

<b>Zeitschrift:</b>	L'Enseignement Mathématique
<b>Herausgeber:</b>	Commission Internationale de l'Enseignement Mathématique
<b>Band:</b>	27 (1981)
<b>Heft:</b>	1-2: L'ENSEIGNEMENT MATHÉMATIQUE
<b>Artikel:</b>	ALTERNATION AND THE ACKERMANN CASE OF THE DECISION PROBLEM
<b>Autor:</b>	Fürer, Martin
<b>Kapitel:</b>	6. Lower bounds
<b>DOI:</b>	<a href="https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-51744">https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-51744</a>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 25.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## 6. LOWER BOUNDS

*Definition.* A *marked binary number* is a word over the alphabet  $\{0, \mathbf{0}, 1, \mathbf{1}\}$  described by the regular expression  $(0 \cup 1)^* \mathbf{0} \mathbf{1}^* \cup \mathbf{1}^*$ . The *value* of a marked binary number is given by the homomorphism  $h$  with  $h(0) = h(\mathbf{0}) = 0$  and  $h(1) = h(\mathbf{1}) = 1$ , i.e. by disregarding the type of the digits.

*Note:* The digits in italics are those which will change their value when the marked binary number is increased by one.

Marked binary numbers allow the following local tests:

1. A word over the alphabet  $\{0, \mathbf{0}, 1, \mathbf{1}\}$  is a marked binary number, iff the last digit is in italics and only the following adjacent pairs of digits occur:
  - a)  $00, 01, 00, 10, 11, 10$  ( $0, 1$  or  $0$  behind  $0$  or  $1$ ), and
  - b)  $01, 11$  ( $1$  behind  $0$  or  $1$ ).
2. For two right adjusted marked binary numbers  $x$  and  $y$  with  $y$  below  $x$  holds:
 

value  $(x) + 1 = \text{value}(y)$  iff only the following vertically adjacent pairs of digits occur:

  - a)  $0$  or  $0$  below  $0$  or  $1$  and
  - b)  $1$  or  $1$  below  $0$  or  $1$ .

**THEOREM** (Lower bound). *If a language  $L$  is accepted by a linear space bounded alternating Turing machine  $M$ , with at most  $q$  successors for each universal configuration, then  $L$  is polynomial time transformable to the set of satisfiable formulas of the monadic  $\forall\exists^q$  class via length order  $n \log n$ .*

*Proof.* We can assume that  $M$  is a one-tape alternating Turing machine accepting  $L$  in space  $n + 1$  and time  $2^m - 1$  for an  $m = O(n)$ . We describe the case  $q = 2$ . To each input  $w$  of  $M$ , we define (using function symbols  $f_L$  and  $f_R$ ) the functional form  $F(w)$  of a formula  $F'(w)$  of the monadic  $\forall\exists^q$  class, such that:

*Claim A* :  $w \in L$  iff  $F(w)$  is satisfiable.

Before we define the formula  $F(w)$ , we show how to construct a structure  $\alpha$  from an accepting computation tree, such that  $\alpha$  will turn out to be a model of  $F(w)$ .

If  $w$  is accepted by  $M$ , then there is an accepting computation tree  $CT$  with the properties:

- Every node of the tree with depth less than  $2^m - 1$  has exactly two sons, and every node with depth  $2^m - 1$  is a leaf. I.e. it is a complete binary tree.
- If the same configuration appears in several nodes, then the corresponding successor configurations are the same.

Therefore, there are functions  $\text{succ}_L$  and  $\text{succ}_R$ , which define the instantaneous descriptions of the successor configurations in the tree. Furthermore, we can choose  $\text{succ}_L$  and  $\text{succ}_R$  in such a way that they have the following property:

For every pair consisting of a state and a scanned symbol, we consider the possible moves of  $M$  to be an ordered set.

If ID is a universal instantaneous description, then  $\text{succ}_L(\text{ID})$  is the first and  $\text{succ}_R(\text{ID})$  is the second successor of ID.

If ID is existential, then  $\text{succ}_L(\text{ID})$  and  $\text{succ}_R(\text{ID})$  are arbitrary successors of ID (typically  $\text{succ}_L(\text{ID}) = \text{succ}_R(\text{ID})$ ).

