Mathematisches Forschungsinstitut Oberwolfach

Proof Complexity and Beyond

Organized by
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24 March – 29 March 2024

ABSTRACT. Proof complexity is a multi-disciplinary research area that addresses questions of the general form "how difficult is it to prove certain mathematical facts?" The current workshop focussed on recent advances in our understanding that the analysis of an appropriately tailored concept of "proof" underlies many of the arguments in algorithms, geometry or combinatorics research that make the core of modern theoretical computer science. These include the analysis of practical Boolean satisfiability (SAT) solving algorithms, the size of linear or semidefinite programming formulations of combinatorial optimization problems, the complexity of solving total **NP** search problems by local methods, and the complexity of describing winning strategies in two-player round-based games, to name just a few important examples.

Introduction by the Organizers

The workshop *Proof Complexity and Beyond* was organised by Albert Atserias (Barcelona), Jakob Nordström (Copenhagen/Lund), Meena Mahajan (Chennai) and Alexander Razborov (Chicago). The workshop was held during March 24th-29th and had 48 participants, including 4 remote participants. The program featured a total of 33 talks: 7 one-hour invited talks and 26 short talks. In addition, there was an open problem session, and during breaks intensive interaction took place in smaller groups.

As originally conceived by Stephen Cook and Robert Reckhow in their seminal article, propositional proof complexity is "the study of the length of the shortest proof of a propositional tautology in various proof systems as a function of the length of the tautology." The original motivation for what came to be known as Cook's program was to shed light on the celebrated **P** vs. **NP** problem, today one of the Clay Mathematical Institute Millenium Problems. But since that time, numerous connections with other areas—such as combinatorial optimization, practical Boolean satisfiability (SAT) solving, operation research, and extremal combinatorics, to name just a few—have been discovered. In our workshop, we attempted to "blend" Cook's program proper and these more modern directions.

We now proceed to describing concrete talks delivered at the workshop, and we attempt to loosely classify them into several categories. Our description is followed by abstracts that are listed in the order of appearance at the workshop.

Algebraic and semi-algebraic proof systems. Just as was the case with its predecessor (*Proof Complexity and Beyond*, 2017 edition), this was a major theme of our workshop, although the focus slightly shifted towards algebraic proof systems. It stems from the following simple observation. Two most fundamental mathematical results underlying algebraic and real geometry, Hilbert's Nullstellensatz and Stengle's Positivestellensatz, are essentially proof systems for proving unsatisfiability of a system of polynomial equations and inequalities, respectively. In turn, the grading of "proofs" in such proof systems by their "complexity" underlies several of the successful applications of these results of classical mathematics to theoretical computer science and affine areas.

The plenary talk by RISSE reported a remarkable progress on the notoriously difficult "Small Clique Problem" in the context of semi-algebraic proof systems. Namely, the problem has been solved for the prominent system of Sherali-Adams (with an additional restriction on coefficients). CONNERYD spoke about another recent major progress in the area, optimal polynomial calculus lower bounds for non-colorability of sparse random graphs. In a somewhat similar vein, POTECHIN reported an intriguing lower bound on the size of coefficients for the widely studied pigeon-hole-principle and the most basic algebraic proof system, Nullstellensatz.

Other talks in this category were more open-ended. TZAMERET spoke about the functional lower bound method for analyzing strong proof systems and its applications. The talk by TORAN was devoted to one of the most prominent tools (pebbling tautologies) in the context of algebraic proof systems; the method led to new strong separations between several such systems. The talk by GALESI highlighted important connections between complexity of algebraic proofs and the Tensor Isomorphism Problem, the latter being instrumental in several different areas. HIRSCH introduced so-called "tropical proof systems" that provide a very nice connection between (semi)-algebraic proof complexity and tropical mathematics. BONACINA surveyed generalizations of the Max-SAT resolution proof system when weights can be negative and showed how it leads to new algebraic and semi-algebraic proof systems.

Proof, circuit, and communication complexity. Loosely speaking, circuit (or computational) complexity studies what we can compute with limited resources,

communication complexity studies how much information we must exchange to compute in settings where the input is distributed, and proof complexity studies what we can *prove* efficiently using only specific constructions that are allowed by circuit and/or communication constraints. Intuitively, these tasks should be related to each other. Quite remarkably, it turns out that these connections go way deeper than this loose philosophical speculation, and this made for another major theme at the workshop.

In her invited talk, DE REZENDE spoke about lifting techniques, a major development connecting these three areas in particularly influential ways. Her talk provided a game-theoretical perspective of the subject. Another invited talk given by SOKOLOV reviewed, in a somewhat similar style, applications of sunflowers in proof and circuit complexities. Initiated by Erdős and Rado in the context of extremal combinatorics, this notion has become indispensable in several areas of theoretical computer science. GÖÖS spoke of very interesting applications of the hardness condensation method, previously employed in circuit and proof complexity, to some prominent problems in the communication complexity setting. SOFRONOVA presented top-down lower bounds for depth 4 circuits that make an important step towards resolving one of the most fundamental (and notoriously difficult) problems in circuit complexity. HRUBEŠ spoke about a well-known system of monotone calculus and showed various connections to monotone arithmetic circuits.

Logic-based propositional proof systems. These are proof systems in the proper sense, i.e. those that encode normal mathematical arguments in a recognizable form. Most talks in this section can be viewed as steps towards Cook's program.

ITSYKSON spoke about their recent major result that had generated quite a bit of interest in the community: strong lower bounds for the regular variant of the system "parity resolution". PAPAMAKARIOS showed how to extend a (relatively) recent breakthrough result about non-automatability of resolution to bounded-depth Frege: this is now the strongest proof system for which this can be reasonably hoped to be achieved with our current understanding. HÅSTAD viewed the same system from a different angle: his talk reported lower bounds for the pigeon-hole-principle on the grid. PANG considered the notion of very strong trade-offs previously established in circuit and proof complexity in several different contexts and showed how to extend it to a fundamental tool in graph isomorphism testing known as Weisfeiler-Leman algorithms.

Practical SAT Solving and Quantified Boolean Formulas (QBFs). The tremendous success of SAT solvers on real-world instances has thrown up newer challenges and opened new directions. In a survey talk aimed at highlighting one such challenge, NORDSTRÖM discussed the issue of certifying answers of SAT solvers and other combinatorial solvers in succinct yet easily verifiable formats. THAPEN-II presented evidence that an approach using symmetry-breaking techniques for SAT solving is plausibly stronger than extended resolution, since it can encapsulate limited reasoning with QBFs.

In a session looking at directions beyond propositional proofs, MAHAJAN gave a brief overview of proof complexity for the more succinct formalism of QBFs. CHOUDHURY reported on initial steps towards analysing the dependency schemes heuristic, used in many QBF solvers, from a rigorous proof-theoretic viewpoint. KACHE laid out the roadmap for obtaining lower bounds for the quantified version of polynomial calculus.

Proof Complexity and Search Problems. This is yet another fascinating connection which has seen a surge of advances and new insights after 2017. In his plenary talk opening the workshop, ROBERE surveyed this theory and known results, as well as outlined next steps to take. FLEMING reported their recent contribution affirming that the prominent class of search problems PPP is not Turing-closed in the relevant (black-box) setting, thus providing strong evidence that its "big" version is also not Turing-closed. THAPEN-I connected this theory to the feasible disjunction/feasible interpolation property that in particular led to the first example of a proof system for which these two concepts behave very differently.

Mathematical Logic, Meta-Complexity etc. In this category we list several talks that are particularly well connected to the parent discipline, mathematical logic. OLIVEIRA surveyed the connections between (un)provability of statements in various theories and the complexity of proving computational lower bounds, presenting this study as a principled approach to understanding the difficulty of proving lower bounds. Along these lines, CARMOSINO discussed the difficulty of proving known circuit lower bounds in specific theories; provability of the size hierarchy would then imply other circuit lower bounds. JEŘÁBEK discussed the theory of exponential integer parts, described some properties of these theories, and, towards obtaining a finite axiomatization, presented an associated 2-player game over the integers. PUDLÁK described how the additional strength of narrow implicit proof systems based on quantified propositional calculi, using resolution to certify the implictly described proofs, corresponds to a jump in the hierarchy.

Miscellaneous (Beyond Proof Complexity). There were several talks on topics not directly in the area of proof complexity per se, but with significant non-trivial connections. KOTHARI delivered an exposition on the Kikuchi matrix method, that has found much use recently in solving problems about extremal combinatorics, and highlighted where and how verifying unsatisfiablity plays a role. TULSIANI followed up with describing a general framework for obtaining decoding algorithm, based on the Sum-of-Squares hierarchy of semidefinite programs and proofs. BLEKHERMAN discussed (the undecidability of) certifying the unsatisfiability of graph homomorphism inequality problems, highlighting an interplay between extremal combinatorics and real algebraic geometry. GROHE described a lower bound for the k-dimensional Weisfeiler-Leman algorithms for graph isomorphism testing referred to earlier; such lower bounds imply lower bounds in algebraic proof systems for formulas that formalise the existence of isomorphisms.

Open Problems Session

On Tuesday evening at 20h an Open Problems Session was held in the main auditorium. The session was attended by almost all participants, and was run by Albert Atserias, one of the organizers of the workshop. On Monday morning the participants were polled in a show of hands to express interest in having such a session. In keeping with similar traditions in comparable workshop series, also with the precedent settled in the previous edition of the Proof Complexity and Beyond worskhop of 2017 (Oberwolfach 1733), the suggested format was to allocate 10 slots of 5 minutes each. The slots would be filled on a first-come first-served basis by volunteering presenters. The reception was enthusiastic. By Tuesday afternoon all 10 slots had been filled with names of presenters. In the actual session on Tuesday we had one extra last-minute improvised open problem presentation. The session ended within schedule at 21h.

What follows is a list of succinct descriptions of the open problems that were presented. We made an effort to summarize each open problem with a single-sentence interrogation. The interrogation is followed by some short clarifications concerning the definitions, or by some known relevant facts on the state of the art.

1. Mika Göös. Is there a TFNP class beyond FP that is easy in the random oracle model? One can see that PPP and PLS are hard in the random oracle model. For example, it is well-known that it takes $\Omega(2^{n/2})$ queries to have a good chance of finding a collision (let alone a preimage of 0^n) in a random function from $\{0,1\}^n$ to $\{0,1\}^n$. Thus, PPP is hard in the random oracle model.

2. Robert Robere. Is it possible to randomly black-box reduce 3-PIGEON to 2-PIGEON? Here 3-PIGEON is the TFNP search problem of finding three out of $2N + 1$ pigeons that map to the same out of N holes, and 2-PIGEON is the standard pigeonhole principle search problem of finding two out of $N + 1$ pigeons that map to the same out of N holes; i.e., the defining problem of PPP.

3. Noah Fleming. Are Stabbing Planes and Cutting Planes, as proof systems for integer linear programming, equivalent up to quasi-polynomial simulations? It is known that Stabbing Planes quasi-polynomially simulates Cutting Planes. Recently proved lower bounds for Stabbing Planes suggest that a converse simulation might be possible too.

4. Greg Bleckermann. Is non-negativity of binomials of graph densities decidable? A binomial of graph densities is a formal expression of the form $a_1 t(G_1) + a_2 t(G_2)$ where a_1, a_2 are integers and G_1, G_2 are finite graphs. The graph-density function of G, denoted by $t(G)$, is the graph function defined by $H \mapsto t(G, H) = |\text{Hom}(G, H)|/|V(H)|^{|V(G)|}$; i.e., $t(G, H)$ is the fraction of maps from $V(G)$ to $V(H)$ that are homomorphisms from G to H. By standard tricks, the only interesting case is $a_1 = 1$ and $a_2 = -1$, i.e., deciding if $t(G_1) \geq t(G_2)$.

5. Marco Carmosino. Does the two-sorted bounded-arithmetic theory VPV prove the Non-Deterministic Time Hierarchy Theorem? It is known that the theory

VPV is able to prove many theorems of computational complexity theory, including the Deterministic Time Hierarchy Theorem in the form $\text{DTIME}(n^{2c+1}) \not\subseteq \text{DTIME}(n^c)$, for all $c \geq 1$.

6. Marc Vinyals. Can one efficiently reduce the number of bits in the coefficients of an n-variable linear threshold function from, say, n^{100} bits down to n^2 bits? It is known that $O(n \log n)$ bits suffice but no efficient algorithm is known to achieve even polynomial compression.

7. Shuo Pang. In the Cops-Robber game on the $k \times m$ cylinder grid, how many rounds can the Robber survive if the number of cops is $5k/2$? It is known that $k+1$ cops can catch the robber but they need $\Omega(m)$ rounds, while $3k$ cops can catch the robber in $O(\log m)$ rounds.

