

# ASYNC Loop Constructs for Relaxed Synchronization

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**Abstract.** Conventional iterative solvers for partial differential equations impose strict data dependencies between each solution point and its neighbors. When implemented in OpenMP, they repeatedly execute barrier synchronization in each iterative step to ensure that data dependencies are strictly satisfied. We propose new parallel annotations to support an *asynchronous computation model* for iterative solvers. ASYNC\_DO annotates a loop whose iterations can be executed by multiple processors, as OpenMP parallel DO loops in Fortran (or parallel for loops in C), but it does not require barrier synchronization. ASYNC\_REDUCTION annotates a loop which performs parallel reduction operations but uses a relaxed tree barrier, instead of the conventional barrier, to synchronize the processors. When a number of ASYNC\_DO and ASYNC\_REDUCTION loops are embedded in an iterative loop annotated by ASYNC\_REGION, the iterative solver allows each data point to be updated using the value of its neighbors which may not be the most current, instead of forcing the processor to wait for the new value to arrive. We discuss how the compiler can transform an ASYNC\_REGION (with embedded ASYNC\_DO and ASYNC\_REDUCTION) into an OpenMP parallel section with relaxed synchronization. We present experimental results to show the benefit of using ASYNC loop constructs in 2D and 3D multigrid methods as well as an SOR-preconditioned conjugate gradient linear system solver.

## 1 Introduction

Many important applications use iterative solvers to solve partial differential equations (PDE's). It has been found for quite some time that there exist a class of iterative solvers which are allowed to follow a loose data dependence relationship between each data point and its neighbors [7, 3, 4]. Under such an *asynchronous computation model*, the update of a data point does not need to strictly depend on the most updated values of its neighbors. Instead, Some older values of its neighbors can be used before the newest values become available. It may take more iterations for an asynchronous algorithm to converge or to achieve the same numerical accuracy as its synchronous counterpart. However, when implemented on parallel systems, especially those of a large size, the asynchronous algorithms suffer less from the interconnect latency than their conventional counterparts.

Unfortunately, current parallel languages and language extensions (such as OpenMP [5]) do not effectively support the asynchronous computation model. When implemented with OpenMP parallel annotations, for example, an iterative solver typically has a sequential outermost loop containing a number of parallel inner loops. Each parallel loop annotation implies two barrier synchronization points, at the beginning and the end of the loop, where all processors must meet before simultaneously proceeding to the next statement. Such barrier synchronization, executed repeatedly in each iterative step, dictates the conventional strict synchronous computation model, at the expense of performance penalty due to the interconnect latency. Barriers also severely limit the compiler’s ability to generate efficient machine code.

In this paper, we propose three new loop annotations, called *ASYNC\_DO*, *ASYNC\_REDUCTION*, and *ASYNC\_REGION*, respectively. *ASYNC\_DO* annotates a loop whose iterations can be executed by multiple processors, but unlike an OpenMP parallel DO (or parallel for) loop, it does not require barrier synchronization. *ASYNC\_REDUCTION* annotates a loop which performs parallel reduction but uses a relaxed tree barrier, instead of the conventional barrier, to synchronize the processors. When a number of *ASYNC\_DO* and *ASYNC\_REDUCTION* loops are embedded in an iterative loop annotated by *ASYNC\_REGION*, the iterative solver in effect follows the *asynchronous computation model* mentioned above. We present experimental results to show the benefit of using *ASYNC* loops in 2D and 3D multigrid methods as well as an SOR-preconditioned conjugate gradient linear system solver.

## 2 ASYNC Loops

**ASYNC\_DO Loops** *ASYNC\_DO* annotates a DO loop whose iterations can be executed in parallel by multiple processors without barrier synchronization. Its syntax, analogous to that of an OpenMP parallel DO loop, is in the form of `!$ASYNC_DO parallel clause`, where *parallel clause* takes the same form and meaning as its counterpart in OpenMP *sans* the reduction clause [5]. Figure 1 shows an example of annotating parallel loops by *ASYNC\_DO*. When the shown *ASYNC\_DO* is embedded in an *ASYNC\_REGION*, it will be transformed by the compiler into an iteration-partitioned loop shown in Figure 2. Notice the absence of barrier synchronization.

