Two-Player Perfect Information Games: A Brief Survey

Tsan-sheng Hsu

徐讚昇

tshsu@iis.sinica.edu.tw

`http://www.iis.sinica.edu.tw/~tshsu`

Abstract

- **Domain: two-player games.**
- **Which game characters are predominant when the solution of a game is the main target?**
  - **It is concluded that decision complexity is more important than state-space complexity.**
  - **There is a trade-off between using knowledge-based methods and using brute-force methods.**
  - **There is a clear correlation between the first-player's initiative and the necessary effort to solve a game.**
  - **Fairness of a game.**
- **A survey of related studies on two-player games.**
  - **Mathematical properties.**
    - ▷ ***Strategy-stealing argument.***
  - **Computational results.**

Domain of studies

- **Domain: 2-person zero-sum games with perfect information.**
  - **Result: win, loss or draw.**
    - ▷ ***Some games, such as EWN, have no draw.***
  - **Zero-sum means one player's loss is exactly the other player's gain, and vice versa.**
    - ▷ ***There is no way for both players to win at the same time.***
    - ▷ ***By the same token, there is no way for both players to lose at the same time.***
    - ▷ ***In these cases, it is usually called a tie[1] or draw[2]***

[1] "Tie" sometimes means both sides have chance to win.

[2] "Draw" sometimes means both sides have no chance to win.

Positions

- **An arrangement of pieces on the board with an indication of who is the next player.**
- **Sometimes a position includes some historical information such the location of Ko in Go.**
- **Classifications**
  - **Initial position(s)**
  - **Legal position: a position that can be reached from the initial position(s).**
    - ***Note this is different from forming all possible arrangements using rules.***
    - ***For example: When 32 pieces are left in a chess board, it is impossible to have 3 pawns of one color to be in one column.***

Unreasonable, but Legal Positions

- **Unreasonable, but legal, positions**
  - **Positions that are unlikely to happen in real tournaments.**
  - **Examples**
    - ▷ *I: In chess, all of your pieces are alive while the opponent has only the king left.*
    - ▷ *II: if one can capture the opponent's king in a position and thus wins in chess, but he makes another move so that another piece also checks the king, then it results in a double checked position which is unreasonable.*
  - **How unreasonable is unreasonable is a question that is similar to how difficult a position is. It could be results of player(s) making mistake(s).**

Game-theoretic value

- **Game-theoretic value** of a game: the outcome, i.e., win, loss or draw, when all participants play optimally.
- Classification of games' solutions according to L.V. Allis [Ph.D. thesis 1994] if they are considered solved.
  - **Ultra-weakly solved**: the game-theoretic value of the initial position has been determined.
  - **Weakly solved**: for the initial position a strategy has been determined to achieve the game-theoretic value against any opponent.
    - ▷ *This strategy is called optimal.*
    - ▷ *The strategy must be efficient and practical in terms of resource usage.*
    - ▷ *If the game-theoretical value is win, then the optimal strategy has a role as the first player.*
    - ▷ *If the game-theoretical value is loss, then the optimal strategy has a role as the second player.*
    - ▷ *If the game-theoretical value is draw, then the optimal strategy must be able to at least draw any opponent from both roles as the first and the second player.*
  - **Strongly solved**: an optimal strategy has been determined for all legal positions.

Note on game-theoretic value

- **The game-theoretic values of most games are unknown or are only known for some legal positions, in particular the initial position.**
- **This is one of the most challenging and exciting research areas in games.**

Complexity of a game

- **State-space complexity of a game: the number of legal positions in a game.**
  - **Often it is difficult to filter out unreasonable positions, instead we use all possible arrangements for convenience.**
- **Game-tree (or decision) complexity of a game: the number of nodes in a solution search tree.**
  - **Actually, it is usually a game graph, not tree.**
  - **A solution search tree is a tree where the game-theoretic value of the root position can be decided.**
  - **Each node in the tree is a legal position. The children of a parent node p are the positions that p can reach in one step.**
    - ▷ *Some children of a node may not be in a solution search tree.*
    - ▷ *For example, if facing a position, one can capture the opponent's king and thus wins in Chess, but he makes other move and as a result his king is captured in the next ply.*
  - **Some legal states may not be in an optimal solution search tree.**
    - ▷ *These are unreasonable positions.*
  - **Mostly concerns about weakly solving the game.**

