

## GNSS data management and processing with the GPSTk

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**Abstract** We organize complex problems in simple ways Introduction  
using a GNSS data management strategy based on “GNSS

Data Structures” (GDS), coupled with the open source The “GPS Toolkit” (GPSTk) project (Tolman et al. 2004  
“GPS Toolkit” (GPSTk) suite. The code resulting from Harris and Mac (2007) is an open source project sponsored  
using the GDS and their associated “processing paradigm by the Applied Research Laboratories of the University of  
is remarkably compact and easy to follow, yielding better Texas (ARL:UT), having several collaborators around the  
code maintainability. Furthermore, the data abstraction world. It aims to provide a GNSS computing suite to the  
allows flexible handling of concepts beyond mere data satellite navigation community, consisting of a core library,  
encapsulation, including programmable general solvers. An accessory libraries, and some applications. The GPSTk  
existing GPSTk class can be modified to achieve the goal functionality has been continuously improving (Renfro  
We briefly describe the “GDS paradigm” and show how et al. 2005; Harris et al. 2006; 2007), and its GNU Lesser  
the different GNSS data processing “objects” may be General Public License (LGPL) allows users the freedom  
combined in a flexible way to develop data processing to develop both free and commercial software.  
strategies such as Precise Point Positioning (PPP) and Shortly after starting to develop carrier phase-based  
network-based PPP that computes satellite clock offsets capabilities for the GPSTk, some project developers started  
on-the-fly. to face, with increasing frequency, several data manage-  
ment issues that were difficult to deal with using just  
vectors and matrices. The present paper introduces a novel  
approach to GNSS data processing software development,  
based on a hierarchy of data structures which cope with  
data management issues in a consistent way. This is the  
origin of the “GNSS Data Structures” (GDS) and the  
associated GDS Processing Paradigm

**Keywords** GPSTk GNSS data structures GDS  
PPP POP

The GPS Tool Box is a column dedicated to highlighting algorithms and source code utilized by GPS engineers and scientists. If you have an interesting program or software package you would like to share with our readers, please pass it along; e-mail it to us at [gpstoolbox@ngs.noaa.gov](mailto:gpstoolbox@ngs.noaa.gov). To comment on any of the source code discussed here, or to download source code, visit our website at <http://www.ngs.noaa.gov/gps-toolbox>. This column is edited by Stephen Hilla, National Geodetic Survey, NOAA, Silver Spring, Maryland, and Mike Craymer, Geodetic Survey Division, Natural Resources Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

GNSS data structures

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In order to solve the GNSS data management problem in a flexible, consistent, and comprehensive way, the GNSS Data Structures were developed and added to the on-the-fly auxiliary library of the GPSTk. First introduced in Harris et al. 2007, the GDS and their associated GDS Processing Paradigm have been continuously evolving and improving since their inception (Salazar et al. 2008, 2009).

The GDS hold several kinds of GNSS-related data, oceanic-, and polar-tides; and antenna phase centers variations must be taken into account. The International GNSS Service (IGS) precise orbits and clock les are used in PPP, but the orbits are typically provided every 900s while the observations are often collected every 30 s. Therefore, time management issues arise. The GPSTk provides some necessary classes that ease these complex issues. The implementation details for these can be found in example8.cpp, example9.cpp, and example10.cpp on the GPSTk web site:<http://www.gpstk.org/doxygen/examples.html>

The code of the core PPP processing line follows:

```
gpsData >> reqObs >> linear1 >> csLI
    >> csMW >> markArc >> decimateData
    >> basicModel >> eclipsedSV >> grDelay
    >> svPcenter >> corr >> windup
    >> cTropo >> linear2 >> pcFilter
    >> phaseAlign >> linear3 >> baseChange
    >> cDOP >> pppSolver;
```

## GDS processing paradigm

Apart from the GDS themselves, a “GDS Processing Paradigm” was also developed, where the GNSS Data Structures are complemented with several associated processing classes. With the GDS paradigm, the GNSS data processing becomes like an assembly line, where all of the processing steps are performed sequentially. The GDS are treated like white boxes that “flow” from one “workstation” (processing step) to the next in this assembly line.

Thus, the GDS are always used as both the input and output of each processing step, providing an easy and straightforward way to encapsulate and process data. This paradigm allows developing clean, simple to read, and easy to use software that speeds up development and reduces errors.

The objects from these processing classes march into the GDS and add, delete, and/or modify what is needed (according to their function), and leave the results in the same GDS, appropriately indexed. These processing objects are designed to use sensible defaults in their parameters, but may be tuned to suit specific needs.

