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The Complexity of two Problems on Arithmetic Circuits

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Abstract By using arithmetic circuits, encoding multivariate polynomials may be drastically more efficient than writing down the list of monomials. *Via* the study of two examples, we show however that such an encoding can be hard to handle with a Turing machine even if the degree of the polynomial is low. Namely we show that deciding whether the coefficient of a given monomial is zero is hard for $\mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}}$ under strong nondeterministic Turing reductions. As a result, this problem does not belong to the polynomial hierarchy unless this hierarchy collapses. For polynomials over fields of characteristic $k > 0$, this problem is $\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}$-complete. This gives a $\mathrm{coNP}^{\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}}$ algorithm for deciding an upper bound on the degree of a polynomial given by a circuit in fields of characteristic $k > 0$.

1 Introduction

Multivariate polynomials are intensively used in computer algebra. The naive way of encoding such polynomials is to write down the list of the coefficients of all monomials, but even low-degree polynomials may have an exponentially large number of such coefficients (consider for example the determinant). That is why this possibility is not always suitable.

Arithmetic circuits can sometimes remedy this situation since their size is in general much smaller than the list of all coefficients. An arithmetic circuit over a field K is a circuit that contains addition and multiplication gates over K (instead of OR and AND gates for usual boolean circuits). With such gates, and with inputs consisting of variables and constants of K, the circuit computes a polynomial (see the preliminaries below for details). For example, the polynomial $(x+y)^{2^n}$ can be computed by a circuit of size $O(n)$ by "repeated squaring", whereas the number of monomials is exponentially large.

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Though compact, this manner of storing data is not always easy to handle. There are efficient randomized algorithms for testing whether a polynomial is identically zero (see e.g. [14]), for example, but many other problems become hard when dealing with arithmetic circuits. One way to simplify them is to consider only circuits of polynomial "formal degree" ([10] or [12], the degree of the polynomial if no cancellation would occur). In this direction, Erich Kaltofen [7] designed efficient algorithms for the greatest common divisor of two polynomials, for instance.

This paper, in the same spirit as [1], investigates two natural problems concerning multivariate polynomials given by arithmetic circuits. We are concerned with the complexity of these problems in the usual Turing machine model. One of them is the computation of the degree of a polynomial (Section 5). This problem is efficiently solved by a probabilistic algorithm in the case where the "formal degree" is polynomially bounded; unfortunately, in characteristic 0, the upper bound of [1] in the counting hierarchy is not improved. However, for polynomials over fields of characteristic $k > 0$, we obtain the better bound $\mathrm{coNP}^{\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}}$. We shall also study the problem of deciding whether the coefficient of a given monomial is zero (Sections 3 and 4). We show that even on polynomially-bounded formal degree instances, this problem is hard, that is, hard for $\mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}}$ under strong nondeterministic Turing reductions. We also provide a complete characterization of the complexity of this problem when the field is of positive characteristic.

Throughout this paper, we heavily rely on the results of [10]. Though stated in an algebraic context in [10] (namely Valiant's framework), we show indeed that they can also be useful for proving results in boolean complexity related to the manipulation of polynomials given by arithmetic circuits.

2 Preliminaries

An *arithmetic circuit* over a field K is a directed acyclic graph, each of the vertices is of indegree 0 or 2, one and only one vertex being of outdegree 0. This last vertex is called *output*, and vertices of indegree zero are called *inputs*. An input is labeled by a variable x_i or a constant among $\{-1, 0, 1\}$ in K. Every other vertex is called a *gate* and is labeled by $+$ or $\times$. The polynomial computed by a vertex is defined inductively as follows:

- the polynomial computed by an input is its label (*i.e.* a constant or a variable);
- the polynomial computed by a $+$ gate is the sum of its entries;

– the polynomial computed by a $\times$ gate is the product of its entries.

The *polynomial computed by a circuit* is the polynomial computed by the output of the circuit. Note that the only allowed constants of the field are -1, 0 and 1, so the coefficients of our polynomials are in $\mathbf{Z}$ (characteristic zero) or in $\mathbf{Z}_k$ (characteristic $k > 0$). The *size* of a circuit C, written $|C|$, is the number of its vertices. See Figure 1 below for an example where cancellations occur.