If ID is accepting, then  $\text{succ}_L(\text{ID}) = \text{succ}_R(\text{ID}) = \text{ID}$ .

Given functions  $\text{succ}_L$  and  $\text{succ}_R$  and an accepting computation tree  $CT$  of depth  $2^m - 1$  with the above properties, we define now the structure  $\alpha$ , such that:

*Claim B* :  $\alpha$  is a model of  $F(W)$ .

1. The universe  $|\alpha|$  is the set  $\{(t, \text{ID}) \mid t \text{ is an integer with } 0 \leq t \leq 2^m - 1 \text{ and ID is the instantaneous description of a configuration occurring in a branch of the computation tree } CT \text{ of } M \text{ with input } w \text{ at time } t\}$ .
2.  $f_L$  (resp.  $f_R$ ) is interpreted by a function mapping  $(t, \text{ID})$  for  $t < 2^m - 1$  to  $(t+1, \text{succ}_L(\text{ID}))$  (resp.  $(t+1, \text{succ}_R(\text{ID}))$ ) and  $(2^m - 1, \text{ID})$  to  $(0, \text{start ID for input } w)$ .  $\text{succ}_L(\text{ID})$  ( $\text{succ}_R(\text{ID})$ ) is defined to be the instantaneous description of the left (right) successor configuration of ID.
3. In  $(t, \text{ID})$  the monadic predicates are interpreted as follows:

$$\text{Let } t = \sum_{i=0}^{m-1} b_i 2^i \text{ with } b_i \in \{0, 1\},$$

and let  $ID = a_0 \dots a_{k-1} (a_k, q) a_{k+1} \dots a_n$  with  $a_j \in \Sigma$  (alphabet) and  $q \in Q$  (states).

Then the  $O(m)$  monadic predicate symbols  $B_j, M_j, Z, L_{j'}, S_p, T_{\sigma j}$  with  $j \in \{0, \dots, m-1\}$ ,  $j' \in \{0, \dots, n\}$ ,  $p \in Q$  and  $\sigma \in \Sigma$  are interpreted as

$B_j^\alpha ((t, ID))$  is true iff  $b_j = 1$

$M_j^\alpha ((t, ID))$  is true iff  $b_j = 1$  for all  $i < j$ , i.e.  $b_i$  is marked

$Z^\alpha ((t, ID))$  is true iff  $b_i = 0$  for all  $i$

$L_{j'}^\alpha ((t, ID))$  is true iff  $j' = k$

$S_p^\alpha ((t, ID))$  is true iff  $p = q$

$T_{\sigma j'}^\alpha ((t, ID))$  is true iff  $a_{j'} = \sigma$

We now define the formula  $F(w)$  and add some remarks about the intended meaning of its subformulas. This makes it obvious that claim B holds.  $F(w)$  is the formula

$$\forall_y [F_H(y) \wedge F_V(y, f_L(y)) \wedge F_V(y, f_R(y)) \wedge F_0(y) \wedge F_U(y) \wedge F_W(y) \wedge F_L(y, f_L(y)) \wedge F_R(y, f_R(y)) \wedge F_A(y)]$$

where

a)  $F_H(y)$  is  $\bigwedge_{0 \leq j \leq m-2} [M_{j+1}(y) \leftrightarrow (M_j(y) \wedge B_j(y))] \wedge M_0(y)$

The intended meaning is:

All binary numbers are correctly marked. ( $H$  stands for horizontal condition.)

b)  $F_V(y, z)$  is  $\bigwedge_{0 \leq j \leq m-1} [B_j(z) \leftrightarrow (M_j(y) \leftrightarrow \neg B_j(y))]$

The intended meaning is:

The level number below level number  $l$  is  $l + 1$ . ( $V$  stands for vertical condition.)

c)  $F_0(y)$  is  $\bigwedge_{0 \leq j \leq m-1} \neg B_j(y) \leftrightarrow Z(y)$

The intended meaning is:

The configuration at level 0 is distinguished by  $Z$ .

