

# Deep Learning with Nontrivial Constraints

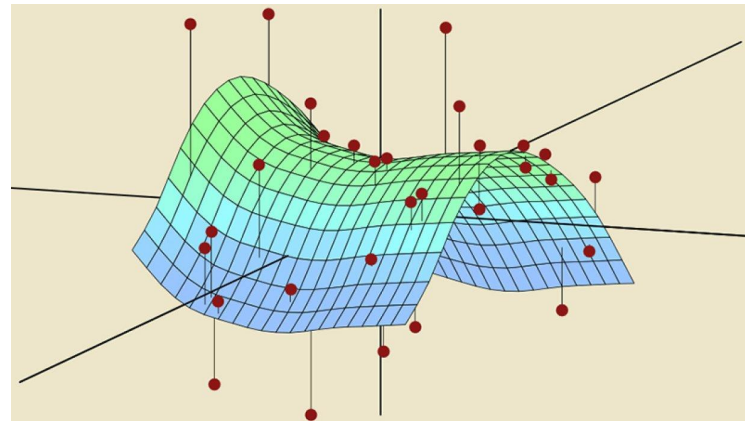
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Computer Science & Engineering  
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities  
Oct 31, 2025

**2025 Annual Midwest Optimization Meeting @ UND**



# Three fundamental questions in DL



- **Approximation:** is it powerful, i.e., the  $\mathcal{H}$  large enough for all possible weights?

- **Optimization:** how to solve

$$\min_{\mathbf{w}'_i, \mathbf{b}'_i} \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \ell[\mathbf{y}_i, \{\text{NN}(\mathbf{w}_1, \dots, \mathbf{w}_k, b_1, \dots, b_k)\}(\mathbf{x}_i)]$$

- **Generalization:** does the learned NN work well on “similar” data?

# Isn't it solved?

## Base class

CLASS `torch.optim.Optimizer(params, defaults)` [Source]

Base class for all optimizers.

### • WARNING

Parameters need to be specified as collections consistent between runs. Examples of objects and iterators over values of dictionaries.

Parameters:

- **params** (*iterable*) – an iterable of `Tensor`s that should be optimized.
- **defaults** – (dict): a dict containing default values for the optimizer when a parameter group doesn't specify

## Algorithms

Adadelta

Implements Adadelta algorithm.

Adagrad

Implements Adagrad algorithm.

Adamax

Implements Adamax algorithm (a variant of Adam based on infinity norm).

ASGD

Implements Averaged Stochastic Gradient Descent.

L-BFGS

Implements L-BFGS algorithm, heavily inspired by `minFunc`.

NAdam

Implements NAdam algorithm.

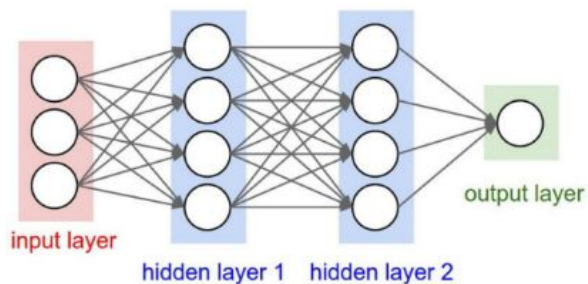
RAdam

Implements RAdam algorithm.

Algorithm

# When DL meets constraints

Artificial neural networks



Unconstrained optimization

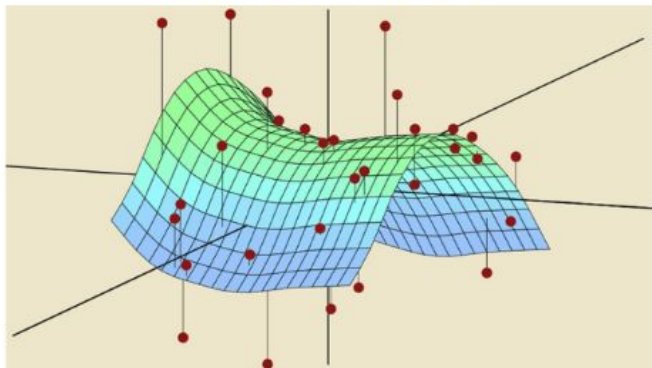
$$\min_{w'_i s, b'_i s} \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \ell [y_i, \{\text{NN}(w_1, \dots, w_k, b_1, \dots, b_k)\}(x_i)]$$
$$\min_x f(x)$$

**“Solved”**

Constrained optimization

$$\min_x f(x) \quad \text{s. t. } g(x) \leq 0$$

**largely “unsolved”**



used to approximate nonlinear functions

# This talk is about GAPS

$$\min_x f(x) \quad \text{s.t. } g(x) \leq 0$$

largely “unsolved”



An imaginary chat between a PhD student working in deep learning (**DLP**) and a PhD student working in optimization (**OP**)

DLP: Man, I've solved a constrained DL problem recently

OP: Oh, that's a hard problem

DLP: Really? I actually did it

OP: How?