More definitions (1/3)

- **Initiative**: the right to move first.
  - Many games are known to be favor to the first player.
    - ▷ *Go-Moku.*
  - Only very few games are known to be favor to the second player.
    - ▷ *6 by 6 Othello.*
- A **fair** game: the game-theoretic value is draw and both players have roughly an equal probability to make a mistake.
  - People normally enjoy playing fair games over unfair ones.
  - Examples:
    - ▷ *Paper-scissor-stone.*
    - ▷ *Roll a dice and the one getting a larger number wins.*
    - ▷ *Nine Men's Morris (weakly proven in 1995; strongly proven in 2010 [Edelkamp et al '10]).*
    - ▷ *Checkers (weakly proven in 2007).*
    - ▷ *8 by 8 Othello (weakly proven in 2024 [Takizawa '24]).*
  - Many popular games are not fair or are unknown of their fairness.
  - It is difficult to prove a non-trivial game is fair or to design a non-trivial fair one, **which is a challenging research area.**

More definitions (2/3)

- An asymmetric game
  - An asymmetric game is one that has different rules for the two players.
  - Examples: Renju, Go with a non-zero Komi value.
- A convergent game: the size of the state space decreases as the game progresses.
  - Start with many pieces on the board and pieces are gradually removed during the course of the game.
    - ▷ *Example: Checkers.*
  - It means the number of possible configurations decreases as the game progresses.
- A divergent game: the size of the state space increases as the game progresses.
  - May start with an empty board, and pieces are gradually added during the course of the game.
    - ▷ *Example: Connect-5 before the board is almost filled.*
  - It means the number of possible configurations increases as the game progresses.
    - ▷ *For Chinese chess, a rook can visit more places when it is away from its initial location.*

More definitions (3/3)

- **A game may be convergent at one stage and then divergent at other stage.**
  - **Most games are dynamic.**
  - **For the game of Tic-Tac-Toe, assume you have played x plys where x is even.**
    - ▷ ***Then you have a possible of***

$$\begin{pmatrix} 9 \\ x/2 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 9 - x/2 \\ x/2 \end{pmatrix}$$

different configurations.

    - ▷ ***This number is not monotonously increasing or decreasing.***

Predictions made in 1990

- **Predictions were made in 1990 [Allis et al. 1991] for the year 2000 concerning the expected playing strength of computer programs.**

solved	over champion	world champion	grand master	amateur
Connect-four	Checkers $(8 * 8)$	Chess	Go $(9 * 9)$	Go $(19 * 19)$
Qubic	Renju	Draughts $(10 * 10)$	Chinese chess	
Nine Men's Morris	Othello		Bridge	
Go-Moku	Scrabble			
Awari	Backgammon			

  - ▷ *Over champion means definitely over the best human player.*
  - ▷ *World champion means equaling to the best human player.*
  - ▷ *Grand master means beating most human players.*

A double dichotomy of the game space

$\log\log(\text{state-space complexity}) \rightarrow$

category 3 if solvable at all, then by knowledge-based methods	**category 4** currently unsolvable by any method
category 1 solvable by any method	**category 2** if solvable at all, then by brute-force methods

$\log\log(\text{game-tree complexity}) \rightarrow$

Questions to be researched

- **Can perfect knowledge obtained from solved games be translated into rules and strategies which human beings can assimilate?**
- **Are such rules generic, or do they constitute a multitude of ad hoc recipes?**
- **Can methods be transferred between games?**
  - **More specifically, are there generic methods for all category-i games, or is each game in a specific category a law unto itself?**

Convergent games (1/2)

- **Since most games are dynamic, here we consider games whose ending phases are convergent.**
  - **Can be solved by the method of endgame databases if we can enumerate and store all possible positions at a certain stage.**
- **Problems solved (mostly using retrograde analysis):**
  - **Nine Men's Morris: (weakly) in the year 1995, a total of 7,673,759,269 states after the initial adding phase, and strongly in 2010.**
    - ▷ ***The game theoretic value is draw.***
  - **Mancala games**
    - ▷ ***Awari: in the year 2002 whose game theoretic value is draw.***
    - ▷ ***Kalah: in the year 2011[3] upto Kalah(6,6) whose game theoretic value is first player win.***

[3] http://kalaha.krus.dk/

Convergent games (2/2)

- **More problems solved (mostly using retrograde analysis):**
  - **Checkers**
    - ▷ *By combining endgame databases, middle-game databases and verification of opening-game analysis.*
    - ▷ *Solved the so called 100-year position in 1994.*
    - ▷ *The game is weakly proved to be a draw in 2007.*
    - ▷ ***A fair game.***
  - **Chess endgames**
  - **Chinese chess endgames**
  - **Chinese dark chess endgames**
  - **EWN endgames**
  - . . .

