Distributed Online and Bandit Convex Optimization

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Abstract

We study the problems of distributed online and bandit convex optimization against an adaptive adversary. We want to minimize the average regret on M machines that communicate R times intermittently. We show that collaboration is not beneficial if the machines can access gradients of the cost functions at each time step, i.e., they have first-order feedback. In this setting, simple non-collaborative algorithms are min-max optimal. This contrasts with the provable benefit of collaboration when optimizing against a stochastic adversary, which samples the cost functions from fixed distributions. To identify the benefit of collaboration, we consider the harder setting where the machines can only access values of their cost function, i.e., they have bandit feedback. Here, we identify the high-dimensional regime where collaboration is beneficial and may even lead to a linear speedup in the number of machines. Our results bridge the gap between distributed online optimization against stochastic and adaptive adversaries.

1. Introduction

We consider the following distributed regret minimization problem on M machines with horizon T:

$$\min_{\{x_t^m \in \mathcal{X}\}} \frac{1}{M} \sum_{m\in[M],t\in[T]} f_t^m(x_t^m) - \min_{x^\star \in \mathcal{X}} \frac{1}{M} \sum_{m\in[M],t\in[T]} f_t^m(x^\star), \tag{1}$$

where f_t^m is a non-negative, convex cost function observed by machine m at time t, and x_t^m is the model it plays. This formulation captures distributed learning problems where the data is generated in real-time but isn't stored, e.g., mobile keyboard prediction [1, 12] and self-driving vehicles [8, 19]. We want to solve this problem in the *intermittent communication* (IC) setting [27, 29] where the machines work in parallel and are allowed to communicate R times with T time steps in between. The IC setting captures the expensive nature of communication in collaborative learning, such as in cross-device federated learning [15, 17].

The IC setting has been widely studied over the past decade [2, 3, 5, 6, 22, 24, 25, 30–32]. Most existing works consider the ***"stochastic"*** setting where $\{f_t^m\}$'s are sampled from a fixed distribution specified in advance. However, real-world applications may have distribution shifts, unmodeled perturbations, or even an adversarial sequence of cost functions, all of which violate the fixed distribution assumption. To alleviate this issue, in this paper, we extend our understanding of distributed online optimization to ***"adaptive"*** adversaries that could potentially generate a worst-case sequence of cost functions. Although some recent works have underlined the importance of the adaptive setting [4, 10, 11, 16, 18], our understanding of the optimal regret guarantees for problem (1) is still lacking.

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We first show that, under usual assumptions, there is no benefit of collaboration if all the machines have access to the gradients, a.k.a. first-order feedback for their cost functions. Specifically, in this setting, running online gradient descent on each device without any communication is min-max optimal for problem (1). Thus, we move to the harder setting of bandit convex optimization with two-point feedback. We study a natural variant of FEDAVG equipped with a stochastic gradient estimator due to Shamir [21]. We show that collaboration reduces the variance of the stochastic gradient estimator and is thus beneficial for problems of high enough dimension. We prove a linear speedup in the number of machines for high-dimensional problems, which mimics the stochastic setting [26, 29].

2. Setting

This section introduces notations, definitions, and assumptions used in our analysis.

Notation. We denote the horizon by $T = KR$. $\succeq, \preceq, \cong$ denote inequalities up to numerical constants. We denote the average function by $f_t(\cdot) := \frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]} f_t^m(\cdot)$ for all $t \in [T]$. We use $\mathbb{1}_A$ to denote the indicator function for the event A. Our model space is denoted by $\mathcal{X} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^d$. We denote the expected averaged regret by $Reg(M, K, R)$ in all the settings.

Function classes. We consider two common [13, 20] function classes in this paper: (i) $\boldsymbol{\mathcal{F}^{G,B}}$, the class of convex, differentiable, non-negative and G-Lipschitz functions, i.e., $\forall x, y \in \mathcal{X}$, $|f(x) - f(y)| \leq G\,\|x-y\|_2$, with bounded optima, i.e., $\|x^\star\|_2 \leq B$, $\forall\, x^\star \in \arg\min_{x\in\mathcal{X}} f(x)$; (ii) $\boldsymbol{\mathcal{F}^{H,B}}$, the class of convex, differentiable, non-negative and H-smooth functions, i.e., $\forall x, y \in \mathcal{X}$, $\|\nabla f(x) - \nabla f(y)\|_2 \leq H\,\|x-y\|_2$, with bounded optima. $\boldsymbol{\mathcal{F}^{G,B}}$ includes linear cost functions, while $\boldsymbol{\mathcal{F}^{H,B}}$ consists of quadratic functions. We also define $\boldsymbol{\mathcal{F}^{G,H,B}} := \boldsymbol{\mathcal{F}^{G,B}} \cap \boldsymbol{\mathcal{F}^{H,B}}$.

Adversary model. Note that in the most general setting, each machine will face arbitrary functions from a class $\mathcal{F}$ at each time step. Our algorithmic results are for this general model, which is usually referred to as an **"adaptive"** adversary. We also consider a weaker **"stochastic"** adversary model to aid comparison. More specifically, the adversary cannot adapt to the sequence of the models used by each machine but must fix a distribution in advance for each machine, i.e., $\forall m \in [M]$, $\mathcal{D}_m \in \Delta(\mathcal{F})$ such that at each time $t \in [T]$, $f_t^m \sim \mathcal{D}_m$. An example of this easier model is distributed stochastic optimization where $f_t^m(\cdot) := f(\cdot; z_t^m \sim \mathcal{D}_m) \in \mathcal{F}$ for $f(\cdot;\cdot) \in \mathcal{F}$.

