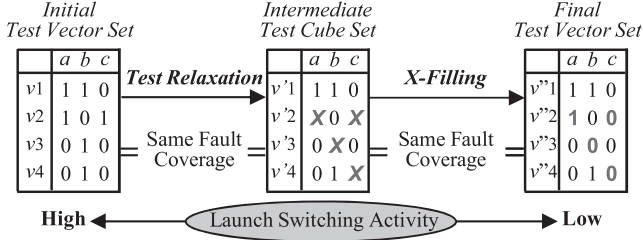**Fig. 1**   LOC-based at-speed scan testing.

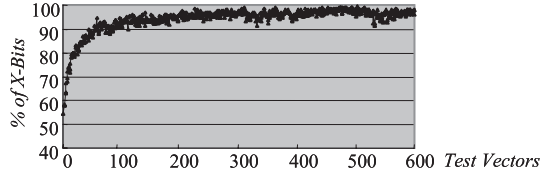Fig. 2　Concept of test relaxation and X-filling.

Fig. 3　X-bit distribution for an industrial circuit.

to *equalize the input and output values of as many FFs as possible* [13]–[15]. Launch switching activity is reduced in this way. The concept of this approach is illustrated in Fig. 2.

The test relaxation & *X*-filling approach is practical as a simple post-ATPG processing method since it reduces launch switching activity without affecting test data volume, fault coverage, performance, or circuit design. However, this approach has one major limitation: if the number of *X*-bits identified from a test set is small, its reducing effect on launch switching activity may be insufficient. Such an *X*-bit shortage may be caused by test compaction or test compression. Figure 3 shows an example of an industrial circuit (600 K gates and 600 transition delay test vectors) for which test vectors obtained at the early stages of test generation have few (60% or less) *X*-bits.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to improve the test relaxation & *X*-filling approach so as to effectively reduce launch switching activity even when only a small number of *X*-bits are available, as in test compaction and test compression. This paper outlines the achievement of this goal through the implementation of a novel two-stage scheme: *CTX* (*Clock-Gating-Based Test Relaxation and X-Filling*). The basic idea of this approach is to make sophisticated use of clock-gating in test relaxation & *X*-filling, as illustrated in Fig. 4.

Figure 4 (a) illustrates four FFs controlled by two clock control signals, EN_A and EN_B, whose values are 1 for the initial test vector. This means that all of the FFs are *active* (i.e. capturing) at C_1 (Fig. 1), resulting in four initial launch transitions. CTX consists of the following two stages:

- **Stage-1 (Clock-Disabling)**: Test relaxation is first conducted to turn as many enabling clock control signals (value = 1) as possible into *neutral* ones (with = *X*), as shown in Fig. 4 (b); *X*-filling is then conducted to turn as many neutral clock control signals as possible into disabling ones (value = 0), as shown in Fig. 4 (c).
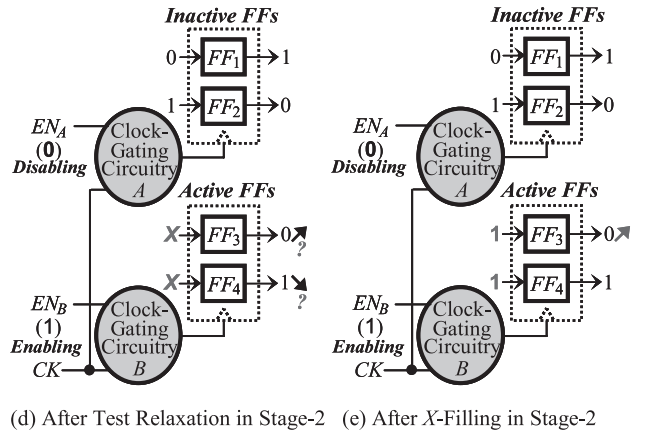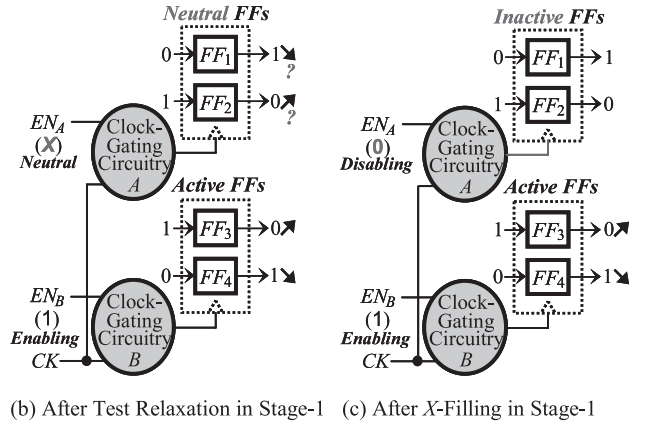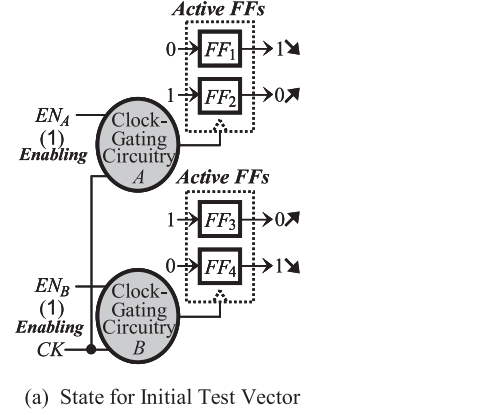