**ASYNC\_REDUCTION** The *ASYNC\_REDUCTION* is supported by a relaxed barrier tree structure which allows a thread, depending on its thread ID, to deposit its partial term of the reduction result in the tree and continue its execution without obtaining the newly computed value. Figure 3 shows an example with eight threads. Threads are numbered 0 through 7 and every dot represents a lock structure. Once a pair of threads arrive at the appropriate lock (if one gets there first, it waits for the other), the left-sibling thread proceeds up the tree with the new information deposited by both threads, and the other thread is

```

!$ASYNC_DO default(shared)
!$      private(i1,i2,i3,u1,u2)
      do i3=2,n3-1
        do i2=2,n2-1
          do i1=1,n1
            u1(i1) = u(i1,i2-1,i3)
            >      + u(i1,i2+1,i3)
            >      + u(i1,i2,i3-1)
            >      + u(i1,i2,i3+1)
            u2(i1) = u(i1,i2-1,i3-1)
            >      + u(i1,i2+1,i3-1)
            >      + u(i1,i2-1,i3+1)
            >      + u(i1,i2+1,i3+1)
          enddo
          do i1=2,n1-1
            r(i1,i2,i3) = v(i1,i2,i3)
            >      - a(0) * u(i1,i2,i3)
            >      - a(1) * (u(i1-1,i2,i3)
            >      + u(i1+1,i2,i3)
            >      + u1(i1))
            >      - a(2) * (u2(i1)
            >      + u1(i1-1)
            >      + u1(i1+1))
            >      - a(3) * (u2(i1-1)
            >      + u2(i1+1))
          enddo
        enddo
      enddo

```

**Fig. 1.** An ASYNC\_DO loop inside MG residual calculation subroutine

```

z_low = (my_id * bz(k)) + 1
z_high = (my_id + 1) * bz(k)
if(my_id .eq. 0) z_low = 2
if(my_id .eq. (total_threads - 1))
  z_high = n3 - 1
do i3 = z_low, z_high
  do i2=2,n2-1
    do i1=1,n1
      u1(i1) = u(i1,i2-1,i3)
      >      + u(i1,i2+1,i3)
      >      + u(i1,i2,i3-1)
      >      + u(i1,i2,i3+1)
      u2(i1) = u(i1,i2-1,i3-1)
      >      + u(i1,i2+1,i3-1)
      >      + u(i1,i2-1,i3+1)
      >      + u(i1,i2+1,i3+1)
    enddo
    do i1=2,n1-1
      r(i1,i2,i3) = v(i1,i2,i3)
      >      - a(0) * u(i1,i2,i3)
      >      - a(1) * (u(i1-1,i2,i3)
      >      + u(i1+1,i2,i3)
      >      + u1(i1))
      >      - a(2) * (u2(i1)
      >      + u1(i1-1)
      >      + u1(i1+1))
      >      - a(3) * (u2(i1-1)
      >      + u2(i1+1))
    enddo
  enddo
enddo

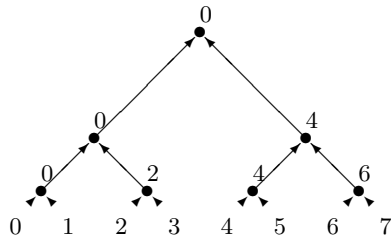
```

**Fig. 2.** A synchronization-relaxed loop generated from ASYNC\_DO annotation

released and allowed to continue execution. Using this structure, we can greatly reduce the amount of blocking time of threads.