Oracle model. We consider three kinds of access to the cost functions in this paper. Each machine $m \in [M]$ for all time steps $t \in [T]$ has access to one of the following: (i) **gradient** of f_t^m at a single point, a.k.a., first-order feedback; (ii) **stochastic gradient** g_t^m of f_t^m at a single point, such that it is unbiased $\mathbb{E}[g_t^m(x)] = \nabla f_t^m(x)$ and has bounded variance $\mathbb{E}\left[\|g_t^m(x) - \nabla f_t^m(x)\|_2^2\right] \leq \sigma^2$, $\forall\, x \in \mathcal{X}$; and (iii) **function values** of f_t^m at two different points, a.k.a., two-point bandit feedback.

We consider two more assumptions controlling how similar the cost functions look across machines, and the average regret at the comparator [23]:

Assumption 1 [1] $\forall\, t \in [T], x \in \mathcal{X}$, $\frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]} \|\nabla f_t^m(x) - \nabla f_t(x)\|_2^2 \leq \zeta^2 \leq 4G^2$.

1. Woodworth et al. [28] consider a more relaxed assumption in the stochastic setting: $\forall\, x \in \mathcal{X}$, $\frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]} \|\mathbb{E}_{z\sim\mathcal{D}_m}[\nabla f(x;z)] - \nabla f(x)\|_2^2 \leq \zeta^2 \leq 4G^2$ for $f(\cdot) := \frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]} \mathbb{E}_{z\sim\mathcal{D}_m}[\nabla f(x;z)]$.

Assumption 2 $\forall\, x^\star \in \arg\min_{x\in\mathcal{X}} \sum_{t\in[T]} f_t(x),\ \frac{1}{T}\sum_{t\in[T]} f_t(x^\star) \le F_\star$. *For non-negative functions in $\mathcal{F}^{G,H,B}$, this implies $\frac{1}{T}\sum_{t\in[T]} \|\nabla f_t(x^\star)\|_2^2 \ \le\ HF_\star$ (c.f., Lemma 4.1 [23]).*

Min-max regret. We can finally define our problem class. We use $\mathcal{P}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}) := \mathcal{F}^{\otimes MKR}$ to denote all selections of MKR functions from a class $\mathcal{F}$. We use the argument ζ, $F_\star$ to further restrict this to selections that satisfy Assumptions 1 and 2 respectively. Furthermore, with a slight abuse of notation, we use the superscript 1 to denote first-order feedback and $(0,2)$ to denote two-point zeroth-order feedback to the cost functions. In this paper, we consider four problem classes: $\mathcal{P}^1_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,D},\zeta)$, $\mathcal{P}^{0,2}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,D},\zeta)$, $\mathcal{P}^1_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{H,B},\zeta,F_\star)$, $\mathcal{P}^{0,2}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,H,B},\zeta,F_\star)$. And we are interested in characterizing the min-max regret for these classes. In particular, for a problem class $\mathcal{P}$, we want to characterize up to numerical constants the following quantity:

$$\mathcal{R}(\mathcal{P}) := \min_{\mathcal{A}} \max_{P\in\mathcal{P}} \mathbb{E}_{\mathcal{A}} \left(\frac{1}{MT} \sum_{t\in[T],m\in[M]} f_t^m(x_t^m) - \min_{x\in\mathcal{X}} \frac{1}{M} \sum_{t\in[T],m\in[M]} f_t^m(x) \right), \tag{2}$$

where $\mathcal{A}$ is a randomized algorithm producing models x_t^m's. For stochastic adversaries, the expectation is also taken over the randomness of sampling from the distributions $\mathcal{D}_m \in \Delta(\mathcal{F})$.

3. Collaboration doesn't help with First-order Feedback

We first consider the class $\mathcal{P}^1_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,B},\zeta)$. Note the following bound is always true for any stream of functions and sequence of models:

$$\frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]} \left(\sum_{t\in[KR]} f_t^m(x_t^m) - \min_{x^m\in\mathcal{X}} \sum_{t\in[KR]} f_t^m(x^m) \right) \ge \frac{1}{M} \sum_{t\in[KR],m\in[M]} f_t^m(x_t^m) - \min_{x\in\mathcal{X}} \sum_{t\in[KR]} f_t(x).$$

This means we can upper bound regret in equation 1 by running a non-collaborative algorithm such as online gradient descent (OGD) on each machine. In other words:

$$\mathcal{R}\left(\mathcal{P}^1_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,D},\zeta)\right) \preceq \mathcal{R}\left(\mathcal{P}^1_{1,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,D})\right) \cong \frac{GB}{\sqrt{T}}. \tag{3}$$

The min-max rate for a single machine follows classical results using vanilla OGD (c.f., Theorem 3.1 in [13]). But **can collaborative algorithms beat this natural baseline? No!**

Consider the problem where the functions don't vary across the machines but may change with time. This problem satisfies Assumption 1 with $\zeta = 0$. In this problem, the machines jointly see only T different functions but can make M first-order queries to the functions at each time step. However, these additional queries are not useful as there is a known sample-complexity lower bound of $GB/\sqrt{T}$ for $\mathcal{P}^1_{1,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,B})$ (c.f., Theorem 3.2 [13]) which holds for any number of first-order queries at each time step. This implies that,

$$\frac{GB}{\sqrt{T}} \cong \mathcal{R}\left(\mathcal{P}^1_{1,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,D})\right) \preceq \mathcal{R}\left(\mathcal{P}^1_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,B},\zeta)\right). \tag{4}$$

Combining equations (3) and (4), we conclude that $\mathcal{R}\left(\mathcal{P}^1_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,B},\zeta)\right) \cong GB/\sqrt{T}$. Or in other words, there is no benefit of collaboration when the machines have first-order feedback.

