

# Sequential P Systems with Active Membranes without counting<sup>\*</sup>

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**Abstract.** We study variants of P systems that are working in the sequential mode. Basically, they are not computationally universal, but there are possible extensions that can increase the computation power. Extensions that implement a notion of zero-checking, are often computationally universal. P systems with an ability to create new membranes are a rare exception as they are known to be computationally universal even in the sequential mode without using a dedicated zero-check operation. Using sets instead of multiset was inspired by Reaction systems and we show how to use this relaxation in the context of active membranes.

## 1 Introduction

Membrane systems (P systems) [1] were introduced by Păun (see [2]) as distributed parallel computing devices inspired by the structure and functionality of cells. Starting from the observation that there is an obvious parallelism in the cell biochemistry and relying on the assumption that “if we wait enough, then all reactions which may take place will take place”, a feature of the P systems is given by the maximal parallel way of using the rules. For various reasons ranging from looking for more realistic models to just more mathematical challenge, the maximal parallelism was questioned, either simply criticized, or replaced with presumably less restrictive assumptions. In some cases, a sequential model may be a more reasonable assumption. In sequential P systems, only one rewriting rule is used in each step of computation. Without priorities, they are equivalent to Petri nets [3], hence not computationally universal. However priorities, inhibitors and other modifications can increase the computation power. It seems that there is a link between universality and ability to zero-check [4].

## 2 Preliminaries

Here we recall several notions from the classical theory of formal languages.

An **alphabet** is a finite nonempty set of symbols. Usually it is denoted by  $\Sigma$ . A **string** over an alphabet is a finite sequence of symbols from the alphabet. We denote by  $\Sigma^*$  the set of all strings over an alphabet  $\Sigma$ . By  $\Sigma^+ = \Sigma^* - \{\varepsilon\}$

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we denote the set of all nonempty strings over  $\Sigma$ . A **language** over the alphabet  $\Sigma$  is any subset of  $\Sigma^*$ .

The number of occurrences of a given symbol  $a \in \Sigma$  in the string  $w \in \Sigma^*$  is denoted by  $|w|_a$ .  $\Psi_\Sigma(w) = (|w|_{a_1}, |w|_{a_2}, \dots, |w|_{a_n})$  is called a Parikh vector associated with the string  $w \in \Sigma^*$ , where  $\Sigma = \{a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n\}$ . For a language  $L \subseteq \Sigma^*$ ,  $\Psi_\Sigma(L) = \{\Psi_\Sigma(w) | w \in L\}$  is the Parikh image of  $L$ . If FL is a family of languages, PsFL denotes the family of Parikh images of languages in FL.

Next, we recall notions from graph theory.

A **rooted tree** is a tree, in which a particular node is distinguished from the others and called the root node. Let  $T$  be a rooted tree. We will denote its root node by  $r_T$ . Let  $d$  be a node of  $T \setminus \{r_T\}$ . As  $T$  is a tree, there is a unique path from  $d$  to  $r_T$ . The node adjacent to  $d$  on that path is also unique and is called a **parent node** of  $d$  and is denoted by  $parent_T(d)$ . We will denote the set of nodes of  $T$  by  $V(T)$  and set of its edges by  $E(T)$ . Let  $T_1, T_2$  be rooted trees. A bijection  $f : V(T_1) \rightarrow V(T_2)$  is an **isomorphism** iff  $\{(f(u), f(v)) | (u, v) \in E(T_1)\} = E(T_2)$  and  $f(r_{T_1}) = r_{T_2}$ .

### 3 Active P systems

The fundamental ingredient of a P system is the **membrane structure** (see [5]). It is a hierarchically arranged set of membranes, all contained in the **skin membrane**. Each membrane determines a compartment, also called region, which is the space delimited from above by it and from below by the membranes placed directly inside, if any exists. Clearly, the correspondence membrane – region is one-to-one, that is why we sometimes use interchangeably these terms. The membrane structure can be also viewed as a rooted tree with the skin membrane as the root node.

A P system consists of a membrane structure, where each membrane is labeled with a number from 1 to  $m$ . Each membrane contains a set of objects. Objects can be transformed into other objects and sent through a membrane according to given rules defined for membrane labels. The rules are known from the beginning for each possible membrane, even for the ones that do not exist yet, or the ones that will never exist.

In this paper we work with P systems with active membranes (Active P systems). The rules can modify the membrane structure by dissolving and creating new membranes. That is why we will define the configuration to include the membrane structure as well.

Let  $\Sigma$  be a set of objects. A **membrane configuration** is a tuple  $(T, l, c)$ , where:

- $T$  is a rooted tree,
- $l \in \mathbb{N}^{V(T)}$  is a mapping that assigns for each node of  $T$  a number (label), where  $l(r_T) = 1$ , so the skin membrane is always labeled with 1,
- $c \in (2^\Sigma)^{V(T)}$  is a mapping that assigns for each node of  $T$  a set of objects from  $\Sigma$ , so it represents the contents of the membrane.