(a)　State for Initial Test Vector

(b) After Test Relaxation in Stage-1　(c) After *X*-Filling in Stage-1

(d) After Test Relaxation in Stage-2　(e) After *X*-Filling in Stage-2

Fig. 4　Basic flow of CTX.

Since all FFs controlled by a disabling clock control signal (e.g., FF_1 and FF_2, in Fig. 4 (c)) are *inactive*, launch transitions are efficiently reduced in a collective manner.

- **Stage-2 (FF-Silencing)**: Test relaxation is then conducted to turn as many active transition-FFs (input ≠ output, e.g. FF_3 and FF_4 in Fig. 4 (c)) as possible into neutral-FFs (input or output = *X*, e.g. FF_3 and FF_4 in Fig. 4 (d)), after which *X*-filling (which attempts to equalize the input and output of a neutral-FF) is conducted to turn as many neutral-FFs as possible into non-transition-FFs (input = output, e.g. FF_4 in

Fig. 4 (e)) by attempting to equalize the input and the output of a neutral-FF. In this way, the number of launch transitions at individual FFs is reduced.

The following are the major contributions of the CTX scheme:

(1) *Clock-Disabling-Based Test Relaxation & X-Filling*: CTX fully explores the collective power-saving capability of clock-gating in at-speed scan testing.
(2) *FF-Silencing-Based Test Relaxation & X-Filling*: CTX attempts to equalize the input and output values of the remaining active FFs to further reduce launch transitions at individual FFs.
(3) *Non-Intrusive Use of Clock-Gating*: By using clock-gating throughout test data manipulation, CTX avoids causing any ATPG change, test data inflation, or fault coverage loss.
(4) *X-Bit-Efficiency*: With clock-disabling and FF-Silencing, CTX significantly reduces launch switching activity even when only a small number of X-bits are available.

2. Background

2.1 Test Relaxation

As illustrated in Fig. 2, *test relaxation* is the process of identifying don't-care bits (X-bits) from a fully-specified test vector set, V, to create a partially-specified test cube set, C, while guaranteeing that some properties of V are preserved by C. Such properties include stuck-at fault coverage [11], transition delay fault coverage [12], and even all sensitized paths for transition delay fault detection [15].

X-bits can also be obtained directly from test generation by disabling random-fill. However, this increases ATPG time and test data volume. For example, the test vector count increased by 144.8% when random-fill was disabled to leave X-bits for low-power X-filling [13]. Thus, it is preferable to apply maximum test compaction with random-fill to generate an initial *fully-specified* compacted test set, and then use test relaxation to create *partially-specified* test cubes. Compaction followed by relaxation results in a compact final test set with additional benefits after X-filling is conducted [13]–[15].

