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# Strongly Polynomial Sequences as Interpretations

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## Abstract

A strongly polynomial sequence of graphs  $(G_n)$  is a sequence  $(G_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  of finite graphs such that, for every graph  $F$ , the number of homomorphisms from  $F$  to  $G_n$  is a fixed polynomial function of  $n$  (depending on  $F$ ). For example,  $(K_n)$  is strongly polynomial since the number of homomorphisms from  $F$  to  $K_n$  is the chromatic polynomial of  $F$  evaluated at  $n$ . In earlier work of de la Harpe and Jaeger, and more recently of Averbouch, Garijo, Godlin, Goodall, Makowsky, Nešetřil, Tittmann, Zilber and others, various examples of strongly polynomial sequences and constructions for families of such sequences have been found.

We give a new model-theoretic method of constructing strongly polynomial sequences of graphs that uses interpretation schemes of graphs in more general relational structures. This surprisingly easy yet general method encompasses all previous constructions and produces many more. We conjecture that, under mild assumptions, all strongly polynomial sequences of graphs can be produced by the general method of quantifier-free interpretation of graphs in certain basic relational structures (essentially disjoint unions of transitive tournaments with added unary relations). We verify this conjecture for strongly polynomial sequences of graphs with uniformly bounded degree.

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## 1 Introduction

The chromatic polynomial  $P(G, x)$  of a graph  $G$ , introduced by Birkhoff over a century ago, is such that for a positive integer  $n$  the value  $P(G, n)$  is equal to the number of proper  $n$ -colorings of the graph  $G$ . Equivalently,  $P(G, n)$  is the number  $\text{hom}(G, K_n)$  of homomorphisms from  $G$  to the complete graph  $K_n$ . It can thus be considered that the sequence  $(K_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  defines the chromatic polynomial by means of homomorphism counting.

A *strongly polynomial sequence* of graphs is a sequence  $(G_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  of finite graphs such that, for every graph  $F$ , the number of homomorphisms from  $F$  to  $G_n$  is a polynomial function of  $n$  (the polynomial depending on  $F$  and the sequence  $(G_n)$ , but not on  $n$ ). A sequence  $(G_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  of finite graphs is *polynomial* if this condition holds for sufficiently large  $n \geq n_F$ . The sequence of complete graphs  $(K_n)$  provides a classical example of a strongly polynomial sequence. A homomorphism from a graph  $F$  to a graph  $G$  is often called a  $G$ -*colouring* of  $F$ , the vertices of  $G$  being the “colours” assigned to vertices of  $F$  and the edges of  $G$  specifying the allowed colour combinations on the endpoints of an edge of  $F$ .

The notion of (strongly) polynomial sequences of graphs was introduced by de la Harpe and Jaeger [7] (as a generalization of the chromatic polynomial), in a paper which includes a characterization of polynomial sequences of graphs via (induced) subgraph counting and the construction of polynomial sequences by graph composition. The notion of a (strongly) polynomial sequence extends naturally to relational structures, thus allowing the use of standard yet powerful tools from model theory, like interpretations.

The “generalized colourings” introduced in [11] include only colourings invariant under all permutations of colours, which holds for  $K_n$ -colourings (that is, proper  $n$ -colourings), but not in general for  $G_n$ -colourings for other sequences of graphs  $(G_n)$ . However, generalized colourings in the sense defined in [11] do include harmonious colourings (proper colourings with the further restriction that a given pair of colours appears only once on an edge) and others not expressible as the number of homomorphisms to terms of a graph sequence. Makowsky [10] moves towards a classification of polynomial graph invariants, but one that does not include the class of invariants we define in this paper.

Garijo, Goodall and Nešetřil [6] focus on constructing strongly polynomial sequences. They give a construction involving coloured rooted trees that produces a large class of strongly polynomial sequences, that in particular incorporates the Tittmann–Averbouch–Makowsky polynomial [12] (not obtainable by graph composition and other previously known operations for building new polynomial sequences from old).

We extend the scope of the term “strongly polynomial” to sequences of general relational structures. The property of a sequence of relational structures being strongly polynomial is preserved under a rich variety of transformations afforded by the model-theoretic notion of an interpretation scheme. We start with “trivially” strongly polynomial sequences of relational structures, made

from basic building blocks, and then by interpretation project these sequences onto graph sequences that are also strongly polynomial. The interpretation schemes that can be used here are wide-ranging (they need only be quantifier-free in their specification), and therein lies the power of the method. All constructions of strongly polynomial sequences that have been devised in [7] and [6] are particular cases of such interpretation schemes for graph structures. Indeed, we conclude the paper with the conjecture that (under mild assumptions) *all* strongly polynomial sequences of graphs might be produced by the schema we describe here. This is verified for the case of sequences of graphs with uniformly bounded degree.

## 2 Preliminaries

### 2.1 Relational structures

A *relational structure*  $\mathbf{A}$  with *signature*  $\lambda$  is defined by its *domain*  $A$ , a set whose elements we shall call vertices, and relations with names and arities as defined in  $\lambda$ . A relational structure will be denoted by an uppercase letter in boldface and its underlying domain by the corresponding lightface letter; for brevity we refer to a relational structure  $\mathbf{A}$  with signature  $\lambda$  as a  $\lambda$ -*structure*, and may just give the *type* (list of arities given by  $\lambda$ ) when the symbols used for the corresponding relations are not of importance. A 1-ary relation defines a subset of the domain and will be called a *label*, or a *mark* (a special type of labelling defined at the end of this section). A 2-ary relation defines edges of a digraph on vertex set the domain, and a graph when the relation is symmetric. When the signature  $\lambda$  contains only arities 1 and 2 we have a digraph together with labels on edges and vertices: relations of arity 1 are labels on vertices (where in general a vertex may receive more than one label) and relations of arity 2 are labelled edges (two vertices may be joined by edges of different labels). A Cayley graph on a group  $\Gamma$  with finite generating set  $S \subset \Gamma$  is an example of a labelled digraph, a directed edge joining  $x$  to  $y$  bearing label  $s \in S$  such that  $y = xs$ .

The symbols of the relations and constants defined in  $\lambda$  define the non-logical symbols of the first-order language  $\text{FO}(\lambda)$  associated with  $\lambda$ -structures. We take first-order logic with equality as a primitive logical symbol and which is always interpreted as standard equality, so the equality relation does not appear in the signature  $\lambda$ . In what follows  $\lambda$  will be finite, in which case  $\text{FO}(\lambda)$  is countable. The variable symbols will be taken from the set  $\{x_i : i \in \mathbb{N}\}$  or  $\{y_i : i \in \mathbb{N}\}$ , or, when double indexing is convenient, from  $\{x_{i,j} : i, j \in \mathbb{N}\}$ . The subset of  $\text{FO}(\lambda)$  consisting of formulas with exactly  $p$  free variables is denoted by  $\text{FO}_p(\lambda)$ . The fragment of  $\text{FO}(\lambda)$  consisting of quantifier-free formulas is denoted by  $\text{QF}(\lambda)$ , and  $\text{QF}_p(\lambda)$  denotes those quantifier-free formulas with exactly  $p$  free variables.

For a formula  $\phi \in \text{FO}_p(\lambda)$  and a  $\lambda$ -structure  $\mathbf{A}$  we define the *satisfaction set*

$$\phi(\mathbf{A}) = \{(v_1, \dots, v_p) \in A^p : \mathbf{A} \models \phi(v_1, \dots, v_p)\},$$

where  $\phi(v_1, \dots, v_p)$  is the formula obtained upon substituting  $v_i$  for each free variable  $x_i$  of  $\phi$ ,  $i = 1, \dots, p$ . A *homomorphism* from a  $\lambda$ -structure  $\mathbf{A}$  to a  $\lambda$ -structure  $\mathbf{B}$  is a mapping  $f : A \rightarrow B$  that preserves relations, that is, which has the property that for each relation  $R$  in  $\lambda$  of any given arity  $r$  it is the case that  $R(f(v_1), \dots, f(v_r))$  in  $\mathbf{B}$  whenever  $R(v_1, \dots, v_r)$  in  $\mathbf{A}$ . When  $\mathbf{A}$  is a graph and

$R$  the relation representing adjacency of vertices this is a graph homomorphism as usually defined.

The number of homomorphisms from  $\mathbf{A}$  to  $\mathbf{B}$  is denoted by  $\text{hom}(\mathbf{A}, \mathbf{B})$ .

A  $\kappa$ -structure  $\mathbf{A}$  and a  $\lambda$ -structure  $\mathbf{B}$  are *weakly isomorphic*, denoted by  $\mathbf{A} \approx \mathbf{B}$ , if there exists a bijection  $t$  between the symbols in  $\kappa$  and the symbols in  $\lambda$  and a bijection  $f : A \rightarrow B$  such that, for every  $R \in \kappa$ , the relations  $R$  and  $t(R)$  have the same arity (here denoted by  $r$ ) and for every  $v_1, \dots, v_r \in A$  we have

$$\mathbf{A} \models R(v_1, \dots, v_r) \iff \mathbf{B} \models t(R)(f(v_1), \dots, f(v_r)).$$

In other words,  $\mathbf{A} \approx \mathbf{B}$  if  $\mathbf{A}$  and  $\mathbf{B}$  are the same structure, up to renaming of the relations and relabelling of the vertices.

