Stabilization and pseudo-stabilization

James E. Burns1, Mohamed G. Gouda2, Raymond E. Miller3

1 Georgia Institute of Technology
2 Department of Computer Sciences, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX 78712-1188, USA
3 University of Maryland at College Park

Received June 1990 / Accepted February 1991

James E. Burns received the B.S. degree in mathematics from the California Institute of Technology, the M.B.I.S. degree from Georgia State University, and the M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in information and computer science from the Georgia Institute of Technology. He is currently an Associate Professor in the College of Computing at the Georgia Institute of Technology, having served previously on the faculty at Indiana University. He has broad research in theoretical issues of distributed and parallel computing, especially relating to problems of synchronization and fault tolerance.

Mohamed Gawdat Gouda was born and raised in Egypt. His first bachelor degree was in engineering, and his second was in mathematics. Both degrees are from Cairo University. After his graduation, he moved to Canada where he obtained an MA in mathematics from York University, and a Master and a Ph.D. in computing science from the University of Waterloo. Later, he moved to the United States of America where he worked for the Honeywell Corporate Technology Center for three years. In 1980, he moved to the University of Texas at Austin, and has settled there ever since, except for one summer at Bell Labs, one summer at MCC, and one winter at the Eindhoven Technical University. Gouda currently holds the Mike A. Myer Centennial Professorship in Computing Science at the University of Texas at Austin. Gouda’s area of research is distributed and concurrent computing. In this area, he has been working on: abstraction, nondeterminism, atomicity, convergence, stability, formality, correctness, efficiency, scientific elegance, and technical beauty (not necessarily in that order). Gouda was the founding Editor-in-Chief of the journal Distributed Computing, published by Springer-Verlag in 1985. He was the program committee chairman of the 1989 SIGCOMM Conference sponsored by ACM. He was the first program committee chairman for the International Conference on Network Protocols, established by the IEEE Computer Society in 1993. Gouda is an original member of the Austin Tuesday Afternoon Club. In his spare time, he likes to design network protocols and prove them correct for fun.

Raymond E. Miller received his Ph.D. in 1957 from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana. He was a Research Staff Member at IBM, Thomas J. Watson Research Center, Yorktown Heights, N.Y., from 1957 until 1980, Director of the School of Information and Computer Science at Georgia Tech from 1980 until 1987, and is currently a professor of computer science at the University of Maryland, College Park and Director of the NASA Center of Excellence in Space Data and Information Sciences at Goddard Space Flight Center. He has written over 90 technical papers in areas of theory of computation, machine organization, parallel computation and communication protocols. He is a Fellow of the IEEE and a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He has been active in the ACM and IEEE/CS, and is a Board member of the Computing Research Association. In the IEEE/CS, he is a member of the Board of Governors and the 1991 Vice President for Educational Activities.

Summary. A stabilizing system is one which if started at any state is guaranteed to reach a state after which the system cannot deviate from its intended specification. In this paper, we propose a new variation of this notion, called pseudo-stabilization. A pseudo-stabilizing system is one which if started at any state is guaranteed to reach a state after which the system does not deviate from its intended specification. Thus, the difference between the two notions comes down to the difference between “cannot” and “does not” — a difference that hardly matters in many practical situations. As it happens, a number of
well-known systems, for example the alternating-bit protocol, are pseudo-stabilizing but not stabilizing. We conclude that one should not try to make any such system stabilizing, especially if stabilization comes at a high price.

**Key words:** Alternating-bit protocol – Communication protocols – Convergence – Self-stabilization – System specification

1 Introduction

We have been interested for some time now in classes of systems that “well-behave” irrespective of their initial states. Clearly, such systems are extremely robust in the face of transient faults which may yield them in arbitrary states; this should explain our interest in these systems. Our aim in this paper is to investigate the criteria for well-behaving in the context of arbitrary initialization.

