

# DATABASE THEORY

## Lecture 3: Complexity of Query Answering

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Knowledge-Based Systems

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More recent versions of this slide deck might be available.  
For the most current version of this course, see  
[https://iccl.inf.tu-dresden.de/web/Database\\_Theory/en](https://iccl.inf.tu-dresden.de/web/Database_Theory/en)

# Review: The Relational Calculus

What we have learned so far:

- There are many ways to describe databases:
  - ~> named perspective, unnamed perspective, interpretations, ground facts, (hyper)graphs
- There are many ways to describe query languages:
  - ~> relational algebra, domain independent FO queries, safe-range FO queries, active domain FO queries, Codd's tuple calculus
  - ~> either under named or under unnamed perspective

All of these are largely equivalent: [The Relational Calculus](#)

Next question: How hard is it to answer such queries?

# How to Measure Complexity of Queries?

- Complexity classes often for **decision problems** (yes/no answer)  
~> database queries return many results (no decision problem)
- The size of a query result can be very large  
~> it would not be fair to measure this as “complexity”
- In practice, database instances are much larger than queries  
~> can we take this into account?

# Query Answering as Decision Problem

We consider the following decision problems:

- **Boolean query entailment:** given a Boolean query  $q$  and a database instance  $\mathcal{I}$ , does  $\mathcal{I} \models q$  hold?
- **Query of tuple problem:** given an  $n$ -ary query  $q$ , a database instance  $\mathcal{I}$  and a tuple  $\langle c_1, \dots, c_n \rangle$ , does  $\langle c_1, \dots, c_n \rangle \in M[q](\mathcal{I})$  hold?
- **Query emptiness problem:** given a query  $q$  and a database instance  $\mathcal{I}$ , does  $M[q](\mathcal{I}) \neq \emptyset$  hold?

↪ Computationally equivalent problems (exercise)

# The Size of the Input

## Combined Complexity

Input: Boolean query  $q$  and database instance  $\mathcal{I}$

Output: Does  $\mathcal{I} \models q$  hold?

- ~ estimates complexity in terms of overall input size
- ~ “2KB query/2TB database” = “2TB query/2KB database”
- ~ study worst-case complexity of algorithms for fixed queries:

## Data Complexity

Input: database instance  $\mathcal{I}$

Output: Does  $\mathcal{I} \models q$  hold? (for fixed  $q$ )

- ~ we can also fix the database and vary the query:

## Query Complexity

Input: Boolean query  $q$

Output: Does  $\mathcal{I} \models q$  hold? (for fixed  $\mathcal{I}$ )

# Review: Computation and Complexity Theory

# The Turing Machine (1)

Computation is usually modelled with Turing Machines (TMs)

↪ “algorithm” = “something implemented on a TM”

A TM is an automaton with (unlimited) working memory:

- It has a finite set of states  $Q$
- $Q$  includes a start state  $q_{\text{start}}$  and an accept state  $q_{\text{acc}}$
- The memory is a tape with numbered cells  $0, 1, 2, \dots$
- Each tape cell holds one symbol from the set of tape symbols  $\Gamma$
- There is a special symbol  $\sqcup$  for empty tape cells
- The TM has a transition relation  $\Delta \subseteq (Q \times \Gamma) \times (Q \times \Gamma \times \{l, r, s\})$
- $\Delta$  might be a partial function  $(Q \times \Gamma) \rightarrow (Q \times \Gamma \times \{l, r, s\})$   
↪ deterministic TM (DTM); otherwise nondeterministic TM

There are many different but equivalent ways of defining TMs.

# The Turing Machine (2)

TMs operate step-by-step:

- At every moment, the TM is in one state  $q \in Q$  with its read/write head at a certain tape position  $p \in \mathbb{N}$ , and the tape has a certain contents  $\sigma_0\sigma_1\sigma_2 \cdots$  with all  $\sigma_i \in \Gamma$   
 $\leadsto$  current **configuration** of the TM
- The TM starts in state  $q_{\text{start}}$  and at tape position 0.
- Transition  $\langle q, \sigma, q', \sigma', d \rangle \in \Delta$  means:  
if in state  $q$  and the tape symbol at its current position is  $\sigma$ ,  
then change to state  $q'$ , write symbol  $\sigma'$  to tape, move head by  $d$  (left/right/stay)
- If there is more than one possible transition, the TM picks one nondeterministically
- The TM **halts** when there is no possible transition for the current configuration (possibly never)

A **computation path** (or **run**) of a TM is a sequence of configurations that can be obtained by some choice of transition.