An **active P system** is a tuple  $(\Sigma, C_0, R_1, R_2, \dots, R_m)$ , where:

- $\Sigma$  is a set of objects,
- $C_0$  is initial membrane configuration,
- $R_1, R_2, \dots, R_m$  are finite sets of rewriting rules associated with the labels  $1, 2, \dots, m$  and can be of forms:
  - $u \rightarrow w$ , where  $u \subseteq \Sigma$ ,  $|u| \geq 1$ ,  $w \subseteq (\Sigma \times \{\cdot, \uparrow, \downarrow_j\})$  and  $1 \leq j \leq m$ ,
  - a dissolving rule  $u \rightarrow w\delta$ , where  $u \subseteq \Sigma$ ,  $|u| \geq 1$ ,  $w \subseteq (\Sigma \times \{\cdot, \uparrow, \downarrow_j\})$  and  $1 \leq j \leq m$ ,
  - a membrane creation  $u \rightarrow [{}_j v]_j$ , where  $u \subseteq \Sigma$ ,  $|u| \geq 1$ ,  $v \subseteq \Sigma$  and  $1 \leq j \leq m$ .

For the first two forms, each rewriting rule may specify for each object on the right side, whether it stays in the current region (we will omit the symbol  $\cdot$ ), moves through the membrane to the parent region ( $\uparrow$ ) or to a specific child region ( $\downarrow_j$ , where  $j$  is a label of a membrane). We denote these transfers with an arrow immediately after the symbol. An example of such rule is the following:  $ab \rightarrow ab \downarrow_2 c \uparrow \delta$ .

By applying the rule we mean the removal of objects specified on the left side and the addition of the objects on the right side with respect to set union semantics. Symbol  $\delta \notin \Sigma$  does not represent an object. It may be present only at the end of the rule, which means that after the application of the rule, the membrane is dissolved and its contents (objects, child membranes) are propagated to the parent membrane.

Active P systems differ from classic (passive) P systems in ability to create new membranes by rules of the third form. Such rule will create new child membrane with a given label  $j$  and a given set of objects  $v$  as its contents. If current membrane already contains a child membrane with label  $j$ , then such rule is not applicable.

For an active P system  $(\Sigma, C_0, R_1, R_2, \dots, R_m)$ , configuration  $C = (T, l, c)$ , membrane  $d \in V(T)$  the rule  $r \in R_{l(d)}$  is **applicable** iff:

- $r = u \rightarrow w$  and  $u \subseteq c(d)$  and for all  $(a, \downarrow_k) \in w$  there exists  $d_2 \in V(T)$  such that  $l(d_2) = k \wedge \text{parent}(d_2) = d$ ,
- $r = u \rightarrow w\delta$  and  $u \subseteq c(d)$  and for all  $(a, \downarrow_k) \in w$  there exists  $d_2 \in V(T)$  such that  $l(d_2) = k \wedge \text{parent}(d_2) = d$  and  $d \neq r_T$ ,
- $r = u \rightarrow [{}_j v]_j$  and  $u \subseteq c(d)$ .

In this paper we assume only sequential systems, so in each step of the computation, there is one rule nondeterministically chosen among all applicable rules in all membranes to be applied.

A **computation step** of P system is a relation  $\Rightarrow$  on the set of configurations such that  $C_1 \Rightarrow C_2$  holds iff there is an applicable rule in a membrane in  $C_1$  such that applying that rule can result in  $C_2$ .

The P system can work in generating or in accepting mode. For the generating mode we consider the concatenation of the objects which leave the system, in the order they are sent out of the skin membrane (if several symbols are expelled at the same time, then any ordering of them is considered). In this case

we generate a language. The result of a single computation is clearly only one multiset or a string, but for one initial configuration there can be multiple possible computations. It follows from the fact that there can be more than one applicable rule in each configuration and they are chosen nondeterministically.

For the accepting mode the input word is encoded into a membrane structure by a given encoding and it is accepted if and only if a given accepting configuration can be reached[3].

## 4 Simulation of register machine

### 4.1 Register machine

**Definition 1.** A  $n$ -register machine is a tuple  $M = (n, P, i, h)$ , where:

- $n$  is the number of registers,
- $P$  is a set of labeled instructions of the form  $j : (op(r), k, l)$ , where  $op(r)$  is an operation on register  $r \leq n$ , and  $j, k, l$  are labels from the set  $Lab(M)$  such that there are no two instructions with the same label  $j$ ,
- $i$  is the initial label, and
- $h$  is the final label.

