

Sleep Spindle Detection Using Time-Frequency Sparsity

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Abstract— This paper proposes an EEG processor for sleep spindle detection algorithms. It non-linearly separates the raw EEG signal into non-oscillatory transient and sustained rhythmic oscillation components using long and short windows for the short-time Fourier transform. The processor utilizes the fact that sleep spindles can be sparsely represented via the inverse of a short-time Fourier transform. Five sleep spindle detectors were tested on the EEG database with and without the proposed EEG processor. We achieved an improvement of 13.3% in the by-sample F_1 score, and 13.9% in the by-sample Matthews Correlation Coefficient score of these algorithms when the processed EEG was used for spindle detection. The processor was able to improve the scores by reducing the number of false positive spindles and increasing the number of true positive spindles detected.

Index Terms—Short time Fourier transform, spectrogram, convex optimization, pursuit algorithms

I. INTRODUCTION

Sleep spindles comprise of a group of rhythmic waves that progressively increase and decrease in amplitude [32]. They are measured by electroencephalography (EEG) and the duration of these waves range from 0.5 to 3 seconds [37]. Any spindle-like waveform that has a duration less than 0.5 seconds is generally not considered a sleep spindle [25], [32]. The frequency range of spindles is between 12 and 14 Hz [25]. However, recent studies have extended this range to 11-16 Hz [35], [24], [9], [8].

It is believed that sleep spindles play an important functional role in synaptic plasticity and memory consolidation during sleep [13]. Alterations in their density have been observed in EEG of several patients with disorders such as schizophrenia [12], [34], autism [18], other neurodegenerative and sleep disorders [23]. For this reason, it is thought that sleep spindles may be valuable as diagnostic biomarkers [35].

Traditionally, spindles have been identified and scored visually by experts in sleep clinics. The experts have been trained to not only detect spindles, but also classify the patient's EEG data into different stages of sleep. The patient's EEG is divided into 30 second epochs and scored [32]. This is a labor intensive and subjective method of detecting spindles. Further complicating the detection process is the low inter-expert agreement of spindle identification [38].

A. State-of-the-art

Several detectors have been developed in the past few decades with their number growing in the past few years. Most of the widely used detectors employ the method of bandpass filtering and amplitude thresholding [26], [12], [34], [36], [4], [14], [20]. Several spindle detectors employ advanced methods such as artificial intelligence [16], [17], neural networks [15], likelihood [22] and support vector machines [1]. Some of the detection algorithms are able to extract and classify features other than sleep spindles [21].

Time-frequency analysis using the short-time Fourier transform (STFT) is a commonly used method for spindle detection [7], [15], [6]. The peaks in the spectrogram obtained using the STFT can

be used to detect sleep spindles. Another adaptive time-frequency method of signal analysis is Matching Pursuit (MP) [19]. The idea of MP was used in sleep spindle detection as early as 1996 [11] and more recently in [16], [17]. The performance of MP, however, for sleep spindle detection of healthy male subjects was not at par with the other detectors employing more basic detection methods [27].

B. Motivation

The EEG is a non-stationary signal exhibiting a mixture of oscillatory and non-oscillatory transient behaviors. It possesses rhythmic oscillations as well as transients due to measurement artifacts and non-rhythmic brain activity. Furthermore, the bandpass filter used by the sleep spindle detection algorithms is excited by these transients in the EEG. As a result, the spindle activity in the bandpass filtered data is not always prominent. This emphasizes the need for the separation of the sustained oscillations and the non-oscillatory transients. Separation of these components for analysis using linear methods is difficult. On the other hand, non-linear methods have the potential to process and analyze complex non-stationary signals more efficiently than linear methods [29].

In this paper, we present a non-linear method that separates the transients from the sustained rhythmic oscillations and apply it to the problem of sleep spindle detection. This non-linear method acts as a processor for algorithms that use bandpass filtering as a means to detect spindles. Using the proposed processor, the algorithms in [34], [36], [4], [14], and [20] see significant improvement in sleep spindle detection.

