SCP-GAN: Self-Correcting Discriminator Optimization for Training Consistency Preserving Metric GAN on Speech Enhancement Tasks

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Abstract

In recent years, Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) have produced significantly improved speech enhancement (SE) task results. However, they are challenging to train. In this work, we introduce several improvements to GAN training schemes, which can be applied to most GAN-based SE models. We propose using consistency loss functions, which target the inconsistency in time and time-frequency domains caused by Fourier and Inverse Fourier Transforms. We also present self-correcting optimization for training a GAN discriminator on SE tasks which helps avoid “harmful” training directions for parts of the discriminator loss function. We have tested our proposed methods on several state-of-the-art GAN-based SE models and obtained consistent improvements, including new state-of-the-art results for the VoiceBank+DEMAND dataset.

Index Terms: Speech Enhancement, GAN, MetricGAN, Self-Correcting Optimization, STFT Consistency, Voice Bank+DEMAND

1. Introduction

Speech Enhancement (SE) is a process of making deteriorated speech signals more understandable and perceptually pleasing. The SE has been widely used for various applications, including mobile communication, speech recognition systems, hearing aids, etc. SE as an area of research interest has been around for several decades. Traditional SE techniques [1, 2] often use a heuristic or straightforward signal processing algorithm to estimate a gain function, which is then applied to the noisy input to produce improved speech. Recent developments in deep learning have inspired many Deep Neural Network (DNN)-based SE techniques [3, 4, 5, 6, 7] that outperform conventional signal processing-based methods. One particular DNN-based architecture, Generative Adversarial Network (GAN), has garnered much interest in the SE community for the past few years [5, 6, 8, 9]. In the applications of SE, GAN architecture is primarily employed to generate enhanced speech. One of the earliest works where GAN models were implemented on the SE domain is the SEGAN [5] model. It utilizes an adversarial framework to map the noisy waveform to a corresponding enhanced speech. Later, MetricGAN [6] introduced a metric score optimization scheme, where an evaluated metric was introduced into adversarial loss functions, replacing a traditional binary-classifier [5] and creating a new branch for SE GAN-based research. There have been several improvements to the MetricGAN model, e.g., MetricGAN+ [8], iMetricGAN [10], CMGAN [9], etc. More recently, with a rise of Transformers [11] and Conformers [12], models such as DB-AIAT [13], DPT-FSNet [14], SE-Conformer [15], CMGAN [9], etc. show significant improvements on SE tasks.

Despite much work, training of GAN-based models is prone to problems such as non-convergence, overfitting, and gradient instabilities. One common issue in GAN’s discriminator training is a potentially “harmful” gradient direction [16] where parts of the model might train opposite to the desired direction. To overcome this problem, we propose a new method called Self-Correcting (SC) Discriminator Optimization. At the same time, the SE DNN-based models are subject to problems caused by the signal-processing tools, e.g., an inconsistency in the Short-Time Fourier Transform (STFT) and its inverse (iSTFT) [7, 17]. Inspired by [18], we adapt and introduce the consistency loss function as a part of Consistency Preserving (CP) Net into the GAN framework, where loss and architecture take into account the iSTFT effects. From our experiments, the combination of SC and CP methods improves the SE GAN-based models even further than either method; we call such a combination SCP-GAN.

The remainder of this paper is as follows. In section 2, we list earlier works pertinent to our current work. In section 3, we introduce improvements to current GAN-based SE models. We present and compare the SCP-GAN results on VoiceBank+DEMAND dataset [19] to the current state-of-the-art (SOTA) models in section 4. Then, in section 5, we provide an extensive ablation study to show the advantages of the proposed methods. Finally, in section 6, we highlight the methods’ contributions to the field.