DLP: My problem is  $\min_x f(x)$ , s.t.  $g(x) \leq 0$ . I put  $g(x)$  as a penalty and then call ADAM

OP: Are you sure it works?

DLP: Yes, the performance is improved and my paper is published at ICML

OP: Why don't you try augmented Lagrangian methods?

DLP: No implementation in Pytorch. Is it possible we work out some theory about my method?

OP: I think it's hard. It's not convex

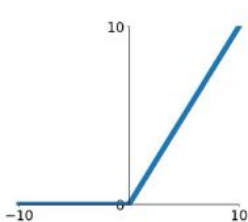
# Outline

## Constrained deep learning: CDL

- **What, how, and why for CDL**
- No good solvers for CDL yet
- Granso and PyGranso
- PyGranso in action
- Outlook

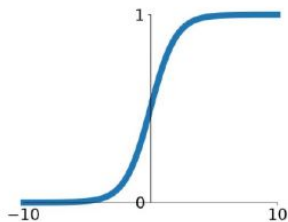
# DL with simple constraints

## Embedding constraints into DL models



**ReLU**  
(Rectified Linear Unit)

**Nonnegativity**



**Sigmoid**

**[0, 1]**

$$\mathbf{z} \mapsto \left[ \frac{e^{z_1}}{\sum_j e^{z_j}}, \dots, \frac{e^{z_p}}{\sum_j e^{z_j}} \right]^T$$

**Softmax**

**Nonnegativity and summed to 1**

# DL with nontrivial constraints

- Robustness evaluation
- Imbalanced learning
- Topology optimization
- Contrastive learning

More examples: A1

## **Deep Learning with Nontrivial Constraints: Methods and Applications**

**Chuan He<sup>1</sup>, Ryan Devera<sup>1</sup>, Wenjie Zhang<sup>1</sup>, Ying Cui<sup>2</sup>, Zhaosong Lu<sup>3</sup> and Ju Sun<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Computer Science and Engineering, University of Minnesota

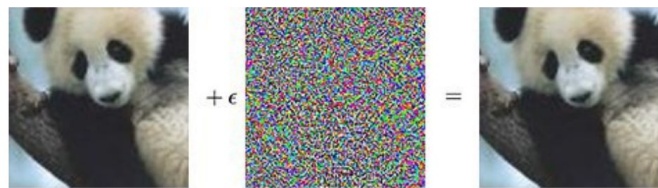
<sup>2</sup>Industrial Engineering and Operations Research, University of California, Berkeley

<sup>3</sup>Industrial and Systems Engineering, University of Minnesota

{he000233, dever120, zhan7867}@umn.edu, yingcui@berkeley.edu, {zhaosong, jusun}@umn.edu



# Robustness evaluation (RE)



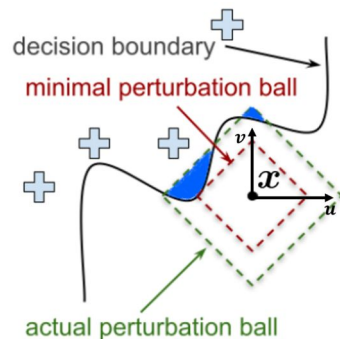
"panda"

$x$

$\delta$

"gibbon"

$x'$



Maximize loss function

$$\max_{x'} \ell(y, f_{\theta}(x'))$$

$$\text{s. t. } d(x, x') \leq \epsilon, \quad x' \in [0, 1]^n$$

Allowable perturbation

Valid image

Minimize robustness radius

$$\min_{x'} d(x, x')$$

$$\text{s. t. } \max_{i \neq y} f_{\theta}^i(x') \geq f_{\theta}^y(x'), \quad x' \in [0, 1]^n$$

Change the predicted class

Valid image

# Projected gradient descent (PGD) for RE

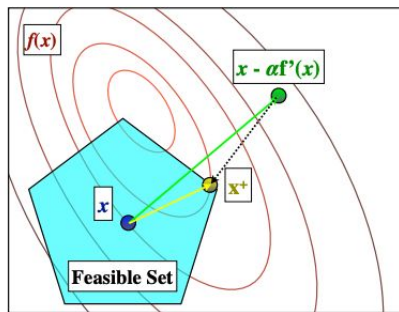
$$\min_{\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{Q}} f(\mathbf{x})$$

$$\mathbf{x}_{k+1} = P_{\mathcal{Q}}\left(\mathbf{x}_k - \alpha_k \nabla f(\mathbf{x}_k)\right)$$

Step size

$$P_{\mathcal{Q}}(\mathbf{x}_0) = \arg \min_{\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{Q}} \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_0\|_2^2$$

