

Automatic presentations for semigroups

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ABSTRACT

This paper applies the concept of FA-presentable structures to semigroups. We give a complete classification of the finitely generated FA-presentable cancellative semigroups: namely, a finitely generated cancellative semigroup is FA-presentable if and only if it is a subsemigroup of a virtually abelian group. We prove that all finitely generated commutative semigroups are FA-presentable. We give a complete list of FA-presentable one-relation semigroups and compare the classes of FA-presentable semigroups and automatic semigroups.

Keywords: Automatic presentation; FA-presentable; cancellative semigroup; virtually abelian group.

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Automatic presentations were introduced by Khoussainov and Nerode [KN95] to fulfill a need to extend finite model theory to infinite structures in such a way that interesting decision problems remain soluble; the present paper applies this concept to semigroups. We give definitions and examples, survey some previously published results, and establish some new ones, most importantly a complete characterization of the finitely generated cancellative semigroups admitting automatic presentations.

Recall that a *structure* \mathcal{A} is a tuple (A, R_1, \dots, R_n) where:

- A is a set called the *domain* of \mathcal{A} ;
- for each i with $1 \leq i \leq n$, there is an integer $r_i \geq 1$ such that R_i is a subset of A^{r_i} ; r_i is called the *arity* of R_i .

An obvious instance of a structure is a relational database. However, there are many other natural examples; for instance, a semigroup is a structure (S, \circ) , where \circ has arity 3, and a group is a structure $(G, \circ, e, {}^{-1})$, where \circ has arity 3, e has arity 1, and ${}^{-1}$ has arity 2.

Informally, an automatic presentation for the structure (A, R_1, \dots, R_n) consists of a regular language of abstract representatives for the elements of A such that the relations R_i are all recognizable by synchronous finite automata; see [Definition 2.3](#). A structure that admits an automatic presentation is said to be FA-presentable.

One important field of research has been the attempt to classify FA-presentable structures with specific classes of structures. As any finite structure is FA-presentable, we are really only interested in infinite structures here. In some cases this means that we have no real examples (for example, any FA-presentable integral domain is finite [KNRS04]). Essentially the only cases where we have a complete classification are those of:

- Boolean algebras [KNRS04];
- ordinals [Del04];
- finitely generated groups [OT05].

(For a number of partial results for FA-presentable groups, see [Nie07]; for some necessary conditions for trees and linear orders to be FA-presentable, see [KRS03].)

As far as groups are concerned, we also have the notion of an ‘automatic group’ in the sense of [ECH⁺92]. This has been generalized to semigroups (as in [CRRT01, OSKM98, Hud96]). The considerable success of the theory of automatic groups was another motivation to have a general notion of FA-presentable structures; see also [Pel97, Sq22]. We note that a structure admitting an automatic presentation is often called an ‘automatic structure’; although we will avoid that term, the reader should be aware of the terminological clash with the different notion of an automatic structure for a group or semigroup in the sense of [ECH⁺92, CRRT01].

In this paper we will be particularly concerned with FA-presentable semigroups. When one moves from groups to semigroups, it appears that the problem becomes significantly more difficult. For example, if one has an undirected graph Γ with vertices V and edges E , then we have a semigroup with elements

$S = V \cup \{e, 0\}$, where we have the following products:

$$uv = \begin{cases} e & \text{if } u, v \in V \text{ and } \{u, v\} \in E; \\ 0 & \text{if } u, v \in V \text{ and } \{u, v\} \notin E; \end{cases}$$

$$ue = eu = u0 = 0u = 0 \text{ for } u \in V \cup \{e, 0\}.$$

Moreover, if we form the semigroup S from the graph Γ in this way, then S is FA-presentable if and only if Γ is FA-presentable. It is known [KNRS04] that the isomorphism problem for FA-presentable graphs is Σ_1^1 -complete (and hence undecidable); hence the isomorphism problem for FA-presentable semigroups is also Σ_1^1 -complete.

Given this, it seems sensible to restrict oneself to some naturally occurring classes of semigroups. Given the classification of the FA-presentable finitely generated groups referred to above, a natural class to consider is that of the FA-presentable finitely generated cancellative semigroups. In this paper we give a complete classification of these structures: a finitely generated cancellative semigroup is FA-presentable if and only if it embeds into a virtually abelian group ([Theorem 10.1](#)).

We remark that there are many examples of *non-cancellative* finitely generated FA-presentable semigroups. It is easy to see that adjoining a zero to a semigroup always preserves FA-presentability and destroys cancellativity. All finite semigroups, whether cancellative or not, are FA-presentable. Another example is the bicyclic monoid; see [Example 3.2](#).

In [Section 6](#), we prove that all finitely generated commutative semigroups are FA-presentable ([Theorem 6.1](#)). We also classify the FA-presentable one-relation semigroups ([Proposition 9.1](#)).

Finally, in [Section 11](#), we consider the relationship between the classes of FA-presentable semigroups and automatic semigroups.

2 AUTOMATIC PRESENTATIONS

A semigroup is a set equipped with an associative binary operation \circ , although the operation symbol is often suppressed, so that $s \circ t$ is denoted st . We recall the idea of a “convolution mapping” which we will need throughout this paper:

DEFINITION 2.1. Let L be a regular language over a finite alphabet A . Define, for $n \in \mathbb{N}$,

$$L^n = \{(w_1, \dots, w_n) : w_i \in L \text{ for } i = 1, \dots, n\}.$$

Let $\$$ be a new symbol not in A . The mapping $\text{conv} : (A^*)^n \rightarrow ((A \cup \{\$\})^n)^*$ is defined as follows. Suppose

$$w_1 = w_{1,1}w_{1,2} \cdots w_{1,m_1}, w_2 = w_{2,1}w_{2,2} \cdots w_{2,m_2}, \dots, w_n = w_{n,1}w_{n,2} \cdots w_{n,m_n},$$

where $w_{i,j} \in A$. Then $\text{conv}(w_1, \dots, w_n)$ is defined to be

$$(w_{1,1}, w_{2,1}, \dots, w_{n,1})(w_{1,2}, w_{2,2}, \dots, w_{n,2}) \cdots (w_{1,m}, w_{2,m}, \dots, w_{n,m}),$$

where $m = \max\{m_i : i = 1, \dots, n\}$ and with $w_{i,j} = \$$ whenever $j > m_i$.