2.2 X-Filling

As illustrated in Fig. 2, *X-filling* is the process of assigning logic values to the X-bits in a test cube for a specific purpose. In this paper, X-filling is used to reduce *launch switching activity* (LSA), which occurs at C_1 (Fig. 1). Many low-LSA X-filling techniques have been proposed [13]–[15], and Fig. 5 illustrates one of them, called *JP-fill* [15].

JP-Fill: In Fig. 5, the test cube is $c = \langle 10XX \rangle$ and the logic function of the combinational portion is F. Thus, $\langle c: \text{PPI} \rangle = \langle 0XX \rangle$ and $\langle F(c): \text{PPO} \rangle = \langle XXX \rangle$. First, *justification* (①) is conducted in an attempt to assign 0 to p_2,
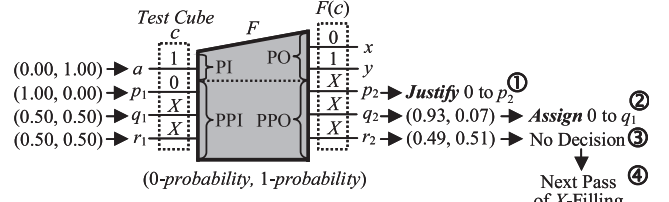

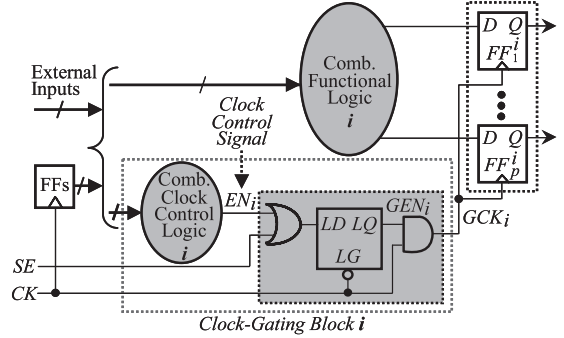**Fig. 5** Concept of JP-Fill.

Fig. 6 Example scheme of clock-gating.

since p_1 is 0. Then, the 0 and 1 probabilities of each PPO X-bit for bit-pairs q_1-q_2 and r_1-r_2 of the form X-X are calculated by setting the 0 and 1 probabilities for each input X-bit to 0.50, after which *probability propagation* is conducted. Since the 0-probability (0.93) of q_2 is significantly larger than its 1-probability (0.07), it is reasonable to assign 0 to q_1 (②). However, since the 0-probability (0.49) of r_2 is nearly equivalent to its 1-probability (0.51), no decision is made for r_1 (③). In this case, 3-valued logic simulation is performed, and one more pass of JP-Fill (④) is conducted with justification and/or probability propagation.

In essence, JP-fill uses justification and multiple passes to improve the effectiveness of X-filling, while its scalability is improved through probability propagation. In this way, JP-fill achieves effectiveness and scalability in a balanced manner.

2.3 Clock-Gating

Clock-gating is the most widely used power management mechanism in practice. Figure 6 shows an example scheme.

A circuit may contain multiple clock-gating blocks. Figure 6 shows the i-th such block, which is enhanced for scan testing. In shift mode ($SE = 1$), all FFs are constantly driven by the clock CK so that the shift operation is properly conducted. The *clock control signal* (EN_i) is generated at the rising edge of CK and takes over control of GEN_i in capture mode ($SE = 0$). GEN_i is then ANDed with CK to create the *gated clock* GCK_i that is directly connected to the FFs.

Clock-gating can be used to reduce launch switching activity in capture mode. This is achieved by setting EN_i to 0 at the last shift pulse, S_L. This way, the launch capture
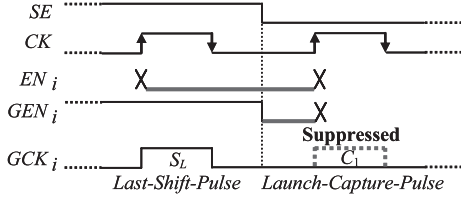
Fig. 7 Clock-gating for reducing launch switching activity.

clock pulse (C_1 in Fig. 1) is suppressed as shown in Fig. 7, and no FFs controlled by GCK_i (i.e. $FF_1^i \sim FF_p^i$ as shown in Fig. 6) will capture. In other words, launch transitions at the FFs are reduced in a *collective* manner.