Divergent games

- **Since most games are dynamic, here we consider games whose INITIAL phases are divergent.**
- **Connection games**
  - **Connect-four** ($6 * 7$)
  - **Qubic** ($4 * 4 * 4$)
  - **Go-Moku** ($15 * 15$)
  - **Renju**
  - k**-in-a-row games**
  - **Hex** ($10 * 10$ **or** $11 * 11$)
- **Polyomino games: place pieces inside a board without overlapping and alternatively until one cannot place more.**
  - **Pentominoes**
  - **Domineering**
- **Othello**
- **Chess**
- **Chinese chess**
- **Shogi**
- **Go**

Connection games (1/2)

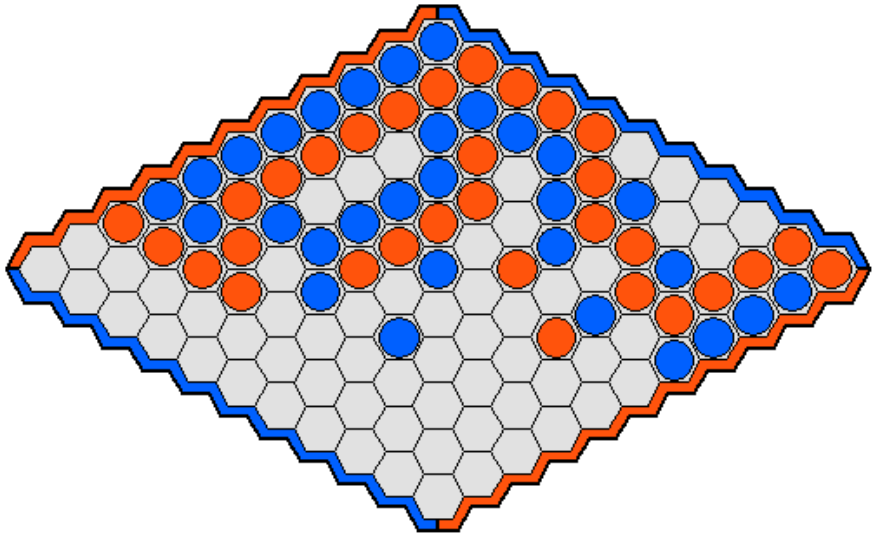
- **Connect-four** $(6 * 7)$
  - **Weakly solved by J. Allen in 1989 using a brute-force depth first search with alpha-beta pruning, a transposition table, and killer-move heuristics.**
  - **Also weakly solved by L.V. Allis in 1988 using a knowledge-based approach by combining 9 strategic rules that identify potential threats of the opponent.**
    - ▷ ***Threats are something like forced moved or moves you have little choices.***
    - ▷ ***Threats are moves with predictable counter-moves.***
  - **It is first-player-win.**
  - **Weakly solved on a SUN-4 workstation using 300+ hours.**
- **Qubic** $(4 * 4 * 4)$
  - **A three-dimensional version of Tic-Tac-Toe.**
  - **Connect-four played on a** $4 * 4 * 4$ **game board.**
  - **Weakly solved in 1980 by O. Patashnik by combining the usual depth-first search with expert knowledge for ordering the moves.**
    - ▷ ***It is first-player-win for the 2-player version.***

Connection games (2/2)

- **Go-Moku** ($15 * 15$)
  - **First-player-win.**
  - **Weakly solved by L.V. Allis in 1995 using a combination of threat-space search and database construction.**
- **Renju**
  - **Does not allow the first player to play certain moves.**
  - **An asymmetric game.**
  - **Weakly solved by Wágner and Viráag in 2000 by combining search and knowledge.**
    - ▷ *Took advantage of an iterative-deepening search based on threat sequences up to 17 plies.*
    - ▷ *It is still first-player-win.*
- **k-in-a-row games**
  - **mnk-Game: a game playing on a board of m rows and n columns with the goal of obtaining a straight line of length k.**
  - **Variations: first ply picks only one stone, the rest of the plys pick two stones at one time.**
    - ▷ *Connect6.*
    - ▷ *Try to balance the advantage of the initiative!*

