



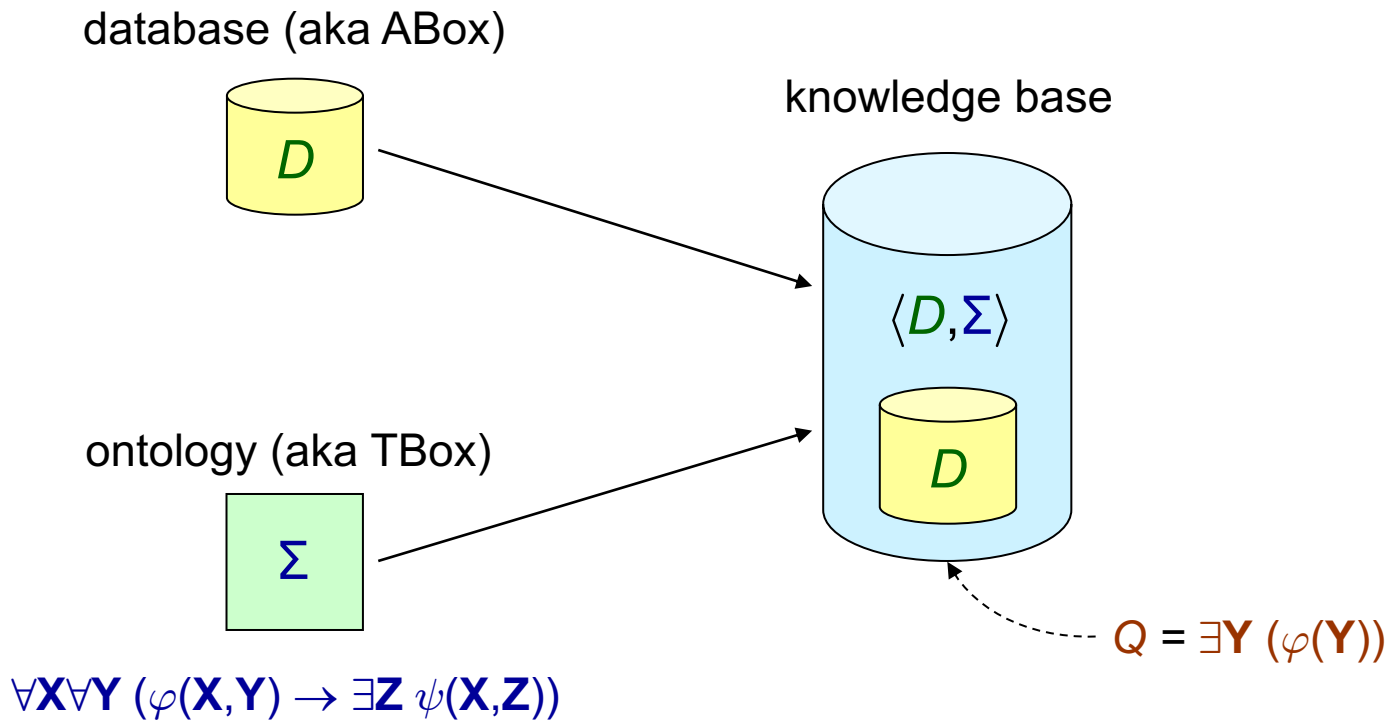
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Existential Rules – Lecture 6

Adapted from slides by Andreas Pieris and Michaël Thomazo
Summer Term 2023

BCQ-Answering: Our Main Decision Problem



decide whether $D \wedge \Sigma \models Q$

Query Answering via the Chase

Theorem: $D \wedge \Sigma \models Q$ iff $U \models Q$, where U is a universal model of $D \wedge \Sigma$

+

Theorem: $\text{chase}(D, \Sigma)$ is a universal model of $D \wedge \Sigma$

=

Corollary: $D \wedge \Sigma \models Q$ iff $\text{chase}(D, \Sigma) \models Q$



Undecidability of BCQ-Answering

Theorem: BCQ-Answering is **undecidable**

Proof : By simulating a deterministic Turing machine with an empty tape

...syntactic restrictions are needed!!!



Termination of the Chase

- Drop the existential quantification
 - We obtain the class of **full** existential rules
 - Very close to Datalog

- Drop the recursive definitions
 - We obtain the class of **acyclic** existential rules
 - A.k.a. non-recursive existential rules



Termination of the Chase

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Acyclic Existential Rules

- The definition of a predicate P does not depend on P - formal definition via the predicate graph
- The **predicate graph** of a set Σ of existential rules, denoted $PG(\Sigma)$, is the graph (V,E) , where
 - $V = \{P \mid P \in \text{sch}(\Sigma)\}$
 - $E = \{(P,R) \mid \forall X \forall Y (\dots \wedge P(X,Y) \wedge \dots \rightarrow \exists Z (\dots \wedge R(X,Z) \wedge \dots)) \in \Sigma\}$

$$\forall X (Person(X) \rightarrow \exists Y (hasParent(X,Y) \wedge Person(Y)))$$



Acyclic Existential Rules

- The definition of a predicate P does not depend on P - formal definition via the predicate graph
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 - $V = \{P \mid P \in \text{sch}(\Sigma)\}$
 - $E = \{(P,R) \mid \forall X \forall Y (\dots \wedge P(X,Y) \wedge \dots \rightarrow \exists Z (\dots \wedge R(X,Z) \wedge \dots)) \in \Sigma\}$
- A set Σ of existential rules is **acyclic** if the graph $PG(\Sigma)$ is acyclic
- We denote **ACYCLIC** the class of acyclic existential rules



The Naïve Algorithm for **ACYCLIC**

- The naïve algorithm shows that BCQ-Answering under **ACYCLIC** is
 - in **PTIME** w.r.t. the data complexity
 - in **2EXPTIME** w.r.t. the combined complexity

...can we do better than the naïve algorithm?

YES!!!



Combined Complexity of **ACYCLIC**

Theorem: BCQ-Answering under **ACYCLIC** is in **NEXPTIME** w.r.t. the combined complexity

Proof: We first need to establish the so-called **small witness property**



Combined Complexity of **ACYCLIC**

Theorem: BCQ-Answering under **ACYCLIC** is in **NEXPTIME** w.r.t. the combined complexity

Proof: Guess-and-check, using the so-called **small witness property**

We cannot do better than the previous algorithm:

Theorem: BCQ-Answering under **ACYCLIC** is **NEXPTIME-hard** w.r.t. the combined complexity

Proof : By reduction from a tiling problem, a classical NEXPTIME-hard problem



Tiling Problem

Tiling:

Input: $T = \{t_0, \dots, t_k\}$, a set of square tile types,

$H, V \subseteq T \times T$, the horizontal and vertical compatibility relations

n , an integer in unary

Question: decide whether a $2^n \times 2^n$ tiling exists, that is,

	1	2	3	...	2^n
1					
2					
3					
⋮					
2^n					



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$(1, 1) = t_0$

	1	2	3	...	2^n
1	t_0				
2					
3					
\vdots					
2^n					



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	1	2	3	...	2^n
1	t_0				
2		t	t'		
3					
⋮					
2^n					

