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Undecidable word problem in subshift automorphism groups

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Abstract. This article studies the complexity of the word problem in groups of automorphisms of subshifts. We show in particular that for any Turing degree, there exists a subshift whose automorphism group contains a subgroup whose word problem has exactly this degree.

Subshifts are sets of colorings of a group G avoiding some family of forbidden patterns. The most commonly studied kind of subshifts are the subshifts of finite type (SFTs), which when $G = \mathbb{Z}^2$ correspond to sets of Wang tilings, up to a recoding. They have been introduced independently as a way of discretizing dynamical systems on compact spaces and as a tool to study decidability questions. They have also been used as models for complex systems.

An automorphism of a subshift X is a shift-invariant continuous bijection from X to X , or equivalently a reversible cellular automaton on X . Little is known about automorphism groups of subshifts in general, besides that they are countable, for instance it is not known whether the automorphism groups of the 2-symbol full shift and of the 3-symbol full shift are isomorphic.

However some properties of the base subshift influence its automorphism group: for instance when a multidimensional subshift has positive entropy it contains every finite group [1], but this is not a necessary condition.

In dimensions $d \geq 2$, computability has played a central role in the study of SFTs, sofic and effective shifts. From a computability point of view, it is known that the word problem in the automorphism group of an SFT is computably enumerable. Here we show that for any given computably enumerable degree, one can construct an SFT the automorphism group of which has a word problem with this degree.

1 Preliminaries

By countable set, we mean injectable in \mathbb{N} . Let λ denote the empty word. For \mathcal{A} a countable alphabet, we note $\mathcal{A}^* := \bigsqcup_{n \in \mathbb{N}} \mathcal{A}^n$ the set of finite words over \mathcal{A} . We also note $\mathcal{A}^{\leq r} := \bigsqcup_{n \leq r} \mathcal{A}^n$ for $r \in \mathbb{N}$.

Let us note X^C the complement of set X . $W \Subset X$ means that $W \subset X$ and W is finite. $V \sqcup W$ means $V \cup W$ assuming that $V \cap W = \emptyset$.

1.1 Computability

Computability problems are naturally defined over \mathbb{N} , but can easily be extended through subsets of it, cartesian products or disjoint union (by canonically injecting \mathbb{N} in sets of tuples). For example, if $\mathcal{G} \subset \mathbb{N}$, then the set \mathcal{G}^* of tuples admits a simple injection into \mathbb{N} . Let us fix a (computable) countable set I , that we can identify to integers.

Definition 1. *Let us define the following reducibilities, for $X, Y \subset I$:*

1. X is Turing-reducible to Y , $X \leq_T Y$, if: one can compute X with oracle Y .
2. X is enumeration-reducible to Y , $X \leq_e Y$, if: from any x and any integer $i \in \mathbb{N}$, one can compute a finite set $Y_i(x)$ such that $x \in X$ if and only if $\exists i \in \mathbb{N}, Y_i(x) \subset Y$.
3. X is positive-reducible to Y , $X \leq_p Y$, if: from any x , one can compute finitely many finite sets $Y_0(x), \dots, Y_{n-1}(x)$ such that $x \in X$ if and only if $\exists i < n, Y_i(x) \subset Y$.
4. X is many-one-reducible to Y , $X \leq_m Y$, if: from any x , one can compute some $\phi(x)$ such that $x \in X$ if and only if $\phi(x) \in Y$.
5. X is one-one-reducible to Y , $X \leq_1 Y$, if, $X \leq_m Y$ and ϕ is one-to-one.

One-one reducibility implies many-one reducibility, which in turns implies positive-reducibility, which implies both Turing-reducibility and enumeration-reducibility.

Each reducibility \leq_r induces a notion of equivalence \equiv_r : $A \equiv_r B$ iff $A \leq_r B$ and $B \leq_r A$. And each notion of equivalence \equiv_r induces a notion of degree deg_r : the degree of a set A is its equivalence class for \equiv_r .

The join $A \oplus B$ of A and B is the set C such that $2n + 1 \in C$ iff $n \in A$ and $2n \in C$ iff $n \in B$. It has the property that $A \leq_r A \oplus B$ and $B \leq_r A \oplus B$ for any reducibility \leq_r previously defined.