The first criterion for the notion of well-behaving in spite of arbitrary initialization can be traced back to Dijkstra’s seminal paper on self-stabilization [5, 6]. Dijkstra’s criterion requires that if the system starts at an arbitrary state, then it is guaranteed to reach, within a finite number of transitions, a state after which the system cannot deviate from its intended specification. Many authors have adopted Dijkstra’s criterion since then; see for example [2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11]. We refer to systems that satisfy this criterion as stabilizing systems.

In this paper, we propose a new criterion for the notion of well-behaving in spite of arbitrary initialization. Our criterion requires that if the system starts at an arbitrary state, then it is guaranteed to reach, within a finite number of transitions, a state after which the system does not deviate from its intended specification. We call systems that satisfy this criterion pseudo-stabilizing.

The “fragile” distinction between stabilization and pseudo-stabilization is better illustrated by an example. Consider a system with a state-transition diagram as shown in Fig. 1. (In this diagram, circles represent system states and arcs represent transitions between the states in the usual way.) Starting from any state, this system is guaranteed to reach, within one transition, either state p or state q. From p, only one computation (p, p, ...) can be executed, and from q, only one computation (q, q, ...) can be executed. Thus, if the intended specification of this system is \( F = \{ (p, p, ...), (q, q, ...) \} \), then the system will reach within one transition a state (p or q) after which no deviation from F is possible. Hence, the system is stabilizing.

Now, consider a second system with a state-transition diagram as shown in Fig. 2, and assume that the intended specification of this system is the same \( F \) as before. This system is not stabilizing because starting at state \( p \), there is no guarantee that the system will ever leave \( p \), yet at \( p \) the system can deviate from \( F \) by executing the computation \((p, q, q, ...)\) which is not in \( F \). On the other hand, every computation of this system is in one of the following forms:

\[
(p, p, ...),
(q, q, ...)
\]

Thus, every computation has an infinite suffix in \( F \). In other words, along every computation the system is guaranteed to reach a state after which the system does not deviate from \( F \) (although it may have an infinite number of chances to do so). Hence the system is pseudo-stabilizing.

As we show later, pseudo-stabilization is strictly weaker than stabilization, with “does not deviate” replacing “cannot deviate”. Thus, every stabilizing system is also pseudo-stabilizing but there are pseudo-stabilizing systems that are not stabilizing. We contend, however, that pseudo-stabilizing systems are adequate for most practical purposes, and there is no real need to make them stabilizing, especially if the price of stabilization is high.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. In Sect. 2, we state our definitions of systems and their regions of execution, and identify two types of regions called “attractors” and “pseudo-attractors”. In sect. 3, we define what it means for a system to be stabilizing or pseudo-stabilizing to a given specification. In Sect. 4, we discuss an important relationship between (pseudo-) attraction and (pseudo-) stabilization. In particular, we prove that if a system has a (pseudo-) attractor where some specification is achieved, then the system (pseudo-) stabilizes to that specification. This result gives a sufficient condition for establishing that a given system stabilizes or pseudo-stabilizes to a given specification. We use this result, in Sect. 5, to show that the Alternating-Bit protocol pseudo-stabilizes to its specification. Concluding remarks are in Sect. 6. For convenience, our discussion
of the Alternating-Bit protocol is divided into several subsections. An informal presentation of the protocol is given in 5.1, followed by a formal presentation in 5.2. A specification of the protocol is presented in 5.3, and a proof that the protocol pseudo-stabilizes to that specification is outlined in 5.4. Up to this point, our protocol can only tolerate message loss. Thus, we extend the protocol to tolerate message corruption in 5.5, and tolerate message reorder in 5.6, while preserving its property of pseudo-stabilization.

2 Attractors and pseudo-attractors

Let $S$ be a system defined by a set of states, and a set of transitions, where each transition is an ordered pair of states.

A region of system $S$ is a subset of the system states. A region $P$ is closed iff for every state $p$ and $q$, if $p$ is in $P$ and $(p, q)$ is a transition then $q$ is in $P$.