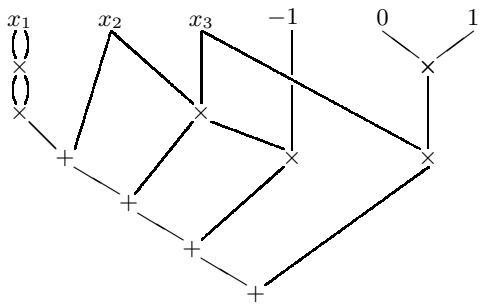

Figure1. A circuit of size 16 computing the polynomial $x_1^4 + x_2$.

Another useful quantity concerning arithmetic circuits is their formal degree. The formal degree of a vertex in an arithmetic circuit is inductively defined as follows:

– the formal degree of an input is 1;
– the formal degree of a $+$ gate is the maximum of the formal degrees of its entries;
– the formal degree of a $\times$ gate is the sum of the formal degrees of its entries.

The *formal degree* of an arithmetic circuit is the formal degree of its output. We denote the formal degree of a circuit C by $\deg_{\mathrm{f}}(C)$. Note that one can easily compute the formal degree of a circuit by induction.

Here we are interested in the complexity of handling arithmetic circuits by (usual, boolean) Turing machines. Note that an arithmetic circuit is easily encodable in binary since it merely consists of a labeled directed graph. Hence, such circuits can be manipulated by Turing machines. We shall study two problems: computing the degree of a polynomial, and deciding whether the coefficient of a monomial is zero. We shall define two versions of both problems, a "bounded" version where a part of the input

is given in unary, and the unbounded one where the whole input is in binary.

The first language we shall consider concerns the degree of the polynomial. If C is an arithmetic circuit, the degree of the (multivariate) polynomial computed by C is denoted by $\deg(C)$. The language DEG is defined as follows:

$$\mathrm{DEG} = \{(C, d) : \deg(C) \leq d\},$$

where C is an arithmetic circuit and d an integer. A "bounded" version of DEG is also defined:

$$\mathrm{DEG_b} = \{(C, 1^d) : \deg(C) \leq d\},$$

that is, d is given in unary, hence the size of the input is $\geq d$.

The second language we shall study concerns the coefficient of a monomial in a polynomial. A monomial m is encoded by the list of the exponents of all the variables in binary. If we denote by $\mathrm{coef}_C(m)$ the coefficient of the monomial m in the polynomial computed by C, we define

$$\mathrm{ZMC} = \{(C, m) : \mathrm{coef}_C(m) = 0\}$$

(ZMC stands for Zero Monomial Coefficient), and its bounded version:

$$\mathrm{ZMC_b} = \{(C, m, 1^d) : \mathrm{coef}_C(m) = 0 \text{ and } \deg_{\mathrm{f}}(C) = d\}.$$

As above, C is an arithmetic circuit, and m a monomial.

Note that these languages only depend on the characteristic of the underlying field, because the only allowed constants in the arithmetic circuits are -1, 0 and 1. When dealing with fields of characteristic $k > 0$, we will use the superscript k as in ZMC^k, $\mathrm{ZMC}^k_{\mathrm{b}}$, DEG^k and $\mathrm{DEG}^k_{\mathrm{b}}$.

We finally briefly recall a few complexity classes; we refer the reader to [13] and [5] for instance for further details. If L is a language, we denote by P^L (resp. NP^L) the class of languages recognized by a deterministic (resp. nondeterministic) polynomial time Turing machine with oracle L. If $\mathcal{C}$ is a set of languages, $\mathrm{P}^{\mathcal{C}}$ (resp. $\mathrm{NP}^{\mathcal{C}}$) denotes $\cup_{L\in\mathcal{C}}\mathrm{P}^L$ (resp. $\cup_{L\in\mathcal{C}}\mathrm{NP}^L$).

We define inductively the classes Σ_i^p as follows: $\Sigma_0^p = \mathrm{P}$ and $\Sigma_{i+1}^p = \mathrm{NP}^{\Sigma_i^p}$. The *polynomial hierarchy* is $\mathrm{PH} = \cup_{i\geq 0}\Sigma_i^p$.

We shall also encounter probabilistic classes. The class coRP is the set of languages L recognized by a probabilistic Turing machine that doesn't make any mistake on inputs in L, and has a small probability of error for inputs outside of L. More precisely, a language L is in coRP if there exists $A \in \mathrm{P}$ and a polynomial $q(n)$ such that for all $x \in \{0,1\}^*$:

– if $x \in L$ then $\mathrm{Card}\{y \in \{0,1\}^{q(|x|)} : (x,y) \in A\} = 0$;
– if $x \notin L$ then $\mathrm{Card}\{y \in \{0,1\}^{q(|x|)} : (x,y) \in A\} \geq 2^{q(|x|)-1}$.