$(t, t') \in H$



Tiling Problem

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Input: $T = \{t_0, \dots, t_k\}$, a set of square tile types,

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$(1, 1) = t_0$

	1	2	3	...	2^n
1	t_0				
2		t	t'		
3		t''			
\vdots					
2^n					

$(t, t') \in H$

$(t, t'') \in V$



Combined Complexity of **ACYCLIC**

We cannot do better than the previous algorithm

Theorem: BCQ-Answering under **ACYCLIC** is **NEXPTIME-hard w.r.t. the combined complexity**

Proof : By reduction from a tiling problem, a classical NEXPTIME-hard problem



NEXPTIME-hardness of **ACYCLIC**

- The database stores the horizontal and the vertical relations

$$D = \{H(t,t') \mid (t,t') \in H\} \cup \{V(t,t') \mid (t,t') \in V\}$$

- We use $\Sigma \in \text{ACYCLIC}$ to inductively construct $2^k \times 2^k$ tilings from $2^{k-1} \times 2^{k-1}$ tilings
- The key observation is that

X_1	X_2	Y_1	Y_2
X_3	X_4	Y_3	Y_4
Z_1	Z_2	W_1	W_2
Z_3	Z_4	W_3	W_4

is a $2^k \times 2^k$ tiling

iff

X_1	X_2	X_2	Y_1	Y_1	Y_2
X_3	X_4	X_4	Y_3	Y_3	Y_4
X_3	X_4	X_4	Y_3	Y_3	Y_4
Z_1	Z_2	Z_2	W_1	W_1	W_2
Z_1	Z_2	Z_2	W_1	W_1	W_2
Z_3	Z_4	Z_4	W_3	W_3	W_4

are $2^{k-1} \times 2^{k-1}$ tilings



NEXPTIME-hardness of **ACYCLIC**

The $2^k \times 2^k$ tiling

X_1	X_2
X_3	X_4

 is represented by an atom of the form

ID of the tiling

$T_k(S, O, X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4)$

origin of the tiling, i.e., the upper-left tile



NEXPTIME-hardness of ACYCLIC

Base step - construct 2×2 tilings of the form

X_1	X_2
X_3	X_4

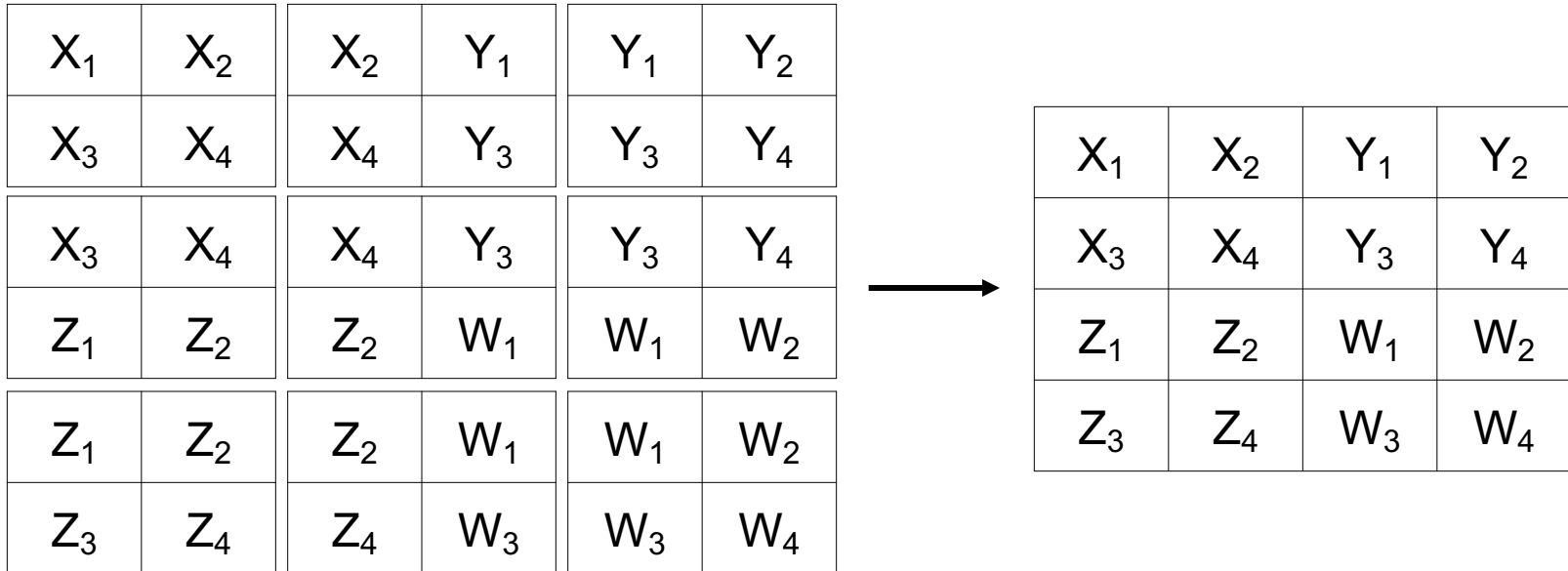
$$\forall X_1 \forall X_2 \forall X_3 \forall X_4 (H(X_1, X_2) \wedge H(X_3, X_4) \wedge V(X_1, X_3) \wedge V(X_2, X_4) \rightarrow$$

$$\exists Y T_1(Y, X_1, X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4))$$



NEXPTIME-hardness of ACYCLIC

Inductive step - construct $2^k \times 2^k$ tilings from $2^{k-1} \times 2^{k-1}$ tilings



