ADAPTIVE-SATURATED RNN: REMEMBER MORE WITH LESS INSTABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Orthogonal parameterization has offered a compelling solution to the vanishing gradient problem (VGP) in recurrent neural networks (RNNs). Thanks to orthogonal parameters and non-saturated activation functions, gradients in such models are constrained to unit norms. On the other hand, although the traditional vanilla RNN have been observed to possess higher memory capacity, they suffer from the VGP and perform badly in many applications. This work connects the aforementioned approaches by proposing Adaptive-Saturated RNNs (asRNN), a variant that dynamically adjusts the saturation level between the two. Consequently, asRNN enjoys both the capacity of a vanilla RNN and the training stability of orthogonal RNNs. Our experiments show encouraging results of asRNN on challenging sequence learning benchmarks compared to several strong competitors. We will make the implementation publicly available upon acceptance.

1 MOTIVATION

RNNs is an important model class in Artificial Intelligence (Hyötyniemi, 1996). However, training a vanilla RNN (with tanh activation) is notoriously challenging due to the VGP, in which gradients' magnitudes become *exponentially* smaller (Zhao et al., 2020; Collins et al., 2017). Thus, extensive efforts have been devoted to this phenomenon to develop more stable, effective models such as orthogonal RNNs (Lezcano-Casado & Martínez-Rubio, 2019), and LSTM (Hochreiter & Schmidhuber, 1997). Empirically, orthogonal RNNs show more competitive performances compared to LSTM and vanilla RNN on long-sequence tasks. However, due to non-saturated activations and unitary constrain, their memory capacity is also more limited compared to vanilla RNN (Collins et al., 2017).

This study aims to realize the memory capacity potential of vanilla RNNs by endowing them with the capability to address the VGP of orthogonal RNNs. As a result, we propose the *adaptive-saturated RNN* (asRNN), a vanilla RNN variant that dynamically adjusts the activation's saturation level. Particularly, we observe that, let $f(x;a) = \frac{\tanh(ax)}{a}$, then:

$$\lim_{a\to 0} f(x;a) = x, \quad \text{and} \quad \lim_{a\to 1} f(x;a) = \tanh(x). \tag{1}$$

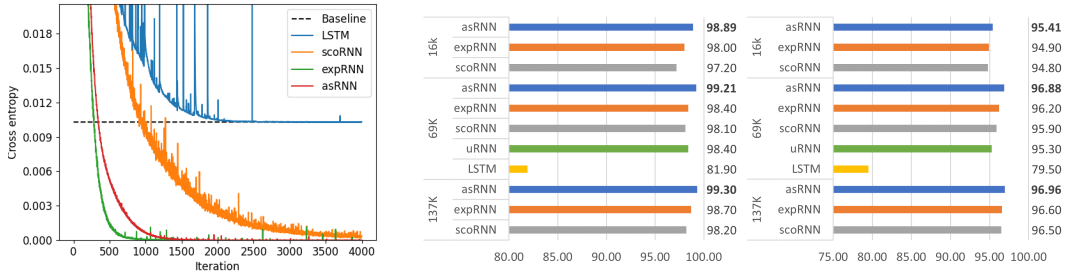
By adjusting a and updating parameters with more freedom than an orthogonal RNN, it is possible to have high memory capacity without being affected by the VGP, thereby maintaining high training stability. Therefore, we can generalize and use $f(x;a)$ as an activation function, which let us to further control gradient norms. Remarkably, adjusting a also relieves the exploding gradient problem (EGP), which is achievable with gradient clipping (Appendix A.4.1). In the next section, we formally introduce asRNN and outline a key result of a condition for avoiding the VGP in asRNN. Finally, we demonstrate asRNN's promising performance on challenging sequence learning problems against several strong competitors.