BPP is analogous but both-sided errors are allowed:

– if $x \in L$ then $\mathrm{Card}\{y \in \{0,1\}^{q(|x|)} : (x,y) \in A\} \geq 3/4.2^{q(|x|)}$;
– if $x \notin L$ then $\mathrm{Card}\{y \in \{0,1\}^{q(|x|)} : (x,y) \in A\} < 1/4.2^{q(|x|)}$.

Finally, PP is similar but the threshold is 1/2 and is the same for both accepting and rejecting conditions. The class PP gives rise to the *counting hierarchy*: $\mathrm{CH} = \mathrm{P} \cup \mathrm{P}^{\mathrm{PP}} \cup \mathrm{P}^{\mathrm{PP}^{\mathrm{PP}}} \cup \ldots$

Let us now define "counting classes". The class #P is the set of *functions* that count the number of accepting paths of a non-deterministic Turing machine working in polynomial time. More precisely, $f : \{0,1\}^* \to \mathbf{N}$ is in #P if there exists $A \in \mathrm{P}$ and a polynomial $q(n)$ such that

$$f(x) = \mathrm{Card}\{y \in \{0,1\}^{q(|x|)} : (x,y) \in A\}.$$

The closure of #P under subtraction is called GapP: thus, a function GapP takes its values in $\mathbf{Z}$ and is the difference of two #P functions.

An analogous definition provides counting classes modulo k: if k is an integer greater than 1, $\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}$ is the set of *languages* L such that

$$x \in L \Leftrightarrow \mathrm{Card}\{y \in \{0,1\}^{q(|x|)} : (x,y) \in A\} \not\equiv 0 \bmod k.$$

If k is prime, $\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}$ is closed under complement [2], so we can take $\equiv 0$ in the definition instead of $\not\equiv 0$.

Let us recall a few inclusions:

$$\mathrm{P} \subseteq \mathrm{NP} \subseteq \mathrm{PH} \subseteq \mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}} \subseteq \mathrm{CH}, \text{ and } \mathrm{P} \subseteq \mathrm{coRP} \subseteq \mathrm{BPP} \subseteq \Sigma_2^p.$$

We shall also make use of *strong nondeterministic Turing reductions*, introduced by Long [8]. This is defined as follows: $B \leq_T^{sn} A$ iff $B \in (\mathrm{NP}^A \cap \mathrm{coNP}^A)$.

The next section studies ZMC (and its bounded version): we first show that over fields of characteristic zero, $\mathrm{ZMC_b} \in \mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}}$, $\mathrm{ZMC} \in \mathrm{CH}$ and these languages are outside PH unless it collapses. Then we study fields of characteristic $k > 0$, in which ZMC^k and $\mathrm{ZMC}_\mathrm{b}^k$ are $\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}$-complete. Finally, Section 5 deals with DEG and $\mathrm{DEG_b}$.

3 The coefficient of a monomial in characteristic zero

Here we work on polynomials with coefficients in $\mathbf{Z}$, *i.e.* we do not use modular arithmetic. The following two results are shown.

Proposition 1. $\mathrm{ZMC_b}$ *is* $\mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}}$*-complete under strong nondeterministic Turing reductions* $\leq_T^{sn}$.

Proposition 2. ZMC *is in* CH *and is* $\mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}}$*-hard under strong nondeterministic Turing reductions* $\leq_T^{sn}$.

Remark that the hardness result of Proposition 2 is implied by that of Proposition 1. The latter is shown in Section 3.1. The upper bounds of both propositions are proved in Section 3.2.

3.1 Hardness for $\mathbf{P}^{\#\mathbf{P}}$

The language Perm We define the language Perm as a decision problem for the permanent. We recall that the permanent of a matrix $M = (m_{i,j})_{1\leq i,j\leq n}$ is defined as

$$\mathrm{per}(M) = \sum_{\sigma\in\mathcal{S}_n} \prod_{i=1}^{n} m_{i,\sigma(i)}$$

where $\mathcal{S}_n$ is the set of all permutations of $\{1,\ldots,n\}$. Despite its similarity with the determinant, the permanent seems to be hard to compute (even for 0-1 matrices) since it is #P-complete under counting reductions [18]. The language Perm is the following:

$$\mathrm{Perm} = \{(M,v) : \mathrm{per}(M) = v\},$$

where M is a 0-1 square matrix, and v an integer (this language also appears in [6]). We show that Perm is $\mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}}$-hard under strong nondeterministic Turing reductions, *i.e.*

$$\mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}} \subseteq \mathrm{NP}^{\mathrm{Perm}} \cap \mathrm{coNP}^{\mathrm{Perm}}.$$

