



TECHNISCHE  
UNIVERSITÄT  
DRESDEN

# FOUNDATIONS OF DATABASES AND QUERY LANGUAGES

## Lecture 7: Query Optimisation

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# Overview

1. Introduction | Relational data model
2. First-order queries
3. Complexity of query answering
4. Complexity of FO query answering
5. Conjunctive queries
6. Tree-like conjunctive queries
7. Query optimisation
8. Limits of first-order query expressiveness
9. Introduction to Datalog
10. Implementation techniques for Datalog
11. Path queries
12. Constraints (1)
13. Constraints (2)
14. Outlook: database theory in practice

See course homepage [[⇒ link](#)] for more information and materials

# Review

We have studied FO queries and the simpler conjunctive queries

Our focus was on query answering complexity:

	Combined complexity	Query complexity	Data complexity
FO queries	PSPACE-comp.	PSPACE-comp.	in $AC^0$
Conjunctive queries	NP-comp.	NP-comp.	in $AC^0$
Tree CQs	in P	in P	in $AC^0$
Bound. Treewidth CQs	in P	in P	in $AC^0$
Bound. Hypertree w CQs	in P	in P	in $AC^0$

# Static Query Optimisation

Can we optimise query execution without looking at the database?

Queries are logical formulae, so some things might follow . . .

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Queries are logical formulae, so some things might follow . . .

**Query equivalence:** Will the queries  $Q_1$  and  $Q_2$  return the same answers over any database?

- In symbols:  $Q_1 \equiv Q_2$
- We have seen many examples of equivalent transformations in exercises
- Several uses for optimisation:
  - ~> DBMS could run the “nicer” of two equivalent queries
  - ~> DBMS could use cached results of one query for the other
  - ~> Also applicable to equivalent subqueries

## Static Query Optimisation (2)

Other things that could be useful:

- **Query emptiness:** Will query  $Q$  never have any results?
  - ~> Special equivalence with an “empty query”  
(e.g.,  $x \neq x$  or  $R(x) \wedge \neg R(x)$ )
  - ~> Empty (sub)queries could be answered immediately
- **Query containment:** Will the query  $Q_1$  return a subset of the results of query  $Q_2$ ? (in symbols:  $Q_1 \sqsubseteq Q_2$ )
  - ~> Generalisation of equivalence:  
 $Q_1 \equiv Q_2$  if and only if  $Q_1 \sqsubseteq Q_2$  and  $Q_2 \sqsubseteq Q_1$
- **Query minimisation:** Given a query  $Q$ , can we find an equivalent query  $Q'$  that is “as simple as possible.”

# First-order logic: Decidable or not?

We have seen in recent lectures:

- FO queries can be answered in  $PSPACE$  (combined complexity) and  $AC^0$  (data complexity)
- FO queries correspond to relational algebra, so every relational DBMS answers FO queries in practice

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In foundational courses on logic, you should have learned

- Reasoning in first-order logic is undecidable

Indeed, Wikipedia says it too (so it must be true ...):

- “Unlike propositional logic, first-order logic is undecidable (although semidecidable)” [Wikidedia article [First-order logic](#)]



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Is the first-order logic we use different from the first-order logic used elsewhere? Is mathematics inconsistent?

# Solving the Mystery

All of the above are true for first-order logic  
but people are studying different decision problems:

## Problem 1: Model Checking

- Given: a logical sentence  $\varphi$  and a finite model  $\mathcal{I}$
- Question: is  $\mathcal{I}$  a model for  $\varphi$ , i.e., is  $\varphi$  satisfied in  $\mathcal{I}$ ?
- Corresponds to Boolean query entailment
- PSPACE-complete for first-order sentences

## Problem 2: Satisfiability Checking

- Given: a logical sentence  $\varphi$
- Question: does  $\varphi$  have any model?
- Equivalent to many reasoning problems (entailment, tautology, unsatisfiability, etc.)
- undecidable for first-order sentences

# Back to Query Optimisation

What do these results mean for query optimisation?

Two similar questions:

(1) Are the Boolean FO queries  $\varphi_1$  and  $\varphi_2$  equivalent?

(2) Are the FO sentences  $\varphi_1$  and  $\varphi_2$  equivalent?

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(2) Are the FO sentences  $\varphi_1$  and  $\varphi_2$  equivalent?