Projection operator



**Key hyperparameters:**

- (1) step size
- (2) iteration number

$$\max_{\mathbf{x}'} \ell(\mathbf{y}, f_{\theta}(\mathbf{x}'))$$

s. t.  $d(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{x}') \leq \varepsilon, \quad \mathbf{x}' \in [0, 1]^n$

---

## Algorithm 1 APGD

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```

1: Input:  $f, S, x^{(0)}, \eta, N_{\text{iter}}, W = \{w_0, \dots, w_n\}$ 
2: Output:  $x_{\max}, f_{\max}$ 
3:  $x^{(1)} \leftarrow P_S(x^{(0)} + \eta \nabla f(x^{(0)}))$ 
4:  $f_{\max} \leftarrow \max\{f(x^{(0)}), f(x^{(1)})\}$ 
5:  $x_{\max} \leftarrow x^{(0)}$  if  $f_{\max} \equiv f(x^{(0)})$  else  $x_{\max} \leftarrow x^{(1)}$ 
6: for  $k = 1$  to  $N_{\text{iter}} - 1$  do
7:    $z^{(k+1)} \leftarrow P_S(x^{(k)} + \eta \nabla f(x^{(k)}))$ 
8:    $x^{(k+1)} \leftarrow P_S\left(x^{(k)} + \alpha(z^{(k+1)} - x^{(k)})\right. \\ \left. + (1 - \alpha)(x^{(k)} - x^{(k-1)})\right)$ 
9:   if  $f(x^{(k+1)}) > f_{\max}$  then
10:     $x_{\max} \leftarrow x^{(k+1)}$  and  $f_{\max} \leftarrow f(x^{(k+1)})$ 
11:   end if
12:   if  $k \in W$  then
13:     if Condition 1 or Condition 2 then
14:        $\eta \leftarrow \eta/2$  and  $x^{(k+1)} \leftarrow x_{\max}$ 
15:     end if
16:   end if
17: end for

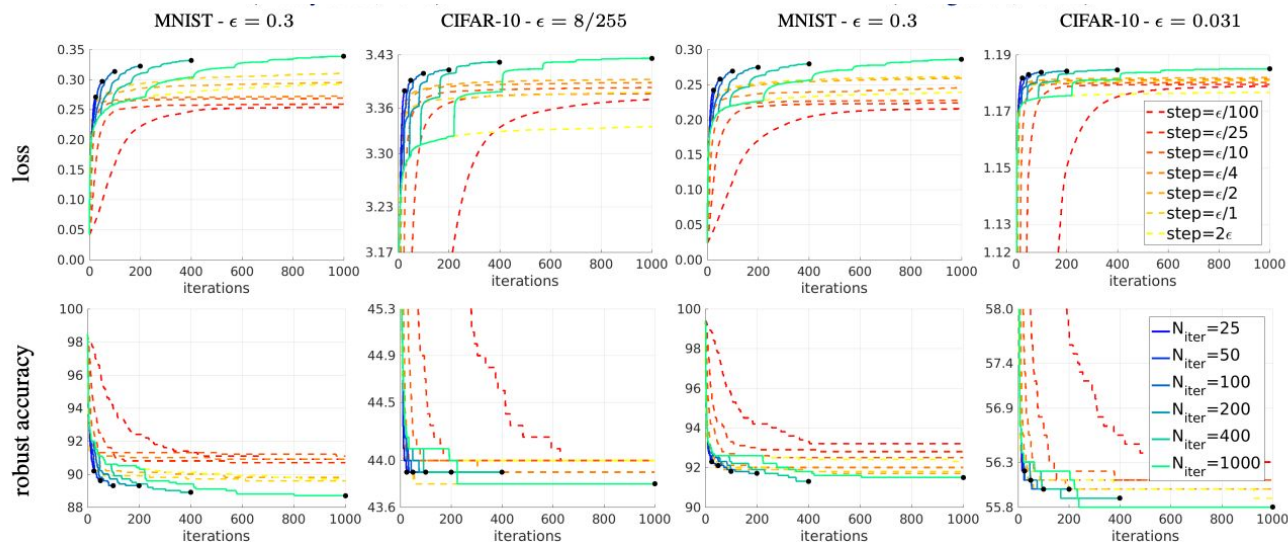
```

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**Ref** [https://angms.science/doc/CVX/CVX\\_PGD.pdf](https://angms.science/doc/CVX/CVX_PGD.pdf)  
<https://www.cs.ubc.ca/~schmidtm/Courses/5XX-S20/S5.pdf>

Reliable evaluation of adversarial robustness with an ensemble of diverse parameter-free attacks. Croce, F., Hein, M., ICML 2020  
<https://arxiv.org/pdf/2003.01690.pdf>

# Problem with projected gradient descent



$$\begin{aligned} & \max_{\mathbf{x}'} \ell(\mathbf{y}, f_{\theta}(\mathbf{x}')) \\ & \text{s.t. } d(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{x}') \leq \epsilon, \quad \mathbf{x}' \in [0, 1]^n \end{aligned}$$

Tricky to set:  
iteration number & step size  
i.e., **tricky to decide where to stop**

# Robustness evaluation: penalty methods for complicated d (perceptual attack)

$$\begin{aligned} & \max_{\mathbf{x}'} \ell(\mathbf{y}, f_{\theta}(\mathbf{x}')) \\ \text{s. t. } & d(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{x}') \leq \epsilon, \quad \mathbf{x}' \in [0, 1]^n \end{aligned}$$

$$d(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{x}') \doteq \|\phi(\mathbf{x}) - \phi(\mathbf{x}')\|_2$$

where  $\phi(\mathbf{x}) \doteq [\hat{g}_1(\mathbf{x}), \dots, \hat{g}_L(\mathbf{x})]$

**perceptual distance**

**Projection onto the constraint is complicated**

## Penalty methods

$$\max_{\tilde{\mathbf{x}}} \mathcal{L}(f(\tilde{\mathbf{x}}), y) - \lambda \max(0, \|\phi(\tilde{\mathbf{x}}) - \phi(\mathbf{x})\|_2 - \epsilon)$$

Solve it for each fixed  $\lambda$  and then increase  $\lambda$

---

### Algorithm 2 Lagrangian Perceptual Attack (LPA)

---