A computation of $S$ is a nonempty maximal sequence $(p_1, p_2, \ldots)$, where each $p_i$ is a system state and each $(p_i, p_{i+1})$ is a system transition. The maximality condition implies that if the last state in a finite computation is $p$ then for every system state $q$, $(p, q)$ is not a system transition.

A computation leads to a region $P$ iff it has a state in $P$.

Definition 1. A region $P$ of $S$ is an attractor iff it satisfies the following two conditions.

i. $P$ is closed.

ii. Every computation of $S$ leads to $P$.

Thus, each system computation eventually reaches every system attractor. Moreover, once a computation reaches an attractor, it stays there indefinitely.

Definition 2. An infinite sequence $(P_1, P_2, \ldots)$ of regions of $S$ is a pseudo-attractor iff it satisfies the following two conditions.

i. For every $k$, $k = 1, 2, \ldots$, the region $\left( \bigcup_{i=1}^{k} P_i \right)$ is closed.

ii. Every computation of $S$ leads to the region $\left( \bigcup_{i=1}^{\infty} P_i \right)$.

Let $(P_1, P_2, \ldots)$ be a pseudo-attractor of some system. Thus, for every system computation, there is $k, k = 1, 2, \ldots$, such that the computation eventually reaches a region $P_k$ but never reaches any of the preceding regions $P_1, \ldots, P_{k-1}$. In this case, the computation stays within $P_k$ indefinitely (since $\bigcup_{i=1}^{k} P_i$ is closed).

The next theorem, which follows directly from the above definitions, states an interesting relationship between the attractors and pseudo-attractors of a system.

Theorem 1. Let $P$ be a region of $S$ and $(P_1, P_2, \ldots)$ be an infinite sequence of regions of $S$.

i. If $P$ is an attractor of $S$, then $(P, P, \ldots)$ is a pseudo-attractor of $S$.

ii. If $(P_1, P_2, \ldots)$ is a pseudo-attractor of $S$, then $\left( \bigcup_{i=1}^{\infty} P_i \right)$ is an attractor of $S$.

3 Stabilization and pseudo-stabilization

A specification of a system $S$ is a set of computations of $S$.

Next, we define what it means for a system to be stabilizing or pseudo-stabilizing to a given specification; but first we adopt the following notation.

Notation. Let $c$ be any computation that has at least $i$ states. Then, $c.i$ denotes the $i^{th}$ state in $c$, and $c.i$ denotes the suffix of $c$ starting with the $i^{th}$ state $c.i$.

Definition 3. A system $S$ stabilizes to a specification $F$ iff

($\forall$ computation $c$ of $S$, $\exists$ a positive integer $i$: every computation of $S$ that starts with the state $c.i$ is in $F$)

Definition 4. A system $S$ pseudo-stabilizes to a specification $F$ iff

($\forall$ computation $c$ of $S$, $\exists$ a positive integer $i$: the computation $c.i$ is in $F$)

Informally, system $S$ stabilizes to a specification $F$ iff starting from an arbitrary state, $S$ is guaranteed to reach a state after which $F$ cannot be violated. By way of contrast, $S$ pseudo-stabilizes to $F$ iff starting from an arbitrary state, $S$ is guaranteed to reach a state after which $F$ is not violated. Thus, the distinction between the two definitions comes down to the difference between “cannot” and “is not”. This distinction cannot be detected or observed by an external observer of the system. In particular, an external observer can observe only one computation of the system, namely the computation that the system executes. It can also observe that the intended specification is not violated after some point in the computation, but cannot observe that the intended specification cannot be violated after some point. In other words, an external observer can observe pseudo-stabilization but not stabilization. This suggests that the two concepts of stabilization and pseudo-stabilization are indistinguishable for all practical purposes. In principle, however, the two concepts are distinct; in particular, stabilization is a more strict property than pseudo-stabilization as shown by the next theorem.

Theorem 2. Every system that stabilizes to some specification $F$ pseudo-stabilizes to the same $F$; the converse is not necessarily true.