The ASYNC\_REDUCTION annotation is analogous to an OpenMP parallel DO loop with a reduction clause, but with the relaxed barrier tree replacing the strict barrier. Figure 4 shows an example of a loop annotated by ASYNC\_REDUCTION. When embedded in an ASYNC\_REGION, this loop will be transformed into an iteration-partitioned loop with a call to a runtime routine `logbarrier` which implements the relaxed barrier tree.

**ASYNC\_REGION** Recall that a conventional OpenMP parallel directive defines a lexical scope whose statements are executed by parallel threads with two implied synchronization points, one at the entry and the other at the exit. An



**Fig. 3.** A relaxed barrier tree structure

```
!$ASYNC_REDUCTION(+:d)
  do j=1, lastcol-firstcol+1
    d = d + p(j)*q(j)
  enddo
```

*converted to*

```
temp = 0.d0
do j = low_limit, high_limit
  temp = temp + p(j)*q(j)
enddo
call logbarrier(my_id, temp, d, 0)
```

**Fig. 4.** A loop converted from ASYNC\_REDUCTION

ASYNC\_DO (or an ASYNC\_REDUCTION) loop defines a lexical scope whose statements are executed by parallel threads but without synchronization. An iterative solver may contain several ASYNC\_DO or ASYNC\_REDUCTION loops, and normally, the parallel threads must synchronize before they start executing the solver and after they finish. The ASYNC\_REGION directive defines the lexical scope of the iterative solver and, by default, this scope has two barrier synchronization points, one at the entrance and the other at the exit. Within this scope, parallel threads follow the “owner computes” rule when they partition the ASYNC\_DO and ASYNC\_REDUCTION loop iterations such that, every time they reenter these loops, each will modify the same array sections.

Algorithm 1 provides a general template for writing an iterative solver using the asynchronous loops. The notation *!\$a parallel loop header* in the algorithm could mean !\$ASYNC\_DO, !\$ASYNC\_REDUCTION, or any conventional OpenMP parallel construct. The iterative loop annotated by ASYNC\_REGION

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**Algorithm 1** A General Template of Using ASYNC Loops