2. Related Work

2.1. Adaptively Weighted GAN (awGAN)

The discriminator plays a very important role in training GAN-based models. However, optimizing the discriminator loss function(s) has been a challenge [16]. In the image generation domain, most discriminator loss functions have a form of two equally weighted parts, where one of these parts only relies on the original dataset. The second part depends on the generator network, its output, and not the original data, [16] calls them ‘real’ and ‘fake’ parts, respectively. However, the training with an equally weighted discriminator loss function is not performed equally on the real and fake parts, but it depends on the angle between real and fake gradients and their magnitudes. Under such conditions, the actual training direction might end up in the opposite direction to either real or fake gradients, which is undesirable as it can cause issues with convergence and stability [16]. To solve such issue [16] proposed the method of adaptive weights for the discriminator loss function and the algorithm for choosing such weights on image generati...
2.2. STFT Consistencies in SE DNN models

The short-time Fourier transform (STFT) is one of the most fundamental and widely used methods in audio signal processing. Most DNN-based SE models [7, 9, 17] use a complex-valued STFTs generator to suppress noise and preserve speech. However, using STFT methods has its issues. One of those issues is the STFT consistency. This is an issue when a loss function does not consider ISTFT signal reconstruction. Several works have been done to resolve this issue. [17] presented an algorithm for a phase reconstruction based on a local approximation of the consistency constraints. Adding simple differentiable projection layers to the enhancement DNN to solve the issue was proposed by [7]. More recently, [18] introduced the iSTFT into back-propagation methods for SE DNN-based models.

3. SCP-GAN

We propose the following two innovative learning strategies to enhance the performance of SE GAN-based models.

3.1. Self-Correcting Discriminator Optimization

Notation: The angle between two gradients $\nabla L_C$ and $\nabla L_E$ is defined as $\angle_2(\nabla L_C, \nabla L_E) = \cos^{-1}\left(\frac{\langle \nabla L_C, \nabla L_E \rangle}{\|\nabla L_C\|_2 \|\nabla L_E\|_2}\right)$, where $\langle \cdot, \cdot \rangle$ and $\|\|_2$ denote the Euclidean inner product and the Euclidean 2-norm, respectively.

We introduce the Self-Correcting (SC) Discriminator Optimization method, a generalization of the method from [16] to the SE domain. A large number of existing SE GAN-based models have the discriminator loss function consisting of either two [6, 9] or three [8] equally weighted parts:

$$L_D = L_C + L_E \quad (1)$$
$$L_D = L_C + L_E + L_N \quad (2)$$

where $L_C$, $L_E$, and $L_N$ exclusively rely on clean, enhanced, and noisy datasets, respectively. For example, MetricGAN [6] has a two-part discriminator loss (i.e. Eq. (1)) with

$$L_C = \mathbb{E}_y (D(y, y) - Q(y, y))^2 \quad (3)$$
$$L_E = \mathbb{E}_{x,y} (D(G(x, y) - Q(G(x), y))^2 \quad (4)$$

and, MetricGAN+ [8] also uses the $L_N$ (i.e. Eq. (2)) such as

$$L_N = \mathbb{E}_{x,y} (D(x, y) - Q(x, y))^2. \quad (5)$$

Above, $x$ is a noisy signal, $y$ is its corresponding clean version, and $D(\cdot, \cdot)$, $G(\cdot)$, and $Q(\cdot, \cdot)$ are the discriminative model, generative model, and evaluation metric, respectively.

Moreover, notations $\mathbb{E}_y$ and $\mathbb{E}_{x,y}$ denote the expectation over $\{y\}$ and $\{(x, y)\}$, respectively. In such a setup as [6], $G$ only takes the noisy signal while both $D$ and $Q$ take two inputs, either $(y, y)$ (as in (3)) or $(G(x), y)$ (as in (4)) for training $D$ to approximate $Q$ on clean and enhanced signals, respectively.

However, gradient descent training with $\nabla L_D$ is not performed equally on clean and enhanced parts; its effect depends on the angle between $\nabla L_C$, $\nabla L_E$ and $\nabla L_N$ (if used) and their magnitudes. For example in (1), if the angle between $\nabla L_C$ and $\nabla L_E$ is a large obtuse angle and $\|\nabla L_C\|_2 > \|\nabla L_E\|_2$, then $\nabla L_C$ would make an obtuse angle with $\nabla L_E$ and thus training along $\nabla L_D$ would increase the loss $L_E$, which would be undesirable (or even harmful) to the enhanced part of the model.

