Multi-frequency phase-coded microwave signal generation based on polarization modulation and balanced detection

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Photonic multi-frequency phase-coded microwave signal generation is proposed and demonstrated based on polarization modulation and balanced detection. Consisting of only a polarization modulator (PolM) driven by an electrical coding data, a polarization beam splitter (PBS) and a balanced photodetector (BPD), the proposed microwave phase coder has no requirement on the wavelength, intensity modulation format, or modulation index of the input optical microwave signal, and allows phase coding of arbitrary-format RF signals, which enables multi-frequency phase coding with compact structure, simple operation, and high flexibility. A proof-of-concept experiment is performed, achieving simultaneous phase coding of 15 and 30 GHz, or 10 and 20 GHz RF signals with a coding rate of 5 Gb/s. © 2015 Optical Society of America

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Phase-coded signal generation has attracted a lot of attention in the past decades, especially for radar applications, due to its pulse compression capability [1]. Conventionally, the phase-coded signal is generated in the electrical domain, which results in limited operational frequency range and a relatively small time-bandwidth product due to the inherent electronic bottleneck. To overcome these problems, photonic microwave phase-coded signal generation has been proposed and intensively studied, thanks to the high frequency, wide bandwidth, and immunity to electromagnetic interference enabled by the photonic technologies [2,3]. One method to generate the phase-coded signal is based on optical pulse shaping using a spatial light modulator (SLM) [4], but the system is bulky and lossy due to the use of free-space optics. Pure fiber optic schemes can efficiently solve these problems [5–10]. One such scheme is to heterodyne two phase-correlated optical wavelengths in which one wavelength is phase modulated [5–7], or to map two phase-correlated optical wavelengths into two orthogonal polarization directions followed by polarization modulation [8–10]. The key to the two approaches is how to separate the two wavelengths and get them phase modulated, respectively. The existing solutions are based on either optical filters or a length of polarization maintaining fiber, which inevitably limits the operational frequency range due to the wavelength-dependent operation.

On the other hand, the recent developments of multi-band and multifunctional radars [11] urgently demand simultaneous multi-frequency phase-coded signal generation, which is hard to implement using the approaches with wavelength-dependent devices. Although photonic microwave phase-coded signal generation without the use of wavelength-dependent components has been realized based on a phase modulator (PM) [12], a dual-parallel Mach–Zehnder modulator (DPMZM) [13], a dual-drive Mach–Zehnder modulator (DDMZM) [14], a dual-parallel PolM [15], a polarization modulator (PolM), together with a PM [16] or cascaded PolMs [17], few of them can implement simultaneous multi-frequency phase coding. For the photonic microwave phase coders based on single modulator [12–15], the introduction of multiple frequencies with the required power level would inherently generate many undesirable mixing components due to the nonlinearity of the electro-optic modulators, while for the approaches in [16] and [17], to implement multi-frequency phase coding, one separated PolM is required for each RF signal, and the magnitude of the RF signal should be equal to the half-wave voltage of the PolM at the frequency of the RF signal, or precise polarization alignment is required. Recently, Ghelfi et al. proposed an approach to generate phase-coded RF signals at multiple frequencies by upconverting an electrical phase-coded signal at intermediate frequency (IF) to the RF band based on intensity modulation of ultrashort pulses from a mode-locked laser (MLL) [18]. However, the phase coding is implemented in the electronic domain.