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```
1: !$ASYNC_REGION
2: DO ITER = 1, number_iter
3: !$a parallel loop header
4: a parallel loop body
5: ...
6: !$a parallel loop header
7: a parallel loop body
8: ...
9: !$a parallel loop header
10: a parallel loop body
11: ...
12: END DO ITER
```

---

will be transformed by the compiler into an OpenMP parallel section (!\$OMP

parallel) to be executed by a number of parallel threads. Within the asynchronous region, an `ASYNC_DO` loop is transformed by the compiler into a `DO` loop whose iteration ranges are determined by the thread ID, as illustrated previously in Figure 2. No barrier synchronization is inserted. An `ASYNC_REDUCTION` loop is transformed into a `DO` loop that computes a partial reduction before invoking the relaxed barrier synchronization routine to add the partial term to the final result, as illustrated in Figure 4. A conventional OpenMP parallel do or reduction loop will be transformed into a `DO` loop as stipulated in the OpenMP standard, with conventional barrier synchronization inserted. Sequential loops and statements within the `ASYNC_REGION` will be enclosed in a segment annotated by the `!$OMP master` directive to indicate that they are executed by the master thread only.

It is important for the compiler to *align* the iteration ranges of the `DO` loops converted from the inner parallel loops (`ASYNC` or OpenMP) such that no two threads write into the same array sections. This requires the compiler to perform array data flow analysis which has been studied quite extensively by previous work [8, 10, 11] and will be omitted in this paper due to space limitation. If the compiler is unable to perform the necessary array dataflow analysis for a particular asynchronous region, the `ASYNC_REGION` annotation will be ignored. An `ASYNC_DO` loop will be treated as an ordinary OpenMP parallel `DO` loop and an `ASYNC_REDUCTION` loop will be treated as an ordinary OpenMP reduction loop.

### 3 Benchmark Study

In this section, we introduce two benchmarks, namely MG and preconditioned CG, from the 2003 release of the NAS OpenMP parallel benchmarks (version 3.2) [1, 9]. The MG program belongs to the class of iterative methods which use *relaxation methods* [12]. The CG program belongs to the class using *Krylov subspace methods* [12]. The Krylov subspace methods are known to benefit greatly from *preconditioning*, in terms of both numerical accuracy and computation efficiency. Relaxation methods such as SOR have been found to be effective preconditioners. We wrote a simple SOR preconditioner for CG.

**MG Using ASYNC Loops** The MG program implements a multigrid method to solve the Poisson problem  $\nabla u^2 = v$  with periodic boundary conditions. The benchmark places -1 and +1 values at twenty random grid points each, and zeros elsewhere. Each iteration consists of a full V-cycle [12]. We also derived a two-dimensional version of MG for a 2D grid size, but the algorithm remained the same. The high level organization of MG in OpenMP can be illustrated by the code skeleton in Algorithm 2. In the actual OpenMP code, the `!$OMP` annotations are within the subroutines shown in the algorithm such that within each subroutine call, one or more `!$OMP` parallel `DO` loops are executed, forcing a strict data flow.

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**Algorithm 2** Multigrid V-Cycle with Full Synchronization
 

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```

1: DO iter = 1, number_iter
2:   for  $i = h_{max} \dots h_0, i = i/2$  do
3:     !OMP parallel do
4:       Coarsen residual:  $r^i = I_{i/2}^i r^{i/2}$ 
5:   end for
6:   !OMP parallel do
7:   Zero:  $u^{h_0} = 0$ 
8:   !OMP parallel do
9:   Smooth:  $u^{h_0} = u^{h_0} + Sr^{h_0}$ 
10:  for  $i = 2 \dots h_{max}/2, i = 2i$  do
11:    !OMP parallel do
12:    Zero:  $u^i = 0$ 
13:    !OMP parallel do
14:    Prolongate:  $u^i = I_i^{i/2} u^{i/2}$ 
15:    !OMP parallel do
16:    Calculate Residual:  $r^i = r^i - Au_i$ 
17:    !OMP parallel do
18:    Smooth:  $u^i = u^i + Sr^i$ 
19:  end for
20:  !OMP parallel do
21:  Prolongate:  $u^{h_{max}} = I_{h_{max}}^{h_{max}/2} u^{h_{max}/2}$ 
22:  !OMP parallel do
23:  Calculate Residual:  $r^{h_{max}} = r^{h_{max}} - Au^{h_{max}}$ 
24:  !OMP parallel do
25:  Smooth:  $u^{h_{max}} = u^{h_{max}} + Sr^{h_{max}}$ 
26:  END DO ITER

```

---

To relax the data flow constraints, we annotate the entire iterative solver by `ASYNC_REGION` (which will then be converted to an OpenMP parallel section as discussed previously). A careful analysis of the numerical property of the solver suggests that all but two of the synchronization points can be safely removed without severely slowing the convergence. The necessary synchronization points occur immediately after the prolongation operation, but before the residual calculation. Hence, we change all embedded OpenMP parallel DO loops to `ASYNC_DO` loops. As discussed previously, the `ASYNC_DO` loops will result in a partition of the parallel loop iterations, but without implied barrier synchronization. We reinsert barriers immediately before the residual calculation. Figures 1 and 2 (in Section 2) show details for the residual calculation loop. The high-level organization of the `ASYNC_REGION` is shown in the code skeleton in Algorithm 3 below.