We recall several interesting functions, such as quadratics, that don't lie in $\mathcal{F}^{G,B}$ but do lie in $\mathcal{F}^{H,B}$. To understand the latter class we look at problems in $\mathcal{P}^1_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{H,B}, \zeta, F_\star)$. In the single machine setting, we know that OGD incurs a regret of $HB^2/T + \sqrt{HF_\star}B/\sqrt{T}$ (c.f., Theorem 3 [23]). This serves as the non-collaborative baseline. Unfortunately, there is again a matching sample complexity lower bound for $\mathcal{P}^1_{1,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{H,B}, F_\star)$ (c.f., Theorem 4 [26]). Using a similar argument as before, we can obtain that

$$\mathcal{R}(\mathcal{P}^1_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{H,B}, \zeta, F_\star)) \cong \frac{HB^2}{T} + \frac{\sqrt{HF_\star}B}{\sqrt{T}},$$

which suggests that the regret doesn't improve with collaboration, either.

Thus, when the machines have first-order feedback for their own objectives, they do not benefit from collaboration. The commonality between these problems is that even when the functions are the same across the machines, the hardest instances within the problem class do not benefit from the additional gradient accesses. This suggests that we should consider settings where machines have weaker oracles than first-order and may benefit through collaboration. One such setting is with stochastic first-order oracles because, with additional stochastic gradients, the machines can reduce the variance of their gradient estimator. This is one mechanism through which collaboration helps in the stochastic setting [26, 29], and we see next that it naturally arises in bandit convex optimization.

4. Online Local SGD Algorithm

Algorithm 1: FEDOSGD (η)

Initialize $x_0^m = 0$ on all machines $m \in [M]$
for $t \in \{0, \ldots, KR-1\}$ **do**
  for $m \in [M]$ ***in parallel*** **do**
    Use model x_t^m and **incur loss $f_t^m(x_t^m)$**
    Obtain stochastic gradient estimate g_t^m at point x_t^m
    if $(t+1) \mod K = 0$ **then**
      Communicate to server: $(x_t^m - \eta \cdot g_t^m)$
      On server $x_{t+1} \leftarrow \frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}(x_t^m - \eta \cdot g_t^m)$
      Communicate to machine: $x_{t+1}^m \leftarrow x_{t+1}$
    else
      $x_{t+1}^m \leftarrow x_t^m - \eta \cdot g_t^m$

In this section, we study distributed bandit convex optimization with two-point feedback [7, 21]. We analyze the online variant of the FEDAVG or LOCAL-SGD algorithm, which is common in the stochastic setting. We call the algorithm FEDOSGD and describe it in Algorithm 1. Our goal is to understand the performance of this algorithm for $\mathcal{P}^{0,2}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,B}, \zeta)$ and $\mathcal{P}^{0,2}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,H,B}, \zeta, F_\star)$. But before considering the zeroth-order oracle, we first consider the first-order stochastic oracle as an intermediate step. In particular, we first look at the problems in the class $\mathcal{P}^{1,\sigma}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,B}, \zeta)$.

Lemma 1 *Consider the problem class $\mathcal{P}^{1,\sigma}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,B},\zeta)$. If we choose $\eta = \frac{B}{G\sqrt{T}} \cdot \min\left\{1, \frac{G\sqrt{M}}{\sigma}, \frac{\sqrt{G}}{\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\sqrt{\sigma K}}, \frac{\sqrt{G}}{\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\sqrt{\zeta K}}\right\}$, then the models $\{x_t^m\}_{t,m=1}^{T,M}$ of Algorithm 1 satisfy the following guarantee:*

$$\frac{1}{MKR}\sum_{t\in[KR],m\in[M]} \mathbb{E}\left[f_t^m(x_t^m) - f_t^m(x^\star)\right] \preceq \frac{GB}{\sqrt{KR}} + \frac{\sigma B}{\sqrt{MKR}} + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\left(\frac{\sqrt{\sigma G}B}{\sqrt{R}} + \frac{\sqrt{\zeta G}B}{\sqrt{R}}\right),$$

where $x^\star \in \arg\min_{x\in\mathbb{R}^d}\sum_{t\in[KR]} f_t(x)$, and the expectation is w.r.t. the stochastic gradients.

Note that when $K = 1$, the upper bound in Lemma 1 reduces to the first two terms, both of which are known to be optimal due to lower bounds in the stochastic online setting (c.f., Appendix A). We now use this lemma to guarantee bandit two-point feedback oracles for the same function class. We recall that one can obtain a stochastic gradient for a *"smoothed-version"* $\hat{f}$ of a Lipschitz function f at any point $x \in \mathcal{X}$, using two function value calls to f around the point x [7, 21].

More specifically, we consider the following gradient estimator, which was originally proposed by Shamir [21]

$$g_u(x) := \frac{d(f(x+\delta u) - f(x-\delta u))u}{2\delta} \in \mathbb{R}^d, \tag{5}$$

where $\delta > 0$ is a small parameter, and u is a random unit vector. For $\hat{f}(x) := \mathbb{E}_u[f(x+\delta u)]$, we have (c.f., Lemmas 3 and 5 [21]),

$$\mathbb{E}_u[g_u(x)] = \nabla\hat{f}(x) \quad \text{and} \quad \mathbb{E}_u\left[\left\|g_u(x) - \nabla\hat{f}(x)\right\|_2^2\right] \preceq dG^2.$$

Equipped with this gradient estimator, we can prove the following guarantee for $\mathcal{P}^{1,\sigma}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,D},\zeta)$.