II. PRELIMINARIES

A. Notation

Vectors and matrices are represented by lower- and upper-case bold letters respectively. For a vector $\mathbf{x} = [x_0, \dots, x_{N-1}]$, $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^N$, the l_1 and l_2 norms are defined as

$$\|\mathbf{x}\|_1 = \sum_{k=1}^N |x_k|, \quad \|\mathbf{x}\|_2 = \left(\sum_{k=1}^N |x_k|^2 \right)^{1/2} \quad (1)$$

Further, the root mean square (RMS) value of the vector \mathbf{x} is defined as

$$\mathbf{x}_{\text{rms}} = \left(\frac{1}{N} \sum_{k=1}^N |x_k|^2 \right)^{1/2} \quad (2)$$

B. Basis Pursuit Denoising

Utilizing convex optimization, basis pursuit denoising (BPD) finds signal representations in over-complete transforms by minimizing the l_1 norm of the representation coefficients [5]. Minimizing the l_1 norm results in a sparse representation for the signal \mathbf{x} . Sparse representations are representations which account for most of the information in a signal with a linear combination of a small number of representation coefficients. If we define the input signal \mathbf{y} , $\in \mathbb{R}^N$ as

$$\mathbf{y} = \mathbf{A}\mathbf{c} + \mathbf{w} \quad (3)$$

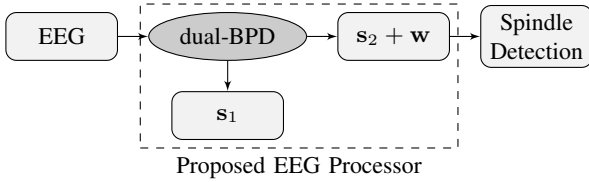


Fig. 1. The proposed dual-BPD EEG processor. The processor decomposes the input EEG channel into two components s_1, s_2 and the residual w . The long-window component along with the residual ($s_2 + w$) is used for spindle detection.

where the columns of \mathbf{A} form an over-complete basis for \mathbb{R}^N , and w is the residual, then basis-pursuit denoising (BPD) yields an approximation to y by minimizing the following objective function-

$$\arg \min_{\mathbf{c}} \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{c}\|_2^2 + \lambda \|\mathbf{c}\|_1 \quad (4)$$

BPD admits the presence of a residual in the decomposition which is useful for practical signals that contain measurement artifacts. A similar type of sparse approximation method is matching pursuit (MP). MP, compared to BPD, has a tendency of selecting coefficients wrongly, thereby resulting in an erroneous approximation, in the initial iterations [5]. This forces the MP algorithm to make alternating corrections suggesting a complex structure for the input signal. Due to this, the original structure of the input signal is often missed entirely [5].

C. Short-time Fourier Transform

For the sparse representation of an input signal consisting of oscillatory pulses, \mathbf{A} in (3) can be taken as the inverse of a short-time Fourier transform (STFT). The STFT depends on the window length, overlapping factor and the discrete Fourier transform (DFT) length. We use 93.75% overlapping between the windows, i.e., a hop-size of 1/16 of the window length and a DFT length equal to the window length. Consequently, the STFT is 16 times over-sampled. Moreover, if the time-frequency array of the STFT coefficients \mathbf{c} is of size $M \times K$, for a signal y of length N , then $\mathbf{A} : \mathbb{C}^{M \times K} \rightarrow \mathbb{C}^N$ is defined as

$$[\mathbf{A}\mathbf{c}]_n = [\text{STFT}^{-1}(\mathbf{c})]_n, \quad n \in \mathbb{Z}_N \quad (5)$$

whereas $\mathbf{A}^H : \mathbb{C}^N \rightarrow \mathbb{C}^{M \times K}$ is defined as

$$[\mathbf{A}^H \mathbf{y}]_{(m,k)} = [\text{STFT}(\mathbf{y})]_{(m,k)}, \quad m \in \mathbb{Z}_M, k \in \mathbb{Z}_K \quad (6)$$

We implement \mathbf{A} using a sine window such that $\mathbf{A}\mathbf{A}^H = \mathbf{I}$ as in [28].