The machine is capable of the following instructions:

- $(add(r), k, l)$  : Add one to the contents of register  $r$  and proceed to instruction  $k$  or to instruction  $l$ ; in the deterministic variants usually considered in the literature we demand  $k = l$ .
- $(sub(r), k, l)$  : If register  $r$  is not empty, then subtract one from its contents and go to instruction  $k$ , otherwise proceed to instruction  $l$ .
- $halt$  : This instruction stops the machine. This additional instruction can only be assigned to the final label  $h$ .

A deterministic  $m$ -register machine can analyze an input  $(n_1, \dots, n_m) \in N_0^m$  in registers 1 to  $m$ , which is recognized if the register machine finally stops by the halt instruction with all its registers being empty (this last requirement is not necessary). If the machine does not halt, the analysis was not successful.

A configuration of a register machine is a tuple  $(r_1, \dots, r_m, ip)$ , where  $r_i$  is value of the register  $i$  and  $ip$  (instruction pointer) is the label of current instruction to be executed.

### 4.2 Simple simulation

For a register machine with  $m$  registers we will construct an active P system  $(\Sigma, C_0, R_1, \dots, R_{m+1})$ , where  $\Sigma = \{x_j, y_j \text{ for instructions with label } j\} \cup \{t_i \text{ for each register } i\}$ . Skin membrane will be labeled with  $m+1$ , other labels correspond to registers 1 to  $m$ .  $C_0$  will be the input word for the register machine encoded into a membrane structure by the following encoding:

For a configuration of register machine  $(r_1, r_2, \dots, r_m, ip)$  the membrane structure will consist of a skin membrane, which will contain  $m$  chains consisting of  $r_i$  membranes embedded one into another like in a Matryoshka doll with label  $i$ . The innermost membranes will contain a single object  $t_i$ . If  $r_i = 0$  then  $t_i$  is in the skin membrane and there is no membrane with label  $i$ . Object representing the label of the current instruction  $(x_{ip})$  is in the skin membrane.

We will have following rules in the skin membrane:

- $y_j \rightarrow x_j$ ,
- $x_j \rightarrow x_j \downarrow_i$  for instruction  $j : op(i)$ ,
- $x_j, t_i \rightarrow [1y_k, t_i]_1$  for instruction  $j : (add(i), k, \_)$ ,
- $x_j, t_i \rightarrow l$  for instruction  $j : (sub(i), \_, l)$

For the membrane  $i$ :

- $x_j \rightarrow x_j \downarrow_i$  for instruction  $j : op(i)$ ,
- $x_j, t_i \rightarrow [1y_k, t_i]_1$  for instruction  $j : (add(i), k, \_)$ ,
- $y_j \rightarrow y_j \uparrow$  for instruction  $j : (op(i), \_, \_)$ ,
- $x_j, t_i \rightarrow y_k, t_i, \delta$  for instruction  $j : (sub(i), k, l)$

Object  $x_j$  represents the instruction currently executed. It is sent down the chain of membranes and in the innermost membrane the creation of new membrane or the dissolution is performed. Then the next instruction represented by object  $y_j$  is sent upwards all the way to the skin membrane. The object  $t_i$  is always present in the innermost membrane. The zero-test is implemented by rule in the skin membrane, which require the presence of  $t_i$ , meaning that the value of register  $i$  is zero.

If empty register halting is needed, we will consume  $t_i$  symbols with the label of a halting instruction in the skin membrane.

The simulation was quite straightforward. We proved that the model is computational complete. However, the simulation is not very effective. It uses alphabet of size  $2 * \text{number of instructions} + \text{number of registers}$ . And its number of membranes is linearly dependent on sum of values of registers. The time needed for executing an instruction on register  $i$  is linearly dependent on  $r_i$ .

### 4.3 Optimization of the simulation

In this subsection we address the inefficient usage of membranes in the previous simulation. New, optimized simulation will reduce it to logarithmic dependency.

For a register machine with  $m$  registers we will construct an active P system, where  $\Sigma = \{0, 1, p, s, t\} \cup \{x_j, y_j, z_j \text{ for instructions with label } j\}$ . Skin membrane will be labeled with  $m + 1$ , other labels correspond to registers 1 to  $m$ .

Assume configuration of register machine  $(r_1, r_2, \dots, r_m, ip)$ . For each register  $i$ , let  $b_1 b_2 \dots b_k$  be a binary representation of  $r_i$ . The skin membrane will contain a chain of  $k$  membranes embedded one into another like in a Matryoshka doll with label  $i$ . The membrane in depth  $d$  will contain the object  $b_{k-d}$ , which is either 0 or 1. So the highest-order position in the binary number is represented by the

innermost membrane and more-often incremented positions are in membranes closer to the skin membrane. Moreover, the innermost membranes contain a single object  $t$ . The skin membrane contains the label of the current instruction  $x_{ip}$ . Other membranes (not skin and not innermost) contain  $s$ . Object  $p$  will be in all membranes except the skin membrane and direct children of skin membrane. It represents the fact that the membrane can be dissolved, while keeping at least one membrane for binary representation of the register value.