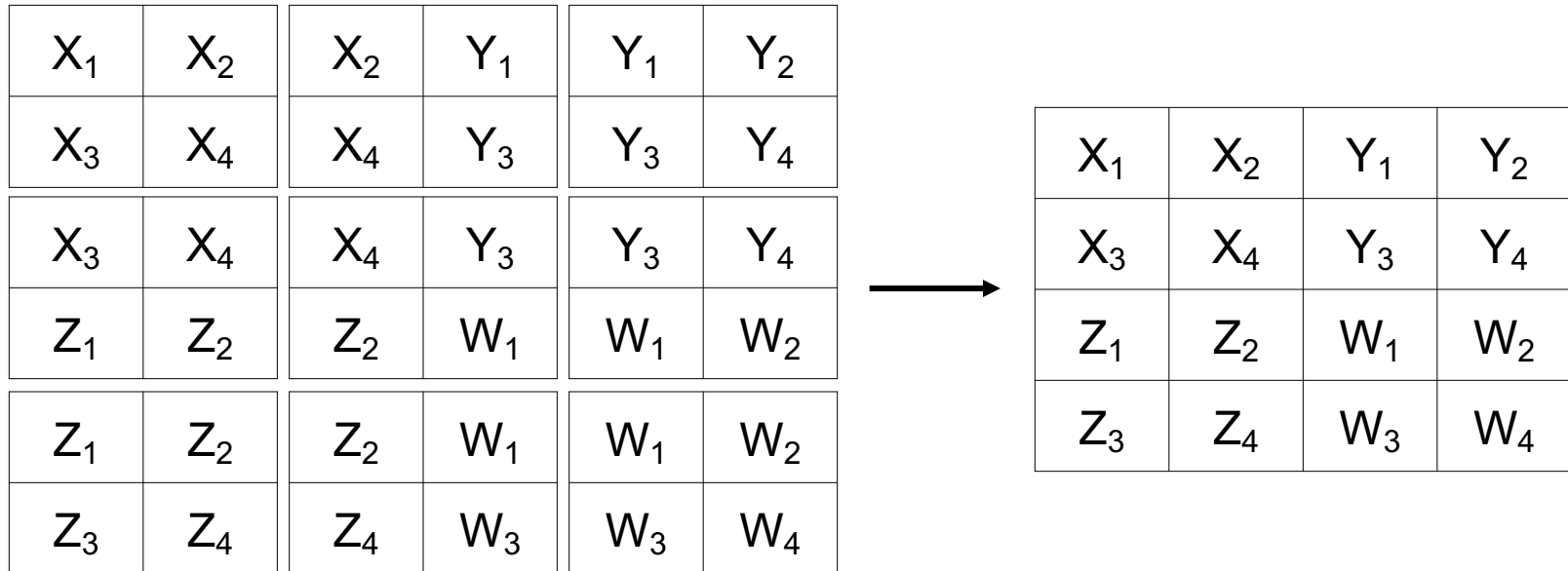
$$\begin{aligned}
 & T_{k-1}(S_1, O_1, X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4) \wedge T_{k-1}(S_2, O_2, X_2, Y_1, X_4, Y_3) \wedge T_{k-1}(S_3, O_3, Y_1, Y_2, Y_3, Y_4) \wedge \\
 & T_{k-1}(S_4, O_4, X_3, X_4, Z_1, Z_2) \wedge T_{k-1}(S_5, O_5, X_4, Y_3, Z_2, W_1) \wedge T_{k-1}(S_6, O_6, Y_3, Y_4, W_1, W_2) \wedge \\
 & T_{k-1}(S_7, O_7, Z_1, Z_2, Z_3, Z_4) \wedge T_{k-1}(S_8, O_8, Z_2, W_1, Z_4, W_3) \wedge T_{k-1}(S_9, O_9, W_1, W_2, W_3, W_4) \rightarrow \\
 & \exists U \exists T_k(U, O_1, S_1, S_3, S_7, S_9)
 \end{aligned}$$

(\forall -quantifiers are omitted)



NEXPTIME-hardness of ACYCLIC

Inductive step - construct $2^k \times 2^k$ tilings from $2^{k-1} \times 2^{k-1}$ tilings



$$\forall S \forall O \forall X_1 \forall X_2 \forall X_3 \forall X_4 (T_n(S, O, X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4) \rightarrow T(S, O))$$

Concluding NEXPTIME-hardness of ACYCLIC

- Several rules but polynomially many \Rightarrow feasible in **polynomial time**
- $D \wedge \Sigma \models \exists X T(X, t_0)$ iff a $2^n \times 2^n$ tiling exists
- Can be formally shown **by induction** on n

Corollary: BCQ-Answering under **ACYCLIC** is **NEXPTIME-complete w.r.t. the combined complexity**



Termination of the Chase

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Sum Up

Data Complexity		
FULL	PTIME-c	Naïve algorithm
		Reduction from Monotone Circuit Value problem
ACYCLIC	in LOGSPACE	covered later...

Combined Complexity		
FULL	EXPTIME-c	Naïve algorithm
		Simulation of a deterministic exponential time TM
ACYCLIC	NEXPTIME-c	Small witness property
		Reduction from Tiling problem



Recall our Example



Σ

$\forall X (Person(X) \rightarrow \exists Y (hasParent(X, Y) \wedge Person(Y)))$

$chase(D, \Sigma) = D \cup \{hasParent(Alice, z_1), Person(z_1),$

$hasParent(z_1, z_2), Person(z_2),$

$hasParent(z_2, z_3), Person(z_3), \dots$

The above rule can be written as the DL-Lite axiom

$Person \sqsubseteq \exists hasParent. Person$



Recall our Example



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Existential quantification & recursive definitions
are key features for modelling ontologies



Challenge

We need classes of existential rules such that

- Existential quantification and recursive definition **coexist**
⇒ the chase may be infinite
- BCQ-Answering is decidable, and tractable w.r.t. the data complexity



Tame the infinite chase:

Deal with infinite structures without explicitly building them



Linear Existential Rules

- A **linear existential rule** is an existential rule of the form

$$\forall X \forall Y (P(X, Y) \rightarrow \exists Z \psi(X, Z))$$

where $P(X, Y)$ is an atom

- We denote **LINEAR** the class of linear existential rules
- A **local property** - we can inspect one rule at a time
 - \Rightarrow given Σ , we can decide in linear time whether $\Sigma \in \text{LINEAR}$
 - $\Rightarrow \Sigma_1 \in \text{LINEAR}, \Sigma_2 \in \text{LINEAR} \Rightarrow (\Sigma_1 \cup \Sigma_2) \in \text{LINEAR}$
- Strictly more expressive than DL-Lite



LINEAR vs. DL-Lite

Existential rules and DLs rely on first-order semantics - comparable formalisms

DL-Lite Axioms	Existential Rules
$A \sqsubseteq B$	$\forall X (A(X) \rightarrow B(X))$
$A \sqsubseteq \exists R$	$\forall X (A(X) \rightarrow \exists Y R(X,Y))$
$\exists R \sqsubseteq A$	$\forall X \forall Y (R(X,Y) \rightarrow A(X))$
$\exists R \sqsubseteq \exists P$	$\forall X \forall Y (R(X,Y) \rightarrow \exists Z P(X,Z))$
$A \sqsubseteq \exists R.B$	$\forall X (A(X) \rightarrow \exists Y (R(X,Y) \wedge B(Y)))$
$R \sqsubseteq P$	$\forall X \forall Y (R(X,Y) \rightarrow P(X,Y))$
$A \sqsubseteq \neg B$	$\forall X (A(X) \wedge B(X) \rightarrow \perp)$