In this Letter, we propose and demonstrate a novel photonic microwave phase coder with simultaneous multi-frequency phase coding capability, consisting of a PolM driven by electrical coding data, a polarization beam splitter (PBS), and a balanced photodetector (BPD). As compared to the previous reported
photonic microwave phase coding schemes, the proposed photonic microwave phase coder can accept optical input signals carrying RF frequencies at any wavelengths, with arbitrary intensity modulation formats (double sideband modulation, single sideband modulation, carrier-suppressed double sideband modulation, etc.) and with arbitrary modulation indices. It also allows phase coding of arbitrary-format RF signals (single frequency signal, linear frequency modulated signal, etc.) by using an optical signal carrying RF signals with these formats. Thus, the proposed scheme enables multi-frequency phase coding with compact structure, simple operation, and high flexibility. In addition, the proposed system can output RF signals with frequencies that are higher than the maximal frequency of the electro-optic modulators if a photonic microwave multiplying technique is applied. Therefore, bi-phase coding (either “0” or “π”) of the RF signal carried in \( E_0(t) \) is realized. The coding phase is only determined by the polarity of the electrical coding signal, with no connection to its magnitude. Since the phase coding is actually independent of \( E_0(t) \), the wavelength, intensity modulation format (double sideband modulation, single sideband modulation, carrier-suppressed double sideband modulation, etc.), or modulation index will not affect the performance of the proposed photonic microwave phase coder. The modulation index \( γ \) will only affect the output power of the phase coding signal. If the optical signal \( E_0(t) \) is injected into the proposed photonic microwave phase coder carries multiple RF signals, simultaneous multi-frequency phase coding can be realized with compact structure, simple operation, and high flexibility. Phase coding of arbitrary-format RF signals can also be realized if \( E_0(t) \) carries arbitrary-format RF signals. In addition, it can be seen that the same coding phase is applied to the RF signals carried by \( E_0(t) \). As an example, we consider a case when an OFC with a comb line angular spacing of \( ω_m \) is served as \( E_0(t) \), i.e.,

\[
E_0(t) = E_0\{\exp(jω_0t) + \exp[j(ω_0 + ω_m)t] + \ldots
+ \exp[j(ω_0 + (n - 1)·ω_m)t]\},
\]

where \( ω_0 \) is the angular frequency of the first line of the OFC, and \( n \) is the number of the comb lines. Then, we can get

\[
|E_0(t)|^2 = E_0^2 \cdot \left\{ n + \sum_{k=1}^{n-1} 2(n-k) \cos(κω_m t) \right\}.
\]

Thus, the output RF current is written as

\[
I(t) = -φ(t) \cdot E_0^2 \cdot \left\{ \sum_{k=1}^{n-1} 2(n-k) \cos(κω_m t) \right\} \cdot \sin(2αt) \cdot \sin(2γt).
\]

From Eq. (9), we can see that binary phase coding of RF signals at multiple frequencies of \( k · ω_m \) \((1 ≤ k ≤ n - 1)\) is implemented. Similar results can be obtained if the OFC is replaced by an ultrashort pulse from an MLL or a wavelength division multiplexing (WDM) signal carrying multiple RF frequencies.

A proof-of-concept experiment based on the setup shown in Fig. 1 is carried out. The injected OFC with three combs is generated by modulating a lightwave at 1550.11 nm from a laser diode (LD, Teraxion NLL04) at a Mach–Zehnder modulator (MZM, Fujitsu, FTM7938EZ). The bandwidth of the MZM is 40 GHz and the half-wave voltage is 2.8 V. The microwave signal introduced to the MZM is generated by a microwave signal generator (Agilent 8267D). The PolM (Versawave Technologies) has a bandwidth of 40 GHz and a half-wave voltage of 3.5 V. A pulse pattern generator (PPG, Anritsu MP1763C) is used to generate the electrical coding signal. The BPD (\( u^2t \) photons, BPDV2150R) has a bandwidth of

![Fig. 1. Schematic of the proposed photonic multi-frequency phase-coded microwave signal generator based on polarization modulation and balanced detection. LD, laser diode; PC, polarization controller; PolM, polarization modulator; PBS, polarization beam splitter; BPD, balanced photodetector.][1]
40 GHz and a responsivity of 0.53 A/W. An optical spectrum analyzer (Yokogawa AQ 6370C) with a resolution of 0.02 nm is used to measure the optical spectra, and a digital storage oscilloscope (Agilent DSO-X92504A) with an instantaneous bandwidth of 32 GHz and a sampling rate of 80 GSa/s is employed to observe the waveforms.