```

1: procedure LPA(classifier network  $f(\cdot)$ , LPIPS distance  $d(\cdot, \cdot)$ , input  $\mathbf{x}$ , label  $y$ , bound  $\epsilon$ )
2:    $\lambda \leftarrow 0.01$ 
3:    $\tilde{\mathbf{x}} \leftarrow \mathbf{x} + 0.01 * \mathcal{N}(0, 1)$   $\triangleright$  initialize perturbations with random Gaussian noise
4:   for  $i$  in  $1, \dots, S$  do  $\triangleright$  we use  $S = 5$  iterations to search for the best value of  $\lambda$ 
5:     for  $t$  in  $1, \dots, T$  do  $\triangleright T$  is the number of steps
6:        $\Delta \leftarrow \nabla_{\tilde{\mathbf{x}}} [\mathcal{L}(f(\tilde{\mathbf{x}}), y) - \lambda \max(0, d(\tilde{\mathbf{x}}, \mathbf{x}) - \epsilon)]$   $\triangleright$  take the gradient of (5)
7:        $\hat{\Delta} = \Delta / \|\Delta\|_2$   $\triangleright$  normalize the gradient
8:        $\eta = \epsilon * (0.1)^{t/T}$   $\triangleright$  the step size  $\eta$  decays exponentially
9:        $m \leftarrow d(\tilde{\mathbf{x}}, \tilde{\mathbf{x}} + h\hat{\Delta})/h$   $\triangleright m \approx$  derivative of  $d(\tilde{\mathbf{x}}, \cdot)$  in the direction of  $\hat{\Delta}$ ;  $h = 0.1$ 
10:       $\tilde{\mathbf{x}} \leftarrow \tilde{\mathbf{x}} + (\eta/m)\hat{\Delta}$   $\triangleright$  take a step of size  $\eta$  in LPIPS distance
11:    end for
12:    if  $d(\tilde{\mathbf{x}}, \mathbf{x}) > \epsilon$  then
13:       $\lambda \leftarrow 10\lambda$   $\triangleright$  increase  $\lambda$  if the attack goes outside the bound
14:    end if
15:  end for
16:   $\tilde{\mathbf{x}} \leftarrow \text{PROJECT}(d, \tilde{\mathbf{x}}, \mathbf{x}, \epsilon)$ 
17:  return  $\tilde{\mathbf{x}}$ 
18: end procedure

```

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# Problem with penalty methods

Method	cross-entropy loss		margin loss	
	Viol. (%) ↓	Att. Succ. (%) ↑	Viol. (%) ↓	Att. Succ. (%) ↑
Fast-LPA	73.8	3.54	41.6	56.8
LPA	<b>0.00</b>	80.5	<b>0.00</b>	97.0
PPGD	5.44	25.5	<b>0.00</b>	38.5
PWCF (ours)	0.62	<b>93.6</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>100</b>

**LPA, Fast-LPA:** penalty methods

**PPGD:** Projected gradient descent

Penalty methods tend to encounter

**large constraint violation** (i.e., infeasible solution, known in optimization theory) or **suboptimal solution**

$$\begin{aligned} & \max_{\mathbf{x}'} \ell(\mathbf{y}, f_{\theta}(\mathbf{x}')) \\ \text{s. t. } & d(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{x}') \leq \varepsilon, \quad \mathbf{x}' \in [0, 1]^n \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} & d(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{x}') \doteq \|\phi(\mathbf{x}) - \phi(\mathbf{x}')\|_2 \\ \text{where } & \phi(\mathbf{x}) \doteq [\hat{g}_1(\mathbf{x}), \dots, \hat{g}_L(\mathbf{x})] \end{aligned}$$

**PWCF**, an optimizer with a principled stopping criterion on **stationarity & feasibility**

# Outline

## Constrained deep learning: CDL

- What, how, and why for CDL
- **No good solvers for CDL yet**
- Granso and PyGranso
- PyGranso in action
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# DL frameworks



**JAX: Autograd and XLA**



**For unconstrained DL problems**

# Convex optimization solvers and frameworks



Modeling languages



**GUROBI**  
OPTIMIZATION

**SDPT<sup>3</sup> - a M<sub>ATLAB</sub> software package for  
semidefinite-quadratic-linear programming**

[K. C. Toh](#), [R. H. Tütüncü](#), and [M. J. Todd](#).

**TFOCS: Templates for First-Order Conic Solvers**

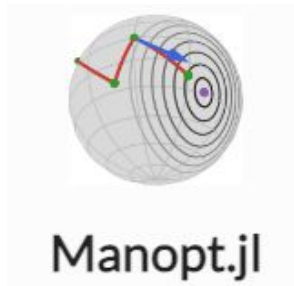
Solvers

**Not for DL**, which involves NCVX optimization

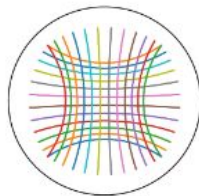
Note: Gurobi can handle certain NCVX problems



# Manifold optimization



Geomstats