Definition 1: If the clock of a FF is a gated clock, the FF is called a *clock-gated FF*; otherwise, the FF is called a *non-clock-gated FF*. A group of FFs controlled by the same gated clock is called a *clock-gated FF group*. For example, Fig. 4 shows two clock-gated FF groups: $\{FF_1, FF_2\}$ and $\{FF_3, FF_4\}$. Note that all FFs connected through one clock tree are considered one clock-gated FF group.

The capability of clock-gating to collectively reduce launch switching activity by disabling the clock for a group of FFs makes it a highly effective technique in terms of reducing yield loss risk in at-speed scan testing, especially when the percentage of available *X*-bits in a test cube is low (such as in test compaction and test compression, where the effect of conventional *X*-filling on LSA reduction is often limited).

From an ATPG point of view, clock-gating can be utilized by implementing either of the following two basic approaches:

Approach-1 (Detection-Oriented): Test generation is conducted in a manner that activates as many clocks for FFs as possible (i.e. disabling clock-gating) in order to make more FFs available for launch and capture in transition fault detection. Most commercial ATPG systems use this approach explicitly or implicitly. This leads to a smaller test set, higher fault coverage, and shorter CPU time, at the cost of higher launch switching activity.

Approach-2 (Reduction-Oriented): In test generation, clock-gating can be used aggressively to reduce launch switching activity. However, this reduces the number of FFs available for launch and capture in transition fault detection, leading to test vector count inflation, a longer CPU time, and even fault coverage loss under certain conditions.

In practice, it is preferable to use the detection-oriented approach (Approach-1) to generate a compact initial test set, and then convert it into a final test set with reduced launch switching activity by using CTX, the basic idea of which is illustrated in Fig. 4. The details of CTX are described in the following section.

3. The CTX Scheme

3.1 Problem Formalization

The following is a problem regarding clock-gating-based reduction of launch switching activity in at-speed scan testing:

Suppose that $V_{initial}$ is a set of test vectors. Find a new set of test vectors, V_{final}, under the following conditions:

(1) The fault coverage of V_{final} may not be less than that of $V_{initial}$.
(2) The size of V_{final} must be equal to that of $V_{initial}$.
(3) The peak launch switching activity of V_{final} must be lowered from that of $V_{initial}$ to the greatest extent possible utilizing clock-disabling and FF-silencing.

3.2 Basic Concept

This paper proposes a novel two-stage scheme, namely *CTX* (*Clock-Gating-Based Test Relaxation and X-Filling*), to solve the preceding problem. The following are useful terms in describing the procedure of CTX:

Definition 2: If the value of a clock control signal, *EN*, under an input vector is logic 1 (0), *EN* is said to be *enabling* (*disabling*). If the value is *X*, *EN* is said to be *neutral*. For example, EN_A in Fig. 4 (a), (b), and (c) are enabling, neutral, and disabling clock control signals, respectively.

Definition 3: If the clock for a FF or a clock-gated FF group is enabled (disabled), the FF or the clock-gated FF group is said to be *active* (*inactive*). For example, FF_1 and FF_2 (FF_3 and FF_4) in Fig. 4 (c) are inactive (active) FFs. It can also be said that the clock-gated FF group $\{FF_1, FF_2\}$ ($\{FF_3, FF_4\}$) is inactive (active).

Definition 4: If the input and output of a FF have the *same* (*different*) logic value, the FF is said to be a *non-transition-FF* (*transition-FF*). If the input or output of a FF is *X*, the FF is said to be a *neutral-FF*. For example, both FF_3 and FF_4 in Fig. 4 (d) are neutral-FFs. In Fig. 4 (e), FF_3 is a transition-FF, FF_4 is a non-transition-FF, and both of them are active.

CTX is based on the following two observations:

Observation-1: Not all enabling clock control signals necessarily need to be enabling. This exception occurs when a clock control signal is enabled to detect a fault in a test vector, but said fault is later detected by another test vector that does not require the clock control signal to be enabling.