Theorem 2 *Consider the problem class $\mathcal{P}^{0,2}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,B},\zeta)$. If we use the gradient estimator in (5) and the stepsize $\eta = \frac{B}{G\sqrt{T}}\cdot\min\left\{1, \frac{\sqrt{M}}{\sqrt{d}}, \frac{1}{\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\sqrt{K}d^{1/4}}\right\}$, then the models $\{x_t^{m,j}\}_{t,m,j=1}^{T,M,2}$ of Algorithm 1 satisfy the following guarantee:*

$$\frac{1}{2MKR}\sum_{t\in[KR],m\in[M],j\in[2]} \mathbb{E}\left[f_t^m(x_t^{m,j}) - f_t^m(x^\star)\right] \preceq \frac{GB}{\sqrt{KR}} + \frac{GB\sqrt{d}}{\sqrt{MKR}} + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{GBd^{1/4}}{\sqrt{R}},$$

where $x^\star \in \arg\min_{x\in\mathbb{R}^d}\sum_{t\in[KR]} f_t(x)$, and the expectation is w.r.t. the choice of function queries.

According to Theorem 2, when $K = 1$, the bound reduces to the first two terms, which are known to be tight for two-point bandit feedback [7, 13] (see Appendix A), **making FEDOSGD optimal**. When $K > 1$, we would like to compare our results to the non-collaborative baseline as we did in section 3. Using the gradient estimator in (5) proposed by Shamir [21], the non-collaborative baseline gets regret $\mathcal{O}\left(GB\sqrt{d}/\sqrt{KR}\right)$. Thus, as long as $d \succeq K^2$, FEDOSGD is better than the non-collaborative baseline. Furthermore, if $d \succeq K^2M^2$, then second term in the upper bound dominates, and FEDOSGD gets a *"linear speed-up"* in the number of machines.

Note that the lipschitzness assumption is crucial to the two-point gradient estimator in equation 5. While there are gradient estimators that don't require lipschitzness or bounded gradients [9], they do require stronger assumptions such as bounded function values. To avoid making these assumptions, we skip looking at the problems in $\mathcal{P}^{0,2}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{H,B}, \zeta, F_\star)$ and directly look at the problems in $\mathcal{P}^{0,2}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,H,B}, \zeta, F_\star)$. Similar to before, we start by looking at $\mathcal{P}^{1,\sigma}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,H,B}, \zeta, F_\star)$.

Lemma 3 *Consider the problem class $\mathcal{P}^{1,\sigma}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,H,B}, \zeta, F_\star)$. The models $\{x_t^m\}_{t,m=1}^{T,M}$ of Algorithm 1 with $\eta = \min\left\{\frac{1}{H}, \frac{B}{\sqrt{HF_\star T}}, \frac{B\sqrt{M}}{\sigma}, \frac{B}{\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\sqrt{G\sigma K}}, \frac{B}{\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\sqrt{G\zeta K}}\right\}$ satisfy the following regret guarantee:*

$$\frac{1}{MKR}\sum_{t\in[KR],m\in[M]} \mathbb{E}\left[f_t^m(x_t^m) - f_t^m(x^\star)\right] \preceq \frac{HB^2}{KR} + \frac{\sqrt{HF_\star}B}{\sqrt{KR}} + \frac{\sigma B}{\sqrt{MKR}} + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\left(\frac{\sqrt{G\sigma}B}{\sqrt{R}} + \frac{\sqrt{G\zeta}B}{\sqrt{R}}\right),$$

where $x^\star \in \arg\min_{x\in\mathbb{R}^d}\sum_{t\in[KR]} f_t(x)$, and the expectation is w.r.t. the stochastic gradients.

According to Lemma 3, when $K = 1$ and $\sigma = 0$, the upper bound is optimal (see Appendix B). Using the gradient estimator in (5) and plugging $\sigma \le G\sqrt{d}$, we get the following result.

Theorem 4 *Consider the problem $\mathcal{P}^{0,2}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,H,B}, \zeta, F_\star)$. If we use the gradient estimator in (5) and the stepsize $\eta = \min\left\{\frac{1}{2H}, \frac{B}{\sqrt{HF_\star T}}, \frac{B\sqrt{M}}{G\sqrt{d}}, \frac{B}{\mathbb{1}_{K>1}G\sqrt{K}d^{1/4}}\right\}$, the outputs $\{x_t^{m,j}\}_{t,m,j=1}^{T,M,2}$ of Algorithm 1 satisfy the following regret guarantee:*

$$\frac{1}{2MKR}\sum_{t\in[KR],m\in[M],j\in[2]} \mathbb{E}\left[f_t^m(x_t^{m,j}) - f_t^m(x^\star)\right] \preceq \frac{HB^2}{KR} + \frac{\sqrt{HF_\star}B}{\sqrt{KR}} + \frac{GB\sqrt{d}}{\sqrt{MKR}} + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{GBd^{1/4}}{\sqrt{R}},$$

where $x^\star \in \arg\min_{x\in\mathbb{R}^d}\sum_{t\in[KR]} f_t(x)$, and the expectation is w.r.t. the choice of function queries.