2 METHODOLOGY

Formulation Based on the observation Eq. 1, we formally define the hidden cell of asRNN as:

$$h_t = \boldsymbol{W}_f^{-1}\tanh(\boldsymbol{W}_f(\boldsymbol{W}_{xh}\boldsymbol{x}_t + \boldsymbol{W}_{hh}\boldsymbol{h}_{t-1} + \boldsymbol{b})), \tag{2}$$

where $\mathcal{W} = \{\boldsymbol{W}_f, \boldsymbol{W}_{xh}, \boldsymbol{W}_{hh}, \boldsymbol{b}\}$ is the set of trainable parameters, $\boldsymbol{W}_f$ introduces an end-to-end composite layer to control the saturation level of asRNN. To ensure the non-singularity of $\boldsymbol{W}_f$,



(a) Copy task ($L = 2000$) (b) Sequential MNIST (c) Permuted MNIST

Figure 1: Results on the long sequence learning task. We report training loss for the Copy task and test errors for the sequential and permuted MNIST.

we parameterize $\boldsymbol{W}_f = \boldsymbol{U}_f \boldsymbol{D}_f$, where $\boldsymbol{U}_f$ is orthogonal, $\boldsymbol{D}_f$ is positively diagonal. Remarkably, we observe that: (i) by fixing $\boldsymbol{W}_f$ to be identity, we recover a vanilla RNN; and (ii) let $\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}$ be orthogonal, fix $\boldsymbol{U}_f$ to be the identity, and let $\boldsymbol{D}_f \to \mathbb{0}$, we recover an orthogonal RNN. From such construction, asRNN not only dynamically adjusts the saturation level but also controls the singular values of the temporal Jacobian (Thm. 2.1), which in turn alleviates the VGP.

Key theoretical result Let $\boldsymbol{w} \in \mathcal{W}$, we define the gradient and Jacobian as (Pascanu et al., 2012): $\frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial \boldsymbol{w}} = \sum_{1 \leq t_1 \leq T} \frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial \boldsymbol{h}_T} \boldsymbol{J}(T, t_1) \frac{\partial \boldsymbol{h}_{t_1}}{\partial \theta}$, where $\boldsymbol{J}(t_2, t_1) = \prod_{t_1 < t \leq t_2} \boldsymbol{J}(t)$ and $\boldsymbol{J}(t) = \boldsymbol{W}_f^{-1} \text{diag}[1 - (\boldsymbol{W}_f \boldsymbol{h}_t)^2] \boldsymbol{W}_f \boldsymbol{W}_{hh}$. The vanishing gradient problem in RNNs is credited to the existence of a temporal Jacobian $\boldsymbol{J}(t_2, t_1) \approx 0$ that bottlenecks the backpropagated signal. Under mild assumptions (Appendix A.2), we show a condition for asRNN where all singular values of temporal Jacobian matrices are lower bounded by 1. Thanks to this, the VGP is alleviated on vanilla RNN.

Theorem 2.1. *Let G and H be respectively the d_h-th degree generalized permutation group and its signed permutation subgroup. Under the assumptions in Appendix A.2, if $||\boldsymbol{D}_f||_2 \leq \frac{arctanh(\sqrt{1 - ||\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}^{-1}||_2})}{(||\boldsymbol{W}_{xh}||_2 C_x + ||\boldsymbol{b}||_\infty) \sum_{i=0}^{t-1} (||\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}||_{\max} + 1)^i}$ and $\min_{\boldsymbol{E} \in G} ||\boldsymbol{W}_{hh} - \boldsymbol{E}||_2 \leq \frac{\sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{D}_f)}{||\boldsymbol{D}_f||_2}$, then*

$$\exists \epsilon \geq 0 : \min_{\boldsymbol{E} \in H} ||\boldsymbol{U}_f - \boldsymbol{E}||_2 \leq \epsilon \to \forall t_2 > t_1 \in \mathbb{N}^* : \sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{J}(t_2, t_1)) \geq 1.$$

Importantly, Zhao et al. (2020) conjectured and showed a scenario where RNNs and LSTM have short-term memories, a problem associated with the VGP. Thm. 2.1 shows another where vanilla RNN does not exhibit the VGP. Hence, the conjecture of Zhao et al. (2020) is suggested to be false.

3 Experiment

To validate the model's memory capacity, we consider the Copy task(Hochreiter & Schmidhuber, 1997), sequential MNIST(LeCun et al., 1998), and permuted MNIST(Goodfellow et al., 2014). Next, we use the Penn Treebank character-level prediction (PTB-c)(Marcus et al., 1993) task to explore the model's expressivity (Kerg et al., 2019; Bojanowski et al., 2016). We benchmark asRNN against the strong orthogonal RNNs with long memories and high trainability such as expRNN(Lezcano-Casado & Martínez-Rubio, 2019), scoRNN(Helfrich et al., 2018), uRNN(Arjovsky et al., 2016), and the popular LSTM(Hochreiter & Schmidhuber, 1997) with high expressivity from the gated mechanism. We follow the setting described in Appendix A.4 and report the results in Fig. 1 and Tab. 1. On long sequence learning tasks (Fig. 1), our asRNN shows excellent performance by converging stably on the Copy task, and achieves better generalization on the sequential and permuted MNIST tasks. On the PTB task, asRNN achieved encouraging results by outperforming all orthogonal RNN baselines, only second to LSTM. Overall, our empirical results