For signatures  $\kappa$  and  $\lambda$ , we denote by  $\kappa \sqcup \lambda$  the signature obtained from the disjoint union of  $\kappa$  and  $\lambda$ . The *strong sum*  $\mathbf{A} \oplus \mathbf{B}$  of a  $\kappa$ -structure  $\mathbf{A}$  and a  $\lambda$ -structure  $\mathbf{B}$  is the  $\kappa \oplus \lambda$ -structure whose domain is the disjoint union  $A \sqcup B$  of the domains of  $\mathbf{A}$  and  $\mathbf{B}$ , where for every  $R \in \kappa$  and  $S \in \lambda$  (with respective arities  $r$  and  $s$ ) and for every  $v_1, \dots, v_{\max(r,s)}$  in  $A \sqcup B$  it holds that

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{A} \oplus \mathbf{B} \models R(v_1, \dots, v_r) &\iff (v_1, \dots, v_r) \in A^r \text{ and } \mathbf{A} \models R(v_1, \dots, v_r), \\ \mathbf{A} \oplus \mathbf{B} \models S(v_1, \dots, v_s) &\iff (v_1, \dots, v_s) \in B^s \text{ and } \mathbf{B} \models S(v_1, \dots, v_s). \end{aligned}$$

Note that the strong sum is not commutative, but we do have

$$\mathbf{A} \oplus \mathbf{B} \approx \mathbf{B} \oplus \mathbf{A}.$$

A class  $\mathcal{C}$  of  $\lambda$ -structures is *marked* by a relation  $U \in \lambda$  if  $U$  is unary, and for every  $\mathbf{A} \in \mathcal{C}$  we have

$$\mathbf{A} \models (\forall x) U(x).$$

## 2.2 Sequences of relational structures

We begin with a definition of the notion that is the subject of this paper.

**Definition 2.1.** A sequence  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  of  $\lambda$ -structures is *strongly polynomial* if for every quantifier-free formula  $\phi$  there is a polynomial  $P_\phi$  such that  $|\phi(\mathbf{A}_n)| = P_\phi(n)$  holds for every  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ .

*Remark 2.2.* A sequence is *polynomial* if for every quantifier-free formula  $\phi$  there is a polynomial  $P_\phi$  and an integer  $n_\phi$  such that  $|\phi(\mathbf{A}_n)| = P_\phi(n)$  holds for every integer  $n \geq n_\phi$ . We shall only consider strongly polynomial sequences in this paper, but occasionally it will help to clarify what is involved in the property of being a strongly polynomial sequence by giving examples of sequences that are polynomial but not strongly polynomial.

We begin by formulating equivalent criteria for a sequence of structures to be strongly polynomial in terms of homomorphisms or induced substructures (Theorem 2.5 below). For graph structures this will make a direct connection to the notion as originally defined by de la Harpe and Jaeger [7].

For this we require the following lemma:

**Lemma 2.3.** *Let  $\lambda$  be a signature for relational structures. For every formula  $\phi$  in  $\text{QF}(\lambda)$ , there exist  $\lambda$ -structures  $\mathbf{F}_1, \dots, \mathbf{F}_\ell$  and integers  $c_1, \dots, c_\ell$  such that for every  $\lambda$ -structure  $\mathbf{A}$  we have*

$$|\phi(\mathbf{A})| = \sum_i c_i \text{hom}(\mathbf{F}_i, \mathbf{A}).$$

*Proof.* Let  $\phi \in \text{QF}(\lambda)$  be quantifier-free with free variables  $x_1, \dots, x_p$ .

We first put  $\phi$  in disjunctive normal form, with basic terms  $(x_i = x_j)$  (for  $1 \leq i < j \leq p$ ) and  $R(x_{i_1}, \dots, x_{i_r})$  for relation  $R$  in  $\lambda$  with arity  $r$  and  $i_1, \dots, i_r$  in  $\{1, \dots, p\}$ . Thus  $\phi$  is logically equivalent to

$$\bigvee_{\mathcal{P}} \zeta_{\mathcal{P}} \wedge \phi_{\mathcal{P}}, \quad (1)$$

where the disjunction runs over partitions  $\mathcal{P}$  of  $\{1, \dots, p\}$ , where  $\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}$  is the conjunction of all equalities and non-equalities that have to hold between free variables  $x_1, \dots, x_p$  in order that  $\mathcal{P}$  induces the partition of free variables into their  $k$  ( $1 \leq k \leq p$ ) equality classes, and where  $\phi_{\mathcal{P}}$  is a formula with  $k$  free variables defining the  $\lambda$ -structure  $\mathbf{F}_{\mathcal{P}}$  induced by  $x_{i_1}, \dots, x_{i_k}$  for arbitrary choice of representatives  $i_1, \dots, i_k$  of the parts of  $\mathcal{P}$ . As all the terms in (1) are mutually exclusive, we have

$$|\phi(\mathbf{A})| = \sum_{\mathcal{P}} \text{ind}(\mathbf{F}_{\mathcal{P}}, \mathbf{A}),$$

where  $\text{ind}(\mathbf{F}, \mathbf{A})$  denotes the number of injective mappings  $f : F \rightarrow A$  defining an isomorphism between  $\mathbf{F}$  and its image.

We wish to rewrite this sum in terms of induced substructures as one in terms of homomorphism numbers, and we achieve this in two steps. First we move from counting induced substructures to counting injective homomorphisms,

$$\text{inj}(\mathbf{F}, \mathbf{A}) = \sum_{\substack{\mathbf{F}': \mathbf{F}' = \mathbf{F} \\ \forall R \in \lambda \ R(\mathbf{F}') \supseteq R(\mathbf{F})}} \text{ind}(\mathbf{F}', \mathbf{A}),$$

in which  $\text{inj}(\mathbf{F}, \mathbf{A})$  denotes the number of injective homomorphisms from  $\mathbf{F}$  into  $\mathbf{A}$  and  $R(\mathbf{F}) = \{(v_1, \dots, v_r) \in F^r : R(v_1, \dots, v_r)\}$  is the set of tuples satisfying the  $r$ -ary relation  $R$  in  $\mathbf{F}$ , and similarly  $R(\mathbf{F}')$  denotes those tuples satisfying the relation  $R$  in  $\mathbf{F}'$ . From this identity, by inclusion-exclusion we obtain

$$\text{ind}(\mathbf{F}, \mathbf{A}) = \sum_{\substack{\mathbf{F}': \mathbf{F}' = \mathbf{F} \\ \forall R \in \lambda \ R(\mathbf{F}') \subseteq R(\mathbf{F})}} \left( \prod_{R \in \lambda} (-1)^{|R(\mathbf{F})| - |R(\mathbf{F}')|} \right) \text{inj}(\mathbf{F}', \mathbf{A}).$$

The second step is to move from counting injective homomorphisms to counting all homomorphisms, the relationship between which is given by

$$\text{hom}(\mathbf{F}, \mathbf{A}) = \sum_{\Theta} \text{inj}(\mathbf{F}/\Theta, \mathbf{A}),$$

where the sum is over partitions  $\Theta$  of the domain  $F$  of  $\mathbf{F}$  and  $\mathbf{F}/\Theta$  is the structure obtained from  $\mathbf{F}$  by identifying elements of its domain  $F$  that lie in the same block of  $\Theta$ . We then obtain

$$\text{inj}(\mathbf{F}, \mathbf{A}) = \sum_{\Theta} \mu(\Theta) \text{hom}(\mathbf{F}/\Theta, \mathbf{A}),$$

where

$$\mu(\Theta) = \prod_{I \in \Theta} (-1)^{|I|-1} (|I|-1)!$$

is the Möbius function of the lattice of partitions of  $F$ . The statement of the lemma now follows.  $\square$

*Remark 2.4.* In the context of graphs (structures with signature comprising a symmetric binary relation) the identities used in the proof of Lemma 2.3 between counts of induced subgraphs, homomorphisms and injective homomorphisms find widespread application (see for example [3]).

We now come to the promised reformulation of the notion of a strongly polynomial sequence of structures.

**Theorem 2.5.** *The following are equivalent for a sequence  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  of  $\lambda$ -structures:*

- (i) *The sequence  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is strongly polynomial;*
- (ii) *For each quantifier-free formula  $\phi$  there is a polynomial  $P_\phi$  such that  $|\phi(\mathbf{A}_n)| = P_\phi(n)$  for each  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ ;*
- (iii) *For each  $\lambda$ -structure  $\mathbf{F}$  there is a polynomial  $P_{\mathbf{F}}$  such that  $\text{hom}(\mathbf{F}, \mathbf{A}_n) = P_{\mathbf{F}}(n)$  for each  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ ;*
- (iv) *For each  $\lambda$ -structure  $\mathbf{G}$  there is a polynomial  $P_{\mathbf{G}}$  such that  $\text{ind}(\mathbf{G}, \mathbf{A}_n) = P_{\mathbf{G}}(n)$  for each  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ .*

*Proof.* Items (i) and (ii) are equivalent by definition. As homomorphisms and finite induced substructures can be expressed in QF, items (iii) and (iv) are both special cases of (ii). Finally, Lemma 2.3 shows that (iii) implies (ii), and the proof of the same lemma that (iv) also implies (ii).  $\square$

*Remark 2.6.* In Theorem 2.5, the equivalence also holds with weaker conditions in which the existence of a polynomial function is replaced by the existence of a rational function. Indeed, assume  $f(x) = P(x)/Q(x)$  is a rational function, where  $P$  and  $Q$  are polynomials. Then there exist polynomials  $R(x), S(x)$  such that  $f(x) = S(x) + R(x)/Q(x)$  and  $\deg R < \deg Q$ . For sufficiently large  $n$ , it follows that  $-1 < R(x)/Q(x) < 1$ . As  $f(x)$  takes only integral values on integers, it follows that  $R(n)/Q(n) = 0$  for sufficiently large  $n$ . Hence  $R = 0$  and  $f$  is a polynomial function.