According to Theorem 4, when $K = 1$, the upper bound is tight [7, 26] showing that **FEDOSGD is optimal** (see Appendix B). Recall that in this setting, the non-collaborative baseline obtains the regret [23] as $\mathcal{O}\left(HB^2/(KR) + \sqrt{HF_\star}B/\sqrt{KR} + GB\sqrt{d}/\sqrt{KR}\right)$. Thus, the benefit of collaboration through FEDOSGD for high-dimensional problems in $\mathcal{P}^{0,2}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,H,B}, \zeta, F_\star)$ is identical to whats we discussed for $\mathcal{P}^{0,2}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,B}, \zeta, F_\star)$.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we show that, in the adaptive bandit setting, the benefit of collaboration is very similar to the stochastic setting, where the collaboration is useful when: (i) There is stochasticity in the problem and (ii) The variance of the gradient estimators is *"high"* [29] and reduces with collaboration. There are several open questions and directions: **(i)** Does collaboration provably not help for the smaller class $\mathcal{P}^{1}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,H,B}, \zeta, F_\star)$? This might require new proof techniques. **(ii)** Is the final term tight in Theorems 2 and 4? **(iii)** How to use the heterogeneity assumption to develop a gradient estimator? Currently, we lose the tight dependence on ζ in our final results because $\sigma \preceq G\sqrt{d}$ for the estimator in equation 5. **(iv)** How to obtain second-order methods in the distributed online setting, especially in the intermittent communication setting? **(v)** For stochastic linear bandits, collaborative methods have been shown to attain optimal regret with very few rounds of communication [14]. What structures in the problem can we further exploit to reduce communication?

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Appendix A. Proof of Theorem 2

We first recall and prove Lemma 1:

Lemma 5 *Consider the problem class $\mathcal{P}^{1,\sigma}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,B},\zeta)$. If we choose $\eta = \frac{B}{G\sqrt{T}} \cdot \min\left\{1, \frac{G\sqrt{M}}{\sigma}, \frac{\sqrt{G}}{\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\sqrt{\sigma K}}, \frac{\sqrt{G}}{\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\sqrt{\zeta K}}\right\}$, then the models $\{x_t^m\}_{t,m=1}^{T,M}$ of Algorithm 1 satisfy the following guarantee:*

$$\frac{1}{MKR}\sum_{t\in[KR],m\in[M]} \mathbb{E}\left[f_t^m(x_t^m) - f_t^m(x^\star)\right] \preceq \frac{GB}{\sqrt{KR}} + \frac{\sigma B}{\sqrt{MKR}} + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\left(\frac{\sqrt{\sigma G}B}{\sqrt{R}} + \frac{\sqrt{\zeta G}B}{\sqrt{R}}\right),$$

where $x^\star \in \arg\min_{x\in\mathbb{R}^d}\sum_{t\in[KR]} f_t(x)$, and the expectation is w.r.t. the stochastic gradients.

Proof Consider any time step $t \in [KR]$ and define ghost iterate $\bar{x}_t = \frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]} x_t^m$ (which not might actually get computed). Note that if $K = 1$, the machines calculate the stochastic gradient at the same point, $\bar{x}_t$. Then using the update rule of Algorithm 1, we can get the following:

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathbb{E}_t\left[\|\bar{x}_{t+1} - x^\star\|_2^2\right] &= \mathbb{E}_t\left[\left\|\bar{x}_t - \frac{\eta_t}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m) - x^\star + \frac{\eta_t}{M}\sum_{m=1}^{M}\left(\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m) - g_t^m(x_t^m)\right)\right\|_2^2\right] \\
&= \|\bar{x}_t - x^\star\|_2^2 + \frac{\eta_t^2}{M^2}\left\|\sum_{m\in[M]}\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\right\|_2^2 - \frac{2\eta_t}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\langle \bar{x}_t - x^\star, \nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\rangle + \frac{\eta_t^2\sigma^2}{M} \\
&= \|\bar{x}_t - x^\star\|_2^2 + \frac{\eta_t^2}{M^2}\left\|\sum_{m\in[M]}\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\right\|_2^2 - \frac{2\eta_t}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\langle x_t^m - x^\star, \nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\rangle \\
&\quad + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{2\eta_t}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\langle x_t^m - \bar{x}_t, \nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\rangle + \frac{\eta_t^2\sigma^2}{M} \\
&\le \|\bar{x}_t - x^\star\|_2^2 + \frac{\eta_t^2}{M^2}\left\|\sum_{m\in[M]}\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\right\|_2^2 - \frac{2\eta_t}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\left(f_t^m(x_t^m) - f_t^m(x^\star)\right) \\
&\quad + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{2\eta_t}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\langle x_t^m - \bar{x}_t, \nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\rangle + \frac{\eta_t^2\sigma^2}{M},
\end{aligned}$$

where $\mathbb{E}_t$ is the expectation conditioned on the filtration at time t under which x_t^m's are measurable, and the last inequality is due to the convexity of each function. Re-arranging this leads to