Observe that the map conv sends an n -tuple of words to a word of n -tuples. We then have:

DEFINITION 2.2. Let A be a finite alphabet, and let $R \subseteq (A^*)^n$ be a relation on A^* . Then R is said to be *regular* if

$$\{\text{conv}(w_1, \dots, w_n) : (w_1, \dots, w_n) \in R\}$$

is a regular language over $(A \cup \{\$\})^n$.

Having done this, we can now define the concept of an ‘automatic presentation’ for a structure:

DEFINITION 2.3. Let $\mathcal{S} = (S, R_1, \dots, R_n)$ be a relational structure. Let L be a regular language over a finite alphabet A , and let $\phi : L \rightarrow S$ be a surjective mapping. Then (L, ϕ) is an *automatic presentation* for \mathcal{S} if:

1. the relation $L_= = \{(w_1, w_2) \in L^2 : \phi(w_1) = \phi(w_2)\}$ is regular, and
2. for each relation R_i of arity r_i , the relation

$$L_{R_i} = \{(w_1, w_2, \dots, w_{r_i}) \in L^{r_i} : (\phi(w_1), \dots, \phi(w_{r_i})) \in R_i\}$$

is regular.

A structure with an automatic presentation is said to be *FA-presentable*.

As noted in Section 1, a semigroup can be viewed as a relational structure in which the binary operation \circ becomes a ternary relation. The following definition simply restates the preceding one in the special case where the structure is a semigroup:

DEFINITION 2.4. Let S be a semigroup. Let L be a regular language over a finite alphabet A , and let $\phi : L \rightarrow S$ be a surjective mapping. Then (L, ϕ) is an *automatic presentation* for S if the relations

$$\begin{aligned} L_= &= \{(w_1, w_2) \in L^2 : \phi(w_1) = \phi(w_2)\}, \\ L_\circ &= \{(w_1, w_2, w_3) \in L^3 : \phi(w_1)\phi(w_2) = \phi(w_3) \text{ in } S\} \end{aligned}$$

are both regular.

3 EXAMPLES

In this section, we give some examples of FA-presentable semigroups. We first exhibit a well-known example:

EXAMPLE 3.1. *The natural numbers under addition are FA-presentable: let $L = \{0, 1\}^* \{1\} \cup \{0\}$ and define $\phi : L \rightarrow \mathbb{N}$ by letting $\phi(w)$ be the natural number expressed by w in reverse binary notation. The equality relation $L_=$ is the diagonal relation $\{(w, w) : w \in L\}$, for every natural number has a unique representative of L . A finite automaton can recognize the relation $L_+ = \{(u, v, w) : \phi(u) + \phi(v) = \phi(w)\}$ because it can add u to v digit by digit and compare the result with w , storing the carry in its internal state. So (L, ϕ) is an automatic presentation for $(\mathbb{N}, +)$.*

EXAMPLE 3.2. *The bicyclic monoid B , which is presented by $\langle b, c \mid bc = 1 \rangle$, is FA-presentable. Notice that every element of the bicyclic monoid has a normal form $c^i b^j$ and that*

$$c^i b^j \circ c^k b^l = \begin{cases} c^i b^{l+(j-k)} & \text{if } j \geq k \\ c^{i+(k-j)} b^l & \text{if } j < k \end{cases}.$$

Retain the language L and the mapping ϕ from the previous example. Let $K = \{\text{conv}(x, y) : x, y \in L\}$, where $\psi : K \rightarrow B$ is given by

$$\text{conv}(x, y) \mapsto c^{\phi(x)} b^{\phi(y)}.$$

Then (K, ψ) is an automatic presentation for B : the equality relation $K_=$ is the diagonal relation, and the multiplication relation K_\circ is easily seen to be automatic, since addition of natural numbers (in reverse binary notation) can be carried out by an automaton, as can subtraction and comparison.

4 BASIC RESULTS

The following notions and proposition will be useful in what follows:

DEFINITION 4.1. Let (L, ϕ) be an automatic presentation for a structure. Then (L, ϕ) is a *binary* automatic presentation if the language L is over a two-letter alphabet; it is an *injective* automatic presentation if the mapping ϕ is injective (so that every element of the structure has exactly one representative in L).

PROPOSITION 4.2 ([KN95, Corollary 4.3] & [Blu99, Lemma 3.3]). *Any structure that admits an automatic presentation admits an injective binary automatic presentation.*

An *interpretation* of one structure inside another is, loosely speaking, a copy of the former inside the latter. The following definition is restricted to an interpretation of one semigroup inside another.

DEFINITION 4.3. Let S and T be semigroups. Let $n \in \mathbb{N}$. An (*n-dimensional*) *interpretation* of T in S consists of the following:

- a first-order formula $\psi(x_1, \dots, x_n)$, called the *domain formula*, which specifies those n -tuples of elements of S used in the interpretation;
- a surjective map $f : \psi(S^n) \rightarrow T$, called the *co-ordinate map* (where $\psi(S^n)$ denotes the set of n -tuples of elements of S satisfying the formula ψ);
- a first-order formula $\theta_=(x_1, \dots, x_n; y_1, \dots, y_n)$ that is satisfied by

$$(a_1, \dots, a_n; b_1, \dots, b_n)$$

in the semigroup S if and only if $f(a_1, \dots, a_n) = f(b_1, \dots, b_n)$ in the semigroup T ;

- a first-order formula $\theta_\circ(x_1, \dots, x_n; y_1, \dots, y_n; z_1, \dots, z_n)$ that is satisfied by

$$(a_1, \dots, a_n; b_1, \dots, b_n; c_1, \dots, c_n)$$

in the semigroup S if and only if $f(a_1, \dots, a_n)f(b_1, \dots, b_n) = f(c_1, \dots, c_n)$ in the semigroup T .