*Remark 2.7.* Assume  $\kappa$  is a signature that is a subset of another signature  $\lambda$ . Then every  $\kappa$ -structure can be considered as a  $\lambda$ -structure. The notion of strongly polynomial sequence is robust in the sense that a sequence  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  of  $\kappa$ -structures is strongly polynomial if and only if  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  (considered as a sequence of  $\lambda$ -structures) is strongly polynomial: indeed, for every  $\lambda$ -structure  $\mathbf{F}$ , either  $\mathbf{F}$  contains a relation not in  $\kappa$  and thus  $\text{hom}(\mathbf{F}, \mathbf{A}_n) = 0$  for every  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ , or  $\mathbf{F}$  can be considered as a  $\kappa$ -structure, and the number of homomorphisms from  $\mathbf{F}$  to  $\mathbf{A}_n$  does not depend on the signature considered.

We end this section with a few statements on the invariance of strongly polynomial sequences with respect to various operations.

**Lemma 2.8.** *Let  $(\mathbf{A}_{i,n})_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  be strongly polynomial sequences of  $\lambda_i$ -structures, for  $1 \leq i \leq k$ . Then the sequence  $(\bigoplus_{i=1}^k \mathbf{A}_{i,n})_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is strongly polynomial.*

*Proof.* By Lemma 2.3 it is sufficient to check polynomiality of  $\text{hom}(\mathbf{F}, \bigoplus_{i=1}^k \mathbf{A}_{i,n})$ . Let  $\mathbf{F}_1, \dots, \mathbf{F}_\ell$  be the connected components of  $\mathbf{F}$ . Then the proof follows from

the identity

$$\begin{aligned} \text{hom}(\mathbf{F}, \bigoplus_{i=1}^k \mathbf{A}_{i,n}) &= \prod_{j=1}^{\ell} \text{hom}(\mathbf{F}_j, \bigoplus_{i=1}^k \mathbf{A}_{i,n}) \\ &= \prod_{j=1}^{\ell} \sum_{i=1}^k \text{hom}(\mathbf{F}_j, \mathbf{A}_{i,n}). \end{aligned}$$

(Note that in the last equality we consider each  $\mathbf{A}_{i,n}$  as a  $\bigsqcup_{i=1}^k \lambda_i$ -structure, which it is safe to do according to Remark 2.7.)  $\square$

**Lemma 2.9.** *Let  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  be a strongly polynomial sequence of  $\lambda$ -structures and let  $P$  be a polynomial such that  $P(n) \in \mathbb{N}$  for  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ . Then the sequence  $(P(n) \mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is strongly polynomial, where  $P(n) \mathbf{A}_n$  denotes the  $\lambda$ -structure obtained as the disjoint union of  $P(n)$  copies of  $\mathbf{A}_n$ .*

*Proof.* By Lemma 2.3 it is sufficient to check polynomiality of  $\text{hom}(\mathbf{F}, P(n) \mathbf{A}_n)$ . Let  $\mathbf{F}_1, \dots, \mathbf{F}_\ell$  be the connected components of  $\mathbf{F}$ . Then the proof follows from the identity

$$\text{hom}(\mathbf{F}, P(n) \mathbf{A}_n) = \prod_{j=1}^{\ell} \text{hom}(\mathbf{F}_j, P(n) \mathbf{A}_n) = \prod_{j=1}^{\ell} (P(n) \text{hom}(\mathbf{F}_j, \mathbf{A}_n)).$$

$\square$

**Lemma 2.10.** *Let  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  be a strongly polynomial sequence of  $\lambda$ -structures and let  $P$  be a polynomial such that  $P(n) \in \mathbb{N}$  for  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ . Then the sequence  $(\mathbf{A}_{P(n)})_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is strongly polynomial.*

*Proof.* For every  $\phi \in \text{QF}(\lambda)$  there is a polynomial  $Q$  such that  $|\phi(\mathbf{A}_n)| = Q(n)$  for each  $n \geq 1$ , as  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is a strongly polynomial sequence. Thus  $|\phi(\mathbf{A}_{P(n)})| = Q \circ P(n)$ . It follows that the sequence  $(\mathbf{A}_{P(n)})_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is strongly polynomial.  $\square$

### 3 Basic structures

Two special types of marked structures will be of particular interest in this paper:

- $\mathbf{E}$  is a structure whose domain is a singleton, and whose signature is a single unary relation  $U$  that satisfies  $(\forall x) U(x)$ ;
- $\mathbf{T}_n$  is a transitive tournament of order  $n$ . Precisely, the domain of  $\mathbf{T}_n$  is  $[n] = \{1, \dots, n\}$  and its signature contains a single binary relation  $S$  with  $\mathbf{T}_n \models S(i, j) \iff i < j$ , and a single unary relation  $U$ , which satisfies  $(\forall x) U(x)$ .

**Definition 3.1.** *A basic structure with parameters  $(k, \ell)$  is a structure*

$$\mathbf{B} = \overbrace{\mathbf{E} \oplus \dots \oplus \mathbf{E}}^{\ell \text{ times}} \oplus \overbrace{\mathbf{T}_{N_1} \oplus \dots \oplus \mathbf{T}_{N_k}}^{k \text{ times}}.$$



which is the strong sum of  $\ell$  marked vertices and  $k$  marked transitive tournaments of respective orders  $N_1(\mathbf{B}), \dots, N_k(\mathbf{B})$ . We denote by  $\mathcal{B}_{k,\ell}$  the class of all basic structures with parameters  $(k, \ell)$  and by  $\beta_{k,\ell}$  the signature of these structures. It will be notationally convenient to assume that the relations in  $\beta_{k,\ell}$  are  $U_1^E, \dots, U_\ell^E, U_1^T, \dots, U_k^T, S_1, \dots, S_k$ .

A *basic sequence* is a sequence  $(\mathbf{B}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  of basic structures  $\mathbf{B}_n \in \mathcal{B}_{k,\ell}$  (for some fixed  $k, \ell \in \mathbb{N}$ ) such that there are non-constant polynomials  $Q_i, 1 \leq i \leq k$  with  $Q_i(n) = N_i(\mathbf{A}_n)$  (for every  $1 \leq i \leq k$  and  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ ).

It follows directly from Lemmas 2.10 and 2.8 that every basic sequence is strongly polynomial.

## 4 Strongly polynomial sequences by interpretations

The basic building blocks we use for constructing strongly polynomial graph sequences are marked tournaments  $(\mathbf{T}_{P(n)})$  on a polynomial number of vertices, and the constant sequence  $(\mathbf{E})$  consisting of a single marked vertex. From these we can produce all the strongly polynomial sequences given in [7] and [6] and much more. (In Section 5.1 we give a large selection of examples of strongly polynomial graph sequences that exhibits their diversity.) To do this we need just two operations: strong sum and graphical interpretation of structures. The latter is a potent operation for it produces graph sequences from strongly polynomial sequences of  $\lambda$ -structures of arbitrary signature  $\lambda$ , while strong sum is an essential operation for gluing together separately constructed sequences, from which a sequence of larger structures can be made. (Note that one could equivalently consider disjoint union and QF-interpretation in place of strong sum and QF-interpretation.)

### 4.1 Interpretation schemes

We begin with the definition of an interpretation scheme that we shall require.

**Definition 4.1.** Let  $\kappa, \lambda$  be signatures, where the signature  $\lambda$  has  $q$  relational symbols  $R_1, \dots, R_q$  with respective arities  $r_1, \dots, r_q$ . An *interpretation scheme*  $I$  of  $\lambda$ -structures in  $\kappa$ -structures with exponent  $p$  is a tuple  $I = (p, \rho_0, \dots, \rho_q)$ , where  $p$  is a positive integer,  $\rho_0 \in \text{FO}_p(\kappa)$ , and  $\rho_i \in \text{FO}_{pr_i}(\kappa)$ , for  $1 \leq i \leq q$ .

For  $\kappa$ -structure  $\mathbf{A}$ , we denote by  $I(\mathbf{A})$  the  $\lambda$ -structure  $\mathbf{B}$  with domain  $B = \rho_0(\mathbf{A})$  and relations defined by

$$\mathbf{B} \models R_i(\mathbf{v}_1, \dots, \mathbf{v}_{r_i}) \iff \mathbf{A} \models \rho_i(\mathbf{v}_1, \dots, \mathbf{v}_{r_i})$$

(for  $1 \leq i \leq q$  and  $\mathbf{v}_1, \dots, \mathbf{v}_{r_i} \in B$ ).

**Definition 4.2.** A *QF-interpretation scheme* is an interpretation scheme in which all the formulas  $\rho_i, 0 \leq i \leq q$ , used to define it in Definition 4.1 are quantifier-free.

**Example 4.3.** Let us consider two signatures  $\kappa$  and  $\lambda$  with  $\kappa \subset \lambda$ . Then the following transformations are easily (and almost trivially) checked to be definable by QF-interpretation schemes:

- *Lift*, the canonical injection of  $\kappa$ -structures into  $\lambda$ -structures (same relations);
- *Forget*, the canonical projection of  $\lambda$ -structures onto  $\kappa$ -structures (filters out relations not in  $\kappa$ );
- *Merge*, which maps  $\lambda \sqcup \lambda$ -structures into  $\lambda$ -structures by merging similar relations (so that  $\text{Merge}(\mathbf{A} \oplus \mathbf{B}) = \mathbf{A} + \mathbf{B}$ );
- *Mark*, which maps  $\lambda$ -structures into  $\lambda^+$ -structures (where  $\lambda^+$  is the signature obtained by adding to  $\lambda$  a new unary relation  $U$ ) by putting every element in the relation  $U$ .

