NON-COMMUTATIVE GRÖBNER BASES
FOR COMMUTATIVE ALGEBRAS

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Abstract. An ideal $I$ in the free associative algebra $k\langle X_1, \ldots, X_n \rangle$ over a field $k$ is shown to have a finite Gröbner basis if the algebra defined by $I$ is commutative; in characteristic 0 and generic coordinates the Gröbner basis may even be constructed by lifting a commutative Gröbner basis and adding commutators.

1. Introduction

Let $k$ be a field and let $k[x] = k[x_1, \ldots, x_n]$ be the polynomial ring in $n$ variables and $k\langle X \rangle = k\langle X_1, \ldots, X_n \rangle$ the free associative algebra in $n$ variables. Consider the natural map $\gamma : k\langle X \rangle \to k[x]$ taking $X_i$ to $x_i$. It is sometimes useful to regard a commutative algebra $k[x]/I$ through its non-commutative presentation $k[x]/I \cong k\langle X \rangle/J$, where $J = \gamma^{-1}(I)$. This is especially true in the construction of free resolutions as in [An]. Non-commutative presentations have been exploited in [AR] and [PRS] to study homology of coordinate rings of Grassmannians and toric varieties. These applications all make use of Gröbner bases for $J$ (see [Mo] for non-commutative Gröbner bases). In this note we give an explicit description (Theorem 2.1) of the minimal Gröbner bases for $J$ with respect to monomial orders on $k\langle X \rangle$ that are lexicographic extensions of monomial orders on $k[x]$.

Non-commutative Gröbner bases are usually infinite; for example, if $n = 3$ and $I = (x_1x_2x_3)$ then $\gamma^{-1}(I)$ does not have a finite Gröbner basis for any monomial order on $k[x]$. (There are only two ways of choosing leading terms for the three commutators, and both cases are easy to analyze by hand.) However, after a linear change of variables the ideal becomes $I' = (x_1(x_1 + x_2)(x_1 + x_3))$, and we shall see in Theorem 2.1 that $X_1(x_1 + x_2)(x_1 + x_3)$ and the three commutators $X_iX_j - X_jX_i$ are a Gröbner basis for $\gamma^{-1}(I')$ with respect to a suitable order. This situation is rather general: Theorems 2.1 and 3.1 imply the following result:

**Corollary 1.1.** Let $k$ be an infinite field and $I \subset k[x]$ be an ideal. After a general linear change of variables, the ideal $\gamma^{-1}(I)$ in $k\langle X \rangle$ has a finite Gröbner basis. In characteristic 0, if $I$ is homogeneous, such a basis can be found with degree at most $\max\{2, \text{regularity}(I)\}$.

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Thus, for example, \(X.J\) is a monomial ideal in \(k(X)\). The non-commutative initial ideal \(\gamma(J)\) is defined as the set of all monomials \(u \in k(X)\) such that neither \(u.m_{x_i} \) nor \(u.m_{x_i} \) lies in \(L\). For instance, if \(L = \langle x_1x_2x_3, x_2^d \rangle\) then \(\mathcal{U}_d(x_1x_2x_3) = \{ x_2^j \mid j < d \}\).

**Theorem 2.1.** The non-commutative initial ideal \(\gamma(J)\) is minimally generated by the set \(\{ X_iX_j \mid j < i \}\) together with the set

\[ \{ \delta(u \cdot m) \mid m \text{ is a generator of } in_<(I) \text{ and } u \in \mathcal{U}_{in_<(J)}(m) \}. \]

In particular, a minimal \(\gamma\)-Gröbner basis for \(J\) consists of \(\{ X_iX_j - X_jX_i : j < i \}\) together with the elements \(\delta(u \cdot f)\) for each polynomial \(f\) in a minimal \(\gamma\)-Gröbner basis for \(I\) and each monomial \(u \in \mathcal{U}_{in_<(I)}(in_<(f))\).