Observation-2: Even if only one FF needs to be active for fault detection, all other FFs in the same clock-gated FF group also have to be active since they share the same clock control signal. This results in redundant transitions, especially when clock-gating is coarse-grained.

The basic concept of CTX is summarized in Fig. 8.

The first observation leads to Stage-1 (*Clock-Disabling*) of CTX, as shown in Fig. 8. Test relaxation is conducted to turn as many enabling clock control signals as possible into neutral ones, after which *X*-filling is conducted to convert as many neutral clock control signals as possible into disabling ones. In this way, launch switching activity can be reduced efficiently at the clock-gated FF group level
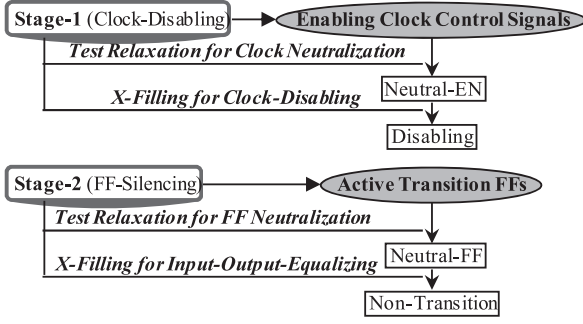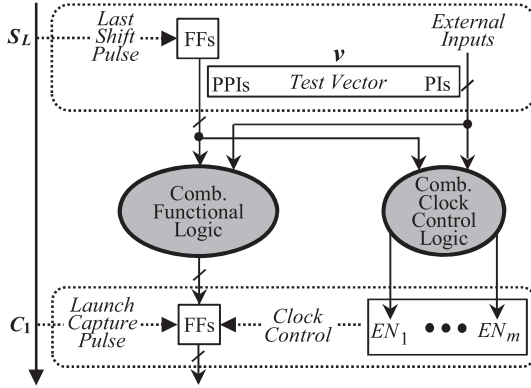
Fig. 8 Basic concept of CTX.

Fig. 9 Circuit model for CTX.

due to the collective reduction capability of clock gating.

The second observation leads to Stage-2 (*Input-Silencing*) of CTX, as shown in Fig. 8. Test relaxation is conducted to turn as many active transition-FFs as possible into neutral-FFs, after which *X*-filling is conducted to convert as many neutral-FFs as possible into non-transition-FFs. Subsequently, launch switching activity can be further reduced at the individual FF level.

An example of the basic flow of CTX when applied has been demonstrated in Fig. 4. In the following sections, the details of the CTX procedure are presented.

3.3 Circuit Model

Figure 9 shows a model of a circuit containing m clock-gating blocks, for the purpose of test generation in CTX.

In Fig. 9, signals related to the last shift pulse and launch capture pulse are surrounded by the dotted line, respectively. As shown in Fig. 9, a fully-specified test vector, v, is loaded at the rising edge of the last shift pulse, S_L. v consists of the PPI part $\langle v : \text{PPI} \rangle$ (which corresponds to the outputs of FFs) and the PI part $\langle v : \text{PI} \rangle$ (which corresponds to primary inputs). The combinational clock control logic circuitry produces m clock control signals, $EN_1, EN_2, \ldots, EN_m$, which correspond to the m clock-gating blocks, as shown in Fig. 6. Each of the clock control signals may be disabling or enabling, and determines whether the corresponding clock-gated FF group is active

or not at launch capture pulse C_1. In the figure, the signals related to the clock activation are surrounded by the solid rectangles and the logic circuits are surrounded by the solid circles, respectively.

3.4 CTX Procedure

Based on the fundamental concept of CTX shown in Fig. 8, the CTX procedure can be described as follows. Note that the list of clock control signal line EN as shown in Fig. 6 can be obtained by a synthesis tool which inserts clock gating circuit.

***Procedure of CTX*:**

Input: $V^0 = \{v_i^0 \mid i = 1, 2, \ldots, n\}$ // initial test set
Output: $V^2 = \{v_i^2 \mid i = 1, 2, \ldots, n\}$ // final test set

Stage-1 (*Clock-Disabling*):

(**1-1**) Obtain $RS(v_i^0) = \{$bits in v_i^0 that are reachable from at least one enabling clock control signal under $v_i^0\}$ for $i = 1, 2, \ldots, n$.