The following result, although here stated only for semigroups, is true for structures generally:

PROPOSITION 4.4 ([Blu99, Proposition 3.13]). *Let S and T be semigroups. If S has an automatic presentation and there is an interpretation of T in S , then T has an automatic presentation.*

The fact that a tuple of elements (a_1, \dots, a_n) of a structure S satisfies a first-order formula $\theta(x_1, \dots, x_n)$ is denoted $S \models \theta(a_1, \dots, a_n)$. We then have:

PROPOSITION 4.5 ([KN95]). *Let S be a structure with an automatic presentation. For every first-order formula $\theta(x_1, \dots, x_n)$ over the structure there is an automaton which accepts $\text{conv}(w_1, \dots, w_n)$ if and only if $S \models \theta(\phi(w_1), \dots, \phi(w_n))$. Moreover, there is an algorithm which effectively constructs such an automaton from such a formula.*

(**Proposition 4.4** is actually a consequence of **Proposition 4.5**.)

As a consequence of **Proposition 4.5**, FA-presentable structures have decidable first-order theories. In the context of semigroups, this means that any first-order definable property or relation of semigroups is decidable. For example, Green's relations and cancellativity are both decidable for FA-presentable semigroups. This contrasts the situation for automatic semigroups, where Green's relation \mathcal{R} [KO06] and cancellativity [Cai06a] are undecidable.

5 FINITELY GENERATED FA-PRESENTABLE GROUPS

As mentioned in **Section 1**, a classification of the finitely generated groups with an automatic presentation was given in [OT05]. For convenience, we state the result here (along with some extra details from [OT05] that we will need later). Recall that a group G is said to be *virtually abelian* if it has an abelian subgroup A of finite index. If G is finitely generated, then the subgroup A is finitely generated as well. Using the fact that any finitely generated abelian group is the direct sum of finitely many cyclic groups, we may assume that A is of the form \mathbb{Z}^n for some $n \geq 0$.

THEOREM 5.1 ([OT05]). *A finitely generated group admits an automatic presentation if and only if it is virtually abelian. In particular, a group G with a subgroup \mathbb{Z}^n of index ℓ admits an automatic presentation (L, ϕ) , where L is the language of words*

$$g_i \text{conv}(\varepsilon_1 z_1, \dots, \varepsilon_n z_n),$$

where $\varepsilon_i \in \{+, -\}$, z_i is a natural number in reverse binary notation, g_1, \dots, g_ℓ are representatives of the cosets of \mathbb{Z}^n in G , with $\phi : L \rightarrow G$ being defined in the natural way:

$$\phi(g_i \text{conv}(\varepsilon_1 z_1, \dots, \varepsilon_n z_n)) = g_i(\varepsilon_1 z_1, \dots, \varepsilon_n z_n).$$

6 COMMUTATIVE SEMIGROUPS

Commutative semigroups often have pleasant properties with regard to finite 'descriptions'. For example, Rédei's Theorem shows that all finitely generated commutative semigroups are finitely presented [Réd63], and finitely generated commutative monoids are presented by finite confluent Noetherian rewriting systems [Die86]. The following result is thus perhaps unsurprising:

THEOREM 6.1. *Every finitely generated commutative semigroup admits an automatic presentation.*

To prove this result, we will need the following lemma:

LEMMA 6.2 ([Blu99, Corollary 3.14]). *The class of FA-presentable structures is closed under forming quotients by first-order definable congruences, under forming finitary direct products, and under passing to first-order definable substructures. Moreover, in each case an automatic presentation is effectively constructable.*

We now proceed with the proof of [Theorem 6.1](#):

Proof of 6.2. Finitely generated free commutative semigroups are isomorphic to $(\mathbb{N}, +)^n - \{(0, \dots, 0)\}$ for some n and are thus FA-presentable, since the class of FA-presentable structure is closed under direct products, the exclusion of a single element gives a first-order definable substructure.

Every commutative semigroup is a quotient of a free commutative semigroup and, by [Tai68], the corresponding congruence is first-order definable; the result then follows from [Lemma 6.2](#). □6.2

We observe that not all countable commutative semigroups are FA-presentable: for example, any monoid which contains (\mathbb{N}, \times) is not FA-presentable [KNRS04, Theorem 3.6].

7 GROWTH

In the proof of [Theorem 5.1](#) above, given in [OT05], one essential ingredient was the notion of growth. Before defining the growth of a semigroup, we first establish notation for and state a basic property of lengths of the words representing the elements of the domain of the structure.

DEFINITION 7.1. Let S be a semigroup with an injective automatic presentation (L, ϕ) . For any $s \in S$, denote by $l(s)$ the length of the unique word in L representing s .

PROPOSITION 7.2 ([Blu99, Proposition 5.1]). *Let S be a semigroup with an injective automatic presentation; then there is a constant $N \in \mathbb{N}$ such that, for all $s, t \in S$,*

$$l(st) \leq \max\{l(s), l(t)\} + N.$$

We now turn to the concept of *growth*:

DEFINITION 7.3. Let S be a semigroup generated by a finite set X . Define $\delta(s)$ to be the length of the shortest product of elements of X that equals s , i.e.

$$\delta(s) = \min\{n \in \mathbb{N} : s = x_1 \cdots x_n \text{ for some } x_i \in X\}.$$

The *growth function* $\gamma : \mathbb{N} \rightarrow \mathbb{N}$ of S is given by

$$\gamma(n) = |\{s \in S : \delta(s) \leq n\}|.$$

If the function γ is bounded above by a polynomial function (that is, if there exists a polynomial function β and some $N \in \mathbb{N}$ such that $\beta(n) > \gamma(n)$ for $n > N$), then S is said to have *polynomial growth*.

Note that whether a semigroup has polynomial growth or not is independent of the choice of finite generating set [Gri91]. We now have the following result:

THEOREM 7.4. *Any finitely generated subsemigroup of a semigroup admitting an automatic presentation has polynomial growth.*

Before embarking on a proof of this result, we pause to emphasize that polynomial growth is dependent on the structures in question being semigroups: general algebras admitting automatic presentations are only guaranteed to have at most exponential growth [KN95, Lemma 4.5].

Proof of 7.4. Let S be a semigroup, finitely generated by X , that admits an automatic presentation. By [Proposition 4.2](#), assume without loss of generality that this automatic presentation is injective and binary. This proof follows that in [OT05], which dealt with groups. The main ingredient is provided by the following lemma:

LEMMA 7.5. *Let $R = \max\{l(a) : a \in X\}$. There is a constant N such that, for all $m \in \mathbb{N}$,*

$$\max\{l(a_1 \cdots a_m) : a_i \in X\} \leq R + \lceil \log_2 m \rceil N. \quad (1)$$

Proof of 7.5. Let N be the constant of [Proposition 7.2](#). We proceed by induction on m .

