

### A (Mostly) Informal Introduction to Computation Theory

- Computation theory is a different, more structural and less statistical approach to complexity, emergence, organization.
- Computation theory can be very elegant, rigorous, and mathematical.
- But I'll present little of the formalism. I think the math can obscure some of the basic ideas, which are really quite simple.

We'll begin with some examples in the form of a game:

- I'll give you the specification for a set
- I'll then show you an object, and you need to tell me if it's in the set or not

### Example 1

The set  $\mathcal{L}$  consists of all sequences of 0's and 1's of any length, except for those that have two 00's in a row.

Accept all sequences of 1's and 0's except for those which have two or more 0's in a row.

1110101101  
1101101001  
110110101011

### Example 2:

The set  $\mathcal{L}$  consists of all sequences of correctly balanced parentheses.

(( ))  
(( )) (( )) (( ))  
(( )) (( )) (( )) (( ))

This example is harder.

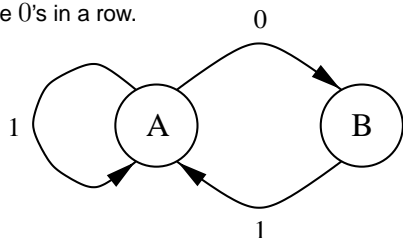
### Example 3:

The set  $\mathcal{L}$  consists of all sequences of 0's and 1's, except for those that contain a **prime** number of consecutive 0's!

1100011000001  
11000011  
111000000000001  
11  $\overbrace{00 \cdots 00}^{1031 \text{ elements}}$  11

### What to learn from the examples

- There are qualitative differences between the procedures you just used to identify the strings on the previous slides.
- These distinctions lie at the heart of computation theory.
- We'll start by focusing on example 1.
- Your task was to accept all sequences of 1's and 0's except for those which have two or more 0's in a row.



- Sequence is OK if there exists a path through this machine
- Example: 1011001 is not in the set.

### Finite State Machines

- The mathematical object on the previous page is known as a **Finite State Machine** or a **Finite Automaton**.
- Note that this two-state machine can correctly identify arbitrarily long sequences.
- The machine is a finite representation of the infinite set  $\mathcal{L}$ .

#### Some terminology and definitions

- A **Language**  $\mathcal{L}$  is a set of words (symbol strings) formed from an **Alphabet**  $\mathcal{A}$ .
- We'll always assume a binary alphabet,  $\mathcal{A} = \{0, 1\}$ .

**Big Idea:** There is a correspondence between the rules needed to generate or describe a language, and the type of machine needed to recognize it.

### Regular Expressions

- A **Regular Expression** is a way of writing down rules that generate a language.
- To generate a regexp, start with the symbols in  $\mathcal{A}$ .
- You can make new expressions via the following operations: grouping, concatenating, logical OR (denoted  $+$ ), and closure  $*$ .
- Closure means 0 or more concatenations.
- Examples:
  1.  $(0 + 1) = \{0, 1\}$
  2.  $(0 + 1)^* = \{\epsilon, 0, 1, 00, 01, 10, 11, 000, 001, \dots\}$
  3.  $(01)^* = \{\epsilon, 01, 0101, 010101, \dots\}$
- ( $\epsilon$  is the empty symbol. )

### Regular Languages and FSM

- A language  $\mathcal{L}$  is a **Regular Language** if and only if it can be generated by a regular expression.
- A puzzle: what is the regular expression that generates the language of example 1?

Two important results:

1. For any regular language, there is an FSM that recognizes it.
2. Any language generated by an FSM is regular.

Notes on terminology:

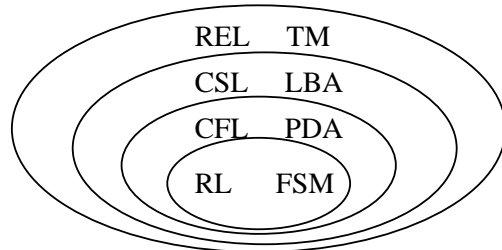
- A regular expression is a **rule**.
- A regular language is a **set**.
- A FSM is a **machine**.

Regular languages  $\leftrightarrow$  FSM's is the first example of the correspondence between sets and the procedures or machines needed to recognize them.



### Chomsky Hierarchy

- The hierarchy continues:



- This hierarchy of languages/machines is known as the **Chomsky Hierarchy**.
- Each level in the hierarchy contains something new, and also contains all the languages at lower levels of the hierarchy.

### Chomsky Hierarchy, terminology

- **CSL = Context Sensitive Language**. These are like CFL's, but allow transitions that depend on the position of the variable in the strings.
- **LBA = Linear Bounded Automata**. These are like PDA's, except:
  1. Controller can write anywhere on work tape.
  2. Work tape restricted to be a linear function of input.
- **Recursively Enumerable Languages** are those languages produced by an unrestricted grammar.
- An **Unrestricted Grammar** is like a CSL, but allows substitutions that shrink the length of the string.
- **TM = Turing Machines**. These are LBA's with linear tape restriction removed. These are the most powerful model of computation. (Example 3 requires a TM.) Much more on these later!

### Chomsky Hierarchy, Conclusions

- Order languages (sets) by the type of machine needed to recognize elements of the language.
- There are qualitative difference between machines at different levels of the hierarchy.
- At lower levels of the hierarchy, there are algorithms for minimizing machines. (I.e., remove duplicate nodes.)
- The minimum machine can be viewed as a representation of the pattern contained in the language. The machine is a description of all the regularities.
- The size of the machine may be viewed as a measure of complexity.
- The machine itself reveals the "architecture" of the information processing.

### Other computation theory notes

- It is possible to refine the Chomsky hierarchy with different sorts of machines. The result is a rich partial ordering of languages.
- To use computation theory as a basis for measuring complexity or structure, I think it's important to start at the bottom of the hierarchy and work your way up.

### Computation Theory References

The basic material presented is quite standard and there are many references on it. Here are a few:

- Hopcroft and Ullman. Introduction to Automata Theory, Languages and Computation. Addison-Wesley. 1979. *A standard reference. Not my favorite, though. It's thorough and clear, but rather dense.*
- Brookshear. Theory of Computation: Formal Languages, Automata, and Complexity. Benjamin/Cummings. 1989. *I like this book. I find it much clearer than Hopcroft and Ullman.*

### Computation theory applied to physical sequences

- Badii and Politi. Complexity: Hierarchical Structures and Scaling in Physics. Cambridge. 1997. *Excellent book, geared toward physics grad students. Closest thing to a textbook that covers topics similar to those I've covered throughout these lectures.*
- Bioinformatics textbooks?