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}(f_t^m(x_t^m)-f_t^m(x^\star)) &\le \frac{1}{2\eta_t}\left(\|\bar{x}_t-x^\star\|_2^2-\mathbb{E}_t\left[\|\bar{x}_{t+1}-x^\star\|_2^2\right]\right)+\frac{\eta_t}{2M^2}\left\|\sum_{m\in[M]}\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\right\|_2^2\\ &\quad+\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\langle x_t^m-\bar{x}_t,\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\rangle+\frac{\eta_t\sigma^2}{2M}\\ &\le \frac{1}{2\eta_t}\left(\|\bar{x}_t-x^\star\|_2^2-\mathbb{E}_t\left[\|\bar{x}_{t+1}-x^\star\|_2^2\right]\right)+\frac{\eta_t}{2}\left(G^2+\frac{\sigma^2}{M}\right)\\ &\quad+\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{G}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\mathbb{E}\left[\|x_t^m-\bar{x}_t\|_2\right]. \end{aligned}\tag{6}$$

The last inequality comes from each function's G-Lipschitzness. For the last term in (6), we can upper bound it similar to lemma 8 in Woodworth et al. [28] to get that

$$\frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\mathbb{E}\left[\|x_t^m-\bar{x}_t\|_2\right]\le(\sigma+2\zeta)\sum_{t'=\tau(t)}^{\tau(t)+K-1}\eta_{t'},\tag{7}$$

where $\tau(t)$ maps t to the last time step when communication happened. Plugging (7) into (6) and choosing a constant step-size η, and taking full expectation we get

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\mathbb{E}\left[f_t^m(x_t^m)-f_t^m(x^\star)\right] &\le \frac{1}{2\eta}\left(\left\|\mathbb{E}\left[\bar{x}_t-x^\star\right]^2\right\|_2-\mathbb{E}\left[\|\bar{x}_{t+1}-x^\star\|_2^2\right]\right)\\ &\quad+\frac{\eta}{2}\left(G^2+\frac{\sigma^2}{M}\right)+\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot G(\sigma+2\zeta)K\eta.\end{aligned}$$

Summing this over time $t\in[KR]$ we get,

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M],t\in[T]}\mathbb{E}\left[f_t^m(x_t^m)-f_t^m(x^\star)\right] &\preceq \frac{\|\bar{x}_0-x^\star\|_2^2}{\eta}+\eta\left(G^2+\frac{\sigma^2}{M}+\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\sigma GK+\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\zeta GK\right)T\\ &\preceq \frac{B^2}{\eta}+\eta\left(G^2+\frac{\sigma^2}{M}+\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\sigma GK+\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\zeta GK\right)T.\end{aligned}$$

Finally choosing,

$$\eta=\frac{B}{G\sqrt{T}}\cdot\min\left\{1,\frac{G\sqrt{M}}{\sigma},\frac{\sqrt{G}}{\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\sqrt{\sigma K}},\frac{\sqrt{G}}{\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\sqrt{\zeta K}}\right\},$$

we can obtain,

$$\frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M],t\in[T]}\mathbb{E}\left[f_t^m(x_t^m)-f_t^m(x^\star)\right]\preceq GB\sqrt{T}+\sqrt{\sigma G}B\sqrt{KT}+\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\sqrt{G\zeta}B\sqrt{KT}+\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{\sigma B\sqrt{T}}{\sqrt{M}}.\tag{8}$$

Dividing by KR finishes the proof. ■

Now we are ready to prove Theorem 2.

Theorem 2 *Consider the problem class $\mathcal{P}^{0,2}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,B},\zeta)$. If we use the gradient estimator in (5) and the stepsize $\eta = \frac{B}{G\sqrt{T}}\cdot\min\left\{1, \frac{\sqrt{M}}{\sqrt{d}}, \frac{1}{\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\sqrt{K}d^{1/4}}\right\}$, then the models $\{x_t^{m,j}\}_{t,m,j=1}^{T,M,2}$ of Algorithm 1 satisfy the following guarantee:*

$$\frac{1}{2MKR}\sum_{t\in[KR],m\in[M],j\in[2]}\mathbb{E}\left[f_t^m(x_t^{m,j}) - f_t^m(x^\star)\right] \preceq \frac{GB}{\sqrt{KR}} + \frac{GB\sqrt{d}}{\sqrt{MKR}} + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{GBd^{1/4}}{\sqrt{R}},$$

where $x^\star \in \arg\min_{x\in\mathbb{R}^d}\sum_{t\in[KR]} f_t(x)$, and the expectation is w.r.t. the choice of function queries.

Proof First, we consider smoothed functions

$$\hat{f}_t^m(x) := \mathbb{E}_{u\sim Unif(S_{d-1})}[f_t^m(x+\delta u)],$$

for some $\delta > 0$ and S_{d-1} denoting the euclidean unit sphere. Based on the gradient estimator in (5) proposed by Shamir [21] (which can be implemented with two-point bandit feedback) and Lemma 1, we can get the following regret guarantee (noting that $\sigma \le c_1\sqrt{d}G$ for a numerical constant c_1, c.f., [21]):

$$\mathbb{E}\left[\frac{1}{MKR}\sum_{t\in[KR],m\in[M]}\hat{f}_t^m(\hat{x}_t^m)\right] - \frac{1}{MKR}\sum_{t\in[KR],m\in[M]}\hat{f}_t^m(x^\star) \preceq \frac{GB}{\sqrt{KR}} + \frac{GB\sqrt{d}}{\sqrt{MKR}} + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{GBd^{1/4}}{\sqrt{R}},$$

where the expectation is w.r.t. the stochasticity in the stochastic gradient estimator. To transform this into a regret guarantee for f we need to account for two things:

1. The difference between the smoothed function $\hat{f}$ and the original function f. This is easy to handle because both these functions are pointwise close, i.e., $\sup_{x\in\mathcal{X}}|f(x) - \hat{f}(x)| \le G\delta$.

