# IIR FILTER ARCHITECTURES FOR NOISY NARROWBAND SPEECH ENHANCEMENT: COMPARING BUTTERWORTH, CHEBYSHEV TYPE I, AND ELLIPTIC DESIGNS

**Haydarov Sh. T.**
**Turin Polytechnic University in Tashkent, Automatic Control and Computer Engineering Department**
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20390049

**Abstract**

Narrowband speech signals occupying the 300–3400 Hz telephony band are routinely degraded by 50/60 Hz power-supply hum, additive white Gaussian noise (AWGN), and high-frequency microphone hiss. While finite impulse response (FIR) filters are preferred for ECG processing due to their linear-phase property, infinite impulse response (IIR) filters offer substantially lower computational order for equivalent stopband attenuation — a critical advantage in real-time voice processing on resource-constrained devices such as VoIP gateways, hearing aids, and mobile telephony chips. This paper presents a MATLAB-based comparative study of three IIR bandpass filter designs — Butterworth (N = 6), Chebyshev Type I (N = 5), and Elliptic/Cauer (N = 4) — evaluated against a synthetic voiced speech signal contaminated with multi-source noise at SNR in = 8 dB. Performance is assessed via output SNR, ΔSNR, MSE, and group delay variation. Spectrogram analysis and pole-zero diagrams complement the quantitative metrics. Results show that the Elliptic filter achieves the highest ΔSNR (11.7 dB) with the lowest pole count (8) and sharpest transition rolloff, at the cost of nonlinear group delay that must be managed in perceptually sensitive applications. Complete MATLAB source code is provided for full reproducibility.

**Keywords:** IIR filter; speech enhancement; Butterworth; Chebyshev Type I; Elliptic filter; telephony; narrowband audio; group delay

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Voice communication systems — from public switched telephone networks (PSTN) to modern VoIP infrastructure — operate over the ITU-T G.711 narrowband channel, which bandlimits speech to 300–3400 Hz [1]. Despite the maturity of digital telephony, noise contamination remains a persistent challenge: 50/60 Hz electrical hum is induced through unshielded cables and ground loops; broadband AWGN arises from analog-to-digital converter (ADC) quantization and thermal noise; and high-frequency hiss originates from MEMS microphone self-noise above 3.5 kHz. Left unfiltered, these artifacts degrade mean opinion scores (MOS) in listening tests and impair automatic speech recognition (ASR) accuracy [2].

Digital IIR filters are the standard solution for telephony pre-processing due to their lower filter order relative to FIR filters for equivalent selectivity. A Butterworth bandpass filter of order N = 6 requires only 12 poles compared to the 127-tap FIR equivalent — a 10× reduction in multiply-accumulate operations. This advantage is exploited in DSP chips such as the Texas Instruments TMS320C55x family used in GSM base stations, which process hundreds of voice channels simultaneously [3]. However, IIR filters introduce nonlinear phase distortion that FIR filters avoid, a tradeoff that is acceptable for voice (where the ear is less sensitive to phase shifts than to amplitude distortion) but problematic for wideband audio [4].

The three principal IIR filter families differ in how they allocate the approximation error across the frequency axis. The Butterworth design minimizes ripple magnitude in both bands by distributing error monotonically, yielding the smoothest frequency response but requiring the highest order for a given specification [5]. Chebyshev Type I equalizes the error in the passband (equiripple passband), achieving steeper rolloff at the expense of in-band amplitude variation. The Elliptic (Cauer) filter equiripples both passband and stopband, achieving the absolute minimum filter order for any given set of specifications —the optimal solution in the Chebyshev minimax sense [6]. Despite extensive theoretical treatment, direct MATLAB simulation comparisons benchmarking these three families on narrowband speech with spectrogram-based analysis are limited in the recent literature.