d)  $F_U(y)$  is  $\bigwedge_{0 \leq j \leq n} \bigwedge_{\substack{\sigma, \sigma' \in \Sigma \\ \sigma \neq \sigma'}} \neg (T_{\sigma j}(y) \wedge T_{\sigma' j}(y)) \wedge \bigwedge_{\substack{q, q' \in Q \\ q \neq q'}} \neg (S_q(y) \wedge S_{q'}(y))$

The intended meaning is:

For every configuration there is at most one symbol in every tape cell, and the Turing machine is in at most one state.

e)  $F_W(y)$  is  $Z(y) \rightarrow \left[ \bigwedge_{0 \leq j \leq n} T_{\sigma_j j}(y) \wedge L_0(y) \wedge \bigwedge_{1 \leq j \leq n} \neg L_j(y) \wedge S_{q_0}(y) \right]$

where  $\sigma_0 \sigma_1 \dots \sigma_n$  is  $wb$  (the input  $w$  extended by a blank endmarker  $B$ ), and  $q_0$  is the start state of  $M$ . This is the only subformula of  $F(w)$  depending not only on  $n = |w|$ , but also on  $w$ . Its intended meaning is:

The distinguished configuration at level 0 is the start configuration.

f) Exactly as for nondeterministic Turing machines, it is possible to check if  $ID_1$  is a successor of  $ID_0$  by writing  $ID_1$  below  $ID_0$  and checking all 6-tuples seen through a window of length 3 and height 2 which is pushed over the two words, and by checking that no head of the Turing machine walks in or out of the tape portion represented by the instantaneous descriptions. In this way, we check

- for universal  $ID_0$ , if the left son is labeled with  $\text{succ}_L(ID_0)$  and the right son is labeled with  $\text{succ}_R(ID_0)$ ;
- for existential  $ID_0$ , just if both sons are labeled with any successors;
- for accepting  $ID_0$ , if both sons are labeled with  $ID_0$ .

It is easy to construct a formula  $P_j^L(y, z)$  ( $P_j^R(y, z)$ ) expressing the window condition at the positions  $j, j + 1, j + 2$  for the ID's in node  $y$  and in its left (right) son  $z$ .

$P_j^L(y, z)$  and  $P_j^R(y, z)$  are built from the atomic formulas

$$S_p(y), S_p(z) \quad \text{for } p \in Q$$

and  $L_{j'}(y), L_{j'}(z) \quad \text{for } j' = j, j + 1, j + 2$

and  $T_{\sigma j'}(y), T_{\sigma j'}(z) \quad \text{for } j' = j, j + 1, j + 2 \quad \text{and } \sigma \in \Sigma$ .

The length of  $P_j^L(y, z)$  and  $P_j^R(y, z)$  are bounded by a constant times the maximal length of the atomic formulas.

For  $D = L$  and  $D = R$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} F_D(y, z) \text{ is } Z(z) \vee & \left[ \bigwedge_{0 \leq j \leq n-2} P_j^D(y, z) \right. \\ & \left. \wedge (L_0(z) \rightarrow (L_0(y) \vee L_1(y))) \wedge (L_n(z) \rightarrow (L_{n-1}(y) \vee L_n(y))) \right]. \end{aligned}$$

$$g) \quad F_A(y) \text{ is } [B_{m-1}(y) \wedge M_{m-1}(y)] \rightarrow \bigvee_{q \in Q_a} S_q(y)$$

$Q_a$  is the set of accepting states of  $M$ . The intended meaning of  $F_A(y)$  is:

At the deepest level  $2^m - 1$ , all branches of the computation tree accept.

Now the formula  $F(w)$  is defined, and for  $w \in L$  it should be clear that  $F(w)$  is satisfiable and has the model  $\alpha$ .

We still have to show the other direction of claim A. If  $F(w)$  is satisfiable, then  $w \in L$ . Let  $\alpha$  be a model of  $F(w)$ . In  $\alpha$  the formula

$$\forall y [F_H(y) \wedge F_V(y, f_L(y)) \wedge F_V(y, f_R(y))]$$

is valid. Hence for all  $b \in |\alpha|$  a level number  $l(b)$  is defined by the interpretation of the predicate symbols  $B_j$  in  $\alpha$ . The level numbers have the property

$$l(f_L^\alpha(b)) = l(f_R^\alpha(b)) = l(b) + 1 \bmod 2^m.$$

Therefore (as  $|\alpha|$  is non-empty), there are elements of all levels mod  $2^m$ , in particular, there is an element  $b_0$  of level 0.