2. The difference between the points $\hat{x}_t^m$ at which the stochastic gradient is computed for $\hat{f}_t^m$ and the actual points $x_t^{m,1}$ and $x_t^{m,2}$ on which we incur regret while making zeroth-order queries to f_t^m. This is also easy to handle because due to the definition of the estimator in 5, $x_t^{m,1}, x_t^{m,1} \in B_\delta(\hat{x}_t^m)$, where $B_\delta(x)$ is the L_2 ball of radius δ around x.

In light of the last two observations, the average regret between the smoothed and original functions only differs by a factor of $2G\delta$, i.e.,

$$\begin{aligned}
&\mathbb{E}\left[\frac{1}{2MKR}\sum_{t\in[KR],m\in[M],j\in[2]} f_t^m(x_t^{m,j})\right] - \frac{1}{MKR}\sum_{t\in[KR],m\in[M]} f_t^m(x^\star) \\
&\qquad \preceq G\delta + \frac{GB}{\sqrt{KR}} + \frac{GB\sqrt{d}}{\sqrt{MKR}} \\
&\qquad\quad + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{GBd^{1/4}}{\sqrt{R}} \\
&\qquad \preceq \frac{GB}{\sqrt{KR}} + \frac{GB\sqrt{d}}{\sqrt{MKR}} + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{GBd^{1/4}}{\sqrt{R}},
\end{aligned}$$

where the last inequality is due to the choice of δ such that $\delta \preceq \frac{Dd^{1/4}}{\sqrt{R}}\left(1 + \frac{d^{1/4}}{\sqrt{MK}}\right)$. ■

Appendix B. Proof of Theorem 4

We first restate and prove Lemma 3:

Lemma 6 *Consider the problem class $\mathcal{P}^{1,\sigma}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,H,B}, \zeta, F_\star)$. The models $\{x_t^m\}_{t,m=1}^{T,M}$ of Algorithm 1 with $\eta = \min\left\{\frac{1}{H}, \frac{B}{\sqrt{HF_\star T}}, \frac{B\sqrt{M}}{\sigma}, \frac{B}{\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\sqrt{G\sigma K}}, \frac{B}{\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\sqrt{G\zeta K}}\right\}$ satisfy the following regret guarantee:*

$$\frac{1}{MKR}\sum_{t\in[KR],m\in[M]} \mathbb{E}\left[f_t^m(x_t^m) - f_t^m(x^\star)\right] \preceq \frac{HB^2}{KR} + \frac{\sqrt{HF_\star}B}{\sqrt{KR}} + \frac{\sigma B}{\sqrt{MKR}} + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\left(\frac{\sqrt{G\sigma}B}{\sqrt{R}} + \frac{\sqrt{G\zeta}B}{\sqrt{R}}\right),$$

where $x^\star \in \arg\min_{x\in\mathbb{R}^d}\sum_{t\in[KR]} f_t(x)$, and the expectation is w.r.t. the stochastic gradients.

Proof Consider any time step $t \in [KR]$ and define ghost iterate $\bar{x}_t = \frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]} x_t^m$ (which not might actually get computed). Then using the update rule of Algorithm 1, we can get:

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathbb{E}_t\left[\|\bar{x}_{t+1} - x^\star\|_2^2\right] &= \mathbb{E}_t\left[\left\|\bar{x}_t - \frac{\eta_t}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m) - x^\star + \frac{\eta_t}{M}\sum_{m=1}^{M}\left(\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m) - g_t^m(x_t^m)\right)\right\|_2^2\right], \\
&= \|\bar{x}_t - x^\star\|_2^2 + \frac{\eta_t^2}{M^2}\left\|\sum_{m\in[M]}\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\right\|_2^2 - \frac{2\eta_t}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\langle \bar{x}_t - x^\star, \nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\rangle + \frac{\eta_t^2\sigma^2}{M} \\
&= \|\bar{x}_t - x^\star\|_2^2 + \frac{\eta_t^2}{M^2}\left\|\sum_{m\in[M]}\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\right\|_2^2 - \frac{2\eta_t}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\langle x_t^m - x^\star, \nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\rangle \\
&\quad + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{2\eta_t}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\langle x_t^m - \bar{x}_t, \nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\rangle + \frac{\eta_t^2\sigma^2}{M} \\
&\le \|\bar{x}_t - x^\star\|_2^2 + \frac{\eta_t^2}{M^2}\left\|\sum_{m\in[M]}\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\right\|_2^2 - \frac{2\eta_t}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\left(f_t^m(x_t^m) - f_t^m(x^\star)\right) \\
&\quad + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{2\eta_t}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\langle x_t^m - \bar{x}_t, \nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\rangle + \frac{\eta_t^2\sigma^2}{M},
\end{aligned}$$

where $\mathbb{E}_t$ is the expectation taken with respect to the filtration at time t, and the last line comes from the convexity of each function. Re-arranging this and using the self-bounding property (c.f.,

Lemma 4.1 [23]) leads to

$$\frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}(f_t^m(x_t^m)-f_t^m(x^\star)) \le \frac{1}{2\eta_t}\left(\|\bar{x}_t-x^\star\|_2^2-\mathbb{E}_t\left[\|\bar{x}_{t+1}-x^\star\|_2^2\right]\right)+\frac{\eta_t}{2M^2}\left\|\sum_{m\in[M]}\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\right\|_2^2$$
$$+\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\langle x_t^m-\bar{x}_t,\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\rangle+\frac{\eta_t\sigma^2}{2M}$$
$$\le \frac{1}{2\eta_t}\left(\|\bar{x}_t-x^\star\|_2^2-\mathbb{E}_t\left[\|\bar{x}_{t+1}-x^\star\|_2^2\right]\right)+\frac{\eta_t H}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}(f_t^m(x_t^m)-f_t^m(x^\star))$$
$$+\frac{\eta_t H}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}f_t^m(x^\star)+\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\langle x_t^m-\bar{x}_t,\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\rangle+\frac{\eta_t\sigma^2}{2M}.$$