To address this issue, as in [16] for GAN, we introduce weights into the two-part discriminator loss in Eq. (1),

$$L_D^{SC} = w_C L_C + w_E L_E \quad (6)$$

and call it $SC_2$ - Self-Correcting two terms discrimination loss. Moreover, we introduce weights into the three-part discriminator in Eq. (2)

$$L_D^{SC} = w_C L_C + w_E L_E + w_N L_N \quad (7)$$

and call it $SC_3$ - Self-Correcting three terms discrimination loss. We choose the weights so that $\nabla L_D^{SC}$ does not make an obtuse angle with any of $\nabla L_C$, $\nabla L_E$, or $\nabla L_N$. While for the $SC_2$ method, weights can be easily generalized from the AVG-GAN algorithm in [16]; for the $SC_3$ method, determination of the weights is much more complicated involving many cases. We have analyzed all possible cases and derived corresponding formulas for each scenario. The precise mathematical statement with proof is provided in Theorem 1 in the Supplementary Material. There are a total of 7 general cases (up to symmetry and a pick of direction(s) that we want to prioritize); however, these cases can be categorized into four groups:

1. all angles are acute
2. two obtuse angles
3. three obtuse angles
4. all angles are obtuse

Some of the above cases require non-trivial projections into desirable subspaces with substantial computations.

Algorithm 1: Self-Correcting Discriminator Method

1. Compute: $\nabla L_C, \nabla L_E, \nabla L_N$ if $L_N$ is used
2. if $\angle_2(\nabla L_C, \nabla L_E) < 90^\circ$ then
3. $w_C = 1$ and $w_E = 1$
4. if $L_N$ is used and $\angle_2(w_C \nabla L_C + w_E \nabla L_E, \nabla L_N) < 90^\circ$ then
5. $w_N = 1$
6. else
7. $w_N = -\frac{\|\nabla L_C, \nabla L_N\|_2}{\|\nabla L_C\|_2^2} + \frac{\|\nabla L_E, \nabla L_N\|_2}{\|\nabla L_E\|_2^2}$
8. end
9. else
10. $w_C = 1$ and $w_E = -\frac{\|\nabla L_C, \nabla L_E\|_2}{\|\nabla L_C\|_2^2}$
11. if $L_N$ is used and $\angle_2(w_C \nabla L_C + w_E \nabla L_E, \nabla L_N) < 90^\circ$ then
12. $w_N = 1$
13. else
14. $w_N = -\frac{\|\nabla L_C, \nabla L_N\|_2}{\|\nabla L_C\|_2^2} + \frac{\|\nabla L_E, \nabla L_C\|_2}{\|\nabla L_E\|_2^2}$
15. end
16. end
**3.2. Consistency Preserving Network**

Most GAN-based SE models [6, 9, 13, 14] have a generator (G) that accepts the STFT spectrogram of a noisy waveform as input. The G’s output is an enhanced spectrogram that later uses iSTFT to produce the enhanced waveform; Figure 1a illustrates the process. The G is then updated using a combination of various loss functions, e.g., Time Loss [20], TF-magnitude Loss [21], Adversarial Metric Loss [6], etc. For example, the TF-magnitude Loss [21] is computed between the enhanced and clean spectrograms; see Figure 1a. However, such loss and architectural setup do not consider the effect of the iSTFT reconstruction, which causes inconsistencies between signals.

We incorporate the idea from [18] to SE GAN-based models by modifying architecture and loss function(s) such that any input into a loss function (including the Adversarial Loss) undergoes the same process, taking into consideration the effects of signal reconstruction from the spectrogram; we call such process and loss function a Consistency Preserving (CP) Network and a consistency loss, respectively. Particularly, the CP Net ensures that the same number of STFT and iSTFT transforms are applied on clean, enhanced, and noisy (if used) signals and avoids distortion(s) that could happen on the ends of the audio segments, where the edge regions have insufficient data to reconstruct a signal from the spectrogram with the overlap-add operation. Our approach addresses this issue using the same STFT-iSTFT process and avoids such unexpected behavior. Figure 1b depicts the process of computing Time and TF-magnitude losses using the proposed CP method by ensuring that the same transforms are applied on enhanced, clean, and noisy (if used) signals.

Note: The Clean Audio to the Clean* Audio process inside the CP Net (2nd row from the top of Figure 1b) can be performed at the data preprocessing stage.