To verify the simultaneous multi-frequency phase coding capability of the proposed scheme, an OFC with three comb lines is used as the injected light. Figure 2 shows the optical spectrum at the output of the MZM when the MZM is driven by a 4-dBm 15-GHz RF signal and biased at 2.4 V. The polarization direction of the OFC is adjusted to have an angle of 45° to one principal axis of the PolM by tuning PC1. A 5 Gbit/s electrical coding signal with a pattern of “1111-111-1 1-1-11 1-11-1” generated by the PPG is introduced to the PolM. The peak-to-peak voltage of the electrical coding signal is set to be 1.2 V. The generated signals at 15 and 30 GHz are selected by using a digital bandpass filter with a passband of 10 GHz centered at 15 and 30 GHz, respectively. Figure 3 shows the simultaneously generated phase-coded waveforms and the corresponding recovered phase profiles at 15 and 30 GHz. The duration of the generated signal corresponding to one integral pattern of “1111-111-1 1-1-11 1-11-1” is 3.2 ns. As can be seen, simultaneous phase coding at 15 and 30 GHz is realized. The recovered phase is 0° or 180°, corresponding to “1” or “-1” in the electronic coding signal, which is consistent with the theoretical analyses.

By increasing the peak-to-peak voltage of the electrical coding signal to 1.8 V, the waveforms of the generated phase-coded signals at 15 and 30 GHz and the corresponding recovered phase profiles are shown in Figs. 4(a)–4(d), respectively. By comparing the results with those in Fig. 3, we can find that the recovered phase profiles are not affected by the amplitude of the electrical coding signal, which agrees well with the theoretical analyses in Eq. (9). The pulse compression capability is also investigated with the autocorrelation results of the 15- and 30-GHz phase-coded signals. Figure 5 shows the autocorrelation results of the generated phase-coded signals with a data rate of 5 Gbit/s and magnitudes of 1.2 V and 1.8 V, respectively.
30-GHz phase-coded signals shown in Fig. 5. As can be seen, for the 15- and 30-GHz phase-coded signals, the peak-to-side-lobe ratios (PSRs) are about 4.47 and 5.04 dB, respectively. The full width at half-maximum (FWHM) of the main lobe is about 0.19 ns for the 15-GHz signal and 0.2 ns for the 30-GHz signal, giving a compression ratio of about 16.

Since no wavelength-dependent component is used, good frequency tunability can be achieved by simply adjusting the frequency of the RF signal in the OFC generator. For instance, when the spacing of the OFC is set to 10 GHz, phase-coded signals at 10 and 20 GHz are simultaneously generated, as shown in Fig. 6. The autocorrelation curves of the generated signals are shown in Fig. 7; they give a PSR of 4.6 dB, a main lobe FWHM of 0.19 ns, and a compression ratio of about 16 for the 10-GHz phase-coded signal; and a PSR of 5.16 dB, a main lobe FWHM of 0.19 ns, and a compression ratio of about 16 for the 20-GHz phase-coded signal.

In conclusion, we proposed and demonstrated a novel photonic microwave phase-coded signal generator with simultaneous multi-frequency phase coding capability based on polarization modulation and balanced detection. The proposed photonic microwave phase coder has no requirement on the wavelength, intensity modulation format, and modulation index of the input optical microwave signal, which provides multi-frequency phase coding capability with compact structure, simple operation, and high flexibility, and allows phase coding with arbitrary-format RF signals. Phase-coded signals at 15 and 30 GHz, or 10 and 20 GHz with a coding rate of 5 Gbit/s were experimentally generated by employing an OFC with three comb lines as the input optical signal. A phase-coded signal with more carrier frequencies can be realized by using an optical signal with more frequency components, such as an OFC with more comb lines, an ultra-short pulse from an MLL, and a single-wavelength or WDM signal carrying multiple RF frequencies. Phase coding of arbitrary-format RF signal can also be realized by using an optical signal carrying RF signals with these formats. The proposed scheme will bring the benefits of extended working frequency range and large working bandwidth for multi-frequency radars. This approach can find applications in multi-band and multifunctional radars.

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