For $m = 1$, the inequality (1) holds, since

$$\max\{l(a_1) : a_1 \in X\} = R = R + \lceil \log_2 1 \rceil N.$$

Now assume that (1) is true for $1 \leq m \leq k$. The cases of k being odd or even must be considered separately:

1. Suppose k is odd, with $k = 2r - 1$. Then, by [Proposition 7.2](#):

$$\begin{aligned} & \max\{l(a_1 \cdots a_{k+1}) : a_i \in X\} \\ &= \max\{l(a_1 \cdots a_{2r}) : a_i \in X\} \\ &\leq \max\{l(a_1 \cdots a_r), l(a_{r+1} \cdots a_{2r}) : a_i \in X\} + N \\ &\leq \max\{R + \lceil \log_2 r \rceil N, R + \lceil \log_2 r \rceil N\} + N \\ &= R + \lceil \log_2 r \rceil N + N \\ &= R + (\lceil \log_2 r + 1 \rceil) N \\ &= R + \lceil \log_2 2r \rceil N \\ &= R + \lceil \log_2(k + 1) \rceil N, \end{aligned}$$

as required.

2. Suppose k is even, say $k = 2r$. Then:

$$\begin{aligned} & \max\{l(a_1 \cdots a_{k+1}) : a_i \in X\} \\ &= \max\{l(a_1 \cdots a_{2r+1}) : a_i \in X\} \\ &\leq \max\{l(a_1 \cdots a_r), l(a_{r+1} \cdots a_{2r+1}) : a_i \in X\} + N \\ &\leq \max\{R + \lceil \log_2 r \rceil N, R + \lceil \log_2(r + 1) \rceil N\} + N \\ &= R + \lceil \log_2(r + 1) \rceil N + N. \end{aligned}$$

At this point, two subcases are required, depending on whether r is a power of two:

- (a) Suppose that r is not a power of 2. Since the function $\lceil \log_2 y \rceil$ on the set $\{y \in \mathbb{N} : y > 0\}$ takes the same value on y and $y + 1$ except when y is a power of 2, $\lceil \log_2(r + 1) \rceil = \lceil \log_2 r \rceil$. Therefore, by the reasoning in part (1),

$$R + \lceil \log_2(r + 1) \rceil N + N = R + \lceil \log_2 r \rceil N + N = R + \lceil \log_2(k + 1) \rceil N,$$

as required.

(b) Suppose that $r = 2^x$, where $x \in \mathbb{N}$. Observe that

$$\lceil \log_2(k + 1) \rceil = \lceil \log_2(2r + 1) \rceil = \lceil \log_2(2^{x+1} + 1) \rceil = x + 2.$$

Consequently,

$$\begin{aligned} & R + \lceil \log_2(r + 1) \rceil N + N \\ &= R + \lceil \log_2(r + 1) + 1 \rceil N \\ &= R + \lceil \log_2(r + 1) + \log_2 2 \rceil N \\ &= R + \lceil \log_2 2(r + 1) \rceil N \\ &= R + \lceil \log_2 2(2^x + 1) \rceil N \\ &= R + \lceil \log_2(2^{x+1} + 2) \rceil N \\ &= R + (x + 2)N \\ &= R + \lceil \log_2(k + 1) \rceil N, \end{aligned}$$

as required. □7.5

We now return to the proof of [Theorem 7.4](#). By [Lemma 7.5](#), the number of possible words in L for elements of the form $x_1 \cdots x_m$, where $x_i \in X$, is no greater than

$$2^{(R + \lceil \log_2 m \rceil N) + 1} = 2^{R+1} (2^{\lceil \log_2 m \rceil})^N \leq 2^{R+1} (2^{1 + \log_2 m})^N = km^N,$$

where $k = 2^{R+1} 2^N$ is a constant. So there are at most km^N elements $s \in S$ with $\delta(s) = m$. Consequently,

$$\gamma(n) = |\{s \in S : \delta(s) \leq n\}| \leq k \cdot 1^N + k \cdot 2^N + \dots + k \cdot n^N \leq kn^{N+1}.$$

So S has polynomial growth. This establishes [Theorem 7.4](#). □7.4

8 MAXIMUM GROUP HOMOMORPHIC IMAGE

Given the classification of FA-presentable finitely generated groups (see [Theorem 5.1](#) above), it makes sense to investigate (finitely generated) groups related to semigroups. The *maximum group homomorphic image* of a semigroup S , if it exists, is the largest group G such that there is a surjective homomorphism from S onto G , in the sense that there is a homomorphism from this group G onto any group H that is a homomorphic image of S . The congruence associated to this homomorphic image is called the *minimum group congruence*. (For further background information, see [[How95](#), Section 5.3].)

DEFINITION 8.1. Let S be a semigroup. A subset K of S is:

- *unitary* if for all $s \in S$ and $k \in K$, we have $(sk \in K \vee ks \in K) \implies s \in K$;
- *dense* if for all $s \in S$ there exists $x, y \in S$ such that $sx \in K$ and $ys \in K$;
- *reflexive* if for all $a, b \in S$, we have $ab \in K \implies ba \in K$.

The subsemigroup generated by K is denoted $\langle K \rangle$.

DEFINITION 8.2. Let S be a semigroup, with E its set of idempotents. Then S is:

- regular if for every $s \in S$ there exists $s' \in S$ such that $ss's = s$;
- π -regular if for every $s \in S$, there exists $n \in \mathbb{N}$ and $s' \in S$ such that $s^n s' s^n = s^n$;
- strongly π -inverse if it is π -regular and E is commutative;
- a unitary dense E -semigroup if E is a subsemigroup, and E is unitary and dense;
- a strongly $\langle E \rangle$ -unitary dense monoid if it is a monoid and $\langle E \rangle$ is reflexive, unitary and dense.

Using a variety of results from the literature, we obtain the following result:

PROPOSITION 8.3. *If S is FA-presentable and either*

- *a regular semigroup,*
- *a strongly π -inverse semigroup,*
- *a unitary dense E -semigroup, or*
- *a strongly $\langle E \rangle$ unitary dense monoid,*

then the maximum group homomorphic image of S exists and is FA-presentable.