Let $L \in \mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}}$. Since computing the permanent of a 0-1 matrix is #P-complete, there exists a polynomial-time deterministic oracle Turing machine $\mathcal{M}$ that decides L with the help of the oracle per. It is easy to simulate this machine with a nondeterministic one, call it $\mathcal{N}$, that consults the oracle Perm. We proceed as follows. While $\mathcal{M}$ does not use its oracle, $\mathcal{N}$ simply simulates $\mathcal{M}$ in a deterministic manner. As soon as $\mathcal{M}$ asks for the value of a permanent, say $\mathrm{per}(M)$ for a matrix M, the machine $\mathcal{N}$ guesses the value of this permanent and check for a correct guess thanks to its oracle Perm: only the correct path (corresponding to the true value of the permanent) is continued, whereas the other paths are rejected.

Our machine $\mathcal{N}$ thus exactly has one path that behaves like $\mathcal{M}$, the other being rejecting paths. So $\mathcal{N}$ recognizes L, and we have shown the inclusion $\mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}} \subseteq \mathrm{NP}^{\mathrm{Perm}}$. The other inclusion $\mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}} \subseteq \mathrm{coNP}^{\mathrm{Perm}}$ holds by closure of $\mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}}$ under complement.

Remark 1. Toda's theorem ([15]) asserts that $\mathrm{PH} \subseteq \mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}}$. It yields

$$\mathrm{PH} \subseteq \mathrm{NP}^{\mathrm{Perm}}.$$

This implies that Perm does not lie in the polynomial hierarchy unless it collapses. Indeed, if Perm $\in \Sigma_i^p$ for some i, then $\mathrm{PH} \subseteq \mathrm{NP}^{\Sigma_i^p} = \Sigma_{i+1}^p$, and PH collapses to the $(i+1)$-th level.

$\mathbf{ZMC_b}$ is harder than Perm

Remark 2. The following ideas already appear in [17]. We nevertheless detail the reduction here for the sake of completeness.

We now show that $\mathrm{ZMC_b}$ is harder than Perm. For, if $M = (m_{i,j})$ is a matrix $(1 \leq i, j \leq n)$ and v an integer, we use the following classical multivariate polynomial, already appearing in e.g. [17] (without the term $-vX_1 \cdots X_n$, though):

$$P_{(M,v)}(X_1, \ldots, X_n) = \prod_{j=1}^{n} (\sum_{i=1}^{n} m_{i,j} X_i) - vX_1 \cdots X_n.$$

We claim that the coefficient of the monomial $X_1 \cdots X_n$ in this polynomial is $\mathrm{per}(M) - v$. Indeed, consider the product

$$(\sum_{i=1}^{n} m_{i,1} X_i)(\sum_{i=1}^{n} m_{i,2} X_i) \cdots (\sum_{i=1}^{n} m_{i,n} X_i).$$

In order to develop it, in each factor one has to choose one term of the sum. Since we are concerned with the coefficient of $X_1 \cdots X_n$, one has to choose different variables X_i for each factor. Therefore, for each permutation σ of $\{1, \ldots, n\}$, the product yields a term of the form $(\prod_i m_{i,\sigma(i)}) X_1 \cdots X_n$, thus the coefficient of $X_1 \cdots X_n$ in the product is

$$\sum_{\sigma} \prod_{i} m_{i,\sigma(i)} = \mathrm{per}(M).$$

Now, taking the term $-vX_1 \cdots X_n$ into account, we obtain the announced coefficient $\mathrm{per}(M) - v$.

From the input (M, v), it is easy to build in polynomial time an arithmetic circuit with polynomially-bounded formal degree[1] that computes $P_{(M,v)}$. Then the language $\mathrm{ZMC_b}$ enables us to decide Perm by asking whether the coefficient of $X_1 \cdots X_n$ in $P_{(M,v)}$ is zero. We conclude that $\mathrm{ZMC_b}$ is harder than Perm for polynomial-time many-one reductions. This shows the hardness results of Propositions 1 and 2. This also implies that $\mathrm{ZMC_b}$ (and *a fortiori* ZMC) is not in the polynomial hierarchy unless it collapses.

