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Invertible substitutions on a three-letter alphabet[☆]

Substitutions inversibles sur un alphabet de trois lettres

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Abstract

We study the structure of invertible substitutions on a three-letter alphabet. We show that there exists a finite set \mathbb{S} of invertible substitutions such that any invertible substitution can be written as $I_w \circ \sigma_1 \circ \sigma_2 \circ \cdots \circ \sigma_k$, where I_w is the inner automorphism associated with w , and $\sigma_j \in \mathbb{S}$ for $1 \leq j \leq k$. As a consequence, M is the matrix of an invertible substitution if and only if it is a finite product of non-negative elementary matrices. **To cite this article:** B. Tan et al., *C. R. Acad. Sci. Paris, Ser. I 336 (2003)*. © 2003 Académie des sciences/Éditions scientifiques et médicales Elsevier SAS. All rights reserved.

Résumé

Nous étudions la structure des substitutions inversibles sur un alphabet à trois lettres. Nous prouvons qu'il existe un ensemble fini \mathbb{S} de substitutions inversibles tel que toute substitution inversible puisse être écrite comme $I_w \circ \sigma_1 \circ \sigma_2 \circ \cdots \circ \sigma_k$, où I_w est l'automorphisme intérieur associé à w et où $\sigma_j \in \mathbb{S}$ pour $1 \leq j \leq k$. Comme conséquence, M est la matrice d'une substitution inversible si et seulement si elle est un produit fini de matrices élémentaires non-négatives. **Pour citer cet article :** B. Tan et al., *C. R. Acad. Sci. Paris, Ser. I 336 (2003)*.

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Version française abrégée

Soit $A = \{a, b, c\}$ un alphabet de trois lettres. On désigne par A^* et Γ_A les monoïde et groupe libres engendrés par A . Une substitution σ sur A (c'est-à-dire un endomorphisme de A^*) est dite inversible si elle se prolonge en un automorphisme de Γ_A . On peut identifier σ au triplet de mots $(\sigma(a), \sigma(b), \sigma(c))$. On pose $\pi_1 = (b, a, c)$, $\pi_2 = (c, b, a)$, $\phi_l = (ba, b, c)$, $\phi_r = (ab, b, c)$. Le monoïde des substitutions inversibles sur A sera noté $\mathcal{IS}(A^*)$.

Si $w \in \Gamma_A$, on désigne par I_w l'automorphisme intérieur de Γ_A associé à w : $I_w(u) := wuw^{-1}$.

La structure du monoïde des substitutions inversibles sur un alphabet de deux lettres est connue : il est engendré par une permutation et deux substitutions de Fibonacci [12]. Quand l'alphabet a plus de deux lettres, la situation

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est beaucoup plus compliquée. Dans [15], il est prouvé que le monoïde $\mathcal{IS}(A^*)$ n'est pas de type fini, mais sa structure restait jusqu'à présent inconnue.

Dans cette Note, nous prouvons les théorèmes suivants.

Théorème 1. *Soit σ est une substitution inversible. Il existe $w \in A^*$ ou $w^{-1} \in A^*$ et $\sigma_1, \dots, \sigma_k \in \{\pi_1, \pi_2, \phi_l, \phi_r\}$ tels que*

- (1) $\sigma = I_w \circ \sigma_1 \circ \dots \circ \sigma_k$.
- (2) *De plus, on peut choisir pour w (ou w^{-1}) un suffixe (ou un préfixe) commun aux mots $\sigma(a)$, $\sigma(b)$ et $\sigma(c)$.*

Théorème 2. *Une matrice 3×3 à coefficients entiers positifs ou nuls est la matrice d'une substitution inversible si et seulement si c'est un produit fini de matrices élémentaires à coefficients positifs.*

1. Introduction

The study of substitutions (the endomorphisms of free monoids of finite type) plays an important role in finite automata, symbolic dynamics, and fractal geometry [1,2,4]. It has various applications to quasicrystals, computational complexity, information theory. In addition, substitution is also a fundamental object studied in combinatorial group theory [6–8].

Plenty of results have been obtained for substitutions over a two-letter alphabet [3,11,13]. The notion of invertible substitution appears in [10]: these are the substitutions which extend as automorphisms of the corresponding free group. Since then, they have been studied by many authors (for instance, see [3,5]). The invertible substitutions over a two-letter alphabet form a monoid whose structure is known [12]: this monoid can be generated by a permutation and two so-called Fibonacci substitutions. This result has had many applications, namely to the study of local isomorphisms of fixed points of substitutions [12,14] and to the study of trace maps [10].

