DECOMPOSITION OF A GROUP WITH A SINGLE DEFINING RELATION INTO A FREE PRODUCT[1]

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Let G be a group with generators a_ν, $\nu=1, \cdots, n$. An application of any automorphism A of the free group on the a_ν or, equivalently, of a sequence of T-transformations (defined below) maps G upon an isomorphic group G'. If G is defined by a set of prescribed relations for the a_ν, G' can be defined by transcribing the original relations in terms of the $A^{-1}a_\nu$. Even if G is defined by a single relation, it is not known how far the set of all groups with a single defining relation and isomorphic to a given one is determined by the transformations A. However, Grushko's theorem [2][2] implies that at least the decomposibility of G into a free product of two of its proper subgroups can be made obvious by applying a properly chosen A. We shall show that for a G with a single defining relation a result of J. H. C. Whitehead [1] provides a constructive method for finding A and some simple tests for the free indecomposability of G.

DEFINITIONS AND REMARKS. (1) *T-transformations*. By a T-transformation on the generators $a_1, \cdots, a_n$ of the free group $F=F(a_1, \cdots, a_n)$ we mean a mapping of the form:

$$Ta_k = a_k \text{ for some fixed } k, \qquad 1 \leqq k \leqq n,$$

$$Ta_i = a_i \text{ or } a_i a_k^{\epsilon} \text{ or } a_k^{-\epsilon} a_i \text{ or } a_k^{-\epsilon} a_i a_k^{\epsilon}, \qquad i \neq k,\ 1 \leqq i \leqq n.$$

The Greek superscripts denote either 1 or -1. The symbol a_k is referred to as the *distinguished* symbol for the given T-transformation. Whenever necessary, we shall indicate the distinguished symbol by writing T_{a_k} rather than T.

(2) *The symbol TW*. The symbol TW ($W=W(a_1, \cdots, a_n)$, T denotes a T-transformation on $a_1, \cdots, a_n$) denotes the word obtained by reducing $W(Ta_1, \cdots, Ta_n)$ (i.e., by deleting all $a_\nu a_\nu^{-1}$, $a_\nu^{-1}a_\nu$ in it).

(3) *The symbol $L(W)$*. If W is a reduced word, then $L(W)$ denotes the number of symbols in W. We refer to this number as the *length* of W.

(4) *T-reductions and level transformations*. A T-transformation, as

Presented to the Society, April 24, 1954; received by the editors June 9, 1954.

[1] This paper is part of a thesis presented to the Graduate School of Arts and Science of New York University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The author is indebted to Professor Wilhelm Magnus for his encouragement and valuable advice.

[2] Numbers in brackets refer to the references at the end of the paper.

applied to a (reduced) word W, is called:

$$\text{a } T\text{-reduction if } L(TW) < L(W)$$

and

$$\text{a level transformation if } L(TW) = L(W).$$

(5) *Internal and external T-transformations.* Let W be a reduced word, $W=W(a_1, \cdots, a_n)$. Regard it as a word in the symbols $a_1, \cdots, a_n, a$. If $T=T_{a_i}$, then T is called an *internal* T-transformation with respect to W. If $T=T_a$, then T is called an *external* T-transformation with respect to W.

(6) *Active and inactive symbols; right, left, and transform symbols. Active and inactive words.* Consider a T-transformation on the symbols $a_1, \cdots, a_n$. We call a_i *inactive* if $Ta_i=a_i$. We call a_i *active* if $Ta_i\neq a_i$. If a_i^ρ is an active symbol and $Ta_i^\rho=a_i^\rho a_k^\epsilon$ $(T=T_{a_k})$, we call a_i^ρ a *right* symbol. If $Ta_i^\rho=a_k^{-\epsilon}a_i^\rho$, we call a_i^ρ a *left* symbol. If $Ta_i=a_k^{-\epsilon}a_ia_k^\epsilon$, we call a_i a *transform* (symbol). A word W is said to be *active* (*inactive*) T if one (none) of its symbols is active T.

(7) *Conjugate T-transformations.* Consider $W=W(a_1, \cdots, a_n)$ and let $a\neq a_i$, $1\leqq i\leqq n$. Let T_a be a definite T-transformation on the symbols $a_1, \cdots, a_n, a$. We shall call an internal T-transformation T_{a_k} on the symbols $a_1, \cdots, a_n$ *conjugate* to T_a if, for $a_i\neq a_k$,

$$T_a a_i^\rho = a_i^\rho a^\epsilon \text{ implies } T_{a_k} a_i^\rho = a_i^\rho a_k^\epsilon,$$

$$T_a a_i = a^{-\epsilon} a_i a^\epsilon \text{ implies } T_{a_k} a_i = a_k^{-\epsilon} a_i a_k^\epsilon,$$

$$T_a a_i = a_i \text{ implies } T_{a_k} a_i = a_i.$$

(8) *Disjoint words.* Two words are said to be *disjoint* if the symbols which occur in one of them do not occur in the other (a and a^{-1} are *not* disjoint).

