

# MINIMAL DFAS FOR TESTING DIVISIBILITY

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ABSTRACT. We present and prove a theorem answering the question “how many states does a minimal deterministic finite automaton (DFA) recognizing the set of base- $b$  numbers divisible by  $k$  have?”

## 1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The following exercise is typical in introductory texts on deterministic finite automata (DFAs): “produce an automaton that recognizes the set of binary strings that, when interpreted as binary numbers, are divisible by  $k$ .” For example, exercise 1.30 in [2] asks the student to prove that the language  $\{x \mid x \text{ is a binary number that is a multiple of } k\}$  is regular for each  $k \geq 1$ ; explicitly presenting an automaton is the easiest solution.

The traditional (and correct) answer constructs a  $k$ -state automaton that keeps track not only of divisibility by  $k$ , but also the current residue modulo  $k$ . For example, if the input read was 1101, the machine would remember “ $13 \bmod k$ ”. The transitions between states are simple: if the automaton’s current state is “ $r \bmod k$ ”, and the input symbol read is “0”, it moves to state  $(2r) \bmod k$ ; if the input symbol read is “1”, it moves to state  $(2r + 1) \bmod k$ .

(This example also generalizes to bases other than binary. Furthermore, even if the input string is encoded in base  $b$ , the canonical DFA will still have  $k$  states. It will, however, contain  $b$  transitions from each state.)

The traditional answer, unfortunately, in general fails to produce a *minimal* DFA. This paper addresses the considerably more difficult question of “how many states does a minimal DFA that recognizes the set of base- $b$  numbers divisible by  $k$  have?” We denote this number by  $f_b(k)$  and derive a closed-form expression; in the proof, we also describe the states of the minimal DFA in more detail.

The function  $f_b(k)$  may be computed by algorithmic means. The author used two implementations of the Hopcroft minimization algorithm: an original Perl program and the highly-optimized AT&T FSM Package<sup>TM</sup>. According to experts in the field, no prior work addresses the general case of this problem except through such computational alleys.

## 2. INTERESTING PATTERNS

The function  $f_b(k)$  exhibits very curious behavior. One interesting pattern considers  $f_b(k)$  with  $b$  fixed and  $k = x \cdot y^z$  for increasing values of  $z$ .

**Example.** Table of  $f_b(k)$  for  $b = 6$  and  $k = 2^z$ . (That is,  $x = 1$ ,  $y = 2$ , and  $z$  ranges from 0 to 10.)

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$z$	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
$2^z$	1	2	4	8	16	32	64	128	256	512	1024
$f_6(2^z)$	1	2	3	5	8	12	20	29	45	72	104
$f_6(2^{z+1}) - f_6(2^z)$	1	1	2	3	4	8	9	16	27	32	64

The successive differences of  $f_6(2^z)$  are the powers of 2 and 3, sorted in increasing order!

**Example.** Table of  $f_b(k)$  for  $b = 2^2 \cdot 5 = 20$  and  $k = 30 \cdot 5^z$ . (That is,  $x = 30$ ,  $y = 5$ , and  $z$  ranges from 0 to 6.)

$z$	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
$30 \cdot 5^z$	30	150	750	3750	18750	93750	468750
$f_{20}(30 \cdot 5^z)$	4	6	14	26	58	118	246
$f_{20}(30 \cdot 5^{z+1}) - f_{20}(30 \cdot 5^z)$	2	8	12	32	60	128	300

Here, the successive differences of  $f_{20}(30 \cdot 5^z)$  come in increasing order from two sequences:  $\{2 \cdot 4^m\} = \{2, 8, 32, 128, \dots\}$  and  $\{12 \cdot 5^m\} = \{12, 60, 300, \dots\}$ .

We observe that the function  $f_b(k)$  manages to pick terms, in increasing order, from two unrelated sequences! At first, it is hard to imagine a formula that would produce such a function. Investigating this bizarre behavior was the starting point for this study.