III. DUAL BASIS PURSUIT DENOISING

We model the raw EEG signal as

$$\mathbf{y} = \mathbf{s}_1 + \mathbf{s}_2 + \mathbf{w}, \quad \mathbf{y}, \mathbf{s}_1, \mathbf{s}_2, \mathbf{w} \in \mathbb{R}^N \quad (7)$$

where $\mathbf{s}_1, \mathbf{s}_2$ are vectors which are sparsely represented using the over-complete transforms $\mathbf{A}_1, \mathbf{A}_2$, and w is the residual obtained after the decomposition. This kind of a model is used in ‘Morphological Component Analysis’ (MCA) for non-linear separation of signal components [33].

For the separation of the non-oscillatory transients and the sustained oscillations, we use \mathbf{A}_1 and \mathbf{A}_2 to be the inverse STFT using different window lengths. We use a short window for \mathbf{A}_1 to sparsely represent the transients and a long window for \mathbf{A}_2 for representing the sustained rhythmic oscillations.

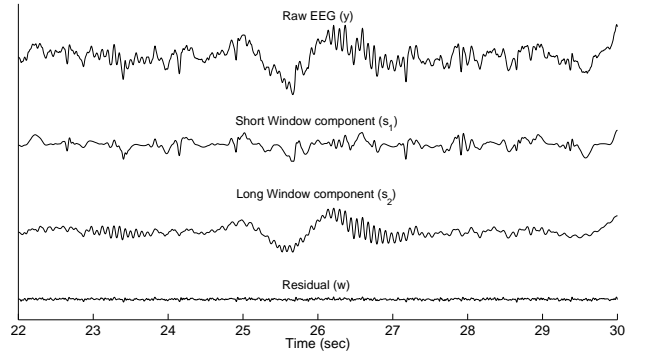


Fig. 2. The raw EEG decomposed into the short (s_1) and long window (s_2) components using dual-BPD. The residual w obtained after the decomposition is also shown.

Given y we will estimate s_1, s_2 by solving the following minimization problem-

$$\{\mathbf{c}_1^*, \mathbf{c}_2^*\} = \arg \min_{\mathbf{c}_1, \mathbf{c}_2} \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{c}_1 - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{c}_2\|_2^2 + \lambda_1 \|\mathbf{c}_1\|_1 + \lambda_2 \|\mathbf{c}_2\|_1 \quad (8)$$

The individual components s_1, s_2 are then estimated as

$$\mathbf{s}_i = \mathbf{A}_i \mathbf{c}_i^* \quad i = 1, 2. \quad (9)$$

If we let

$$\mathbf{A} = [\mathbf{A}_1 \quad \mathbf{A}_2], \quad \mathbf{c} = [\mathbf{c}_1 \quad \mathbf{c}_2]^T \quad (10)$$

where

$$\mathbf{A}_i \mathbf{A}_i^H = \mathbf{I}, \quad i = 1, 2 \quad (11)$$

then using the split augmented Lagrangian shrinkage algorithm (SALSA) as in [2], [30], and [31] we obtain the following algorithm for solving (8)

