# FSA and regular languages

Data Structures and Algorithms for Computational Linguistics III (ISCL-BA-07)

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## Languages and automata

- Recognizing strings from a language defined by a grammar is a fundamental question in computer science
- The efficiency of computation, and required properties of computing device depends on the grammar (and the language)
- A well-known hierarchy of grammars both in computer science and linguistics is the *Chomsky hierarchy*
- Each grammar in the Chomsky hierarchy corresponds to an abstract computing device (an automaton)
- The class of *regular grammars* are the class that corresponds to *finite state automata*





## How to describe a language?

Formal grammars

A formal *grammar* is a finite specification of a (formal) language.

- Since we consider languages as sets of strings, for a finite language, we can (conceivably) list all strings
- How to define an infinite language?
- Is the definition $\{ba, baa, baaa, baaaa, \ldots\}$ 'formal enough'?
- Using regular expressions, we can define it as `baa*`
- But we will introduce a more general method for defining languages





## Phrase structure grammars

- A phrase structure grammar is a generative device
- If a given string can be generated by the grammar, the string is in the language
- The grammar generates *all* and the *only* strings that are valid in the language
- A phrase structure grammar has the following components
  - $\Sigma$ A set of *terminal* symbols
  - $N$ A set of *non-terminal* symbols
  - $S \in N$ A special non-terminal, called the start symbol
  - $R$ A set of *rewrite rules* or *production rules* of the form:

$$\alpha \rightarrow \beta$$

which means that the sequence $\alpha$ can be rewritten as $\beta$ (both $\alpha$ and $\beta$ are sequences of terminal and non-terminal symbols)





## Chomsky hierarchy and automata

| *Grammar class* | *Rules* | *Automata* |
|---|---|---|
| Unrestricted grammars | $\alpha \rightarrow \beta$ | Turing machines |
| Context-sensitive grammars | $\alpha A \beta \rightarrow \alpha \gamma \beta$ | Linear-bounded automata |
| Context-free grammars | $A \rightarrow \alpha$ | Pushdown automata |
| Regular grammars | $A \rightarrow a$, $A \rightarrow aB$ \| $A \rightarrow a$, $A \rightarrow B a$ | Finite state automata |





## Regular grammars: definition

A regular grammar is a tuple $G = (\Sigma, N, S, R)$ where

- $\Sigma$ is an alphabet of terminal symbols
- $N$ are a set of non-terminal symbols
- $S$ is a special 'start' symbol $\in N$
- $R$ is a set of rewrite rules following one of the following patterns ($A, B \in N$, $a \in \Sigma$, $\epsilon$ is the empty string)

**Left regular**

1. $A \rightarrow a$
2. $A \rightarrow Ba$
3. $A \rightarrow \epsilon$

**Right regular**

1. $A \rightarrow a$
2. $A \rightarrow aB$
3. $A \rightarrow \epsilon$





## Regular languages: some properties/operations

- $\mathcal{L}_1\mathcal{L}_2$ Concatenation of two languages $\mathcal{L}_1$ and $\mathcal{L}_2$: any sentence of $\mathcal{L}_1$ followed by any sentence of $\mathcal{L}_2$
- $\mathcal{L}^*$ Kleene star of $\mathcal{L}$: $\mathcal{L}$ concatenated with itself 0 or more times
- $\mathcal{L}^R$ Reverse of $\mathcal{L}$: reverse of any string in $\mathcal{L}$
- $\overline{\mathcal{L}}$ Complement of $\mathcal{L}$: all strings in $\Sigma^*_{\mathcal{L}}$ except the ones in $\mathcal{L}$ ($\Sigma^*_{\mathcal{L}} - \mathcal{L}$)
- $\mathcal{L}_1 \cup \mathcal{L}_2$ Union of languages $\mathcal{L}_1$ and $\mathcal{L}_2$: strings that are in any of the languages
- $\mathcal{L}_1 \cap \mathcal{L}_2$ Intersection of languages $\mathcal{L}_1$ and $\mathcal{L}_2$: strings that are in both languages

Regular languages are closed under all of these operations.