### 3. MAIN RESULT

**Theorem 1.** Let  $\lambda(x, y) = \frac{x}{\gcd(x, y)}$ . Then

$$\begin{aligned}
f_b(k) &= \lambda(k, b^\infty) + \sum_{\alpha=0}^{\infty} \min \{ \lambda(b^\alpha, k), \lambda(k, b^\alpha) - \lambda(k, b^{\alpha+1}) \} \\
&= \min_{\mathcal{A} \geq 0} \left\{ \lambda(k, b^{\mathcal{A}}) + \sum_{\alpha=0}^{\mathcal{A}-1} \lambda(b^\alpha, k) \right\} \\
&= \lambda(k, b^{\mathcal{A}_0}) + \sum_{\alpha=0}^{\mathcal{A}_0-1} \lambda(b^\alpha, k),
\end{aligned}$$

where  $\mathcal{A}_0$  is the smallest nonnegative integer  $\alpha$  satisfying  $\lambda(k, b^\alpha) - \lambda(k, b^{\alpha+1}) < \lambda(b^\alpha, k)$ .

**Remarks.** The function  $\lambda(x, y)$  is not symmetric; indeed,  $\lambda(x, y) = \lambda(y, x)$  if and only if  $x = y$ .

We use the notation  $\lambda(k, b^\infty)$  to denote  $\lambda(k, b^\alpha)$  for sufficiently large  $\alpha$ ; similarly, the infinite sum can be truncated when  $\lambda(k, b^\alpha) - \lambda(k, b^{\alpha+1}) = 0$ . This equality certainly holds for  $\alpha \geq \log_2 k$ .

Lemma 6 shows that the three expressions in the theorem are equivalent.

To understand the expressions of  $f_b(k)$  in the theorem, we may draw a table listing  $\alpha$ ,  $\lambda(b^\alpha, k)$ ,  $\lambda(k, b^\alpha)$ , and  $\lambda(k, b^\alpha) - \lambda(k, b^{\alpha+1})$ . The first and third expressions may be understood fairly simply as written. However, the second expression is more difficult; it states that  $f_b(k)$  is the minimal sum one can obtain by summing zero or more elements of the form  $\lambda(b^\alpha, k)$  (as  $\alpha$  ranges from 0 to  $\mathcal{A} - 1$ ) and then the following value of  $\lambda(k, b^\alpha)$  (that is,  $\alpha = \mathcal{A}$ ).

**Example.**  $b = 6, k = 16 = 2^4$ : We can calculate  $f_b(k)$  with any of the expressions above (for the third, use  $\mathcal{A}_0 = 2$ ). The minimal terms of the first expression appear underlined below; simultaneously, the minimal “path”  $8 = 1 + 3 + 4$  (in terms of the second formula above) is indicated in boldface. Note that other paths such as  $15 = 1 + 3 + 9 + 2, 9 = 1 + 8$ , and  $16 = 16$  (the trivial path  $\mathcal{A} = 0$ ) yield non-minimal sums.

$\alpha$	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
$\lambda(b^\alpha, k)$	<u>1</u>	<b>3</b>	9	27	81	486	2916
$\lambda(k, b^\alpha)$	16	8	<b>4</b>	2	1	1	1
$\lambda(k, b^\alpha) - \lambda(k, b^{\alpha+1})$	8	4	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
$\lambda(k, b^\infty)$							<u>1</u>

#### 4. COROLLARIES TO THE MAIN RESULT

**Corollary 2.** *The following are upper bounds for  $f_b(k)$ :*

$$\begin{aligned}
 f_b(k) &\leq k &&= \lambda(k, b^0) \\
 f_b(k) &\leq 1 + \frac{k}{\gcd(k, b)} &&= \lambda(b^0, k) + \lambda(k, b^1) \\
 f_b(k) &\leq 1 + \frac{k}{\gcd(b, k)} + \frac{k}{\gcd(k, b^2)} &&= \lambda(b^0, k) + \lambda(b^1, k) + \lambda(k, b^2)
 \end{aligned}$$

*Proof.* These follow immediately from the second expression in Theorem 1.  $\square$

**Corollary 3.** *The canonical DFA described in Section 1 is minimal if and only if  $\gcd(k, b) = 1$  or  $k = 2$ .*

*Proof.* The canonical DFA has  $k$  states and hence we must determine when  $f_b(k) = k$ .