Model	$T = 150$	$T = 300$
LSTM	$\mathbf{1.41 \pm 0.005}$	$\mathbf{1.43 \pm 0.004}$
asRNN	1.46 ± 0.006	1.49 ± 0.005
nnRNN	1.47 ± 0.003	1.49 ± 0.002
expRNN	1.49 ± 0.008	1.52 ± 0.001
EURNN	1.61 ± 0.001	1.62 ± 0.001
RNN-orth	1.62 ± 0.004	1.66 ± 0.006
RNN	2.89 ± 0.002	2.90 ± 0.002

Table 1: Test bit-per-character at PTB-c. The best results are in bold. T denotes the BPTT length.

show that asRNN possesses both high memory capacity and expressivity compared to other non-gated RNNs and can alleviate the EVGP, which corroborates our motivation in Sec. 1.

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A Appendix

A.1 Related work

Long short-term memory. A dominant approach in preventing the exploding and vanishing gradient problem in RNN is with gated mechanisms, such as LSTM (Hochreiter & Schmidhuber, 1997). This model is easily trained and gives good performance on a variety of sequence learning tasks. Despite the fact that LSTM has a lower memory capacity compared to vanilla RNN (Collins et al., 2017), and that it performs badly on long-memory tasks (Helfrich et al., 2018), we include this model for its high effectiveness in language modeling, where the decisive factor is expressivity such as mechanism or hidden size (Bojanowski et al., 2016).

Orthogonal RNN. This class of models addressed the VGP with non-saturated activation functions (e.g. modReLU) and a unitary hidden weight matrix. To constrain the unitarity during gradient descent, scoRNN followed a scaled Cayley transformation, while uRNN and EURNN used pre-selected unitary transformation compositions (Helfrich et al., 2018; Arjovsky et al., 2016; Jing et al., 2017). To compensate for the expressivity loss, expRNN proposed to use the computationally cheap exponential map stemming from Lie group theory (Lezcano-Casado & Martínez-Rubio, 2019). As a result, the gradients grow only *linearly* in sequence length. There is also an initialization scheme proposed for this class to directly solve many long sequence learning tasks (Henaff et al., 2016).

Non-normal RNN. Despite having high trainability, being unitary limits the expressivity of Orthogonal RNNs compared to their free parameters counterparts. Non-normal RNN, which leverages Schur decomposition to acquire non-unit eigenvalues, is proposed to overcome this problem while maintaining the trainability of Orthogonal RNNs (Kerg et al., 2019). Consequently, nnRNN outperforms Orthogonal RNNs on both long sequence learning tasks and language modeling tasks.

A.2 Assumptions

Assumption A.1. *(scale-independent loss) it is* **not** $\forall \epsilon > 0, \exists \delta > 0 : \mathcal{L}(\boldsymbol{y}, \hat{\boldsymbol{y}}) < \epsilon \rightarrow ||\boldsymbol{y} - \hat{\boldsymbol{y}}||_2 < \delta$.

Assumption A.1 prevents the convergence from closing the gap between $||\hat{\boldsymbol{y}}||_2$ and $||\boldsymbol{y}||_2$ by re-scaling the output layer with a factor of $||\boldsymbol{D}_f||_2$, which potentially causes the VGP. As a remark, it is possible to reduce this effect on scale-dependent loss with $\mathcal{L}(\delta^{-1}\boldsymbol{y}, \hat{\boldsymbol{y}})$, for some small hyperparameter $\delta > 0$. We leave this for consecutive works.

Assumption A.2. *(bounded input distribution)* $\exists C_x > 0, \forall t : ||\boldsymbol{x}_t||_\infty \leq C_x$.

In practice, it is common to normalize input with $C_x = 1$ before training neural network-based architectures. Assumption A.2 prevents the absurdity of an infinitely large input saturating asRNN and causing the VGP.

Assumption A.3. *(no nil-potent singular value)* $\sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}) \geq 1$.