The reinserted synchronization points are necessary because, if stale values are used from the interpolated grid, the residual will undoubtedly be higher. Once this higher residual is applied to correct the grid, the difference (in norm) of the current grid to the previous one will also be larger. This error will propagate through each V-cycle iteration, so that the residual will continue to grow

---

**Algorithm 3** Multigrid V-Cycle with ASYNC\_DO loops
 

---

```

1: !$ASYNC_REGION
2: DO iter = 1, number_iter
3: for  $i = h_{max} \dots h_0, i = i/2$  do
4:   !$ASYNC_DO
5:   Coarsen residual:  $r^i = I_{i/2}^i r^{i/2}$ 
6: end for
7: !$ASYNC_DO
8: Zero:  $u^{h_0} = 0$ 
9: !$ASYNC_DO
10: Smooth:  $u^{h_0} = u^{h_0} + Sr^{h_0}$ 
11: for  $i = 2 \dots h_{max}/2, i = 2i$  do
12:   !$ASYNC_DO
13:   Zero:  $u^i = 0$ 
14:   !$ASYNC_DO
15:   Prolongate:  $u^i = I_i^{i/2} u^{i/2}$ 
16:   !$Barrier
17:   !$ASYNC_DO
18:   Calculate Residual:  $r^i = r^i - Au_i$ 
19:   !$ASYNC_DO
20:   Smooth:  $u^i = u^i + Sr^i$ 
21: end for
22: !$ASYNC_DO
23: Prolongate:  $u^{h_{max}} = I_{h_{max}}^{h_{max}/2} u^{h_{max}/2}$ 
24: !$Barrier
25: !$ASYNC_DO
26: Calculate Residual:  $r^{h_{max}} = r^{h_{max}} - Au^{h_{max}}$ 
27: !$ASYNC_DO
28: Smooth:  $u^{h_{max}} = u^{h_{max}} + Sr^{h_{max}}$ 
29: END DO ITER

```

---

indefinitely after a few iterations. The smoothing operation exists to even out sharp differences in the residual, but the effects of a larger magnitude of residual values in general will still exist. Our experiments without the reinserted barriers have turned out poor numerical accuracies and hence confirmed the necessity of these synchronization points.

### 3.1 SOR-preconditioned CG Using ASYNC Loops

A *preconditioned* conjugate gradient method is given in Algorithm 4 below [12]. Preconditioning a system of linear equations is a way to transform the original system into one that is likely to be easier to solve with an iterative solver. Both the efficiency and robustness of iterative techniques can be improved by a good preconditioner. The number of iterations to execute CG are expected to be reduced after preconditioning. The preconditioner  $M$  (in steps 1 and 6) is chosen such that  $M^{-1}$  is a good approximation of  $A^{-1}$ . Also, the system  $Mz = r$  needs to be much easier to solve than the original system  $Ax = b$ , for example,

using Jacobi, Gauss-Seidel, or Successive Overrelaxation. Here, we apply the preconditioner  $M$  to the system  $Ax = b$  from the left, i.e.  $M^{-1}Ax = M^{-1}b$ . Notice in statement 6 of algorithm 4, we compute  $z = M^{-1}r = M^{-1}(b - Ax) = M^{-1}b - M^{-1}Ax$ . Thus  $z$  represents the residual of the transformed system.

---

**Algorithm 4** Preconditioned Conjugate Gradient

---

```

1: Compute  $r_0 = b - Ax_0$ ,  $z_0 = M^{-1}r_0$ ,  $p_0 = z_0$ 
2: for  $j = 0, 1, \dots$  until convergence do
3:    $\alpha_j = (r_j, z_j) / (Ap_j, p_j)$ 
4:    $x_{j+1} = x_j + \alpha_j p_j$ 
5:    $r_{j+1} = r_j - \alpha_j Ap_j$ 
6:    $z_{j+1} = M^{-1}r_{j+1}$ 
7:    $\beta_j = (r_{j+1}, z_{j+1}) / (r_j, z_j)$ 
8:    $p_{j+1} = z_{j+1} + \beta_j p_j$ 
9: end for