If  $\gcd(k, b) = 1$  or  $k = 2$ , the first expression of Theorem 1 immediately gives  $f_b(k) = k$ . Otherwise, we have  $\frac{k}{\gcd(k, b)} < k - 1$ , and by the previous corollary,

$$f_b(k) \leq 1 + \frac{k}{\gcd(k, b)} < k.$$

$\square$

**Corollary 4.** *The successive differences of  $f_6(2^z)$  are powers of 2 and 3, sorted in increasing order.*

*Proof.* Manipulation of the result of the theorem yields

$$\begin{aligned}
 f_6(2^z) &= \lambda(2^z, 6^\infty) + \sum_{\alpha=0}^{\infty} \min \{ \lambda(6^\alpha, 2^z), \lambda(2^z, 6^\alpha) - \lambda(2^z, 6^{\alpha+1}) \} \\
 &= 1 + \sum_{\alpha=0}^{\infty} \min \{ 3^\alpha \cdot \lceil 2^{\alpha-z} \rceil, \lfloor 2^{z-\alpha-1} \rfloor \} \\
 &= 1 + \sum_{\alpha=0}^{z-1} \min \{ 3^\alpha, 2^{z-\alpha-1} \}.
 \end{aligned}$$

It is not difficult to see that as one increments  $z \mapsto z + 1$ , a new term of the form  $\min \{ 3^\alpha, 2^{z-\alpha-1} \}$  is added, and the desired property holds.  $\square$

**Remark.** A similar approach may be applied to the general case of  $f_b(x \cdot y^z)$  for increasing values of  $z$ . In particular, we can easily prove the pattern we noticed in Section 2 for  $f_{20}(30 \cdot 5^z)$ .

**Corollary 5.** *If  $b = p^n$  ( $p$  not necessarily prime, but see the remark) and  $k = p^m \cdot x$  with  $\gcd(x, p) = 1$ , then  $f_b(k) = x + \lceil \frac{m}{n} \rceil$ .*

*Proof.* We use the first expression of the theorem:

$$\begin{aligned} f_b(k) &= \lambda(k, b^\infty) + \sum_{\alpha=0}^{\infty} \min \{ \lambda(b^\alpha, k), \lambda(k, b^\alpha) - \lambda(k, b^{\alpha+1}) \} \\ &= x + \sum_{\alpha=0}^{\infty} \min \left\{ \lceil p^{n\alpha-m} \rceil, \lceil p^{m-n\alpha} \rceil \cdot x - \lceil p^{m-(n+1)\alpha} \rceil \cdot x \right\} \end{aligned}$$

As long as  $n\alpha < m$ ,  $\lceil p^{n\alpha-m} \rceil = 1$  and  $\lceil p^{m-n\alpha} \rceil \cdot x > \lceil p^{m-(n+1)\alpha} \rceil \cdot x$ . There are precisely  $\lceil \frac{m}{n} \rceil$  such  $\alpha$  (since  $0 \leq \alpha < \frac{m}{n}$ ), so we have

$$\begin{aligned} f_b(k) &= x + \sum_{\alpha=0}^{\lceil \frac{m}{n} \rceil - 1} \{1\} + \sum_{\alpha=\lceil \frac{m}{n} \rceil}^{\infty} \{0\} \\ &= x + \left\lceil \frac{m}{n} \right\rceil, \end{aligned}$$

as desired.  $\square$

**Remark.** If  $p$  is prime, and thus  $b$  is a prime power, this corollary completely characterizes  $f_b(k)$ , as all  $k$  can be represented in the form  $p^m \cdot x$  with  $\gcd(x, p) = 1$ .