Hex ($10 * 10$ or $11 * 11$)

- **Invented in 1942 by Peit Hein and John Hash (source: wiki)**
- **Rules**
  - **Two players place one piece of each one's color alternatively.**
  - **A player connects the NW and SE sides, while the other one connects the NE and SW sides.**
  - **One who can do the assigned connection wins.**



Red won

Courtesy of ICGA web site

HEX: properties

- **Revised rules:**
  - *When the first player wins, allow the second player to play one more time. If the second player also wins, then the game is tie.*
  - *When the board is full and no one wins, then it is a draw.*
- **Properties:**
  - **Property 0: It is a finite game.**
    - *Trivially true.*
  - **Property 1: It is impossible for both players to win at the same time.**
    - *No chance of tie.*
  - **Property 2: There is at least one winner.**
    - *No chance of draw.*
  - **Property 3: It is a first-player-win game.**

Property 1: there cannot be two winners

- **A topological argument.**
  - **A vertical chain can only be cut by a horizontal chain and vice versa because each cell is connected with 6 adjacent cells.**
    - ▷ *Note if a cell has 4 neighbors as in the case of Go, then it is possible to cut off a vertical chain by cells that are not horizontally connected and vice versa.*
- **Other arguments such as one using graph theory exist.**

Property 2: there is at least one winner

- **Assume there is no winner when the board is full.**
- **W.l.o.g. let R be the set of red cells that can be reached by chains originated from the rightmost column.**
  - **R must contain a cell of the rightmost column; otherwise we have a contradiction which means the blue wins.**
- **Let $N(R)$ be the blue cells that can be reached by R originated from the rightmost column.**
  - **$N(R)$ must contain a cell in the top row.**
    - ▷ *Otherwise, R contains all cells in the first row, which is a contradiction.*
  - **$N(R)$ must contain a cell in the bottom row.**
    - ▷ *Otherwise, R contains all cells in the bottom row, which is a contradiction.*
  - **$N(R)$ must be connected.**
    - ▷ *Otherwise, R can advance further.*
  - **Hence $N(R)$ is a blue winning chain.**
- **Corollary: only a chain of a direction can stop a chain of the other direction.**

Illustration of the ideas (1/3)