Assuming $\eta_t \le \frac{1}{2H}$ with further re-arranging leads to

$$\frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}(f_t^m(x_t^m)-f_t^m(x^\star)) \le \frac{1}{\eta_t}\left(\|\bar{x}_t-x^\star\|_2^2-\mathbb{E}_t\left[\|\bar{x}_{t+1}-x^\star\|_2^2\right]\right)+\frac{\eta_t H}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}f_t^m(x^\star)$$
$$+\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{2}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\langle x_t^m-\bar{x}_t,\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\rangle+\frac{\eta_t\sigma^2}{M}. \tag{9}$$

We can bound the red term after taking expectation and then bounding the consensus term similar to Lemma 8 in Woodworth et al. [28] as follows

$$\frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\mathbb{E}\left[\langle x_t^m-\bar{x}_t,\nabla f_t^m(x_t^m)\rangle\right] \le \frac{G}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\mathbb{E}\left[\|x_t^m-\bar{x}_t\|_2\right]$$
$$\le G(\sigma+2\zeta)\sum_{t'=\tau(t)}^{\tau(t)+K-1}\eta_{t'}, \tag{10}$$

where $\tau(t)$ maps t to the last time step when communication happened. Plugging back equation (10) into (9), after taking expectation, applying tower rule, and re-arranging gives the following

$$\frac{1}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}\mathbb{E}\left[f_t^m(x_t^m)-f_t^m(x^\star)\right] \le \frac{1}{\eta_t}\left(\mathbb{E}\|\bar{x}_t-x^\star\|_2^2-\mathbb{E}\left[\|\bar{x}_{t+1}-x^\star\|_2^2\right]\right)+\frac{\eta_t H}{M}\sum_{m\in[M]}f_t^m(x^\star)$$
$$+\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot 2G(\sigma+2\zeta)\sum_{t'=\tau(t)}^{\tau(t)+K-1}\eta_{t'}+\frac{\eta_t\sigma^2}{M}.$$

Now using a constant step-size $\eta \le 1/(2H)$ and summing over time

$$Reg(M,K,R) \le \frac{B^2}{\eta}+\eta HTF_\star+2\eta G(\sigma+2\zeta)KT+\eta T\frac{\sigma^2}{M}$$
$$=\frac{B^2}{\eta}+\eta T\left(HF_\star+\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot 2G\sigma K+\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot 4G\zeta K+\frac{\sigma^2}{M}\right).$$

In particular, choosing $\eta = \min\left\{\frac{1}{2H}, \frac{B}{\sqrt{HF_\star T}}, \frac{B}{\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\sqrt{2G\sigma K}}, \frac{B}{2\mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\sqrt{G\zeta K}}, \frac{B\sqrt{M}}{\sigma}\right\}$ this simplifies to (ignoring numerical constants)

$$Reg(M,K,R) \leq HB^2 + B\sqrt{HF_\star KR} + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot BK\sqrt{G\sigma R} + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot BK\sqrt{G\zeta R} + \frac{\sigma B\sqrt{KR}}{\sqrt{M}}. \tag{11}$$

This gives averaged regret (ignoring numerical constants),

$$\frac{Reg(M,K,R)}{KR} \leq \frac{HB^2}{KR} + \frac{\sqrt{HF_\star}B}{\sqrt{KR}} + \frac{\sigma B}{\sqrt{MKR}} + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\left(\frac{\sqrt{G\sigma}B}{\sqrt{R}} + \frac{\sqrt{G\zeta}B}{\sqrt{R}}\right). \tag{12}$$

■

It is now straightforward to prove Theorem 4 similar to the proof for Theorem 2 by replacing σ^2 with $G^2 d$:

Theorem 4 *Consider the problem $\mathcal{P}^{0,2}_{M,K,R}(\mathcal{F}^{G,H,B}, \zeta, F_\star)$. If we use the gradient estimator in (5) and the stepsize $\eta = \min\left\{\frac{1}{2H}, \frac{B}{\sqrt{HF_\star T}}, \frac{B\sqrt{M}}{G\sqrt{d}}, \frac{B}{\mathbb{1}_{K>1}G\sqrt{K}d^{1/4}}\right\}$, the outputs $\{x_t^{m,j}\}_{t,m,j=1}^{T,M,2}$ of Algorithm 1 satisfy the following regret guarantee:*

$$\frac{1}{2MKR}\sum_{t\in[KR],m\in[M],j\in[2]} \mathbb{E}\left[f_t^m(x_t^{m,j}) - f_t^m(x^\star)\right] \preceq \frac{HB^2}{KR} + \frac{\sqrt{HF_\star}B}{\sqrt{KR}} + \frac{GB\sqrt{d}}{\sqrt{MKR}} + \mathbb{1}_{K>1}\cdot\frac{GBd^{1/4}}{\sqrt{R}},$$

where $x^\star \in \arg\min_{x\in\mathbb{R}^d}\sum_{t\in[KR]} f_t(x)$, and the expectation is w.r.t. the choice of function queries.