## Three ways to define a regular language

- A language is regular if there is regular grammar that generates/recognizes it
- A language is regular if there is an FSA that generates/recognizes it
- A language is regular regular if we can define a regular expressions for the language





## Regular expressions

- Every regular language (RL) can be expressed by a regular expression (RE), and every RE defines a RL
- A RE `e` defines a RL $\mathcal{L}(e)$
- Relations between RE and RL
  - $\mathcal{L}(\varnothing) = \varnothing$,
  - $\mathcal{L}(\epsilon) = \epsilon$,
  - $\mathcal{L}(a) = a$
  - $\mathcal{L}(ab) = \mathcal{L}(a)\mathcal{L}(b)$
  - $\mathcal{L}(a*) = \mathcal{L}(a)^*$
  - $\mathcal{L}(a|b) = \mathcal{L}(a) \cup \mathcal{L}(b)$ (some author use the notation `a+b`, we will use `a|b` as in many practical implementations)

  where, $a, b \in \Sigma$, $\epsilon$ is empty string, $\varnothing$ is the language that accepts nothing (e.g., $\Sigma^* - \Sigma^*$)
- Note: no standard complement and intersection in RE





## Regular expressions

and some extensions

- Kleene star (`a*`), concatenation (`ab`) and union (`a|b`) are the basic operations
- Parentheses can be used to group the sub-expressions. Otherwise, the priority of the operators are as listed above: `a|bc* = a|(b(c*))`
- In practice some short-hand notations are common
  - `.` = $(a_1|\ldots|a_n)$, for $\Sigma = \{a_1, \ldots, a_n\}$
  - `a+` = `aa*`
  - `[a-c]` = `(a|b|c)`
  - `[^a-c]` = `. - (a|b|c)`
  - `\d` = `(0|1|...|8|9)`
  - ...
- And some non-regular extensions, like `(a*)b\1` (sometimes the term *regexp* is used for expressions with non-regular extensions)





## Some properties of regular expressions

Useful identities for simplifying regular expressions

- `u|(v|w) = (u|v)|w`
- `u|v = v|u`
- `u(v|w) = uv|uw`
- `u|∅ = u`
- `uϵ = ϵu = u`
- `∅u = ∅`
- `u(vw) = (uv)w`
- `∅* = ϵ`
- `ϵ* = ϵ`
- `(u*)* = u*`
- `u|u = u`
- `(u|v)* = (u*|v*)*`
- `u*|ϵ = u*`

**An exercise**

Simplify `a|ab*`

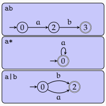
```
a|ab*  =  aϵ|ab*
       =  a(ϵ|b*)
       =  ab*
```

Note: some of these are direct statements of Kleene algebra, others can be derived from them.





## Converting regular expressions to FSA




- For more complex expressions, one can replace the paths for individual symbols with corresponding automata
- Using $\epsilon$ transitions may ease the task
- The reverse conversion (from automata to regular expressions) is also easy:
  - identify the patterns on the left, collapse paths to single transitions with regular expressions

## Exercise
convert `b((ab)*|a)` to an NFA





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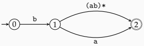






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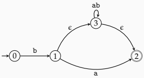
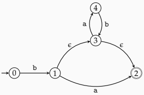
convert `b((ab)*|a)` to an NFA







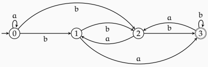

## Exercise
convert `b((ab)*|a)` to an NFA








## Converting FSA to regular expressions




- The general idea: remove (intermediate) states, replacing edge labels with regular expressions





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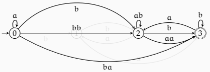


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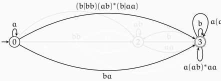


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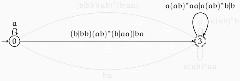
## Converting FSA to regular expressions

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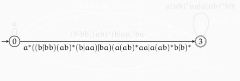
## Converting FSA to regular expressions

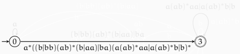



- The general idea: remove (intermediate) states, replacing edge labels with regular expressions





## Converting FSA to regular expressions




- The general idea: remove (intermediate) states, replacing edge labels with regular expressions

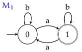
An exercise: simplify the resulting regular expressions





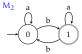
## Two example FSA
what languages do they accept?