Linear Existential Rules

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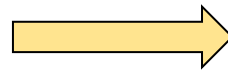
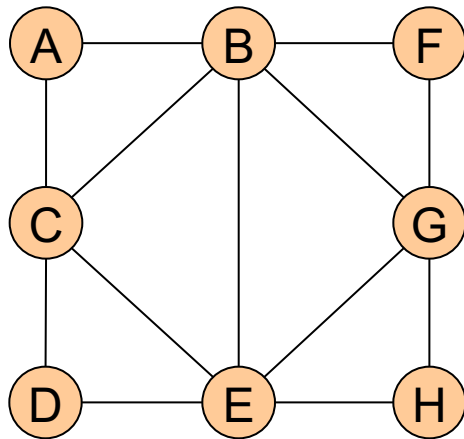
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 - $\Rightarrow \Sigma_1 \in \text{LINEAR}, \Sigma_2 \in \text{LINEAR} \Rightarrow (\Sigma_1 \cup \Sigma_2) \in \text{LINEAR}$
- Strictly more expressive than DL-Lite
- Infinite chase - $\forall X (Person(X) \rightarrow \exists Y (hasParent(X, Y) \wedge Person(Y)))$
- But, BCQ-Answering is decidable - **the chase has finite treewidth**



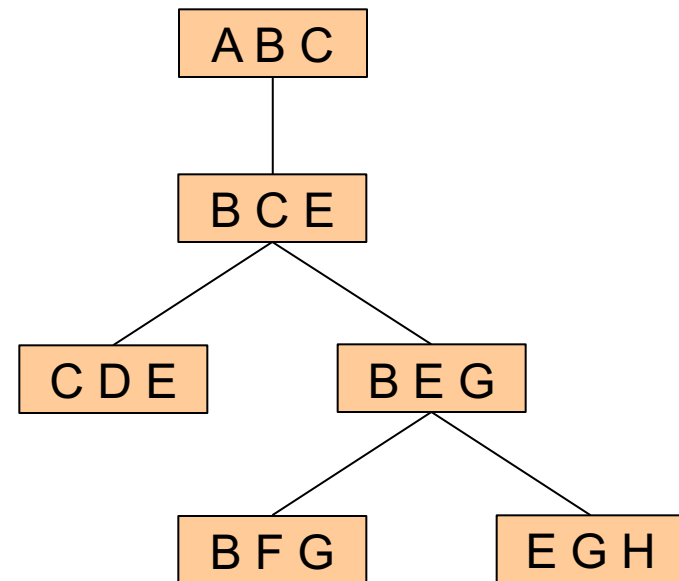
Treewidth of a Graph

Tree decomposition - a mapping of a graph into a tree

Graph $G = (V, E)$



Tree decomposition $T = (V', E')$ of G

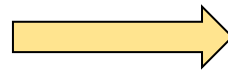
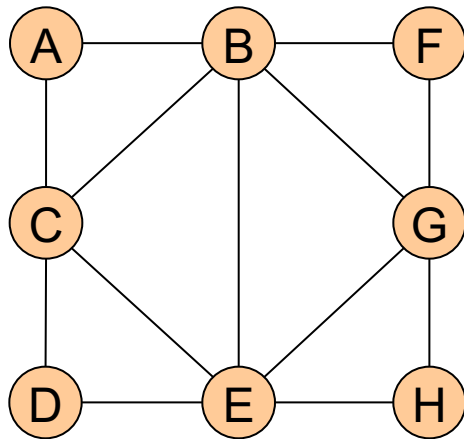


1. For each $v \in V$, there exists $u \in V'$ such that $v \in u$
2. For each $(v,w) \in E$, there exists $u \in V'$ such that $\{v,w\} \subseteq u$
3. For each $v \in V$, $\{u \mid v \in u\}$ induces a connected subtree

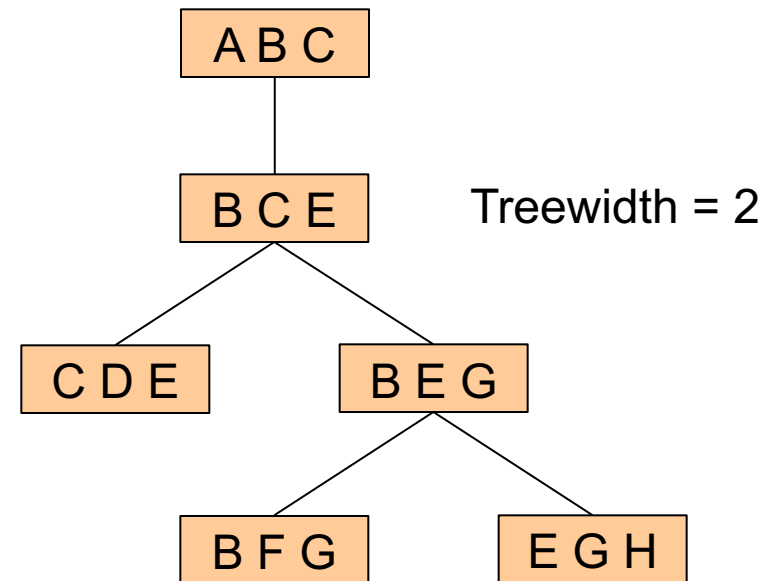
Treewidth of a Graph

Tree decomposition - a mapping of a graph into a tree

Graph $G = (V, E)$



Tree decomposition $T = (V', E')$ of G



- The **width** of T is defined as $\max_{u \in V'} \{|u|\} - 1$
- The **treewidth** of G , denoted $tw(G)$, is the minimum width over all tree decompositions of G

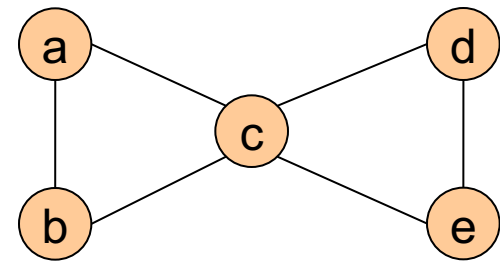
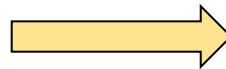
Treewidth of an Instance

- An instance J can be represented as a graph \mathcal{G}_J - Gaifman graph

$R(a,b,c)$

$S(c,d)$

$T(c,d,e)$



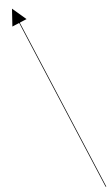
- The treewidth of J , denoted $\text{tw}(J)$, is defined as $\text{tw}(\mathcal{G}_J)$
- Thus, we can talk about the treewidth of the chase
- Lemma: For a database D , and a set $\Sigma \in \text{LINEAR}$, $\text{tw}(\text{chase}(D, \Sigma))$ is finite

Decidability of **LINEAR**

Theorem: BCQ-Answering under **LINEAR** is decidable

Proof: The ingredients of the proof are the following:

1. The chase under **LINEAR** has finite treewidth
2. The **tree model property** implies decidability of satisfiability - classical result



A fragment \mathcal{L} of first-order logic enjoys the tree model property if: for every $\varphi \in \mathcal{L}$,
if φ is satisfiable, then there exists $J \in \text{models}(\varphi)$ such that $\text{tw}(J)$ is finite



Decidability of **LINEAR**

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Proof: The ingredients of the proof are the following:

1. The chase under **LINEAR** has finite treewidth
 2. The **tree model property** implies decidability of satisfiability - classical result
- Consider a database D , a set $\Sigma \in \mathbf{LINEAR}$, and a BCQ Q
 - Clearly, $D \wedge \Sigma \models Q$ iff $D \wedge \Sigma \wedge \neg Q \models \perp$
 - Thus, it suffices to show that, if $D \wedge \Sigma \wedge \neg Q$ is satisfiable, then it has a model of finite treewidth
 - By universality, $D \wedge \Sigma \wedge \neg Q$ is satisfiable implies $\text{chase}(D, \Sigma) \wedge \neg Q$ is satisfiable
 - Therefore, $D \wedge \Sigma \wedge \neg Q$ is satisfiable implies $\text{chase}(D, \Sigma)$ is a model of $D \wedge \Sigma \wedge \neg Q$
 - The claim follows since $\text{tw}(\text{chase}(D, \Sigma))$ is finite



Decidability of **LINEAR**

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Proof: The ingredients of the proof are the following:

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...but, what about the complexity of the problem?

we need new techniques

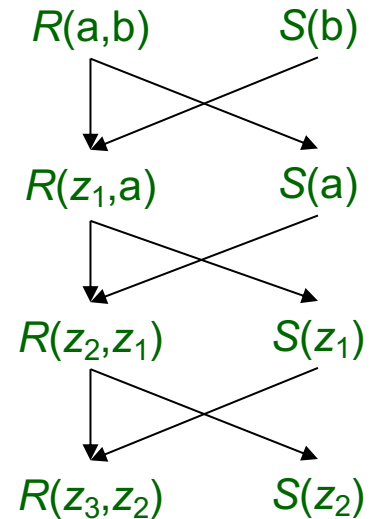


Chase Graph

The chase can be naturally seen as a graph - **chase graph**

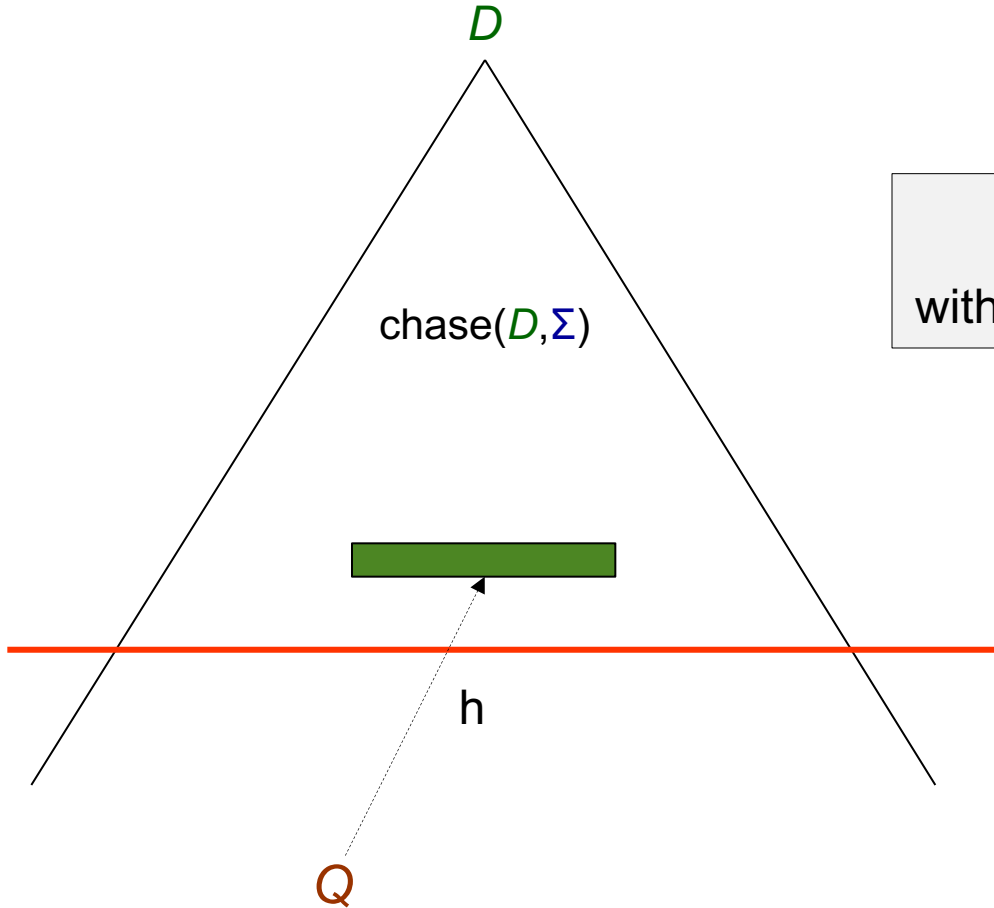
$$D = \{R(a,b), S(b)\}$$

$$\Sigma = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \forall X \forall Y (R(X,Y) \wedge S(Y) \rightarrow \exists Z R(Z,X)) \\ \forall X \forall Y (R(X,Y) \rightarrow S(X)) \end{array} \right.$$



For **LINEAR**, the chase graph is a **forest**

Bounded Derivation-Depth Property



For **LINEAR**, $k = |Q| \cdot m$
 with $m = |\text{sch}(\Sigma)| \cdot (2 \cdot \text{maxarity})^{\text{maxarity}}$

depth k
 k does not depend on D

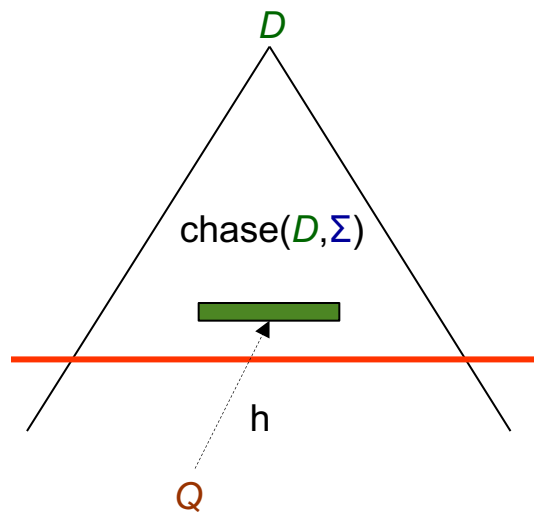
chase graph up to depth k

$$\text{chase}(D, \Sigma) \models Q \Rightarrow \text{chase}^k(D, \Sigma) \models Q$$



The Blocking Algorithm for **LINEAR**

- The blocking algorithm shows that BCQ-Answering under **LINEAR** is
 - in **PTIME** w.r.t. the data complexity
 - in **2EXPTIME** w.r.t. the combined complexity



...we can do better than the blocking algorithm

$$k = |Q| \cdot |\text{sch}(\Sigma)| \cdot (2 \cdot \text{maxarity})^{\text{maxarity}}$$

Data Complexity of **LINEAR**

Theorem: BCQ-Answering under **LINEAR** is in **LOGSPACE** w.r.t. the data complexity

Proof: Not so easy! Different techniques must be applied. This will be the subject of the second part of our course.