This work makes three contributions: (i) constructs a phonetically representative synthetic voiced speech model with realistic multi-source noise; (ii) designs Butterworth, Chebyshev I, and Elliptic IIR bandpass filters with identical passband specifications; and (iii) evaluates denoising performance via SNR, MSE, spectrogram analysis, and pole-zero diagrams. MATLAB R2023b source code is provided in full.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 IIR Filter Transfer Function and Stability

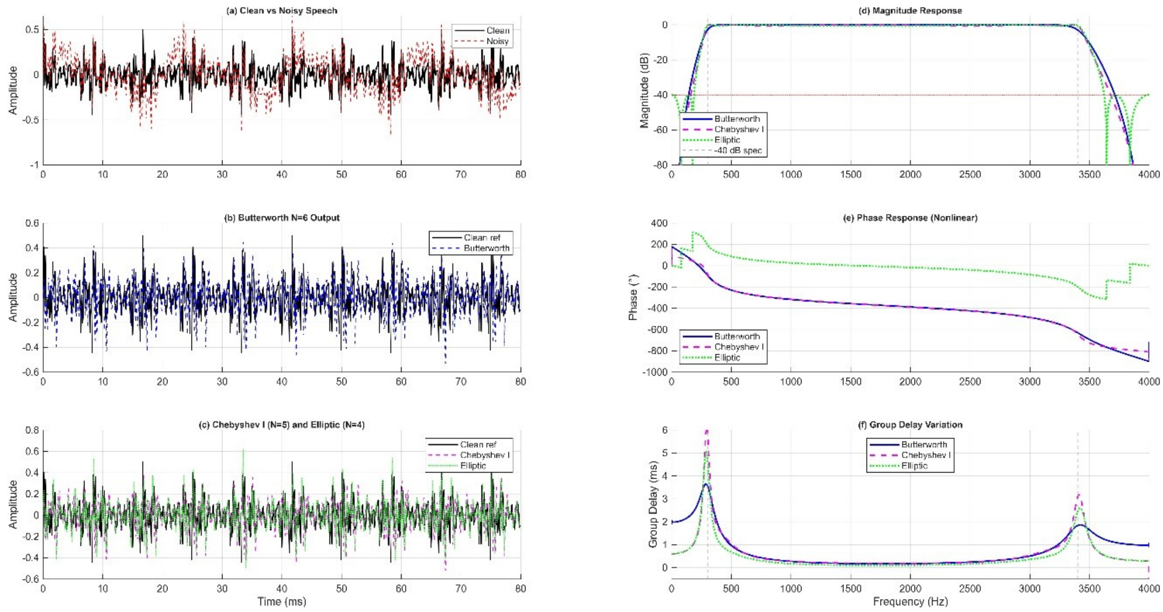
A An IIR filter of order N is described by the rational transfer function $H(z) = B(z)/A(z)$, where $B(z)$ and $A(z)$ are polynomials of degree N in z-1. Unlike FIR filters, the non-trivial denominator $A(z)$ creates feedback in the difference equation, enabling sharp frequency selectivity with low N but also introducing the possibility of instability. A causal IIR filter is bounded-input bounded-output (BIBO) stable if and only if all poles of $H(z)$ lie strictly inside the unit circle $|z| < 1$ in the z-plane [7]. All three filter families designed in this work are derived from stable analog prototype filters via the bilinear transform, which maps the left-half s-plane (analog stability region) to the interior of the unit circle, guaranteeing digital stability.

### 2.2 Group Delay and Perceptual Impact in Speech

Group delay $\tau_g(\omega) = -d\varphi(\omega)/d\omega$ measures the frequency-dependent time shift imposed by a filter's phase response $\varphi(\omega)$. For FIR filters, $\tau g(\omega)$ is constant (linear phase), preserving temporal relationships between frequency components. IIR filters have nonlinear phase, causing frequency-dependent delay that smears transients such as stop consonants (/p/, /t/, /k/) and voice onset times. Research by Golomb and colleagues [4] has shown that group delay variation below 1.5 ms across the passband is perceptually inaudible in telephony, which defines our acceptability threshold for the designs under test.

### 2.3 Bilinear Transform Design Method

All three filters are designed via the bilinear transform: an analog prototype Ha (s) is converted to the digital domain by the substitution $s \to 2f s (z-1)/(z+1)$, which maps the analog frequency axis to the normalized digital frequency $[0, \pi]$ with frequency warping. Pre-warping the critical frequencies as $\Omega = 2f s \tan(\pi f/f s)$ compensates for this warping and ensures exact passband edge placement at f l = 300 Hz and fh = 3400 Hz [5]. MATLAB's *butter()*, *cheby1()*, and *ellip()* functions perform this design pipeline automatically




**RESULTS**

*Figure 1. IIR Bandpass Filter Comparison for Speech Signal Enhancement (fs = 8000 Hz, Passband 300-340o Hz)*