Since our goal is to construct strongly polynomial sequences of graphs, we shall have a particular use for interpretation schemes of graph structures in  $\kappa$ -structures.

**Definition 4.4.** A *graphical interpretation scheme*  $I$  of  $\kappa$ -structures is a triple  $(p, \iota, \rho)$ , where  $p$  is a positive integer,  $\iota \in \text{FO}_p(\kappa)$ , and  $\rho \in \text{FO}_{2p}(\kappa)$  is symmetric (that is, such that  $\vdash \phi(x, y) \leftrightarrow \phi(y, x)$ ). For every  $\kappa$ -structure  $\mathbf{A}$ , the interpretation  $I(\mathbf{A})$  has vertex set  $V = \iota(\mathbf{A})$  and edge set

$$E = \{\{\mathbf{u}, \mathbf{v}\} \in V \times V : \mathbf{A} \models \rho(\mathbf{u}, \mathbf{v})\}.$$

We have already mentioned a graphical interpretation scheme of digraph structures: that which interprets an orientation of a graph as the underlying undirected graph simply by forgetting the edge directions (for example  $K_n$  from  $\mathbf{T}_n$ ). Taking the complement of a graph  $G$  is a graphical interpretation scheme (of graph structures) with  $p = 1$  in which we take  $\iota = 1$  (constantly true), and  $\rho(x, y) = \neg R(x, y)$ , where  $R(x, y)$  represents adjacency between  $x$  and  $y$ . The square of the graph  $G$ , joining vertices  $x$  and  $y$  when they are adjacent or share a common neighbour, is a graphical interpretation scheme (of graph structures) with  $p = 1$ ,  $\iota = 1$ , and  $\rho(x, y) = R(x, y) \vee (\exists z R(x, z) \wedge R(z, y))$  (this one requires a quantifier). The line graph of a simple undirected graph  $G$  can be realized indirectly: orient the edges  $G$  and use a graphical interpretation scheme of digraph structures with  $p = 2$ , by taking  $\iota(x, y) = R(x, y)$ , where  $R$  is the antisymmetric relation representing oriented edges of  $G$ , and  $\rho(x_1, y_1, x_2, y_2) = [(x_1 = y_2) \vee (y_1 = y_2) \vee (x_1 = y_2) \vee (x_2 = y_1)] \wedge \neg[(x_1 = x_2) \wedge (y_1 = y_2)] \wedge \neg[(x_1 = y_2) \wedge (x_2 = y_1)]$ . A more natural way to define a graphical interpretation scheme (of graph structures) for the operation of taking the line graph requires the general interpretation schemes discussed in Section 8. Compare also Remark 5.2 in Section 5.1.2.

The following standard result from model theory (see for example [8, Section 3.4]) underlies the key role interpretation will play in moving from one strongly polynomial sequence of structures to another.

Let  $I = (p, \rho_0, \dots, \rho_q)$  be an interpretation scheme of  $\lambda$ -structures in  $\kappa$ -structures. We inductively define the mapping  $M_I$  from terms in  $\text{FO}(\lambda)$  to terms in  $\text{FO}(\kappa)$  by:

- $M_I(x_i) = (x_{i,1}, \dots, x_{i,p})$  for variable  $x_i$ ;
- $M_I(R_i(t_1, \dots, t_{r_i})) = \rho_i(M_I(t_1), \dots, M_I(t_{r_i}))$ ;

- $M_I(\phi \vee \psi) = M_I(\phi) \vee M_I(\psi)$ ;
- $M_I(\phi \wedge \psi) = M_I(\phi) \wedge M_I(\psi)$ ;
- $M_I(\neg\phi) = \neg M_I(\phi)$ ;
- $M_I((\exists x) \phi) = (\exists x_1 \dots \exists x_p) \bigwedge_{i=1}^p \rho_0(x_i) \wedge M_I(\phi)$ ;
- $M_I((\forall x) \phi) = (\forall x_1 \dots \forall x_p) \bigwedge_{i=1}^p \rho_0(x_i) \rightarrow M_I(\phi)$ .

Then we define the mapping  $\tilde{I} : \text{FO}(\lambda) \rightarrow \text{FO}(\kappa)$  by

$$\tilde{I}(\phi) = \bigwedge_{i=1}^k \rho_0(x_i) \wedge M_I(\phi),$$

where  $x_1, \dots, x_k$  are the free variables of  $\phi$ .

Note that if all the  $\rho_i$  are quantifier-free then  $\tilde{I}$  maps quantifier-free formulas to quantifier-free formulas.

**Lemma 4.5.** *If  $I$  is an interpretation scheme of  $\lambda$ -structures in  $\kappa$ -structures then for every  $\phi \in \text{FO}_r(\lambda)$  and every  $\kappa$ -structure  $\mathbf{A}$  we have*

$$\phi(I(\mathbf{A})) = \tilde{I}(\phi)(\mathbf{A}).$$

As a corollary of Lemma 4.5 we have

**Corollary 4.6.** *If  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is a strongly polynomial sequence of  $\kappa$ -structures and if  $I$  is a QF-interpretation scheme of  $\lambda$ -structures in  $\kappa$ -structures, then  $(I(\mathbf{A}_n))_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is a strongly polynomial sequence of  $\lambda$ -structures.*

The interest of marked structures is that marking provides a way to track components of strong sums, thus allowing the combination of componentwise defined interpretation schemes, as shown by the next lemma.

**Lemma 4.7.** *Let  $I_i$  ( $1 \leq i \leq k$ ) be interpretation schemes of  $\lambda_i$ -structures in  $\kappa_i$ -structures with exponent  $p_i$ . Assume that each  $\kappa_i$  contains a unary relation  $U_i$ .*

*Then there exists an interpretation  $I$  scheme of  $\bigsqcup_{i=1}^k \lambda_i$ -structures in  $\bigsqcup_{i=1}^k \kappa_i$ -structures with exponent  $p = \max p_i$  such that, for every  $\kappa_i$ -structure  $\mathbf{A}_i$  marked by  $U_i$  ( $1 \leq i \leq k$ ), we have*

$$I\left(\bigoplus_{i=1}^k \mathbf{A}_i\right) = \bigoplus_{i=1}^k I_i(\mathbf{A}_i).$$

*Moreover, if all the  $I_i$ 's are QF-interpretation schemes, we can require  $I$  to be a QF-interpretation scheme.*

*Proof.* For  $1 \leq i \leq k$ , let  $I_i = (p_i, \rho_0^i, \dots, \rho_{q_i}^i)$ , where  $\rho_j^i$  has  $r_{i,j} p_i$  free variables ( $1 \leq j \leq q_i$ ). We define the interpretation scheme  $I = (p, \rho_0, \rho_{i,j})$  ( $1 \leq i \leq k$ ,  $1 \leq j \leq q_i$ ) with exponent  $p$  of  $\bigsqcup_{i=1}^k \lambda_i$ -structures in  $\bigsqcup_{i=1}^k \kappa_i$ -structures as follows: the formula  $\rho_0$  is

$$\rho_0 : \bigvee_{i=1}^k \left( \bigwedge_{j=1}^{p_i} U_i(x_j) \wedge \bigwedge_{j=p_i}^p (x_j = x_p) \wedge \rho_0^i(x_1, \dots, x_{p_i}) \right)$$

and the formula  $\rho_{i,j}$  (with  $r_{i,j}p$  free variables) is defined by

$$\rho_{i,j} : \bigwedge_{\ell=1}^{r_{i,j}p} U_i(x_\ell) \wedge \rho_j^i(x_1, \dots, x_{p_i}, x_{p+1}, \dots, x_{p+p_i}, \dots, x_{(r_{i,j}-1)p+1}, \dots, x_{(r_{i,j}-1)p+p_i}).$$

Then  $I$  obviously satisfies the requirements of the lemma statement.  $\square$

QF-interpretation schemes of strong sums are instrumental in the construction of strongly polynomial sequences, as exemplified by the next result.

**Corollary 4.8.** *Let  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  and  $(\mathbf{B}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  be strongly polynomial sequences of graphs. Then  $(\mathbf{A}_n + \mathbf{B}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$ ,  $(\mathbf{A}_n \times \mathbf{B}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$ ,  $(\mathbf{A}_n \square \mathbf{B}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$ ,  $(\mathbf{A}_n \boxtimes \mathbf{B}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$ , and  $(\mathbf{A}_n[\mathbf{B}_n])_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  are strongly polynomial sequence of graphs (formed respectively by disjoint union, direct product, Cartesian product, strong product, and lexicographic product).*

*Proof.* This follows from Corollary 4.6 and Lemma 2.8, by noticing that all the constructions listed here are QF-interpretations of  $\text{Mark}(\mathbf{A}_n) \oplus \text{Mark}(\mathbf{B}_n)$ .  $\square$

Many more constructions can be used to combine strongly polynomial sequences of structures by means of strong sum and QF-interpretations, of which the following is an example.

**Example 4.9.** Let  $t$  be a fixed odd integer, and let  $(\mathbf{A}_{i,n})_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  ( $1 \leq i \leq t$ ) be a strongly polynomial sequences of graphs. We define  $\mathbf{B}_n$  as the graph with vertex set  $A_{1,n} \times \dots \times A_{t,n}$  where  $(u_1, \dots, u_t)$  is adjacent to  $(v_1, \dots, v_t)$  in  $\mathbf{B}_n$  if there is a majority of  $i \in \{1, \dots, t\}$  such that  $u_i$  is adjacent to  $v_i$  in  $\mathbf{A}_{i,n}$ . Then  $(\mathbf{B}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is a strongly polynomial sequence.