8. Jakob Nordström. In the configuration model of Resolution with a *baby* version of the redundancy-based rule added, how would one prove lower bounds? In the *baby* version of the new rule, two restrictions are imposed: (1) the added clause does not introduce any new variables, and (2) the implication test underlying the rule is replaced by the much weaker containment test. In this model, the standard pigeonhole principle formulas and the standard Tseitin formulas are easy.

9. Paul Beame. For PCR, can we get a better degree-automating algorithm than Groebner basis which does not immediately kill the negated variables? In PCR, variables come in pairs x and $\overline{x}$ with the axiom $x+\overline{x}-1=0$ to avoid exponentially many monomials when representing clauses. In such a situation, the first thing the Groebner basis algorithm would do is to eliminate all occurrences of $\overline{x}$ and replace them by $1-x$, or all occurrences of x and replace them by $1-\overline{x}$. This defeats the whole purpose of introducing the negated variables $\overline{x}$.

10. Albert Atserias. Can one find PC/SA/SOS degree lower bounds for graph isomorphism formulas $\text{ISO}(G,H)$ that do not come from CFI graphs or their small variants? Here $\text{ISO}(G,H)$ is a standard CNF encoding of the statement that G and H are isomorphic. A concrete question: Writing $\text{vc}(G)$ for the minimum vertex cover size of G, find n-vertex graphs G_n and H_n with $\text{vc}(G_n) < 0.51n$ and $\text{vc}(H_n) > 0.99n$ yet the SA-degree of refuting $\text{ISO}(G_n, H_n)$ grows unbounded. It is known, but not trivial, that such examples for SA would lift to similar examples for SOS.

11. Antonina Kolokolova. How strong is a deductive proof system in which lines are represented by DNNF (Decomposable Negation Normal Form) formulas? Such a system would simulate OBDD proofs, and also proofs with lines represented by read-once branching programs (aka free BDDs), even if they are not ordered.

Workshop: Proof Complexity and Beyond

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Abstracts

Propositional Proof Complexity and TFNP
Robert Robere

A recent line of work [1–8] has demonstrated many deep connections between propositional proof systems and total NP search problems (TFNP). The basic correspondence allows us to associate a total search problem S with each propositional proof system P such that the following holds: for every tautology T, T has a short proof in P if and only if proving T can be "efficiently reduced" to proving the totality of S. This allows us to define a theory of reducibility for proof systems that is analogous to classical reducibility in complexity theory, it has led to the resolution of a number of open problems in both proof complexity and the theory of TFNP, and also has suggested new directions of study in both of these areas.

In this talk we will survey this connection, the recent progress that has been made, and outline some next steps for the development to take.

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Black-Box PPP Is Not Turing Closed

Noah Fleming

(joint work with Stefan Grosser, Toniann Pitassi, Robert Robere)

The complexity class PPP contains all total search problems many-one reducible to the Pigeon problem, where we are given a succinct encoding of a function mapping $n+1$ pigeons to n holes, and must output two pigeons that collide in a hole. PPP is one of the "original five" syntactically-defined subclasses of TFNP [3,9–11], and has been extensively studied due to its defining problem — the pigeonhole principle — which captures strong induction, which is the basic axiom underlying most formal systems for mathematical reasoning. Additionally, PPP has strong connections to other areas such as the theory of lattices and cryptography [1,7,8,13], extremal combinatorics [4,12], and propositional proof complexity [2,5,6].

Despite the prominent role of PPP, it seems to lack certain robustness properties that all other natural TFNP classes enjoy. A prominent example of such a property is *closure under Turing reductions*. (A TFNP class $\mathcal{C}$ is closed under Turing reductions if any problem polynomial-time reducible to $\mathcal{C}$ via multiple calls to a problem in $\mathcal{C}$ is also polynomial-time reducible to a single call to $\mathcal{C}$.) The classical TFNP classes are typically defined using closure under *many-one* reductions, although, the original family of black-box separations between these classes, proved by [2], already hold for the Turing closed variants. The later work of Buss and Johnson [6] asked whether these classical TFNP classes are closed under Turing reductions. They proved that four of the five original TFNP classes PPA, PPAD, PPADS, and PLS are closed under Turing reductions, and they constructed an artificial TFNP subclass that was not Turing closed in the black-box setting. Subsequently, with the exception of PPP, all other natural TFNP classes have been shown to be Turing closed. Thus PPP stands as the only natural TFNP class not known to be Turing closed. The question of whether PPP contains its Turing closure was further highlighted by Daskalakis in his recent IMU Abacus Medal Lecture.

In this joint work with Stefan Grosser, Toniann Pitassi and Robert Robere, we prove that PPP is indeed not Turing-closed in the black-box setting, affirmatively resolving the above conjecture and providing strong evidence that PPP is not Turing-closed. In fact, we are able to separate PPP from its *non-adaptive* Turing closure, in which all calls to the Pigeon oracle must be made in parallel. This differentiates PPP from all other important TFNP subclasses, and especially from its closely-related subclass PWPP — defined by reducibility to the *weak* pigeonhole principle — which is known to be non-adaptively Turing-closed. Our proof requires developing new tools for PPP lower bounds, and creates new connections between PPP and the theory of *pseudoexpectation operators* used for Sherali-Adams and Sum-of-Squares lower bounds. In particular, we introduce a new type of pseudo-expectation operator that is precisely tailored for lower bounds against black-box PPP, which may be of independent interest.

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TFNP Intersections and Feasible Disjunction

Neil Thapen

(joint work with Pavel Hubáček, Erfan Khaniki)

The complexity class CLS was introduced by Daskalakis and Papadimitriou [1] to capture the computational complexity of important TFNP problems solvable by local search over continuous domains and, thus, lying in both PLS and PPAD. It was later shown that, e.g., the problem of computing fixed points guaranteed by Banach's fixed point theorem is CLS-complete by Daskalakis et al. [2]. Recently,

Fearnley et al. [3] disproved the plausible conjecture of Daskalakis and Papadimitriou that CLS is a proper subclass of PLS ∩ PPAD by proving that CLS = PLS ∩ PPAD.

To study the possibility of other surprising collapses in TFNP, we connect classes formed as the intersection of existing subclasses of TFNP with the phenomenon of *feasible disjunction* in propositional proof complexity; where a proof system has the feasible disjunction property if, whenever a disjunction $F \vee G$ has a small proof, and F and G have no variables in common, then either F or G has a small proof [7, 8]. We study feasible disjunction for various systems and notions of smallness, in particular extending work of Hakoniemi [5] to show a kind of feasible disjunction for size and degree for Sherali Adams. Using this we separate the classes formed by intersecting the classical subclasses PLS, PPA, PPAD, PPADS, PPP and CLS, relying extensively on the lower bounds and connections with proof systems shown recently by Göös et al. [4]. We also give the first examples of proof systems which have the feasible interpolation property, but not the feasible disjunction property.

This work has appeared as [6].

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A Variant of Monotone Calculus
Pavel Hrubeš

Monotone calculus is a Frege-style system which operates with implications $A \to B$ where A and B are monotone. I will define a weakening of this system and show its connections with monotone arithmetic circuits.

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Proof Complexity, Communication Complexity, and Lifting

Susanna F. de Rezende

Query-to-communication lifting theorems are methods of obtaining lower bounds for communication models from lower bounds for weaker query models. This method was used in [13] to separate the monotone NC hierarchy and to obtain monotone circuit depth lower bounds for functions like *st*-connectivity and *k*-clique. Soon after it was generalized in [2] to obtain lower bounds for tree-like proof systems. It was later brought to light in [6] where it was shown that this technique is more general than originally presented, and this gave rise to many new result in proof and circuit complexity, including: optimal $2^{\Omega(n)}$ lower bounds on the size of monotone boolean formulas computing an explicit monotone function in NP [10] and near optimal $2^{\widetilde{\Omega}(n)}$ for a function in monotone P [3]; the refinement of the monotone AC^i hierarchy from the monotone NC^i hierarchy and new tradeoffs for cutting planes proofs [4]; and a new family of techniques for proving lower bounds on cutting planes proofs and monotone circuit size [5].

In this talk we will view proofs and circuits as games: the *Prover-Adversary game* [1, 11] where a proof is seen as a protocol for solving the falsified clause search problem $\mathsf{Search}(F)$ for an unsatisfiable CNF formula F; and the *monotone Karchmer-Wigderson game* [7] where a monotone circuit is seen as communication (dag-like) protocol [8,9,12,14] to solve the monotone Karchmer-Wigderson relation $\mathsf{mKW}(f)$ for a monotone function f. We will see that, given an unsatisfiable CNF formula F, we can define a (partial) monotone function f such that $\mathsf{Search}(F)$ and $\mathsf{mKW}(f)$ become exactly the same problem, and then see how lifting theorems can be used to obtain lower bounds for protocols solving these search problems. In particular we will argue that for a formula F encoding the pigeonhole principle, we can obtain monotone circuit size and depth lower bounds for the clique-colouring function from communication lower bounds for $\mathsf{Search}(F)$ composed with the so-called indexing gadget. These communication lower bounds can, in turn, be shown via lifting theorems, such as those in [3,5,6,10,13], leading to the best known size and depth lower bounds for the clique-colouring function.

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On the Automatability of Bounded-Depth Frege Systems

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A large chunk of research in proof complexity concentrates on trying to show that certain statements cannot have short proofs in some proof system. But even if a statement does have short proofs in a proof system, such proofs may not be easy to find. This motivates the notion of automatability [6]: A proof system P is called automatable if, given a statement τ, one can find a P-proof of τ in time polynomial in the size of the shortest P-proof of τ. Apart from being a natural notion in itself, of central importance to automated theorem proving, the concept of automatability is connected to other important threads in proof complexity, e.g. canonical pairs and feasible interpolation [2, 6, 11].

   Now, the stronger the proof system, the harder it is to automate it, and in-deed, early results show non-automatability for strong systems under plausible complexity theoretic assumptions [6, 10], and even, tightening the assumptions,

weaker systems [1,5]. More recently, starting with [3], weak proof systems, including resolution, res(k), cutting planes and various algebraic proof systems, have been shown to be as hard to automate as possible [3, 7–9]. In this talk, we argue how this can be extended to bounded-depth Frege systems.

We furthermore touch upon the problem of whether resolution is weakly automatable. A proof system P is weakly automatable if, given a statement τ, one can find a Q-proof of τ in time polynomial in the size of the shortest P-proof of τ, where Q is a proof system that polynomially simulates P. Whereas we know that resolution is as hard to automate as possible, whether it can be weakly automatable remains to a large extent open. An equivalent problem is whether depth-2 Frege systems have feasible interpolation [4, 5]. Focusing on the latter problem, we present a version of the point-line game of [4], present some of its properties, trying to suggest that the problem of weakly automating resolution might not be as hard as the problem of (strongly) automating resolution.

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Functional Lower Bounds in Algebraic Proofs: Symmetry, Lifting, and Barriers

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(joint work with Tuomas Hakoniemi, Nutan Limaye)

Strong algebraic proof systems such as IPS (Ideal Proof System; Grochow–Pitassi [7]) offer a general model for deriving polynomials in an ideal and refuting unsatisfiable propositional formulas, subsuming most standard propositional proof systems. One of the most successful approach to this day for lower bounding the size of IPS refutations is the Functional Lower Bound Method (Forbes, Shpilka, Tzameret and Wigderson [5]), which reduces the hardness of refuting a polynomial equation $f(\bar{x}) = 0$ with no Boolean solutions to the hardness of computing the function $1/f(\bar{x})$ over the Boolean cube with an algebraic circuit. We consider this approach in general terms, and attempt to understand how far it can lead with respect to lower bounds, and where it cannot reach.

In particular, using symmetry we provide a general way to obtain many new hard instances against fragments of IPS via the functional lower bound method. This includes hardness over finite fields and hard instances different from Subset Sum variants both of which were unknown before, and stronger constant-depth lower bounds. Conversely, we expose the limitation of this method by showing it cannot lead to proof complexity lower bounds for any hard *Boolean* instance (e.g., CNFs) for any sufficiently strong proof systems. Specifically, we discuss the following new results:

Nullstellensatz degree lower bounds using symmetry: Extending [5] we show that every unsatisfiable symmetric polynomial with n variables requires degree $> n$ refutations (over sufficiently large characteristic). Using symmetry again, by characterising the $n/2$-homogeneous slice appearing in refutations, we show that unsatisfiable *invariant* polynomials of degree $n/2$ require degree $\geq n$ refutations.

Lifting to size lower bounds: Lifting our Nullstellensatz degree bounds to IPS-size lower bounds, we obtain exponential lower bounds for any polylogarithmic degree symmetric instance against IPS refutations written as oblivious read-once algebraic programs (roABP-IPS). For invariant polynomials, we show lower bounds against roABP-IPS and refutations written as multilinear formulas in the *placeholder* IPS regime (studied by Andrews-Forbes [2]), where the hard instances do not necessarily have small roABPs themselves, including over *positive characteristic* fields. This provides the first IPS-fragment lower bounds over finite fields.

