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What is known about the Value 1 Problem for Probabilistic Automata?

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Abstract. The value 1 problem is a decision problem for probabilistic automata over finite words: are there words accepted by the automaton with arbitrarily high probability? Although undecidable, this problem attracted a lot of attention over the last few years. The aim of this paper is to review and relate the results pertaining to the value 1 problem. In particular, several algorithms have been proposed to partially solve this problem. We show the relations between them, leading to the following conclusion: the Markov Monoid Algorithm is the most correct algorithm known to (partially) solve the value 1 problem.

1 Introduction

In 1963 Rabin [Rab63] introduced the notion of probabilistic automata, which are finite automata with randomized transitions. This powerful model has been widely studied and has applications in many fields like image processing [CK97], computational biology [DEKM99] and speech processing [Moh97]. Several algorithmic properties of probabilistic automata have been considered in the literature. For instance, Schützenberger [Sch61] proved in 1961 that functional equivalence is decidable in polynomial time (see also [Tze92]), and even faster with randomized algorithms, which led to applications in software verification [KMO+11].

However, many natural decision problems are undecidable, and part of the literature on probabilistic automata is about undecidability results. For example the emptiness, the isolation and the value 1 problems are undecidable, as shown in [Paz71,BMT77,GO10]. To overcome untractability results, a lot of effort went into finding subclasses of probabilistic automata for which natural decision problems become decidable. For instance, the papers [KVAK10,CKV+11] look at restrictions implying a decidable model-checking problem against ω-regular specifications, and the paper [CSV13] investigates whether assuming isolated cut-points leads to decidability for the emptiness problem.
We focus here on the efforts made to understand the value $1$ problem. The aim of this paper is to review and relate the attempts made in this direction over the last few years [GO10, CSV11, FGO12, CT12, BBG12, FGKO14].

2 Definitions

Let $Q$ be a finite set of states. A probability distribution over $Q$ is a function $\delta : Q \to [0, 1]$ such that $\sum_{q \in Q} \delta(q) = 1$.

Let $A$ be a finite alphabet. The transitions of a probabilistic automaton are given by a function $\Delta : Q \times A \to \mathcal{D}(Q)$; equivalently, for each letter $a \in A$ we consider a probabilistic transition matrix $M_a$, which is a square matrix in $[0, 1]^{Q \times Q}$ such that every row of $M_a$ is a probability distribution over $Q$. The value of $M_a(q, t)$ is the probability to go from state $q$ to state $t$ when reading the letter $a$.

Given an input word $w \in A^*$, we denote $P_A(s \xrightarrow{w} t)$ the probability to go from state $s$ to state $t$ when reading the word $w$. Formally, if $w = a_1a_2 \cdots a_n$ then $P_A(s \xrightarrow{w} t) = (M_{a_1}M_{a_2} \cdots M_{a_n})(s, t)$.

Definition 1 (Probabilistic automaton). A tuple $A = (Q, A, q_0, \Delta, F)$ represents a probabilistic automaton, where $Q$ is a finite set of states, $A$ is the finite input alphabet, $q_0 \in Q$ is the initial state, $\Delta$ define the transitions and $F \subseteq Q$ is the set of accepting states.

Definition 2 (Acceptance probability). The acceptance probability of a word $w \in A^*$ by $A$ is $\sum_{f \in F} P_A(q_0 \xrightarrow{w} f)$, denoted $P_A(w)$.

Definition 3 (Value). The value of $A$, denoted $\text{val}(A)$, is the supremum acceptance probability over all possible input words:

$$\text{val}(A) = \sup_{w \in A^*} P_A(w).$$

We are interested in the following decision problem:

Given a probabilistic automaton $A$, decide whether $\text{val}(A) = 1$.

3 An Equivalent Formulation and the Exact Computational Complexity

The first result about the value $1$ problem is its surprising undecidability, obtained with an elementary proof by Hugo Gimbert and Youssouf Oualhadj in [GO10].
In a related yet seemingly different line of work, Christel Baier, Marcus Größer and Nathalie Bertrand undertook a thorough study of probabilistic Büchi automata [BG05,BBG08,BBG09,BBG12]. One of the results obtained there is the undecidability of the emptiness problem for probabilistic Büchi automata with probable semantics. It turns out that the two problems are actually Turing-equivalent:

- the value $1$ problem for probabilistic automata over finite words,
- the emptiness problem for probabilistic Büchi automata with probable semantics.

A first (very simple) reduction has been explained in [BBG12]: from a probabilistic automaton $A$ over finite words, one can construct a probabilistic Büchi automaton $A'$ of linear size, such that $\text{val}(A) = 1$ if and only if $A'$ is non-empty for the probable semantics. The converse reduction is more involved, and follows from [CSV13], but here the constructed automaton is of exponential size.

Even better, the exact computational complexity has been given in [CSV13]: both problems are $\Sigma^0_2$-complete.

**Theorem 1 ([BBG12,CSV13]).** The value $1$ problem for probabilistic automata over finite words and the emptiness problem for probabilistic Büchi automata with probable semantics are Turing-equivalent and $\Sigma^0_2$-complete.

## 4 Decidable Subclasses of Probabilistic Automata

Several subclasses of probabilistic automata were constructed in order to decide the value $1$ problem on such instances.

The first class was the $\sharp$-acyclic automata by Gimbert and Oualhadj [GO10].

Later but concurrently, two different works have been published in the very same conference. The first one introduces simple automata and structurally simple automata, by Krishnendu Chatterjee and Mathieu Tracol [CT12]. The second, by Hugo Gimbert, Youssouf Oualhadj and the author introduces leaktight automata [FGO12].

Although geared towards the same goal (deciding the value $1$ problem), the two classes came from different perspectives. The paper of Krishnendu Chatterjee and Mathieu Tracol relies on a theorem from Probability Theory, called the jet decompositions of (infinite) Markov Chains. The paper of Hugo Gimbert, Youssouf Oualhadj and the author relies on a theorem from Algebra, called Simon’s theorem, asserting the existence of factorization trees of bounded height.

Subsequent studies [FGKO14] showed that the class of leaktight automata actually strictly contains all the other classes, implying that the Markov Monoid
Algorithm used to decide the value 1 problem for leaktight automata actually decides the value 1 problem for all cases where it is known to be decidable.

Conclusion and Perspectives

In this paper, we discussed some recent developments about the value 1 problem. We first gathered some results from the literature, explaining that it is actually Turing-equivalent to the emptiness for probabilistic Büchi automata with the probable semantics, and $\Sigma^b_2$-complete. Then we presented the different attempts to decide the value 1 problems on subclasses of probabilistic automata. As a conclusion, the Markov Monoid Algorithm introduced in [FGO12], used to decide the value 1 problem for leaktight automata, is actually the most correct algorithm known so far, as the class of leaktight automata strictly contains all other classes for which the value 1 problem is known to be decidable.

This motivates a deeper understanding of this algorithm. We know that the Markov Monoid Algorithm cannot solve the value 1 problem, as this problem is undecidable, but then what is the problem solved by this algorithm? In other words, can we characterize for which probabilistic automata the Markov Monoid Algorithm finds a value 1 witness?
References