Combined Complexity of **LINEAR**

Theorem: BCQ-Answering under **LINEAR** is in **NEXPTIME** w.r.t. the combined complexity

Proof: We first need to establish the so-called **small witness property**



Small Witness Property for **LINEAR**

Lemma: $\text{chase}(D, \Sigma) \models Q \Rightarrow$ there exists a chase sequence

$$D \langle \sigma_1, h_1 \rangle J_1 \langle \sigma_2, h_2 \rangle J_2 \langle \sigma_3, h_3 \rangle J_3 \dots \langle \sigma_n, h_n \rangle J_n$$

of D w.r.t. Σ with

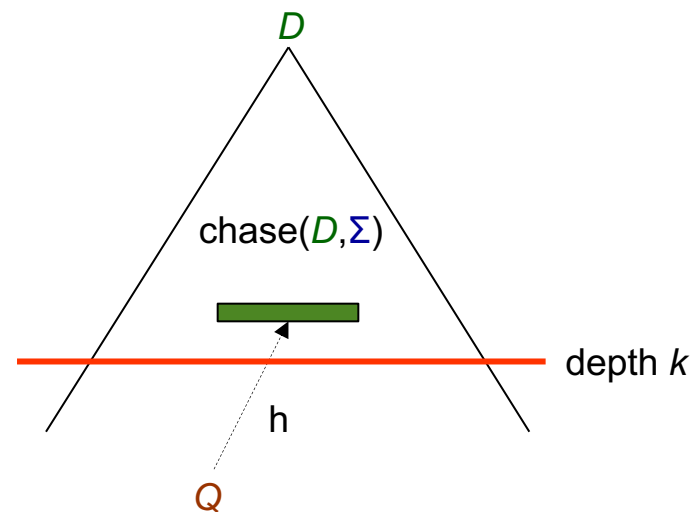
$$n = (|Q|)^2 \cdot |\text{sch}(\Sigma)| \cdot (2 \cdot \text{maxarity})^{\text{maxarity}}$$

such that $J_n \models Q$

Proof:

- By hypothesis, there exists a homomorphism h such that $h(Q) \subseteq \text{chase}(D, \Sigma)$
- By the bounded-derivation depth property

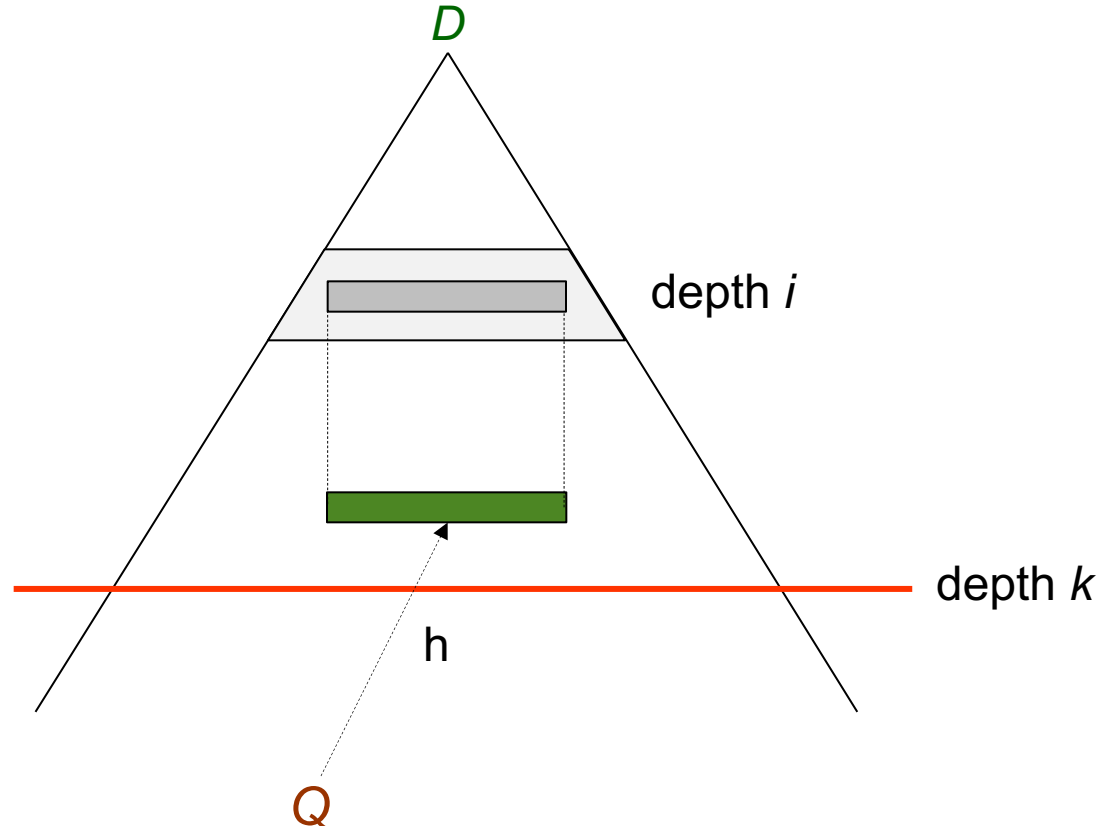
$$k = |Q| \cdot |\text{sch}(\Sigma)| \cdot (2 \cdot \text{maxarity})^{\text{maxarity}}$$



Small Witness Property for **LINEAR**

Proof (cont.):

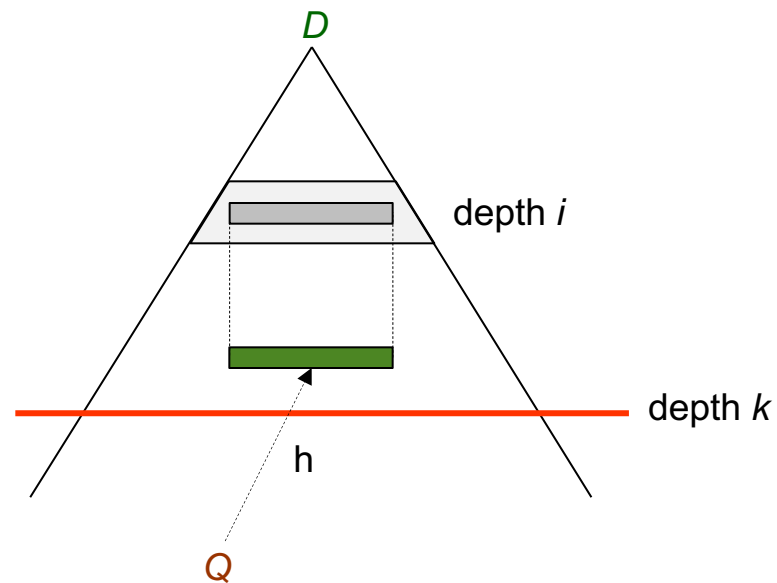
- Let us focus on depth i of the chase graph
- How many atoms do we need?
- No more than $|Q|$