By an adaptation of the work of Amireddy, Garg, Kayal, Saha and Thankey [1], we extend and strengthen the constant-depth IPS lower bounds obtained recently in Govindasamy, Hakoniemi and Tzameret [6] which held only for multilinear proofs, to $\mathsf{poly}(\log \log n)$ *individual degree* proofs. This is a natural and stronger constant depth proof system than

in [6], which admits small refutations for standard hard instances like the pigeonhole principle and Tseitin formulas.

Barriers for Boolean instances: While lower bounds against strong propositional proof systems were the original motivation for studying algebraic proof systems in the 1990s [3, 4], we show that the functional lower bound method alone cannot establish any size lower bound for *Boolean* instances for any sufficiently strong proof systems, and in particular, cannot lead to lower bounds against $\mathsf{AC}^0[p]$-Frege and TC^0-Frege.

Overall, this work wraps up to some extent research on IPS lower bounds via the functional lower bound method, showing how far it can be pushed, and where it cannot be applied. It generalises and improves previous work on IPS lower bounds obtained via the functional lower bound method in [5, 6]. We established size lower bounds for symmetric instances, and hard instances qualitatively different from previously known hard instances. This allows us also to show lower bounds over finite fields, which were open. We then showed how to incorporate recent developments on constant-depth algebraic circuit lower bounds [1] in the setting of proof complexity. This enables us to improve the constant-depth IPS lower bounds in [6] to stronger fragments, namely IPS refutations of constant depth and $\mathsf{poly}(\log\log n)$-individual degrees. As a corollary, we show a new finite field functional lower bound for *multilinear formulas* which may be of independent interest.

As for the barrier we uncovered, it is now evident that the functional lower bound method *alone* cannot be used to settle the long-standing open problems about the proof complexity of constant-depth propositional proofs with counting gates. This does not rule out however the ability of IPS lower bounds, and the IPS "paradigm" in general, to progress on these open problems, since other relevant methods may be found helpful (the meta-complexity method established in [9], the lower bounds for multiples method [2, 5], and the noncommutative reduction [8]). Moreover, our barrier only shows that we cannot hope to use a single non-Boolean unsatisfiable axiom $f(\bar{x}) = 0$ and consider the function $1/f(\bar{x})$ over the Boolean cube to obtain a CNF IPS lower bound (whenever the CNF is semantically implied from $f(\bar{x}) = 0$ over the Boolean cube). However, it does not rule out in general the use of a reduction to matrix rank, which is the backbone of many algebraic circuit lower bounds (as well as the functional lower bound method), and should potentially be helpful in proof complexity as well.

A very interesting problem that remains open is to prove CNF lower bounds using the functional method against fragments of IPS that sit below the reach of the barrier, namely fragments that cannot derive efficiently the conjunction of arbitrarily many polynomials (that is, systems that are not sufficiently strong in the above terminology).

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Clique Is Hard on Average for Sherali-Adams with Bounded Coefficients

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(joint work with Susanna F. de Rezende, Aaron Potechin)

A fundamental problem of theoretical computer science is k-clique: given an n-vertex graph, determine whether it contains a clique of size k. This problem can be solved in time $O(n^k)$ by iterating over all subsets of vertices of size k and checking whether one of them is a clique. This naïve algorithm is essentially the fastest known; the constant in the exponent can be slightly improved [20] but, assuming the exponential time hypothesis [6], this linear dependence on k in the exponent is optimal in the worst-case.

Besides studying k-clique in the worst-case, one may consider it in the average-case setting. Suppose the given graph is an Erdős-Rényi graph with edge probability around the threshold of containing a k-clique. Does k-clique require time $n^{\Omega(k)}$ on such graphs? Or, even less ambitiously, is there an algorithm running in time $n^{o(k)}$ that decides the n^{ϵ}-clique problem on such graphs? It is unlikely that the hardness of such average-case questions can be based on worst-case hardness assumptions such as $\mathbf{P} \neq \mathbf{NP}$ or the exponential time hypothesis [5]. They are, in fact, being used as hardness assumptions themselves: the *planted clique conjecture*

states that $n^{1/2-\epsilon}$-clique requires time $n^{\Omega(\log n)}$ on Erdős-Rényi graphs with edge probability $1/2$.

In order to obtain evidence that the planted clique conjecture holds we intend to prove it for bounded computational models. We consider the Sherali-Adams proof system with bounded coefficients and show that, for $k \leq 2\log n$, it requires proofs of size $n^{\Omega(k)}$ to refute the claim that a uniformly sampled graph contains a clique of size $n^{0.1}$. This establishes a quantitative version of the planted clique conjecture for all algorithms captured by this proof system. Note that this proof system is incomparable to resolution, as shown in [12]. Previously similar results have been shown for tree-like resolution [4, 16] and for the Nullstellensatz proof system without dual-variables [18].

If we are only interested in refuting the existence of a smaller clique, say of size $4\log n$, then there are essentially optimal $n^{\Omega(k)}$ average-case size lower bounds for regular resolution [1, 21]. For resolution, there are two average-case lower bounds that hold in different regimes: for $n^{5/6} \ll k \leq n/3$, Beame et al. [3] proved an average-case $\exp(n^{\Omega(1)})$ size lower bound and for $k \leq n^{1/3}$, Pang [21] proved a $2^{k^{1-o(1)}}$ lower bound. It is a long standing open problem, mentioned, e.g., in [4], to prove an unconditional $n^{\Omega(k)}$ resolution size lower bound for the unary encoding – even in the worst case.

For the less usual binary encoding of the clique formula it is somewhat straightforward to prove almost optimal $n^{\Omega(k)}$ resolution size lower bounds for the less usual binary encoding of the k-clique formula [17] and these lower bounds can even be extended to an $n^{\Omega(k)}$ lower bound for the Res(s) proof system for constant s [8].

An extended abstract previously appeared in the *Proceedings of the 64th Annual IEEE Symposium on Foundations of Computer Science (FOCS '23)* [10].

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Graph Colouring Is Hard on Average for Polynomial Calculus

Jonas Conneryd

(joint work with Susanna F. de Rezende, Jakob Nordström, Shuo Pang, Kilian Risse)

Determining the *chromatic number* of a graph G, i.e., how many colours are needed for the vertices of G if no two vertices connected by an edge should have the same colour, is one of the original 21 problems shown NP-complete in the seminal work

of Karp [12]. This *graph colouring problem*, as it is also referred to, has been extensively studied since then, but there are still major gaps in our understanding.

It is widely believed that any algorithm that colours graphs optimally has to run in exponential time in the worst case, and the currently fastest algorithm for 3-colouring has time complexity $O(1.3289^n)$ [4]. To understand graph colouring from the viewpoint of computational complexity, it is natural to investigate bounded models of computation that are strong enough to describe the reasoning performed by state-of-the-art algorithms for graph colouring and to prove unconditional lower bounds that hold in these models.

We investigate the hardness of graph colouring for algorithms based on algebraic reasoning, where the idea is to encode the graph colouring problem as a set of polynomials whose common roots correspond to proper colourings of the graph. The goal is then to either find those roots or prove that they do not exist. This leads us to the *polynomial calculus* proof system [1, 6], whose reasoning captures, for instance, most implementations of the Gröbner basis algorithm as well as an algorithm introduced in a well-known sequence of works [7–10] with surprisingly strong practical performance.

It was previously known [2, 13] that polynomial calculus requires linear degree, and hence exponential size via the size-degree relation [11], to solve graph colouring in the worst case. However, the hard instances in those papers come from reductions to other problems, so it was consistent with our knowledge that graph colouring is in fact easy for polynomial calculus except in some rather artificial special cases. Stronger evidence for the hardness of graph colouring would be an *average-case* lower bound, just as was established for resolution by Beame, Culberson, Mitchell, and Moore [3].

In this work we establish optimal, linear, degree lower bounds and exponential size lower bounds for polynomial calculus proofs of non-colourability of sparse random graphs. Our results hold over any field and for both Erdős-Rényi random graphs and random regular graphs.

An abridged version of this work appeared in the *Proceedings of the 64th Annual IEEE Symposium on Foundations of Computer Science (FOCS '23)* [5].

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Pebble Games and Algebraic Proof Systems

Jacobo Torán

(joint work with Lisa-Marie Jaser)

Analyzing refutations of the well known pebbling formulas $\text{Peb}(G)$ we prove some new strong connections between pebble games and algebraic proof system, showing that there is a parallelism between the reversible, black and black-white pebbling games on one side, and the three algebraic proof systems Nullstellensatz, Monomial Calculus [1] and Polynomial Calculus on the other side.

We prove that very similar results to those given in [3] for Nullstellensatz and reversible pebbling are also true for the case of Monomial Calculus and black pebbling. More concretely we show that for any DAG G with a single sink, if there is a MC refutation for $\text{Peb}(G)$ having simultaneously degree s and size t then there is a black pebbling strategy on G with space s and time $t + s$. This is done by proving that any Horn formula has a very especial kind of MC refutation, which we call input monomial refutation since it is the same concept as an input refutation in Resolution.

For the other direction, we show that from a black pebbling strategy for G with space s and time t it is possible to extract a MC refutation for $\text{Peb}(G)$ having simultaneously degree s and size ts. The small loss in the time parameter compared to the results in [3] comes from the fact that size complexity is measured

in slight different ways in NS and MC. Using these results we are able to show degree separations between NS and MC as well as strong degree-size tradeoffs for MC in the same spirit as those in [3]. The results also show that strong degree lower bounds for MC refutations do not imply exponential size lower bounds as it happens in the PC proof system [4].

The degrees of the refutation for pebbling formulas in NS and MS correspond exactly to the space in reversible and black games respectively. This is not the case for PC degree and space in the black-white pebble game [2]. We notice however that if instead of the degree we consider the complexity measure of variable space, then the connection still holds. For any single sink DAG G the variable space complexity of refuting Peb(G) in each of the algebraic proof systems NS, MC and PC is exactly the space needed in a strategy for pebbling G in each of the three versions reversible, black and black-white of the pebble game. This results allow us to apply known separations between the pebbling space needed in the different versions of the the game, in order to obtain separations in the variable space measure between the different proof systems.

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On Small-Depth Frege Proofs for PHP

JOHAN HÅSTAD
</div>

We study formal proofs for the Pigeon Hole Principle (PHP). The PHP states that $m + 1$ pigeons can fly to m holes such that no two pigeons fly to the same hole. It has $(m + 1)m$ Boolean variables and variable x_{ij} is true iff pigeon i flies to the hole j. The axioms say that for each i there is a value of j such that x_{ij} is true and for each j there is at most one i such that x_{ij}. This is clearly a contradiction and the questions is whether this can be established by a short proof using simple and natural derivation rules and where each formula derived is of depth at most d in the basis given by $\wedge$ and $\vee$.

The case of $d = 1$ corresponds to resolution and an early milestone was obtained by Haken [3] in 1985 when he established exponential size lower bounds for such a proof. This was extended in a sequence of works [1,2,6,7] to prove that polynomial size proofs require depth d at least $\Omega(\log \log n)$.

These bounds remained the strongest lower bounds for any tautology until Pitassi et al [8] obtained super-polynomial lower bounds for depths up to $o(\sqrt{\log n})$.

The tautology considered was first studied by Tseitin [9] and considers a set linear equations modulo two defined by a graph. The underlying graph for [8] is an expander. These results were later extended to depth almost logarithmic by Håstad and Risse [4,5] and in this case the underlying graph is the two-dimensional grid.

We continue this line of research and prove that similar bounds apply to the PHP and to make use of previous work we study the graph PHP where the underlying graph is an odd size two-dimensional grid. If one colors this graph as a chess board, the corners are of the same color and let us assume this is white. In the graph PHP on the grid, there is a pigeon on each white square and it should fly to one of the adjacent black squares that define the holes.

Phrased slightly differently, the PHP on the grid says that there is a perfect matching of the odd size grid while Tseitin tautology on the same graph states that it is possible to assign Boolean values to the edges of the grid such that there is an odd number of true variables next to any node. As a perfect matching would immediately yield such an assignment, the PHP is a stronger statement and possibly easier to refute. The statements are, however, quite similar and indeed we our proof follow along the same lines as [5] and use many ideas from that paper.

As in most previous papers the main technical tool is to prove a "switching lemma". By assigning values to most variables in a formula it is possible to switch a small depth-two formula from being a CNF to being a DNF and the other way around. By choosing a very special way of assigning values we are able to preserve the graph PHP and hence prove our theorem by induction over d.

