

ECOLOLOCATION: A TECHNIQUE FOR RF BASED LOCALIZATION IN WIRELESS SENSOR NETWORKS

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we present a novel sequence-based RF-only node localization algorithm, called Ecolocation. Our algorithm determines the location of unknown nodes by examining the ordered sequence of received signal strength (RSS) measurements taken at multiple reference nodes. We employ a constraint-based approach that provides for robust location decoding even in the presence of random RSS fluctuations due to multi-path fading and shadowing. Through extensive systematic simulations, and a representative set of real mote experiments, we show that over a wide range of settings Ecolocation performs better than other state of the art approaches in terms of localization accuracy and precision.

1. INTRODUCTION

Wireless sensor networks (WSN) are severely constrained for energy and cost of deployment and operation. The unique selling point of many WSN systems is that they are *inexpensive, autonomous systems* capable of working *unattended for many years*. This can be realized to some extent by multi-tasking the components on sensor motes. Thus, the system radio which is used for inter-mote communication can also be used for localization.

In this paper we present a novel RF based node localization algorithm called Ecolocation that examines the ordered sequence of nearby *reference nodes* (nodes with known locations) to determine the location of the *unknown node* (node with unknown location). The key idea of Ecolocation is that the distance-based rank order of reference nodes constitutes a unique signature for different regions in the *localization space*.

In Ecolocation, we obtain the ordered sequence of reference nodes by ranking them on one-way RSS measurements between them and the unknown node. This measured sequence is then compared with the ideal distance-based

sequence for each location to determine how many order-constraints are satisfied. The location which maximizes the number of satisfied constraints is then determined to be the best estimate of the unknown node's location.

Ideally, the ranks of the reference nodes based on RSS readings should be monotonic with their ranks based on true Euclidean distance. Of course, this is not true in the real world because of the presence of multi-path fading and shadowing in the RF channel. Reference nodes farther from the unknown node might measure higher RSS values than reference nodes which are closer and this introduces errors in the constraints. However, we show that the inherent insensitivity to absolute RSS amplitudes and the inherent redundancy present in the set of constraints make this approach to localization very robust in practice. Because of the close analogy to controlling errors by redundancy in traditional error control coding, we name our algorithm the "Error Controlling LOCALizaTION technique", or *Ecolocation* for short.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 describes Ecolocation in detail and presents some illustrative examples. Section 3 deals with related RF based localization techniques which we use for comparison with Ecolocation. In section 4 we evaluate Ecolocation and present its comparative study with other localization techniques. Section 5 discusses the results of a real world systems implementation and the conclusion and future work are presented in section 6.

2. ECOLOCATION

In this section we describe Ecolocation and illustrate it for the ideal and real world scenarios through examples.

The localization process is initiated by the unknown node by broadcasting a localization packet. The reference nodes collect RSS measurements of this packet and forward them to a single point¹ where the location estimate is computed

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¹This could be either a cluster-head or the unknown node itself, depending on the application and computational capabilities of nodes.

as follows:

1. Determine the ordered sequence of reference nodes by ranking them on the collected RSS measurements.
2. For each possible location grid-point in the location space determine the relative ordering of reference nodes and compare it with the RSS ordering previously obtained, to determine how many of the ordering constraints are satisfied.
3. Pick the location that maximizes the number of satisfied constraints. If there is more than one such location, take their centroid.

2.1. Ideal versus Real World Scenarios

Radio frequency (RF) based localization techniques are inherently dependent on the RF channel whose multi-path fading and shadowing effects have a fundamental bearing on the accuracy of location estimate. Nevertheless, it helps to study the localization technique in isolation of these effects. We introduce Ecolocation for the ideal scenario of zero multi-path fading and shadowing effects and later explain why it provides robust and accurate location estimate even in the presence of these effects.

2.1.1. Ideal Scenario

In the absence of multi-path fading and shadowing, RSS measurements between the reference nodes and the unknown node accurately represent the distances between them. If the reference nodes are ranked as a sequence in decreasing order of these RSS values then this order represents the increasing order of their separation from the unknown node. For a reference node ranked at position i in the ordered sequence,

$$R_i > R_j \Rightarrow d_i < d_j, \forall i < j$$

where, R_i and d_i are the RSS measurement and distance of the i^{th} ranked reference node from the unknown node, respectively.