The former ideas are coupled with a redefinition of C++ operator “>>”, implemented in such a way that several operators may be concatenated. It allows a programming style that clearly shows how the data flow along the processing steps (resembling the “pipes” concept used in UNIX-based systems). The following two experiments show how this is done.

### Experiment #1

This experiment deals with a “Precise Point Positioning” (PPP) implementation (Kouba and Heroux2001). PPP is a complex task, and issues like phase wind-up effects; solid

The GDS processing data chain is a single C++ line, although in this case (for clarity sake) it spans seven physical lines. This line must be enclosed within a while loop to process all available epochs, and also within a try/catch block to manage exceptions. Table 1 provides a brief explanation about what these objects (processing steps) do and which classes they belong to.

The object `pppSolver`, belonging to the `SolverPPP` class, deserves particular mention. This object is an Extended Kalman Filter (EKF) preconfigured to solve the PPP equation system in a way consistent with Kouba and Heroux2001: coordinates are treated as constants (static), the receiver clock is considered white noise, and the vertical wet tropospheric delay is processed as a random walk in a stochastic model (using the Niell mapping functions). All of these parameters are configurable.

### Static PPP results

Figure 1 plots the results from this PPP processing code applied to station MADR, May 27th., 2008, using the default configuration for `SolverPPP` objects (PPP with static coordinates) and a NEU coordinate frame. The a priori position used was the one provided by the IGS in Solution Independent Exchange (SINEX) files for that epoch. These results are consistent with what it is expected from this processing strategy, showing a small residual bias in the “Up” coordinate of about 17 mm, reaching errors below 5 cm in less than 1.5 h of processing.

Figure 2 plots the 3D-positioning differences with respect to the IGS nominal position using several PPP processing tools provided by “The Precise Point

Table 1 Processing steps/objects used for precise point positioning (PPP)

Object/(Class)	Description
<i>reqObs</i> (RequireObservables)	Checks if required TypeID's are present
<i>linear1</i> (ComputeLinear)	Computes linear combinations used to detect cycle slips (ionospheric, Melbourne-Wubben)
<i>csLI</i> (LICSDetector)	Detect cycle slips using ionospheric and Melbourne-Wubben combinations
<i>csMW</i> (MWCSDetector)	Detect cycle slips using ionospheric and Melbourne-Wubben combinations
<i>markArc</i> (SatArcMarker)	Keeps track of satellite arcs
<i>decimateData</i> (Decimate)	If not a multiple of 900 s, then decimates data
<i>basicModel</i> (BasicModel)	Computes the basic components of a GNSS signal propagation model
<i>eclipsedSV</i> (EclipsedSatFilter)	Removes from GDS satellites in eclipse
<i>grDelay</i> (GravitationalDelay)	Computes gravitational delay effect due to changing gravity field along SV-RX ray
<i>svPcenter</i> (ComputeSatPCenter)	Computes the effect of satellite antenna phase center
<i>corr</i> (CorrectObservables)	Corrects observables from tides, receiver antenna phase center, eccentricity, etc
<i>windup</i> (ComputeWindUp)	Computes phase wind-up correction
<i>cTropo</i> (ComputeTropModel)	Models delays due to troposphere
<i>linear2</i> (ComputeLinear)	Computes ionosphere-free combinations for code (PC) and phase (LC)
<i>pcFilter</i> (SimpleFilter)	Filters out spurious values in PC combination
<i>phaseAlign</i> (PhaseCodeAlignment)	Aligns phase with code values, preserving the integer nature of ambiguities
<i>linear3</i> (ComputeLinear)	Computes code and phase pre filter residuals
<i>baseChange</i> (XYZ2NEU)	Prepares GDS to use a North-East-Up reference frame in pppSolver
<i>cDOP</i> (ComputeDOP)	Computes DOP values
<i>pppSolver</i> (SolverPPP)	Solves the equation system with an Extended Kalman Filter (EKF) configured in PPP mode

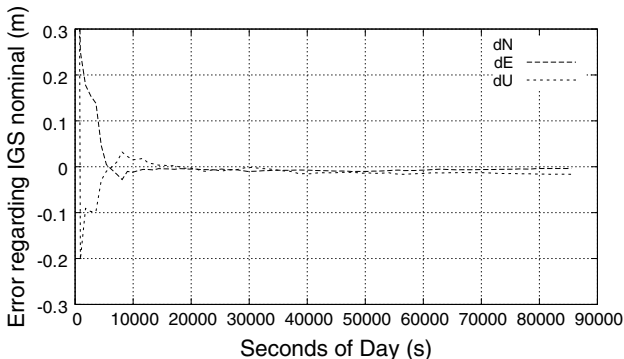


Fig. 1 GPSTk static PPP results, regarding IGS nominal, for MADR PPP processing tools. Static PPP results for MADR station, 2008/05/27