$\mathcal{T}_p \mathcal{G}$   
geoopt

**McTorch Lib, a manifold optimization library for deep learning**

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Only for **differentiable manifolds constraints**

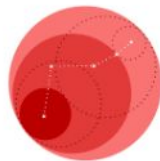
# General constrained optimization

**KNITRO**<sup>®</sup>



**IPOPT**

**Interior-point methods**



**ensmallen**

flexible C++ library for efficient numerical optimization

**GENO**

**Augmented Lagrangian methods**



**Cooper**

**TensorFlow Constrained Optimization (TFCO)**

**Lagrangian-method-based constrained optimization**

# Specialized ML packages



Problem-specific solvers that **cannot be easily extended** to new formulations

# Outline

## Constrained deep learning: CDL

- What, how, and why for CDL
- No good solvers for CDL yet
- **Granso and PyGranso**
- PyGranso in action
- Outlook

# Issues with typical CDL methods

## projected gradient descent

$$\min_{\mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{Q}} f(\mathbf{x})$$

$$\mathbf{x}_{k+1} = P_{\mathcal{Q}}(\mathbf{x}_k - \alpha_k \nabla f(\mathbf{x}_k))$$

**Issue: no principled stopping criterion/step size rules**

## penalty methods

$$\min_{\mathbf{x}} f(\mathbf{x}) \quad \text{s. t. } g(\mathbf{x}) \leq 0$$

$$\min_{\mathbf{x}} f(\mathbf{x}) + \lambda \max(0, g(\mathbf{x}))$$

Solved with increasing  $\lambda$ : sequence

**Issue: infeasible solution**

## Lagrangian method

$$\min_{\mathbf{x}} \max_{\lambda \geq 0} \overset{\blacktriangledown}{f}(\mathbf{x}) + \lambda^\top g(\mathbf{x})$$

**Idea: alternating minimize  $\mathbf{x}$  and maximize  $\lambda$  via gradient descent**

## Issues

- Infeasible solution
- Slow convergence

## Want

- **Feasible & stationary solution**
- **Reasonable speed**

# Principled answers to these questions

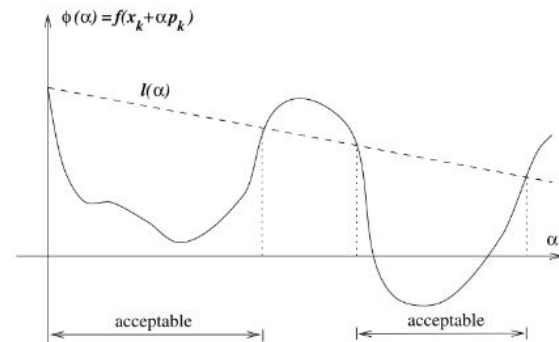
- Feasible & stationary solution

## Stationarity and feasibility check: KKT condition

- Reasonable speed

## Line search

- A hidden problem: nonsmoothness



Armijo (Sufficient Decrease) Condition

# Key algorithm



<http://www.timmitchell.com/software/GRANSO/>

**Nonconvex, nonsmooth, constrained**

$$\min_{\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n} f(\mathbf{x}), \text{ s.t. } c_i(\mathbf{x}) \leq 0, \forall i \in \mathcal{I}; \quad c_i(\mathbf{x}) = 0, \forall i \in \mathcal{E}.$$

**Penalty sequential quadratic programming (P-SQP)**

$$\begin{aligned} \min_{d \in \mathbb{R}^n, s \in \mathbb{R}^p} \quad & \mu(f(x_k) + \nabla f(x_k)^\top d) + e^\top s + \frac{1}{2} d^\top H_k d \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & c(x_k) + \nabla c(x_k)^\top d \leq s, \quad s \geq 0, \end{aligned}$$

Ref: **Curtis, Frank E., Tim Mitchell, and Michael L. Overton.** "A BFGS-SQP method for nonsmooth, nonconvex, constrained optimization and its evaluation using relative minimization profiles." *Optimization Methods and Software* 32.1 (2017): 148-181.

# Algorithm highlights

## Steering strategy for the penalty parameter

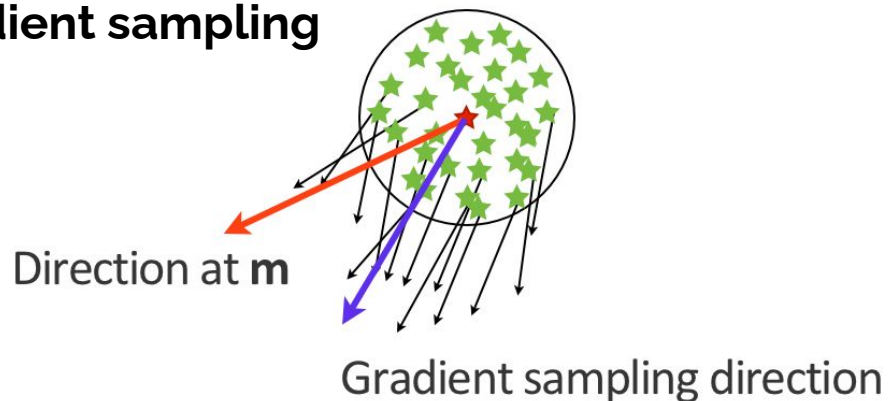
If feasibility improvement is insufficient :  $l_\delta(d_k; x_k) < c_v v(x_k)$

## Stationarity based on (approximate) gradient sampling

$$G_k := [\nabla f(x^k) \quad \nabla f(x^{k,1}) \quad \dots \quad \nabla f(x^{k,m})]$$

$$\min_{\lambda \in \mathbb{R}^{m+1}} \quad \frac{1}{2} \|G_k \lambda\|_2^2$$

$$\text{s.t. } \mathbf{1}^T \lambda = 1, \quad \lambda \geq 0$$





## Key take-away



- Principled stopping criterion and line search, to obtain a **solution with certificate** (stationarity & feasibility check)
- Quasi-newton style method for fast convergence, i.e., **reasonable speed and high-precision solution**

# Limitations of GRANSO