See [2] for a reference on computability-theoretical reductions.

1.2 Monoids and groups

We will deal with countable monoids $\mathbb{M} = \mathcal{G}^*/R$, where $\mathcal{G} \subset \mathbb{N}$, \mathcal{G}^* is the free monoid generated by symbols from \mathcal{G} and R is a monoid congruence⁵. The monoid is always implicitly endowed with its generating set \mathcal{G} (later, some problems may depend on the presentation). Each element of the monoid is represented

⁵ We could deal in the same way with semigroups, by prohibiting the empty word.

by a word $u \in \mathcal{G}^*$, but the representation is not one-to-one (except for the free monoid itself). We note $u =_{\mathbb{M}} v$ if $\pi(u) = \pi(v)$ and $\pi : \mathcal{G}^* \rightarrow \mathbb{M}$ is the natural quotient map.

It is also clear that the concatenation map, which from any two words $u, v \in \mathcal{G}^*$ outputs $u \cdot v$, which is one representative of the corresponding product, is computable. We say that \mathbb{M} is an *effective group* if, additionally, there is a computable map $\psi : \mathcal{G}^* \rightarrow \mathcal{G}^*$ such that $u \cdot \psi(u) =_{\mathbb{M}} \psi(u) \cdot u =_{\mathbb{M}} \lambda$.

The *equality problem* of \mathbb{M} , endowed with generating family \mathcal{G} , is the set of pairs $\{(u, v) \in (\mathcal{G}^*)^2 \mid u =_{\mathbb{M}} v\}$, endowed with a natural enumeration so that we can consider it as a computability problem.

Remark 1.

1. It is clear that the *word problem* $\{u \in \mathcal{G}^* \mid u =_{\mathbb{M}} \lambda\}$ is one-one-reducible to the equality problem.
2. If \mathbb{M} is an effective group, then the word problem is actually many-one-equivalent to the equality problem.
3. The equality problems for \mathbb{M} endowed with two distinct finite generating sets are one-one-equivalent.
4. If \mathbb{M}' is a submonoid of \mathbb{M} endowed with a generating set which is included in that of \mathbb{M} , then the equality problem in \mathbb{M}' is one-one-reducible to that of \mathbb{M} .
5. In particular, the equality problem in any finitely generated submonoid is one-one-reducible to that of \mathbb{M} .

Nevertheless, there are countable groups whose word problem is computable when endowed with one generating family, and uncomputable when endowed with another one.

The word problem is known to be decidable if and only if the group is *computable* (see [3] for a proof in the finitely generated case), that is, it can be seen as a computable subset of \mathbb{N} over which the composition rule is a computable function (this implies that inversion is also a computable map).

1.3 Subshifts

Let \mathcal{A} be a finite alphabet and \mathbb{M} a group (most of the following should be true if \mathbb{M} is a cancellative monoid though). A finite *pattern* w over \mathcal{A} with *support* $W = \mathcal{S}(w) \subseteq \mathcal{G}^*$ is a map $w = (w_i)_{i \in W} \in \mathcal{A}^W$. Depending on the context, note that, for $g \in \mathcal{S}(w)$, w_g may either be an element of \mathcal{A} or a subpattern with support $\{g\}$. If $g \in \mathcal{G}^*$ and w is a pattern, we will note $\sigma^g(w)$ the pattern with support $W \cdot g$ such that $\sigma^g(w)_{i \cdot g^{-1}} = w_i$ for all $i \in \mathcal{S}(w)$.

We are interested in $\mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}}$, which is a Cantor set, when endowed with the prodiscrete topology, on which \mathbb{M} acts continuously by (left) shift: we note $\sigma^i(x)_j = x_{i \cdot j}$ for $i, j \in \mathbb{M}$ and $x \in \mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}}$.