Algorithm 1 dual-BPD (8) with $\mathbf{A}_i \mathbf{A}_i^H = \mathbf{I}$

1: **inputs:**

$$\mathbf{y} \in \mathbb{R}^N, \lambda_1, \lambda_2, \mu$$

2: **initialize:**

$$\mathbf{d}_i, \mathbf{c}_i \in \mathbb{C}^{M \times K}$$

3: **repeat**

$$4: \quad \mathbf{v}_i \leftarrow \text{soft}(\mathbf{c}_i + \mathbf{d}_i, \lambda_i/\mu) - \mathbf{d}_i, \quad i = 1, 2$$

$$5: \quad \mathbf{d}_i \leftarrow \frac{1}{\mu + 2} \mathbf{A}_i^H [\mathbf{y} - \mathbf{A}_1 \mathbf{v}_1 - \mathbf{A}_2 \mathbf{v}_2], \quad i = 1, 2$$

$$6: \quad \mathbf{c}_i \leftarrow \mathbf{d}_i + \mathbf{v}_i, \quad i = 1, 2$$

7: **until** convergence

8: **return** $\mathbf{c}_1, \mathbf{c}_2$

The soft-threshold function, $\text{soft}(\mathbf{x}, T)$ is defined as in [10], generalized here to the complex plane.

Figure 2 shows the decomposition of the raw EEG using dual-BPD. The sum of the three components shown, s_1, s_2 and w equals the raw EEG, emphasizing that none of the information in the raw EEG is lost. Further, it can be seen that s_1 contains the non-oscillatory transients and none of the sustained oscillations in the input signal y . The sustained oscillations are contained in s_2 component.

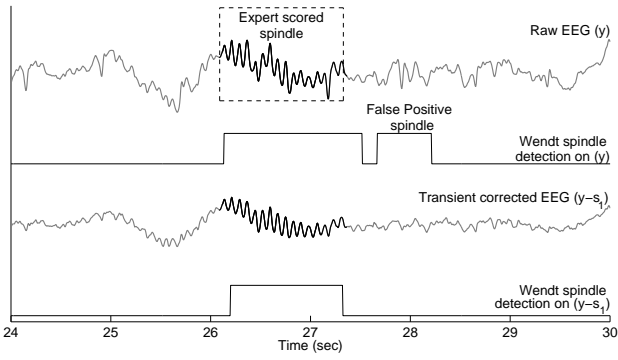


Fig. 3. A false positive spindle detected by the Wendt algorithm applied on the raw EEG. The false positive is not produced by the Wendt algorithm when the transient corrected EEG, instead of the raw EEG, is used for spindle detection.

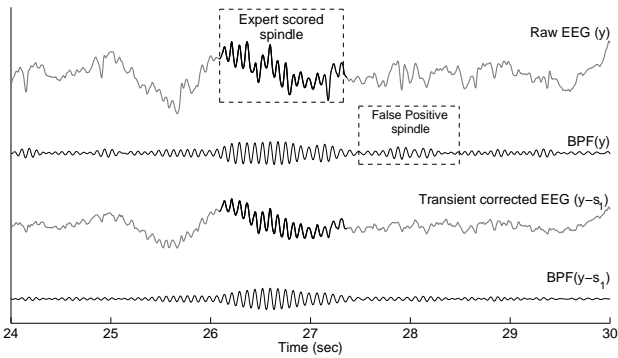


Fig. 4. The raw and processed EEG filtered with the bandpass filter (BPF) used by the Wendt algorithm for spindle detection.

IV. EXAMPLES

To illustrate sleep spindle detection using the dual-BPD processor, we apply dual-BPD to the C3-A1 channel of the EEG. The algorithms in [36] and [20] are then used to detect spindles. The database used in this and the following example is explained in Section V-A.

We use a window length of 0.32 seconds for \mathbf{A}_1 and a window length of 1.28 seconds for \mathbf{A}_2 . This particular choice of window length for \mathbf{A}_1 tends to separate transients of duration less than approximately 0.3 seconds from the sustained oscillatory waveforms of longer duration. The window length for \mathbf{A}_2 is chosen in accordance with the mean duration, 1.25 seconds, of the sleep spindles [36]. Also, the window lengths of 0.32 and 1.28 seconds ensure that the DFT lengths used are powers of 2 at a sampling rate of 100 Hz and 200 Hz.