Proof of 8.3. For each of the given species of semigroup, the minimum group congruence exists and is first-order definable [Gom93, ZLW96]. So the maximum group homomorphic image of any such semigroup will be FA-presentable by Lemma 6.2. 8.3

COROLLARY 8.4. *Let S be the free inverse monoid on the set A ; then, S has an automatic presentation if and only if $|A| = 1$.*

Proof of 8.4. The monoid S is regular and its maximum group homomorphic image is the free group on A . Thus if S is FA-presentable, then so is the free group with on A , whence $|A| = 1$ since otherwise it contains a free subsemigroup on two generators, which does not have polynomial growth, which would contradict Theorem 7.4.

Conversely, if $|A| = 1$, then free inverse monoid on A is isomorphic to the semigroup formed by the set

$$\{(r, s, t) \in \mathbb{Z}^3 : r \geq 0, s \geq 0, -s \leq t \leq r\}$$

under the operation

$$(r, s, t)(r', s', t') = (\max\{r, r' + t\}, \max\{s, s' - t\}, s + s');$$

see [How95, p.219]. Since a finite automaton can add, subtract, and compare integers in reverse binary notation, it is clear that this semigroup is FA-presentable. 8.4

9 ONE-RELATION SEMIGROUPS

In this section, we characterize those one-relation semigroup presentations that define FA-presentable semigroups.

PROPOSITION 9.1. *A semigroup S with one defining relation has an automatic presentation if and only if either S is monogenic, or S is generated by two elements, say a and b , and the defining relation is one of:*

$$\begin{aligned} a = b^k; \quad ab = ba; \quad ab = b^k; \quad ba = b^k; \quad ab = aba; \\ ba = aba; \quad ab = bab^2; \quad ba = b^2ab; \quad a = bab; \quad a^2 = b^2. \end{aligned}$$

Proof of 9.1. Vazhenin [Vaz83] proved that these semigroups are precisely the one-relation semigroups with decidable first-order theory. The proof involves an interpretation of each of these semigroups in $(\mathbb{N}, +)^k$ for some $k \in \mathbb{N}$. The semigroup $(\mathbb{N}, +)^k$ is FA-presentable by [Theorem 6.1](#); thus each of these semigroups is FA-presentable by [Proposition 4.4](#). 9.1

10 CHARACTERIZATION OF FA-PRESENTABLE CANCELLATIVE SEMIGROUPS

The present section is dedicated to proving the following characterization theorem:

THEOREM 10.1. *A finitely generated cancellative semigroup is FA-presentable if and only if it embeds into a virtually abelian group.*

Recall that a semigroup S has a group of left (respectively, right) quotients G if S embeds into G and every element of G is of the form $t^{-1}s$ (respectively, st^{-1}) for $s, t \in S$. If a semigroup S has a group of left (respectively, right) quotients, then this group is unique up to isomorphism. For further information on groups of left and right quotients, see [CP61, Section 1.10].

The following result, due to Grigorchuk, generalizes the result of Gromov [Gro81] that a finitely generated group of polynomial growth is virtually nilpotent (i.e. it has a nilpotent subgroup of finite index):

THEOREM 10.2 ([Gri88b]). *A finitely generated cancellative semigroup has polynomial growth if and only if it has a virtually nilpotent group of left quotients.*

We then have the following immediate consequence of [Theorems 10.2](#) and [7.4](#):

COROLLARY 10.3. *Let S be a finitely generated cancellative semigroup that admits an automatic presentation. Then the group of left quotients of S exists and is virtually nilpotent.*

Note that the groups of left and right quotients of subsemigroups of virtually nilpotent groups coincide (see [NT63] or [Cai05, Sections 5.2–5.3]). We now have:

PROPOSITION 10.4. *Let S be a finitely generated cancellative semigroup that admits an automatic presentation. Then the [necessarily virtually nilpotent] group of left (and right) quotients of S admits an automatic presentation.*

Proof of 10.4. Let G be the group of left (and right) quotients of S . The strategy is to show that G has a 2-dimensional interpretation in S .

- The domain formula is tautological: $\phi(x_1, x_2) := x_1 = x_1$. Thus all pairs of elements of S are used.
- The co-ordinate map is $f(x_1, x_2) = x_1^{-1}x_2$. Since G is the group of left quotients of S , the mapping f is surjective as required.
- The formula $\theta_=_$ is given by

$$\theta_=(x_1, x_2; y_1, y_2) := (\exists a, b)(x_1 a = x_2 b \wedge y_1 a = y_2 b),$$

since

$$\begin{aligned} f(x_1, x_2) &= f(y_1, y_2) \\ \iff (\exists a, b)(f(x_1, x_2) = ab^{-1} \wedge f(y_1, y_2) = ab^{-1}) \\ \iff (\exists a, b)(x_1^{-1}x_2 = ab^{-1} \wedge y_1^{-1}y_2 = ab^{-1}) \\ \iff (\exists a, b)(x_1 a = x_2 b \wedge y_1 a = y_2 b). \end{aligned}$$

- The formula θ_0 is given by

$$\begin{aligned} \theta_0(x_1, x_2; y_1, y_2; z_1, z_2) := \\ (\exists a, b, c, d)(cx_1 a = dy_2 b \wedge cx_2 = dy_1 \wedge z_2 b = z_1 a), \end{aligned}$$

since

$$\begin{aligned} f(x_1, x_2)f(y_1, y_2) &= f(z_1, z_2) \\ \iff (\exists a, b)(f(x_1, x_2)f(y_1, y_2) = ab^{-1} \wedge f(z_1, z_2) = ab^{-1}) \\ \iff (\exists a, b)(x_1^{-1}x_2y_1^{-1}y_2 = ab^{-1} \wedge z_1^{-1}z_2 = ab^{-1}) \\ \iff (\exists a, b, c, d)(c^{-1}d = x_2y_1^{-1} \wedge x_1^{-1}c^{-1}dy_2 = ab^{-1} \wedge z_1^{-1}z_2 = ab^{-1}) \\ \iff (\exists a, b, c, d)(cx_2 = dy_1 \wedge dy_2b = cx_1a \wedge z_2b = z_1a). \quad \boxed{10.4} \end{aligned}$$