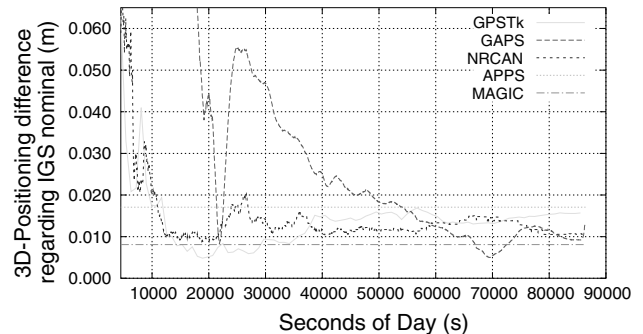


Fig. 2 3D Positioning difference regarding IGS nominal for several PPP processing tools. Static PPP results for MADR station, 2008/05/27

Positioning Software Centre (<http://gge.unb.ca/Resources/PPP/>). This tool receives RINEX observation files and sends them to several online PPP processing facilities such as:

- € CSRS-PPP (NRCAN): [http://www.geod.nrcan.gc.ca/online\\_data\\_e.php](http://www.geod.nrcan.gc.ca/online_data_e.php)
- € GPS Analysis and Positioning Software (GAPS): <http://gaps.gge.unb.ca/>

Automatic Precise Positioning Service (APPS), formerly Auto-GIPSY: <http://apps.gdgps.net/>  
 MagicGNSS (MAGIC): <http://magicgnss.gmv.com/ppp>  
 This figure confirms that our relatively simple GPSTk-based PPP code compares quite favorably both in precision and convergence time with other PPP processing tools (note that APPS and MAGIC work in static,

forward-backward mode, providing only the last position solution).

### Kinematic PPP results

The `pppSolver` preassigned stochastic models may be tuned and changed at will, given that they are objects inheriting from a general class called `StochasticModel`. This is a very important advantage of abstraction, and treating coordinates as white noise (kinematic mode) may be achieved in a very simple way:

```
1 WhiteNoiseModel newCoordinatesModel(100.0);
2 pppSolver.setCoordinatesModel(&newCoordinatesModel);
```

In line #1, a white noise stochastic model object (with a sigma of 100 m) is declared, while in line #2, `pppSolver` object is configured to use the new model for coordinate estimation. The vertical wet tropospheric effect is still treated as a random walk process, and the receiver clock continues as another white noise process (with a higher sigma). Figure 3 presents the results, confirming the good quality of GPSTk model: the coordinates are consistently within  $\pm 10$  cm of the IGS values, with a 3D-RMS of 0.047 m for the convergence phase (from 1.5 h onwards).

The services of the "The Precise Point Positioning Software Centre" were used again, this time to compute the kinematic positioning. Table 2 presents the 3D-RMS position difference with respect to the IGS SINEX position (for the convergence phase). MagicGNSS results are not shown because it provides only static solutions. GPSTk delivers the second lowest 3D-RMS.

### Forward-backward PPP results

The previous results were obtained with a Kalman filter that only runs forward. However, given that PPP is done in post-processing mode, a stronger solution can be obtained

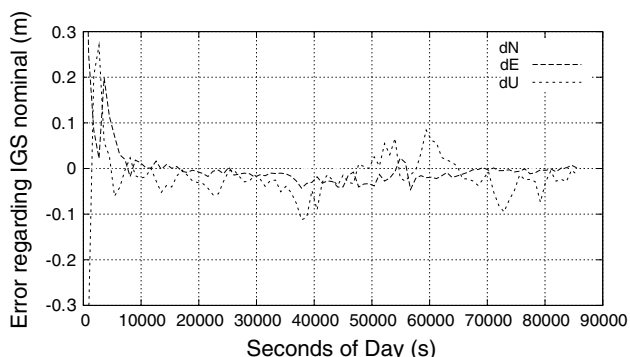


Fig. 3 Kinematic PPP results, regarding IGS nominal, for MADR station, 2008/05/27

PPP positioning tool	3D-RMS (m)
APPS	0.034
GAPS	0.067
GPSTk	0.047
NRCAN	0.073

running the filter in forward-backward mode, where ambiguity convergence achieved in a given forward run is used for the next backward run. It may be iterated at will.