When the alphabet has more than two letters, the situation is much more complicated. In [15], it was shown, by enumerating infinitely many so-called indecomposable substitutions, that the monoid of invertible substitutions over three letters (which will be denoted by $\mathcal{IS}(A^*)$) is not finitely generated. But, up to now the structure of $\mathcal{IS}(A^*)$ remained unknown. Here, we elucidate this structure. We show that if σ is an invertible substitution over a three-letter alphabet, there exists a word w such that $I_w \circ \sigma$ or $I_{w^{-1}} \circ \sigma$ is the composition of finitely many Fibonacci substitutions and permutations (Theorem 3.1). As a consequence, the matrix of an invertible substitution is positively decomposable (Theorem 3.2).

2. Preliminaries and notations

Let us first recall some basic definitions and notations in the theory of substitutions (see [1,8] for a general theory).

Set $A = \{a, b, c\}$ and $\bar{A} = \{a, b, c, a^{-1}, b^{-1}, c^{-1}\}$. Let A^* (resp. Γ_A) be the free monoid (resp. the free group) generated by A (the unit element is the empty word ε). The elements of A^* will be called “positive words” or simply “words” and those of Γ_A “signed” or “mixed” words. The inverse of a positive word will be said to be “negative”.

Let $w \in \Gamma_A$: $w = x_1 \cdots x_k$ with $x_i \in \bar{A}$ ($i = 1, 2, \dots, k$). If $x_i x_{i+1} \neq \varepsilon$ (for $i = 1, \dots, k - 1$), we say that $x_1 \cdots x_k$ is in the reduced form and that the length of w is k . This length will be denoted by $|w|$. Let w, w_j ($j = 1, \dots, k$) $\in \Gamma_A$. If $w = w_1 w_2 \cdots w_k$ satisfies $|w| = |w_1| + \dots + |w_k|$, we say that $w_1 w_2 \cdots w_k$ is a

reduced expression of w . Then, we say that w_1 is a prefix of w and that w_k is a suffix of w , and we write $w_1 \triangleleft w$ and $w_k \triangleright w$.

A substitution σ over A is a morphism σ of A^* . Such a morphism extends in a natural way to an endomorphism of Γ_A ; If this extension is an automorphism of Γ_A , the substitution σ is said to be invertible. The set of substitutions (resp. invertible substitutions) is denoted by $\mathcal{S}(A^*)$ (resp. by $\mathcal{IS}(A^*)$).

We often identify an endomorphism σ of Γ_A with the triple $(\sigma(a), \sigma(b), \sigma(c))$ of (maybe mixed) words. We define the length of σ to be $|\sigma| = |\sigma(a)| + |\sigma(b)| + |\sigma(c)|$.

If U is a subset of a monoid, $\langle U \rangle$ stands for the sub-monoid (not the sub-group, even when dealing inside a group) generated by U . The use of the same notation for different groups and monoids will not generate any confusion.

We shall use the following basic invertible substitutions and automorphisms.

Permutations: Let $\mathcal{P} = \langle \pi_1, \pi_2 \rangle$, where $\pi_1 = (b, a, c)$ and $\pi_2 = (c, b, a)$. Note that \mathcal{P} is a subgroup isomorphic to the symmetric group on A .

Fibonacci type: Set $\phi_l = (ba, b, c), \phi_r = (ab, b, c)$. Set $\mathcal{L} = \{\pi \circ \phi_l \circ \pi'; \pi, \pi' \in \mathcal{P}\}, \mathcal{R} = \{\pi \circ \phi_r \circ \pi'; \pi, \pi' \in \mathcal{P}\}$, and $\mathcal{F} = \mathcal{R} \cup \mathcal{L}$. The elements in \mathcal{F} are called substitutions of Fibonacci type or simply Fibonacci substitutions.

Simple substitutions: Set $S = \langle \pi_1, \pi_2, \phi_l, \phi_r \rangle = \langle \mathcal{P}, \mathcal{L}, \mathcal{R} \rangle \subset \mathcal{IS}(A^*)$. The elements in S will be called simple substitutions.

Involutions: $t_1 = (a^{-1}, b, c), t_2 = (a, b^{-1}, c), t_3 = (a, b, c^{-1}), \mathcal{I} = \{t_i; 1 \leq i \leq 3\}$.

According to Nielsen's theory [8], $\text{Aut}(\Gamma_A) = \langle \mathcal{P}, \mathcal{F}, \mathcal{I} \rangle = \langle \pi_1, \pi_2, \phi_l, \phi_r, t_1 \rangle$.