3.2 The help of a #P-oracle

We now show that $\mathrm{ZMC_b}$ is in $\mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}}$. We need the following definition of [10, section 5.2] (also in [11]).

Definition 1. *Let α be a gate whose inputs are β and γ. The gate α is* disjoint *if the subcircuits associated to β and γ are disjoint.*

A circuit is said to be multiplicatively disjoint *if all its multiplication gates are disjoint.*

Multiplicatively disjoint circuits are useful in the light of the following result of Malod and Portier [11, Lemma 2] (also in [10]).

Lemma 1. *Let C be a circuit of size s and formal degree d. There exists a multiplicatively disjoint circuit C' of size $\leq ds$ which computes the same polynomial as C. Furthermore, constructing C' from C requires only time polynomial in $|C|$ and d.*

In order to show that $\mathrm{ZMC_b}$ is in $\mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}}$, we rely on the proof of Theorem 3 of [10, section 2.4]: the idea is that the coefficient of the monomial m in a multiplicatively disjoint circuit is merely the number of possible "developments" that lead to m. By a "development" we mean a tree which represents the choices in the distribution of $\times$ over $+$. More precisely, if C is a multiplicatively disjoint arithmetic circuit, a development D is a subgraph of C satisfying the following properties:

- every $\times$ gate in D has both inputs in D;
- every $+$ gate in D has exactly one input in D;
- D contains the output gate of the circuit, and every gate in D different from the output gate has at least one child in D.

[1] An immediate construction provides a formal degree of roughly $2n$ for the product, and $n \log n$ for $vX_1 \cdots X_n$ (since $|v| \leq n!$, because it is a permanent of a 0-1 $n \times n$ matrix). The overall circuit thus has formal degree $\leq 2n(1 + \log n) \leq |C|^2$.

The monomial computed by a development is merely the product of its variables. If the development contains the constant 0, then the development will be called *neutral*. Otherwise, if the development contains the constant -1, then it will be called *negative*, else *positive*. The following result of [10] justifies the introduction of the notion of developments.

Lemma 2. *Let C be a multiplicatively disjoint circuit and m a monomial $X_1^{\alpha_1} \cdots X_n^{\alpha_n}$. Let $d^+(m)$ and $d^-(m)$ be the numbers of positive and negative developments computing m, respectively. Then the coefficient of m in the polynomial computed by C is equal to $d^+(m) - d^-(m)$.*

We finally have the following result.

Lemma 3. *The function f which, given a multiplicatively disjoint circuit C and a monomial m, computes the coefficient of m, is in GapP.*

Proof. Checking whether a tree is a development corresponding to a given monomial is in P. Define $A^+(m)$ (respectively $A^-(m)$) to be the set of positive (resp. negative) developments of C computing m. The coefficient of m is then $|A^+(m)| - |A^-(m)|$ and is computable in GapP because deciding $A^+(m)$ and $A^-(m)$ takes only polynomial time. □

For the bounded version $\mathrm{ZMC_b}$, the formal degree of the circuit is bounded by the size of the input since it is given in unary. Therefore one can compute in polynomial time an equivalent multiplicatively disjoint circuit by Lemma 1. By Lemma 3, computing the coefficient of m and testing it to zero (*i.e.* deciding $\mathrm{ZMC_b}$) is done in $\mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}}$. This concludes the proof of Proposition 1.

In fact, we obtain a polynomial-time algorithm with only one call to a GapP oracle f. This can be converted into one call to a #P oracle as follows. Let f^+ and f^- be the #P-functions such that $f = f^+ - f^-$ and take a polynomial $p(n)$ such that $f^+(x), f^-(x) < 2^{p(|x|)}$ for all x. Then the function g defined by $g(x) = f^+(x) + 2^{p(|x|)} f^-(x)$ is in #P and we can recover f from g. We have therefore proved a slightly stronger statement, since only one call to the #P oracle is necessary: $\mathrm{ZMC_b} \in \mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}[1]}$.

Unbounded version. However, this construction does not work for the unbounded version, since we cannot transform the original circuit into a multiplicatively disjoint one in polynomial time. We only show here that ZMC is in the counting hierarchy CH.

As in [10], we first build a "generic" arithmetic circuit, called G_n, whose inputs can be specialized to simulate any other circuit of size $\leq n$.