We will have following rules in the skin membrane:

- $y_j \rightarrow x_j$ ,
- $x_j \rightarrow x_j \downarrow_i$  for instruction  $j : op(i)$

For the membrane  $i$  and instruction  $j$ :

- $y_j \rightarrow y_j \uparrow$  (return the next instruction to the skin membrane).

For the membrane  $i$  and instruction  $j : add(i, k)$ :

- $x_j 1 \rightarrow x_j \downarrow_i 0$  (we decremented lower position, so we must increment higher position (011 to 100, now at 1 to 0)),
- $x_j 0 \rightarrow y_k \uparrow 1$  (we incremented a position and can return and proceed to the next instruction),
- $x_j 1t \rightarrow [i 1tp]_i y_k \uparrow 0s$  (incrementing 111 to 1000).

For the membrane  $i$  and instruction  $j : sub(i, k, l)$ :

- $x_j 1s \rightarrow y_k \uparrow 0s$  (we found position to decrement, proceed to the next instruction),
- $x_j 0 \rightarrow x_j \downarrow_i 1$  (1000 is decremented to 0111 and now we encountered a 0),
- $x_j 1tp \rightarrow z_k t\delta$  (decrementing the number of bits),
- $z_j st \rightarrow y_j t$  (after decremented the number of bits, remove  $s$  in the new highest-order position),
- $x_j 0t \rightarrow y_l \uparrow 0t$  (trying to decrement a zero)

#### 4.4 Further optimizations

Could the simulation be optimized even more? Encoding the register value to a chain of membranes is not making full use of membrane structure. There are many options how to efficiently represent an integer by a tree. For efficient implementation of the increment and decrement instructions we need an encoding with a property that a local change in value of the encoding of the entire tree corresponds to a local change in value of the encodings of its child subtrees. Stein in 1999 [6] proposed a boustrophedonic variant of Cantor pairing function. The implementation of an active P system simulating a register machine using this pairing function to encode child subtrees would be quite easy, but we would stick to the logarithmic time in the worst case (diagonal of the pairing function). Catalan pairing function [7] orders full binary trees by the number of nodes. The time would be logarithmic with a base 4, which is a slight improvement, but asymptotically still the same.

## 5 Modified membrane creation semantics

In this section we will investigate the effect of other semantics of membrane creation. The previous semantics assumed an explicit membrane creation rule. If the current membrane already contains child membrane with the same label as the membrane going to be created, then the rule is not applicable, hence the membrane creation is aborted. Similar behavior is in the definition of sending objects to the child membrane. If such membrane does not exist, objects cannot be sent and the rule is not applicable.

These two behaviors are in fact complementary. It seems natural to join these two artificial rule abortions and provide a rule that will always be applicable if the precondition of left side inclusion is fulfilled. Therefore we will have no explicit membrane creation rule. Any rule which is sending some objects to child membrane labeled  $j$  will create child membrane  $j$  if it does not exist.

Formally, rules can be of form:

- $u \rightarrow w$ , where  $u \subseteq \Sigma$ ,  $|u| \geq 1$ ,  $w \subseteq (\Sigma \times \{\cdot, \uparrow, \downarrow_j\})$  and  $1 \leq j \leq m$ ,
- a dissolving rule  $u \rightarrow w\delta$ , where  $u \subseteq \Sigma$ ,  $|u| \geq 1$ ,  $w \subseteq (\Sigma \times \{\cdot, \uparrow, \downarrow_j\})$  and  $1 \leq j \leq m$ .

For an active P system  $(\Sigma, C_0, R_1, R_2, \dots, R_m)$ , configuration  $C = (T, l, c)$ , membrane  $d \in V(T)$  the rule  $r \in R_{l(d)}$  is **applicable** iff:

- $r = u \rightarrow w$  and  $u \subseteq c(d)$ ,
- $r = u \rightarrow w\delta$  and  $u \subseteq c(d)$  and  $d \neq r_T$ .

TODO: example needed (with picture?)

We will now show how the computational completeness of this variant of membrane creation is achieved by simulating the register machine. The simulation is essentially the same as in section 4.3. All the rules which are sending objects into a child membrane are already assuming that the child membrane already exists. The only difference is in the rule for membrane creation:  $x_j 1t \rightarrow [{}_i 1tp]_i y_k \uparrow 0s$ . This rule is applied always in the innermost membrane with no child membranes. Modified simulation will therefore use rule  $x_j 1t \rightarrow 1 \downarrow_i t \downarrow_i p \downarrow_i y_k \uparrow 0s$ , which, when applied, creates a child membrane  $i$ , because no such child membrane exists.

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