The above relationship between two reference nodes is a *constraint* on the location of the unknown node and is dependent on it. An i^{th} ranked reference node forms $(i - 1)$ constraints with lesser ranked ones and for a total of α reference nodes there are $\left(\frac{\alpha(\alpha-1)}{2}\right)$ constraints on the unknown node.

For fixed reference node locations, the sequence order and the constraints are completely determined by the unknown node location. Figure 1 illustrates this idea for a simple case of five reference nodes and one unknown node. Table 1 shows the constraints on the unknown node for the example in 1(a).

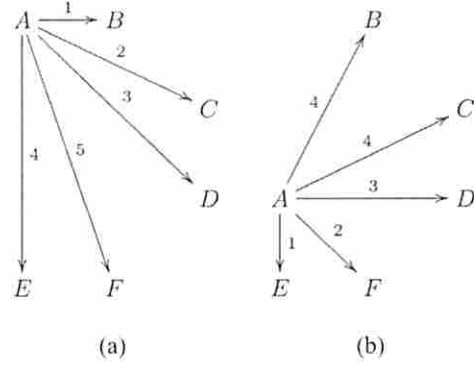


Fig. 1. The order of reference nodes (B, C, D, E, F) depends on the location of the unknown node (A).

B:1	C:2	D:3	E:4	F:5
R_1	$R_2 < R_1$	$R_3 < R_1$ $R_3 < R_2$	$R_4 < R_1$ $R_4 < R_2$ $R_4 < R_3$	$R_5 < R_1$ $R_5 < R_2$ $R_5 < R_3$ $R_5 < R_4$

Table 1. Constraints on the unknown node for the example in figure 1(a).

Each location grid-point² in the location space has its own set of constraints based on its Euclidean distances to the reference nodes. The unknown node location estimate can be obtained by comparing the constraints obtained from RSS measurements to the constraint sets of each location grid-point and picking the location which satisfies the maximum number of constraints. If there are more than one such locations then their centroid is the location estimate.

2.1.2. Real World Scenario

In contrast to the ideal scenario, the real world is characterized by the presence of multi-path fading and shadowing in the RF channel. Ideally, reference nodes that are far from the unknown node should measure lower RSS values than reference nodes that are nearer, but due to multi-path effects this is not true in the real world.

Figure 2 shows the experimental RSS measurements at five MICA 2 receivers placed at different distances from a MICA 2 transmitter. It shows that the receiver at 17.08 feet measured a higher RSS value than the receiver at 16.12 feet. Evidently, RSS measurements do not represent distances accurately in the real world.

²Location space scanning can be made more efficient by using greedy search/multiresolution algorithms instead of exhaustively looking at all locations, but we do not discuss this optimization in this paper as it doesn't affect localization performance.

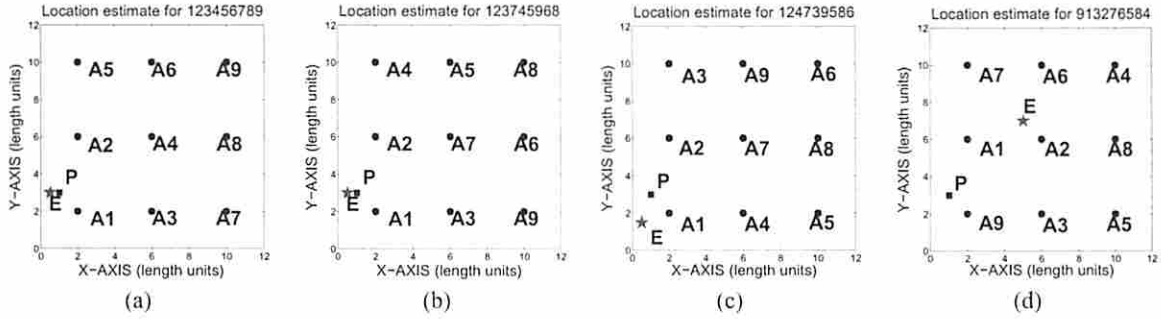


Fig. 3. Ecolocation location estimate (E) for the unknown node (P) at (1, 3) for a grid layout of 9 reference nodes (A). The reference nodes are numbered according to their rank in the ordered sequence. (a) Sequence: 123456789 (no erroneous constraints) [Estimate: (0.5, 3)] (b) Sequence: 123745968 (13.9% erroneous constraints) [Estimate: (0.5, 3)] (c) Sequence: 124739586 (22.2% erroneous constraints) [Estimate: (0.5, 1.5)] (d) Sequence: 913276584 (47.2% erroneous constraints) [Estimate: (5, 7)].