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Lower Bounds for Regular Resolution Over Parities

Dmitry Itsykson

(joint work with Klim Efremenko, Michal Garlík)

The proof system resolution over parities ($\mathrm{Res}(\oplus)$) [7,8] operates with disjunctions of linear equations (linear clauses) over $\mathbb{F}_2$; it extends the resolution proof system by incorporating linear algebra over $\mathbb{F}_2$. Over the years, several exponential lower bounds on the size of tree-like $\mathrm{Res}(\oplus)$ refutations have been established [1–4, 6, 7, 9–11]. However, proving a superpolynomial lower bound on the size of dag-like $\mathrm{Res}(\oplus)$ refutations remains a highly challenging open question.

We prove an exponential lower bound for regular $\mathrm{Res}(\oplus)$. Regular $\mathrm{Res}(\oplus)$ is a subsystem of dag-like $\mathrm{Res}(\oplus)$ that naturally extends regular resolution. This is the first known superpolynomial lower bound for a fragment of dag-like $\mathrm{Res}(\oplus)$ which is exponentially stronger than tree-like $\mathrm{Res}(\oplus)$. In the regular regime, resolving linear clauses C_1 and C_2 on a linear form f is permitted only if, for both $i \in \{1, 2\}$, the linear form f does not lie within the linear span of all linear forms that were used in resolution rules during the derivation of C_i.

Namely, we show that the size of any regular $\mathrm{Res}(\oplus)$ refutation of the binary pigeonhole principle BPHP_n^{n+1} is at least $2^{\Omega(\sqrt[3]{n}/\log n)}$. A corollary of our result is an exponential lower bound on the size of a strongly read-once linear branching program solving a search problem. This resolves an open question raised by Gryaznov, Pudlák, and Talebanfard [5].

As a byproduct of our technique, we prove that the size of any tree-like $\mathrm{Res}(\oplus)$ refutation of the weak binary pigeonhole principle BPHP_n^m is at least $2^{\Omega(n)}$ using Prover-Delayer games. We also give a direct proof of a width lower bound: we show that any dag-like $\mathrm{Res}(\oplus)$ refutation of BPHP_n^m contains a linear clause C with $\Omega(n)$ linearly independent equations.

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Some Applications of Sunflowers

DMITRY SOKOLOV

Sunflowers is an extremely powerful object that is widely used in theoretical computer science. The original notion was defined by Erdős, Rado [2].

Definition 1. (k, ℓ)-*sunflower:*
- $S_1, S_2, S_3, \ldots, S_\ell \subseteq \{0,1\}^n$ *of size* k;
- $Z := \bigcap S_i$;
- $\forall i, j \ S_i \cap S_j = Z$.

And recently generalization of it was considered by Rossman [5].

Definition 2. (p, ε)-*robust sunflower:*
- $S_1, S_2, S_3, \cdots \subseteq \{0,1\}^n$ *of size* k;
- $Z := \bigcap S_i$;
- $\Pr_{W \sim \mathbf{U}_p}[\exists i, W \subseteq (S_i \setminus Z)] \geq 1 - \varepsilon$.

At first viewing, it is not clear why *robust sunflowers* is the more general notion of usual sunflowers. However, through applications of sunflowers, one can note that properties that we typically *want* from sunflowers are exactly what we see in the definition of robust version. In this talk, we will try to show it and discuss the following questions:
- For which problems sunflowers and robust sunflowers are useful?
- What is the *spreadness* of a set? Is it useful to think about spreadness instead of sunflowers?

During this talk, we consider the following applications:

- monotone circuit lower bounds for clique [1, 4];
- lower bounds for Res(k)-proofs of random formulas via sunflowers;
- depth-3 circuit lower bounds via sunflowers (simplification of [3]).

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Hardness Condensation by Restriction

Mika Göös

(joint work with Ilan Newman, Artur Riazanov, Dmitry Sokolov)

Hardness condensation is a lower-bound technique in boolean function complexity, where one transforms an n-variate problem f of complexity $k \ll n$ into a related problem f' defined over $\Theta(k)$ variables such that the complexity is preserved at $\Theta(k)$. This approach was first introduced by Buresh-Oppenheim and Santhanam [3] in the context of circuit complexity. Later, it was put to concrete use in the context of proof complexity by Razborov [9] and then further developed in [2, 6, 10, 11]. In these works, the function f' was obtained from f by expander-based function composition.

We study hardness condensation by *restriction*, the simplest operation that reduces the number of variables. Our work focuses on two computational measures: query complexity and communication complexity.

Our first result shows that there exists a function with *query complexity k* such that any its restriction that leaves $O(k)$ variables free has query complexity $O(k^{3/4}\text{poly}(\log k))$. The function that exhibits this is constructed using cheat sheets [1].

Randomized communication complexity is generally non-condensable in a very strong sense: Hambardzumyan, Hatami, and Hatami [7] have shown that there exists a 2^n-by-2^n matrix with communication complexity $\Theta(n^{0.9})$ such that all its $2^{n/2}$-by-$2^{n/2}$ submatrices have constant communication complexity.

Our second result shows that condensation is possible for a very important function: sink-of-xor. This function was used by Chattopadhyay, Mande, and

Sherif [4] to refute log approximate rank conjecture (LARC): they show that $2^{\binom{n}{2}}$-by-$2^{\binom{n}{2}}$ matrix describing sink-of-xor has approximate rank $O(n^4)$ and randomized communication complexity $\Omega(n)$. We show that there exists $2^{O(n)}$-by-$2^{O(n)}$ submatrix of sink-of-xor that retains communication cost $\Omega(n)$. On the other hand, we show that every submatrix of this size has approximate rank at most $O(n^3)$, achieving the stronger negation of LARC conjectured by Chattopadhyay, Garg, and Sherif [5].

The main open question that we leave open is whether the deterministic communication complexity can be condensed by restriction. In a concurrent works Hrubes [8] shows that it can be condensed with a polynomial loss, namely that every 2^n-by-2^n matrix with deterministic communication complexity k has a $2^{O(\sqrt{k})}$-by-$2^{O(\sqrt{k})}$ submatrix of deterministic communication complexity $\Omega(\sqrt{k})$. Can we show that some polynomial loss is necessary?

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Top-Down Lower Bounds for Depth-Four Circuits

Anastasia Sofronova

(joint work with Mika Göös, Artur Riazanov, Dmitry Sokolov)

We present a top-down lower-bound method for depth-4 boolean circuits. In particular, we give a new proof of the well-known result that the parity function requires depth-4 circuits of size exponential in $n^{1/3}$. Our proof is an application of robust sunflowers and block unpredictability.

The working complexity theorist has three main weapons in their arsenal when proving lower bounds against small-depth boolean circuits (consisting of $\wedge$, $\vee$, $\neg$ gates of unbounded fanin). The most wildly successful ones are the *random restriction* method [1,7] and the *polynomial approximation* method [14,19]. The random restriction method, in particular, is applied ***bottom-up***: it starts by analysing the bottom-most layer of gates next to input variables and finds a way to simplify the circuit so as to reduce its depth by one. The third main weapon, which is the subject of this work, is the ***top-down*** method: starting at the top (output) gate we walk down the circuit in search of a mistake in the computation.

It has been an open problem (posed in [9,12]) to prove exponential lower bounds for depth-4 circuits by a top-down argument. We develop such a lower-bound method in this work and use it to prove a lower bound for the parity function. It has been long known using bottom-up methods that the depth-4 complexity of n-bit parity is $2^{\Theta(n^{1/3})}$ [8,21]. We recover a slightly weaker bound.

Theorem 1. *Every depth-4 circuit computing the n-bit parity requires $2^{n^{1/3-o(1)}}$ gates.*

Our top-down proof of this theorem is a relatively simple application of two known techniques: robust sunflowers [2,13,15] and unpredictability from partial information [12,18,20], which we generalise to blocks of coordinates (obtaining essentially best possible parameters).

A major motivation for the further development of top-down methods is that the method is, in a precise sense, *complete* for constant-depth circuits, in that it can be used to prove tight lower bounds (up to polynomial factors) for *any* boolean function. The same is not known to hold for the aforementioned bottom-up techniques. For example, there is currently no known bottom-up proof for the depth-3 circuit lower bound that underlies the oracle separation $\mathsf{AM} \not\subseteq \Sigma_2\mathsf{P}$ [4, 11,16]. We suspect more generally that top-down methods could prove useful in settings where the bottom-up methods have failed so far, such as proving lower bounds against $\mathsf{AC}^0 \circ \oplus$ circuits computing inner-product [5,6,10,17] or against the polynomial hierarchy in communication complexity [3].

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The Kikuchi Matrix Method

Pravesh Kothari

A 3-SAT formula is a collection of disjunctive 3-clauses (i.e., OR of 3 literals) on a given collection of n truth variables. In the well-known 3-SAT problem, we are given such a 3-SAT formula with m clauses on n variables and our goal is to find an assignment that satisfies all the constraints (if one exists) and if not, find a short (i.e., polynomial size in n) *witness* or *certificate* of unsatisfiability of the formula. 3-SAT is a well-known (and in many a sense, the *first*) NP-complete problem. It is

also a problem that turns out to be hard to approximate. In a more fine-grained picture, denser instances of 3-SAT (i.e., when m grows super-linearly in n) appear intuitively easier (more "easily accessible" information about the satisfying assignment, in the form of additional clauses, if there is one or more "likelihood" of a short contradiction when there are more clauses) but this ease only amounts to an asymptotic gain for formulas with $\omega(n^2)$ constraints. Specifically, we know a $2^{O(n^{1-\delta})}$ time algorithm to find an assignment that gets within $(1-\epsilon)$ factor of the optimal (along with a certificate of approximate optimality) if the formula has at least $\tilde{O}(n^{2+\delta})$ constraints and a polynomial time algorithm if the formula has at least $O(n^3)$ constraints. Back in the late 1980s, in the context of proof complexity, researchers [5] posed the question of whether *random* 3-SAT formulas could be easier than the worst-case. Such formulas are unsatisfiable with high probability if $m \geq O(n)$. Indications of comparative easiness of such formulas finally arrived with the work of Goerdt and Krivilevich [9] and Coja-Oghlan, Goerdt and Lanka [6] in 2004 who proved that random 3-SAT formulas with $\tilde{O}(n^{1.5})$ clauses admit efficient *refutation* algorithms, i.e., polynomial time algorithms that generate a certificate of unsatisfiability of the given formula. And about a decade later, Raghavendra, Rao and Schramm [16], building on the work of Allen, O'Donnell and Witmer [2] proved that there is a $2^{n^{1-\delta}}$ time algorithm to find certificates of unsatisfibility with high probability for formulas with at least $\tilde{O}(n^{1.5-\delta/2})$ clauses. To top this work off, while we lack tools for proving NP-hardness of such *average-case* problems, there are lower bounds in various restricted models [15] (e.g., the sum-of-squares hierarchy of convex relaxations) that show that the running time vs clause density trade-offs achieved in the above works are nearly tight. Finally, all the above story extends naturally to k-SAT (and in fact, all constraint satisfaction problems that generalize k-SAT) for any constant $k \in \mathbb{N}$ with the two relevant threshold values of m being $\tilde{O}(n^{k/2})$ and $\tilde{O}(n^{1+(1-\delta)(k/2-1)})$.

Random k-SAT formulas appear a lot easier than their worst-case counterparts. But could this ease simply be a quirk of the specific random model? Said differently, how "robust" are our conclusions (and our algorithms) with respect to the specific, and rather arbitrary, choice of the random model for the formulas? Such questions [8] were posed in pioneering works of Blum and Spencer and later Feige and Kilian in the 1990s for graph problems. In 2007, Feige [7] proposed a *semi-random* model to formally tackle this question for k-SAT. Feige's goal was to pose a model where an instance is chosen by a combination of random and worst-case choices. The random choices will hopefully steer clear of the worst-case hard formulas while the worst-case component would, in principle, prevent overfitting to specific, brittle properties of a specific random model. Formally, he proposed the *smoothed model* of j-SAT where a formula is chosen by 1) starting with an arbitrary, worst-case k-SAT formula, and, 2) perturbing each literal pattern (i.e., negation pattern on each literal appearing in every clause) independently with some small constant probability, say, 0.1. If the number of clauses $m \geq O(n)$ then such a formula is unsatisfiable with high probability no matter what formula we

begin with. Feige asked the question of whether such smoothed k-SAT formulas admit efficient refutation algorithms and in particular, are they easier than worst-case and in fact, as easy as random k-SAT formulas?

The algorithms that work for random k-SAT formulas strongly exploit the randomness in the variables appearing in the clauses – an aspect completely lost in the smoothed model where the only randomness is the random perturbation of worst-case literal patterns that we begin with. Nevertheless, he managed to find new combinatorial techniques that, when combined with some spectral methods allow *weak*[1] refutation algorithms for such smoothed 3-SAT formulas. These ideas, however, did not yield strong refutation algorithms for 3-SAT and did not generalize to k-SAT for any $k \geq 4$.