**Proof.** We first argue that a non-commutative monomial \(M = X_iX_j\) lies in \(in_<(J)\) if and only if its commutative image \(\gamma(M)\) is in \(in_<(I)\) or \(i < j < i + 1\) for some \(j\). Indeed, if \(i_j > i_{j+1}\) then \(M \in in_<(J)\) because \(X_jX_i - X_iX_j \in J\) has initial term \(X_jX_i\) with \(s > t\). If on the contrary \(i_1 < \cdots < i_r\) but \(\gamma(M) \in in_<(I)\), then there exists \(f \in I\) with \(in_<(f) = \gamma(M)\). The non-commutative polynomial \(F = \delta(f)\) satisfies \(in_<(F) = M\). The opposite implication follows because \(\gamma\) induces an isomorphism \(k[x]/I \cong k(X)/\gamma^{-1}(I)\).
Now let \( m' = u \cdot m \) where \( m = x_{i_1} \cdots x_{i_r} \) is a minimal generator of \( \text{in}_{\prec}(I) \) with \( i_1 \leq \cdots \leq i_r \). We must show that \( \delta(u \cdot m) \) is a minimal generator of \( \text{in}_{\prec}(J) \) if and only if \( u \in \mathcal{U}_{\text{in}_{\prec}(I)}(m) \).

For the “only if” direction, suppose that \( \delta(u \cdot m) \) is a minimal generator of \( \text{in}_{\prec}(J) \). Suppose that \( u \) contains the variable \( x_j \). We must have \( j > i_1 \), since else, taking \( j \) minimal, we would have \( \delta(u \cdot m) = X_j \cdot \delta(\frac{m}{x_j}) \). Similarly \( j < i_r \). Thus \( u \in k[x_{i_1}, \ldots, x_{i_r-1}] \). This implies \( \delta(u \cdot m) = X_{i_1} \cdot \delta(\frac{m}{x_{i_1}}) = \delta(u \cdot \frac{m}{x_{i_1}}) \cdot X_{i_1} \).

Therefore neither \( \delta(u \cdot \frac{m}{x_{i_1}}) \) nor \( \delta(u \cdot \frac{m}{x_{i_r}}) \) lies in \( \text{in}_{\prec}(J) \), and hence neither \( \frac{m}{x_{i_1}} \) nor \( \frac{m}{x_{i_r}} \) lies in \( \text{in}_{\prec}(I) \).

For the “if” direction we reverse the last few implications. If \( u \in \mathcal{U}_{\text{in}_{\prec}(I)}(m) \) then neither \( \delta(u \cdot \frac{m}{x_{i_1}}) \) nor \( \delta(u \cdot \frac{m}{x_{i_r}}) \) lies in \( \text{in}_{\prec}(J) \), and therefore \( \delta(u \cdot m) \) is a minimal generator of \( \text{in}_{\prec}(J) \).

\[ \square \]

3. Finiteness and lifting of non-commutative Gröbner bases

We maintain the notation described above. Recall that for a prime number \( p \) the Gauss order on the natural numbers is described by

\[ s \leq_p t \quad \text{if} \quad \left( \frac{t}{s} \right) \not\equiv 0 \pmod{p}. \]

We write \( \leq_0 = \leq \) for the usual order on the natural numbers. A monomial ideal \( L \) is called \( p\)-Borel-fixed if it satisfies the following condition: For each monomial generator \( m \) of \( L \), if \( m \) is divisible by \( x_j \) but no higher power of \( x_j \), then \( x_i/x_j \) divides some monomial in \( L \) for all \( i < j \) and \( s \leq_p t \).

**Theorem 3.1.** With notation as in Section 2:

(a) If \( \text{in}_{\prec}(I) \) is \( 0\)-Borel fixed, then a minimal \( \succeq \)-Gröbner basis of \( J \) is obtained by applying \( \delta \) to a minimal \( \succeq \)-Gröbner basis of \( I \) and adding commutators.

(b) If \( \text{in}_{\prec}(I) \) is \( p\)-Borel-fixed for any \( p \), then \( J \) has a finite \( \succeq \)-Gröbner basis.

**Proof.** Suppose that the monomial ideal \( L := \text{in}_{\prec}(I) \) is \( p\)-Borel-fixed for some \( p \). Let \( m = x_{i_1} \cdots x_{i_r} \) be any generator of \( L \), where \( i_1 \leq \cdots \leq i_r \), and let \( x_j^{l_j} \) be the highest power of \( x_j \) dividing \( m \). Since \( t \leq_p t \) we have \( x_j^{l_j} = x_i^{p \cdot u_j} \in L \) for each \( l < i_r \).