Definition 2.1. An invertible substitution σ is said to be trivial if $\sigma \in \mathcal{P}$. If there exist non-trivial invertible substitutions σ_1 and σ_2 such that $\sigma = \sigma_1 \circ \sigma_2$, we say that σ is decomposable.

The invertible substitutions which are not in $\mathcal{P} \cup \mathcal{F}$ and not decomposable will be called non-simple indecomposable. As a matter of fact, there exist infinitely many such substitutions, hence $\mathcal{IS}(A^*)$ is not finitely generated [15].

Inner automorphisms: Let $z \in \Gamma_A$. $I_z \in \text{Aut}(\Gamma_A)$ is defined as follows: $I_z(w) = zwz^{-1}$ ($w \in \Gamma_A$). That is $I_z = (zaz^{-1}, zbz^{-1}, zcz^{-1})$. We have $I_z \circ (w_1, w_2, w_3) = (zw_1z^{-1}, zw_2z^{-1}, zw_3z^{-1})$ and $\sigma \circ I_z = I_{\sigma(z)} \circ \sigma$. Notice also that $I_\varepsilon = I$.

If $w \in \Gamma_A$, one denotes by $|w|_a$ (resp. $|w|_b$ or $|w|_c$) the number (the algebraic sum of exponents) of appearances of a (resp. b or c) in w (e.g., $|a^{-1}ba|_a = 0$). Let $\sigma \in \mathcal{S}(A^*)$. One associates a matrix M_σ with σ : $M_\sigma = (|\sigma(\beta)|_\alpha)_{\alpha, \beta \in A}$. Let $\sigma, \tau \in \mathcal{S}(A^*)$. One has $M_{\sigma \circ \tau} = M_\sigma M_\tau$. If $\sigma \in \mathcal{IS}(A^*)$, then $\det(M_\sigma) = \pm 1$.

The above definitions and equalities can be extended to the case when σ and τ are endomorphisms of Γ_A .

3. Main theorems

The following decomposition theorem characterizes the structure of $\mathcal{IS}(A^*)$: any invertible substitution is a simple one up to an inner automorphism.

Theorem 3.1. Let $\sigma \in \mathcal{IS}(A^*)$. There exists $w \in A^*$ or $w^{-1} \in A^*$ such that

- (1) $I_w \circ \sigma$ is a simple substitution. That is, there exist $\sigma_1, \dots, \sigma_k \in \{\pi_1, \pi_2, \phi_l, \phi_r\}$ such that $\sigma = I_{w^{-1}} \circ \sigma_1 \cdots \sigma_k$.

(2) Furthermore, we can take w (or w^{-1}) to be a common suffix (or prefix) of $\sigma(a)$, $\sigma(b)$, and $\sigma(c)$.

Remark 3.1. We point out that the decomposition theorem for the case of two-letter alphabet [12] is an easy consequence of Theorem 3.1.

As consequence we have:

Theorem 3.2. A 3×3 -matrix with non-negative integer coefficients is the matrix of some invertible substitution if and only if it is a finite product of non-negative elementary matrices.

4. Proofs

The symbol “+” (resp. “-”) will represent various non-empty positive words (resp. non-empty negative words). We also use the symbols like “+ - +” to represent various types of mixed words. As an example, $u = + - +$ means that $u = u_1 u_2^{-1} u_3$, where $u_j \in A^*$ and $u_1 u_2^{-1} u_3$ is a reduced expression. The meanings of “ $u = + \dots$ ”, “ $u = \dots -$ ”, “ $u = + \dots -$ ” etc. are now clear.

The following lemma is a simple version of Nielsen’s cancellation procedure that we use in the proofs. For the details, we refer the reader to [8,9].

Lemma 4.1. Let $\sigma = (w_1, w_2, w_3) \in \text{Aut}(\Gamma_A)$. There exist $k \geq 0$ and $\tau_1, \dots, \tau_k \in \{\pi_1, \pi_2, \phi_l, \phi_r, \iota_1\}$ such that, if one sets $\sigma_0 = \sigma$ and $\sigma_i = \sigma_{i-1} \circ \tau_i$ (for $i = 1, \dots, k$), one has $|\sigma_i| \leq |\sigma_{i-1}|$ ($i = 1, \dots, k$) and σ_k is the identity.

Definition 4.1. We say that a non-trivial substitution $\sigma = (w_1, w_2, w_3)$ is mixed if it satisfies $w_i w_k^{-1} w_j = + - +$ for all (i, j, k) such that $i \neq k$ and $j \neq k$.