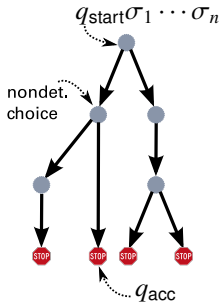


# Languages Accepted by TMs

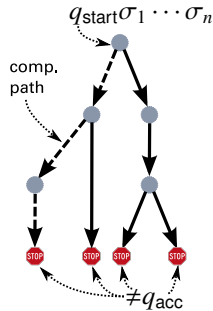
The (nondeterministic) TM **accepts** an input  $\sigma_1 \cdots \sigma_n \in (\Gamma \setminus \{\sqcup\})^*$  if, when started on the tape  $\sigma_1 \cdots \sigma_n \sqcup \cdots$ ,

- (1) the TM halts on every computation path and
- (2) there is at least one computation path that halts in the accepting state  $q_{acc} \in Q$ .

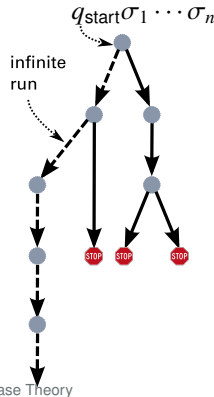
accept:



reject:



reject (not halting):



# Solving Computation Problems with TMs

A **decision problem** is a language  $\mathcal{L}$  of words over  $\Sigma = \Gamma \setminus \{\sqcup\}$

$\leadsto$  the set of all inputs for which the answer is “yes”

A TM **decides** a decision problem  $\mathcal{L}$  if it halts on all inputs and accepts exactly the words in  $\mathcal{L}$

TMs take **time** (number of steps) and **space** (number of cells):

- **Time( $f(n)$ )**: Problems that can be decided by a DTM in  $O(f(n))$  steps, where  $f$  is a function of the input length  $n$
- **Space( $f(n)$ )**: Problems that can be decided by a DTM using  $O(f(n))$  tape cells, where  $f$  is a function of the input length  $n$
- **NTime( $f(n)$ )**: Problems that can be decided by a TM in at most  $O(f(n))$  steps **on any of its computation paths**
- **NSpace( $f(n)$ )**: Problems that can be decided by a TM using at most  $O(f(n))$  tape cells **on any of its computation paths**

# Some Common Complexity Classes

$$P = PTime = \bigcup_{k \geq 1} Time(n^k)$$

$$NP = \bigcup_{k \geq 1} NTime(n^k)$$

$$Exp = ExpTime = \bigcup_{k \geq 1} Time(2^{n^k})$$

$$NExp = NExpTime = \bigcup_{k \geq 1} NTime(2^{n^k})$$

$$2Exp = 2ExpTime = \bigcup_{k \geq 1} Time(2^{2^{n^k}})$$

$$N2Exp = N2ExpTime = \bigcup_{k \geq 1} NTime(2^{2^{n^k}})$$

$$ETime = \bigcup_{k \geq 1} Time(2^{n^k})$$

$$L = LogSpace = Space(\log n)$$

$$NL = NLogSpace = NSpace(\log n)$$

$$PSpace = \bigcup_{k \geq 1} Space(n^k)$$

$$ExpSpace = \bigcup_{k \geq 1} Space(2^{n^k})$$

# NP

NP = Problems for which a possible solution can be verified in P:

- for every  $w \in \mathcal{L}$ , there is a **certificate**  $c_w \in \Sigma^*$ , such that
- the length of  $c_w$  is polynomial in the length of  $w$ , and
- the language  $\{w\#c_w \mid w \in \mathcal{L}\}$  is in P

Equivalent to definition with nondeterministic TMs:

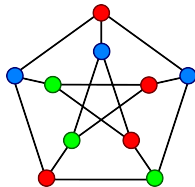
- $\Rightarrow$  nondeterministically guess certificate; then run verifier DTM
- $\Leftarrow$  use accepting polynomial run as certificate; verify TM steps

# NP Examples

## Examples:

- Sudoku solvability (certificate: filled-out grid)
- Composite (non-prime) number (certificate: factorization)
- Prime number (certificate: see Wikipedia “Primality certificate”)
- Propositional logic satisfiability (certificate: satisfying assignment)
- Graph colourability (certificate: coloured graph)

5	3			7	
		8			6
7		6		4	
4	1				
7	8	5	3	9	
			9	6	
	5		1	7	
6			4		
	2		5	3	



$p$	$q$	$r$	$p \rightarrow q$
$f$	$f$	$f$	$w$
$f$	$w$	$f$	$w$
$w$	$f$	$f$	$f$
$w$	$w$	$f$	$w$
$f$	$f$	$w$	$w$
$f$	$w$	$w$	$w$
$w$	$f$	$w$	$f$
$w$	$w$	$w$	$w$

# NP and coNP

Note: Definition of NP is not symmetric

- there does not seem to be any polynomial certificate for Sudoku **unsolvability** or logic **unsatisfiability**
- converse of an NP problem is **coNP**
- similar for NExpTime and N2ExpTime