Note that the dual-BPD algorithm requires the specification of the parameters λ_1, λ_2 . For the examples in this section and the experimental study in Section V, we use $\lambda_1 = \lambda_2 = 0.06 \cdot \gamma_{\text{rms}}$, where the RMS value of y is defined as (2).

For the raw and unprocessed EEG, it can be seen in Fig. 3, the Wendt algorithm [36] detects two spindles - one starting at 26.2 seconds and the other at 27.6 seconds. However, the experts have classified only one spindle, starting at 26.2 seconds. Thus the Wendt algorithm detects a false positive. On the other hand, when the Wendt algorithm is applied to the dual-BPD processed EEG data, it does not produce this false positive.

To further explain, it can be seen in Fig. 4 that the bandpass filter used by Wendt [36] is excited by the non-oscillatory transients present in the EEG. The dual-BPD algorithm, however, separates the transients from the sustained oscillations. The component s_1 contains

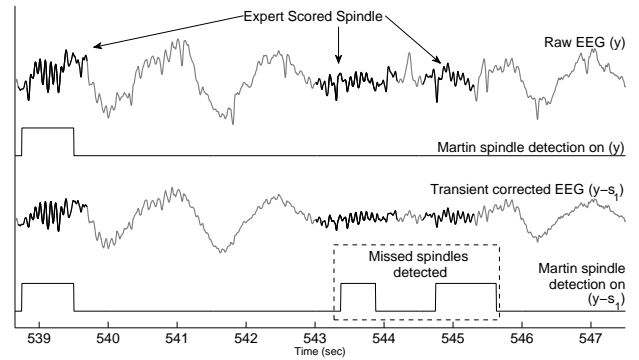


Fig. 5. Spindles originally missed by the Martin algorithm, and their detection on using the dual-BPD processed EEG instead of the raw EEG.

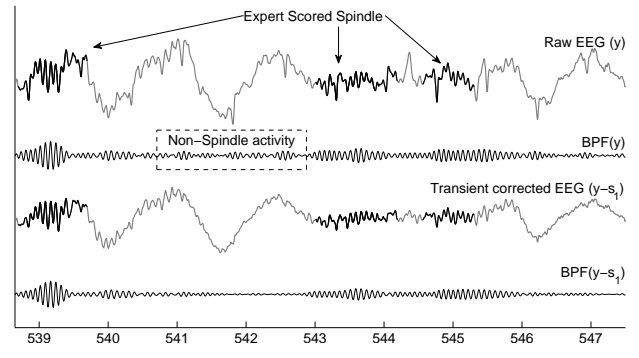


Fig. 6. The input EEG, raw and processed, filtered with the bandpass filter (BPF) used by the Martin algorithm.

most of the transients. Thus, when the dual-BPD processed EEG, $y - s_1$, is used for spindle detection, the spindle activity is much more prominent, with respect to the baseline, in the bandpass filtered output.

As an another example, we consider the Martin algorithm in [20] for sleep spindle detection. Visible in Fig. 5, the experts have annotated 3 sleep spindles starting at 538.8, 543, and 544.6 seconds. However, the Martin algorithm [20] detects only the first spindle. Running the detection on the dual-BPD processed EEG, the Martin algorithm detects the spindles starting at 543 and 544.6 seconds as well.

Once again, it can be seen in Fig. 6 that the bandpass filter used by Martin [20] is excited by the non-oscillatory transients. However, due to the suppression of these transients in $y - s_1$, the spindle activity is enhanced, with respect to the baseline, in the filtered output.

V. EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION

To study the performance of the dual-BPD EEG processor for sleep spindle detection, we implement it on the readily available EEG database¹ in [9]. It provides 30 minute excerpts of raw EEG data with annotations for sleep spindles. We apply existing sleep spindle detection algorithms to both raw EEG and EEG processed using dual-BPD.