Lemma 4.2 [15]. Any mixed substitution is non-invertible.

Corollary 4.1. Let $\sigma = (w_1, w_2, w_3)$ be an invertible substitution, suppose that for all $i \neq j$, w_i is neither a prefix nor a suffix of w_j . There exist $\pi \in \mathcal{P}$ and non-empty words u, v, x, y such that either $\sigma \circ \pi = (ux, uv, yv)$ or $\sigma \circ \pi = (uxv, uv, y)$.

Lemma 4.3. Let $u \in \Gamma_A$ and $x, y \in A^*$ non-empty. Suppose that $ux = yu$ and $|ux| = |u| + |x|$. Then we have either $u \in A^*$ or $u^{-1} \in A^*$.

When $w = \alpha_1 \alpha_2 \dots \alpha_{|w|} \in \Gamma_A$ ($\alpha_i \in \bar{A}$), we shall use the following notations:

$$h_i(w) = \alpha_i \quad (i = 1, 2, \dots, |w|), \quad h_\infty(w) = h_{|w|}(w).$$

The following lemmas study the “cancellation properties” between special words.

Lemma 4.4. Let u, v, x and y be non-empty words satisfying

$$h_1(u) \neq h_1(y) \quad \text{and} \quad h_\infty(x) \neq h_\infty(v); \tag{4.1}$$

$$x \text{ (resp. } v) \text{ is not a prefix of } v \text{ (resp. } x); \tag{4.2}$$

$$y \text{ (resp. } u) \text{ is not a suffix of } u \text{ (resp. } y). \tag{4.3}$$

Set $w_1 = ux, w_2 = uv, w_3 = yv$ and consider the following mixed word:

$$w = w_{i_0}^\varepsilon w_{i_1}^{-\varepsilon} \dots w_{i_k}^{(-1)^k \varepsilon}, \tag{4.4}$$

where $k \geq 0$, $\varepsilon \in \{+1, -1\}$, $i_m \in \{1, 2, 3\}$ ($m = 0, 1, \dots, k$) and $i_m \neq i_{m+1}$ ($m = 0, 1, \dots, k - 1$). Then we have

$$h_1(w) = h_1(w_{i_0}^\varepsilon), \quad h_\infty(w) = h_\infty(w_{i_k}^{(-1)^k \varepsilon}), \tag{4.5}$$

$$|w| \geq 2. \tag{4.6}$$

The above lemma will be used to study substitutions of the form (ux, uv, yv) . The following lemma is the corresponding version for (uxv, uv, y) .

Lemma 4.5. *Let u, v, x and y be non-empty words such that $h_1(u) \neq h_1(y)$, $h_\infty(v) \neq h_\infty(y)$, v is not a prefix of xv and u is not a suffix of ux .*

Set $w_1 = uxv$, $w_2 = uv$, $w_3 = y$ and consider the mixed words of the form (4.4). Then

- (i) (4.5) holds;
- (ii) If $|y| > 1$, (4.6) holds;
- (iii) If $|y| = 1$, (4.6) holds except when $k = 0$, and $w_{i_0} = w_3$.

Lemma 4.6. *Under the notations and conditions of Lemma 4.4 (resp. Lemma 4.5), the substitution $\sigma = (w_1, w_2, w_3)$ is not invertible.*

Proposition 4.1. *Suppose that $\sigma = (w_1, w_2, w_3)$ is a non-simple indecomposable substitution. Then we have either $h_1(w_1) = h_1(w_2) = h_1(w_3)$ or $h_\infty(w_1) = h_\infty(w_2) = h_\infty(w_3)$. In other words, w_1, w_2 , and w_3 must have a common non-empty prefix or suffix.*

Lemma 4.7. *Let $z, u, v, x, y \in A^*$. Assume that u, v, x, y satisfy (4.1), (4.2) and (4.3). Set $w_1 = ux$, $w_2 = uv$, $w_3 = yv$, then both substitutions (zw_1, zw_2, zw_3) and (w_1z, w_2z, w_3z) are not invertible.*

Remark 4.1. When $x, y, u, v, w_1, w_2, w_3$ are given as in Lemma 4.5, conclusions similar to those of the above lemma hold.