(9) *Minimal words.* $W=W(a_1, \cdots, a_n)$ is said to be *minimal* (T) or, simply, *minimal*, if $L(TW)\geqq L(W)$ for every T on $a_1, \cdots, a_n$. If W is minimal with respect to all T-transformations on $a_1, \cdots, a_n$, then it is also minimal with respect to all T-transformations on a set of symbols containing the symbols $a_1, \cdots, a_n$.

(10) *Use of the term "involves."* If it is impossible to eliminate a symbol a appearing in a word W by writing W cyclically and deleting all pairs $(a_\nu a_\nu^{-1})^{\pm 1}$, we say that W *involves* a.

LEMMA. *Let $W=W(a_1, \cdots, a_n)$ be a (reduced) minimal word in $a_1, \cdots, a_n$. Assume that W is nontrivial, i.e., $L(W)>1$.* Let $a\neq a_i$,

$i=1, \cdots, n$. Let $T_a a_i \neq a_i$ for at least one a_i in W. Then $L(T_a W) - L(W) \geqq 2$.

Obviously the to-be-proved increase in length of W under T is due to "trapped" a-symbols.

PROOF. Note that if $L(W)>1$ and W is minimal, it must contain at least two symbols of a kind, if any. For, let us assume that W contains a single symbol a_1 and $W= \cdots a_1 a_j \cdots, j\neq 1$. Then the T-transformation: $a_1 \to a_1 a_j^{-1}$, $a_i \to a_i$, $i \neq 1$, decreases $L(W)$ by 1, which contradicts the assumed minimality of W.

Now consider a definite T_a such that $L(T_a W)=L(W)$. It is clear that $T_a W = W$. Also, W must be a product of the form:

$$W = \prod [(i\text{'s or } 1) \text{ an } r \ (t\text{'s or } 1) \text{ an } l \ (i\text{'s or } 1)], \tag{1}$$

where $i=$inactive symbol, $r=$right symbol, $l=$left symbol, $t=$transform. Let a_1 be the first right symbol in the above product. It is not difficult to see that the conjugate T_{a_1} of T_a (see definition (7)) applied to W would result in the elimination of all a_1 symbols from W without insertion of any other symbols. But this would decrease $L(W)$ which is impossible in view of the assumed minimality of W.

We know by now that $L(T_a W) - L(W) \geqq 1$. The "trapping" of an a-symbol in $T_a W$ may be effected by a right a_i, a left a_i, or a transform a_i. We know that W must contain at least two such a_i symbols. We claim that each of these a_i symbols "traps" an a-symbol. We assume that this statement is false and proceed to deduce a contradiction.

We observe that every active (under T_a) symbol a_q in W which does not "trap" an a-symbol must be contained in a "block" of the form:

$$[\text{right symbol (transforms or 1) left symbol}].$$

As for the "trapping" symbol a_i^ρ we assume, at first, that it is a right or a left symbol under T_a. Then, $W = W_1 a_i^\rho W_2$, where $W_i = 1$ or a word of the form (1) above and not both $W_i = 1$. As before, T_{a_i}, assumed to be conjugate to T_a, applied to W will eliminate all a_i symbols in W other than a_i^ρ and will not introduce any new symbols in place of the eliminated symbols. This would decrease $L(W)$ by at least 1, which is impossible.

There remains the possibility that the trapping symbol a_i^ρ is a transform under T_a. Then

$$W = W_1[a_i^\rho \text{ (transforms or 1) left symbol}]\, W_2 = W_1 A W_2 \tag{2}$$

or

(3) $W = W_1$ [right symbol (transforms or 1) $a_i^\rho]W_2 = W_1\bar{A}W_2$.

We again emphasize the fact that not both words W_1 and W_2 can be 1, for the left (right) symbol in (2) ((3)) must have a counterpart. In (2), $T_{a_i}^\nu$, where T_{a_i} is assumed to be conjugate to T_a and the value of $\nu=\pm 1$ is determined by the equation: $T_{a_i}^\nu l = a_i^{-\rho} l$, l=left symbol, eliminates an a_i^ρ in A when applied to $W=W_1AW_2$. Also, $T_{a_i}^\nu W_j = W_j$, $j=1, 2$. Similarly, in (3), $T_{a_i}^\nu$, where the value of ν is determined by the equation: $T_{a_i}^\nu r = r a_i^{-\rho}$, r=right symbol, eliminates an a_i^ρ in $\bar{A}$ when applied to $W=W_1\bar{A}W_2$. Also, $T_{a_i}^\nu W_j = W_j$, $j=1, 2$. Thus, in both cases $L(W)$ is decreased which is impossible in view of the assumed minimality of W.