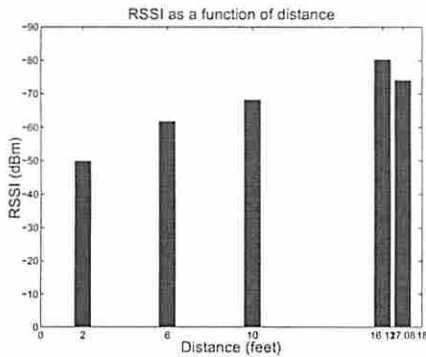


Fig. 2. Real world experimental results: Reference nodes far from the unknown node may measure higher RSS values than closer reference nodes. Note that y-axis is reverse ordered.

Therefore, if the reference nodes are ranked on their respective RSS measurements, the constraints on the unknown node location formed by these ranks will be erroneous. For example, if the ranks of fourth and fifth ranked reference nodes are interchanged due to multi-path effects in the RF channel, as in the experiment of figure 2, for the example in figure 1(a), then the new constraints are as shown in table 2. As it can be seen, 10% of the constraints are erroneous in this case.

The percentage of erroneous constraints depends on the RF channel condition, the topology of the reference nodes and the number of reference nodes. The unknown node location estimate accuracy in turn depends on the percentage of erroneous constraints. This is illustrated through a few examples.

B:1	C:2	D:3	E:5	F:4
R_1	$R_2 < R_1$	$R_3 < R_1$ $R_3 < R_2$	$R_5 < R_1$ $R_5 < R_2$ $R_5 < R_3$	$R_4 < R_1$ $R_4 < R_2$ $R_4 < R_3$ $R_4 < R_5$

Table 2. Constraints for the example of table 1 when the ranks of fourth and fifth ranked reference nodes are interchanged due of multi-path effects.

Figure 3 shows a sample layout of nine reference nodes placed in a grid and a single unknown node. Figure 3(a) plots the location estimate for the ideal case when there are no erroneous constraints on the unknown node. Figures 3(b), 3(c) and 3(d) show the location estimates for varying percentages of erroneous constraints. It is evident that location estimate error increases with increasing percentage of erroneous constraints.

These examples suggest that Ecolocation is robust to multi-path effects of the RF channel up to some level. The inherent redundancy in the constraint set ensures that the non-erroneous constraints help in estimating the unknown node location accurately. Also, the constraint construction inherently holds true for random variations in RSS measurements up to a tolerance level of $(|R_i - R_j|)$. Prior to presenting a complete performance evaluation of Ecolocation we discuss related localization techniques proposed by others.

3. RELATED WORK

Over the past few years many solutions have been proposed for RF-only localization in wireless ad-hoc and sensor net-

works which can be broadly classified into two main categories – *range based* and *range free*. Range based techniques estimate distances (range) from RSS measurements between the unknown node and the reference nodes and use them to triangulate the location of the unknown node [3], [6], [7], [8], [9], [10], [12], [13], [14], [15]. On the other hand range free techniques estimate the location of the unknown node without determining the range [4], [17].

To compare with Ecolocation, we selected four localization techniques – *proximity localization*, *centroid* [17], *approximate point in triangle* [4] and *maximum likelihood estimation* [7] – based on the criterion that they should use RSS of RF signals to calculate the location estimate over a single hop.

Proximity localization: It is a simple localization scheme in which the location of the closest reference node, based on RSS measurements, is the unknown node location estimate. It can be considered as an extreme special case of Ecolocation where only the first ranking reference node is considered.