In this talk, we presented recent progress and some surprising applications thereof on Feige's smoothed model. In a joint work with Abascal and Guruswami [1], we found *strong* refutation algorithms for smoothed k-SAT formulas with $\tilde{O}(n^{k/2})$ clauses based on new combination of combinatorial and spectral methods. These results were then generalized to obtain the same running time vs clause density trade-off (i.e., $2^{n^{1-\delta}}$ time for formulas with $\tilde{O}(n^{1+(1-\delta)(k/2-1)})$ clauses) in a later joint work with Manohar and Guruswami [10] based on a new tool called *Kikuchi matrices* combined with a new *regularity decomposition* for hypergraphs. Simpler proof was later found in a joint work with Hsieh and Mohanty [11] and with Munha-Correia and Sudakov [12].

Somewhat surprisingly, these new algorithms have applications to problems in combinatorics and coding theory that we also discussed in the talk. The principle behind these applications is simple if somewhat strange. In principle, the truth of any mathematical statement can be efficiently encoded into a satisfiability of a 3-SAT formula thus reducing a mathematical problem to understanding whether the formula produced by the reduction is satisfiable. This abstract idea, however, is too general to be useful as a tool for actually establishing mathematical results. In our applications, however, we'd be able to encode the truth of certain kinds of combinatorial statements as the satisfiability of a *family of* SAT formulas and thus, to disprove the truth of such a statement, it is enough to prove that one of these formulas, say a *randomly* chosen member, is unsatisfiable. While this may appear to get us closer to random SAT formulas, the resulting formulas are far from random. In fact, in a precise sense, they can be described by a number of random bits that is significantly smaller (in applications n^ϵ for $\epsilon \ll 1$ or even $\mathsf{poly}\log n$) than the number of variables that disallows straightforward probabilistic analyses. Nevertheless, it turns out that the *analysis of the refutation algorithms for smoothed formulas* above can be adapted with some work to apply to even such randomness-starved formulas. Notice that we do not need any efficient algorithm

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[1]A weak refutation algorithm certifies unsatisfiability of a 3-SAT formula, as opposed to a strong refutation algorithm that certifies that the every assignment must violate a constant fraction of the clauses in the input formula. The results discussed for random 3-SAT above all yield strong refutation algorithms.

for proving unsatisfiability of the SAT formula in such an application. The algorithm arises purely as a tool for arguing the unsatisfiability (indeed, we know of no other proofs, in general, for establishing such a result).

The applications of this technique so far include a new cubic (improving on the quadratic) lower bounds on the blocklength of a 3-query locally decodable codes [3], exponential (improving on cubic) lower bounds [13] on the block length of 3-query, linear, locally correctable codes (with applications to almost resolving the Hamada conjecture from the theory of algebraic designs for 4-designs), a super-polynomial lower bound [14] for non-linear 3-query locally correctable codes, the resolution of Feige's conjecture [10] on the hypergraph Moore bound, and improved bounds on three-term arithmetic progressions with random common differences [3, 4]. In the talk, we focused largely on the lower bounds on the local codes.

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Decoding Codes via Proofs

Madhur Tulsiani

The problem of finding the nearest codeword to a possibly corrupted received word, can naturally be viewed as an optimization problem. Over the past few years, approaching this optimization problem via continuous relaxations have led to new unique decoding and list decoding algorithms for several code families.

This talk discussed a general framework for obtaining such algorithms using relaxations based on the Sum-of-Squares (SoS) hierarchy of semidefinite programs. In particular, this framework is an adaptation of the well-known "proofs to algorithms" paradigm to the setting of codes [1]. If the proof of the fact that all pairs of codewords have large distance can be expressed in a (positivestellensatz) proof system corresponding to the SoS hierarchy, then one can use it to obtain a list decoding algorithm for the corresponding code. This can easily be seen to be the case for several code families based on expander graphs, where the proofs of distance rely on spectral properties of these graphs [2, 3]. Using the fact that spectral bounds can be phrased as SoS inequalities, this yields the first efficient list-decoding algorithms for several such families of codes.

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Graph Homomorphisms and Polynomials

GRIGORIY BLEKHERMAN

If we are given a polynomial expression in traces of powers of real symmetric matrices, such as

$$3[\operatorname{tr}(A^2)]^2 \operatorname{tr}(B^4) - 4\operatorname{tr}(A^4)[\operatorname{tr}(B^2)]^2,$$

is there an algorithm to decide whether this expression is nonnegative for all real symmetric matrices A, B *of all sizes*? What happens if we replace trace by normalized trace $\widetilde{\operatorname{tr}}(A) = \frac{\operatorname{tr}(A)}{n}$, where n is the size of the matrix?

The first (unnormalized) problem is *undecidable*, while the second one is *decidable*. The key to the hardness of the unnormalized problem is the beautiful geometry of *the image of the probability simplex under the Vandermonde map*.

For any $n \times n$ matrix A recall that $\operatorname{tr}(A^d) = \lambda_1^d + \cdots + \lambda_n^d$, where λ_i are the eigenvalues of A. Let p_d to denote the d-th power sum polynomial: $p_d(x) = x_1^d + \cdots + x_n^d$. Testing whether $3[\operatorname{tr}(A^2)]^2 \operatorname{tr}(B^4) - 4\operatorname{tr}(A^4)[\operatorname{tr}(B^2)]^2$ is nonnegative on all real symmetric matrices of all sizes is equivalent to understanding whether $3p_2^2(x)p_4(y) - 4p_4(x)p_2^2(y)$ is nonnegative on all real vectors x and y of any dimension. Define the *d-th Vandermonde map* $\nu_{n,d}$ by sending a point in $\mathbb{R}^n$ to its image under the first d power sums:

$$\nu_{n,d}(x) = (p_1(x), \ldots, p_d(x)).$$

Let Δ_{n-1} be the probability simplex in $\mathbb{R}^n$: Δ_{n-1} consists of all vectors with non-negative coordinates with the sum of coordinates equal to 1. The image $\nu_{n,d}(\Delta_{n-1})$ is called the *the (n,d)-Vandermonde cell* and is denoted by $\Pi_{n,d}$. Observe that the first coordinate of $\Pi_{n,d}$ is identically 1, and so we may project it out, and see $\Pi_{n,d}$ as the subset of $\mathbb{R}^{d-1}$, which is the image of Δ_{n-1} under $(p_2, \ldots, p_d)$.

Since all of our exponents are even, and the polynomial $3p_2^2(x)p_4(y) - 4p_4(x)p_2^2(y)$ is bi-homogeneous in x and y, it follows that deciding nonnegativity of $3p_2^2(x)p_4(y) - 4p_4(x)p_2^2(y)$ for all $x, y \in \mathbb{R}^n$ is equivalent to deciding nonnegativity $3b - 4a$ on the product $\Pi_{n,2} \times \Pi_{n,2}$ via the substituion $a = \frac{p_4(x)}{p_2^2(x)}, b = \frac{p_4(y)}{p_2^2(y)}$.

By considering only even exponents, and only multihomogeneous polynomials, we can by taking ratios of the form $\frac{p_{2k}(x)}{p_2^k(x)}$ reduce the problem to understanding the geometry of the Vandermonde cell $\Pi_{n,d}$. The image of $\Pi_{n,3}$ looks as follows:
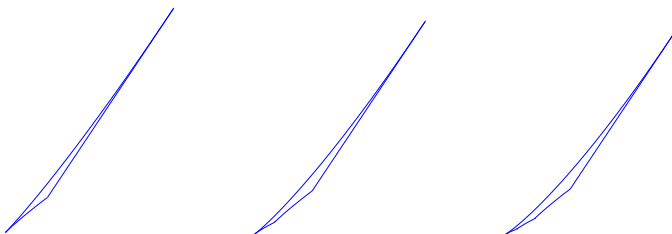

FIGURE 1. The sets $\Pi_{n,3}$ for $n = 3, 4, 5$

The Vandermonde cell $\Pi_{n,3}$ has n special points of the form $(1/k, 1/k^2)$ for $k = 1, \ldots, n$. The lower boundary of the image consists of concave curves joining the special points $(1/k, 1/k^2)$. As n goes to infinity we get infinitely many isolated points on the curve $y = x^2$. The upper boundary of the limit cell $\Pi_{\infty,3}$ is given by the curve $y^2 = x^3$ for $0 \leq x \leq 1$.

Once we have several matrix variables, we will get one copy of $\Pi_{n,3}$ for every matrix variable, and so we will want to test nonnegativity of polynomials on products $\Pi_{n,3} \times \Pi_{n,3} \times \cdots \times \Pi_{n,3}$. This allows us to prove undecidability using the existing reduction of Hatami and Norin [4], who applied it in the context of proving undecidability of inequalities in graph homomorphism densities. The details are provided in [1], and we describe a connection between geometry of the Vandermonde map and graph homomorphism density inequalities.

Given two simple graphs G, H a homomorphism $\varphi : G \to H$ is a map from the vertex set $V(G)$ of G to the vertex set $V(H)$ of H such that φ preserves adjacency of vertices. The *homomorphism density* $t(H, G)$ is defined by

$$t(H, G) = \frac{\#\text{homomorphisms}\, G \to H}{\text{total } \# \text{ of maps}\, V(G) \to V(H)}.$$

One can ask for complexity of deciding whether a polynomial expression in $t(G_i, H)$ is nonnegative for all target graphs H, and it was shown by Hatami and Norin that this problem is undecidable [4]. We now describe an alternative proof of this result using the geometry of the Vandermonde map.

For a graph H let A_H denote the adjacency matrix of H. It is well known that for an even cycle C_{2k} we have

$$t(C_{2k}, H) = \frac{\operatorname{tr} A_H^{2k}}{|V(H)|^{2k}}.$$

Therefore we have

$$\frac{t(C^6, H)}{t(C_2, H)^3} = \frac{\operatorname{tr} A_H^6}{(\operatorname{tr} A_H^2)^3}, \text{ and } \frac{t(C^4, H)}{t(C_2, H)^2} = \frac{\operatorname{tr} A_H^4}{(\operatorname{tr} A_H^2)^2}.$$

If we do not restrict to adjacency matrices of graphs, then we are simply looking at the Vandermonde cell $\Pi_{n,3}$. However, one can show that as we go over all graphs H with any number of vertices, we actually get the full Vadermonde cell $\Pi_{n,3}$ [2].

However, for undecidability we need a product of independent copies of $\Pi_{n,3}$. We can obtain these independent copies by considering *necklace graphs*. The even cycles are $2k$ copies of complete graph K_2 glued together in a circular fashion. One can similarly take $2k$ copies of the triangle K_3 and glue them together in circular fashion, producing a necklace graph on $4k$ vertices. One can show that using necklace graphs for larger complete graphs K_m we can obtain independent copies of $\Pi_{n,3}$ and use the same undecidability reduction [3] [2].

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On the Algebraic Proof Complexity of Tensor Isomorphism

Nicola Galesi

(joint work with Joshua A. Grochow, Toniann Pitassi, Adrian She)

The TENSOR ISOMORPHISM problem (TI) has recently emerged as having connections to multiple areas of research within complexity and beyond, but the current best upper bound is essentially the brute force algorithm. Being an algebraic problem, TI (or rather, proving that two tensors are *non*-isomorphic) lends itself very naturally to algebraic and semi-algebraic proof systems, such as the Polynomial Calculus (PC) and Sum of Squares (SoS). For its combinatorial cousin GRAPH ISOMORPHISM, essentially optimal lower bounds are known for approaches based on PC and SoS [1]. Our main results are an $\Omega(n)$ lower bound on PC degree or SoS degree for TENSOR ISOMORPHISM, and a nontrivial upper bound for testing isomorphism of tensors of bounded rank.

We also show that PC cannot perform basic linear algebra in sub-linear degree, such as comparing the rank of two matrices (which is essentially the same as 2-TI), or deriving $BA = I$ from $AB = I$. As linear algebra is a key tool for understanding tensors, we introduce a strictly stronger proof system, PC+Inv, which allows as derivation rules all substitution instances of the implication $AB = I \to BA = I$. We conjecture that even PC+Inv cannot solve TI in polynomial time either, but leave open getting lower bounds on PC+Inv for any system of equations, let alone those for TI. We also highlight many other open questions about proof complexity approaches to TI.

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Announcing Tropical Proof Systems

Edward A. Hirsch

(joint work with Yaroslav Alekseev, Dima Grigoriev)

Tropical (min-plus) arithmetic has many applications in various areas of mathematics. The operations are the real addition (as the tropical multiplication) and the minimum (as the tropical addition). Recently, [1,4,6] demonstrated a version of Nullstellensatz in the tropical setting.