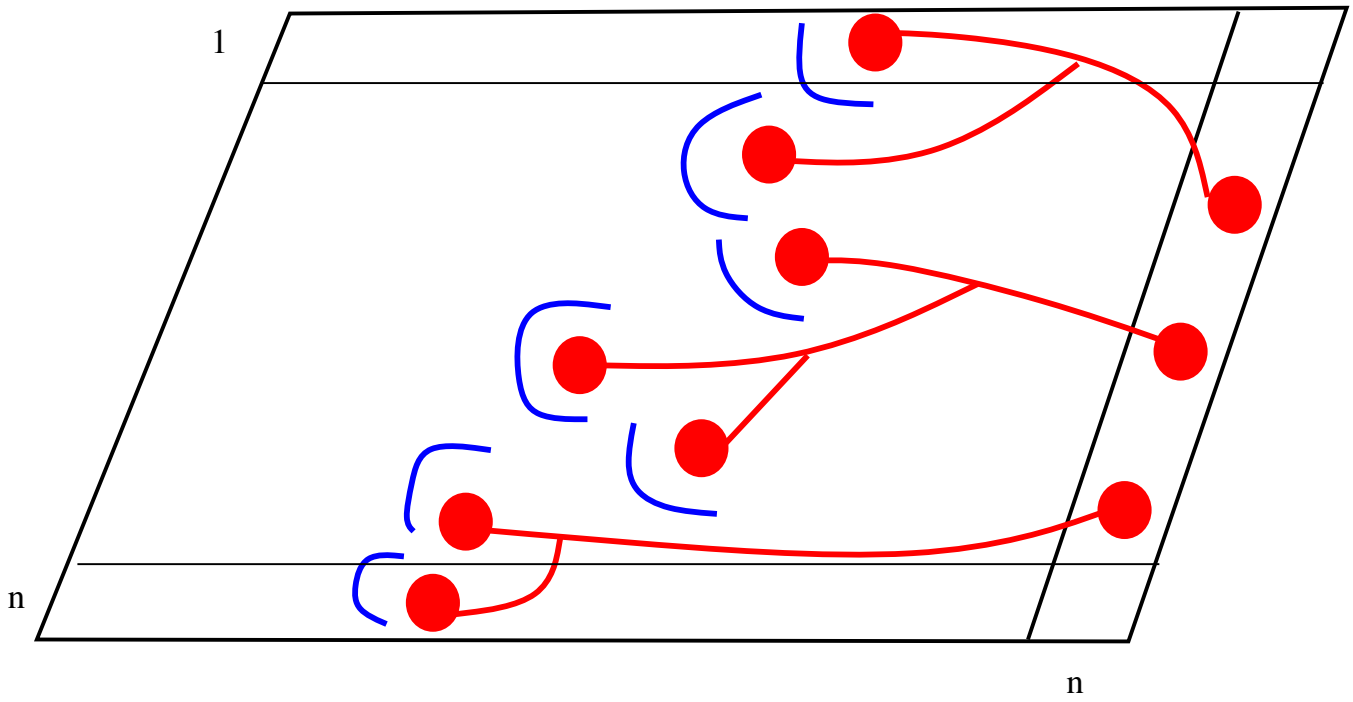


Illustration of the ideas (2/3)