**4. Experiments**

**4.1. Dataset**

We use the publicly accessible Voice Bank+DEMAND [19] dataset to evaluate and compare our proposed SCP-GAN method. The training set of the Voice Bank+DEMAND dataset consists of 11,572 individual recordings of 28 speakers from the Voice Bank corpus [24], which are mixed with DEMAND [25] database and some artificial background noises at the signal-to-noise ratios (SNRs) of 0, 5, 10, and 15 dB. The test set has 824 utterances of two speakers from the Voice Bank corpus, which are mixed with unseen DEMAND noises at the SNRs of 2.5, 7.5, 12.5, and 17.5 dB. All utterances were resampled to 16kHz; in addition, for all the experiments, the frame length was set to 100-sample and the frame rate of the STFT was 160, following [8, 9].

**4.2. Evaluation Metrics**

To assess the speech quality, we select a set of widely used metrics, including the Perceptual Evaluation of Speech Quality (PESQ) [26] (ranging between -0.5 and 4.5), the Segmental Signal-to-Noise Ratio (SSNR), the Short-Time Objective In-telligibility (STOI) [27] (with a range 0 to 1), and three Mean Opinion Score (MOS) [28] based metrics: the MOS prediction of the signal distortion (CSIG), the MOS prediction of the intru-siveness of background noise (CBAK), and MOS prediction of the overall effect (COVL) (MOS metrics range between 1 and 5). For all metrics, higher numbers denote better performance.

**4.3. Experimental Results**

We have applied our proposed methods to two baseline models: a widely-used MetricGAN+ [8] model and a current SOTA model - CMGAN [9]. Our SCP method shows a consistent improvement over the compared baseline. On the MetricGAN+ model, our SCP-MetricGAN+ improved by 0.04, 0.06, 0.04, and 0.01 on the PESQ, CSIG, CBAK, and COVL metrics, respectively. Our improvements with the SCP-CMGAN model are 0.11, 0.12, 0.03, and 0.13 on the same scores. Moreover, we have compared our method to other recent SOTA models which can be seen in Table 1.

**Note:** Results provided in Table 1 for MetricGAN+ and CMGAN models are quoted from the original papers; however, to verify them, we have obtained our results: MetricGAN+ (re-pro.) and CMGAN (re-pro.). The results for the CMGAN (re-pro.) model are very similar to the results from [9] with one exception - the SSNR metric, where our result is lower: 10.61 (ours) vs. 11.10 [9]. Furthermore, the results for MetricGAN+ (re-pro.) model are slightly lower than the ones provided in [8].
### Table 1: Performance comparison on Voice Bank+DEMAND dataset [19]: “-” denotes the results not provided in the original paper; † - quoted from [22]; repro. - our reproduction of experiments

| Model               | # of Param | PESQ   | CSIG   | CBAK   | COVL   | SSNR   | STOI   |
|---------------------|------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| MANNER [23]         | -          | 3.21   | 4.53   | 3.65   | 3.91   | -      | -      |
| DB-IAIT [13]        | 2.81M      | 3.31   | 4.61   | 3.75   | 3.96   | 10.79  | 0.96   |
| DPT-FSNNet [14]     | 0.91M      | 3.33   | 4.58   | 3.72   | 4.00   | -      | 0.96   |
| PCS [23]            | -          | 3.35   | 4.43   | -      | 3.92   | -      | 0.95   |
| MetricGAN+ [8]      | 2.6M       | 3.15   | 4.14   | 3.16   | 3.64   | -      | 0.93†  |
| MetricGAN+ (repro.) | 2.6M       | 3.08   | 4.05   | 3.01   | 3.60   | -      | 0.92†  |
| SCP-MetricGAN+ (ours)| 2.6M       | 3.19   | 4.20   | 3.20   | 3.65   | -      | 0.93   |
| CMGAN [9]           | 1.83M      | 3.41   | 4.63   | 3.94   | 4.12   | 11.10  | 0.96   |
| CMGAN (repro.)      | 1.83M      | 3.39   | 4.62   | 3.93   | 4.13   | 10.61  | 0.96   |
| SCP-CMGAN (ours)    | 1.83M      | 3.52   | 4.75   | 3.97   | 4.25   | 10.82  | 0.96   |

Finally, to demonstrate the significance of our best model, we ran a paired T-test between SCP-CMGAN and CMGAN(repro.) (as our baseline) models (scipy.ttest_rel(scp-cmgan,cmgan(repro.))) using a VoiceBank-DEMAND test dataset, see Table 2 for results. The test confirmed that our results are better than the baseline, with a p-value less than 0.05 for every metric.