## 5 Interpretations of basic sequences

As already noted in Section 3, every basic sequence is strongly polynomial. It follows from Lemma 4.6 that this is also the case for their QF-interpretations:

**Corollary 5.1.** *If  $(\mathbf{B}_n)$  is a basic sequence and  $I$  is a QF-interpretation of  $\lambda$ -structures in  $\beta_{k,\ell}$ -structures, then  $(I(\mathbf{B}_n))$  is a strongly polynomial sequence of  $\lambda$ -structures.*

The class  $\mathcal{P}$  of sequences  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  that can be obtained by QF-interpretations of basic sequences is quite rich. In particular, it is closed under the following operations, which we know can be used to construct new strongly polynomial sequences from old ones:

- Extracting a subsequence  $(\mathbf{A}_{P(n)})$ , where  $P$  is a polynomial such that  $P(n) \in \mathbb{N}$  for  $n \in \mathbb{N}$  (as  $(\mathbf{B}_{P(n)})_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is a basic sequence);
- Applying a QF-interpretation scheme (as the composition of two QF-interpretation schemes defines a QF-interpretation scheme);
- Strong sums (according to Lemma 4.7);
- Multiplying by a polynomial  $P$  such that  $P(n) \in \mathbb{N}$  for  $n \in \mathbb{N}$  (as  $P(n) \mathbf{A}_n$  is a QF-interpretation of  $\mathbf{T}_{P(n)} \oplus \mathbf{A}_n$ ).

## 5.1 Concrete examples

### 5.1.1 Crown graphs

We start from the basic sequence  $\mathbf{A}_n = \mathbf{E} \oplus \mathbf{E} \oplus \mathbf{T}_n$ . Consider the graphical interpretation scheme  $I = (2, \iota, \rho)$ , where

$$\begin{aligned} \iota(x_1, x_2) &: U_1^T(x_1) \wedge \neg U_1^T(x_2) \\ \rho(x_1, x_2, y_1, y_2) &: \neg(x_1 = y_1) \wedge \neg(U_1^E(x_2) \leftrightarrow U_1^E(y_2)). \end{aligned}$$

Then the graph obtained is the *crown graph*  $S_n$  ( $K_{n,n}$  minus a perfect matching), and it follows that  $(S_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is a strongly polynomial sequence. Similarly, for every integer  $k$ , the sequence  $(\text{KG}_{n,k})_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  of the *Kneser graphs* is strongly polynomial.

### 5.1.2 Generalized Johnson graphs

We start from the basic sequence  $\mathbf{A}_n = \mathbf{T}_n$  and consider, for fixed integer  $k$  and subset  $D \subseteq [k]$ , the graphical interpretation scheme  $I = (k, \iota, \rho)$ , where

$$\begin{aligned} \iota(x_1, \dots, x_k) &: \bigwedge_{i=1}^{k-1} S_1(x_i, x_{i+1}) \\ \rho(x_1, \dots, x_k, y_1, \dots, y_k) &: \bigvee_{\substack{I, J \subseteq [k] \\ |I|=|J| \\ |I| \in D}} \left( \bigwedge_{i \notin I, j \notin J} \neg(x_i = y_j) \wedge \bigwedge_{i \in I, j \in J} (x_i = y_j) \right) \end{aligned}$$

Then  $I(\mathbf{A}_n)$  is the generalized Johnson graph  $J_{n,k,D}$ , which is the graph with vertices  $\binom{[n]}{k}$  and where  $X$  and  $Y$  are adjacent whenever  $|X \cap Y| \in D$ .

*Remark 5.2.* Similarly, let  $k$  be an integer and let  $D \subseteq [k]$ , and let  $(G_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  be a strongly polynomial sequence of graphs. For  $n \in \mathbb{N}$  define  $H_n$  as the graph whose vertices are the  $k$ -cliques of  $G_n$ , where two  $k$ -cliques of  $G_n$  are adjacent in  $H_n$  if the cardinality of their intersection belongs to  $D$ . Then the sequence of graphs  $(H_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is strongly polynomial. In particular, the sequence  $(L(G_n))_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  of line graphs is strongly polynomial.

### 5.1.3 Vertex-blowing of a fixed graph

Let  $F$  be a fixed graph with vertex set  $[k]$ . To each vertex  $i$  of  $F$  is associated a polynomial  $P_i$  such that  $P_i(n) \in \mathbb{N}$  for  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ . Let  $\mathbf{A}_n = \bigoplus_{i=1}^k \mathbf{T}_{P_i(n)}$ . We define the graphical interpretation scheme  $I = (1, \iota, \rho)$  by

$$\begin{aligned} \iota(x) &: 1 \\ \rho(x, y) &: \bigvee_{ij \in E(F)} U_i^T(x) \wedge U_j^T(y) \end{aligned}$$

Then  $I(\mathbf{A}_n)$  is the vertex-blowing of  $F$ , in which vertex  $i$  is replaced by  $P_i(n)$  twin copies of  $i$ .

#### 5.1.4 Tree-blowing of a fixed rooted tree

Let  $F$  be a rooted tree with edge set  $E = \{2, \dots, k\}$ . To each edge  $e \in E$  is associated a polynomial  $P_e$  such that  $P_e(n) \in \mathbb{N}$  for  $n \in \mathbb{N}$  and let  $P_1$  be another such polynomial (for the root). Let  $\mathbf{A}_n = \bigoplus_{i=1}^k \mathbf{T}_{P_i(n)}$ . An  $F$ -path will be a sequence  $(1, e_1, \dots, e_i)$  corresponding to a path from the root of  $F$ . Define the graphical interpretation scheme  $I = (k, \iota, \rho)$  by

$$\iota(x_1, \dots, x_k) : \bigvee_{F\text{-path } (a_1, \dots, a_t)} \left( \bigwedge_{i=1}^t U_{a_i}^T(x_i) \wedge \bigwedge_{i=t+1}^k (x_i = x_t) \right)$$

$$\rho(x_1, \dots, x_k, y_1, \dots, y_k) : \rho'(x_1, \dots, x_k, y_1, \dots, y_k) \vee \rho'(y_1, \dots, y_k, x_1, \dots, x_k)$$

where

$$\rho'(x_1, \dots, x_k, y_1, \dots, y_k) : \bigvee_{i=1}^{k-1} \left( \bigwedge_{j=1}^i (x_j = y_j) \wedge (x_i = x_k) \wedge \neg(y_i = y_k) \wedge (y_{i+1} = y_k) \right)$$

Then  $I(\mathbf{A}_n)$  is the tree-blowing of  $F$  (in [6] this operation on rooted trees is called “branching”).

#### 5.1.5 Union of stars of orders $1, \dots, P(n)$

We consider the graphical interpretation scheme  $I = (2, \iota, \rho)$  defined by

$$\iota(x, y) : S_1(y, x)$$

$$\rho(x_1, y_1, x_2, y_2) : (y_1 = y_2) \wedge [(x_1 = y_1) \wedge S_1(x_2, y_2) \vee (x_2 = y_2) \wedge S_1(x_1, y_1)]$$

Then, for  $\mathbf{A}_n = \mathbf{T}_{P(n)}$ , we have

$$I(\mathbf{A}_n) = \bigcup_{i=1}^{P(n)} \mathbf{S}_i,$$

where  $\mathbf{S}_i$  is the star of order  $i$ .

#### 5.1.6 Half graphs

Let  $\mathbf{A}_n = \mathbf{E} \oplus \mathbf{E} \oplus \mathbf{T}_n$ . Consider the graphical interpretation scheme  $I = (2, \iota, \rho)$  where:

$$\iota(x_1, x_2) : U_1^T(x_1) \wedge \neg U_1^T(x_2)$$

$$\rho(x_1, x_2, y_1, y_2) : S_1(x_1, y_1) \wedge U_1^E(x_2) \wedge U_2^E(y_2) \vee S_1(y_1, x_1) \wedge U_1^E(y_2) \wedge U_2^E(x_2)$$

The graph  $I(\mathbf{A}_n)$  is the half graph on  $2n$  vertices (see Fig. 1).

#### 5.1.7 Intersection graphs of chords

Let  $\mathbf{A}_n = \mathbf{T}_n$ . Consider the graphical interpretation scheme  $I = (2, \iota, \rho)$  where:

$$\iota(x_1, x_2) : S_1(x_1, x_2)$$

$$\rho(x_1, x_2, y_1, y_2) : S_1(x_1, y_1) \wedge S_1(y_1, x_2) \wedge S_1(x_2, y_2)$$

The graph  $I(\mathbf{A}_n)$  is the intersection graph of chords of a convex  $n$ -gon (see Fig. 2).