$\boxed{10.4}$

We are now in a position to prove one direction of **Theorem 10.1**:

PROPOSITION 10.5. *A finitely generated cancellative semigroup admitting an automatic presentation embeds into a finitely generated virtually abelian group.*

Proof of 10.5. Let S be a finitely generated cancellative semigroup with an automatic presentation. By **Proposition 10.4**, its group of left quotients G has an automatic presentation. Since S is finitely generated, G is also. **Theorem 5.1** then shows that G is virtually abelian. $\boxed{10.5}$

The other direction is provided by:

PROPOSITION 10.6. *Every finitely generated subsemigroup of a virtually abelian group admits an automatic presentation.*

Proof of 10.6. Let G be a virtually abelian group. Let \mathbb{Z}^n be a finite-index abelian subgroup of G . By replacing \mathbb{Z}^n by its core (the maximal normal subgroup of G contained in \mathbb{Z}^n) if necessary, we may assume that \mathbb{Z}^n is normal in G . Let k be the index of \mathbb{Z}^n in G . Let A be a finite alphabet representing a subset of G , and let S be the semigroup generated by this subset. Throughout this proof, denote by \bar{w} the element of S represented by the word w over an alphabet representing a generating set. This notational distinction is necessary to avoid confusion when there are several representatives for the same element.

Let $B = \{a \in A : \bar{a} \in \mathbb{Z}^n\}$ and let $C = A - B$. So B consists of all letters in A representing elements of the abelian subgroup \mathbb{Z}^n and C consists of letters representing elements of other cosets of \mathbb{Z}^n .

Introduce a new alphabet D representing the set

$$\{\bar{w} : w \in C^{\leq k}, \bar{w} \in \mathbb{Z}^n\},$$

where $C^{\leq k}$ denotes the set of words over C of length at most k . Notice that since the set $C^{\leq k}$ is finite, so is D . Furthermore, the semigroup S is generated by $\bar{B} \cup \bar{C} \cup \bar{D}$. We next observe the following lemma:

LEMMA 10.7. *Every element of the semigroup S is represented by a word over $B \cup C \cup D$ that contains at most $k^2 - 1$ letters from C .*

Proof of 10.7. Let $s \in S$, and let $w \in (B \cup C \cup D)^+$ with $\bar{w} = s$. Then w is of the form

$$u_0 c_1 u_1 c_2 \cdots u_{m-1} c_m u_m, \quad (2)$$

where each u_i lies in $(B \cup D)^*$ and each c_i in C . The aim is to show that such a word w can be transformed into one that still represents $s \in S$ but contains at most $k^2 - 1$ letters from C .

First stage. For any word w of the form (2) and for $i = 0, \dots, m-1$, let $\psi_w(i)$ be maximal such that $\overline{c_{i+1}u_{i+1} \cdots c_m u_m}$ and $\overline{c_{\psi_w(i)+1}u_{\psi_w(i)+1} \cdots c_m u_m}$ lie in the same coset of \mathbb{Z}^n in G . It is clear that $\psi_w(i)$ is always defined and is not less than i . Notice that since there are k distinct cosets of \mathbb{Z}^n in G , $\psi_w(i)$ can take at most k distinct values as i ranges from 0 to $m-1$. Furthermore, for each i , $\overline{c_{i+1}u_{i+1} \cdots c_{\psi_w(i)}u_{\psi_w(i)}}$ lies in \mathbb{Z}^n and so commutes with \bar{u}_i .

Define a mapping $\beta' : (B \cup C \cup D)^+ \rightarrow (B \cup C \cup D)^+$ as follows: for w of the form (2), $\beta'(w)$ is defined to be

$$u_0 c_1 u_1 c_2 \cdots c_i c_{i+1} u_{i+1} \cdots c_{\psi_w(i)} u_{\psi_w(i)} u_i c_{\psi_w(i)+1} \cdots u_{m-1} c_m u_m,$$

where i is minimal with $\psi_w(i) \neq i$, and $\beta'(w) = w$ if $\psi_w(i) = i$ for all i . By the remark at the end of the last paragraph, $\overline{\beta'(w)} = \bar{w}$.

The mapping $\beta : (B \cup C \cup D)^+ \rightarrow (B \cup C \cup D)^+$ is defined by $\beta(w) = (\beta')^p(w)$, where p is minimal with $(\beta')^p(w) = (\beta')^{p+1}(w)$. Again, $\overline{\beta(w)} = \bar{w}$.

So $\beta(w)$ is the word obtained from w by shifting each u_i rightwards to one of at most k distinct positions between the various letters c_j . Thus $\beta(w)$ has the form (2) with at most k of the words u_i being non-empty.

Second stage. Define a mapping $\gamma' : (B \cup C \cup D)^+ \rightarrow (B \cup C \cup D)^+$ as follows: if $w \in (B \cup C \cup D)^+$ has a subword $v \in C^{\leq k}$ with $\bar{v} \in \mathbb{Z}^n$, then choose the leftmost, shortest such subword and replace it with the letter of D representing the same element of S . (Such a letter exists by the definition of D .)

The mapping $\gamma : (B \cup C \cup D)^+ \rightarrow (B \cup C \cup D)^+$ is defined by $\gamma(w) = (\gamma')^p(w)$, where p is minimal with $(\gamma')^p(w) = (\gamma')^{p+1}(w)$. Since each application of γ' that results in a different word decreases the number of letters from C present, such a p must exist. Observe that $\overline{\gamma(w)} = \bar{w}$ and that $\gamma(w)$ cannot contain a subword of k letters from C , for such a string must contain a subword representing an element of \mathbb{Z}^n .

Third stage. The final mapping $\delta : (B \cup C \cup D)^+ \rightarrow (B \cup C \cup D)^+$ is given by $\delta(w) = (\gamma\beta)^p(w)$, where p is minimal with $(\gamma\beta)^p(w) = (\gamma\beta)^{p+1}(w)$. Observe that $\overline{\delta(w)} = \bar{w}$. Now, $\delta(w)$ is of the form (2) with at most k words u_i being nonempty and does not contain k consecutive letters from C . So separated by the k nonempty words u_i are strings of at most $k-1$ letters from C . So the total number of letters from C in $\delta(w)$ is at most $(k-1) \times (k+1) = k^2 - 1$. 10.7

We now return to the proof of **Proposition 10.6**. Choose a set of representatives g_1, \dots, g_k for the cosets of \mathbb{Z}^n in G . Suppose $B \cup D = \{b_1, \dots, b_q\}$.