In this talk we introduce "tropical proof systems": (semi)algebraic proof systems that use min-plus arithmetic. This allows us to view some known proof systems from a different angle. In particular, we provide a static Nullstellensatz-based tropical proof system MP-NS that (equipped with dual Boolean variables) polynomially simulates daglike resolution and also has short proofs for the propositional pigeon-hole principle. Its dynamic version strengthened by an additional derivation rule (a tropical analogue of resolution by linear inequality) is equivalent to the system Res(LP) [5], which derives nonnegative linear combinations of linear inequalities; this latter system is known to polynomially simulate Krajíček's Res(CP) [7] with unary coefficients. No exponential lower bounds are known for this system; there are recent results [2,3] for a treelike version only. For the truth values encoded by $\{0,\infty\}$, dynamic tropical proofs are equivalent to Res(∞), which is a small-depth Frege system called also DNF resolution.

Therefore, tropical proof systems give a finer hierarchy of proof systems below Res(LP) for which we still do not have exponential lower bounds. For the weakest of them, MP-NS mentioned above, we can prove an exponential lower bound for a non-CNF (and very simple) system of inequalities (it expresses that a large tropical power of a Boolean variable equals a non-Boolean constant). The method of proving the bound is also simple enough: we construct a directed graph on monomials occurring in a tropical algebraic combination and analyze the coefficients of the algebraic combination this way. Therefore, we hope for new superpolynomial lower bounds for tropical proof systems of intermediate power.

The new notion of a tropical proof system leaves multiple open questions and directions for further research.

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Meta-Mathematics of Complexity Theory

Igor C. Oliveira

Despite significant efforts from computer scientists and mathematicians, the P vs. NP problem and other fundamental questions about the complexity of computations seem to remain out of reach for existing techniques. The difficulty of making progress on such problems has motivated a number of researchers to investigate the logical foundations of computational complexity. Over the last few decades, several works at the intersection of logic and complexity theory showed that certain fragments of Peano Arithmetic collectively known as Bounded Arithmetic (see, e.g., [6, 7]) can formalize a large fraction of results from algorithms and complexity (e.g., the PCP Theorem [11] and complexity lower bounds against restricted classes of Boolean circuits [10]). It is natural to consider if the same theories can settle longstanding problems about the inherent difficulty of computations.

In the first part of this talk, we survey a few recent results [1–4, 8, 9, 12] on the unprovability of statements of interest to complexity theory in theories of Bounded Arithmetic and highlight some open problems. In the second part of the talk, we will cover new results on the reverse mathematics of complexity lower bounds [5], a research direction which seeks to determine which axioms are necessary to prove certain results. We explore reversals in the setting of bounded arithmetic, with Cook's theory PV_1 as the base theory, and show that several natural lower bound statements about communication complexity, error correcting codes, and Turing machines are equivalent to widely investigated combinatorial principles such as the weak pigeonhole principle for polynomial-time functions and its variants. As a consequence, complexity lower bounds can be formally seen as fundamental mathematical axioms with far-reaching implications. Time permitting, we will also present several implications of these results:

- Under a plausible cryptographic assumption, the classical single-tape Turing machine $\Omega(n^2)$-time lower bound for Palindrome is unprovable in Jerábek's theory APC_1.
- While APC_1 proves one-way communication lower bounds for Set Disjointness, it does not prove one-way communication lower bounds for Equality, under a plausible cryptographic assumption.
- An amplification phenomenon connected to the (un)provability of some lower bounds, under which a quantitatively weak $n^{1+\varepsilon}$ lower bound is provable if and only if a stronger (and often tight) n^c lower bound is provable.

- Feasibly definable randomized algorithms can be feasibly defined deterministically (APC_1 is $\forall \Sigma_1^b$-conservative over PV_1) if and only if one-way communication complexity lower bound for Set Disjointness are provable in PV_1.

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On the Theory of Exponential Integer Parts
EMIL JEŘÁBEK

An *integer part (IP)* of an ordered ring R is a discretely ordered subring $I \subseteq R$ such that every $x \in R$ is within distance 1 from I. (By abuse of language, we will conflate a discretely ordered ring I with the ordered semiring $I_{\geq 0}$.) A classical result of Shepherdson [6] characterizes models of IOpen (= Robinson's arithmetic + induction for open formulas in the language $\mathcal{L}_{\mathrm{OR}} = \langle 0, 1, +, \cdot, < \rangle$):

Theorem 1. *Integer parts of real-closed fields are exactly the models of* IOpen.

Let an *exponential field* be an ordered field R endowed with an isomorphism $\exp\colon \langle R, 0, 1, +, < \rangle \to \langle R_{>0}, 1, 2, \cdot, < \rangle$, optionally satisfying the *growth axiom (GA)* $\exp(x) > x$. Introduced by Ressayre [5], an *exponential integer part (EIP)* of an exponential ordered field $\langle R, \exp \rangle$ is an IP $I \subseteq R$ such that $I_{\geq 0}$ is closed under $\exp$. We are interested in the question of characterizing (non-negative parts of) ordered

rings that are EIP of real-closed exponential fields (RCEF), and in particular, what is the first-order theory of such rings. This problem (and in particular, the question whether this theory properly extends IOpen) was raised by Jeřábek [2], who provided an upper bound: all countable models of the bounded arithmetical theory VTC^0 in $\mathcal{L}_{\mathrm{OR}}$ are EIP of RCEF.

Extensions of Theorem 1 to exponential ordered fields were previously studied by Boughattas and Ressayre [1] and Kovalyov [4], but they focused on generalizing the other direction of the theorem (e.g., what additional properties of RCEF ensure that their EIP are models of open induction in a language with exponentiation?). Moreover, they were mostly concerned with EIP in a language with the binary powering operation $x^y = \exp(y \log x)$. Since $\langle I, +, \cdot, <, x^y \rangle$ can define approximations of exp on its fraction field F, we can canonically extend exp to the completion of F; but no such direct construction seems possible for EIP in $\mathcal{L}_{\mathrm{OR}}$ or $\mathcal{L}_{\mathrm{OR}} \cup \{2^x\}$, hence our arguments will be of different nature.

The main goal of this talk is to present complete axiomatizations of the first-order theories of EIP of RCEF in $\mathcal{L}_{\mathrm{OR}} \cup \{2^x\}$, $\mathcal{L}_{\mathrm{OR}} \cup \{P_2\}$ (where P_2 is a predicate for the image of 2^x), and $\mathcal{L}_{\mathrm{OR}}$, denoted TEIP_{2^x}, TEIP_{P_2}, and TEIP, and to determine some basic properties of these theories.

The theories TEIP_{2^x} and TEIP_{P_2} are axiomatized over IOpen by a finite list of a few obvious axioms. The theory TEIP is more involved: it has an infinite schema of axioms PWin_n^0 expressing, for each $n \in \mathbb{N}$, that the second player has a winning strategy in the *power-of-two game* PowG_n. This game is played between two players, Challenger (C) and Powerator (P), in n rounds: in round $0 \le i < n$, C picks $x_i > 0$, and P responds with $u_i > 0$ such that $u_i \le x_i < 2u_i$. C wins if $u_i u_j < u_h < 2u_i u_j$ for some $h, i, j < n$, otherwise P wins. The motivation for the game is that if $\langle \mathfrak{M}, P_2 \rangle \vDash \mathsf{TEIP}_{P_2}$, then "play $u_i \in P_2$" is a winning strategy for P.

Using the existence of a nonstandard model of IOpen that is a UFD (Smith [7]), we can show that TEIP properly extends IOpen.

The main problem about basic properties of TEIP is whether it is finitely axiomatizable over IOpen. As a partial progress, we show that the formulas $\mathrm{PWin}_n^1(u)$, $n \in \mathbb{N}$, form a strictly increasing hierarchy over $\mathrm{Th}(\mathbb{N})$, where $\mathrm{PWin}_n^1(u)$ expresses that P wins the game $\mathrm{PowG}_n^1(u)$ defined like PowG_n, but with the first move of P fixed as u. To this end, we prove reasonably tight upper and lower bounds on the complexity measure $c(u) = \min\{n : \text{C wins } \mathrm{PowG}_{n+1}^1(u)\}$, showing that $\{c(u) : u \text{ not a power of } 2\} = \mathbb{N}_{>0}$. For example, $k + 1 \le c\big(6^{2^{2^k}!}\big) \le k + 4$.

These bounds also imply that there are models $\langle \mathfrak{M}, P_2 \rangle \vDash \mathrm{Th}(\mathbb{N}) + \mathsf{TEIP}_{P_2}$ such that P_2 is incomparable with the set of "oddless numbers" (i.e., whose all nontrivial divisors are even); indeed, $u \in P_2$ may even be divisible by 3.

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Quantified Propositional Calculi and Narrow Implicit Proofs

Pavel Pudlák

Quantified Propositional Calculus G. This is the sequent calculus that uses quantified propositions and all rules, including quantifier rules [2]. We have to specify how the quantifier rules are used because in propositional calculus there are no terms. In this paper we will use quantifier-free formulas in place of terms in LK in the quantifier rules.

Fragments G_i of G. The classes Σ_i^q, Π_i^q of quantified propositional formulas are defined in the usual way. For $i \geq 1$, G_i denotes the Σ_i^q fragment of G, which is G restricted to formulas of Σ_i^q.

Implicit proofs and narrow implicit proofs. Jan Krajíček [1] defined an operation that from two proof systems P and Q produces another proof system, which he denoted by $[P, Q]$. The proof system $[P, Q]$ can be roughly described as follows. A proof of ϕ in $[P, Q]$ is a pair (Π, C), where C is a Boolean circuit that succinctly defines a possibly exponential size Q-proof of ϕ, and Π is a P-proof of a formula that expresses this fact. In the special case when $P = Q$, Krajíček calls such a proof system *implicit P* and denotes it by iP. For natural proof systems P, this operation seems to produce from P an essentially stronger proof system iP.

Krajíček also defined a restricted version of $[P, Q]$ and denoted it by $[P, Q]^m$; we will call it *the narrow implicit proof system defined by P, Q*. Unlike the general concept of implicit proofs, narrow implicit proof systems are only defined when the proof system Q is based on formulas.

Definition 1. *Let P be an arbitrary proof system and Q a formula based proof system with a class of formulas $\mathcal{F}$ and a set of deduction rules $R_1, \ldots, R_l$. A proof of a formula ϕ in $[P, Q]^m$ (the* narrow implicit proof system *defined by P, Q) is a pair (Π, C) where C is a circuit computing a Boolean function $f_C : \{0, 1\}^n \rightarrow$*

$\{0,1\}^m$ and Π is a P-proof of the formula $\gamma_{C,\phi}$ which says that f_C correctly encodes a Q-proof of ϕ. In more detail, $\gamma_{C,\phi}$ should express the following condition:

- For an $i \in \{0,1\}^n$, $C(i)$, the bit-string that C outputs, encodes a string consisting of a formula and $k+1$ numbers $(\phi_i; i_1, \ldots, i_k; j)$ such that $i_1, \ldots, i_k < i$ and ϕ_i follows from $\phi_{i_1}, \ldots, \phi_{i_k}$ using rule R_j;

where we view strings in $\{0,1\}^n$ as numbers in the interval $[0, 2^n - 1]$; for formalizing C in the propositional calculus, we use variables for every vertex of C and clauses expressing that the values correspond to the gates at the vertices.

We denote by Res the resolution proof system.

Theorem 1. $[Res, G_i]^m$ is polynomially equivalent to G_{i+1} for $i \geq 1$, i.e., the two proof systems polynomially simulate each other.

The existence of the simulation of $[Res, G_i]^m$ by G_{i+1} is proved by proving soundness of $[Res, G_i]^m$ in T_2^i. It is well-known that provability of the soundness of a proof system P in T_2^i implies the existence of a polynomial simulation of P by G_i, see [2].

The opposite simulation is based on cut-elimination. Given a proof Π in G_{i+1}, we eliminate all cuts with Σ_{i+1}^q formulas. Thus the resulting proof Π' is a proof in G_i. The proof has exponential size, if one uses substitutions instead of repeating parts of Π, and can be succinctly defined by a polynomial size circuit. To make an implicit proof from Π', one has to solve a number of technical problems.

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Compressing CFI Graphs and Lower Bounds for the Weisfeiler–Leman Refinements

Martin Grohe

(joint work with Moritz Lichter, Daniel Neuen, and Pascal Schweitzer)

The k-dimensional Weisfeiler-Leman (k-WL) algorithm is a simple combinatorial algorithm that was originally designed as a graph isomorphism heuristic. It naturally finds applications in Babai's quasipolynomial-time isomorphism algorithm, practical isomorphism solvers, and algebraic graph theory. However, it also has surprising connections to other areas such as logic, combinatorial optimization, machine learning, and proof complexity.