Small Witness Property for **LINEAR**

Proof (cont.):

- Let us focus on depth i of the chase graph
- How many atoms do we need?
- No more than $|Q|$
- Thus, to entail the query we need at most



$$k \cdot |Q|$$

$$= |Q| \cdot |\text{sch}(\Sigma)| \cdot (2 \cdot \text{maxarity})^{\text{maxarity}} \cdot |Q|$$

$$= (|Q|)^2 \cdot |\text{sch}(\Sigma)| \cdot (2 \cdot \text{maxarity})^{\text{maxarity}}$$

Combined Complexity of LINEAR

Theorem: BCQ-Answering under LINEAR is in NEXPTIME w.r.t. the combined complexity

Proof: Consider a database D , a set $\Sigma \in \text{LINEAR}$, and a BCQ Q

Having the small witness property in place, we can exploit the following algorithm:

1. Non-deterministically construct a chase sequence

$$D \langle \sigma_1, h_1 \rangle J_1 \langle \sigma_2, h_2 \rangle J_2 \langle \sigma_3, h_3 \rangle J_3 \dots \langle \sigma_n, h_n \rangle J_n$$

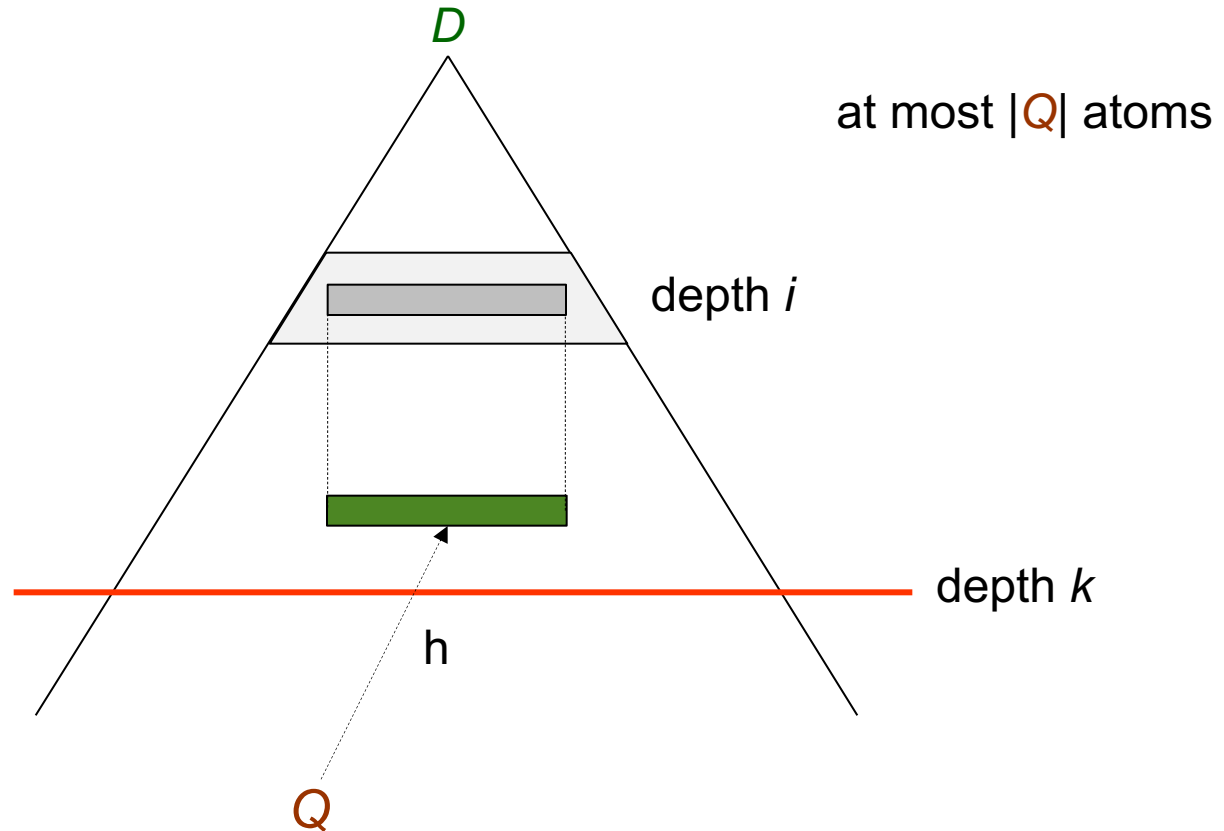
of D w.r.t. Σ with $n = (|Q|)^2 \cdot |\text{sch}(\Sigma)| \cdot (2 \cdot \text{maxarity})^{\text{maxarity}}$

2. Check for the existence of a homomorphism h such that $h(Q) \subseteq J_n$

Can we do better? Any ideas?



Key Observation



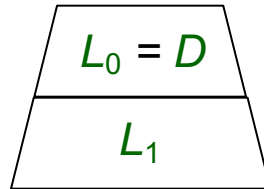
level-by-level construction



Combined Complexity of **LINEAR**

Theorem: BCQ-Answering under **LINEAR** is in **PSPACE** w.r.t. the combined complexity

Proof:



Combined Complexity of **LINEAR**

Theorem: BCQ-Answering under **LINEAR** is in **PSPACE** w.r.t. the combined complexity

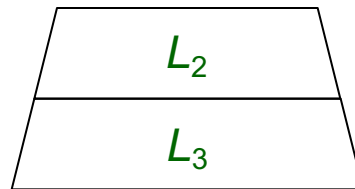
Proof:



Combined Complexity of **LINEAR**

Theorem: BCQ-Answering under **LINEAR** is in **PSPACE** w.r.t. the combined complexity

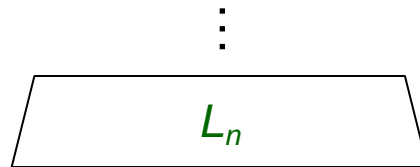
Proof:



Combined Complexity of **LINEAR**

Theorem: BCQ-Answering under **LINEAR** is in **PSPACE** w.r.t. the combined complexity

Proof:



Combined Complexity of LINEAR

Theorem: BCQ-Answering under LINEAR is in PSPACE w.r.t. the combined complexity

Proof (cont.):

At each step we need to maintain

- $O(|Q|)$ atoms
- A counter $ctr \leq (|Q|)^2 \cdot |\text{sch}(\Sigma)| \cdot (2 \cdot \text{maxarity})^{\text{maxarity}}$
- Thus, we need polynomial space
- The claim follows since NPSPACE = PSPACE



Combined Complexity of **LINEAR**

We cannot do better than the previous algorithm

Theorem: BCQ-Answering under **LINEAR** is **PSPACE-hard w.r.t. the combined complexity**

Proof : By simulating a deterministic polynomial space Turing machine



PSPACE-hardness of **LINEAR**

Our Goal: Encode the polynomial space computation of a DTM M on input string I using a database D , a set $\Sigma \in \mathbf{LINEAR}$, and a BCQ Q such that