An object of class `SolverPPPFb` is used for this. It encapsulates `SolverPPP` class functionality and adds a data management and storage layer to handle the whole process. From the user's point of view, the main change is to replace the `SolverPPP` object (`pppSolver`) with a new `SolverPPPFb` object (`fbpppSolver`) inside the while loop that reads and processes the RINEX observation file.

After the first forward processing is done (and data is internally indexed and stored), it is simply a matter of telling the `fbpppSolver` object how many forward-backward cycles we want it to "re-process". For instance:

```
fbpppSolver.ReProcess(4);
```

After that, one last forward processing is needed to get the time-indexed solutions out of `fbpppSolver`

```
while( fbpppSolver.LastProcess(gpsData) )
{
    cout << fbpppSolver.getSolution(TypeID::dLat) << " ";
    cout << fbpppSolver.getSolution(TypeID::dLon) << " ";
    cout << fbpppSolver.getSolution(TypeID::dH) << endl;
}
```

In this case, the forward-backward processing (in static mode) is used to compute the zenith path delay estimation (zpd) for the full day. Figure 4 shows the results for APPS, MAGIC, GPSTk, and NRCAN, as well as the official, combined IGS zpd. NRCAN only provides forward estimates, and GAPS does not provide zpd estimations. Table 3 presents the RMS of the zpd differences with respect to IGS values.

### Experiment #2

In this experiment, class `SolverGeneral` will be used to implement a kinematic PPP-like processing based on a network of stations, where *satellite clock offsets will be estimated on-the-fly*. This procedure is independent of

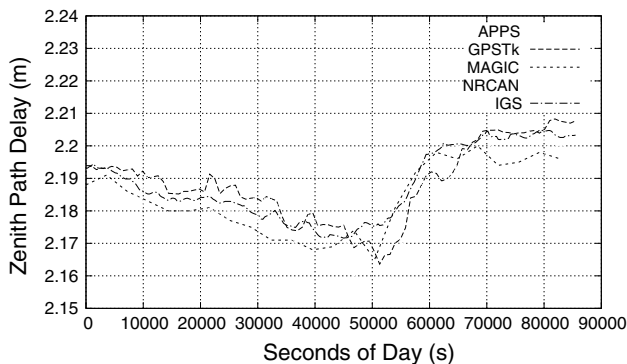


Fig. 4 Forward-backward static PPP zenith path delay results for MADR station, 2008/05/27

Table 3 RMS for zpd differences regarding IGS combined solution

PPP positioning tool	zpd RMS (m)
APPS	0.0018
GPSTk	0.0048
MAGIC	0.0052
NRCAN	0.0069

precise clock information and only needs precise orbits to work; therefore, it will be called "Precise Orbits Positioning" (POP).

The procedure starts with selecting a set of reference stations and setting one of them as the *master station*. Master's clock will be set as the reference for the network, so all the other clocks will be computed with respect to it. The other unknowns for the master station will be the zenith tropospheric delay and the ambiguities. Therefore, the corresponding equations for pseudorange and phase are

$$PrefitPC_0^j \approx tmap_0^j \cdot ztd_0 + c \cdot dt^j \quad (31)$$

$$PrefitLC_0^j \approx tmap_0^j \cdot ztd_0 + Bc_0^j + c \cdot dt^j \quad (32)$$

where  $PrefitPC_0^j$  and  $PrefitLC_0^j$  are, respectively, the pre-lter residual (observation minus modeled effects) of ionosphere-free code and phase combination for satellite  $j$  at master station "0". Further,  $tmap_0^j$  is the tropospheric mapping function,  $ztd_0$  is the zenith tropospheric path delay,  $c \cdot dt^j$  is the relative clock delay between satellite  $j$  and master station "0" in meters, and  $Bc_0^j$  is the ionosphere-free phase ambiguity.