Because  $\forall y [F_0(y) \wedge F_w(y)]$  is valid in  $\alpha$ , the truth values of the predicates  $L_j^\alpha$ ,  $S_p^\alpha$  and  $T_{\sigma j}^\alpha$  in  $b_0$  encode the start configuration of the alternating Turing machine  $M$  with input  $w$ .

Let  $|\alpha|'$  be the subset of  $|\alpha|$  which is accessible from  $b_0$  by several applications of  $f_L^\alpha$  and  $f_R^\alpha$ . Then the validity of

$$\forall y [F_U(y) \wedge F_L(y, f_L(y)) \wedge F_R(y, f_R(y))]$$

in  $\alpha$  ensures that the predicates  $L_j^\alpha$ ,  $S_p^\alpha$  and  $T_{\sigma j}^\alpha$  define for all  $b \in |\alpha|'$  a unique instantaneous description  $ID(b)$  such that  $ID(f_L(b))$  is a left successor of  $ID(b)$ , and  $ID(f_R(b))$  is a right successor of  $ID(b)$ .

Finally, the validity of  $\forall y F_A(y)$  guarantees that the computation tree is accepting.

It is easy to check that  $F(w)$  contains only  $O(n)$  atomic formulas, each of length  $O(\log n)$ . Therefore  $|F(w)| = O(n \log n)$ . It is also obvious that the formula  $F'(w)$  and its functional form  $F(w)$  can be computed from  $w$  in logarithmic space by a Turing machine. Note that most parts of  $F(w)$  depend only on  $n = |w|$ .  $\square$

**COROLLARY 1.** *There is a  $c > 1$  such that no deterministic Turing machine accepts the satisfiable formulas of the monadic  $\forall \exists \exists$  class in time  $O(c^{n/\log n})$ .*

*Proof.* By standard diagonalization arguments, there is a language  $L$  in  $DTIME(c_2^n)$  which is not in  $DTIME(c_1^n)$  for  $c_1 < c_2$  [19].

$L$  is then in  $ASPACE(n)$ . Assume Corollary 1 is not true. Then by first transforming  $L$  according to the lower bound theorem to the monadic  $\forall\exists\exists$  class, and then accepting this language fast,  $L$  could be accepted in deterministic time  $c_1^n$ .  $\square$

**COROLLARY 2.** *For every nondeterministic Turing machine  $M$  which accepts the satisfiable formulas of the monadic  $\forall\exists$  class, there exists a constant  $c$ , such that  $M$  uses space  $cn/\log n$  for infinitely many inputs.*

*Proof.* We use the hierarchy result for  $NSPACE$  [35] and the fact that an alternating Turing machine with only one successor configuration for each universal configuration, is a nondeterministic Turing machine.  $\square$

## CONCLUSIONS

Alternating Turing machines are a powerful tool in the few areas where applications have been found so far. They can make connections visible, which are not seen otherwise. It seems impossible to find the lower bound for the Ackermann case of the decision problem, without knowing alternating Turing machines. Even knowing the result, a direct description of the computation of a deterministic exponential time bounded Turing machine  $M$  by a  $\exists^* \forall\exists^*$  formula, without obviously copying the simulation of  $M$  by an alternating Turing machine, seems impossible.

We are used to think that nondeterministic machines correspond to existential quantifiers (e.g. satisfiability in propositional calculus), and that alternating machines correspond to a sequence of alternating quantifiers (e.g. quantified boolean formulas, i.e. the theory of  $\{0, 1\}$  with equality). This paper shows that this needs not always to be the case.

### Examples

1. Not only the satisfiability problem of the  $\exists^*$  class, but also of the  $\forall^*$  class is  $NP$ -complete (not  $co\text{-}NP$ -complete).
2. Adding an existential quantifier to the  $\forall$  prefix class, means moving from a time to a space complexity class.