Proof. From Definitions 3 and 4 and from the fact that each computation $c.i$ starts with the state $c.i$, it follows that stabilization to $F$ implies pseudo-stabilization to $F$. We show next that the converse is not necessarily true by exhibiting a system that pseudo-stabilizes, but does not stabilize, to some specification.
Consider a system $S$ where

states $= \{p, q\}$, and

transitions $= \{(p, p), (p, q), (q, q)\}$

Thus, the state-transition diagram of $S$ is as shown in Fig. 2.

A possible specification of $S$ is the following $F$ that consists of two infinite computations

$$F=\{(p, p, \ldots), (q, q, \ldots)\}$$

System $S$ does not stabilize to $F$ because the infinite computation $(p, p, \ldots)$ of $S$ has no state such that every computation that starts from that state is in $F$.

On the other hand, $S$ pseudo-stabilizes to $F$ because each computation of $S$ is in one of the following forms:

$$(p, p, \ldots),$$

$$(p, p, \ldots, p, q, q, \ldots),$$

or

$$(q, q, \ldots).$$

Thus, each computation of $S$ has a suffix in $F$. □

The next theorem shows that stabilization has an advantage over pseudo-stabilization in systems with a finite number of states. Specifically, the stabilization of a finite-state system guarantees an upper bound on the number of transitions that the system can execute starting from an arbitrary state until the system starts to behave according to its specifications. Pseudo-stabilization, on the other hand, does not guarantee such an upper bound in finite-state systems.

**Theorem 3.** Let $S$ be a system with $n$ states, and let $F$ be a specification of $S$.

i. If $S$ stabilizes to $F$, then

($\forall$ computation $c$. $\exists$ positive integer $k$: $k \leq n + 1$ and $c \uparrow k$ is in $F$).

ii. The same consequence does not necessarily hold if $S$ merely pseudo-stabilizes to $F$.

**Proof.** Part i: Let $c$ be a computation of $S$. Because of the stabilization of $S$, every computation of $S$, including $c$, has a suffix in $F$, i.e., there is a positive integer $k$ such that $c \uparrow k$ is in $F$. We now show that if $k > n + 1$ then there is a positive integer $i$ smaller than $k$ such that $c \uparrow i$ is in $F$. Let $k$ be larger than $n + 1$. Thus, because $S$ has only $n$ states, the first $k - 1$ states of $c$, namely $c.1, c.2, \ldots, c.(k - 1)$, include at least two identical states. Therefore, there is an infinite computation $d$ of $S$ whose states are all taken from $\{c.1, c.2, \ldots, c.(k - 1)\}$. Because $S$ stabilizes to $F$, then one of the states in $d$, say $c.i$, is such that every computation that starts with $c.i$ is in $F$. Because $c \uparrow i$ is a computation that starts at $c.i$, then $c \uparrow i$ is in $F$.

Part ii: Consider the system $S$ and its specification $F$ in the proof of Theorem 2. Recall that $S$ pseudo-stabilizes to $F$. We need to show that

($\exists$ computation $c$. $\forall$ positive integer $k$: $k > n + 1$ or $c \uparrow k$ is not in $F$).

Note that $n = 2$ since $S$ has two states. Consider the computation $c = (p, p, p, q, q, \ldots)$ of $S$; it is straightforward to check that ($\forall$ positive integer $k$: $k > 3$ or $c \uparrow k$ is not in $F$). □

4 Relationship between attraction and stabilization

In this section, we present sufficient conditions for establishing that a given system $S$ stabilizes or pseudo-stabilizes to a given specification $F$. In particular, we show that if $S$ has a (pseudo-) attractor that satisfies certain conditions involving $F$, then $S$ (pseudo-) stabilizes to $F$. An example of applying this method to establish that a given system pseudo-stabilizes to its specification is discussed in the next section.