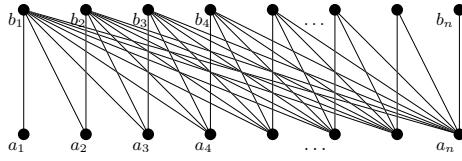


Figure 1: Half graphs form a strongly polynomial sequence

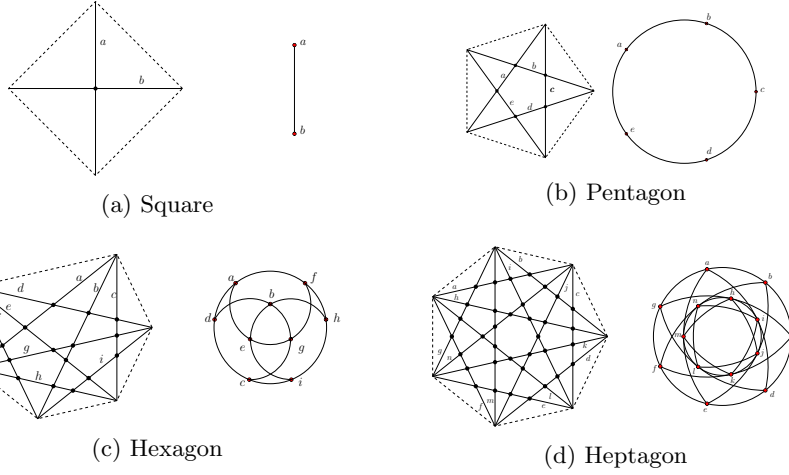


Figure 2: Intersection graphs of chords of a convex  $n$ -gon form a strongly polynomial sequence

## 5.2 Sequences of bounded degree graphs

In this section we completely characterize strongly polynomial sequences of graphs of uniformly bounded degree.

**Theorem 5.3.** *Let  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  be a sequence of graphs of uniformly bounded degree. Then the following conditions are equivalent:*

1. *the sequence  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is strongly polynomial;*
2. *there is a finite set  $\{\mathbf{F}_1, \dots, \mathbf{F}_k\}$  of graphs and polynomials  $P_1, \dots, P_k$  such that*

$$\mathbf{A}_n = \sum_{i=1}^k P_i(n) \mathbf{F}_i;$$

3. *the sequence  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is a QF-interpretation of a basic sequence.*

*Proof.* Assume that the sequence  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is strongly polynomial. Let  $P(n) = |\mathbf{A}_n|$ ,  $d = \deg P$  and, for a graph  $\mathbf{F}$ , let  $P_{\mathbf{F}}(n)$  be the number of copies of  $\mathbf{F}$  in  $\mathbf{A}_n$ . As  $\Delta(\mathbf{A}_n) \leq D$  for some fixed bound  $D$ , we have  $P_{\mathbf{F}}(n) \leq D^{|\mathbf{F}|-1} P(n)$  and so all the polynomials  $P_{\mathbf{F}}$  have degree at most  $d$ . It follows that  $P_{\mathbf{F}} \neq 0$  if and only if there exists  $i \leq d+1$  such that  $P_{\mathbf{F}}(i) \neq 0$ , that is, if and only if  $\mathbf{F}$  is an induced subgraph of  $\bigcup_{i=1}^{d+1} \mathbf{A}_i$ . Let  $\mathbf{F}_1, \dots, \mathbf{F}_k$  be the connected induced subgraphs of  $\bigcup_{i=1}^{d+1} \mathbf{A}_i$ . As every connected component of  $\mathbf{A}_n$  belongs to

$\{\mathbf{F}_1, \dots, \mathbf{F}_k\}$ , we infer that there exist polynomials  $P_1, \dots, P_k$  such that  $\mathbf{A}_n = \sum_{i=1}^k P_i(n) \mathbf{F}_i$ , as can be proved by induction on  $k$  as follows. Let  $\mathbf{F}$  be a connected maximal induced subgraph of  $\bigcup_{i=1}^{d+1} \mathbf{A}_i$ . Without loss of generality, we can assume  $\mathbf{F} = \mathbf{F}_k$ . Let  $P_k = P_{\mathbf{F}_k}$ . Then  $\mathbf{A}_n$  contains  $P_k(n)$  copies of  $\mathbf{F}_k$ , each of them being a connected component of  $\mathbf{A}_n$  (by maximality of  $\mathbf{F}_k$ ). Hence we can define the sequence  $(\mathbf{B}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  by requiring that  $\mathbf{A}_n = \mathbf{B}_n + P_k(n) \mathbf{F}_k$ . The sequence  $(\mathbf{B}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is obviously strongly polynomial. Moreover, the connected induced subgraphs of  $\bigcup_{i=1}^{d+1} \mathbf{B}_i$  form a proper subset of the set of the connected induced subgraphs of  $\bigcup_{i=1}^{d+1} \mathbf{A}_i$ . Without loss of generality, these induced subgraphs are  $\mathbf{F}_1, \dots, \mathbf{F}_\ell$  (for some  $\ell < k$ ). Hence, by induction hypothesis, there are polynomials  $P_1, \dots, P_\ell$  such that  $\mathbf{B}_n = \sum_{i=1}^\ell P_i(n) \mathbf{F}_i$ . Thus  $\mathbf{A}_n = \sum_{i=1}^\ell P_i(n) \mathbf{F}_i + P_k(n) \mathbf{F}_k$ .

Assume that there is a finite set  $\{\mathbf{F}_1, \dots, \mathbf{F}_k\}$  of graphs and polynomials  $P_1, \dots, P_k$  such that  $\mathbf{A}_n = \sum_{i=1}^k P_i(n) \mathbf{F}_i$ . Then the sequence  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is obviously a QF-interpretation of a basic sequence.

Assume that the sequence  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is a QF-interpretation of a basic sequence. Then by Corollary 5.1 it is strongly polynomial, .  $\square$

## 6 Left limits of strongly polynomial sequences

Lovász and Szegedy [9] define a graph property (or equivalently a class of graphs)  $\mathcal{C}$  to be *random-free* if every left limit of graphs in  $\mathcal{C}$  is random-free. They prove the following:

**Theorem 6.1** (Lovász and Szegedy [9]). *A hereditary class  $\mathcal{C}$  is random-free if and only if there exists a bipartite graph  $F$  with bipartition  $(V_1, V_2)$  such that no graph obtained from  $F$  by adding edges within  $V_1$  or within  $V_2$  is in  $\mathcal{C}$ .*

This theorem has, in our setting, the following corollary, which gives a necessary condition for a sequence of graphs to be strongly polynomial.

**Theorem 6.2.** *Every strongly polynomial sequence of graphs  $(G_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  converges to a random-free graphon.*

*Proof.* Consider a strongly polynomial sequence of graphs  $(G_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$ . Let  $P(n) = |G_n|$  and  $d = \deg P$ . For every graph  $F$ , the probability that a random map from  $F$  to  $G_n$  is a homomorphism is a fixed rational function of  $n$ , hence converges as  $n \rightarrow \infty$ . It follows that the sequence  $(G_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  converges to some graphon  $W$ .

For  $k \in \mathbb{N}$ , consider the bipartite graph  $F_k = (V_1, V_2, E)$ , where  $|V_1| = k$ ,  $|V_2| = 2^k$ , and the neighbourhoods of vertices in  $V_2$  are pairwise distinct. Let  $F'$  be any graph obtained from  $F_k$  by adding some edges whose endpoints both belong to  $V_1$  or both to  $V_2$ . There are  $\binom{2^k}{k}$  ways to choose  $k$  vertices from  $V_2$ , which together with the  $k$  vertices of  $V_1$  induce a subgraph of  $F'$  of order  $2k$ , which is unique up to the choice of the ordered part of  $k$  vertices corresponding to  $V_1$ . Hence there are at least  $\binom{2^k}{k} / (k! \binom{2k}{k}) = 2^{k^2(1-o(1))}$  distinct induced subgraphs of  $F'$  of order  $2k$ . Thus, if a hereditary class  $\mathcal{C}$  of graphs is not random-free, there exists for every integer  $k$ , according to Theorem 6.1, a graph  $F'$  derived from  $F_k$  that belongs to  $\mathcal{C}$ . Hence the number of graphs of order  $2k$  in  $\mathcal{C}$  is at least  $2^{k^2(1-o(1))}$ .



To the sequence  $(G_n)$  corresponds a hereditary class  $\mathcal{F} = \{F : \exists n F \subseteq_i G_n\}$ , consisting of graphs  $F$  that occur as an induced subgraph of some  $G_n$ . If a graph  $F$  of order  $k$  belongs to  $\mathcal{F}$ , then it is an induced subgraph of a graph  $G_n$  with  $n \leq kd + 1$ . Indeed, the degree of the polynomial  $P_F$  counting  $F$  is at most  $kd$ , hence if  $P_F(n) = 0$  for every  $n \leq kd + 1$ , then  $P_F = 0$ . It follows that the number of induced subgraphs of order  $k$  is bounded by  $\sum_{i=1}^{kd+1} \binom{P(i)}{k} = 2^{o(k^2)}$ . It follows that every strongly polynomial sequence converges to a random-free graphon.  $\square$

The converse of the implication stated by Theorem 6.2 does not hold in general. Indeed, the set of strongly polynomial sequences is not closed under the operation of subsequence extraction, while the set of sequences converging to a random-free graphon does have this property.

## 7 Going further

We have seen that QF-interpretations of basic sequences form strongly polynomial sequences. We now extend this construction to generalized basic sequences, as a way to generate new strongly polynomial sequences from old.

**Definition 7.1.** Let  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  be a sequence of  $\lambda$ -structures. Let  $\lambda^+$  be the signature obtained from  $\lambda$  by adding a new binary relation  $S$  and a unary relation symbol  $U$ .

For  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ , the  $\lambda^+$ -structure  $\mathbf{T}\langle \mathbf{A} \rangle_n$  is obtained from the disjoint union  $\sum_{i=1}^n \mathbf{A}_i$  by adding relations  $S$  and  $U$  as follows:

- for every vertex  $x$ ,  $\mathbf{T}\langle \mathbf{A} \rangle_n \models U(x)$ ;
- for all vertices  $x \in A_i$  and  $y \in A_j$ ,  $\mathbf{T}\langle \mathbf{A} \rangle_n \models S(x, y)$  if  $i < j$ .