A. Database

According to [9], the EEG was acquired in a sleep laboratory of a Belgium hospital using a digital 32-channel polygraph (Brain-

¹University of MONS - TCTS Laboratory (S. Devuyst, T. Dutoit) and Universit Libre de Bruxelles - CHU de Charleroi Sleep Laboratory (M. Kerkhofs) available at <http://www.tcts.fpms.ac.be/~devuyst/Databases/DatabaseSpindles/>

netTM System of MEDATEC, Brussels, Belgium). The patients from whom the data was obtained, possessed different pathologies (dysomnia, restless legs syndrome, insomnia, apnoea/hypopnoea syndrome) [9]. Three EEG channels (CZ-A1 or C3-A1, FP1-A1, and O1-A1) were recorded in addition to two EOG channels and one submental EMG channel. A segment of 30 minutes of the central EEG channel was extracted from each whole-night recording for sleep spindle scoring. These excerpts were given to two experts who independently scored spindles [9]. The mean age of the 8 patients (male and female) was 46 with standard deviation of 7.45 years.

B. Existing Detection Algorithms

A recent paper [35], studied the performance of 6 widely used sleep spindle detectors. Except for the algorithm in [12]², we implemented the remaining 5 detectors on the sleep spindle database. We implemented the algorithms with the aid of the software provided in [35], with and without the proposed dual-BPD processor. Below, we detail the detectors and the parameters, changed and unchanged in this paper.

Bódizs et al. [4] - The algorithm detects spindles by bandpass filtering the EEG and calculating Hanning-corrected moving average when a constant threshold is exceeded. It derives spindle frequency boundaries and amplitude criteria, for slow and fast spindles, using the all night average spectrum during stage 2, 3, 4 of sleep. We changed the minimum spindle duration to 0.5 seconds from 0.3 seconds. The boundary frequencies were kept unchanged at 9 Hz and 16 Hz.

Mölle et al. [14] - Spindles are detected by bandpass filtering the EEG, calculating RMS value of the signal in sliding windows and applying a constant threshold. We modified the duration of the spindles to be from 0.5 seconds - 3 seconds as per the manual [32], since the same manual was used by the experts who scored the sleep spindles visually. The frequencies used for the pass-band and stop-band were unchanged.

Martin et al. [20] - The algorithm uses the same procedure as in [14] for sleep spindle detection. The primary difference between the two algorithms is that the Martin algorithm uses a time resolution of 25ms for the windows with no overlap, whereas the Mölle algorithm uses a time resolution of 50ms and 50% overlap. We kept all parameters the same as in [20], except for the spindle duration which was changed to 0.5 seconds - 3 seconds.

Wamsley et al. [34] - Sleep spindles are detected by applying the continuous wavelet transform, using complex Morlet wavelet with center frequency 13.5 Hz and calculating the moving average in sliding windows. We changed the minimum duration of the spindles to 0.5 seconds from 0.3 seconds.

Wendt et al. [36] - The spindle detection algorithm uses both the C3-A1 and the O1-A1 channel of the EEG. It detects spindles by bandpass filtering the EEG and using a time-varying threshold with a given offset. We changed the duration of the spindles to 0.5 seconds - 3 seconds.

C. Statistical Measures of Performance

Using spindle detection by experts as the gold standard, we evaluate the performance of a sleep spindle detector using the by-sample analysis method. In the by-sample analysis, a unit is a sample point of the EEG [35]. A sample point is recorded as a sleep spindle if it was scored as such by both the experts [9].

²The detector required the availability of a stage-file which was not provided by the database [9]. The hypnogram provided consisted of 5 sec epochs instead of 30 sec epochs as required by the algorithm.