The construction proceeds as follows. We define

$$G^n_{-n} = 1, G^n_{-n-1} = x_1, \ldots, G^n_0 = x_n.$$

We then compute every possible sum and product of the previous levels, by adding new variables $a_{l+1,i}$ and $b_{l+1,i}$:

$$G^n_{l+1} = \left(\sum_{i=-n}^{l} a_{l+1,i} G^n_i \right) \left(\sum_{i=-n}^{l} b_{l+1,i} G^n_i \right).$$

We then write $G_n(y_1, \ldots, y_p) = G^n_n$. The circuit G_n is generic in the sense that the computation of any crcuit of size $\leq n$ can be obtained from $G_n(y_1, \ldots, y_p)$ by specializing some variables: here is the precise statement coming from [10, Prop. 3].

Lemma 4. *Let $f(x_1, \ldots, x_k)$ be a polynomial computed by an arithmetic circuit C of size $\leq n$. Then*

1. *there exist $a_1, \ldots, a_p$ among $\{-1, 0, 1, 2, x_1, \ldots, x_k\}$ such that $f(x_1, \ldots, x_k) = G_n(a_1, \ldots, a_p)$;*
2. *the values of $a_1, \ldots, a_p$ can be computed from C in polynomial time.*

If C is a fixed circuit and f the polynomial computed by C, let τ be the substitution of the variables $y_1, \ldots, y_p$ of G_n given by the preceding lemma, that is, the map defined by $\tau(y_i) = a_i$. We will write $C = \tau(G_n)$.

If m' is a monomial in G_n, the image $\tau(m')$ of m' by the substitution τ is the product of a (possibly zero) coefficient and a monomial of f; we will denote by $\alpha(m')$ the coefficient and by $\tau'(m')$ the monomial, that is, $\tau(m') = \alpha(m')\tau'(m')$ where $\alpha(m')$ is an integer. Note that both τ' and α are computable in polynomial time.

We thus have:

$$\mathrm{coef}_C(m) = \sum_{m' \mid \tau'(m')=m} \alpha(m') \mathrm{coef}_{G_n}(m').$$

Malod has explicitely evaluated the coefficients of G_n in [10, section 5.2.3] by means of binomial coefficients. More precisely, he shows the following result.

Proposition 3. *The coefficient in G_n of the monomial*

$$m = \prod_{-n \leq i,j \leq n} a_{i,j}^{\alpha_{i,j}} \prod_{-n \leq i,j \leq n} b_{i,j}^{\beta_{i,j}} \prod_{1 \leq i \leq n} x_i^{\gamma_i}$$

is 0 if $\gamma_i \neq \sum_{j=-n}^{n}(\alpha_{i-n,j} + \beta_{i-n,j})$ *for some* $i \geq 1$*, and*

$$\prod_{i=1}^{n}\prod_{j=-n}^{i-1}\binom{\sum_{k=-n}^{j}\alpha_{i,k}}{\alpha_{i,j}}\binom{\sum_{k=-n}^{j}\beta_{i,k}}{\beta_{i,j}} \text{ otherwise.}$$

Thus, if we are given a circuit C, we compute the substitution τ such that $C = \tau(G_n)$ thanks to Lemma 4 and we have:

$$\mathrm{coef}_C(m) = \sum_{m',\tau'(m')=m} \alpha(m')\mathrm{coef}_{G_n}(m').$$

Bürgisser shows in [4, Corollary 3.8] that the so-called falling factorials $N(N-1)\dots(N-k)$ are computable bit by bit in CH on input size $\log N$, as well as integer divisions and sums and products exponential in the size of the input (Theorem 3.7). Therefore this sum of products of binomial coefficients is computable bit by bit in the counting hierarchy CH. Now, a coNP computation is enough for testing whether all bits of the coefficients are zero. Therefore ZMC $\in$ coNP^{CH} = CH. This concludes the proof of Proposition 2.

Remark 3. That ZMC $\in$ CH could also be proven thanks to the result of [1] that the problem BitSLP is in the counting hierarchy. The problem BitSLP consists in computing the bits of an integer computed by an arithmetic circuit. Indeed, similarly as in the proof of Proposition 2.1 of [1], one can substitute to the variables x_i of our polynomial some integers growing sufficiently fast, for instance $2^{2^{is^2}}$, where s is the size of the circuit. Then, when computing the bits of the integer thus computed, there will be no overlap of the coefficients of the polynomial (because they are bounded by 2^{2^s} in absolute value). We will therefore be able to recover them in CH thanks to BitSLP.