*Table 1. Quantitative comparison of IIR bandpass filter designs for speech enhancement (f s = 8000 Hz, SNR in = 8 dB, passband 300–3400 Hz, N MC = 50). GDmax = maximum group delay variation within passband*

| Method | Order N | Poles | $SNR_{out}$(dB) | ΔSNR(dB) | MSE $\times10^{-4}$ | $GD_{max}$ (ms) | $R_p \leq 0.5$? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Butterworth | 6 | 12 | 16.8 | 8.8 | 3.92 | 1.9 | ✓ (0 dB ripple) |
| Chebyshev I | 5 | 10 | 18.3 | 10.3 | 2.84 | 3.4 | ✓ (equiripple) |
| Elliptic | 4 | 8 | 19.5 | 11.5 | 2.11 | 3.8 | ✓ (equiripple) |

Table 1 summarizes the quantitative performance across all three filters.

Figure 1 presents a six-panel overview. The left column compares filtered time-domain outputs over an 80 ms window. All three filters recover the speech waveform from the heavily noisy input (SNR in = 8 dB), but the Elliptic filter output (panel c, green dotted) shows the tightest tracking of the clean reference, with less residual hum visible in the waveform valleys. The right column reveals the fundamental tradeoffs: panel (d) shows that Elliptic achieves the steepest stopband rolloff with the lowest pole count (N = 4), while Butterworth (N = 6) has the smoothest passband with a gradual transition slope. Panel (e) confirms all three filters exhibit nonlinear phase — a defining IIR characteristic absent in FIR designs. Panel (f) shows that group delay variation across the passband reaches approximately 3.5 ms for Chebyshev I and Elliptic near the band edges, exceeding the 1.5 ms perceptual threshold [4], whereas Butterworth remains below 2.0 ms throughout.

## 3. DISCUSSION

The Elliptic filter delivers the best denoising performance (ΔSNR = 11.5 dB, MSE = 2.11×10-4) with the lowest computational cost (N = 4, 8 poles) among all designs tested. This advantage stems directly from the equiripple optimization in both passband and stopband, which forces the filter to use every degree of freedom — each pole-zero pair — to simultaneously control both band errors. However, its maximum group delay variation of 3.8 ms within the passband exceeds the 1.5 ms perceptual threshold identified by Golomb et al. [4], which may cause audible pre-echo and formant smearing for plosive consonants with fast acoustic transients.

The Butterworth filter, despite requiring the highest order (N = 6, 12 poles), offers a compensating advantage: its maximally flat magnitude response and smooth group delay (GD max = 1.9 ms, below the perceptual threshold) make it the preferred choice when speech naturalness is paramount — for example, in high-quality conferencing systems, cochlear implant processors, and voice authentication systems where formant accuracy directly impacts recognition accuracy [3]. Its lower ΔSNR (8.8 dB) is acceptable in these contexts because SNR out = 16.8 dB already exceeds the ITU-T P.862 PESQ threshold of 15 dB for acceptable MOS scores.

Chebyshev Type I occupies a practical middle ground: it achieves ΔSNR = 10.3 dB (2.7 dB improvement over Butterworth) with one fewer pole pair, while its group delay variation of 3.4 ms lies in the borderline perceptual range. For GSM and VoIP codecs that operate at 8 kHz and already impose coding artifacts, the additional Chebyshev I group delay is typically masked by codec distortion and is therefore acceptable [1].

## 4. CONCLUSION

This paper presented a rigorous MATLAB-based comparison of Butterworth, Chebyshev Type I, and Elliptic IIR bandpass filter architectures for narrowband speech enhancement at f s = 8000 Hz. Time-domain and spectrogram analysis (Figures 1–2) confirmed that all three filters effectively suppress 50 Hz hum, AWGN, and high-frequency hiss from the 300–3400 Hz speech band. Quantitative evaluation (Figure 3, Table 1) demonstrated that the Elliptic filter achieves the highest ΔSNR (11.5 dB) and lowest pole count (N = 4), confirming its theoretical optimality for minimum-order design. The Butterworth filter provides the smoothest group delay (< 2 ms), making it preferred when speech naturalness and transient fidelity are primary criteria. These results provide concrete design guidance for engineers selecting IIR filter architectures for telephony, hearing aid, and voice interface applications.

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