The sleep spindle detection algorithms output a binary vector, where 1 indicates a spindle and 0 otherwise. Using this binary vector, a 2×2 contingency table can be created to calculate the values of true positive (TP), false positive (FP), true negative (TN) and false negative (FN) for the detectors. These values are used to further calculate the recall (RE) and precision (PR) of the detectors. For the rigorous evaluation of the detectors, with and without the proposed EEG processor, we will use the F_1 score and the Matthews Correlation Coefficient (MCC). Both the scores range from 0 to 1, with 1 denoting the perfect detector.

$$RE = \frac{TP}{TP + FN} \quad (12a)$$

$$PR = \frac{TP}{TP + FP} \quad (12b)$$

$$F_1 = 2 \times \frac{RE \times PR}{RE + PR} \quad (12c)$$

$$MCC = \frac{TP \times TN - FP \times FN}{\sqrt{(TP + FN)(TP + FP)(TN + FP)(TN + FN)}} \quad (12d)$$

The MCC provides a balanced evaluation of the detector [3]. Moreover, since the spindles are rare events the TN values will be high. Hence, the MCC and F_1 score provide better evaluation of the detector as compared to only sensitivity and specificity values.

D. Results

The dual-BPD processed EEG (C3-A1 channel) was used for sleep spindle detection. We used the same parameters for the dual-BPD algorithm and the window lengths for the transforms $\mathbf{A}_1, \mathbf{A}_2$ as in Section IV.

The F_1 score and further statistics for each of the detectors and their corresponding improvement with the proposed dual-BPD processor were recorded and are listed in the appendix. Also available are the TP, FP, TN, and FN values from which further evaluation can be carried out by the reader. The dual-BPD and the detection algorithms were run on a 2.50 Ghz Intel core i5 machine. The dual-BPD algorithm takes 40 seconds to run 60 iterations on an input EEG signal of 30 minutes with a sampling frequency of 200 Hz.

E. Discussion

For the Martin algorithm [20], the TP values were increased by as much as 23% due to which the RE values increased on an average by 7.8% over the 8 patients. The Wendt algorithm [36] saw a reduction in FP values by as much as 59% thereby increasing the PR values by 14% on an average.

When detecting spindles with the dual-BPD processed EEG, the F_1 scores of the detectors, on an average, improved by 13.3%. The MCC score of these detectors was also improved by 13.9%. The improvement in the F_1 score ranged from 2% to as much as 38% with a similar range of improvement in the MCC score.

The suppression of the non-oscillatory transient waves in the EEG, using dual-BPD, leads to fewer FP values. As a result, the performance of the spindle detection algorithms in Section V-B is improved when they are applied on the dual-BPD processed EEG as compared to the raw EEG.

Indirectly, the experimental study assesses the performance of the 5 spindle detectors on a database different than the one used for their design. Among the detectors, the Wamsley algorithm [34] performed the worst as compared to its performance in [35] where it surpassed the other detectors. It was hardly able to detect spindles in all but one of the 30 min excerpts. The Martin algorithm [20] achieved the highest F_1 score of 0.64 with the proposed EEG processor and 0.60 without it.

It is worth noting that the algorithms in Section V-B were tested on healthy subjects in contrast to the database [9] on which we tested them.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper proposes to improve the performance of existing sleep spindle detection algorithms by pre-processing the raw EEG using dual-BPD. The non-linear dual-BPD method separates the non-oscillatory transient and the sustained rhythmic oscillations components. The non-oscillatory transient component is not used for spindle detection. When the rhythmic oscillations component is filtered, the spindle activity is much more prominent with respect to the baseline. This leads to an increase in the true positive values of the sleep spindle detectors and a decrease in the false positive values of the detectors. This increases the F_1 score of the spindle detection algorithms. The dual-BPD processor was able to increase the F_1 score by 13.3% on an average, with a similar range of improvement in the Matthews Correlation Coefficient of the detectors.

The results suggest that the proposed dual-BPD processor for EEG signals may be used to enhance sleep spindle detection. Since sleep spindle detection is an important component of sleep scoring, it would be desirable to further validate the results on a wider database including full nights of sleep EEG in both, normal and patient populations.

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