```

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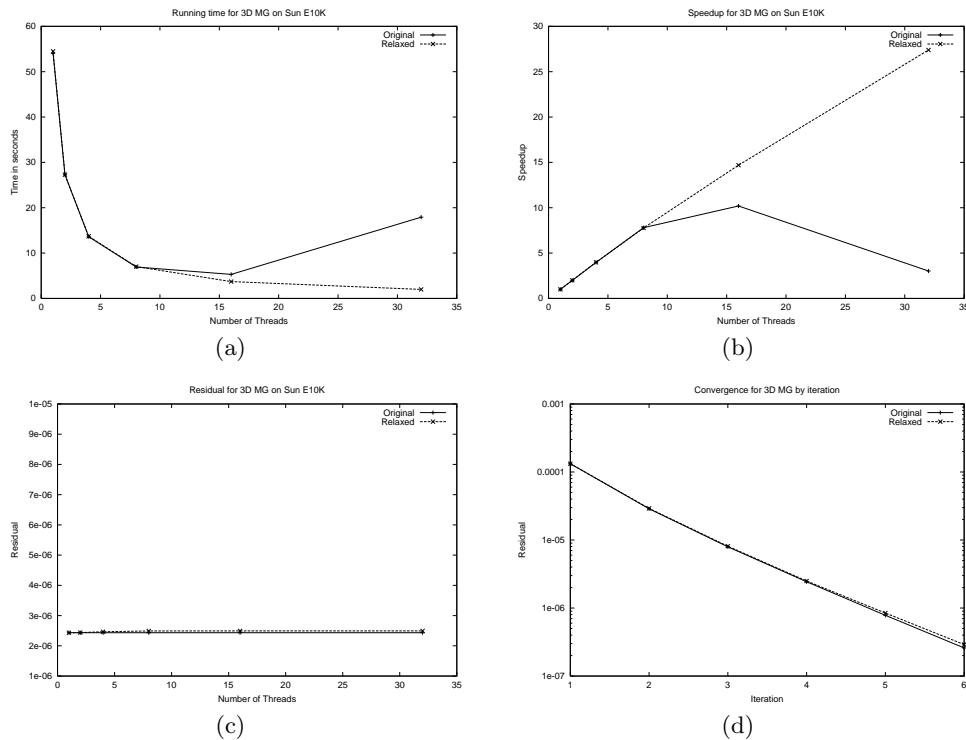
The CG benchmark from NAS estimates the smallest eigenvalue in magnitude of a matrix  $A$  using the inverse power method with shifts. During each iteration, a solution of a system of the form  $Ax = b$  is obtained by calling a CG subroutine. Because here the CG method is being used as a solver inside of another iterative method, it is invoked a fixed number of times. The input matrix is of dimension 14000, and the conjugate gradient method is stopped when the residual norm falls below  $10^{-8}$ . We implemented a point successive overrelaxation (SOR) scheme to serve as a preconditioner for CG. Because the structure of the input matrix is symmetric positive definite but random, the point SOR solver is an appropriate preconditioner. The preconditioner is stopped when the residual norm is less than  $10^{-6}$ .

## 4 Experimental Results

We performed experiments by running the chosen benchmarks on a Sun E10000 which has 54 Ultrasparc II processors (each clocked at 400 Megahertz) and 56 GB of memory. For each data set, tests were run on a differing number of processors, ranging from 1 to 32 in powers of two. With the exception of the residual vs. the number of iterations, all performance data reported here is an average over 10 runs. Since we are still exploring the range of applications for ASYNC loops, the conversion from such loops to OpenMP codes is currently performed manually.

**3D Multigrid** We first use a 256 x 256 x 256 grid size with 4 iterations for the MG benchmark, in order to be consistent with the original benchmark specification for class A problems. Figures 5(a)-5(c) compare the performance and residual after executing four iterations, while figure 5(d) shows that both versions approach convergence at the same rate in the number of iterations shown.