Even though Assumption A.3 is required for Theorem 2.1, we observe that it might be unnecessary to prevent the VGP in practice. By relaxing the Theorem 2.1 to the dominant eigenvalue, we might be able to relax Assumption A.3. We leave this for consecutive works.

A.3 Proof of Theorem 2.1

Lemma A.1. *David Kewei Lin (2019) For a diagonal matrix $\boldsymbol{D}$ and a conformable matrix $\boldsymbol{A}$, we have $||\boldsymbol{D}\boldsymbol{A}||_2 \leq ||\boldsymbol{D}||_{\max}||\boldsymbol{A}||_2$.*

Lemma A.2. *Let G and H be respectively the d_h-th degree generalized permutation group and its signed permutation subgroup. Under the assumptions in Appendix A.2, if $||\boldsymbol{D}_f||_2 \leq \dfrac{\text{arctanh}\left(\sqrt{1-||\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}^{-1}||_2}\right)}{(||\boldsymbol{W}_{xh}||_2 C_x + ||\boldsymbol{b}||_\infty)\sum_{i=0}^{t-1}(||\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}||_{\max}+1)^i}$ and $\min_{\boldsymbol{E}\in G}||\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}-\boldsymbol{E}||_2 \leq \dfrac{\sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{D}_f)}{||\boldsymbol{D}_f||_2}$, then*

$$\exists \epsilon(t) \geq 0 : \min_{\boldsymbol{E}\in H}||\boldsymbol{U}_f - \boldsymbol{E}||_2 \leq \epsilon(t) \rightarrow \forall t \in \mathbb{N}^* : \sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{J}(t)) \geq 1.$$

Proof. Let $\boldsymbol{E}_{hh} = \arg\min_{\boldsymbol{E}\in G}||\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}-\boldsymbol{E}||_2$ and $\boldsymbol{R}_{hh} = \boldsymbol{W}_{hh} - \boldsymbol{E}_{hh}$. First we show that $||\boldsymbol{W}_f\boldsymbol{h}_t||_\infty$ is bounded:

$$\begin{aligned}
||\boldsymbol{W}_f\boldsymbol{h}_t||_\infty &= ||\tanh\left(\boldsymbol{W}_f\left(\boldsymbol{W}_{xh}\boldsymbol{x}_t + \boldsymbol{W}_{hh}\boldsymbol{h}_{t-1} + \boldsymbol{b}\right)\right)||_\infty && (3)\\
&= \tanh\left(||\boldsymbol{W}_f\left(\boldsymbol{W}_{xh}\boldsymbol{x}_t + \boldsymbol{W}_{hh}\boldsymbol{h}_{t-1} + \boldsymbol{b}\right)||_\infty\right) && (4)\\
&\leq \tanh\left(||\boldsymbol{W}_f\boldsymbol{W}_{xh}\boldsymbol{x}_t||_\infty + ||\boldsymbol{W}_f\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}\boldsymbol{h}_{t-1}||_\infty + ||\boldsymbol{W}_f\boldsymbol{b}||_\infty\right) && (5)\\
&\leq \tanh\left(||\boldsymbol{D}_f||_2\left(||\boldsymbol{W}_{xh}||_2 C_x + ||\boldsymbol{b}||_\infty\right) + ||\boldsymbol{D}_f\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}\boldsymbol{D}_f^{-1}||_2||\boldsymbol{W}_f\boldsymbol{h}_{t-1}||_\infty\right) && (6)\\
&\leq \tanh\left(||\boldsymbol{D}_f||_2\left(||\boldsymbol{W}_{xh}||_2 C_x + ||\boldsymbol{b}||_\infty\right)\sum_{i=0}^{t-1}||\boldsymbol{D}_f(\boldsymbol{E}_{hh}+\boldsymbol{R}_{hh})\boldsymbol{D}_f^{-1}||_2^i\right) && (7)\\
&\leq \tanh\left(||\boldsymbol{D}_f||_2\left(||\boldsymbol{W}_{xh}||_2 C_x + ||\boldsymbol{b}||_\infty\right)\sum_{i=0}^{t-1}\left(||\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}||_{\max} + \frac{||\boldsymbol{R}_{hh}||_2||\boldsymbol{D}_f||_2}{\sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{D}_f)}\right)^i\right) && (8)\\
&\leq \tanh\left(||\boldsymbol{D}_f||_2\left(||\boldsymbol{W}_{xh}||_2 C_x + ||\boldsymbol{b}||_\infty\right)\sum_{i=0}^{t-1}\left(||\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}||_{\max}+1\right)^i\right) && (9)\\
&\leq 1 - \frac{1}{\sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{W}_{hh})} && (10)
\end{aligned}$$