The algorithm iteratively computes a coloring of the k-tuples of vertices of a graph. Since Fürer's linear lower bound [1], it has been an open question whether there is a super-linear lower bound for the iteration number for k-WL on graphs.

We answer this question affirmatively, establishing an $\Omega(n^{k/2})$-lower bound for all k.

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Supercritical and Robust Trade-offs for Resolution Depth Versus Width and Weisfeiler–Leman

SHUO PANG

(joint work with Duri Janett, Jakob Nordström)

We study trade-offs in proof complexity and Weisfeiler–Leman algorithms. In a trade-off between a pair of complexity measures, if the first measure is constrained to be small, then usually, the lower bound on the second measure stays below the trivial worst-case upper bound. By contrast, in a so-called supercritical trade-off, the lower bound on the second measure is larger than its worst-case upper bound (see e.g. [1, 3–6, 8]). We present the first resolution width-depth trade-off which is supercritical not only measured in variable size but also in formula size, and which has non-trivial robustness. More specifically, we prove that low width implies depth superlinear in the formula size, where the width is allowed to go up to twice the minimum.

We give analogous trade-offs for the Weisfeiler–Leman algorithm, a fundamental tool in graph isomorphism testing. Namely, for all $k \geq 2$ and $c \leq k-2$, if N is large enough, we show that there are vertex-size N graph pairs that are distinguishable by k-dimensional Weisfeiler–Leman, but even with dimension $k + c$ the algorithm nonetheless requires $\Omega(N^{k/(c+2)})$ many iterations. This improves the result in [7] which was proved in the case $c = 0$, solving an open problem there asking for lower bounds that hold for dimensions larger than the minimum. The result also translates into trade-offs between number of variables and quantifier depth in first-order logic.

Both results follow from lower bounds on a combinatorial game, closely linked to Tseitin formulas and Cai-Fürer-Immerman graphs. The game is the *compressed Cop-Robber game* introduced by [7]. It is a variant of the classical Cop-Robber game on a graph, where in addition a vertex-identification and edge-identification is posed, called a "compression". From a proof-complexity perspective, the compression induces a structured variable substitution under which the (Tseitin) formula size shrinks, a feature that is not possessed by the popular variable substitution based on XOR gadgets and expander graphs.

Our main technical contribution is a new compression scheme of the game and its analysis. Namely, for each $c \in \{1, \ldots, k-1\}$ we give a compressed game where $k + 1$ Cops can win, but the Robber can survive $\Omega(n^{k/(c+1)})$ rounds even against $k + c$ Cops.

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Proof Complexity and QBF

Meena Mahajan

This talk gave a short overview of proof complexity for *Quantified Boolean Formulas* (QBFs).

While traditionally the complexity of propositional proofs has been at the centre of research, the past two decades have witnessed a surge in proof complexity of QBFs. Some of the main paradigms used to extend propositional proof systems to QBFs include expansion, universal reduction, literal merging, and incremental strategy construction. (In particular, applying these paradigms gives multiple QBF proof systems based on resolution alone.) Soundness is often demonstrated by proving that from proofs in these systems, Herbrand functions (equivalently, winning strategies for the universal player in the two-player evaluation game) can be extracted.

There are not too many techniques for proving lower bounds in QBF proof systems. In most systems, propositional hardness transfers directly. But this is not the "genuine" QBF hardness we seek to understand, the hardness that would persist in a QBF solver even given access to, say, a SAT oracle. The principal technique for understanding such hardness is transferring computational hardness. Proofs contain, even if implicitly, information about winning strategies. Identifying the right computational model in which such extracted strategies can be computed enables the required transfer.

The most successful practical SAT solvers are based on the CDCL (Conflict-Driven Clause Learning) template, which is known to be equivalent to Resolution. In the QBF world, not only is there no unique analogue of Resolution, there is also no unique way of extending the algorithm template to Quantified QCDCL. Recent work has formalised proof systems underlying QCDCL-style algorithms and has also proposed more generalised proof systems, providing some analagues of the CDCL=Resolution equivalence.

An overview of QBF proof complexity can be found in [1], and of relations between QBF solving and proof complexity in [2].

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Dependency Schemes in CDCL-Based QBF Solving: A Proof Theoretic Study

ABHIMANYU CHOUDHURY
(joint work with Meena Mahajan)

With the success of propositional SAT solvers, there are many ambitious attempts now to tackle more expressive/succinct formalisms. In particular, for the PSPACE-complete problem of deciding the truth of Quantified Boolean Formulas (QBF), there are now many solvers, as well as a rich (and still growing) theory about the underlying formal proof systems. Designing solvers for QBFs is a useful enterprise because many industrial applications seem to lend themselves more naturally to expressions involving both existential and universal quantifiers; see for instance [1,2]. The proof system Resolution can be lifted to the QBF setting in many ways. The "CDCL way" is to add a universal reduction rule, giving rise to the system Q-Res and the more general QU-Res. Allowing contradictory literals to be merged under certain conditions gives rise to the system long-distance Q-Resolution LDQ-Res. Another "CDCL" way is to lift the CDCL algorithm itself to a QCDCL algorithm: decide values of variables, usually respecting the order of quantified alternation, propagate unit constraints, interpreting unit modulo universal reductions, repeat until a conflict is reached, learn a new clause, backtrack and continue. For false formulas, the learning process yields a long-distance Q-resolution refutation. In [3], a formal proof system QCDCL was abstracted out of the QCDCL algorithm.

A heuristic that has been found to be useful in many QBF solvers, and has been formalised in proof systems, is to eliminate easily-detectable spurious dependencies. In a prenex QBF, a variable "depends" on the variables preceding it in the quantifier prefix; where "depends" means that a Herbrand/Skolem function

for the variable is a function of the preceding variables. However, a Herbrand-function or countermodel may not really need to know the values of all preceding variables. A dependency scheme filters out as many of such unnecessary dependencies as it can detect, producing what is in effect a Dependency QBF, DQBF. Although DQBF is a significantly richer formalism that is known to be NEXP-complete (see [4, 5]), these heuristics are not aiming to solve DQBFs in general. Rather, they algorithmically detect spurious dependencies and disregard them as the algorithm proceeds.

Now, the universal reduction rule in the proof systems (say in `Q-Res`, `LDQ-Res`) can be applied in more settings because there are fewer dependencies, and this can shorten refutations significantly. See for instance [6–8]. Note that the use of a dependency scheme must be proven to be sound and complete, and this in itself is often quite involved. The notion of a dependency scheme being "normal" was introduced in [8], where it is shown that adding any normal dependency scheme to `LDQ-Res` preserves soundness and completeness.

We examine how the usage of a dependency scheme can affect proof systems underlying the QCDCL algorithm. Specifically, we focus on the proof system `QCDCL`, underlying most QCDCL-based solvers, and on the dependency scheme D^{rrs} which has been studied in the context of `Q-Res` and `LDQ-Res`, see [6–8]. We note that the proof system `QCDCL` can be made aware of dependency schemes in more than one way. We identify two natural ways: (1) use a dependency scheme `D` to preprocess the formula, performing reductions in the initial clauses whenever permitted by the scheme, and (2) use a dependency scheme `D` in the QCDCL algorithm itself, in enabling unit propagations and in learning clauses. Denoting the first way as `D + QCDCL(D)` and the second as `QCDCL(D)`, and noting that we could even use different dependency schemes in both these ways, we obtain the system $D_1 + \mathtt{QCDCL}(D_2)$. When D_1 and D_2 are both the trivial dependency scheme $mathttD^{trv}$ inherited from the linear order of the quantifier prefix, this system is exactly `QCDCL`.

Our contributions are as follows:

(1) We formalise the proof system $D' + \mathtt{QCDCL}(D)$ for dependency schemes D, D', and note that whenever D', D are normal schemes, $D' + \mathtt{QCDCL}(D)$ is sound and complete .

(2) For $D, D' \in \{D^{trv}, D^{rrs}\}$, we study the four systems $D' + \mathtt{QCDCL}(D)$. As observed above, one of them is `QCDCL` itself, while the others are new systems. We compare these systems with each other and show that they are all pairwise incomparable We also show that each of them is incomparable with each of the systems $\mathtt{QCDCL}^{\mathtt{LEV-ORD}}_{\mathtt{NO-RED}}$ `Q-Res`, `Q(D`^{rrs}`)Res` and `QU-Res`.

In other words, making QCDCL algorithms dependency-aware is a "mixed bag": in some situations this shortens runs while in others it is disadvantageous.

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Polynomial Calculus for Quantified Boolean Logic: Circuit Characterisation and Lower Bounds

KASPAR KASCHE

(joint work with Olaf Beyersdorff, Luc Nicolas Spachmann)

We research the extension of the proof system PC (Polynomial Calculus) from propositional logic to Quantified Boolean Formulas. This extension is called $\mathcal{Q}$-PC and is defined by a general construction in [2].

Our first result is a tight circuit characterisation of $\mathcal{Q}$-PC proof size by circuit size in an appropriate circuit model. The circuit model in question is a generalisation of decision lists [7], which are lists of simple statements of the form: IF (condition on existential variables) THEN (assignment to universal variables). The decision lists – termed PDLs here for *polynomial decision lists* – have polynomial equations in existential variables as conditions and compute a complete assignment to the universal variables. Semantically, a PDL for a quantified set of polynomial equations Φ computes a countermodel for Φ in the two-player game semantics of QBFs.

We show that the minimal proof size for Φ (of bounded quantifier complexity) in $\mathcal{Q}$-PC is polynomially equivalent to the minimal size of a PDL for Φ. In fact, we show a more general result that applies to a whole class of QBF proof systems with bounded capacity [6] (and fulfilling some closure properties). The result is parameterised by the lines of the proof system, which in turn correspond to the conditions in the decision lists. This generalises a result for Q-Resolution [4] and lifts it to $\mathcal{Q}$-PC.

Having the PDL characterisation in place, we can obtain a size-degree result, relating minimal proof size in $\mathcal{Q}$-PC to the minimal degree of polynomials in the refutation. This is similar in spirit to the size-degree method known for propositional PC [5], albeit the actual relation is different and includes the quantifier depth of the QBF. Technically, the result is shown via the degree-preserving transfer from $\mathcal{Q}$-PC to PDLs and back explained above, together with an additional size-degree relation that we show for PDLs. The technique is similar to a prior size-width result for Q-Resolution [4].

Having both the PDL characterisation and size-degree relation at hand opens the door to new lower bounds for degree and size in $\mathcal{Q}$-PC. Specifically, we show that the parity and more generally the modulo k functions mod_n^k on n variables as well as the majority function maj_n all require high-degree PDLs over all subfields of $\mathbb{C}$. Using a general construction from [1, 2] we can turn any Boolean function f into a QBF $\mathcal{Q}$-f that has f as its only countermodel. Together with our results above this implies that the $\mathcal{Q}$-mod_n^k and $\mathcal{Q}$-maj_n QBFs require both linear degree and exponential monomial size in $\mathcal{Q}$-PC.

In addition to using the size-degree method to prove lower bounds for PDLs and hence for $\mathcal{Q}$-PC proofs, we show that for finite fields of characteristic p, PDLs can be efficiently transformed into $\text{AC}^0[p]$ circuits. This allows to directly transfer circuit lower bounds of [3] into $\mathcal{Q}$-PC proof lower bounds. As a result, either if F and G are both finite fields of different characteristics, or if F is finite and G is a subfield of $\mathbb{C}$, then the systems $\mathcal{Q}$-PC over F and G are incomparable.

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Proof Systems for MaxSAT

Ilario Bonacina

(joint work with Maria Luisa Bonet and Jordi Levy)

MaxSAT is the problem of finding an assignment satisfying the maximum number of clauses in a CNF formula. Proof systems for MaxSAT are formal systems that can be used to certify the optimum value of a MaxSAT instance. The interest

in studying them arises naturally from practical concerns related to SAT- and MaxSAT-solvers, although some of the systems for MaxSAT are also studied for theoretical motivations, for instance due to connections with TFNP classes, see for instance [6]. One relevant proof system for MaxSAT is *MaxSAT-Resolution* [1,7] which proves a lower bound s on the minimum number of falsified clauses in a set of clauses F in the following way: The proof is a sequence of multisets of clauses $\Gamma_0, \ldots, \Gamma_\ell$ such that (1) $\Gamma_0 = F$, (2) Γ_ℓ contains at least s copies of the empty clause $\bot$, and (3) Γ_{i+1} is obtained from Γ_i one of the following two substitution rules:

$$\frac{C \vee x \quad C \vee \neg x}{C} \qquad\qquad \frac{C}{C \vee x \quad C \vee \neg x} \ ,$$

where C are clauses and x is a variable. The clauses in a MaxSAT-Resolution proof can be thought as being *weighted clauses* with weight 1.