```
% Gradient of inner product with respect to A
f_grad      = imag((conj(Bty)*Cx.)/(y'*x));
f_grad      = f_grad(:);

% Gradient of inner product with respect to A
ci_grad     = real((conj(Bty)*Cx.)/(y'*x));
ci_grad     = ci_grad(:);
```

**analytical gradients required**

```
p      = size(B,2);
m      = size(C,1);
X      = reshape(x,p,m);
```

**vector variables only**

**Lack of Auto-Differentiation**

**Lack of GPU Support**

**No native support of tensor variables**

**⇒ impossible to do deep learning with GRANSO**

# GRANSO meets PyTorch

GRANSO + PyTorch



NCVX PyGRANSO  
Documentation

Search the docs ...

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Installation

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Examples



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$$\min_{\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n} f(\mathbf{x}), \text{ s.t. } c_i(\mathbf{x}) \leq 0, \forall i \in \mathcal{I}; c_i(\mathbf{x}) = 0, \forall i \in \mathcal{E}$$

NCVX Package

**NCVX: A General-Purpose Optimization Solver for  
Constrained Machine and Deep Learning**

Buyun Liang, Tim Mitchell, Ju Sun

**First general-purpose solver for  
constrained DL problems**

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- What and how for CDL
- Why CDL
- No good solvers for CDL yet