This implies \( x_i^{p \cdot u_j} \in L \) for \( l < i_r \), and hence every monomial \( u \in \mathcal{U}_L(m) \) satisfies \( \text{deg}_{x_i}(u) < t \) for \( i_1 < l < i_r \). We conclude that \( \mathcal{U}_L(m) \) is a finite set. If \( p = 0 \) then \( \mathcal{U}_L(m) \) consists of 1 alone, since \( x_i^{p \cdot u_j} \in L \) for all \( l < i_r \). Theorem 3.1 now follows from Theorem 2.1.

**Proof of Corollary 1.1.** We apply Theorem 3.1 together with the following results, due to Galligo, Bayer-Stillman and Pardue, which can be found in [Ei, Section 15.9]: if the field \( k \) is infinite, then after a generic change of variables, the initial ideal of \( I \) with respect to any order \( \prec \) on \( k[x] \) is fixed under the Borel group of upper triangular matrices. This implies that \( \text{in}_{\prec}(I) \) is \( p\)-Borel-fixed in characteristic \( p \geq 0 \) in the sense above. If the characteristic of \( k \) is 0 and \( I \) is homogeneous then, taking the reverse lexicographic order in generic coordinates, we get a Gröbner basis whose maximal degree equals the regularity of \( I \).

We call the monomial ideal \( L \) squeezed if \( \mathcal{U}_L(m) = \{1\} \) for all generators \( m \) of \( L \) or if, equivalently, \( m = x_{i_1} \cdots x_{i_r} \in L \) and \( i_1 \leq \cdots \leq i_r \) imply \( x_i^{p \cdot u_j} \in L \) or \( x_i^{p \cdot u_j} \in L \) for every index \( l \) with \( i_1 < l < i_r \). Thus Theorem 2.1 implies that a minimal \( \succeq \)-Gröbner basis of \( I \) lifts to a Gröbner basis of \( J \) if and only if the
initial ideal in\( _\prec (I) \) is squeezed. Monomial ideals that are 0-Borel-fixed, and more generally stable ideals (in the sense of [EK]), are squeezed. Squeezed ideals appear naturally in algebraic combinatorics:

**Proposition 3.2.** A square-free monomial ideal \( L \) is squeezed if and only if the simplicial complex associated with \( L \) is the complex of chains in a poset.

**Proof.** This follows from Lemma 3.1 in [PRS].

### 4. Examples in characteristic \( p \)

Over a finite field Corollary 1.1 fails even for very simple ideals:

**Example 4.1.** Let \( k \) be a finite field and \( n = 3 \). If \( I \) is the principal ideal generated by the product of all linear forms in \( k[x_1, x_2, x_3] \), then \( \gamma^{-1}(I) \) has no finite Gröbner basis, even after a linear change of variables.

**Proof.** The ideal \( I \) is invariant under all linear changes of variables. The \( \prec \)-Gröbner basis for \( J \) is computed by Theorem 2.1, and is infinite. That no other monomial order on \( k\langle X \rangle \) yields a finite Gröbner basis can be shown by direct computation as in the example in the second paragraph of the introduction.

Sometimes in characteristic \( p > 0 \) no Gröbner basis for a commutative algebra can be lifted to a non-commutative Gröbner basis, even after a change of variables:

**Example 4.2.** Let \( k \) be an infinite field of characteristic \( p > 0 \), and consider the Frobenius power

\[
L := \left( (x_1, x_2, x_3)^3 \right)^{\lfloor \frac{p}{3} \rfloor} \subset k[x_1, x_2, x_3]
\]

of the cube of the maximal ideal in 3 variables. No minimal Gröbner basis of \( L \) lifts to a Gröbner basis of \( \gamma^{-1}(L) \), and this is true even after any linear change of variables.

**Proof.** The ideal \( L \) is invariant under linear changes of variable, so it suffices to consider \( L \) itself. Since \( L \) is a monomial ideal, it is its own initial ideal, so by Corollary 3.2 it suffices to show that \( L \) is not squeezed, that is, that neither \( x_1^{p-1}x_2^{p+1}x_3^{p} \) nor \( x_1^{p}x_2^{p+1}x_3^{p-1} \) is in \( L \). This is obvious, since the power of each variable occurring in a generator of \( L \) is divisible by \( p \) and has total degree \( 3p \).

### References


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