Centroid: In [17] the authors propose a range free, proximity based solution for localization where the location estimate is the centroid of all the reference nodes which are in the proximity of the unknown node. In [16] the authors suggest an enhancement to this technique by adaptively placing reference nodes to minimize location error. We do not consider this enhancement as this requires extra information gathering and processing.

Approximate point in triangle: T. He et al in [4] propose a range free localization technique called approximate point in triangle (APIT) in which the RSS value at the unknown node is compared with RSS values at its neighbors and based on this comparison a decision is made whether the unknown node location is inside various triangles formed by the reference nodes. This comparison test is done for all the locations in the location space and for all the triangles that can be formed by the reference nodes. The location estimate is the centroid of the locations which are in a maximum number of triangles. The accuracy of the location estimate also depends on the non reference node neighbor density of the unknown node.

Maximum Likelihood Estimation: Out of the many maximum likelihood location estimation (MLE) techniques proposed, [3], [13], [7] etc., we consider a simple, representative MLE technique proposed in [7]. In this, the authors calculate the location which maximizes a likelihood function, which is based on the distance estimate and its standard deviation, using the gradient climbing method. All RF based MLE methods need good ranging techniques that use radio frequencies to estimate distances. This either requires expensive ranging equipment and/or time consuming pre-configuration surveys of the location space.

In [2] the authors present a comparative study of many RSS based localization techniques using commodity 802.11 cards. According to the authors none of the localization techniques have a significant advantage over others over a range of environments. We conjecture that this could be an artifact of fixing the number of nodes and the node density. Our work differs from this in evaluating the performance of five different RSS based localization techniques over different node deployments in different RF channel conditions.

4. EVALUATION

In the section we present a complete performance evaluation of Ecolocation using simulations.

4.1. Simulation Model

The most widely used simulation model to generate RSS samples as a function of distance in RF channels is the log-normal shadowing model [18]:

$$RSS(d) = P_T - PL(d_0) - 10\eta \log_{10} \frac{d}{d_0} + X_\sigma \quad (1)$$

where, P_T is the transmit power and $PL(d_0)$ is path loss for a reference distance of d_0 . η is the path loss exponent and the random variation in RSS is expressed as a gaussian random variable of zero mean and σ^2 variance, $X_\sigma = N(0, \sigma^2)$. All powers are in dBm and all distances are in meters. In this model we do not provision separately for any obstructions like walls. If obstructions are to be considered an extra constant needs to be subtracted from equation (1) to account for the attenuation in them (the constant depends on the type and number of obstructions).

4.2. Simulation Parameters

The location estimate of any RF-based localization technique depends on a fundamental set of parameters which can be broadly categorized into RF channel characteristics and node deployment parameters.

- *RF Channel Characteristics*: [19], [18]
 - Path loss exponent (η): Measures the power attenuation of RF signals relative to distance.
 - Standard deviation (σ): Measures the standard deviation in RSS measurements due to log-normal shadowing.

The values of η and σ change with the frequency of operation and the clutter and disturbance in the environment.

- *Node Deployment Parameters:*

- Number of reference nodes (α) and unknown nodes (ρ).
- Density of reference nodes (β) and unknown nodes. Node density is defined as the number of nodes per square meter.
- Location space size: A square area of $(\lambda \times \lambda)$ sq. meters is considered.
- Resolution or granularity (γ): The unit distance between two grid points in the location space.
- Node distribution in the location space: Random, grid topology or grid-random topology.

The effect of each of the above parameters on any localization technique depends on the actual technique itself. For example, some localization techniques depend more on the number of reference nodes than resolution, while for some other techniques reference node density may be more important than the number of reference nodes.

Table 3 lists the typical values and ranges for different parameters used in our simulations. Each simulation scenario consists of randomly placing α reference nodes and one unknown node in a square of $(\lambda \times \lambda)$ square meters and generating RSS values between them using equation 1. A 48 bit arithmetic, linear congruential pseudo random number generator is used. Results are averaged over 100 random trials using 10 different random seeds.