Let $\boldsymbol{E}_f = \arg\min_{\boldsymbol{E}\in H}||\boldsymbol{U}_f - \boldsymbol{E}||_2, \boldsymbol{R}_f = \boldsymbol{U}_f - \boldsymbol{E}_f, \boldsymbol{D}_t = \text{diag}[1-(\boldsymbol{W}_f\boldsymbol{h}_t)^2]$. Then

$$\begin{aligned}
\sigma_{min}(\boldsymbol{J}(t)) &= \sigma_{\min}\left(\boldsymbol{D}_f^{-1}\boldsymbol{U}_f^\intercal \text{diag}\boldsymbol{D}_t\boldsymbol{U}_f\boldsymbol{D}_f\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}\right) && (11)\\
&\geq \sigma_{\min}\left(\boldsymbol{D}_f^{-1}\left(\boldsymbol{R}_f^\intercal + \boldsymbol{E}_f^\intercal\right)\boldsymbol{D}_t\left(\boldsymbol{R}_f+\boldsymbol{E}_f\right)\boldsymbol{D}_f\right)\sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}) && (12)\\
&\geq \Big(\sigma_{\min}\Big(\boldsymbol{D}_f^{-1}\boldsymbol{E}_f^\intercal\boldsymbol{D}_t\boldsymbol{E}_f\boldsymbol{D}_f\Big) - ||\boldsymbol{D}_f^{-1}\Big(\boldsymbol{E}_f^\intercal\boldsymbol{D}_t\boldsymbol{R}_f + \boldsymbol{R}_f^\intercal\boldsymbol{D}_t\boldsymbol{E}_f + \\
&\quad \boldsymbol{R}_f^\intercal\boldsymbol{D}_t\boldsymbol{R}_f\Big)\boldsymbol{D}_f||_2\Big)\sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}) && (13)\\
&\geq \left(1 - \max_i(\boldsymbol{W}_f\boldsymbol{h}_t)_i^2 - \frac{||\boldsymbol{D}_f||_2^2}{\sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{D}_f)}\left(2||\boldsymbol{R}_f||_2 + ||\boldsymbol{R}_f||_2^2\right)\right)\sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}) && (14)\\
&\geq \left(\frac{1}{\sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{W}_{hh})} - \frac{||\boldsymbol{D}_f||_2^2}{\sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{D}_f)}||\boldsymbol{R}_f||_2\right)\sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}) && (15)
\end{aligned}$$

The rest of the proof follows directly from the previous inequality. □

Theorem 2.1. *Let G and H be respectively the d_h-th degree generalized permutation group and its signed permutation subgroup. Under the assumptions in Appendix A.2, if $||\boldsymbol{D}_f||_2 \leq \frac{arctanh(\sqrt{1-||\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}^{-1}||_2})}{(||\boldsymbol{W}_{xh}||_2 C_x + ||\boldsymbol{b}||_\infty)\sum_{i=0}^{t-1}(||\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}||_{\max}+1)^i}$ and $\min_{\boldsymbol{E}\in G}||\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}-\boldsymbol{E}||_2 \leq \frac{\sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{D}_f)}{||\boldsymbol{D}_f||_2}$, then*

$$\exists \epsilon \geq 0 : \min_{\boldsymbol{E}\in H} ||\boldsymbol{U}_f - \boldsymbol{E}||_2 \leq \epsilon \rightarrow \forall t_2 > t_1 \in \mathbb{N}^* : \sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{J}(t_2,t_1)) \geq 1.$$

Proof. From Lemma A.1 and Lemma A.2, if $\epsilon = \min_t \epsilon(t)$, then $||\boldsymbol{U}_f - \boldsymbol{E}||_2 \leq \epsilon \rightarrow \forall t_2 > t_1 \in \mathbb{N}^* : \sigma_{\min}(\boldsymbol{J}(t_2,t_1)) \geq 1$ □

A.4 Experimental supplementary

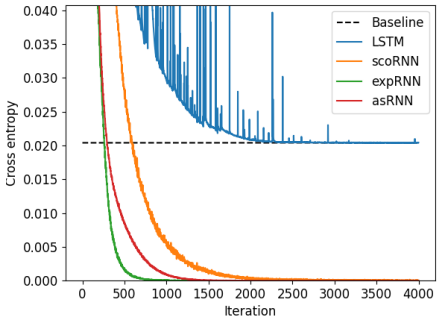

Figure 2: Copy task ($L = 1000$).