(**1-2**) Obtain $T^1 = RS(v_1^0) \cup RS(v_2^0) \cdots \cup RS(v_n^0)$.

(**1-3**) Conduct constrained test relaxation on V^0 to turn as many bits in T^1 into *X*-bits as possible while preserving the fault coverage of V^0. Denote the set of resulting partially-specified test cubes as $C^1 = \{c_i^1 \mid i = 1, 2, \ldots, n\}$.

(**1-4**) Try to justify 0 on each neutral clock control signal under c_i^1 by assigning appropriate logic values to some *X*-bits in c_i^1 for $i = 1, 2, \ldots, n$.

(**1-5**) Conduct low-LSA *X*-filling for the remaining *X*-bits in c_i^1 for $i = 1, 2, \ldots, n$. Denote the set of resulting fully-specified test vectors as $V^1 = \{v_i^1 \mid i = 1, 2, \ldots, n\}$.

Stage-2 (*FF-Silencing*):

(**2-1**) Obtain $RF(v_i^1) = \{$bits in v_i^1 that correspond to active transition-FFs under $v_i^1\}$ for $i = 1, 2, \ldots, n$.

(**2-2**) Obtain $T^2 = RF(v_1^1) \cup RF(v_2^1) \cdots \cup RF(v_n^1)$.

(**2-3**) Conduct constrained test relaxation on V^1 to turn as many bits in T^2 into *X*-bits as possible while preserving (1) the fault coverage of V^1 and (2) the logic value of any clock control signal. Denote the set of resulting partially-specified test cubes as $C^2 = \{c_i^2 \mid i = 1, 2, \ldots, n\}$.

(**2-4**) Conduct low-LSA *X*-filling for the *X*-bits in c_i^2 for $i = 1, 2, \ldots, n$. Denote the set of resulting fully-specified test vectors as $V^2 = \{v_i^2 \mid i = 1, 2, \ldots, n\}$.

3.5 Constrained Test Relaxation

The key operation within CTX procedure described above is *constrained test relaxation*, conducted on a fully-specified test set, V, to turn as many target bits in T into *X*-bits as possible while preserving (1) the fault coverage of V and (2) the logic values of target lines in S. The result is C, a set
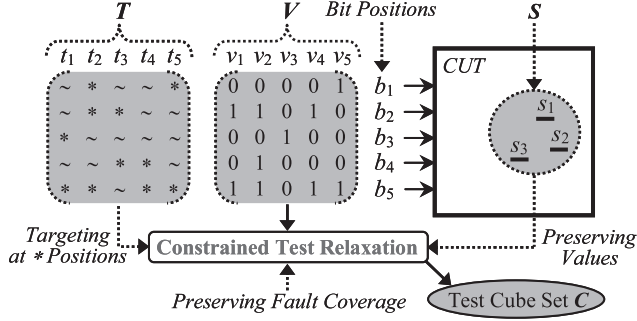
Fig. 10 Basic concept of constrained test relaxation.

Table 1 Basic information of industrial circuits.

Circuit	# Gates	# FFs	# Clock Gating Elements	# Gated FFs (%)	# Vec.	Test Cov. (%)
cir1	50k	1077	66	99.4	319	95.3
cir2	600k	35566	984	82.9	991	90.0

Table 2 Reduction ratio.

Circuit	Reduction Ratio of Launch Switching Activity		
	XID + Preferred	XID + JP	CTX
cir1	29.7	33.9	35.9
cir2	48.1	55.7	59.2

Table 3 CPU time.

Circuit	CPU Time (s)		
	XID + Preferred	XID + JP	CTX
cir1	85.84	96.98	149.31
cir2	3287.13	7033.69	11729.48

of partially-specified test cubes. This process is illustrated in Fig. 10, where $*$ indicates a target bit position. Note that only fault coverage needs to be preserved in constrained test relaxation (S1-S3), where $S = \varnothing$ can be assumed.