A *subshift* is a closed σ -invariant subset $X \subset \mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}}$. Equivalently, X can be defined as the set $X_{\mathcal{F}} := \{x \in \mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}} \mid \forall i \in \mathbb{M}, \forall w \in \mathcal{F}, \exists j \in \mathcal{S}(w), x_{i \cdot j} \neq w_j\}$ avoiding a language $\mathcal{F} \subset \bigsqcup_{W \in \mathcal{G}^*} \mathcal{A}^W$ (which is then called a (defining) *forbidden*

language). If \mathcal{F} can be chosen finite, the subshift is called *of finite type* (SFT); if it can be chosen computably enumerable, it is called *effective*.

The *language* with *support* $W \in \mathcal{G}^*$ of subshift X is the set $\mathcal{L}_W(X) := \{(x_{\pi(i)})_{i \in W} \mid x \in X\}$; the *language* of X is $\mathcal{L}(X) = \bigsqcup_{W \in \mathcal{G}^*} \mathcal{L}_W(X)$, and its *colanguage* is the complement of it. The latter is a possible defining forbidden language. If $u \in \mathcal{L}_W(X)$, we define the corresponding *cylinder* $[u] = \{x \in X \mid \forall i \in W, x_{\pi(i)} = u_i\}$.

Remark 2. π induces a natural covering $\Pi : \mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}} \rightarrow \mathcal{A}^{\mathcal{G}^*}$ by $\Pi(x)_i = x_{\pi(i)}$. Its image set $\Pi(\mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}})$ is a subshift over the free monoid. One can note the following.

1. $X = X_{\mathcal{L}(X)^C}$.
2. The colanguage of the full shift $\mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}}$ is the same as that of the subshift $\Pi(\mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}})$: the set

$$\mathcal{L}(\mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}})^C = \bigsqcup_{W \in \mathcal{G}^*} \{w \in \mathcal{A}^W \mid \exists i, j \in W, i =_{\mathbb{M}} j, w_i \neq w_j\}$$

of patterns that do not respect the monoid congruence.

3. Nevertheless, \emptyset is a forbidden language defining $\mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}}$.
4. The colanguage of every subshift $X_{\mathcal{F}} \subset \mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}}$ is the set of patterns $w \in \mathcal{A}^W$, $W \in \mathcal{G}^*$, whose all extensions to configurations $x \in [u]$ involve as a subpattern a pattern of either \mathcal{F} , or $\mathcal{L}(\mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}})^C$. In that case, by compactness, at least one such subpattern appears within a finite support $V \in \mathcal{G}^*$, with $W \subset V$, which depends only on W .

Remark 3. Let \mathbb{M} be an effective group.

1. The word problem in \mathbb{M} is positive-equivalent (and one-one-reducible) to the colanguage of the full shift.
2. The colanguage of any subshift X is positive-reducible to the join of any defining forbidden language for X and the word problem in \mathbb{M} .

Proof.

1. This point is direct from Point 2 of Remark 2.
2. First, remark that the set of patterns that involve a subpattern from the forbidden language is trivially positive-reducible to the forbidden language. Now, as mentioned in Point 4 of Remark 2, $w \in \mathcal{L}(X)^C$ if and only if there exists $V \in \mathcal{G}^*$ with $V \supset \mathcal{S}(w)$ such that all extensions of w to V involve a subpattern from the forbidden language, or from $\mathcal{L}(\mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}})^C$, which is equivalent to the word problem in \mathbb{M} , from the previous point. \square

It results that, in some sense, one expects most subshifts to have a colanguage at least as complex as the equality problem in the underlying monoid.

1.4 Homomorphisms

Let $X \subset \mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}}$ and $Y \subset \mathcal{B}^{\mathbb{M}}$ be subshifts. Denote $\mathcal{E}nd(X, Y)$ the set of *homomorphisms* (continuous shift-commuting maps) from X to Y , and $\mathcal{A}ut(X, Y)$ the set of bijective ones (*conjugacies*). We also note $\mathcal{E}nd(X) = \mathcal{E}nd(X, X)$ the monoid of *endomorphisms* of X , and $\mathcal{A}ut(X) = \mathcal{A}ut(X, X)$ the group of its *automorphisms*.

If \mathbb{M} is finitely generated, then homomorphisms correspond to block maps (or cellular automata), thanks to a variant of the Curtis-Hedlund-Lyndon theorem [4].