## 5. PROOF OF THE MAIN RESULT

**Lemma 6.** *The three expressions of Theorem 1 are equivalent.*

*Proof.* By looking at the powers of a fixed prime, we see that  $\lambda(b^\alpha, k)$  and  $\gcd(k, b^\alpha)$  are increasing (not necessarily strictly) functions of  $\alpha$ . It is also easy to show that  $\gcd(k, b^{\alpha+1}) / \gcd(k, b^\alpha)$  is decreasing, which immediately implies that  $\lambda(k, b^\alpha) - \lambda(k, b^{\alpha+1})$  is decreasing. Therefore, in the sum

$$\sum_{\alpha=0}^{\infty} \min \{ \lambda(b^\alpha, k), \lambda(k, b^\alpha) - \lambda(k, b^{\alpha+1}) \},$$

one takes  $\mathcal{A}_0$  elements from the first sequence  $\{\lambda(b^\alpha, k)\}$  and then infinitely many from the second sequence  $\{\lambda(k, b^\alpha) - \lambda(k, b^{\alpha+1})\}$ . Telescoping the latter, one gets the other two expressions of the theorem. (The cut-off  $\mathcal{A}_0$  is the smallest nonnegative integer  $\alpha$  satisfying  $\lambda(k, b^\alpha) - \lambda(k, b^{\alpha+1}) < \lambda(b^\alpha, k)$ .)  $\square$

*Proof of Theorem 1.* Constructing a DFA directly, as in Section 1, is often difficult because one must describe the transitions between states in addition to the states themselves. We will use the Myhill-Nerode Theorem and the accompanying theory of extension invariant equivalence relations to work with the states of the automaton only.

**Definition.** Given a language (set of strings)  $L$  over an alphabet  $\Sigma$ , we define the extension invariant equivalence relation  $\sim_L$  associated with  $L$  as follows: strings  $x$  and  $y$  in  $\Sigma^*$  are equivalent ( $x \sim_L y$ ) if for any suffix  $z \in \Sigma^*$ ,  $xz \in L$  if and only if

$yz \in L$ . (As is customary,  $\Sigma^*$  denotes the set of all finite strings over  $\Sigma$ . Later, we use  $\Sigma^+ = \Sigma^* \setminus \{\epsilon\}$  to denote the set of nonempty strings over  $\Sigma$ .)

The Myhill-Nerode Theorem [1, *Thms* 3.9–10] establishes that the minimal-state automaton accepting  $L$  has, up to isomorphism, one state corresponding to each equivalence class of  $\sim_L$ . Therefore, the minimal-state automaton has exactly the number of states as the index of  $\sim_L$ . (In particular, a language  $L$  is regular if and only if  $\sim_L$  has finite index.) In addition, **any** DFA recognizing  $L$  can be altered by identifying (“gluing”) some states together to obtain the minimal-state automaton.

In this proof, we let  $\Sigma$  be the set of base- $b$  digits and  $L$  the set of base- $b$  numbers divisible by  $k$ . In addition, since we work with only one language at a time, we may write  $x \sim y$  rather than  $x \sim_L y$ .

To begin, we will restate the problem equivalently in a way that will allow us to utilize modular arithmetic. Because the canonical DFA accepting  $L$  has a state for each residue modulo  $k$ , the Myhill-Nerode Theorem implies that the minimal-state DFA will contain states that correspond to *groups of residues* modulo  $k$ . Therefore, in the pursuing analysis, rather than considering strings of digits, we discuss residues; in a way, we are projecting  $\Sigma^*$  onto  $\mathbb{Z}_k$  (in the natural manner). For example,  $L$  now becomes very simple: instead of containing all numbers divisible by  $k$ , it contains the single residue  $0 \pmod{k}$ . To complete the reduction, we need only bother ourselves with one further

**Definition.** Let  $r \in \mathbb{Z}_k$  be a residue modulo  $k$  and  $d \in \Sigma$  a base- $b$  digit. We define the concatenation  $rd$  to be the residue  $b \cdot r + d \pmod{k}$ . Similarly, if  $d = d_{n-1} \cdots d_1 d_0 \in \Sigma^+$  is a nonempty string of digits, let the concatenation  $rd$  be what is obtained by successively concatenating individual digits:

$$rd \equiv b \cdot (b \cdot (\dots (b \cdot r + d_{n-1}) \cdots) + d_1) + d_0 \equiv b^n \cdot r + \overline{d_{n-1} \cdots d_1 d_0} \pmod{k},$$

where  $\overline{d}$  denotes  $d$  interpreted as an integer. Of course, if  $d = \epsilon$ , the empty string,  $rd = r\epsilon \equiv r$ .