**Lemma 7.2.** Let  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  be a strongly polynomial sequence of  $\lambda$ -structures. Let  $\lambda^+$  be the signature obtained from  $\lambda$  by adding a new binary relation  $S$  and a unary relation symbol  $U$ .

Then  $(\mathbf{T}\langle \mathbf{A} \rangle_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is a strongly polynomial sequence of  $\lambda^+$ -structures.

*Proof.* Let  $\mathbf{F}$  be a connected  $\lambda^+$ -structure. Say that  $\mathbf{F}$  is nice if  $F$  can be partitioned as  $F = \bigsqcup_{i=1}^k F_i$ , with the property that for every  $(x, y) \in F_i \times F_j$  it holds that  $\mathbf{F} \models S(x, y)$  if and only if  $i < j$  and  $\mathbf{F} \models (\forall x)U(x)$ . Then the number  $\text{inj}(\mathbf{F}, \mathbf{T}\langle \mathbf{A} \rangle_n)$  of injective homomorphisms  $f : \mathbf{F} \rightarrow \mathbf{T}\langle \mathbf{A} \rangle_n$  is given by

$$\text{inj}(\mathbf{F}, \mathbf{T}\langle \mathbf{A} \rangle_n) = \begin{cases} 0, & \text{if } \mathbf{F} \text{ is not nice,} \\ \sum_{1 \leq i_1 < \dots < i_k \leq n} \prod_{j=1}^k \text{inj}(\mathbf{F}_j, \mathbf{A}_{i_j}), & \text{otherwise,} \end{cases}$$

where  $\mathbf{F}_j$  is the substructure of  $\mathbf{F}$  induced on  $F_j$ . As  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is strongly polynomial, there are polynomials  $P_1, \dots, P_k$  such that

$$\text{inj}(\mathbf{F}_j, \mathbf{A}_n) = P_j(n).$$

For every  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ , we have

$$\sum_{1 \leq i_1 < \dots < i_k \leq n} \prod_{j=1}^k P_j(i_j) = \sum_{i_1=1}^n P_1(i_1) \left( \sum_{i_2=i_1+1}^n P_2(i_2) \left( \dots \sum_{i_k=i_{k-1}+1}^n P_k(i_k) \dots \right) \right).$$

But for each  $k$  there exists a polynomial  $Q_k$  such that  $\sum_{i_k=i_{k-1}+1}^n P_k(i_k) = Q_k(n) - Q_k(i_{k-1})$ , in which  $i_0 = 0$ . By induction on  $k$ , it follows that there exists a polynomial  $Q_{\mathbf{F}}$  such that for every  $n \in \mathbb{N}$  we have

$$Q_{\mathbf{F}}(n) = \begin{cases} 0, & \text{if } \mathbf{F} \text{ is not nice,} \\ \sum_{1 \leq i_1 < \dots < i_k \leq n} \prod_{j=1}^k P_j(i_j), & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

It follows that the sequence  $(\mathbf{T}\langle \mathbf{A} \rangle_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is strongly polynomial.  $\square$

**Definition 7.3.** A *generalized basic structure with parameter*

$$(((\mathbf{A}_n^1)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}, \dots, (\mathbf{A}_n^k)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}), (\mathbf{B}^1, \dots, \mathbf{B}^\ell))$$

is any structure of the form

$$\mathbf{C} = \bigoplus_{i=1}^{\ell} \mathbf{B}^i \oplus \bigoplus_{j=1}^k \mathbf{T}\langle \mathbf{A}^j \rangle_{N_j},$$

with  $N_1, \dots, N_k \in \mathbb{N}$ . These integers will be also be denoted by  $N_1(\mathbf{C}), \dots, N_k(\mathbf{C})$ .

A *generalized basic sequence* is a sequence  $(\mathbf{C}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  of generalized basic structures  $\mathbf{C}_n$  with the same parameter  $(((\mathbf{A}_n^1)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}, \dots, (\mathbf{A}_n^k)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}), (\mathbf{B}^1, \dots, \mathbf{B}^\ell))$ , such that there are non-constant polynomials  $Q_i$ ,  $1 \leq i \leq k$  with  $Q_i(n) = N_i(\mathbf{C}_n)$  (for every  $1 \leq i \leq k$  and  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ ).

**Theorem 7.4.** *For every generalized basic sequence  $(\mathbf{C}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  and every QF-interpretation scheme  $I$ , the sequence  $(I(\mathbf{C}_n))_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is strongly polynomial.*

*Proof.* As the sequence  $(\mathbf{T}\langle \mathbf{A} \rangle_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is strongly polynomial, this theorem is a direct consequence of Lemmas 2.10 and 2.8.  $\square$

## 8 Discussion

The notion of interpretation scheme introduced in this paper could be made even more general by introducing a formula  $\varpi$  (with  $2p$  free variables) defining an equivalence relation on the set of  $p$ -tuples compatible with the formulas  $\rho_i$ , in the sense that

$$\bigwedge_{j=1}^{r_i} \varpi(\mathbf{x}_j, \mathbf{y}_j) \vdash \rho_i(\mathbf{x}_1, \dots, \mathbf{x}_{r_i}) \leftrightarrow \rho_i(\mathbf{y}_1, \dots, \mathbf{y}_{r_i})$$

(see for instance [8]). For a general interpretation scheme  $I$  of  $\lambda$ -structures in  $\kappa$ -structures and a  $\kappa$ -structure  $\mathbf{A}$ , the vertex set of  $I(\mathbf{A})$  is then the set of  $\varpi$ -equivalence classes  $[\mathbf{x}]$  of  $p$ -tuples  $\mathbf{x}$  such that  $\mathbf{A}$  satisfies  $\rho_0(\mathbf{x})$ .

In such a context, we can prove the following generalization of Corollary 4.6.

**Theorem 8.1.** *Let  $(\mathbf{A}_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  be a strongly polynomial sequence of  $\kappa$ -structures and let  $I = (p, \varpi, \rho_0, \dots, \rho_k)$  be a general interpretation scheme of  $\lambda$ -structures in  $\kappa$ -structures such that all the formulas  $\varpi, \rho_0, \dots, \rho_k$  are quantifier-free.*

*Assume that all the  $\varpi$ -equivalence classes have polynomial quantifier-free definable cardinalities. More precisely, we assume that there exists an integer*

$N$ , polynomials  $Q_1, \dots, Q_N$  (such that  $Q_i(n) \in \mathbb{N}$  for every  $1 \leq i \leq N$  and every  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ ), and quantifier-free formulas  $\eta_1, \dots, \eta_N$  (with  $p$  free variables) such that  $\bigvee_{i=1}^N \eta_i = 1$  and for every  $n \in \mathbb{N}$  and every  $(v_1, \dots, v_p) \in A_n^p$  the  $\varpi$ -equivalence class  $[(v_1, \dots, v_p)]$  of  $(v_1, \dots, v_p)$  in  $A_n^p$  has cardinality exactly  $Q_i(n)$  if  $\mathbf{A}_n \models \eta_i(v_1, \dots, v_p)$ .

Then  $(I(\mathbf{A}_n))_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is a strongly polynomial sequence of  $\lambda$ -structures.

*Proof.* Let  $I' = (p, \rho_0, \dots, \rho_k)$  and let  $\phi \in \text{QF}_q(\lambda)$  be a quantifier-free formula. According to Lemma 4.5, for every  $\kappa$ -structure  $\mathbf{A}$  we have  $\phi(I'(\mathbf{A})) = \tilde{I}'(\phi)(\mathbf{A})$ . For  $f : [q] \rightarrow [N]$ , define the quantifier free formula  $\psi_f \in \text{QF}_q(\lambda)$  as follows:

$$\psi_f(\mathbf{x}_1, \dots, \mathbf{x}_p) : \quad \tilde{I}'(\phi)(\mathbf{x}_1, \dots, \mathbf{x}_p) \wedge \bigwedge_{i=1}^N \eta_{f(i)}(\mathbf{x}_i).$$

By hypothesis it is immediate that for every  $n \in \mathbb{N}$  we have

$$|\phi(I(\mathbf{A}_n))| = \sum_{f: [q] \rightarrow [N]} \frac{|\psi_f(\mathbf{A}_n)|}{\prod_{i=1}^q Q_i(n)}.$$

Hence  $|\phi(I(\mathbf{A}_n))|$  is a rational function of  $n$ , thus a polynomial function of  $n$  (according to Remark 2.6).  $\square$

General interpretation schemes allow the definition of new constructions preserving the property of a sequence being strongly polynomial. For instance:

- $G \mapsto \dot{G}$ , which maps a graph to its 1-subdivision (that is, the graph obtained from  $G$  by replacing each edge by a path of length 2);
- $G \mapsto L(G)$ , which maps a simple graph to its line graph.

However, if we restrict ourselves to the class of basic structures, introducing an equivalence relation with bounded class cardinalities does not in fact lead to the definition of any new transformations. By a fine study of quantifier-free definable equivalence relations, one can prove the following result.