→ So FO query equivalence is undecidable?

However, (1) is not equivalent to (2) but to the following:

(2') Are the FO sentences  $\varphi_1$  and  $\varphi_2$  equivalent in all finite interpretations?

→ finite-model reasoning for FO logic

# Finite-Model Reasoning

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Yes. Example formula  $\varphi$ :

$$\begin{aligned} & (\forall x. \exists y. R(x, y)) \wedge \\ & (\forall x, y_1, y_2. R(x, y_1) \wedge R(x, y_2) \rightarrow y_1 \approx y_2) \wedge && R \text{ is a function } \dots \\ & (\forall x_1, x_2, y. R(x_1, y) \wedge R(x_2, y) \rightarrow x_1 \approx x_2) \wedge && \dots \text{ and injective } \dots \\ & (\exists y. \forall x. \neg R(x, y)) && \dots \text{ but not surjective} \end{aligned}$$

Such a function  $R$  can only exist over an infinite domain.

$\rightsquigarrow$  over finite models,  $\varphi$  is unsatisfiable

$\rightsquigarrow$   $\varphi$  is finitely equivalent to  $\forall x. R(x, x) \wedge \neg R(x, x)$

$\rightsquigarrow$  this equivalence does not hold on arbitrary models

# Trakhtenbrot's Theorem

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Is finite-model reasoning easier than FO reasoning in general?

Unfortunately no:

## Theorem (Boris Trakhtenbrot, 1950)

Finite-model reasoning of first-order logic is undecidable.

Interesting observation:

- The set of all true sentences (tautologies) of FO is recursively enumerable (“FO is semi-decidable”)
- but the set of all FO tautologies under finite models is not.

↪ finite model reasoning is harder than FO reasoning in this case!



# Let's Prove Trakhtenbrot's Theorem

Proof idea: reduce the Halting Problem to finite satisfiability

- Input of the reduction:  
a deterministic Turing Machine (DTM)  $\mathcal{M}$  and an input string  $w$
- Output of the reduction: a first-order formula  $\varphi_{\mathcal{M},w}$
- Such that  $\mathcal{M}$  halts on  $w$  if and only if  $\varphi_{\mathcal{M},w}$  has a finite model

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Ok, this would do, because Halting of DTMs is undecidable  
but how should we achieve this?

- Capture the computation of the DTM in a finite model
- The model contains the whole run: the tape and state for every computation step
- A finite part of the tape is enough if the DTM halts

# TM Runs as Finite Models

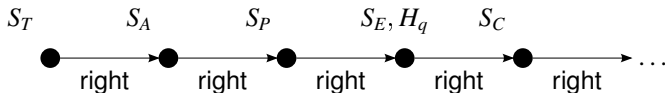
Recall: Turing Machine is given as  $\mathcal{M} = \langle Q, q_{\text{start}}, q_{\text{acc}}, \Sigma, \Delta \rangle$

(state set  $Q$ , tape alphabet  $\Sigma$  with blank  $\sqcup$ , transitions  $\Delta \subseteq (Q \times \Sigma) \times (Q \times \Sigma \times \{l, r, s\})$ )

A configuration is a (finite piece of) tape + a position + a state:



Here is how we want part of our model (database) to look:



# Encoding TM Runs as Relational Structures

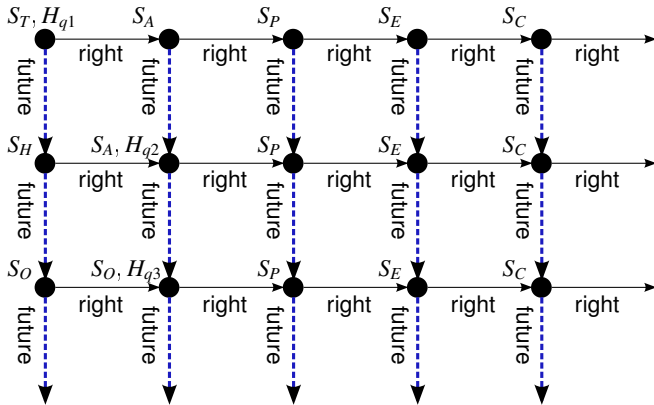
We use several unary predicate symbols to mark tape cells:

- $S_\sigma(\cdot)$  for each  $\sigma \in \Sigma$ : tape cell contains symbol  $\sigma$
- $H_q(\cdot)$  for each  $q \in Q$ : head is at tape cell, and TM is in state  $q$

We use two binary predicate symbols to connect tape positions:

- $\text{right}(\cdot, \cdot)$ : neighbouring tape cells at same step
- $\text{right}^+(\cdot, \cdot)$ : transitive super-relation of right
- $\text{future}(\cdot, \cdot)$ : tape cells at same position in consecutive steps

# Intended Database



(right<sup>+</sup> is not shown)

We now need to specify formulae to enforce this intended structure (or something that is close enough to it).