Finally, extend  $\sim_L$  onto  $\mathbb{Z}_k$ : residues  $x, y \in \mathbb{Z}_k$  are equivalent if for any string  $z \in \Sigma^*$ ,  $xz \equiv 0 \pmod{k}$  if and only if  $yz \equiv 0 \pmod{k}$ .

Now, suppose  $\mathcal{A}$  is a nonnegative integer. We will describe

$$(*) \quad \lambda(k, b^{\mathcal{A}}) + \sum_{\alpha=0}^{\mathcal{A}-1} \lambda(b^{\alpha}, k)$$

*pre-equivalence classes*, each a group of residues, which will be a refinement of the equivalence classes of  $\sim_L$ .

The pre-equivalence classes we define naturally present themselves in *packages*, a term we borrow from computer programming to indicate collections of classes. Altogether, there are  $\mathcal{A} + 1$  distinct packages, which we number  $0, \dots, \mathcal{A}$ ; in addition, we will sometimes refer to package  $\mathcal{A}$  as the distinctive *package etcetera*. These packages come in the sizes anticipated from (\*): if  $0 \leq \alpha < \mathcal{A}$ , package  $\alpha$  contains  $\lambda(b^{\alpha}, k)$  pre-equivalence classes, while package  $\mathcal{A}$  contains  $\lambda(k, b^{\mathcal{A}})$  pre-equivalence classes.

We now define the packages. Suppose  $0 \leq \alpha < \mathcal{A}$ . Package  $\alpha$  will consist of those residues  $r$  such that there exists a string  $d$  of length  $\alpha$  such that  $rd \equiv 0$  and no smaller  $\alpha$  works; furthermore, these residues will be grouped according to their corresponding  $d$ 's. Mathematically, for each  $0 \leq c < b^{\alpha}$  such that  $\gcd(b^{\alpha}, k) \mid c$ ,

package  $\alpha$  contains the pre-equivalence class  $\{x \mid b^\alpha \cdot x + c \equiv 0\}$ , except those  $x$  that appeared in package  $\alpha - 1$  or earlier. (Note that the equation  $b^\alpha \cdot x + c \equiv 0$  has a solution  $x$  iff  $\gcd(b^\alpha, k) \mid c$ .) Because there are precisely  $b^\alpha / \gcd(b^\alpha, k) = \lambda(b^\alpha, k)$  such  $c$  in the desired range, these packages have the stated sizes. Before we proceed, note that the *union* of the pre-equivalence classes in packages 0 through  $\alpha$  consists of **all** residues  $x$  satisfying  $b^\alpha \cdot x + c \equiv 0$  with  $0 \leq c < b^\alpha$ , and no others.

Package etcetera consists of the leftovers; mathematically, it is similar, but there is no restriction on  $c$ : for each  $0 \leq c < k$  (only to avoid duplication modulo  $k$ ), package  $\mathcal{A}$  contains the pre-equivalence class  $\{x \mid b^{\mathcal{A}} \cdot x + c \equiv 0\}$ , except those  $x$  that have appeared previously. Once again, we have the necessary number of classes, since  $k / \gcd(k, b^{\mathcal{A}}) = \lambda(k, b^{\mathcal{A}})$ .

**Example.**  $b = 6$ ,  $k = 16 = 2^4$ : the pre-equivalence classes for  $\mathcal{A} = 2$ . This value of  $\mathcal{A}$  was chosen so that these groups correspond to the states in the minimal DFA. Strikeouts indicate that the given value of  $x$  satisfies  $b^\alpha \cdot x + c \equiv 0$  but already appeared in a previous package.