4 The coefficient of a monomial in positive characteristic

Now we are working over a field of positive characteristic $k > 0$, that is, the polynomials computed by our circuits now have coefficients in $\mathbf{Z}_k$, so we can perform modular arithmetic. This will help a little, since we shall show the following completeness result.

Proposition 4. ZMC^k *and* ZMC$^k_{\mathrm{b}}$ *for fields of characteristic* $k > 0$ *are* Mod$_k$P*-complete.*

Remark 4. Toda's theorem shows that $\mathrm{PH} \subseteq \mathrm{BPP}^{\mathrm{Mod}_2\mathrm{P}}$. This result is generalized in [16] to any $k \geq 2$, that is

$$\mathrm{PH} \subseteq \mathrm{BPP}^{\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}},$$

which implies that ZMC^k is not in the polynomial hierarchy unless it collapses.

4.1 Algorithm

We use the generic polynomial G_n of the preceding section and the same notations. Given a circuit C, one can compute in polynomial time the substitution τ such that $C = \tau(G_n)$. Now, showing that the coefficients of G_n modulo k can be computed in polynomial time is enough in order to show that the coefficients of C can be computed in $\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}$, since the coefficient of m is expressed as a sum of those of G_n:

$$\mathrm{coef}_C(m) = \sum_{m',\tau'(m')=m} \alpha(m')\mathrm{coef}_{G_n}(m')$$

and $\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}$ is closed under exponential sum if the index of the summation is computable in polynomial time (as is the case here).

It remains to see why the coefficients of G_n are computable in polynomial time modulo k. The main tool here is the following result of Édouard Lucas [9], thanks to which we can efficiently compute binomial coefficients modulo k.

Proposition 5 (Lucas, 1878). *Let k be a prime integer. Let $N = \sum_{i=0}^{n} n_i k^i$ and $M = \sum_{i=0}^{n} m_i k^i$ be two integers written in base k. We have*

$$\binom{N}{M} \equiv \prod_{i=0}^{n} \binom{n_i}{m_i} \mod k.$$

Together with Proposition 3, this proves that the computation of the coefficients of G_n modulo k is done in polynomial time. The remark above on the closure of $\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}$ under exponential sum shows that $\mathrm{ZMC}^k \in \mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}$: this is the first part of Proposition 4.

4.2 Lower bound

Let us now show that $\mathrm{ZMC}^k_{\mathrm{b}}$ is hard for $\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}$. We use a reduction from "#Hamilton Cycle", the function that counts the number of Hamilton cycles in a graph. This function is #P-complete under parsimonious

reductions, that is, under counting reductions that preserve the number of solutions, see [19] (one can also use the proof of [13, Th. 18.2] of #P-completeness of "#Hamilton Path" and then use an easy parsimonious reduction from "#Hamilton Path" to "#Hamilton Cycle"). So it remains complete modulo k, *i.e.* "#Hamilton Cycle modulo k" is $\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}$-complete. The number of Hamilton cycles in a graph of adjacency matrix $(x_{i,j})_{1\leq i,j\leq n}$ is given by the polynomial

$$\mathrm{HC}_n(x_{i,j}) = \sum_{\sigma} \prod_{i=1}^{n} x_{i,\sigma(i)},$$

where the sum is taken over all n-cycles of S_n.

Now, as in the case of the permanent, the number of Hamilton cycles is the coefficient of a monomial in a polynomial P that is obtained in polynomial time from the adjacency matrix of the graph:

Lemma 5 ([10], Lemma 14). *Let the polynomials $T_{p,i,j}$ be defined as $T_{1,i,j} = x_{i,j}y_iz_j$ and $T_{p+1,i,j} = \sum_{k=1}^{n} T_{p,i,k}T_{1,k,j}$. Then*

- *the polynomial $P = T_{n,1,1}$ can be computed by an arithmetic circuit of size $O(n^4)$ and of formal degree $O(n)$;*
- *the circuit itself is computable in time polynomial in n;*
- *the coefficient of the monomial $y_1z_1\cdots y_nz_n$ in P is HC_n.*

Since HC_n is the coefficient of a monomial in a polynomial P computed by an arithmetic circuit C of polynomial size and polynomial formal degree, the same argument as in the case of the permanent applies: $\mathrm{ZMC}_{\mathrm{b}}^k$ is as hard as counting the number of Hamilton cycles modulo k, *i.e.* $\mathrm{ZMC}_{\mathrm{b}}^k$ is $\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}$-hard. This concludes the proof of Proposition 4.