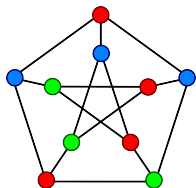
Other classes are symmetric:

- Deterministic classes (coP = P etc.)
- Space classes mentioned above (esp. coNL = NL)

# Reductions

Observation: some problems can be reduced to others

Example: 3-colouring can be reduced to propositional satisfiability



Encoding colours in propositions:

- $r_i$  means "vertex  $i$  is red"
- $g_i$  means "vertex  $i$  is green"
- $b_i$  means "vertex  $i$  is blue"

Colouring conditions on vertices:  $(r_1 \wedge \neg g_1 \wedge \neg b_1) \vee (\neg r_1 \wedge g_1 \wedge \neg b_1) \vee (\neg r_1 \wedge \neg g_1 \wedge b_1)$   
(and so on for all vertices)

Colouring conditions for edges:

$\neg(r_1 \wedge r_2) \wedge \neg(g_1 \wedge g_2) \wedge \neg(b_1 \wedge b_2)$  (and so on for all edges)

Satisfying truth assignment  $\Leftrightarrow$  valid colouring

# Defining Reductions

**Definition 3.1:** Consider languages  $\mathcal{L}_1, \mathcal{L}_2 \subseteq \Sigma^*$ . A computable function  $f : \Sigma^* \rightarrow \Sigma^*$  is a **many-one reduction** from  $\mathcal{L}_1$  to  $\mathcal{L}_2$  if:

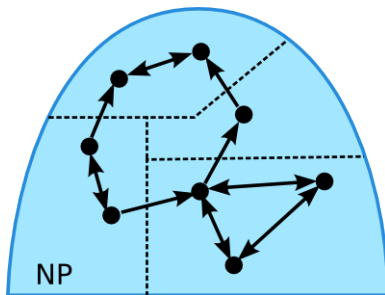
$$w \in \mathcal{L}_1 \quad \text{if and only if} \quad f(w) \in \mathcal{L}_2$$

- ~> we can solve problem  $\mathcal{L}_1$  by reducing it to problem  $\mathcal{L}_2$
- ~> only useful if the reduction is much easier than solving  $\mathcal{L}_1$  directly
- ~> **polynomial many-one reductions**



# The Structure of NP

Idea: polynomial many-one reductions define an order on problems



# NP-Hardness und NP-Completeness

**Theorem 3.2 (Cook 1971; Levin 1973):** All problems in NP can be polynomially many-one reduced to the propositional satisfiability problem (SAT).

- NP has a maximal class that contains a practically relevant problem
- If SAT can be solved in P, all problems in NP can
- Karp discovered 21 further such problems shortly after (1972)
- Thousands such problems have been discovered since ...

**Definition 3.3:** A language is

- **NP-hard** if every language in NP is polynomially many-one reducible to it
- **NP-complete** if it is NP-hard and in NP



Stephen Cook



Leonid Levin



Richard Karp

# Comparing Complexity Classes

Is any NP-complete problem in P?

- If yes, then  $P = NP$
- Nobody knows  $\leadsto$  biggest open problem in computer science
- Similar situations for many complexity classes

Some things that are known:

$$L \subseteq NL \subseteq P \subseteq NP \subseteq PSpace \subseteq ExpTime \subseteq NExpTime$$

- None of these is known to be strict
- But we know that  $P \subsetneq ExpTime$  and  $NL \subsetneq PSpace$
- Moreover  $PSpace = NPspace$  (by Savitch's Theorem)

(see TU Dresden course [Complexity Theory](#) ([link](#)) for many more details)

# Comparing Tractable Problems

Polynomial-time many-one reductions work well for (presumably) super-polynomial problems  $\rightsquigarrow$  what to use for P and below?

**Definition 3.4:** A **LogSpace transducer** is a deterministic TM with three tapes:

- a read-only input tape
- a read/write working tape of size  $O(\log n)$
- a write-only, write-once output tape

Such a TM needs a slightly different form of transitions:

- transition function input: state, input tape symbol, working tape symbol
- transition function output: state, working tape write symbol, input tape move, working tape move, output tape symbol or  $\perp$  to not write anything to the output

# The Power of LogSpace

LogSpace transducers can still do a few things:

- store a constant number of counters and increment/decrement the counters
- store a constant number of pointers to the input tape, and locate/read items that start at this address from the input tape
- access/process/compare items from the input tape bit by bit

**Example 3.5:** Adding and subtracting binary numbers, detecting palindromes, comparing lists, searching items in a list, sorting lists, ... can all be done in L.