**Theorem 4.** Let $S$ be a system with a specification $F$. If $S$ has an attractor $P$ such that every computation of $S$ whose states are all in $P$ is in $F$, then $S$ stabilizes to $F$.

**Proof.** Let $c$ be any computation of $S$; we show that $c$ has a state $p$ such that every computation that starts with $p$ is in $F$. Because $P$ is an attractor, every computation of $S$, including $c$, has a state in $P$. Let $p$ be any state of $c$ that is also in $P$. Because $p$ is in $P$ and $P$ is closed, then the states of a computation that starts with $p$ are all in $P$. All such computations are in $F$. □

**Theorem 5.** Let $S$ be a system with a specification $F$. If $S$ has a pseudo-attractor $(P_1, P_2, \ldots)$ such that every computation of $S$ whose states are all in the same $P_i, i = 1, 2, \ldots$, has a suffix in $F$, then $S$ pseudo-stabilizes to $F$.

**Proof.** Let $c$ be any computation of $S$; we show that $c$ has a suffix in $F$. Because $(P_1, P_2, \ldots)$ is a pseudo-attractor, every computation of $S$, including $c$, has a state in $\bigcup_{i=1}^{\infty} P_i$. Let $P_k$ be the region in the pseudo-attractor $(P_1, P_2, \ldots)$ such that $c$ has a state in $P_k$ but does not have a state in $\bigcup_{i=1}^{k-1} P_i$. Also, let $p$ be any state of $c$ that is also in $P_k$. Because $p$ is in $P_k$, and $\bigcup_{i=1}^{k-1} P_i$ is closed, and because no state of $c$ is in $\bigcup_{i=1}^{k-1} P_i$, then each of the states that follows $p$ in $c$ is also in $P_k$. In other words, $c$ has a nonempty suffix whose states are all in $P_k$. Because every computation whose states are all in $P_k$ has a suffix in $F$, $c$ has a suffix in $F$. □

5 Case-study: the alternating-bit protocol

We show in this section that the well-known Alternating-Bit Protocol [13] pseudo-stabilizes to its intended specification. Our objective of this exercise is two-fold. First, we want to illustrate how Theorem 5 can be utilized in verifying that a given system pseudo-stabilizes to a given specification. Second, and more important, we wish to point out that the stabilization properties of this important protocol are not as bad as may have been suggested by recent results [8, 12] which showed that this protocol
is not stabilizing, and so prompted “probabilistic versions” of the protocol in order to achieve stabilization [1].

5.1 Informal presentation of the protocol

Consider a system of two processes \( s \) and \( r \) that communicate by exchanging messages over two channels. Each channel is an unbounded first-in-first-out buffer that stores the messages sent by one process until each of them is either received by the other process or lost, i.e., disappeared from the channel. (Note that channel characteristics, e.g., unboundedness and the ability to lose messages, are not under the control of the system designer.) Despite the possibility of message loss, process \( s \) is required to transfer reliably an infinite stream of data messages to process \( r \). The following protocol is adopted:

i. Process \( s \) sends the data messages one at a time. After sending each message, \( s \) waits to receive an acknowledgement (ack) message before sending the next data message.

ii. If after sending a data message process \( s \) does not receive an ack message for some time, it concludes correctly that either the data message or its corresponding ack message was lost. In this case, process \( s \) times out and re-sends the last data message.

iii. Each data message has two fields:

\[ \text{data}(t, b) \]

where \( t \) is the message text and \( b \) is either 0 or 1. When \( s \) sends a data message for the first time, it assigns the message a different \( b \) from that of the last data message. If later \( s \) re-sends the data message, the re-sent message will have the same \( b \) (and same \( t \)) as the last message.