#### Table 2: T-test Statistics and p-value: Results of a paired T-test between SCP-CMGAN and CMGAN(repro.) models on Voice Bank+DEMAND test dataset [19], a p-value less than 0.05 indicates statistically significant results.

| Metric | Statistic | p-value |
|--------|-----------|---------|
| PESQ   | 14.889    | 1.419 \times 10^{-10} |
| CSIG   | 18.402    | 1.326 \times 10^{-10} |
| CBAK   | 14.565    | 6.322 \times 10^{-11} |

5. Ablation Study

We have conducted an ablation study to demonstrate the importance of our methods. We have chosen the CMGAN [9] model as the base model due to its SOTA performance at the time of this study. Table 3 shows the average results of each model’s best performance over three randomly chosen seeds.

First, we have retrained the CMGAN [9] model to verify the results from [9]. The results obtained from our experiments are relatively close to the results stated in [9], except for the SSNR metric where we have obtained slightly lower results, i.e., SSNR of 10.61 (ours) vs. SSNR of 11.10 [9].

Next, we have added Noisy Data (ND) to the CMGAN model discriminator training (+ ND’ in Table 3); however, such an addition had slight improvement over the baseline. Following it, we have added our SC method to the baseline model (+ SC2 in Table 3) and nothing else. With SC2, we saw some improvements in PESQ, COVL, and SSNR metrics. Furthermore, we have analyzed the advantages of the CP method (+ CP’ in Table 3) without any add-ons. The CP method shows significant improvements in PESQ, CSIG, and COVL metrics and is comparable in the others.

Then, we combined ND and SC3 methods (+ ND, SC3’ in Table 3). Such a setup further improves baseline as well as single methods, particularly in COVL and SSNR metrics. A combination of ND and CP methods (+ ND, CP’ in Table 3) has the same nature of improvements, producing better results in PESQ, CSIG, and COVL metrics. The last combination of SC2 and CP methods (+ SC2, CP’ in Table 3) demonstrates that together both proposed methods achieve significant improvements on the SE task. Moreover, this particular model achieved the highest SSNR result of 10.91.

Finally, we have combined ND, SC3, and CP methods in the model we call SCP-CMGAN in Table 1. Adding ND and switching from SC2 to SC3 further improves the ‘CMGAN + SC2, CP’ model, achieving new SOTA results.

Note that all of the above models were trained under the same conditions without changing the hyperparameters and with identical software and hardware settings: Python 3.8.13, PyTorch 1.10, and CUDA 11 on NVIDIA Tesla V100 GPUs.

#### Table 3: Ablation Study on Voice Bank + DEMAND: STOI results are equal to 0.96 for all the tests; † - results from our tests; ND - Noisy Data, CP - Consistency Preserving Generator, SC2 - SC with \( \mathcal{L}_C \) and \( \mathcal{L}_E \), SC3 - SC with \( \mathcal{L}_C \), \( \mathcal{L}_E \), and \( \mathcal{L}_N \).†

| Model                 | PESQ   | CSIG   | CBAK   | COVL   | SSNR   | STOI   |
|-----------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| CMGAN (repro.)†       | 3.39   | 4.62   | 3.93   | 4.13   | 10.61  |
| + ND                  | 3.41   | 4.65   | 3.92   | 4.13   | 10.68  |
| + SC2                 | 3.44   | 4.65   | 3.92   | 4.17   | 10.70  |
| + CP                  | 3.47   | 4.71   | 3.93   | 4.20   | 10.54  |
| + ND, SC3             | 3.43   | 4.64   | 3.93   | 4.18   | 10.76  |
| + ND, CP              | 3.47   | 4.73   | 3.93   | 4.22   | 10.53  |
| + SC2, CP             | 3.49   | 4.72   | 3.96   | 4.24   | 10.91  |
| + ND, SC3, CP         | 3.52   | 4.75   | 3.97   | 4.25†  | 10.82  |

6. Conclusion

This paper presents several improvements to SE GAN-based models. The proposed method of Consistency Preservation reconciles the issue with Fourier and Inverse-Fourier transforms inside the generative models. At the same time, the Self-Correcting Discriminator Optimization method helps with training the discriminator by avoiding gradient directions that are potentially harmful to the training. Our experiments demonstrate the proposed methods’ advantages, including new SOTA results for the Voice Bank+DEMAND dataset.

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