$D \wedge \Sigma \models Q$ iff M accepts I using at most $n = (|I|)^k$ cells



PSPACE-hardness of LINEAR

- Assume that the tape alphabet is $\{0, 1, \sqcup\}$
- Suppose that M halts on $I = \alpha_1 \dots \alpha_m$ using $n = m^k$ cells, for $k > 0$

Initial configuration - the database D

$$\text{Config}(s_{\text{init}}, \alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_m, \underbrace{\sqcup, \dots, \sqcup}_{n-m}, \underbrace{1, 0, \dots, 0}_{n-1})$$



PSPACE-hardness of LINEAR

- Assume that the tape alphabet is $\{0, 1, \sqcup\}$
- Suppose that M halts on $I = \alpha_1 \dots \alpha_m$ using $n = m^k$ cells, for $k > 0$

Transition rule - $\delta(s_1, \alpha) = (s_2, \beta, +1)$

for each $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$:

$$\forall X \left(\text{Config}(s_1, \underbrace{X_1, \dots, X_{i-1}}_{i-1}, \alpha, X_{i+1}, \dots, X_n, \underbrace{0, \dots, 0}_{n-i}, 1, \underbrace{0, \dots, 0}_{n-i}) \rightarrow \right.$$

$$\left. \text{Config}(s_2, \underbrace{X_1, \dots, X_{i-1}}_i, \beta, X_{i+1}, \dots, X_n, \underbrace{0, \dots, 0}_{n-i-1}, 1, \underbrace{0, \dots, 0}_{n-i-1}) \right)$$



PSPACE-hardness of **LINEAR**

- Assume that the tape alphabet is $\{0, 1, \sqcup\}$
- Suppose that M halts on $I = \alpha_1 \dots \alpha_m$ using $n = m^k$ cells, for $k > 0$

$$D \wedge \Sigma \models \exists X \text{ Config}(s_{\text{acc}}, X) \text{ iff } M \text{ accepts } I$$

...but, the rules are not constant-free

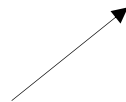
we can eliminate the constants by applying a simple trick



PSPACE-hardness of **LINEAR**

Initial configuration - the database D

auxiliary constants for the states
and the tape alphabet

$$\text{Config}(s_{\text{init}}, \alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_m, \underbrace{\sqcup, \dots, \sqcup}_{n-m}, \underbrace{1, 0, \dots, 0}_{n-1}, s_1, \dots, s_\ell, 0, 1, \sqcup)$$




PSPACE-hardness of LINEAR

Transition rule - $\delta(s_1, 0) = (s_2, \sqcup, +1)$

for each $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$:

$$\begin{array}{c}
 \text{Config}(S_1, X_1, \dots, X_{i-1}, Z, X_{i+1}, \dots, X_n, \underbrace{Z, \dots, Z}_{i-1}, \underbrace{O, Z, \dots, Z}_{n-i}, S_1, \dots, S_\ell, Z, O, B) \rightarrow \\
 \text{Config}(S_2, X_1, \dots, X_{i-1}, B, \underbrace{X_{i+1}, \dots, X_n}_i, \underbrace{Z, \dots, Z}_{n-i-1}, O, Z, \dots, Z, S_1, \dots, S_\ell, Z, O, B)
 \end{array}$$

(\forall -quantifiers are omitted)



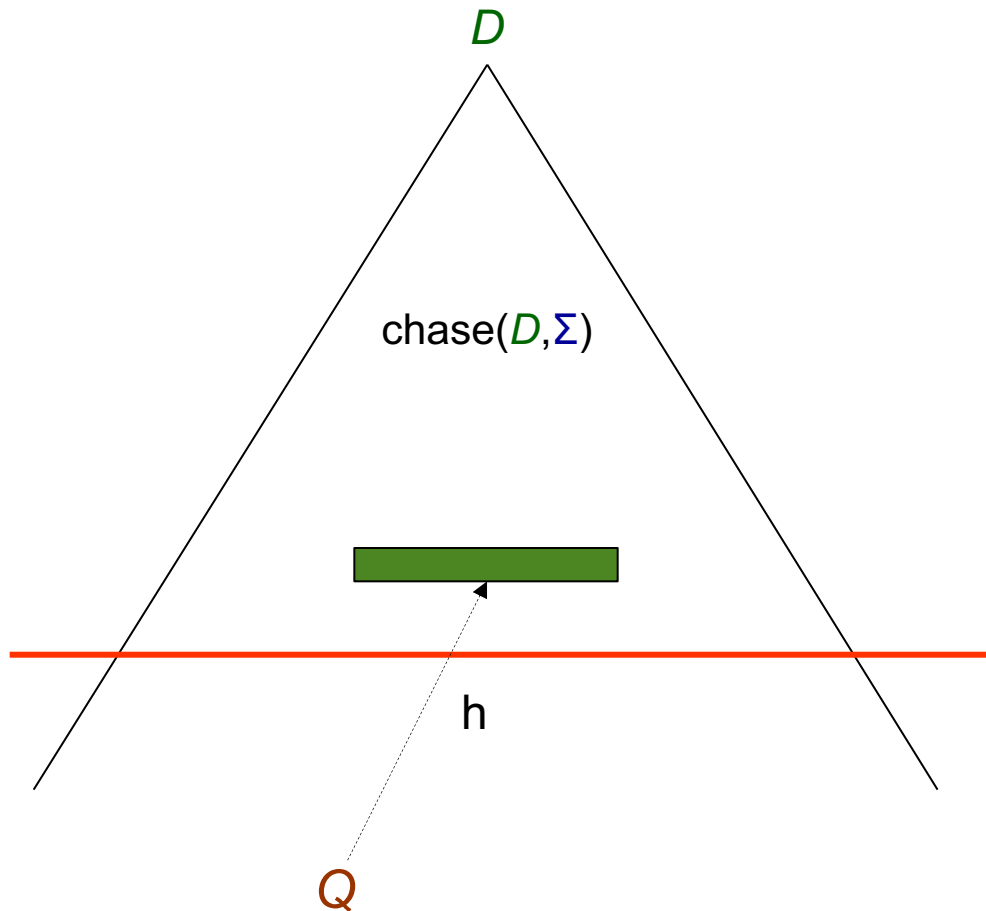
Sum Up

Data Complexity		
FULL	PTIME-c	Naïve algorithm
		Reduction from Monotone Circuit Value problem
ACYCLIC	in LOGSPACE	Second part of our course
LINEAR		

Combined Complexity		
FULL	EXPTIME-c	Naïve algorithm
		Simulation of a deterministic exponential time TM
ACYCLIC	NEXPTIME-c	Small witness property
		Reduction from Tiling problem
LINEAR	PSPACE-c	Level-by-level non-deterministic algorithm
		Simulation of a deterministic polynomial space TM



Forward Chaining Techniques



Useful techniques for establishing optimal upper bounds

...but **not practical** - we need to store instances of very large size