**Theorem 8.2.** *Let  $k, \ell$  be integers and let  $I = (p, \varpi, \rho_0, \dots, \rho_k)$  be a general interpretation scheme of  $\lambda$ -structures in  $\beta_{k, \ell}$ -structures defined by quantifier-free formulas such that there exists an integer  $N$  with the property that, for every  $\mathbf{B} \in \mathcal{B}_{k, \ell}$  and every  $(v_1, \dots, v_p) \in B^p$ , the  $\varpi$ -equivalence class of  $(v_1, \dots, v_p)$  has cardinality at most  $N$ .*

*Then there exists a (restricted) QF-interpretation scheme  $\hat{I} = (\hat{\rho}_0, \rho_1, \dots, \rho_k)$  of  $\lambda$ -structures in  $\beta_{k, \ell}$ -structures such that for every  $B \in \mathcal{B}_{k, \ell}$ , the  $\lambda$ -structures  $I(\mathbf{B})$  and  $\hat{I}(\mathbf{B})$  are isomorphic.*

*Proof sketch.* Consider the graphical interpretation scheme  $I' = (p, \rho_0, \varpi)$ . The condition that  $\varpi$ -equivalence classes have cardinality at most  $N$  translates to the fact that for every  $\mathbf{B} \in \mathcal{B}_{k, \ell}$  the maximum degree of  $I'(\mathbf{B})$  is at most  $N-1$ .

A  $(k, \ell)$ -pattern of length  $p$  is a surjective mapping

$$F : [p] \rightarrow I \cup \bigcup_{j \in J} \{j\} \times [n_j],$$

where  $I \subseteq [\ell]$ ,  $[J] \subseteq [k]$ , and  $1 \leq n_j \leq p$ . The *profile* of  $F$  is the  $k$ -tuple  $(n_1, \dots, n_k)$ . For  $F(i) \notin I$ , we denote by  $F(i)_1$  and  $F(i)_2$  the two coordinates of  $F(i)$  (so that  $F(i) = (F(i)_1, F(i)_2)$ ).

To a  $(k, \ell)$ -pattern  $F$  of length  $p$  we associate the quantifier-free formula

$$\begin{aligned} \tau_F : & \bigwedge_{i:F(i) \in I} U_{F(i)}^E(x_i) \wedge \bigwedge_{i:F(i) \notin I} U_{F(i)_1}^T(x_i) \wedge \bigwedge_{i,j:F(i)=F(j)} (x_i = x_j) \\ & \wedge \bigwedge_{\substack{i,j:F(i),F(j) \notin I \\ \text{and } F(i)_1 = F(j)_i \\ \text{and } F(i)_2 < F(j)_2}} S_{F(i)_1}(x_i, x_j). \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

Then it is easily checked that for  $k, \ell \in \mathbb{N}$  and every  $\mathbf{A} \in \mathcal{B}_{k,\ell}$  there exists a unique  $(k, \ell)$ -pattern  $F_{\mathbf{A}}$  such that  $\mathbf{A} \models \tau_{F_{\mathbf{A}}}(\mathbf{A})$ . Also, for every quantifier-free formula  $\phi \in \text{QF}_p$  there exists a finite family  $\mathcal{F}$  of  $(k, \ell)$ -patterns such that for every  $\mathbf{A} \in \mathcal{B}_{k,\ell}$  and every  $v_1, \dots, v_p \in A$  it holds that

$$\mathbf{A} \models \phi(v_1, \dots, v_p) \iff \mathbf{A} \models \bigvee_{F \in \mathcal{F}} \tau_F(v_1, \dots, v_p).$$

To every  $p$ -tuple  $\mathbf{v} = (v_1, \dots, v_p) \in A^p$ , with  $\mathbf{A} \in \mathcal{B}_{k,\ell}$ , we associate the vector  $\bar{\mathbf{v}}$  of distinct coordinates of  $\mathbf{v}$  belonging to tournaments, taken in order. A vector  $\mathbf{u}$  is *packed* if  $\mathbf{u} = \bar{\mathbf{u}}$ . The profile of a vector  $\mathbf{u}$  is the profile of  $F_{\mathbf{u}}$ . Note that  $\mathbf{u}$  and  $\bar{\mathbf{u}}$  have the same profile. Note also that  $\zeta : \mathbf{v} \mapsto (\bar{\mathbf{v}}, F_{\mathbf{v}})$  is a bijection between  $A^p$  and pairs  $(\mathbf{u}, F)$  such that  $\mathbf{u}$  is packed and has the same profile as  $F$ . For given  $F$ , we denote by  $\Omega(\mathbf{A}, F)$  the packed vectors with coordinates in  $A$  having the same profile as  $F$ . For  $k, \ell \in \mathbb{N}$  and  $\phi \in \text{QF}_p(\beta_{k,\ell})$ , there exists a set  $\mathcal{F}$  of  $(k, \ell)$ -patterns, such that

$$\phi(\mathbf{A}) = \bigcup_{F \in \mathcal{F}} \{\zeta^{-1}(\mathbf{u}, F) : \mathbf{u} \in \Omega(\mathbf{A}, F)\},$$

where the union is a disjoint union.

From the hypothesis that  $\varpi$  is an equivalence relation with bounded classes, we deduce that there exists a collection  $\{\mathcal{F}_1, \dots, \mathcal{F}_t\}$  of disjoint sets of  $(k, \ell)$ -patterns with the same profile, such that each connected component of  $I'(\mathbf{B})$  is a clique with vertex set

$$K_{t,\mathbf{x}} = \{\zeta^{-1}(\mathbf{x}, F) : F \in \mathcal{F}_t\},$$

where  $\mathbf{x}$  is any compressed vector with the same profile as  $F \in \mathcal{F}_t$ . (This is shown by proving that for an equivalence relation  $\varpi$  of a different form we can construct  $\mathbf{A}$  with at least one arbitrarily large equivalence class).

Consider an arbitrary linear order on  $(k, \ell)$ -patterns. Let  $\hat{\rho}_0 \in \text{QF}_p$  be the quantifier-free formula

$$\hat{\rho}_0(x_1, \dots, x_p) : \rho_0(x_1, \dots, x_p) \wedge \bigvee_{i=1}^t \tau_{\min \mathcal{F}_i}(x_1, \dots, x_p).$$

Then  $\hat{\rho}_0$  selects exactly one vertex in each  $\varpi$ -equivalence class, and the statement of the lemma now follows.  $\square$

We do not include the full lengthy technical proof of Theorem 8.2.

## 9 Conclusion and open problems

A natural problem arising from this paper is to figure out whether the strongly polynomial sequences we have constructed from basic sequences constitute the general case, as suggested by Theorem 5.3.

A strongly polynomial sequence of graphs  $(G_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is *induced monotone* if  $G_n$  is an induced subgraph of  $G_{n+1}$  for each  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ . Equivalently,  $(G_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}}$  is induced monotone if there exists a countable graph  $G$  such that  $G_n$  is the subgraph induced by vertices  $1, \dots, f(n)$ , where  $f$  is a monotone (non-decreasing) function.

**Problem 9.1.** *Can all strongly polynomial induced monotone sequences of graphs be obtained by QF-interpretation schemes from generalized basic sequences (as defined in Definition 7.3)?*

There is more to this than meets the eye. By Theorem 6.2, we know that every strongly polynomial sequence converges to a random-free graphon. In some sense, we are asking here whether, under the stronger assumption that the sequence of graphs has an inductive countable limit, the countable limit itself may be an interpretation of a countable “basic” structure.

The Paley graph indexed by  $q$  a prime power congruent to 1 modulo 4 is defined as the Cayley graph on  $\mathbb{F}_q$  with edges joining vertices whose difference is a non-zero square in  $\mathbb{F}_q$ . Paley graphs form a quasi-random sequence and so as a consequence of Theorem 6.2 any strongly polynomial sequence of graphs can contain only finitely many distinct Paley graphs. Nonetheless, a corollary of [7, Prop. 8] is that when  $F$  is a 2-degenerate graph (for example, a series-parallel graph) the number of homomorphic images of  $F$  in the Paley graph on  $q$  vertices is a polynomial in  $q$  (dependent only on  $F$ ).

In [6] it is shown that for the hypercube  $Q_n = \text{Cayley}(\mathbb{F}_2^n, S_1)$ , where  $S_1$  is the set of  $n$  vectors of Hamming weight 1, for each  $F$  the quantity  $\text{hom}(F, Q_n)$  is a polynomial in  $2^n$  and  $n$  (dependent only on  $F$ ).

These examples prompt the following question concerning sequences of Cayley graphs:

**Problem 9.2.** *Let  $(A_n)$  be a sequence of groups and  $(B_n)$  a sequence of subsets,  $B_n \subseteq A_n$ , that are closed under inverses. When is it the case that  $\text{hom}(F, \text{Cayley}(A_n, B_n))$  is a fixed bivariate polynomial (dependent on  $F$ ) in  $|A_n|$  and  $|B_n|$  for sufficiently large  $n \geq n_0(F)$ ?*

If here  $|A_n|$  and  $|B_n|$  are both polynomial in  $n$  then this is to ask whether the sequence  $(\text{Cayley}(A_n, B_n))$  is a polynomial sequence of graphs (see Section 1).

*Remark 9.3.* By a variation of the argument given in [7, Prop.2], when  $A_n = \mathbb{Z}_n$  and  $B_n = B \cap [-(n-1), n-1]$  for  $B \subseteq \mathbb{Z}$ ,  $B = -B$ , the sequence  $(\text{Cayley}(A_n, B_n))$  is polynomial if and only if  $B$  is finite or cofinite.

Is it true for instance that the sequence  $(\text{Cayley}(\mathbb{Z}_n, D_n))$  where  $D_n = [a_n, b_n]$  is an interval of length  $o(n)$  is a polynomial sequence?

In another direction, perhaps one should try to approach by means of interpretations other (multivariate) polynomials, such as the Bollobás-Riordan coloured Tutte polynomial [4].

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