Parameter	Typical Value	Typical Range
P_T	4dBm (max.)	NA
$PL(d_0)$	55dB ($d_0 = 1m$) [1]	NA
η	4 (indoors) 4.6 (outdoors)	1 – 7 [19]
σ	7 (indoors) 4.7 (outdoors)	2 – 14 [19]
α	25	3 – 25
λ	15	{50, 25, 15, 5}
$\beta (= \frac{\alpha}{\lambda^2})$	0.11 (1 ref. node in 9 sq.meters)	{0.01, 0.04, 0.11, 1}
γ	0.1	NA
ρ (for APIT)	8	NA
Node Placement	Random	(Grid, Random, Grid-random)

Table 3. Typical values and ranges for different simulation parameters

4.3. Simulation Results

The performance of Ecolocation is measured on the average location error for a wide range of RF channel conditions

and node deployment parameters. A comparative study of Ecolocation with the four localization techniques described in section 3 is also presented.

Location error is defined as the Euclidean distance between the location estimate and the actual location of the unknown node. The average location error is presented as a percentage of the average inter reference node distance (D_a). On an average, $D_a \approx \frac{\lambda}{2}$.

Figures 4(a) and 4(b) show the average location error for Ecolocation and the four localization techniques as a function of path loss exponent (η) and standard deviation of log-normal shadowing (σ) respectively. The results suggest that Ecolocation performs better for RF channels that have higher η and lower σ values.

Among all five localization techniques Ecolocation provides the least location error over a range of η and σ values. MLE performs equally well for some values. APIT is the least accurate and Centroid is not influenced by radio channel conditions because all reference nodes fall in the radio range of the unknown node.

Figures 4(c) and 4(d) compare the average location error for all five localization techniques as a function of the number of reference nodes (α) and the reference node densities (β) respectively. As the results show, Ecolocation performance improves with increasing reference nodes numbers and density. It should be noted that the average inter reference node distance (D_a) changes with reference node density. Although, figure 4(d) shows that the error due to Ecolocation is constant over all densities, it is constant as a percentage of D_a implying that the absolute location error increases with reducing density of reference nodes.

Ecolocation provides the most accurate location estimate compared to other techniques over a range of reference node numbers and their densities. Proximity localization performs surprising well compared to APIT and Centroid. As expected, the performance of Ecolocation, MLE and Proximity localization improves with number of reference nodes whereas it degrades for Centroid and APIT.

Figure 5 plots the average location error due to Ecolocation for different reference node distributions and it shows that grid placement of reference nodes provides the best location estimates and random placement provides the worst. This is expected because, reference nodes are spread more widely in grid placement than in random placement resulting in a more robust constraint set.

Simulation results suggest that Ecolocation and MLE perform equally well for some radio channel and node deployment parameters even though they follow entirely different approaches. But in the real world, MLE may not perform so well as it needs good η and σ estimates for the deployment environment and its very difficult to obtain accurate estimates for these parameters in the presence of obstructions like walls and furniture.