In this talk we survey some of the consequences of considering the natural generalization of MaxSAT-Resolution to weighted clauses using weights in $\{\pm 1\}$, or natural/integer weights encoded in binary. When negative weights are allowed the soundness of the systems is not automatically enforced and extra conditions on Γ_ℓ are needed. Varying those extra conditions and the weights allowed in the proofs, we have systems of different strength. For instance, (semi-)algebraic static proof systems such as Nullstellensatz (over $\mathbb{Z}$) and Sherali-Adams can be described naturally in this language [3,5]. This can be used, for instance, to show how natural combinatorial principles capture the strength of Nullstellensatz (over $\mathbb{Z}$) and Sherali-Adams, with unary and binary coefficients [4].

In [2] we showed a similar approach to construct proof systems for MaxSAT based not on weighted clauses but on weighted polynomials. Starting from Polynomial Calculus over a finite field we showed how to adapt its inference rules to have a sound and complete system for MaxSAT. As in the case of weighted clauses, restricting the weights allowed also restricts the strength of the resulting MaxSAT system. In presence of integer weights, Polynomial Calculus for MaxSAT gives a natural proof system strictly stronger than Sherali-Adams while allowing the modular reasoning enabled by extending Polynomial Calculus over $\mathbb{F}_q$.

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Certifying Combinatorial Solving Using Cutting Planes with Strengthening Rules

JAKOB NORDSTRÖM

Combinatorial optimization is the use of mathematical techniques to solve problems where, loosely speaking, solutions have to be constructed by combining objects in suitable ways, but where these objects cannot be subdivided (i.e., they are discrete). This leads to a combinatorial explosion in the number of cases that need to be considered, and in theory many combinatorial problems are known to be computationally very challenging (typically **NP**-hard or hard for even stronger complexity classes).

On the applied side, however, the last couple of decades has witnessed a revolution in combinatorial optimization algorithms in paradigms such as Boolean satisfiability (SAT) solving and optimization, constraint programming, and mixed integer linear programming, with modern so-called combinatorial solvers being used routinely to solve large-scale real-world problems. There is currently a very limited understanding of why these algorithms are so much more successful than theory would predict, and this is becoming more and more of an obstacle to further progress. Another critical concern is that modern solvers struggle with correctness. It is well documented in the literature that state-of-the-art solvers, both in academia and industry, sometimes erroneously claim optimality, or return "solutions" that do not satisfy the constraints in the input, or even claim simultaneously a solution and a bound ruling out this very solution. This can be fatal for applications where correctness is a non-negotiable demand.

The purpose of this presentation was to describe how proof complexity can be leveraged to design *certifying solvers*, which output not only an answer but also a machine-verifiable proof that this answer is correct—this process is also known as *proof logging*. With such a certifying combinatorial solver, the workflow becomes as follows (see also Figure 1):

(1) Run the solver on a problem to obtain not only a result, but also a proof.
(2) Feed the problem, result, and proof to a special computer program, called a *proof checker*.
(3) Accept the result if the proof checker says that the proof is valid.

Importantly, such a proof should be possible to produce with minimal overhead by the solver, which means that the proof system used has to be very expressive. At the same time, one would want the proof to be based on very simple rules, so that it is obvious how to verify mechanically that it is correct. Also, reading and understanding the proof should not require knowing the inner workings of the
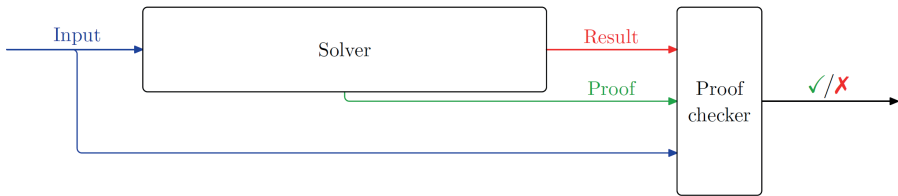
FIGURE 1. Schematic workflow for solver with proof logging.

solver or trusting that it has been implemented correctly, but should be possible with a fully independent, stand-alone proof checker.

Asking for all of this is quite a tall order, and it is far from clear a priori whether one should expect this to be possible in practice. Quite surprisingly, it turns out that the cutting planes proof system [4], if suitably extended with so-called strengthening rules, seems to hit a sweet spot between simplicity and expressivity, making it a convenient proof system for a wide range of applications. A proof checker for this proof system has been implemented in the tool VERIPB [18]. To date, VERIPB has been used to develop certifying versions of state-of-the-art solvers and techniques in

- Boolean satisfiability (SAT) solving (including advanced techniques such as Gaussian elimination [12] and symmetry breaking [3]);
- SAT-based optimization (MaxSAT solving) [1, 2, 17] including preprocessing [14];
- SAT-based pseudo-Boolean solving [11];
- subgraph solving (maximum clique, subgraph isomorphism, and maximum common connected subgraph) [7–9];
- dynamic programming and decision diagrams [5];
- presolving in 0–1 integer linear programming [13]; and
- constraint programming [6, 10, 15, 16].

The proof system underlying VERIPB has been developed in a sequence of joint works with Bart Bogaerts, Stephan Gocht, Ciaran McCreesh, Magnus O. Myreen, Andy Oertel, and Yong Kiam Tan.

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Bounds on the Total Coefficient Size of Nullstellensatz Proofs of the Pigeonhole Principle

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(joint work with Aaron Zhang)

Given a system $\{p_i = 0 : i \in [m]\}$ of m polynomial equations, a Nullstellensatz proof of infeasibility is an equality of the form $1 = \sum_{i=1}^{m} p_i q_i$ for some polynomials $\{q_i = 0 : i \in [m]\}$. Hilbert's Nullstellensatz[1] says that the Nullstellensatz proof system is complete, i.e., a system of polynomial equations has no solutions over an algebraically closed field if and only if there is a Nullstellensatz proof of infeasibility. However, Hilbert's Nullstellensatz does not give any bounds on how large a Nullsellensatz proof must be in order to refute an infeasible system of polynomial equations.

Previously, most research on Nullstellensatz has analyzed the size and degree of Nullstellenstaz proofs. In this work, instead of investigating the size or degree of Nullstellensatz proofs, we investigate the total coefficient size of Nullstellensatz proofs, i.e., the sum of the magnitudes of the coefficients of the monomials in the proof. Our main reason for this is that total coefficient size is a reasonably natural measure which is relatively unexplored (though there has been considerable research on closely related measures such as unary Nullstellensatz size, unary Sherali-Adams size, and the total bit complexity of proofs [1–3, 5, 7]). That said, there are several other reasons why total coefficient size bounds are interesting.

First, analyzing the total coefficient size of proofs may give insight into proof size in settings where we currently cannot prove size lower bounds. If we can prove a large total coefficient size lower bound, this shows that any proof must either have large size or involve large coefficients. Unless there is a reason to suspect that large coefficients are helpful for making the proof shorter, this gives considerable evidence for a lower bound on proof size.

Second, lower bounds on total coefficient size have some direct implications. As observed by [5], a total coefficient size lower bound for the stronger Sherali-Adams proof system implies a lower bound for the reversible resolution proof system which captures the Max-SAT resolution proof system (see [4]) for Max SAT. Similarly, [5] observes that a total coefficient size lower bound for Nullstellensatz implies a lower

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[1]Technically, this is the weak form of Hilbert's Nullstellensatz. Hilbert's Nullstellensatz actually says that given polynomials $p_1, \ldots, p_m$ and another polynomial p, if $p(x) = 0$ for all x such that $p_i(x) = 0$ for each $i \in [m]$ then there exists a natural number r such that p^r is in the ideal generated by $p_1, \ldots, p_m$.

bound for the reversible resolution with terminals proof system, which is a weaker variant of reversible resolution.

Finally, investigating the total coefficient size of proofs gives insight into the following question. Are there natural examples where having fractional coefficients greatly reduces the total coefficient size needed for Nullstellensatz and/or Sherali-Adams proofs? Proving total coefficient size lower bounds for a problem rules out this possibility for that problem. Conversely, if there is a natural example where the minimum proof size is large but the total coefficient size is small, this would be quite interesting.

In this work, we show that the minimum total coefficient size of a Nullstellensatz proof of the pigeonhole principle is $2^{\Theta(n)}$. More precisely, we show the following bounds.

Theorem 1. *For all $n \geq 2$, any Nullstellensatz proof of the pigeonhole principle with n pigeons and $n-1$ holes has total coefficient size $\Omega\left(n^{\frac{3}{4}}\left(\frac{2}{\sqrt{e}}\right)^n\right)$.*

We note that this lower bound also holds for the functional pigeonhole principle, where each pigeon must go to exactly one hole (instead of at least one hole).

Theorem 2. *For all $n \geq 2$, there is a Nullstellensatz proof of the pigeonhole principle with n pigeons and $n-1$ holes with total coefficient size at most 2^{5n}.*

This is joint work with Aaron Zhang which will appear in ICALP 2024. The full version of our paper is on arXiv [6]. This research was supported by NSF grant CCF-2008920 and NDSEG fellowship F-9422254702.

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Strength of the Dominance Rule

Neil Thapen

(joint work with Leszek Aleksander Kołodziejczyk)

It has become standard that, when a SAT solver decides that a CNF Γ is unsatisfiable, it produces a certificate of unsatisfiability in the form of a refutation of Γ in some proof system. The system typically used is DRAT, which is equivalent to extended resolution (ER) – for example, until this year DRAT refutations were required in the annual SAT competition.

Recently Bogaerts et al. [1] introduced a new proof system, associated with the tool VeriPB, which is at least as strong as DRAT and is further able to handle certain symmetry-breaking techniques. We show that this system simulates the proof system G_1, which allows limited reasoning with QBFs and forms the first level above ER in a natural hierarchy of proof systems [2]. This hierarchy is not known to be strict, but nevertheless this is evidence that the system of [1] is plausibly strictly stronger than ER and DRAT. In the other direction, we show that symmetry-breaking for a single symmetry can be handled inside ER.

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Provability of Circuit Size Hierarchies

Marco Carmosino

(joint work with Valentine Kabanets, Antonina Kolokolova and Igor C. Oliveira)

A *gate* is an atomic device that computes a single Boolean function. A *circuit* is an arrangement of wires between gates. Each circuit computes a particular Boolean function on a fixed number of input bits by propagating values along the wires. To measure the circuit complexity of a function f, we fix a set of gates $\mathcal{B}$ — for example, two-bit $\{\mathsf{AND}, \mathsf{OR}\}$ and NOT gates — and count the minimum number of $\mathcal{B}$-gates required to compute f.

Despite decades of study, basic questions about circuit complexity remain open. Straightforward counting arguments show that most Boolean function on n bits require huge circuits: roughly $2^n/n$ gates [4]. Yet, explicit functions that require even super-linear circuit size are unknown. The best known lower bounds for circuits over $\mathcal{B}$ are $5n - o(n)$, but the explicit functions identified can be computed using only $5n + o(n)$ gates [1, 2]. So, new ideas are required for explicit circuit lower bounds in the general[1] setting.

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[1]Super-polynomial lower bounds are indeed known for constant-depth circuit classes and under certain other structural restrictions.

Motivated by the apparent difficulty of making progress, some researchers are exploring mathematical logic to understand why some questions about circuits resist all known proof techniques. A weak fragment of Peano Arithmetic called PV_1 (for "Polynomially Verifiable") captures "efficient" reasoning, by limiting the induction principle to work only on formulas quantifying "small" numbers. Even so, PV_1 formalizes many theorems about computational complexity — including the Cook-Levin and PCP theorems — which seem to require intricate proofs [3].

The immediate meta-mathematical question is: how much circuit complexity can be accomplished inside PV_1? In particular, the Circuit Size Hierarchy (CSH) is a classical result: larger circuits compute strictly more functions. CSH is proved by straightforward counting and encoding of Boolean functions. But a "constructive" proof of CSH remains unknown, and the existing arguments do not produce explicit hard functions. Formally, we ask: is CSH a theorem of PV_1?

This talk shared preliminary evidence that it is difficult to prove CSH in PV_1. If CSH is a theorem of PV_1, then there are super-linear circuit lower bounds for a function computable in PTIME — a breakthrough. This reduces the problem of proving super-linear citcuit lower bounds to a question about the existence of feasible proofs.

However, our work remains in progress because it seems natural to ask for a better relationship between PV_1-provability of CSH and breakthrough circuit lower bounds. Suppose PV_1 proves that, for each $k \in \mathbb{N}$, circuits of size n^{5k} compute functions that are hard for circuits of size n^k. We hope to obtain from this assumption, for each k, a language $\mathcal{H}_k \in \mathsf{PTIME}$ that requires $n^{k+\varepsilon}$ circuit size, with $\varepsilon > 0$. Intuitively, despite our preliminary result, it remains open to "extract all the hardness" from a PV_1-proof of CSH.

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