- Granso and PyGranso
- **PyGranso in action**
- Outlook

# Example 1: Support Vector Machine (SVM)

## Soft-margin SVM

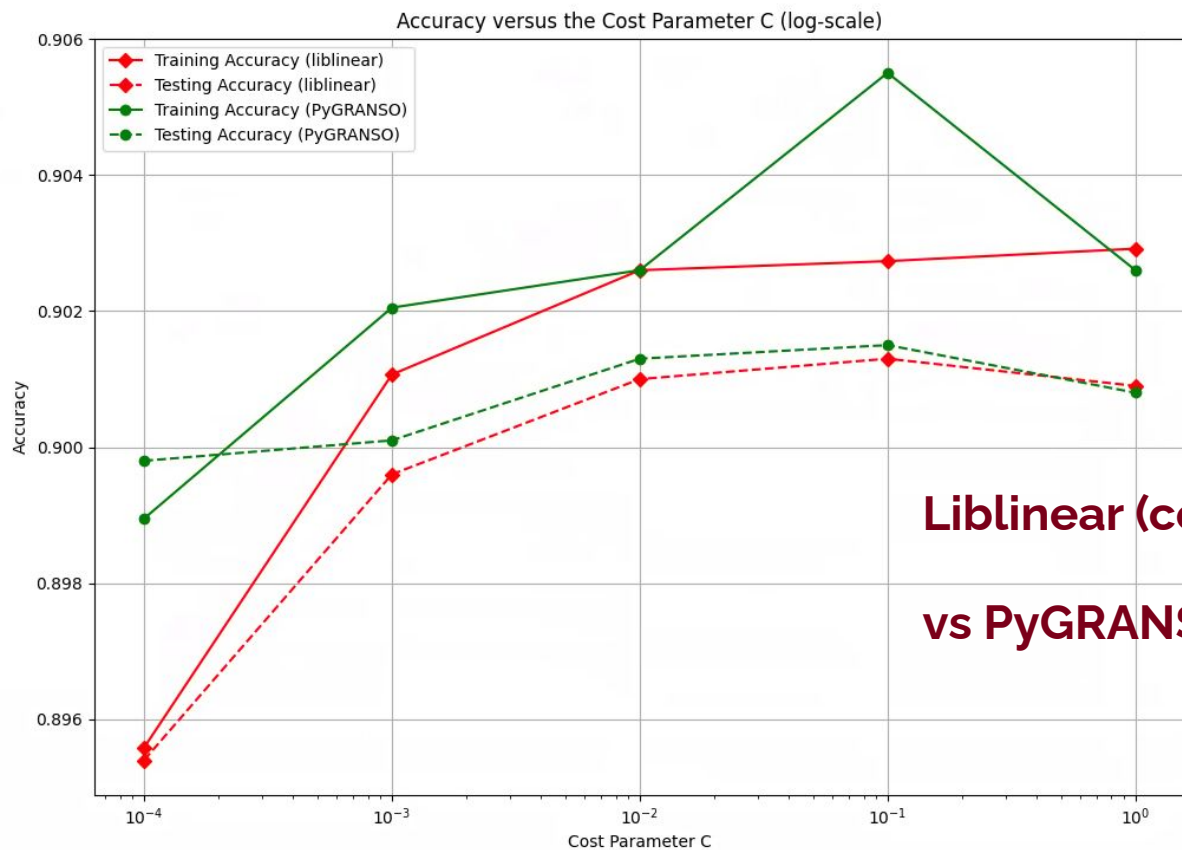
$$\min_{\mathbf{w}, b, \zeta} \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{w}\|^2 + C \sum_{i=1}^n \zeta_i$$

s.t.  $y_i (\mathbf{w}^\top \mathbf{x}_i + b) \geq 1 - \zeta_i, \zeta_i \geq 0 \quad \forall i = 1, \dots, n$

```
def comb_fn(X_struct):
    # obtain optimization variables
    w = X_struct.w
    b = X_struct.b
    zeta = X_struct.zeta
    # objective function
    f = 0.5*w.T@w + C*torch.sum(zeta)
    # inequality constraints
    ci = pygransoStruct()
    ci.c1 = 1 - zeta - y*(x@w+b)
    ci.c2 = -zeta
    # equality constraint
    ce = None
    return [f,ci,ce]

# specify optimization variables
var_in = {"w": [d,1], "b": [1,1], "zeta": [n,1]}
# pygranso main algorithm
soln = pygranso(var_in,comb_fn)
```

# Binary classification (odd vs even digits) on MNIST dataset



**Liblinear (coordinate descent)  
vs PyGRANSO**

## Example 2: Robustness—min formulation

$$\begin{aligned} \min_{\mathbf{x}'} \quad & d(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{x}') \\ \text{s. t.} \quad & \max_{\ell \neq c} f_{\boldsymbol{\theta}}^{\ell}(\mathbf{x}') \geq f_{\boldsymbol{\theta}}^c(\mathbf{x}') \\ & \mathbf{x}' \in [0, 1]^n \end{aligned}$$