The other reference stations will have similar equations, but adding their clock offsets (with respect to master clock) as an additional unknown. Hence,

$$PrefitPC_k^j \approx tmap_k^j \cdot ztd_k + c \cdot dt_k + c \cdot dt^j \quad (33)$$

$$PrefitLC_k^j \approx tmap_k^j \cdot ztd_k + Bc_k^j + c \cdot dt_k + c \cdot dt^j \quad (34)$$

where  $c \cdot dt_k$  is the relative clock delay between reference station  $k$  and master (meters). Finally, the  $i$ th receiver

will have an equation similar to the standard PPP process, but adding the estimation of satellite clock offsets gives

$$PrefitPC_i^j \approx tmap_i^j \cdot ztd_i + c \cdot dt_i + c \cdot dt^j \quad (35)$$

$$PrefitLC_i^j \approx tmap_i^j \cdot ztd_i + Bc_i^j + c \cdot dt_i + c \cdot dt^j \quad (36)$$

where  $(x_0, y_0, z_0)$  is the a priori receiver position,  $(x^j, y^j, z^j)$  is the position of satellite  $j$ , and parameters  $(dx, dy, dz)$  are the corrections to  $(x_0, y_0, z_0)$ .

It can be seen that the connection between receivers is achieved by the simultaneous estimation of satellite clock offsets. As said, this procedure allows rover precise positioning without precise satellite clock products.

Implementation of this equation system starts with declaration and initialization of the variable objects to be used, as well as their associated stochastic models:

```

1 WhiteNoiseModel coordinatesModel( 100.0 );
2 TropoRandomWalkModel tropoModel;
3 PhaseAmbiguityModel ambiModel;

4 Variable dLat( TypeID::dLat, &coordinatesModel, true, false, 100.0 );
5 Variable dLon( TypeID::dLon, &coordinatesModel, true, false, 100.0 );
6 Variable dH( TypeID::dH, &coordinatesModel, true, false, 100.0 );

7 Variable cdt( TypeID::cdt );
   cdt.setDefaultForced(true); // Force default coefficient (1.0)

8 Variable tropo( TypeID::wetMap, &tropoModel, true, false, 10.0 );

9 Variable ambi( TypeID::BLC, &ambiModel, true, true );
   ambi.setDefaultForced(true); // Force default coefficient

10 Variable satClock( TypeID::dtSat, false, true );
   satClock.setDefaultCoefficient(-1.0); // Set default coefficient
   satClock.setDefaultForced(true); // Force default coefficient

11 Variable prefitPC( TypeID::prefitC );
12 Variable prefitLC( TypeID::prefitL );
    
```

Lines #1 to #3 set the stochastic models to be used. Line #4 declares a variable called  $dLat$ , of TypeID "dLat", with a white noise stochastic model (kinematic positioning). The first "true" parameter indicates that this variable is "source-indexed" (i.e., it is a distinct variable for each SourceID, and the following "false" parameter tells that it is not "satellite-indexed", meaning that the same variable will be used for all visible satellites. The final numeric value (100.0) sets the initial sigma. Variables  $dLon$  and  $dH$  (lines #5, #6) follow the same pattern.

Line #7 declares  $cdt$ , the Variable representing receiver clock offsets. The defaults are used (white noise model,

source-indexed, not satellite-indexed, big preset sigma), The specialSourceID called "Variable::someSources" and it is forced to always use the value "1.0" as coefficient indicates that equations equPCRef and equLCRef will (by default, coefficients are looked for inside the GDS). apply to more than one data source. Thus, it is necessary to

Declaration of variables tropo, ambi (ambiguities), and satClock (SV clock offsets) are similar, with the exception "for" loop spanning from line #3 to #6 achieves this in a that ambiguities are source and satellite-indexed, whereas general, reusable way. satellite clocks are only satellite-indexed. The last couple Finally, the former Equation objects are added to an of lines (#11, #12) declare default, dummy "variables" EquationSystem which in turn feeds a SolverGeneral representing the independent terms of equations prePtPC object: and prePtLC

Once the variables are properly declared and initialized, it is the turn of the Equation objects. First, let's declare the equations for master station:

```
1 Equation equPCMaster( prefitPC );
2 equPCMaster.addVariable( tropo );
3 equPCMaster.addVariable( satClock );
4 equPCMaster.header.equationSource = master;

5 Equation equLCMaster( prefitLC );
6 equLCMaster.addVariable( tropo );
7 equLCMaster.addVariable( satClock );
8 equLCMaster.addVariable( ambi );
9 equLCMaster.header.equationSource = master;
10 equLCMaster.setWeight( 10000.0 );
```

Line #1 declares the Equation object for pseudorange, setting the independent term type. Then, lines #2 and #3 add the variables to the equation and finally #4 sets what receiver (or data source) this equation applies to. master is an object of class SourceID holding the information corresponding to the master station. Declaration of the equation for phase is very similar, except for line #8, that adds another variable (ambi), and line #10 that sets the relative weight of this equation: the phase sigma is 100 times smaller, so the associated weight is 100\*100 times larger.