Theorem 1. *Let \mathbb{M} be finitely generated. A map Φ from subshift $X \subset \mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}}$ into subshift $Y \subset \mathcal{B}^{\mathbb{M}}$ is a homomorphism if and only if there exist a radius $r \in \mathbb{N}$ and a block map $\phi : \mathcal{A}^{\mathcal{G}^{\leq r}} \rightarrow \mathcal{B}$ such that for every $x \in \mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}}$ and $i \in \mathcal{G}^*$, $\Phi(x)_{\pi(i)} = \phi(x_{|\pi(i)\mathcal{G}^{\leq r}})$ (where the latter has to be understood with the obvious reindexing of the argument).*

Let us order the block maps $\phi : \mathcal{A}^{\mathcal{G}^{\leq r}} \rightarrow \mathcal{B}$ by increasing radius $r \in \mathbb{N}$, and then by lexicographic order, so that we have a natural bijective enumeration $\mathbb{N} \rightarrow \bigsqcup_{r \in \mathbb{N}} \mathcal{B}^{\mathcal{A}^{\mathcal{G}^{\leq r}}}$ (because \mathcal{A} , \mathcal{B} and \mathcal{G} are finite). This gives in particular a surjective enumeration $\mathbb{N} \rightarrow \mathcal{E}nd(\mathcal{A}^{\mathcal{G}^*}, \mathcal{B}^{\mathcal{G}^*})$ and in general, a partial surjective enumeration $\mathbb{N}' \subset \mathbb{N} \rightarrow \mathcal{E}nd(X, Y)$. In general, $\mathbb{N}' \neq \mathbb{N}$. It is a nontrivial problem to ask whether \mathbb{N}' is computable (this is the case for the full shift when $\mathbb{M} = \mathbb{Z}$), but not the topic of the present paper. Obtaining a bijective enumeration for $\mathcal{E}nd(\mathcal{A}^{\mathcal{G}^*}, \mathcal{B}^{\mathcal{G}^*})$ would be easily achieved by enumerating each block map only for its smallest possible radius. Nevertheless, trying to achieve a bijective enumeration in general for $\mathcal{E}nd(X, Y)$, or even for $\mathcal{E}nd(\mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}}, \mathcal{B}^{\mathbb{M}})$, is a process that would depend on the colanguage of the subshift (we want to avoid two block maps that differ only over the colanguage), which may be uncomputable.

Provided that \mathbb{M} is an effective monoid, $\mathcal{E}nd(X)$ (and any submonoid) is an effective monoid, because the composition of two block maps can be easily computed by summing the neighborhoods. Nevertheless, $\mathcal{A}ut(X)$ need not be an effective group!

For the rest of the paper, let us assume that \mathbb{M} is an effective group. More precisely, all results could be interpreted as reductions to a join with a problem representing the composition map of the group, and sometimes to an additional join with a problem representing the inversion.

2 Equality problem is not too hard

Remark 4. Two distinct block maps $\phi, \psi : \mathcal{A}^{\mathcal{G}^{\leq r}} \rightarrow \mathcal{A}$ representing an endomorphism of X actually represent the same one if and only if for every pattern $u \in \mathcal{A}^{\mathcal{G}^{\leq r}}$, $\phi(u) \neq \psi(u) \Rightarrow u \in \mathcal{L}(X)^C$.

The equality problem is at most as complex as the language.

Theorem 2. *The equality problem in $\mathcal{E}nd(X)$ is positive-reducible to $\mathcal{L}(X)^C$.*

Proof. One can directly apply Remark 4, by noting that it is easy to transform each block map into an equivalent one, so that the resulting two block maps have the same radius (the original maximal one, by ignoring extra symbols).

Of course, this remains true for the equality problem in $\mathcal{A}ut(X)$. Since positive-reducibility implies both Turing-reducibility and enumeration-reducibility, we get the following for the lowest classes of the arithmetic hierarchy (which was already known; see [5]).

Corollary 1.