5.2 Formal presentation of the protocol

The program of each of the two processes \( s \) and \( r \) is a set of actions that has the form:

\[ \text{begin}<\text{action}> \_ \_ \ldots \_ \_<\text{action}> \text{end} \]

The symbol “\( \_ \_ \) ” is a separator that separates the different actions in the program of a process. Each action has the syntax

\[ <\text{guard}> \longrightarrow <\text{sequence of statements}> \]

Each guard is in one of the following three forms:

\[ <\text{local guard}>, \text{rcv}<\text{message}>, \text{or} \]

\[ \text{timeout}<\text{global guard}> \]

where a local guard is a boolean expression over the local variables of its process, and a global guard is a boolean expression over the variables in the two processes \( s \) and \( r \), and the contents of the two channels between them. The contents of a channel is a sequence of messages. Sending of a message consists of adding the message to the “tail” of the sequence, while receiving a message consists of removing the “head” message from the sequence.

The content of the channel from \( s \) to \( r \), denoted \( C_{sr} \), is a sequence of data messages. The content of the channel from \( r \) to \( s \), denoted \( C_{rs} \), is a sequence of ack messages.

The program for process \( s \) is as follows.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{process } s \quad & \text{const in : array [integer] of text \{text of all messages to be sent\}} \\
\text{var } ns : \text{integer} \quad & \text{init 0 \{index of array “in”\}} \\
& \text{; readeys : boolean init true \{ready to send next data message\}} \\
& \text{; bs : (0, 1) init 0 \{the alternating bit\}} \\
\text{begin } & \text{readys } \rightarrow \text{readys : false; send data} \\
& \text{in \{ns\}, bs} \\
& \llcorner \text{rev} \llcorner \text{ack } \rightarrow \text{ns, readeys, bs : = ns + 1,} \\
& \quad \text{true, } 1 - bs \\
& \llcorner \text{timeout} \llcorner \text{readys } \land \text{readys : = false; send data} \quad \llcorner \text{C}_{sr} \llcorner \land \text{C}_{rs} \llcorner \llcorner \text{in [ns], bs} \llcorner \\
\end{align*}
\]

Process \( s \) has three actions. In the first action, \( s \) sends the next data message to \( r \) and waits for an ack message. In the second action, \( s \) receives an ack message (presumably for the last data message it has sent) and gets ready to send the next data message. In the third action, when neither process can send and the two channels between them are empty (indicating a message loss), process \( s \) times out and re-sends the last data message.

The program for process \( r \) is as follows.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{process } r \quad & \text{var out : array [integer] of text \{text of all received messages\}} \\
& \text{; nr : integer \{index of array “out”\}} \\
& \text{; readyr : boolean init false} \\
& \text{; br : (0, 1) init 0 \{expected alternating bit\}} \\
& \text{; t : text \{received text\}} \\
& \text{; b : (0, 1) \{received alternating bit\}} \\
\text{begin } & \text{rcv data \{t, b\} } \rightarrow \text{if } b = br \text{ then out \{nr\}, nr,} \\
& \quad \text{br := t, nr + 1, 1 - br fi;} \\
& \quad \text{readyr := true} \\
& \llcorner \text{readyr } \llcorner \text{readyr : = false; send ack} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Process \( r \) has two actions. In the first action, \( r \) receives a data message and checks whether it is an original message that should be stored or it is a repetition of the last received message and should be discarded. In either case, \( r \) gets ready to reply with an ack message which is then sent in the second action of \( r \).

5.3 Specification of the protocol

A state of the protocol is defined by a value for each variable in the two processes, and by a sequence of data messages for the forward channel from \( s \) to \( r \), and by a
sequence of ack messages for the backward channel from
r to s.

An action in one of the two processes is enabled at a
given state iff either its guard is a (local or global) predi-
cate whose value is true at the given state or its guard is
of the form rev(message) and the input channel of its
process has at least one message at the given state.

A state q of the protocol follows a state p iff at least
one action in one of the two processes is enabled at p
and executing the sequence of statements of an enabled
action starting from p yields q.

A computation of the protocol is an infinite sequence
of protocol states: \( p_1, p_2, \ldots \) such that each \( p_{i+1} \)
follows \( p_i \). (Notice that the protocol has no terminating
states; thus all its computations are infinite.)