We now state a fundamental theorem of Whitehead (Theorem 3 in [1]): "Any two equivalent minimal sets (T) are interchangeable by level T-transformations."

It follows immediately from this result that if W_1 and W_2 are two minimal forms of a word $W=W(a_1, \cdots, a_n)$ obtained from W by means of T-transformations, then $L(W_1)=L(W_2)$. This fact and our lemma permit us to prove the following

COROLLARY. *Let $W=W(a_1, \cdots, a_n)$. Let W_1 and W_2 be two minimal forms of W. Then W_1 and W_2 contain the same number of distinct symbols.*

PROOF. Note that if T is a level transformation with respect to a minimal word $V=V(a_1, \cdots, a_n)$ which is active T, then:

(a): TV is minimal (by Whitehead's theorem above);

(b): T is internal with respect to V (if V is trivial, i.e. $L(V)=1$, this statement is obvious; if V is nontrivial the statement follows from our lemma);

(c): The number of distinct symbols in V equals the number of distinct symbols in TV (since T is both level and internal).

Our corollary is trivial if $L(W_1)=L(W_2)=1$. We may therefore assume that $L(W_1)=L(W_2)>1$. By Whitehead's theorem there exists a (finite) chain of level T-transformations $T_1, \cdots, T_k$ such that $T_1 \cdots T_k W_1 = W_2$, where $T_{i+1} \cdots T_k W_1$ may be supposed active T_i. The desired conclusion now follows immediately by induction on k using the observations (a), (b), (c) in the beginning of the proof.

It follows from Grushko's theorem (cf. [2]) that: A group with $n \geqq 2$ generators and a single defining relation involving the n generators can be decomposed into a free product if and only if it is possible to reduce the number of distinct generators in the left side of the defining relation by means of a suitable free automorphism on the generators.

This result and the corollary to our lemma permit us to prove

THEOREM 1. *Let $G=G[a_1, \cdots, a_n; R(a_1, \cdots, a_n)=1]$, where all a_i are involved in R. Let H be the free product of an infinite cyclic group $\{a\}$ and a nontrivial group B with generators $b_\nu \neq a$. Then $G \simeq H$ if and only if any minimal form of R contains at most $n-1$ distinct a_i's.*

PROOF. The sufficiency part of the proof is obvious. To prove the necessity of our condition we assume that $G \simeq H$ and that some minimal form of R contains n distinct symbols. By the corollary to our lemma every minimal form of R contains n distinct symbols. On the other hand, it follows from Grushko's theorem that it is possible, by applying a suitable free automorphism to the generators of G, to find a representation of G such that the word on the left side of the defining relation associated with this representation contains at most $n-1$ symbols. Minimizing this word we obtain a minimal form of R containing at most $n-1$ symbols, which contradicts the corollary to our lemma.

REMARK. If the number of generators of G exceeds the number of generators involved in R, G is obviously representable as a free product of the required form.

It is clear that if the left side of the defining relation associated with a certain set of generators of G is minimal, then G cannot be represented as a free product. We now state and prove criteria which ensure the minimality of a word $W(a_1, \cdots, a_n)$ and so the indecomposability into a free product of $G=G[a_1, \cdots, a_n; W(a_1, \cdots, a_n) =1]$.

THEOREM 2. *For a product of disjoint minimal words (see definitions (8) and (9)) to be minimal it is necessary and sufficient that each factor W_p of the product be nontrivial (i.e., $L(W_p)>1$ for each W_p).*

PROOF. Let $W=W_1 \cdots W_m$, W_p minimal and nontrivial, W_p, W_q disjoint for $p\neq q$, $1\leqq p, q \leqq m$. Consider any T_a, a^ρ in W_i. Then $L(T_aW_i)-L(W_i)\geqq 0$. Also, if $j\neq i$, (i) $L(T_aW_j)-L(W_j)=0$ if W_j does not contain symbols active T_a, (ii) $L(T_aW_j)-L(W_j)\geqq 2$ if W_j contains symbols active T_a. In case (i) no deletions can take place at the junction(s) between $T_aW_j=W_j$ and its neighbor(s) T_aW_k and its length remains fixed. In case (ii) the length of W_j increases as a result of the application of T_a by at least 2 and its losses, resulting from deletions at the junction(s) between T_aW_j and its neighbor(s), cannot exceed 1 if $j=1$ or m, and they cannot exceed 2 if $1<j<m$. Now, $W=AW_iB$, a^ρ in W_i, A and B not both 1. Assume $A\neq 1$. If all the words in A are inactive with respect to T_a, then $L(T_aA)-L(A)=0$, and no deletions take place between A and T_aW_i. On the other hand,