1. *The equality problem is decidable, in the automorphism group of any subshift with computable language (for instance 1D sofic subshift, 1D substitutive subshift, minimal effective subshift, two-way space-time diagram of a surjective cellular automaton...).*
2. *The equality problem is computably enumerable, in the automorphism group of any effective subshift (for instance multidimensional sofic subshift, substitutive subshift, limit set of cellular automaton...).*

3 Automorphism groups with hard equality problem

The purpose of this section is to prove a partial converse to Theorem 2: a subshift X for which the two problems involved are equivalent, however complex they are.

Let $X \subset \mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}}$ and $Y \subset \mathcal{B}^{\mathbb{M}}$ be subshifts. For $\alpha : \mathcal{B} \rightarrow \mathcal{B}$ and $u \in \mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}}$, let us define the *controlled map* $C_{u,\alpha}$ as the homomorphism over $X \times Y$ such that $C_{u,\alpha}(x, y)_0 = (x_0, \alpha(y_0))$ if $x \in [u]$; (x_0, y_0) otherwise. Denote also π_1 the projection to the first component, and σ_1^g the shift of the first component with respect to element $g \in \mathbb{M}$: $\sigma_1^g(x, y)_0 = (x_g, y_0)$ for every $(x, y) \in X \times Y$.

Remark 5.

1. $\pi_1 C_{u,\alpha} = \pi_1$.
2. If \mathbb{M} is a group and $g \in \mathbb{M}$, then $C_{u,\alpha} = \sigma_1^g C_{\sigma_1^{g^{-1}}(u), \alpha} \sigma_1^{-g}$.
3. $C_{u,\alpha} \in \mathcal{E}nd(X \times Y, X \times \mathcal{B}^{\mathbb{M}})$.
4. $C_{u,\alpha}$ is injective if and only if α is a permutation.
5. $C_{u,\alpha} \in \mathcal{E}nd(X \times Y)$ if Y is (locally) α -permutable, i.e. for all $y \in Y$, if we define z by $z_0 = \alpha(y_0)$, $z_i = y_i$ for $i \neq 0$, then $z \in Y$.
6. From Remark 4, $C_{u,\alpha}$ is the identity over $X \times Y$ if and only if $u \notin \mathcal{L}(X)$ or α is the trivial permutation over letters appearing in Y .

Example 1. Examples of α -permutable subshifts are the full shift on \mathcal{B} or, if $\mathcal{B} = \mathcal{B}' \sqcup \{\perp\}$ and $\alpha(\perp) = \perp$, the \mathcal{B}' -sunny-side-up defined by forbidding every pattern which involves two occurrences of \mathcal{B}' . We have seen that the colanguage of the former is positive-equivalent to the word problem in \mathbb{M} . The language of the latter can be easily proven to be many-one-equivalent to the word problem in \mathbb{M} (as essentially noted in [6, Prop 2.11]), hence yielding a kind of jump for the colanguage.

If $a, b, c \in \mathcal{B}$, let us denote α_{abc} the 3-cycle mapping a to b , b to c , c to b , and any other element to itself. The following lemma corresponds essentially to [7, Lemma 18].

Lemma 1. *Suppose \mathcal{B} has at least 5 distinct elements a, b, c, d, e . Let $u \in \mathcal{A}^{\mathcal{S}(u)}$ be a pattern, $g \in \mathcal{S}(u)$, and $v = u|_{\mathcal{S}(u) \setminus \{g\}}$. Then $C_{u, \alpha_{abc}} = (\Psi\Phi)^2$, where $\Phi = \sigma_1^g C_{u_g, \alpha_{adc}} C_{u_g, \alpha_{bad}} \sigma_1^{g^{-1}}$ and $\Psi = C_{v, \alpha_{bde}} C_{v, \alpha_{cbd}}$.*

Proof. If $x_g = u_g$, then $\Phi(x, y)_0 = (x_0, \phi(y_0))$, where ϕ is the involution that swaps a and b on the one hand, d and e on the other hand; otherwise $\Phi(x, y)_0 = (x_0, y_0)$. If $x \in [v]$, then $\Psi(x, y)_0 = (x_0, \psi(y_0))$, where ψ is the involution that swaps b and c on the one hand, d and e on the other hand; otherwise $\Psi(x, y)_0 = (x_0, y_0)$. Since $\phi^2 = \psi^2 = \text{id}$, one can see that if $x \notin [u]$, then $(\Psi\Phi)^2(x, y)_0 = (x_0, y_0)$. Now if $x \in [u]$, then we see that $\Psi\Phi(x, y)_0 = (x_0, \psi\phi(y_0))$, and $\psi\phi = \alpha_{acb}$, so that we get the stated result.