# Defining the Initial Configuration

Require that  $\text{right}^+$  is a transitive super-relation of  $\text{right}$ :

$$\begin{aligned}\varphi_{\text{right}^+} = & \forall x, y. (\text{right}(x, y) \rightarrow \text{right}^+(x, y)) \wedge \\ & \forall x, y, z. (\text{right}(x, y) \wedge \text{right}^+(y, z) \rightarrow \text{right}^+(x, z))\end{aligned}$$

Define start configuration for an input word  $w = \sigma_1\sigma_2 \dots \sigma_n$ :

$$\begin{aligned}\varphi_w = & \exists x_1, \dots, x_n. H_{q_{\text{start}}}(x_1) \wedge \neg \exists z. \text{right}(z, x_1) \wedge \\ & S_{\sigma_1}(x_1) \wedge \neg \exists z. \text{future}(z, x_1) \wedge \text{right}(x_1, x_2) \wedge \\ & S_{\sigma_2}(x_2) \wedge \neg \exists z. \text{future}(z, x_2) \wedge \text{right}(x_2, x_3) \wedge \\ & \dots \\ & S_{\sigma_n}(x_n) \wedge \neg \exists z. \text{future}(z, x_n) \wedge \\ & \forall y. (\text{right}^+(x_n, y) \rightarrow (S_{\perp}(y) \wedge \neg \exists z. \text{future}(z, y)))\end{aligned}$$

$\leadsto$  there can be any number of cells right of the input, but they must contain  $\perp$ .

# Consistent Tape Contents, Head, and State

A cell can only contain one symbol:

$$\varphi_S = \bigwedge_{\sigma, \sigma' \in \Sigma, \sigma \neq \sigma'} \forall x. (\neg S_\sigma(x) \vee \neg S_{\sigma'}(x))$$

The TM is never at more than one position:

$$\varphi_H = \bigwedge_{q \in Q} \forall x, y. \left( H_q(x) \wedge \text{right}^+(x, y) \rightarrow \bigwedge_{q' \in Q} \neg H_{q'}(y) \right) \wedge \\ \bigwedge_{q \in Q} \forall x, y. \left( \text{right}^+(x, y) \wedge H_q(y) \rightarrow \bigwedge_{q' \in Q} \neg H_{q'}(x) \right)$$

The TM can only be in one state:

$$\varphi_Q = \bigwedge_{q, q' \in Q, q \neq q'} \forall x. (\neg H_q(x) \vee \neg H_{q'}(x))$$

# Transitions

For every non-moving transition  $\delta = \langle q, \sigma, q', \sigma', s \rangle \in \Delta$ :

$$\varphi_\delta = \forall x. H_q(x) \wedge S_\sigma(x) \rightarrow \exists y. \text{future}(x, y) \wedge S_{\sigma'}(y) \wedge H_{q'}(y)$$

For every right-moving transition  $\delta = \langle q, \sigma, q', \sigma', r \rangle \in \Delta$ :

$$\varphi_\delta = \forall x. H_q(x) \wedge S_\sigma(x) \rightarrow \exists y. \text{future}(x, y) \wedge S_{\sigma'}(y) \wedge \exists z. \text{right}(y, z) \wedge H_{q'}(z)$$

For every left-moving transition  $\delta = \langle q, \sigma, q', \sigma', l \rangle \in \Delta$ :

$$\varphi_\delta = \forall x. H_q(x) \wedge S_\sigma(x) \wedge (\exists v. \text{right}(v, x)) \rightarrow \exists y. \text{future}(x, y) \wedge S_{\sigma'}(y) \wedge \exists z. \text{right}(y, z) \wedge H_{q'}(z)$$