Model	T=150	T=300
LSTM	$\mathbf{69.81 \pm 0.001}$	$\mathbf{69.60 \pm 0.0003}$
asRNN	68.93 ± 0.001	68.59 ± 0.001
nnRNN	68.78 ± 0.001	68.52 ± 0.0004
expRNN	68.07 ± 0.15	67.58 ± 0.04
RNN-orth	66.29 ± 0.07	65.53 ± 0.09
EURNN	65.68 ± 0.002	65.55 ± 0.002
RNN	40.01 ± 0.026	39.97 ± 0.025

Table 2: Test accuracy at PTB-c. The best results are in bold. T denotes the BPTT length.

A.4.1 Common setting

The batch size across all experiments was 128. Unless specified otherwise, asRNN is optimized using RMSprop with $\alpha = 0.99$. We report the best results on a similar setup to ours in Jing et al. (2017), Arjovsky et al. (2016), Helfrich et al. (2018), Lezcano-Casado & Martínez-Rubio (2019), and Kerg et al. (2019). For other experiments, we replicate the same setup of Lezcano-Casado & Martínez-Rubio (2019) (copy memory and pixelated MNIST), and of Kerg et al. (2019) (Penn Treebank character-level prediction).

Since no advantage was observed when $\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}$ is updated freely during preliminary empirical testing, this layer is kept strictly orthogonal for the maximum memory-per-parameter capacity. As a result, both $\boldsymbol{U}_f$ and $\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}$ are parameterized as described in Lezcano-Casado & Martínez-Rubio (2019). The diagonal matrix is parameterized as $\boldsymbol{D}_f = \text{diag}(\boldsymbol{d}_f)$, where $\boldsymbol{d}_{f_i} = |s_i| + \epsilon, \boldsymbol{s} \in \mathbb{R}^{d_h}, \epsilon > 0$.

According to Theorem 2.1, we initialize $\boldsymbol{U}_f, \boldsymbol{W}_{hh}$ close to a permutation matrix, such as the identity or those in Henaff et al. (2016) and Helfrich et al. (2018). When a, b, and ϵ are close to zero, asRNN resembles a linear RNN. For this reason, we find the hyperparameter setting of expRNN to be compatible with asRNN. Thus, $\ln(\boldsymbol{W}_{hh})$ uses Henaff initialization (Henaff et al., 2016) for copy memory tasks and Cayley initialization (Helfrich et al., 2018) for other tasks. We also initialize $\boldsymbol{W}_{xh}$ as random semi-orthogonal and $\boldsymbol{b}$ as zero for a greater bound of $\boldsymbol{D}_f$. Ultimately, we initialize $\boldsymbol{s} \sim \mathcal{U}(x; a, b)$, where the optimal settings of a, b, ϵ are task-dependent.

Not only we can avoid the VGP by setting up a, b, ϵ close to zero, but we can also avoid the exploding gradient problem (EGP) by setting a, b, ϵ far from zero (See PTB-c in Table 3). As mitigating the EGP is not our main focus, we use gradient clipping with norm 10 on pixelated MNIST and Penn Treebank tasks, then we select the best hyperparameters for asRNN.

A.4.2 Copy memory task

Copy memory is a synthetic many-to-many classification task first introduced in Hochreiter & Schmidhuber (1997) to test the ability to recall information bits after a very long delay. This task is designed to be extremely difficult for the vanilla RNN due to the VGP (Henaff et al., 2016).

Input samples contain the alphabets 2-9, and the blank and start letters 0, 1, are one-hot encoded into vectors of dim 10. The recalling sequence $\mathcal{A}$ contains the first K letters of the input and are uniformly sampled from the alphabet. It is followed by L blank letters, 1 start letter, and another $K-1$ blank letters. An output sample contains $K+L+1$ blanks letter and the recalling sequence $\mathcal{A}$. The baseline model output $K+L+1$ blanks letter and another $K-1$ letters sampled uniformly of the alphabet, which has the loss of $\frac{K \ln 8}{L+2K}$.