Equations for reference stations and rover receiver are declared in the same way. However, it must be noted that reference stations form SourceIDset, instead of a single station, so they need an additional treatment. Thus, equPCRef and equLCRef are the equations for the reference stations' pseudorange and phase, respectively:

```
1 equPCRef.header.equationSource = Variable::someSources;
2 equLCRef.header.equationSource = Variable::someSources;

3 for( std::set<SourceID>::const_iterator itSet = refStationSet.begin();
   itSet != refStationSet.end();
   ++itSet )
{
4   equPCRef.addSource2Set( *itSet );
5   equLCRef.addSource2Set( *itSet );
6 }
```

```
1 EquationSystem system;
2 system.addEquation( equPCRover );
3 system.addEquation( equLCRover );
4 system.addEquation( equPCRef );
5 system.addEquation( equLCRef );
6 system.addEquation( equPCMaster );
7 system.addEquation( equLCMaster );
8 SolverGeneral solver( system );
```

From now on, object solver is a Extended Kalman Filter configured to solve the defined equation system, building its internal matrices and vectors automatically according to the incoming data. It just needs to be fed with the appropriate GDS.

The approach to this multi-station problem is to preprocess all the stations, one by one, in a way similar to Experiment #1 (PPP), but without applying the solver. The results from preprocessing are stored in an appropriate multi-epoch, multi-station GNSS data structure that automatically takes care of all indexing (structure gnssDataMap is used for this). Then, an epoch-worth of data is extracted each time from the gnssDataMap GDS and fed to solver, and the results are printed.

For this experiment, 5 IGS stations were used: ACOR, MADR, SCOA, SFER, and TLSE, forming a network across Iberic peninsula spanning 1023 km (SFER-TLSE). Station ACOR was set as "master", while MADR was the "rover", 392 km away from nearest reference station (SCOA).

Standard IGS products (precise orbits and satellite clocks) with a 900 s data rate were used, but the data were processed at 30 s, the rate given by the RINEX observation files. Note that in this case, the IGS satellite clocks were not interpolated, but ignored: The SV clocks used for this POP positioning were estimated on-the-fly.

Figure 5 shows the good results from this approach, presenting both the 3D-error in position (with respect to the known IGS position) of POP, and the 3D-error for the standard kinematic PPP processing (Experiment #1). The results are very similar (as expected): 3D-RMS of 0.047 m

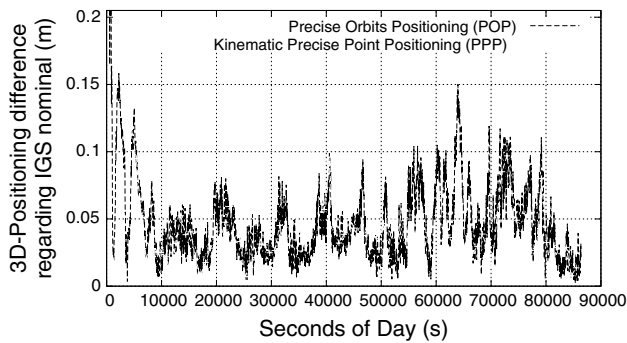


Fig. 5 3D Positioning difference regarding IGS nominal for kinematic PPP and POP processing strategies. MADR station, 2008/05/27

for the kinematic PPP case versus 3D-RMS of 0.050 m for the POP case, but POP yields a higher positioning rate.

This experiment has confirmed how the GPSTk-provided GDS, with their associated paradigm, allow one to develop code that is simple to read and maintain, but able to carry out complex GNSS data processing in an effective way.

## Conclusions

This work introduced a set of extensible data structures, called “GNSS Data Structures” (GDS). The GDS, coupled with the facilities provided by the GPSTk, enable an innovative and extensible data management strategy called the “GDS paradigm”, making it possible to easily develop different data processing strategies. In order to emphasize the aforementioned issues, a couple of GNSS data processing experiments and their results were presented, including Precise Point Positioning (PPP) and Precise Orbits Positioning (POP).

The code resulting from using the GDS and their processing paradigm is remarkably clean, compact, and easy to follow; yielding better code maintainability and supporting our design goal, which is “to free researchers to focus on research”. Its performance compares very favorably with other, more established, GPS processing suites. Furthermore, the GDS design is based on data abstraction, allowing a very extensible handling of concepts beyond mere data encapsulation, including programmable general solvers, among others.

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