if at least one word in A is active T_a, then $L(T_aA)-L(A)\geqq 2$. Similarly for B. Now consider $T_aA\cdot T_aW_i\cdot T_aB$. If no deletions take place at either junction, $L(T_aW)-L(W)\geqq 0$. If deletion takes place at the first junction, say, then the last word in A must be active T_a and $L(T_aA)-L(A)\geqq 2$. It is by now obvious that in any case $L(T_aW)-L(W)\geqq 0$, q.e.d.

As an immediate application of Theorem 2 we have:

The fundamental group of a closed surface cannot be represented as a free product.

THEOREM 3. *Let all exponents in $W(a_1, \cdots, a_n)$ be $\geqq 2$. Then W is minimal.*

PROOF. Apply a definite $T=T_{a_1}$, say, to W, which we can write as

$$W = W_1(a_2, \cdots, a_n)a_1^{k_1}W_2(a_2, \cdots, a_n)a_1^{k_2}\cdots$$

$$\cdot W_p(a_2, \cdots, a_n)a_1^{k_p}W_{p+1}(a_2, \cdots, a_n)$$

(where W_1 or W_{p+1} or both may be 1). Then

$$T_{a_1}W = (T_{a_1}W_1)a_1^{k_1}(T_{a_1}W_2)a_1^{k_2}\cdots(T_{a_1}W_p)a_1^{k_p}(T_{a_1}W_{p+1}).$$

Observe that deletions, if any, can take place only at *one* end of $T_{a_1}W_j$ (cf. the definition of a T-transformation). This fact and our lemma yield immediately the desired conclusion.

It is obvious that the theorem holds in the following slightly more general form:

Let all exponents associated with a generator a_i in W be of the same sign and in absolute value $\geqq 2$. Then W is minimal.

THEOREM 4. *Let $W=V^m$, V minimal. Then W is minimal.*

PROOF. The result is trivial for $m=1$. Let $m=2$. If T is a definite T-transformation, then $T(V^2)=(TV)(TV)$ and deletion can take place between the two bracketed words if and only if TV is a transform, in which case $L(TV)-L(V)\geqq 1$. Consequently $L[(TV)^2]-L(V^2)\geqq 0$, i.e., V^2 is minimal. It follows by induction on k that V^{2k}, $k=$a positive integer, is minimal. Using the reasoning employed in proving the case $m=2$, we can prove our result for V^{2k+1}, and so for V^m.

The following theorem can be easily proved:

THEOREM 5. *Let $K=K[a_1, a_2; R(a_1, a_2)=1]$ and let $G=G[a, b; b^n=1]$.*

Then, for $G \simeq K$ it is necessary and sufficient that R be cyclically equivalent to $A^n(a_1, a_2)$ where $A(a_1, a_2)$ is a primitive element in the free group $F(a_1, a_2)$.

References

1. J. H. C. Whitehead, *On equivalent sets of elements in a free group*, Ann. of Math. vol. 37 (1936).

2. A. G. Kurosh, *Theory of groups*, Gostekhizdat, 1944 (in Russian).

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A THEOREM ON COMMUTATIVE POWER ASSOCIATIVE LOOP ALGEBRAS[1]

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Let L be a loop, written multiplicatively, and F an arbitrary field. Define multiplication in the vector space A, of all formal sums of a finite number of elements in L with coefficients in F, by the use of both distributive laws and the definition of multiplication in L. The resulting *loop algebra* $A(L)$ over F is a linear nonassociative algebra (associative, if and only if L is a group).

An algebra A is said to be power associative if the subalgebra $F[x]$ generated by an element x is an associative algebra for every x of A.

Theorem. *Let $A(L)$ be a loop algebra over a field of characteristic not 2. A necessary and sufficient condition that $A(L)$ be a commutative, power associative algebra is that L be a commutative group.*

Proof. Assume that $A(L)$ is a commutative, power associative algebra. Clearly L must be commutative and $x^2 \cdot x^2 = (x^2 \cdot x) \cdot x$ for all x of $A(L)$. Under the hypothesis that the characteristic of F is not 2, a linearization[2] of this power identity yields

Presented to the Society, December 28, 1953; received by the editors June 2, 1954.

[1] The preparation of this paper was sponsored in part by the Office of Naval Research.

[2] See A. A. Albert, *On the power associativity of rings*, Summa Brasiliensis Mathematicae vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 21–32.