Package 0		Package 1		Package 2 ( <i>etcetera</i> )	
<b>c</b>	<b>{x}</b>	<b>c</b>	<b>{x}</b>	<b>c</b>	<b>{x}</b>
0	{ 0 }	0	{ 0, 8 }	0	{ 0, <del>8</del> , 4, 12 }
		2	{ 5, 13 }	4	{ 3, 7, 11, 15 }
		4	{ 2, 10 }	8	{ <del>2</del> , <del>10</del> , 6, 14 }
				12	{ <del>5</del> , <del>13</del> , 1, 9 }

Recall once more from the statement of the theorem that  $\mathcal{A}_0$  is the smallest nonnegative integer  $\alpha$  satisfying  $\lambda(k, b^\alpha) - \lambda(k, b^{\alpha+1}) < \lambda(b^\alpha, k)$ .

We make three separate claims:

1. for any  $\mathcal{A}$ , our pre-equivalence classes coincide with the equivalence classes of  $\sim_L$  with two possible exceptions: some pre-equivalence classes may be empty and some pre-equivalence classes in package etcetera may actually be equivalent (both of these would produce an overcount);
2. for  $\mathcal{A} \leq \mathcal{A}_0$ , all the pre-equivalence classes are nonempty; and
3. for  $\mathcal{A} \geq \mathcal{A}_0$ , the classes of package etcetera are actually inequivalent.

It follows that for  $\mathcal{A} = \mathcal{A}_0$ , our pre-equivalence classes are precisely the Myhill-Nerode equivalence classes of  $\sim_L$ .

We begin by affirming (1): if two residues  $r$  and  $s$  are in the same class of package  $\alpha$ , there exists no string  $d$  of length less than  $\alpha$  such that  $rd \equiv 0$  or  $sd \equiv 0$ . In addition,  $r \cdot b^\alpha \equiv s \cdot b^\alpha$ , so for any string  $d$  of length at least  $\alpha$ , we have  $rd \equiv sd$ . Therefore,  $r$  and  $s$  are equivalent, and the pre-equivalence classes are a refinement of those of  $\sim_L$ .

Moreover, if  $r$  and  $s$  are in different classes and at least one of  $r$  and  $s$  is not in package etcetera, then  $r \not\sim s$ . Indeed, if  $r$  and  $s$  are in different packages, the result is obviously true. If  $r$  and  $s$  are in different classes of the same package  $\alpha$  with  $\alpha < \mathcal{A}$ , we can also conclude that  $r \not\sim s$  because  $r$  and  $s$  satisfy  $b^\alpha \cdot x + c \equiv 0$  for different values of  $c$ ; therefore, there exists a string  $d$  (namely, the  $d$  such that  $\bar{d} = c$ ) of length  $\alpha$  such that  $rd \equiv 0$  but  $sd \not\equiv 0$ .

Before continuing, we note the significance of  $\mathcal{A}_0$ . If  $\alpha \leq \mathcal{A}_0$ , then

$$\lambda(k, b^{\alpha-1}) - \lambda(k, b^\alpha) \geq \lambda(b^{\alpha-1}, k) \iff k \cdot \frac{\gcd(k, b^{\alpha-1})}{\gcd(k, b^\alpha)} \leq k - b^{\alpha-1},$$

and if  $\alpha > \mathcal{A}_0$ , then

$$\lambda(k, b^{\alpha-1}) - \lambda(k, b^\alpha) < \lambda(b^{\alpha-1}, k) \iff k \cdot \frac{\gcd(k, b^{\alpha-1})}{\gcd(k, b^\alpha)} > k - b^{\alpha-1}.$$