# Joining Two Tables in LogSpace

**Input:** two relations  $R$  and  $S$ , represented as a list of tuples

- Use two pointers  $p_R$  and  $p_S$  pointing to tuples in  $R$  and  $S$ , respectively
- Outer loop: iterate  $p_R$  over all tuples of  $R$
- Inner loop for each position of  $p_R$ : iterate  $p_S$  over all tuples of  $S$
- For each combination of  $p_R$  and  $p_S$ , compare the tuples:
  - Use another two loops that iterate over the columns of  $R$  and  $S$
  - Compare attribute names bit by bit
  - For matching attribute names, compare the respective tuple values bit by bit
- If all joined columns agree, copy the relevant parts of tuples  $p_R$  and  $p_S$  to the output (bit by bit)

**Output:**  $R \bowtie S$

↪ Fixed number of pointers and counters

(making this fully formal is still a bit of work; e.g., an additional counter is needed to move the input read head to the target of a pointer (seek))

# LogSpace reductions

**LogSpace functions:** The output of a LogSpace transducer is the contents of its output tape when it halts  $\rightsquigarrow$  a partial function  $\Sigma^* \rightarrow \Sigma^*$

Note: the composition of two LogSpace functions is LogSpace (exercise)

**Definition 3.6:** A many-one reduction  $f$  from  $\mathcal{L}_1$  to  $\mathcal{L}_2$  is a **LogSpace reduction** if it is implemented by some LogSpace transducer.

$\rightsquigarrow$  can be used to define hardness for classes P and NL

# From L to NL

NL: Problems whose solution can be verified in L

Example: [Reachability](#)

- Input: a directed graph  $G$  and two nodes  $s$  and  $t$  of  $G$
- Output: accept if there is a directed path from  $s$  to  $t$  in  $G$

Algorithm sketch:

- Store the id of the current node and a counter for the path length
- Start with  $s$  as current node
- In each step, increment the counter and move from the current node to one of its direct successors (nondeterministic)
- When reaching  $t$ , accept
- When the step counter is larger than the total number of nodes, reject



# Beyond Logarithmic Space

Propositional satisfiability can be solved in linear space:

~> iterate over possible truth assignments and check each in turn

More generally: all problems in NP can be solved in PSpace

~> try all conceivable polynomial certificates and verify each in turn

What is a “typical” (that is, hard) problem in PSpace?

~> Simple two-player games, and other uses of alternating quantifiers

# Example: Playing “Geography”

## A children’s game:

- Two players are taking turns naming cities.
- Each city must start with the last letter of the previous.
- Repetitions are not allowed.
- The first player who cannot name a new city loses.

## A mathematicians’ game:

- Two players are marking nodes on a directed graph.
- Each node must be a successor of the previous one.
- Repetitions are not allowed.
- The first player who cannot mark a new node loses.

**Question:** given a certain graph and start node, can Player 1 enforce a win (i.e., does he have a winning strategy)?

~> PSpace-complete problem

# Example: Quantified Boolean Formulae (QBF)

We consider formulae of the following form:

$$Q_1 X_1 . Q_2 X_2 . \dots . Q_n X_n . \varphi[X_1, \dots, X_n]$$

where  $Q_i \in \{\exists, \forall\}$  are quantifiers,  $X_i$  are propositional logic variables, and  $\varphi$  is a propositional logic formula with variables  $X_1, \dots, X_n$  and constants  $\top$  (true) and  $\perp$  (false)

Semantics:

- Propositional formulae without variables (only constants  $\top$  and  $\perp$ ) are evaluated as usual
- $\exists X_1 . \varphi[X_1]$  is true if either  $\varphi[X_1/\top]$  or  $\varphi[X_1/\perp]$  are
- $\forall X_1 . \varphi[X_1]$  is true if both  $\varphi[X_1/\top]$  and  $\varphi[X_1/\perp]$  are

**Question:** Is a given QBF formula true?

$\rightsquigarrow$  PSpace-complete problem

# A Note on Space and Time

How many different configurations does a TM have in space  $f(n)$ ?

$$|Q| \cdot f(n) \cdot |\Gamma|^{f(n)}$$

~> No halting run can be longer than this

~> A time-bounded TM can explore all configurations in time proportional to this

Applications:

- $L \subseteq P$
- $P\text{Space} \subseteq \text{ExpTime}$

# Summary and Outlook

The complexity of query languages can be measured in different ways

Relevant complexity classes are based on restricting space and time:

$$L \subseteq NL \subseteq P \subseteq NP \subseteq PSpace \subseteq ExpTime$$

Problems are compared using many-one reductions

↪ see TU Dresden course **Complexity Theory** for further details and deeper insights

## Open questions:

- Now how hard is it to answer FO queries? (next lecture)
- We saw that joins are in LogSpace – is this tight?
- How can we study the expressiveness of query languages?