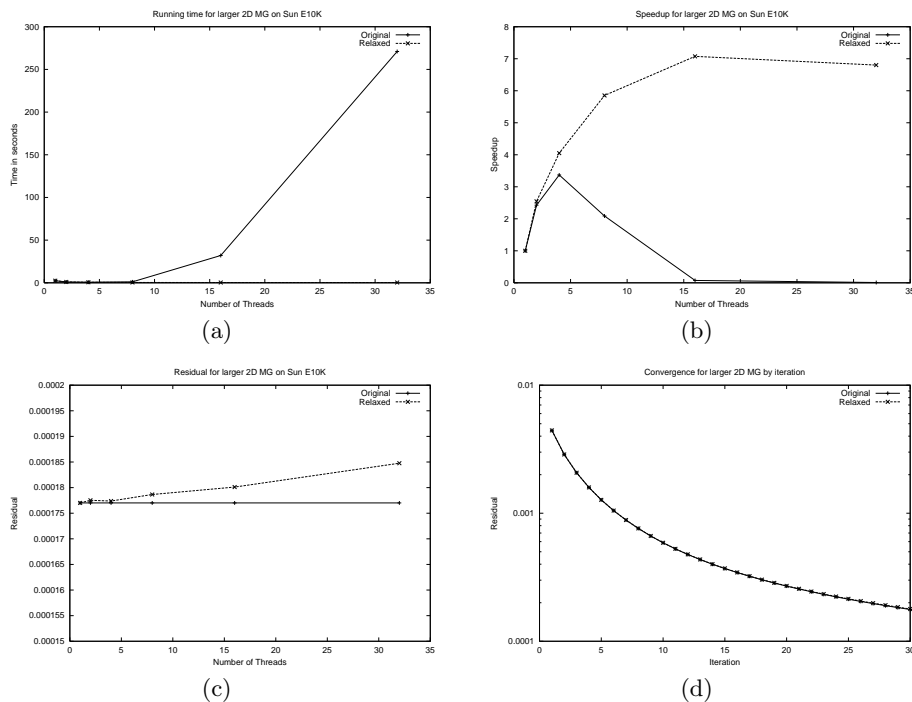


**Fig. 5.** Comparison between strict and relaxed data flow models with MG. (a) Running time using standard 3D grid (b) Parallel speedups (c) Final residual norms (d) Convergence Rates

After just four iterations, a satisfactory residual has been reached. We see that the speedup behavior of the relaxed version is superior to that of the original OpenMP version, in particular with more than eight threads. In addition, although the final residual values are slightly higher than that of the original version, the residuals for the relaxed version are approximately of the same order of magnitude in comparison.

**2D Multigrid** To further study the performance, we use a  $512 \times 512$  grid size for the two dimensional problem. Figures 6(a)-6(c) compare the performance and residual after executing 30 iterations, and figure 6(d) shows that both versions approach convergence at the same rate in the number of iterations given. The results also show that the original version performs quite poorly in terms of parallel speedup. The relaxed version clearly performs better.

**SOR-preconditioned CG** We tested the use of SOR as a preconditioner embedded in the basic conjugate gradient method (see Algorithm 4). The SOR preconditioner was run both in its original OpenMP version with strict data