Equipped, we proceed in order to (2). Suppose  $\mathcal{A} \leq \mathcal{A}_0$ ; then, we claim that for any fixed  $0 < \alpha \leq \mathcal{A}$  and  $c$  such that  $\gcd(k, b^\alpha) \mid c$ , there exists an  $x$  satisfying

$$(\dagger) \quad b^\alpha \cdot x + c \equiv 0$$

which does not satisfy  $b^{\alpha-1} \cdot x + c' \equiv 0$  with  $0 \leq c' < b^{\alpha-1}$ . Indeed, consider all  $x$  satisfying  $(\dagger)$  and note that these  $x$  are spaced apart equally with  $\frac{k}{\gcd(k, b^\alpha)}$  separation between consecutive solutions. Multiplying these  $x$  by  $b^{\alpha-1}$  yields (possibly duplicate) residues  $b^{\alpha-1} \cdot x$  spaced  $k \cdot \frac{\gcd(k, b^{\alpha-1})}{\gcd(k, b^\alpha)}$  apart. But, because  $\alpha \leq \mathcal{A} \leq \mathcal{A}_0$ ,

$$k \cdot \frac{\gcd(k, b^{\alpha-1})}{\gcd(k, b^\alpha)} \leq k - b^{\alpha-1},$$

whence there exists an  $x$  satisfying  $(\dagger)$  such that  $(b^{\alpha-1} \cdot x) \bmod k$  is in between 1 and  $k - b^{\alpha-1}$ , and such an  $x$  cannot satisfy  $b^{\alpha-1} \cdot x + c' \equiv 0$  with  $0 \leq c' < b^{\alpha-1}$ . Therefore, all of the classes of packages 0 through  $\mathcal{A}$  are nonempty.

We finish with (3). Suppose  $\mathcal{A} \geq \mathcal{A}_0$ ; it suffices to show that if  $r \sim s$  and  $\alpha$  is the minimal  $\alpha$  such that  $b^\alpha \cdot r \equiv b^\alpha \cdot s$ , then  $\alpha \leq \mathcal{A}$ . Assume the contrary:  $\alpha > \mathcal{A}$ . Then,  $r$  and  $s$  are both solutions of  $(\dagger)$  for a fixed  $c$ . To derive a contradiction, we again focus on the spacing of solutions of  $(\dagger)$ . So, consider all  $x$  satisfying  $(\dagger)$ ; they are spaced  $\frac{k}{\gcd(k, b^\alpha)}$  apart. As before, the residues  $b^{\alpha-1} \cdot x$  for  $x$  satisfying  $(\dagger)$  are spaced  $k \cdot \frac{\gcd(k, b^{\alpha-1})}{\gcd(k, b^\alpha)}$  apart. However, because  $\alpha > \mathcal{A} \geq \mathcal{A}_0$ ,

$$k \cdot \frac{\gcd(k, b^{\alpha-1})}{\gcd(k, b^\alpha)} > k - b^{\alpha-1}$$

and thus there is not enough room for two distinct  $(b^{\alpha-1} \cdot x) \bmod k$  in between 1 and  $k - b^{\alpha-1}$ . Therefore, either  $b^{\alpha-1} \cdot r \equiv b^{\alpha-1} \cdot s$  or one of  $r$  and  $s$  satisfies  $b^{\alpha-1} \cdot x + c' \equiv 0$  with  $0 \leq c' < b^{\alpha-1}$ . The former contradicts the minimality of  $\alpha$ , and the second is impossible as well: without loss of generality,  $r$  satisfies such an equation. But then, there exists a string  $d$  of length  $\alpha - 1$  such that  $rd \equiv 0$ . Because  $r \sim s$ , it follows that  $rd \equiv sd \equiv 0$  for a string of length  $\alpha - 1$ , once again contradicting the minimality of  $\alpha$ ! We have reached a contradiction in all cases, therefore our assumption was false and  $\alpha \leq \mathcal{A}$ . Therefore, any two residues are “distinguished” at or before  $\alpha = \mathcal{A}$ , and it follows that any  $r$  and  $s$  in the package etcetera are equivalent if and only if they are in the same pre-equivalence class.

At last, we are done. □

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For large-scale computations, when speed was crucial, AT&T Research’s FSM Package was used to compute  $f_b(k)$ , to complement the author’s own programs.

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