Lemma 4.8. *Suppose that $\sigma = (zu_1, zu_2, zu_3)$ (resp. $\sigma = (u_1z, u_2z, u_3z)$) is a non-simple indecomposable substitution, where z is a non-empty word. Suppose that u_1, u_2, u_3 have no common prefix and no common suffix. Then there exist a non-trivial invertible substitution σ' , a permutation $\pi \in \mathcal{P}$ and a Fibonacci $f \in \mathcal{F}$, such that $I_{z^{-1}} \circ \sigma = \sigma' \circ f \circ \pi$ (resp. $I_z \circ \sigma = \sigma' \circ f \circ \pi$).*

Lemma 4.9. *Let σ be a non-simple indecomposable substitution. Then there exists $z \in \Gamma_A$ such that $I_z \circ \sigma$ is decomposable. That is, there exist non-trivial invertible substitutions σ_1 and σ_2 such that $I_z \circ \sigma = \sigma_1 \circ \sigma_2$. Furthermore, $|\sigma_i| < |\sigma|$ ($i = 1, 2$).*

Now we are ready to prove our theorems.

Proof of Theorem 3.1. First we prove Theorem 3.1(1). Let σ be an invertible substitution. Then there exist $k \geq 1$ and indecomposable substitutions $\sigma_1, \dots, \sigma_k$ such that $\sigma = \sigma_1 \circ \dots \circ \sigma_k$.

If some σ_i is non-simple, then by Lemma 4.9, there exist $z \in \Gamma_A$, invertible substitutions σ'_i and σ''_i such that $\sigma_i = I_{z^{-1}} \circ \sigma'_i \circ \sigma''_i$ and that

$$|\sigma'_i| < |\sigma_i|, \quad |\sigma''_i| < |\sigma_i|. \tag{4.7}$$

Then we repeat such decomposition for σ'_i (resp. σ''_i) and so on. By (4.7), such decomposition will terminate after a finite of steps. Finally every factor will be a simple substitution. Hence we can write $\sigma = I_{w_1} \circ \tau_1 \circ I_{w_2} \circ \tau_2 \circ$

$\cdots \circ I_{w_n} \circ \tau_n$, where τ_i ($i = 1, \dots, n$) is a simple substitution and $w_i \in \Gamma_A$ (put $w_i = \varepsilon$ if necessary). Thus we may write $\sigma = I_w \circ \tau_1 \circ \tau_2 \circ \cdots \circ \tau_n$, where $w \in \Gamma_A$.

Let $\tau = \tau_1 \circ \tau_2 \circ \cdots \circ \tau_n$. It is clear that τ is a simple substitution.

Finally, since $I_{w^{-1}} \circ \sigma = \tau$, Lemma 4.3 implies that $w \in A^*$ or $w^{-1} \in A^*$. Theorem 3.1(1) is thus proved.

For Theorem 3.1(2), denoting $|\sigma|_{\min} = \min\{|\sigma(a)|, |\sigma(b)|, |\sigma(c)|\}$, we only need to prove the following equivalent statement.

Claim. We can choose w in (1) such that $|w| \leq |\sigma|_{\min}$.

Let us prove the claim by induction on $k = |\sigma|$.

If $k \leq 4$ the claim can be verified simply by enumerating all cases.

Suppose that the claim is true for $k \leq n$ and that $|\sigma| = n + 1$. By the conclusion (1) of the theorem, there exists $w \in A^*$ or $w^{-1} \in A^*$ such that $I_w \circ \sigma$ is simple. To be specific, we can suppose that $w^{-1} \in A^*$, $\sigma = (w_1, w_2, w_3)$ and that $|w_1| = |\sigma|_{\min}$.

If $|w| \leq |\sigma|_{\min}$, nothing needs to be proven. Suppose $|w| > |\sigma|_{\min} = |w_1|$. It is easy to see that w_1 is a common prefix of w_1, w_2, w_3 . Let then $w_2 = w_1 w'_2$. We have $(w_1, w_2, w_3) = (w_1, w'_2, w_2) \circ (a, ab, c)$, that is, $\sigma = \sigma' \circ f$, where $\sigma' = (w_1, w'_2, w_2)$ is obviously an invertible substitution and $f = (a, ab, c)$ is a Fibonacci substitution.

It is trivial that $|\sigma'| < |\sigma| = n + 1$ and that $|\sigma'|_{\min} \leq |\sigma|_{\min}$, hence by the hypothesis of induction we have the following fact:

There exists $z \in A^*$ (or $z^{-1} \in A^*$) such that $|z| \leq |\sigma'|_{\min}$ and that $g := I_z \circ \sigma'$ is simple.

Then it follows that $I_z \circ \sigma = I_z \circ \sigma' \circ f = g \circ f$.

Since $|z| \leq |\sigma'|_{\min} \leq |\sigma|_{\min}$ and $g \circ f$ is (by definition) simple, the conclusion is proved.

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