For $c_1, \dots, c_m \in C$ with $0 \leq m \leq k^2 - 1$, define

$$P_{c_1 \dots c_m} = \{u_0 c_1 u_1 c_2 \dots u_{m-1} c_m u_m : u_i = b_1^{\alpha_{i,1}} \dots b_q^{\alpha_{i,q}}, \alpha_{i,j} \in \mathbb{N} \cup \{0\}\}.$$

By **Lemma 10.7** and the fact that the elements $\overline{b_j}$ commute, every element of S is represented by an element in at least one of the sets $P_{c_1 \dots c_m}$. That is,

$$S = \bigcup_{\substack{c_1, \dots, c_m \in C \\ 0 \leq m \leq k^2 - 1}} \overline{P_{c_1 \dots c_m}}. \quad (3)$$

By **Theorem 5.1**, the virtually abelian group G has an automatic presentation (L, ϕ) , where L is the language of words

$$g_h \text{conv}(\varepsilon_1 z_1, \dots, \varepsilon_n z_n), \quad (4)$$

where $\varepsilon_i \in \{+, -\}$ and z_i is a natural number in reverse binary notation. (In L , the coset representative g_h functions simply as a *symbol*.) The aim is now to show that the subset of L representing elements of S is regular. To do so, it suffices to show that the set of words in L representing elements of $\overline{P_{c_1 \dots c_m}}$ is regular, since (3) is a finite union.

To this end, fix c_1, \dots, c_m and write P for $P_{c_1 \dots c_m}$. Let $z_{i,j} \in \mathbb{Z}^n$ be such that $\overline{b_j c_{i+1} \dots c_m} = \overline{c_{i+1} \dots c_m} z_{i,j}$. Let $u_0 c_1 u_1 \dots c_m u_m \in P$ with $u_i = b_1^{\alpha_{i,1}} \dots b_q^{\alpha_{i,q}}$. Then

$$\overline{u_0 c_1 u_1 \dots c_m u_m} = \overline{c_1 \dots c_m} \prod_{i=0}^m \prod_{j=1}^q z_{i,j}^{\alpha_{i,j}},$$

or, switching to additive notation and supposing $\overline{c_1 \dots c_m} = g_h(z'_1, \dots, z'_n)$ and $z_{i,j} = (z_{i,j,1}, \dots, z_{i,j,n})$ for all i, j :

$$\overline{u_0 c_1 u_1 \dots c_m u_m} = g_h(z'_1, \dots, z'_n) \sum_{i=0}^m \sum_{j=1}^q \alpha_{i,j} (z_{i,j,1}, \dots, z_{i,j,n}).$$

Therefore define $\theta(z_1, \dots, z_n)$ to be

$$\begin{aligned} & (\exists \alpha_{0,1}, \dots, \alpha_{m,q}) \left((\alpha_{0,1} \geq 0) \wedge \dots \wedge (\alpha_{m,q} \geq 0) \right. \\ & \quad \wedge (z_1 = z'_1 + \sum_{i=0}^m \sum_{j=1}^m \alpha_{i,j} z_{i,j,1}) \\ & \quad \wedge (z_2 = z'_2 + \sum_{i=0}^m \sum_{j=1}^m \alpha_{i,j} z_{i,j,2}) \\ & \quad \vdots \\ & \quad \left. \wedge (z_n = z'_n + \sum_{i=0}^m \sum_{j=1}^m \alpha_{i,j} z_{i,j,n}) \right), \end{aligned}$$

where $\alpha_{i,j} z_{i,j,k}$ is understood to be shorthand for

$$\underbrace{\alpha_{i,j} + \dots + \alpha_{i,j}}_{z_{i,j,k} \text{ times}}.$$

By a special case of [Theorem 5.1](#), the structure $(\mathbb{Z}, +)$ admits an automatic presentation (M, ψ) , where M is the set of words ϵz , where $\epsilon \in \{+, -\}$ and z is in reverse binary notation. Furthermore, it is clear that, in this presentation, the relation \geq is regular. That is, (M, ψ) is an automatic presentation for $(\mathbb{Z}, +, \geq)$.

The set of words in L representing elements of \bar{P} is then

$$\{g_h \text{conv}(z_1, \dots, z_n) : (\mathbb{Z}, +, \geq) \models \theta(\psi(z_1), \dots, \psi(z_n))\}.$$

(Recall that g_h is the representative of the coset in which $\overline{c_1 \cdots c_m}$ lies.) By [Proposition 4.5](#), this set is a regular subset of L .

Union together the [finitely many] regular subsets of L obtained for the various c_1, \dots, c_m to see that the set L_S consisting of those words in L representing elements of S is regular. So S admits the automatic presentation $(L_S, \phi|_{L_S})$.

10.6

[Propositions 10.6](#) and [10.5](#) together yield [Theorem 10.1](#).

11 FA-PRESENTABILITY, AUTOMATICITY, AND CAYLEY GRAPHS

We recall the definition of an automatic semigroup; see [\[CRRT01\]](#) for further background information:

DEFINITION 11.1. A semigroup S is *automatic* if there exists a finite generating set A for S and a regular language L over A such that every element of S is represented by at least one element of L , and, for all $a \in A \cup \{\varepsilon\}$, the relation

$$L_a = \{(u, v) : ua = v \text{ in } S\}$$

is regular.

If S is an automatic semigroup, then the Cayley graph of S (viewed as a labelled graph) is FA-presentable: the language L (as in the definition of ‘automatic’) is a regular language of representatives for the vertices of the Cayley graph (the elements of S), and the adjacency relations (the relations L_a for $a \in A$) and the equality relation (the relation L_ε) are all regular.

The converse of this does not hold: let H be the discrete Heisenberg group — that is, the multiplicative group of matrices of the form

$$\begin{bmatrix} 1 & x & z \\ 0 & 1 & y \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix}, \text{ where } x, y, z \in \mathbb{Z}.$$

The Cayley graph of H is FA-presentable, but H is not automatic [\[BGo4, p. 651\]](#).