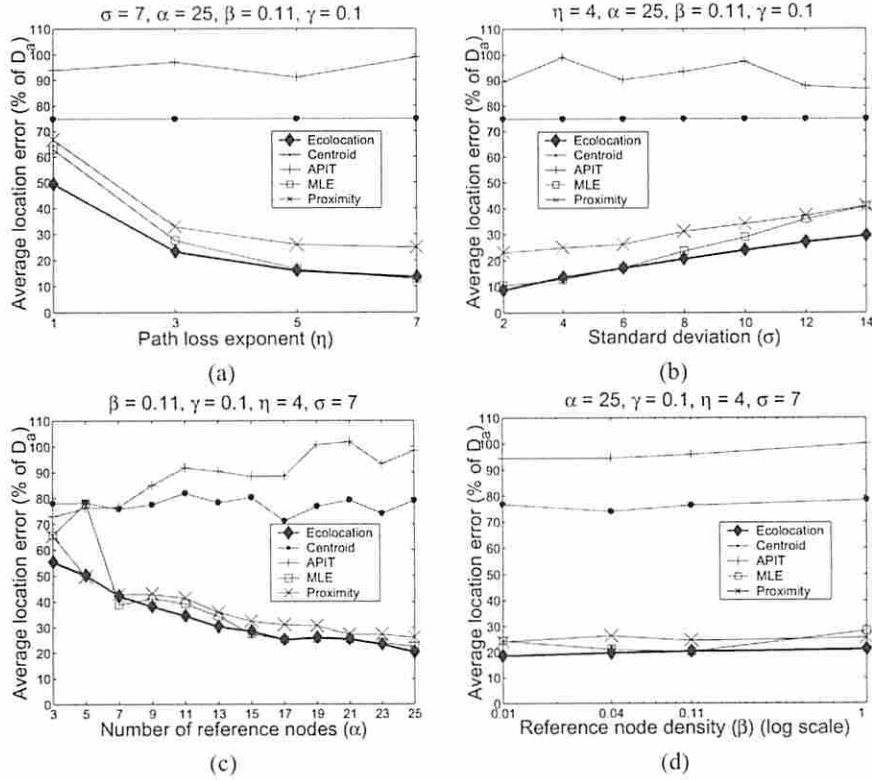


Fig. 4. Comparison: (a) Average location error as a function of path loss exponent ($\sigma = 7, \alpha = 25, \beta = 0.11, \gamma = 0.1$) (b) Average location error as a function of standard deviation ($\eta = 4, \alpha = 25, \beta = 0.11, \gamma = 0.1$) (c) Average location error as a function of number of reference nodes ($\eta = 4, \sigma = 7, \beta = 0.11, \gamma = 0.1$) (d) Average location error as a function of reference node density ($\eta = 4, \sigma = 7, \alpha = 25, \gamma = 0.1$).

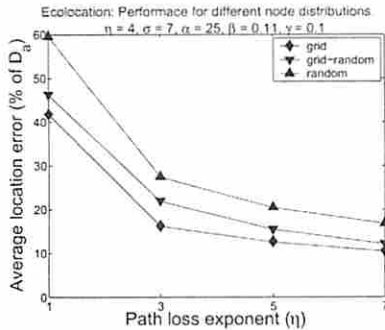


Fig. 5. Average location error as a function path loss exponent for different reference node distributions ($\eta = 4, \sigma = 7, \alpha = 25, \beta = 0.11, \gamma = 0.1$).

5. SYSTEMS IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

The performance of Ecolocation in real systems is studied through two experiments, representing different RF channel

and node deployment parameters, conducted using MICA 2 motes. The first experiment was conducted in a parking lot which represents a relatively obstruction free RF channel and the second experiment was conducted in an office building with many rooms and furniture that represents a typical indoor environment.

Five different unknown node locations were estimated using four different localization techniques - Ecolocation, Centroid, MLE and Proximity localization. APIT was not considered as it requires more than one unknown node. The Centroid technique was introduced to radio channel influence by calculating the location estimate as the centroid of the first three reference nodes by RSS value. This also helps in avoiding the situation where all location estimates are equal because the unknown node radio range covers all reference nodes. For the MLE technique, the values of η and σ from table 3 were used. All calculations were conducted offline using RSS values recorded by the MICA 2 motes in their EEPROMs during experiments.

5.1. Experiment I: Parking lot

The RF channel in an outdoor parking lot represents a class of relatively obstruction free channels. Twenty MICA 2 motes (reference nodes) were placed on the ground with a separation of 10 feet between each other in a (5×4) grid in an area of $(40' \times 30') = 1200$ sq. feet as shown in figure 6.

A MICA 2 mote (the unknown node) placed at five different locations as shown in Figure 6 broadcasted a single localization packet and the reference nodes recorded its RSS measurement. All reference nodes were in the radio range and in line of sight of the unknown node. Figure 6 shows the location estimates calculated using the RSS measurements and table 4 compares the estimation error for all four localization techniques. According to the results Ecolocation performs better than all other techniques in four out of the five cases.

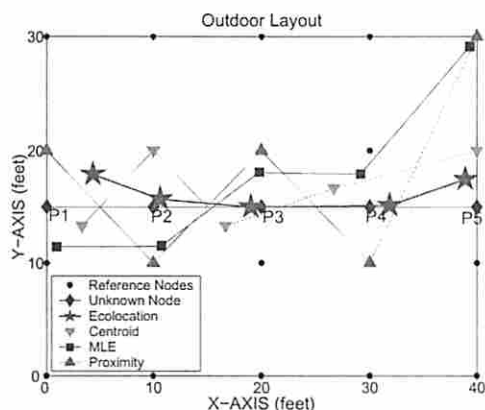


Fig. 6. Experiment I: Parking lot - Performance of various localization techniques.