On this task, we benchmark asRNN against the architectures: LSTM, scoRNN, and expRNN. The recalling length K is 10 for both of the experiments in Figure 2 and Figure 1a). The seed on this task is set at 5544 and the number of parameters is fixed at 22K. All experiments are optimized with smoothing constant $\alpha = 0.9$.

A.4.3 PIXELATED MNIST

Pixelated MNIST is a classification task for hand-written numbers (LeCun et al., 1998). It benchmarks RNN sequence learning under a continuous stream of input.

On the unpermuted pixelated MNIST task (sMNIST), each 28×28 image of a decimal digit is pixelated into a 784 input sequence, then is fed into the RNN to produce an embed vector used for classification. On the permuted pixelated MNIST task (pMNIST), a permutation is applied to all samples before they are pixelated.

On this task, we benchmark asRNN against the following architecture: LSTM, scoRNN, expRNN, restricted-capacity unitary RNN (uRNN)(Arjovsky et al., 2016). The seed on this task is set at 5544.

A.4.4 PENN TREEBANK CHARACTER-LEVEL PREDICTION (PTB-C) TASK

Penn Treebank is a corpus that has an alphabet size of 50, including the end of sentence symbol, and is first introduced in (Marcus et al., 1993). We choose this many-to-many character-level modeling task because rather than bottlenecking RNNs' memory capacity, it tests their expressiveness, which includes structural design and the hidden size Bojanowski et al. (2016). Gated mechanisms such as LSTM is known to be effective for PTB-c.

On this task, we benchmark asRNN against the following architecture: LSTM, expRNN, nnRNN (Kerg et al., 2019), EURNN (Jing et al., 2017), modReLU RNN with Glorot initialization (RNN), modReLU RNN with orthogonal initialization (RNN-orth). For the Penn Treebank character-level prediction, each experiment is carried out for 5 repeated trials. On this task, the number of parameters for each model is fixed at 1.32M.

Task	#epoch/iter	d_h	lr	lr $\boldsymbol{W}_{hh}$	a	b	ϵ
Copy memory	4000	138	$2 \cdot 10^{-4}$	10^{-4}	0	0	$2 \cdot 10^{-5}$
sMNIST	70	122	$7 \cdot 10^{-4}$	$7 \cdot 10^{-5}$	$2 \cdot 10^{-2}$	$2 \cdot 10^{-2}$	10^{-2}
sMNIST	70	257	$5 \cdot 10^{-4}$	$5 \cdot 10^{-5}$	$2 \cdot 10^{-2}$	$2 \cdot 10^{-2}$	10^{-2}
sMNIST	70	364	$3 \cdot 10^{-4}$	$3 \cdot 10^{-5}$	$2 \cdot 10^{-2}$	$2 \cdot 10^{-2}$	10^{-2}
pMNIST	70	122	10^{-3}	10^{-4}	$2 \cdot 10^{-2}$	$2 \cdot 10^{-2}$	10^{-2}
pMNIST	70	257	$7 \cdot 10^{-4}$	$7 \cdot 10^{-5}$	$2 \cdot 10^{-2}$	$2 \cdot 10^{-2}$	10^{-2}
pMNIST	70	364	$7 \cdot 10^{-4}$	$7 \cdot 10^{-5}$	$2 \cdot 10^{-2}$	$2 \cdot 10^{-2}$	10^{-2}
PTB-c (T=150)	100	1024	10^{-3}	10^{-3}	$8 \cdot 10^{-1}$	3	0
PTB-c (T=300)	100	1024	10^{-3}	10^{-3}	$8 \cdot 10^{-2}$	3	0

Table 3: Hyperparameters for asRNN.

B CONCLUSION & FUTURE WORK

In this work, we propose asRNN, a novel variant of vanilla RNN. Under mild assumptions and conditions, we show that asRNN does not exhibit the VGP and potentially possesses long memory. We also conduct experiments to demonstrate asRNN superior trainability on tasks requiring high memory capacity and expressivity.

In near future, we plan to extend asRNN to scale-dependent loss (AssumptionA.1). We also aim to reduce the computational cost using non-exponential sigmoids such as $\frac{x}{(1+|x|^k)^{k^{-1}}}$. Ultimately, since memory capacity is observed to be a bottleneck in gated mechanisms (Collins et al., 2017), we hope to extend our work beyond vanilla RNN by investigating whether this problem is related to the VGP and whether we can do anything to change it.