Theorem 3. *Let $X \subset \mathcal{A}^{\mathbb{M}}$ be a subshift and $Y \subset \mathcal{B}^{\mathbb{M}}$ an α_{abc} -permutable subshift for every $a, b, c \in \mathcal{B}' \subset \mathcal{B}$, where $|\mathcal{B}'| \geq 5$. Then $\mathcal{L}(X)^C$ is one-one-reducible to the word problem in the subgroup of automorphisms of $X \times Y$ generated by σ_1^g and $C_{u_0, \alpha_{abc}}$ for $g \in \mathcal{G}$, $a, b, c \in \mathcal{B}'$ and $u_0 \in \mathcal{A}$.*

Proof. From an induction and Lemma 1, we know that this subgroup includes every $C_{u, \alpha_{abc}}$ for every $a, b, c \in \mathcal{B}'$ and $u \in \mathcal{A}^*$. From Point 6 of Remark 5, an automorphism $C_{u, \alpha_{abc}}$ is equal to the identity if and only if $u \notin \mathcal{L}(X)$.

Consequently, subshifts can have finitely generated groups with equality problems as complex as their language, as formalized by the following corollary.

Corollary 2.

1. *With the same hypotheses, $\mathcal{L}(X)^C$ is one-one-reducible to the word problem in $\text{Aut}(X \times Y)$.*
2. *For every subshift X over a finitely generated group \mathbb{M} , there exists a countable-to-one extension $X \times Y$ such that $\mathcal{L}(X)^C$ is one-one-reducible to the word problem in (a finitely generated subgroup of) $\text{Aut}(X \times Y)$.*
3. *For every subshift X over a finitely generated group \mathbb{M} , there exists a full extension $X \times \mathcal{B}^{\mathbb{M}}$ such that $\mathcal{L}(X)^C \sim \mathcal{L}(X \times \mathcal{B}^{\mathbb{M}})^C$ is one-one-reducible to the word problem in (a finitely generated subgroup of) $\text{Aut}(X \times \mathcal{B}^{\mathbb{M}})$.*
4. *Every Σ_1^0 Turing degree contains the word problem in (a finitely generated subgroup of) $\text{Aut}(X)$, for some 2D SFT X .*
5. *There exists a 2D SFT X for which the word problem in (a finitely generated subgroup of) $\text{Aut}(X)$ is undecidable.*

Point 5 answers [5, Problem 5].

Proof.

1. Just use Point 5 of Remark 1.
2. We use Theorem 3 with Y being the $\{0, 1, 2, 3, 4\}$ -sunny-side-up.

3. We use Theorem 3 with $Y = \{0, 1, 2, 3, 4\}^{\mathbb{M}}$.
4. Every Σ_1^0 degree contains the colanguage of a 2D SFT, thanks to constructions [8,9]. Then its product with the full shift $\{0, 1, 2, 3, 4\}^{\mathbb{Z}^2}$ is still an SFT, and we conclude by the previous point.
5. Apply the previous point with any uncomputable Σ_1^0 degree. □

Note that the number of generators can be decreased if we want to reduce only the language whose support is spanned by a subgroup. For instance 2D SFTs are already known to have (arbitrarily Σ_1^0) uncomputable 1D language. Indeed, our automorphisms do not alter the X layer, so that their parallel applications to all traces with respect to a subgroup is still an automorphism.

Among the open questions, we could wonder whether there is a natural class of SFT (irreducible, with uncomputable language, at least over \mathbb{Z}^2) whose colanguage could be proven reducible to the word problem in the automorphism group. This could require to encode the whole cartesian product of Theorem 3 inside such subshifts. Another question would be to adapt our construction while controlling the automorphism group completely so that it is finitely generated.

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