Observe that whether the Cayley graph of a semigroup is FA-presentable is not dependent on the choice of generating set:

PROPOSITION 11.2. *Let S be a semigroup and suppose the Cayley graph of S with respect to some finite generating set X is FA-presentable. Let Y be any finite generating set for S . Then the Cayley graph of S with respect to Y is also FA-presentable.*

Proof of 11.2. Let (L, ϕ) be an automatic presentation for the Cayley graph of S with respect to X . Let $y \in Y$. Since X generates S , there exists a word $w =$

$w_1 \cdots w_k$ with $w_i \in X$ with $y = w$ in S . Then the adjacency relation L_y is given by

$$\begin{aligned} L_y &= L_{w_1} \circ L_{w_2} \circ \cdots \circ L_{w_k} \\ &= \{(u, v) : (\exists t_1, \dots, t_{k-1}) \\ &\quad ((u, t_1) \in L_{w_1} \wedge (t_2, t_3) \in L_{w_2} \wedge \dots \wedge (t_{k-1}, v) \in L_{w_k})\}. \end{aligned}$$

So the relations L_y are first-order definable and thus regular. So (L, ϕ) is also an automatic presentation for the Cayley graph of S with respect to Y . □11.2

Let \mathcal{S} , \mathcal{C} , and \mathcal{G} be respectively the classes of finitely generated semigroups, finitely generated cancellative semigroups, and finitely generated groups. Let \mathcal{F} be the class of FA-presentable semigroups, \mathcal{A} the class of automatic semigroups, and \mathcal{T} the class of semigroups whose Cayley graphs are FA-presentable.

With this notation, the discussion above can be summarized by the following result:

PROPOSITION 11.3. $\mathcal{S} \cap \mathcal{A} \subsetneq \mathcal{S} \cap \mathcal{T}$ and $\mathcal{C} \cap \mathcal{A} \subsetneq \mathcal{C} \cap \mathcal{T}$.

Within the class of finitely generated groups \mathcal{G} , we can say more:

PROPOSITION 11.4. $\mathcal{G} \cap \mathcal{F} \subsetneq \mathcal{G} \cap \mathcal{A} \subsetneq \mathcal{G} \cap \mathcal{T}$.

Proof of 11.4. By [Theorem 5.1](#), the finitely generated FA-presentable groups are precisely the virtually abelian groups, which are known to be automatic [[ECH⁺92](#), Section 4.1]. Free groups are automatic but not FA-presentable. This establishes the first proper inclusion. For the second proper inclusion, recall that every automatic group has an FA-presentable Cayley graph, but that the non-automatic group H defined above has an FA-presentable Cayley graph. □11.4

However, this does not generalize to semigroups:

PROPOSITION 11.5. *The classes $\mathcal{C} \cap \mathcal{F}$ and $\mathcal{C} \cap \mathcal{A}$ are incomparable; thus the classes $\mathcal{S} \cap \mathcal{F}$ and $\mathcal{S} \cap \mathcal{A}$ are also.*

Proof of 11.5. The non-inclusion of $\mathcal{C} \cap \mathcal{A}$ in $\mathcal{C} \cap \mathcal{F}$ follows from the non-inclusion of $\mathcal{G} \cap \mathcal{A}$ in $\mathcal{G} \cap \mathcal{F}$. The first author has previously exhibited an example of a non-automatic finitely generated subsemigroup S of a virtually abelian group [[Cai06b](#)]. This semigroup S must admit an automatic presentation by [Theorem 10.1](#). This establishes the non-inclusion of $\mathcal{C} \cap \mathcal{A}$ in $\mathcal{C} \cap \mathcal{F}$. □11.5

12 UNARY AUTOMATIC PRESENTATIONS & WORD PROBLEMS

An automatic presentation (L, ϕ) is *unary* if the language L consists of words over a one-letter alphabet. This section considers unary automatic presentations and connections to word problems for semigroups and groups.

THEOREM 12.1. *Let S be a cancellative semigroup that admits a unary automatic presentation. Then S is finite.*

Proof of 12.1. The proof of [[Blu99](#), Theorem 7.19], which asserts that groups admitting unary automatic presentations are finite, holds in the more general setting of cancellative semigroups. □12.1

However, there do exist infinite non-cancellative semigroups admitting unary automatic presentations: for example, a countable semigroup of right zeros $Z = \{z_i : i \in \mathbb{N}\}$ (with $z_i z_j = z_j$ for all $i, j \in \mathbb{N}$) admits the automatic presentation (L, ϕ) , where $L = a^*$ and $\phi : L \rightarrow Z$ is defined by $a^k \mapsto z_k$. The multiplication relation is then

$$\{(a^i, a^j, a^j) : i, j \in \mathbb{N}\},$$

which is clearly regular. Note that Z is left-cancellative, so even one-sided cancellative unary FA-presentable semigroups can be infinite.

Recall that the word problem of a group G with respect to a [semigroup] generating set X is the set of words over X that are equal to 1_G . The word problem for a group is said to be *one-counter* if it is accepted by a one-counter automaton. (See [Ber79] for background information on one-counter automata.) The word problem for a semigroup S with respect to a generating set X , as defined by Duncan and Gilman [DG04], is the set $\{u\#v^r : u, v \in X^*, u = v \text{ in } S\}$, where v^r denotes the reverse of the word v and $\#$ is a new symbol not in X .

Blumensath [Blu99, Proposition 7.22] proved that the Cayley graph of a finitely generated group G is virtually cyclic if and only if the Cayley graph of G admits a unary automatic presentation. This, together with Herbst's [Her91] result that finitely generated groups with one-counter word problem are precisely the virtually cyclic groups, yields the following corollary:

COROLLARY 12.2. *A finitely generated group has a one-counter word problem if and only if its Cayley graph has a unary automatic presentation.*

Finitely generated virtually abelian groups — which are precisely the finitely generated FA-presentable groups — are characterized by having word problems recognizable by blind one-counter automata [EKO06, Theorem 1]. This fact, together with the preceding corollary, suggests the following question:

PROBLEM 12.3. *Are finitely generated FA-presentable semigroups classifiable by having word problems recognizable by some 'natural' class of automata?*

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