Technique	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Ecolocation	5.25	0.97	0.98	1.84	2.73
Centroid	3.73	5.00	3.73	3.73	5.00
MLE	3.65	3.53	3.12	3.05	14.16
Proximity	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	15.00

Table 4. Experiment I: Location error (in feet) at different locations due to different localization techniques.

5.2. Experiment II: Office building

Office buildings with features such as rooms, corridors, furniture and other obstructions represent a distinct class of RF channels. In such dense scenarios it often becomes necessary to provide symbolic location estimates relative to these

features. In this experiment we compare the four localization techniques on the accuracy of symbolic location estimates.

Figure 7 shows a schematic of the experimental setup. Eighteen MICA 2 motes (reference nodes) were placed on the ground randomly in an area of $(52' \times 20')$ = 1040 sq. feet across corridors and different rooms. As in Experiment I, a MICA 2 mote (the unknown node) placed in five different locations as shown in the figure broadcasted a single localization packet and the reference nodes recorded its RSS measurement. For all five locations only a subset of the reference nodes were in line of sight of the unknown node. Table 5 shows the location estimate errors and table 6 compares the symbolic location estimates for all four localization techniques. As the results show, Ecolocation is the only technique which provides accurate symbolic location estimates for the unknown node.

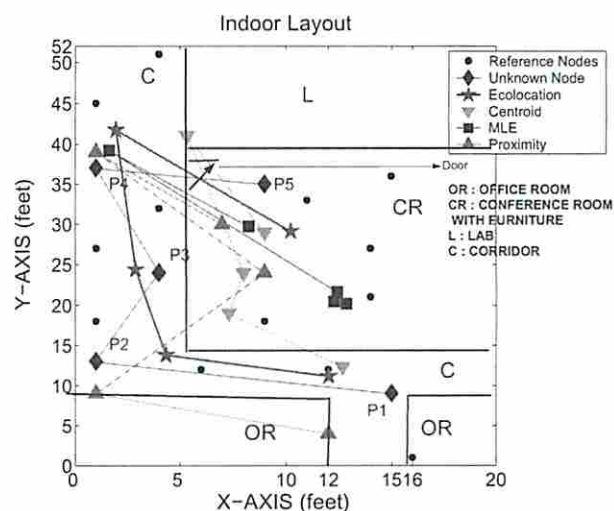


Fig. 7. Experiment II: Office building - Performance of various localization techniques.

Technique	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Ecolocation	3.68	3.42	1.20	4.85	5.97
Centroid	4.06	8.72	4.0	5.89	6.00
MLE	11.39	13.51	8.76	2.28	5.32
Proximity	5.83	4.00	5.00	2.00	5.34

Table 5. Experiment II: Location error (in feet) at different locations due to different localization techniques.

The experimental results suggest that MLE does not perform as well as it does in simulations. As suggested in the previous section, this is because the simulation model

Technique	P1 (C)	P2 (C)	P3 (C)	P4 (C)	P5 (CR)
Ecolocation	C	C	C	C	CR
Centroid	C	CR	CR	L	CR
MLE	CR	CR	CR	C	CR
Proximity	C	C	CR	C	CR

Table 6. Experiment II: Symbolic location estimates for various localization techniques. Note that Ecolocation is the only technique that indicates the correct location in each reading.

of section 4.1 does not include real world features such as walls, furniture and other obstructions.

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In this paper we have presented a novel RF based localization technique called Ecolocation which makes use of the inherent redundancy present in the ordering of reference nodes with respect to the unknown node to provide good location accuracy. We have also presented comparative study of Ecolocation with four other RF based localization techniques through simulations and real world systems implementation. The results show that Ecolocation performs better than other localization techniques over a range of RF channel conditions and node deployment strategies.

In the future we would like explore algorithms such as greedy search and multi-resolution search for scanning the location space to make Ecolocation more efficient. All localization techniques extract costs from the system over which they operate. As part of our future work we will study the effect of Ecolocation as well as other localization techniques over a variety of realistic system designs and protocols.

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