5 Computation of the degree

We now turn to the study of the complexity of DEG and $\mathrm{DEG}_{\mathrm{b}}$.

5.1 Unbounded version

For the unbounded version, we do not improve the $\mathrm{P}^{\mathrm{PP}^{\mathrm{PP}^{\mathrm{PP}}}}$ upper bound of [1] for fields of characteristic zero. Over a field of positive characteristic, however, Section 4 helps us finding the better bound $\mathrm{coNP}^{\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}}$. We first show that DEG is P-hard for logspace reductions.

Lower bound. We show that the "Circuit value problem" (CVP) is easier than DEG. CVP is the language consisting of those boolean circuits whose output is TRUE. This is a P-complete problem under logspace reductions [13, Th. 8.1]. In fact, we can encode a boolean circuit in an arithmetic one, by simulating the boolean operations by polynomials: (x AND y) is xy, (x OR y) is $x+y-xy$, and (NOT x) is $1-x$. From the boolean circuit B, we construct the arithmetic circuit C_0 that simulates B; then we multiply the output gate of C_0 by a new variable x, and add 1. Call the new circuit C. The polynomial computed by C is 1 if the value of B is FALSE, and $x+1$ otherwise. Thus by computing the degree of C, we know the value of B.

Since this procedure uses only logarithmic work space, we conclude that DEG is P-hard for logspace reductions.

Upper bound. Obviously, both problems DEG and ZMC are related. In fact, we have:

$$\deg(C) \leq d \text{ iff (every monomial of degree } > d \text{ has zero for coefficient).}$$

Since the number of monomials is simply exponential in the size of the circuit, this condition is checkable in coNP with the help of the oracle ZMC. It yields:

$$\mathrm{DEG} \in \mathrm{coNP}^{\mathrm{ZMC}}.$$

In characteristic zero, ZMC is in CH, so

$$\mathrm{DEG} \in \mathrm{coNP}^{\mathrm{CH}} = \mathrm{CH}.$$

This does not improve the result of [1] that DEG is in the counting hierarchy. In characteristic $k > 0$, however, ZMC^k is in $\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}$, so $\mathrm{DEG}^k \in \mathrm{coNP}^{\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}}$. Thus we have proved the following result.

Proposition 6. *The problem* DEG^k *for fields of characteristic* $k > 0$ *is* P*-hard for logspace reductions and is in* $\mathrm{coNP}^{\mathrm{Mod_k P}}$.

5.2 Bounded version

The case of $\mathrm{DEG_b}$ is easy and uses classical techniques. Let C be a circuit and f the polynomial it computes: we want to know whether the degree of f is $\leq d$. Since d is given in unary, one can first build in polynomial time an arithmetic circuit computing all the homogeneous components f_i of degree $\leq d$ of f, as in [3, Prop. 5.28] or [10, Lemma 2]. We now simply

have to test whether $f = \sum_{i=0}^{d} f_i$. Testing the equality of two polynomials given by arithmetic circuits is standard by testing the equality at random points, see [14] for example. By working in extensions of the prime field if necessary, it is easy to see that the technique also works in fields of positive characteristic.

As a whole, it yields the following result.

Proposition 7. *The problem* $\mathrm{DEG_b}$ *is in* coRP.

6 Summary and further research

Here is a summary of our results. The symbol $\leq_T^{sn}$ means "strong nondeterministic Turing reduction", see Section 2. The upper bound for DEG in the counting hierarchy is from [1].

	Characteristic zero		Characteristic $k > 0$	
	Lower bound	Upper bound	Lower bound	Upper bound
$\mathrm{ZMC_b}$	$\mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}}$ (under $\leq_T^{sn}$)	$\mathrm{P}^{\#\mathrm{P}}$	$\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}$	
ZMC		CH		
$\mathrm{DEG_b}$	?	coRP	?	coRP
DEG	P	CH	P	$\mathrm{coNP}^{\mathrm{Mod}_k\mathrm{P}}$

There is still a lot of work to do, namely to reduce the gap between the above results. Possible next steps would be to completely characterize ZMC in characteristic zero, and to find a better upper bound than $\mathrm{P}^{\mathrm{PP}^{\mathrm{PP}^{\mathrm{PP}}}}$ for DEG.

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