Let \( p \) be a state of the protocol. For convenience,
let \( \text{in}, \text{ns}, \text{out}, \text{and mr} \) denote respectively the values of
variables \( \text{in}, \text{ns}, \text{out}, \text{and mr} \) at state \( p \). Also, let \( ms \) and
\( mr \) be two integers. State \( p \) is \((ms, mr)\)-safe iff the follow-
ing condition holds:

\[
(ms \leq ns) \land \\
(mr \leq nr) \land \\
(\forall i : 0 \leq i < mr - nr : \text{in}[ms+i] = \text{out}[mr+i]).
\]

A computation of the protocol is successful iff variable
\( nr \) is incremented infinitely often along the computa-
tion, and there are two integers \( ms \) and \( mr \) such that each state
in the computation is \((ms, mr)\)-safe.

The protocol is specified by the set \( F \) of all successful
computations.

5.4 Pseudo-stabilization of the protocol

Consider a system that consists of the two processes \( s \)
and \( r \), and a "message loss" action which when executed
discards one message, if any, from one of the two chan-
nels between \( s \) and \( r \). We assume that along every (infinite)
computation of the system, if the same message is
sent over and over by one process, then it is eventually
received by the other process.

In this section, we apply Theorem 5 to show that this
system pseudo-stabilizes to specification \( F \). In particular,
we show that the system has a pseudo-attractor
\((P_1, P_2, \ldots)\) such that every system computation whose
states are all in the same \( P_i \), \( i = 1, 2, \ldots \), has a suffix
in \( F \). Consider a computation whose states are all in the
same \( P_i \). We discuss the two cases of \( i = 1 \) and \( i > 1 \) sep-
ately. If \( i = 1 \), then at each state in the computation
there is at most one message in the two channels between
\( s \) and \( r \). It is straightforward to show that such a com-
putation has a suffix in \( F \) (provided that every message
that is sent over and over is eventually received).

If \( i > 1 \), then every state in the computation has the
same rank \( i \) which means that the message loss action
is never executed (because it reduces the rank). Moreover,
the timeout action in process \( s \) is never enabled, and so
is never executed. Along the computation, process \( s \)
merely keeps on receiving an ack message then sending
the next data message (with a bit value different from
that of the last data message), and process \( r \) keeps on
receiving a data message with the expected alternating
bit, storing it in array out, then sending back an ack
message. It is straightforward to show that this compu-
tation has a suffix in \( F \).

5.5 Dealing with message corruption

We have assumed so far that each sent message can either
be lost or received correctly; hence the protocol is de-
signed to deal only with message loss. We now discuss
how to extend the protocol to deal with message corrup-
tion as well as message loss.

The corruption of a sent message, whether data or
ack, consists of changing the message into a special mes-
sage "error" before it is received. (Note that the form of
corruption that changes a message into another message
of the same type can already be countered by the pseudo-
stabilization properties of the protocol. Hence, this form of corruption is not considered here any further.)

To deal with the "error" message that may result from message corruption, the following action is added to each of the process $s$ and $r$:

\texttt{recv error $\rightarrow$ skip}

With this action, each process discards all the corrupted messages it receives. In effect, each message corruption is eventually transformed into a message loss.

Now, consider a system that consists of the new processes $s$ and $r$, and a message loss action (similar to that defined in Sect. 5.4), and a message corruption action which when executed changes a message in one of the two channels, if any, into an error message. We assume that along every (infinite) computation of the system, if the same message is sent over and over by one process, then it is eventually received correctly by the other process. It is straightforward to show that this system pseudo-stabilizes to specification $F$. (The proof is similar to the one given in Sect. 5.4; in fact, it is based on the same pseudo-attractor $(P_1, P_2, ...)$, and the same definition of rank in the earlier proof.)

### 5.6 Dealing with message reorder

We now discuss how to extend the protocol to handle message reorder along with message loss and corruption. A message reorder consists of swapping two consecutive messages in the same channel. Because ack messages are all identical, the reordering of ack messages in the channel from $r$ to $s$ has no effect on the protocol. Thus, we need only to consider reordering of data messages in the channel from $s$ to $r$.