```
def comb_fn(X_struct):
    # obtain optimization variables
    x_prime = X_struct.x_prime
    # objective function
    f = d(x, x_prime)
    # inequality constraints
    ci = pygransoStruct()
    f_theta_all = f_theta(x_prime)
    fy = f_theta_all[:, y] # true class output
    # output except true class
    fi = torch.hstack((f_theta_all[:, :y], f_theta_all[:, y+1:]))
    ci.c1 = fy - torch.max(fi)
    ci.c2 = -x_prime
    ci.c3 = x_prime-1
    # equality constraint
    ce = None
    return [f, ci, ce]
# specify optimization variable (tensor)
var_in = {"x_prime": list(x.shape)}
# pygranso main algorithm
soln = pygranso(var_in, comb_fn)
```

# CIFAR10 dataset

Compared with FAB [iterative constraint  
linearization + projected gradient]

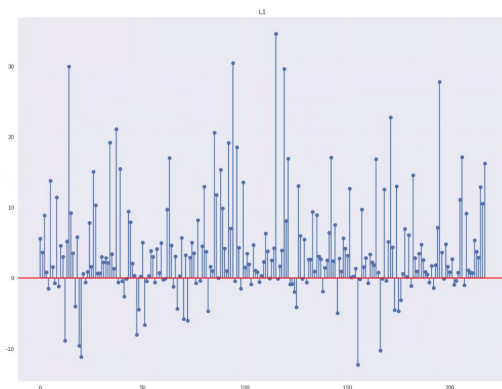
<https://github.com/fra31/auto-attack>

$$\min_{x'} d(x, x')$$

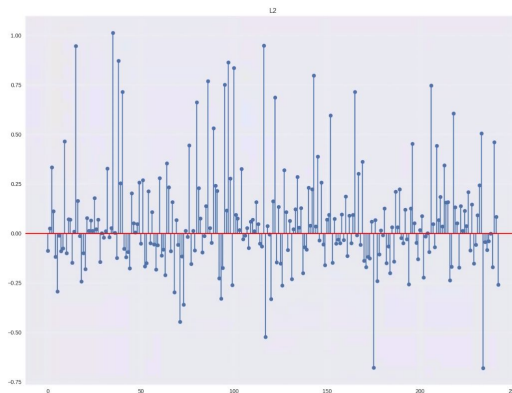
$$\text{s. t. } \max_{\ell \neq c} f_{\theta}^{\ell}(x') \geq f_{\theta}^c(x')$$

$$x' \in [0, 1]^n$$

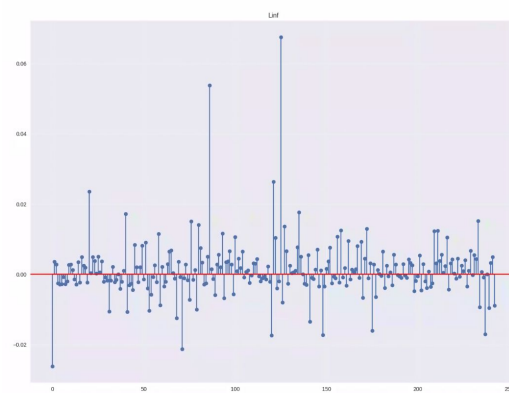
X-axis: image index; Y-axis: PyGRANSO radius - FAB radius



**L1 attack**



**L2 attack**



**Linf attack**



<https://ncvx.org/>

Many  
others

NCVX PyGRANSO  
Documentation

Search the docs ...

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Examples

- Rosenbrock
- Eigenvalue Optimization
- Dictionary Learning
- Nonlinear Feasibility Problem
- Sphere Manifold
- Trace Optimization
- Robust PCA
- Generalized LASSO
- Logistic Regression
- LeNet5
- Perceptual Attack
- Orthogonal RNN

Highlights



Home



## NCVX Package

**NCVX (NonConVeX)** is a user-friendly and scalable python software package targeting general nonsmooth NCVX problems with nonsmooth constraints. **NCVX** is being developed by **GLOVEX** at the Department of Computer Science & Engineering, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

The initial release of **NCVX** contains the solver **PyGRANSO**, a PyTorch-enabled port of **GRANSO** incorporating auto-differentiation, GPU acceleration, tensor input, and support for new QP solvers. As a highlight, **PyGRANSO** can solve general constrained deep learning problems, the first of its kind.



# Closing



## Deep Learning with Nontrivial Constraints: Methods and Applications

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NCVX Package

$$\min_{\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n} f(\mathbf{x}), \text{ s.t. } c_i(\mathbf{x}) \leq 0, \forall i \in \mathcal{I}; c_i(\mathbf{x}) = 0, \forall i \in \mathcal{E}$$

**First general-purpose solver for constrained DL problems**

**NCVX: A General-Purpose Optimization Solver for  
Constrained Machine and Deep Learning**

Buyun Liang, Tim Mitchell, Ju Sun

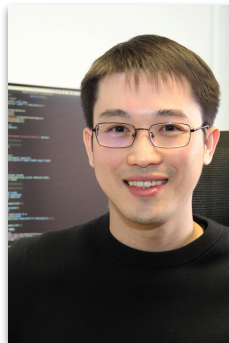
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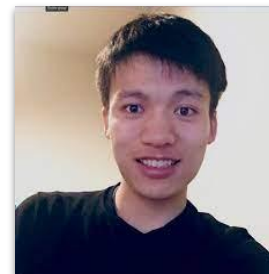
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