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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 $k\langle X\rangle$. (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 $max\{2, regularity(I)\}$.*

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In characteristic 0 the Gröbner basis of $\gamma^{-1}(I)$ in Corollary 1.1 may be obtained by lifting the Gröbner basis of I, but this is not so in characteristic p; see Example 4.2. Furthermore, $\gamma^{-1}(I)$ might have no finite Gröbner basis at all if the field is finite; see Example 4.1.

The behavior of $\gamma^{-1}(I)$ is in sharp contrast to what happens for arbitrary ideals in $k\langle X\rangle$. For example, the defining ideal in $k\langle X\rangle$ of the group algebra of a group with undecidable word problem has no finite Gröbner basis. Another example is Shearer's algebra $k\langle a,b\rangle/(ac-ca, aba-bc, b^2a)\rangle$, which has irrational Hilbert series [Sh]. As any finitely generated monomial ideal defines an algebra with rational Hilbert series, the ideal $(ac-ca, aba-bc, b^2a)$ can have no finite Gröbner basis. (Other consequences of having a finite Gröbner basis are deducible from [An] and [Ba]; these are well-known in the case of commutative algebras!)

In the next section we present the basic computation of the initial ideal and Gröbner basis for $J = \gamma^{-1}(I)$. In §3 we give the application to finiteness and liftability of Gröbner bases.

2. The Gröbner basis of $\gamma^{-1}(I)$

Throughout this paper we fix an ideal $I \subset k[x]$ and $J := \gamma^{-1}(I) \subset k\langle X\rangle$. We shall make use of the *lexicographic splitting* of γ, which is defined as the k-linear map

$$\delta \;:\; k[x] \to k\langle X\rangle\,, \quad x_{i_1}x_{i_2}\cdots x_{i_r} \mapsto X_{i_1}X_{i_2}\cdots X_{i_r} \quad \text{if} \quad i_1 \le i_2 \le \cdots \le i_r.$$

Fix a monomial order $\prec$ on $k[x]$. The *lexicographic extension* $\prec\!\!\!\prec$ of $\prec$ to $k\langle X\rangle$ is defined for monomials $M, N \in k\langle X\rangle$ by

$$M \prec\!\!\!\prec N \quad \text{if} \quad \begin{cases} \gamma(M) \prec \gamma(N) & \text{or} \\ \gamma(M) = \gamma(N) & \text{and } M \text{ is lexicographically smaller than } N. \end{cases}$$

Thus, for example, $X_iX_j \prec\!\!\!\prec X_jX_i$ if $i<j$.

To describe the $\prec\!\!\!\prec$-initial ideal of J we use the following construction: Let L be any monomial ideal in $k[x]$. If $m = x_{i_1}\cdots x_{i_r} \in L$ and $i_1 \le \cdots \le i_r$, denote by $\mathcal{U}_L(m)$ the set of all monomials $u \in k[x_{i_1+1}, \ldots, x_{i_r-1}]$ such that neither $u\frac{m}{x_{i_1}}$ nor $u\frac{m}{x_{i_r}}$ lies in L. For instance, if $L = (x_1x_2x_3,\, x_2^d)$ then $\mathcal{U}_L(x_1x_2x_3) = \{\, x_2^j \mid j<d\,\}$.

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

$$\{\delta(u\cdot m) \mid m \text{ is a generator of } in_{\prec}(I) \text{ and } u \in \mathcal{U}_{in_{\prec}(I)}(m)\}.$$

In particular, a minimal $\prec\!\!\!\prec$*-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* $\prec$*-Gröbner basis for* I *and each monomial* $u \in \mathcal{U}_{in_\prec(I)}(in_\prec(f))$.

Proof. We first argue that a non-commutative monomial $M = X_{i_1}X_{i_2}\cdots X_{i_r}$ lies in $in_{\prec\!\!\!\prec}(J)$ if and only if its commutative image $\gamma(M)$ is in $in_\prec(I)$ or $i_j > i_{j+1}$ for some j. Indeed, if $i_j > i_{j+1}$ then $M \in in_{\prec\!\!\!\prec}(J)$ because $X_sX_t - X_tX_s \in J$ has initial term X_sX_t with $s>t$. If on the contrary $i_1 \le \cdots \le i_r$ but $\gamma(M) \in in_\prec(I)$, then there exists $f \in I$ with $in_\prec(f) = \gamma(M)$. The non-commutative polynomial $F = \delta(f)$ satisfies $in_{\prec\!\!\!\prec}(F) = M$. The opposite implication follows because γ induces an isomorphism $k[x]/I \cong k\langle X\rangle/\gamma^{-1}(I)$.

Now let $m' = u \cdot m$, where $m = x_{i_1} \cdots x_{i_r}$ is a minimal generator of $in_{\prec}(I)$ with $i_1 \leq \cdots \leq i_r$. We must show that $\delta(u \cdot m)$ is a minimal generator of $in_{\lessdot}(J)$ if and only if $u \in \mathcal{U}_{in_{\prec}(I)}(m)$.

For the "only if" direction, suppose that $\delta(u \cdot m)$ is a minimal generator of $in_{\lessdot}(J)$. Suppose that u contains the variable x_j. We must have $j > i_1$, since else, taking j minimal, we would have $\delta(u \cdot m) = X_j \cdot \delta(\frac{u}{x_j} m)$. Similarly $j < i_r$. Thus $u \in k[x_{i_1+1}, \ldots, x_{i_r-1}]$. This implies $\delta(u \cdot m) = X_{i_1} \cdot \delta(u \frac{m}{x_{i_1}}) = \delta(u \cdot \frac{m}{x_{i_r}}) \cdot X_{i_r}$. Therefore neither $\delta(u\frac{m}{x_{i_1}})$ nor $\delta(u\frac{m}{x_{i_r}})$ lies in $in_{\lessdot}(J)$, and hence neither $u\frac{m}{x_{i_1}}$ nor $u\frac{m}{x_{i_r}}$ lies in $in_{\prec}(I)$.

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

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

$$s \leq_p t \quad \text{if} \quad \binom{t}{s} \not\equiv 0 \pmod{p}.$$

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^t but no higher power of x_j, then $(x_i/x_j)^s m \in L$ for all $i < j$ and $s \leq_p t$.

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

(a) If $in_{\prec}(I)$ is 0-Borel fixed, then a minimal $\lessdot$-Gröbner basis of J is obtained by applying δ to a minimal $\prec$-Gröbner basis of I and adding commutators.

(b) If $in_{\prec}(I)$ is p-Borel-fixed for any p, then J has a finite $\lessdot$-Gröbner basis.

Proof. Suppose that the monomial ideal $L := in_{\prec}(I)$ 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 $x_{i_r}^t$ be the highest power of x_{i_r} dividing m. Since $t \leq_p t$ we have $x_l^t m / x_{i_r}^t \in L$ for each $l < i_r$. This implies $x_l^t m / x_{i_r} \in L$ for $l < i_r$, and hence every monomial $u \in \mathcal{U}_L(m)$ satisfies $deg_{x_l}(u) < t$ 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 $x_l m / x_{i_r} \in L$ 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 $in_{\prec}(I)$ 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 $x_l \frac{m}{x_{i_1}} \in L$ or $x_l \frac{m}{x_{i_r}} \in L$ for every index l with $i_1 < l < i_r$. Thus Theorem 2.1 implies that a minimal $\prec$-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 $\lll$-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

$$L \ := \ \big((x_1,\ x_2,\ x_3)^3\big)^{[p]} \quad \subset \quad k[x_1, x_2, x_3]$$

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 $3p$. □

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