Summing all up:

$$\varphi_\Delta = \bigwedge_{\delta \in \Delta} \varphi_\delta$$



# Preserve Tape if not Changed by Transition

Contents of tape cells that are not under the head are kept:

$$\varphi_{\text{mem}} = \forall x, y. \bigwedge_{\sigma \in \Sigma} \left( S_{\sigma}(x) \wedge \left( \bigwedge_{q \in Q} \neg H_q(x) \right) \wedge \text{future}(x, y) \rightarrow S_{\sigma}(y) \right)$$

# Building the Configuration Grid

If one cell has a future ( $\rightarrow$ ) or past ( $\leftarrow$ ), respectively, all cells of the tape do:

$$\varphi_{fp1} = \forall x_2, y_1. (\exists x_1. \text{right}(x_1, y_1) \wedge \text{future}(x_1, x_2)) \leftrightarrow (\exists y_2. \text{future}(y_1, y_2) \wedge \text{right}(x_2, y_2))$$

$$\varphi_{fp2} = \forall x_1, y_2. (\exists y_1. \text{right}(x_1, y_1) \wedge \text{future}(y_1, y_2)) \leftrightarrow (\exists x_2. \text{future}(x_1, x_2) \wedge \text{right}(x_2, y_2))$$

Left ( $l$ ) and right ( $r$ ) neighbours, and future ( $f$ ) and past ( $p$ ) are unique:

$$\varphi_r = \forall x, y, y'. \text{right}(x, y) \wedge \text{right}(x, y') \rightarrow y \approx y'$$

$$\varphi_l = \forall x, x', y. \text{right}(x, y) \wedge \text{right}(x', y) \rightarrow x \approx x'$$

$$\varphi_f = \forall x, y, y'. \text{future}(x, y) \wedge \text{future}(x, y') \rightarrow y \approx y'$$

$$\varphi_p = \forall x, x', y. \text{future}(x, y) \wedge \text{future}(x', y) \rightarrow x \approx x'$$

# Finishing the Proof of Trakhtenbrot's Theorem

We obtain a final FO formula

$$\varphi_{\mathcal{M},w} = \varphi_{\text{right}^+} \wedge \varphi_w \wedge \varphi_S \wedge \varphi_H \wedge \varphi_Q \wedge \varphi_\Delta \wedge \varphi_{\text{mem}} \wedge \\ \varphi_{fp1} \wedge \varphi_{fp2} \wedge \varphi_r \wedge \varphi_l \wedge \varphi_f \wedge \varphi_p$$

Then  $\varphi_{\mathcal{M},w}$  is finitely satisfiable if and only if  $\mathcal{M}$  halts on  $w$ :

- If  $\mathcal{M}$  has a finite run when started on  $w$  then  $\varphi_{\mathcal{M},w}$  has a finite model that encodes this run.
- If  $\varphi_{\mathcal{M},w}$  has a finite model, then we can extract from this model a finite run of  $\mathcal{M}$  on  $w$ .

Note: the proof can be made to work using only one binary relation symbol and no equality (not too hard, but less readable)

# The Impossibility of FO Query Optimisation

Trakhtenbrot's Theorem has severe consequences for static FO query optimisation

All of the following decision problems are undecidable (exercise):

- Query equivalence
- Query emptiness
- Query containment

↪ “perfect” FO query optimisation is impossible

Other important questions about FO queries are also undecidable, for example:

- Is a given FO query domain independent?

# Is Query Optimisation Futile?

Not quite: things are simpler for conjunctive queries

Conjunctive query containment – example:

$$Q_1 : \quad \exists x, y, z. R(x, y) \wedge R(y, y) \wedge R(y, z)$$

$$Q_2 : \quad \exists u, v, w, t. R(u, v) \wedge R(v, w) \wedge R(w, t)$$

$Q_1$  find  $R$ -paths of length two with a loop in the middle

$Q_2$  find  $R$ -paths of length three

$\rightsquigarrow$  in a loop one can find paths of any length

$\rightsquigarrow Q_1 \sqsubseteq Q_2$

# Summary and Outlook

There are many well-defined static optimisation tasks that are independent of the database

→ query equivalence, containment, emptiness

Unfortunately, all of them are undecidable for FO queries →

Slogan: “all interesting questions about FO queries are undecidable”

Next topics:

- More positive results for conjunctive queries
- Measure expressivity rather than just complexity
- Look at query languages beyond first-order logic