We assume that along every (infinite) computation, infinitely many original data messages are not reordered, corrupted, or lost after they are sent. (Recall that each sent data message is either an original or a repetition of the last sent message.) This assumption guarantees that every message reorder is eventually followed by a message loss or corruption (which reduces the value of rank), or eventually causes process $r$ to receive two consecutive data messages that are original and have the same alternating-bit value. In the latter case, if process $r$ can detect the reception of these two messages, it can discard the second message causing a message loss (which reduces the value of rank). Thus, in either case, each message reorder eventually reduces the value of rank which ensures pseudo-stabilization of the system as discussed in Sect. 5.4 and as utilized later in Sect. 5.5.

Note that without message reorder, process $r$ can still receive two consecutive data messages with the same alternating-bit value. In this situation, however, the second of these two messages is a "repetition" of the first message. This fact differentiates between this situation and the earlier situation caused by message reorder. Hence process $r$ should be able to detect whether a received data message is an original or a repetition.

This can be achieved by adding an extra bit $c$ to each data message:

- $c = 0$ if the data message is an original
- $c = 1$ if the data message is a repetition

Consequently, the first and third actions of process $s$ are changed to become:

\texttt{readys $\rightarrow$ readys = false; send data (in [ns], bs, '0')}

\texttt{timeout}$\rightarrow$\texttt{readys} $\land$ \texttt{readyr} $\land$ \texttt{C_r} = $\langle$ $\rangle$ $\land$ \texttt{C_r} = $\langle$ $\rangle$

\texttt{$\rightarrow$ send data (in [ns], bs, '1')}$

Moreover, the first action of process $r$ is changed to become:

\texttt{recv data (t, b, c) $\rightarrow$ if $b = br \lor c = 1$
then readyr := true fi;
if $b = br$
then out [nr], nr, br := t, nr + 1, 1 - br fi}

The first if-statement guarantees that every original data message with an unexpected alternating bit is not acknowledged reducing the value of rank.

It is straightforward to verify pseudo-stabilization of the system consisting of the modified processes $s$ and $r$ and the three actions of message loss, corruption, and reorder that satisfy the following two constraints along every (infinite) computation:

i. If the same message is sent over and over by one process, then it is eventually received correctly by the other process.

ii. Infinitely many original data messages are not lost, corrupted, or reordered after they are sent.

The proof of pseudo-stabilization is similar to the one given in Sect. 5.4 using the same pseudo-attractor $(P_1, P_2, ...)$ and the same definition of rank.

### 6 Concluding remarks

Achieving stabilization can be an expensive proposition in some application domains. For example, it is shown in [8, 12] that stabilization of communication protocols can be achieved only by using unbounded sequence numbers—a feature that most system designers try to avoid. When it is clear that the cost of achieving stabilization is high, system designers should strive to meet weaker criteria. We believe that pseudo-stabilization is one such criterion.

On one hand, the notion of pseudo-stabilization is reasonably close to that of stabilization. On the other hand, pseudo-stabilization is clearly not as demanding as stabilization. After all, pseudo-stabilizing communication protocols can be achieved without unbounded sequence numbers, as evidenced by our case study of the alternating-bit protocols.

The alternating-bit protocol in this paper is new and intriguing. In this protocol, the sender process sends one additional bit per data message to identify whether the data message is an original or a repetition. This identification is utilized by the receiver process to ensure that each message reorder is eventually followed by a message.
loss, hence guaranteeing pseudo-stabilization in the presence of message reorder. It would be hard to motivate or explain this protocol without resorting to the notion of pseudo-stabilization.

Acknowledgements. We are thankful to Anish Arora for discussions that led to Theorem 3, to the referees for suggesting a number of improvements in the presentation, and to K.F. Carbone for carefully preparing the manuscript.

References