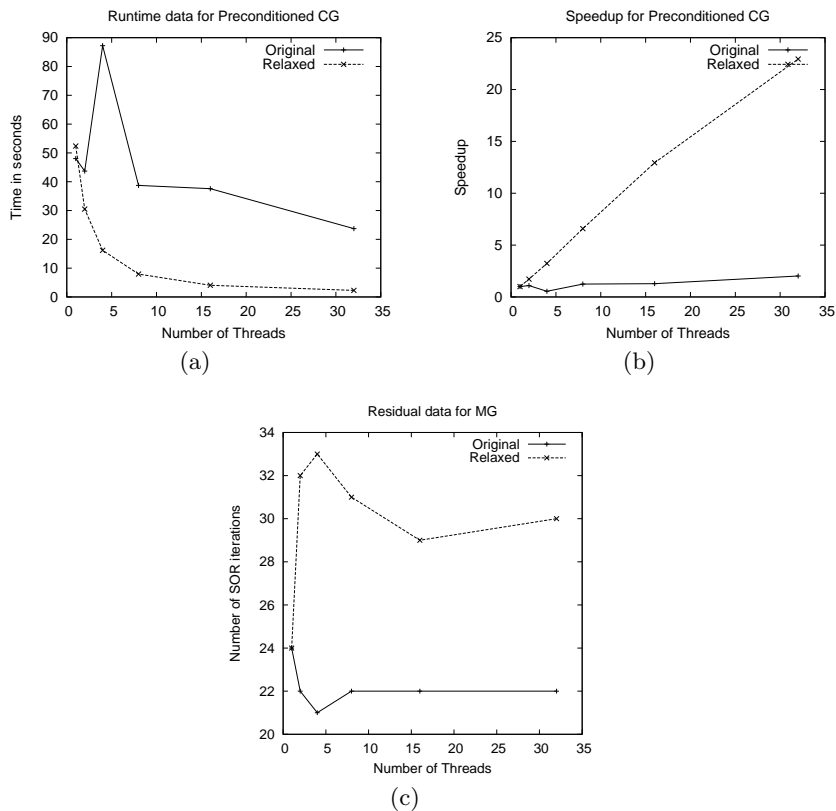


**Fig. 6.** (a) Running time of MG using a 2D grid (b) Parallel speedup (c) Final residual norms (d) Convergence rates

flow and in the `ASYNC_DO` version with relaxed data flow. Figures 7(a) and 7(b) show that the parallel speedups of the relaxed version are much improved over the original version. It is not yet clear why the original version experiences a jump in the running time for four threads. One might observe that the relaxed data flow causes the preconditioner to converge in a greater number of iterations, as figure 7(c) demonstrates. Even as such, the improvement in efficiency over the original version is quite significant.

## 5 Related Work

To the best of our knowledge, this work is the first to propose parallel language constructs to identify loops for execution based on asynchronous algorithms. Although the asynchronous model could be implemented using P-threads or existing OpenMP directives, the way the program is composed will be more tedious and more error-prone to modify. A considerable amount of prior work, on the other hand, has been conducted on theories of asynchronous iterative algorithms in the past decades [7, 3, 4]. Most publications seem to have focused on developing general convergence criteria and tightening convergence conditions, although several have devoted themselves to specific iterative methods such as



**Fig. 7.** Comparison of methods with SOR-preconditioned CG (a) Running times (b) Parallel speedups (c) Number of iterations of first invocation of SOR preconditioner

Jacobi, Gauss-Seidel and SOR [3, 2, 6]. We have not found prior experimentation with multigrid methods using asynchronous algorithms, which we have presented in this paper. Applying the general theory of asynchronous computation model to a concrete iterative numerical method remains a nontrivial problem.

## 6 Conclusion

The number of processors in parallel computers have been steadily increased in recent years. The largest computational clusters now boast over ten thousand processors. Interprocessor data communication is therefore becoming a more serious performance bottleneck. We have proposed three kinds of ASYNC loop constructs to support the asynchronous computation model for iterative solvers, which, when applied successfully, can significantly reduce data communication overhead. The experimental results with 3D and 2D MG benchmarks and with SOR-preconditioned CG benchmark show excellent improvement of the ASYNC versions over the conventional OpenMP versions of these parallel programs in

terms of the parallel execution efficiency. Moreover, the convergence rate has remained approximately the same. While these results are highly encouraging, we observe that deciding which synchronization points to remove remain a nontrivial task which involves careful consideration of the numerical properties of the given iterative solver. We believe that the proposed new loop constructs make it easier for programmers to implement and fine tune asynchronous algorithms.

For our future work, we will further investigate other asynchronous algorithms and hope to see sufficient successes to motivate a full implementation of the proposed ASYNC loops in a parallelizing compiler.

## Acknowledgement

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