Constrained test relaxation is conducted via the following procedure, obtained by applying a basic, non-constrained test relaxation procedure that has previously been proposed [12].

Procedure of Constrained Test Relaxation:

Input V: *set of fully-specified test vectors*
        T: *set of target bits*
        S: *set of target lines (= $\varnothing$ in (1-3) of CTX)*
Output C: *set of resulting partially-specified test cubes*

S-1: Identify all essential faults of V (each of which can only be detected by one test vector in V) through an efficient procedure based on two passes of fault simulation.

S-2: Identify all bits in V whose logic values are necessary to (1) detect all essential faults and (2) preserve logic values of all target lines in S, in such a manner that bits in T are avoided to the greatest extent possible (such bits can be readily found by making use of the justification operation also widely used in ATPG). Then, convert the identified bits in V into X-bits, which results in an intermediate test cube set, C'.

S-3: Perform a 3-valued fault simulation on C' against all the non-essential faults of V. For all undetected, non-essential faults, identify the X-bits whose logic values in V are necessary to detect said faults in such a manner that bits in T are avoided to the greatest extent possible. Finally, in V, restore to the identified X-bits their original logic values. This results in the final test cube set, C.

The time complexity of the constrained test relaxation procedure is $O(M \times N)$, where M and N represent the number of faults and the number of test vectors, respectively.

4. Experimental Results

The CTX test generation scheme was implemented in C language and applied it two industrial circuits for evaluation experiments. The computer used in these experiments

has a 2.8 GHz CPU and 32 GB memory. Transition LOC delay test vectors were generated using the ATPG tool "TetraMAX™" from Synopsys. Table 1 shows the details of the circuits.

Three experiments were conducted using (1) XID with Preferred-Fill [13], (2) XID with JP-Fill [15], and (3) the proposed CTX scheme, where XID is a test relaxation system developed based on [12]. The results are summarized in Table 2. The reduction ratios of launch switching activity (w.r.t.; measured by the WSA metric [13]) for the original test sets are shown under "*XID+Preferred*", "*XID+JP*", and "*CTX*", respectively. It should be noted that none of the three method increases test vector counts.

Table 2 shows that the CTX scheme is more effective than the previous schemes when compared to conventional test relaxation [12] and X-filling [13], [15] results. It also shows that CTX is especially effective for low-power devices, in which the clock-gating mechanism is frequently used. Particularly notable is the reduction ratio for "cir2", which decreased launch switching activity by almost 60%. Moreover, while WSA metric does not represent IR-drop value exactly, given the 60% of WSA reduction ratio, we can expect a significant reduction in IR-drop.

Table 3 shows the amount of CPU time required after a given initial test set has been generated. While CTX require a greater computational cost than the other methods, this increase seems acceptable.

Discussions

(1) CTX is *non-intrusive* in reducing yield loss risk for at-speed scan testing, in that CTX causes no test data inflation, fault coverage loss, circuit/clocking modification, or circuit performance degradation. This makes CTX a preferred part of any power-safe test generation flow.

(2) CTX is *applicable to test compaction and test compression* where the number of X-bits in a test cube is limited. CTX makes up for such X-bit shortages by making

full use of clock-gating in a sophisticated manner (in that the original test vector count does not change).

5. Conclusions

This paper proposed a novel two-stage scheme, namely *CTX* (*Clock-Gating-Based Test Relaxation and X-Filling*) for effectively reducing launch switching activity that may cause yield loss in at-speed scan testing. The basic idea is to use clock-gating to disable as many FFs that do not contribute to fault detection as possible. CTX is the first of technique its kind that makes full use of clock-gating in test relaxation and *X*-filling. CTX reduces yield loss risk without any impact on test size, fault coverage, ATPG, circuit and clock design, or functional performance. Furthermore, CTX is applicable to any test compression schemes where *X*-bits are limited.

Future work includes: (1) conducting more evaluation experiments on more industrial circuits with gated clocks, (2) evaluating CTX in a test compression flow, and (3) conducting IR-drop and timing analysis to further demonstrate the effectiveness of the CTX scheme.

Acknowledgments

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