$L_1 = \mathcal{L}(M_1)$




Odd number of a's over $\{a, b\}$.

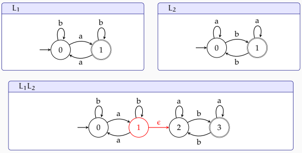
$L_2 = \mathcal{L}(M_2)$




Odd number of b's over $\{a, b\}$.

We will use these languages and automata for demonstration.

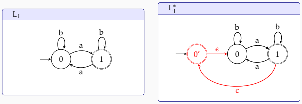
## Concatenation








## Kleene star

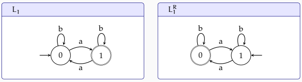



- What if there were more than one accepting states?





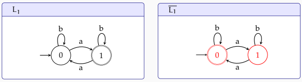
## Reversal







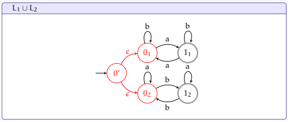

## Complement







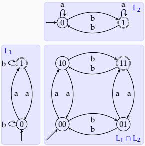

## Union








## Intersection




...or

$L_1 \cap L_2 = \overline{\overline{L_1} \cup \overline{L_2}}$





## Closure properties of regular languages

- Since results of all the operations we studied are FSA: Regular languages are closed under
  - Concatenation
  - Kleene star
  - Reversal
  - Complement
  - Union
  - Intersection





## Wrapping up

- FSA and regular expressions express regular languages
- Regular languages and FSA are closed under
  - Concatenation
  - Kleene star
  - Complement
  - Reversal
  - Union
  - Intersection
- To prove a language is regular, it is sufficient to find a regular expression or FSA for it
- To prove a language is not regular, we can use pumping lemma (see Appendix)

Next:

- FSTs





## Acknowledgments, credits, references

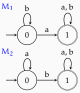
- The classic reference for FSA, regular languages and regular grammars is **hopcroft1979** (there are recent editions).





## Another exercise on intersection

Construct the intersection of the automata below (adapted from **hopcroft2007**, Fig. 4.4)








## Is a language regular?

— or not

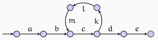
- To show that a language is regular, it is sufficient to find an FSA that recognizes it.
- Showing that a language is *not* regular is more involved
- We will study a method based on *pumping lemma*





## Pumping lemma

intuition



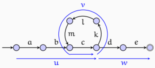

- What is the length of longest string generated by this FSA?
- Any FSA generating an infinite language has to have a loop (application of recursive rule(s) in the grammar)
- Part of every string longer than some number will include repetition of the same substring ('cklm' above)

## Pumping lemma

definition

For every regular language L, there exist an integer p such that a string $x \in L$ can be factored as $x = uvw$,

- $uv^iw \in L, \forall i \geqslant 0$
- $v \neq \epsilon$
- $|uv| \leqslant p$








## How to use pumping lemma

- We use pumping lemma to prove that a language is not regular
- Proof is by contradiction:
  - Assume the language is regular
  - Find a string x in the language, for all splits of $x = uvw$, at least one of the pumping lemma conditions does not hold
    - $uv^iw \in L\ (\forall i \geqslant 0)$
    - $v \neq \epsilon$
    - $|uv| \leqslant p$





## Pumping lemma example

prove $L = a^nb^n$ is not regular

- Assume L is regular: there must be a p such that, if $uvw$ is in the language
  1. $uv^iw \in L\ (\forall i \geqslant 0)$
  2. $v \neq \epsilon$
  3. $|uv| \leqslant p$
- Pick the string $a^pb^p$
- For the sake of example, assume $p = 5$, $x = aaaaabbbbb$
- Three different ways to split

| | |
|---|---|
| $\underbrace{a}_{u}\underbrace{aaa}_{v}\underbrace{abbbbb}_{w}$ | violates 1 |
| $\underbrace{aaaa}_{u}\underbrace{ab}_{v}\underbrace{bbbb}_{w}$ | violates 1 & 3 |
| $\underbrace{aaaaab}_{u}\underbrace{bbb}_{v}\underbrace{b}_{w}$ | violates 1 & 3 |





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