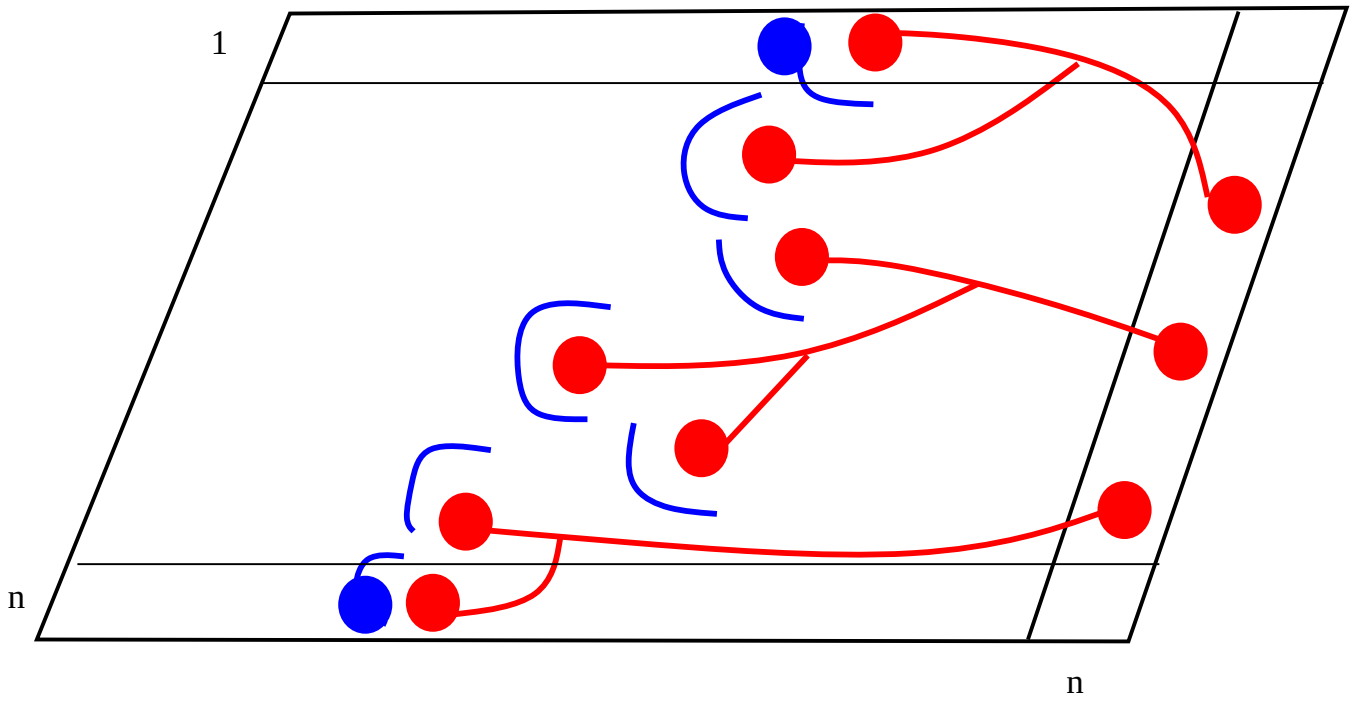
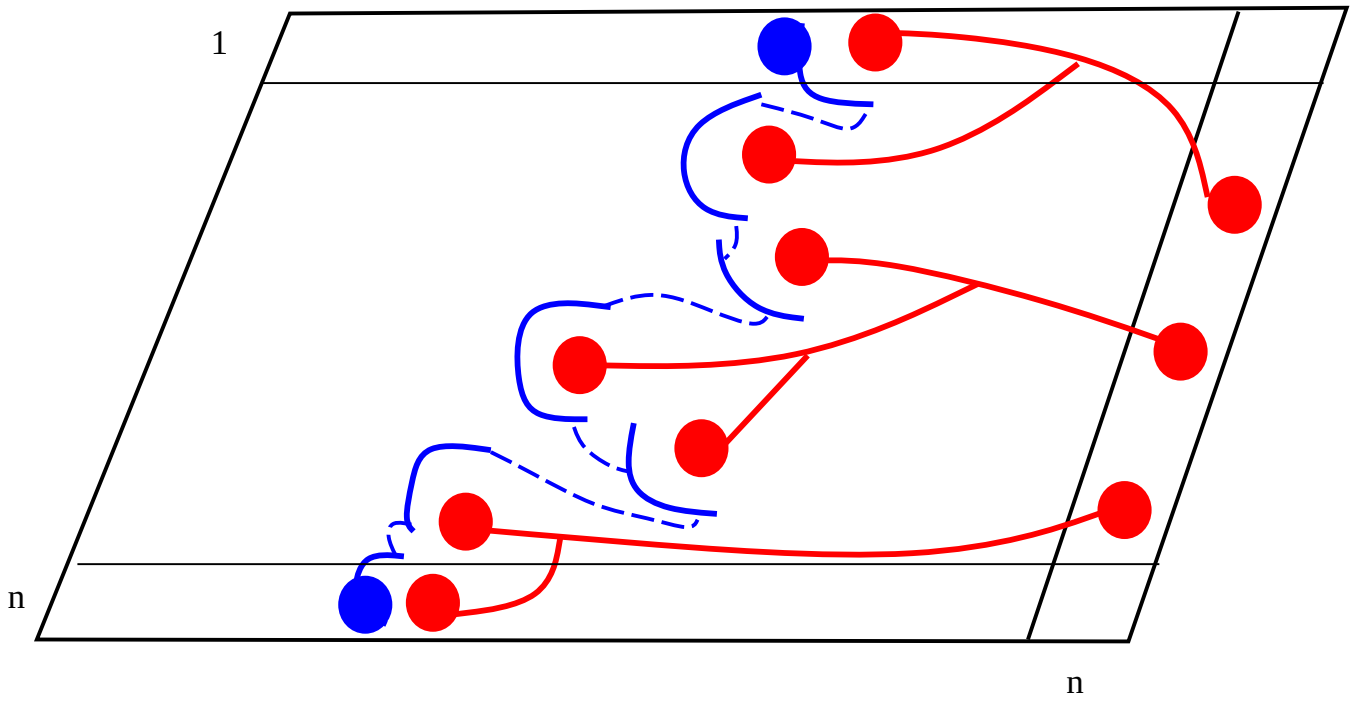


Illustration of the ideas (3/3)



Property 3: Hex is first-player-win

- **Proof is constructed using the "strategy-stealing" argument made by John Nash in 1949.**
  - **If there is a winning strategy for the second player, the first player can still win by making an arbitrary first move and using the second-player strategy from then on.**
    - ▷ *The first player ignores the arbitrary first move by assuming that move does not exist.*
    - ▷ *Hence the second move made by the second player becomes the first move.*
    - ▷ *The third move made by the first player becomes the second move.*
  - **If using the second-player strategy requires playing the chosen first move or any move played before, then make another arbitrary move.**
    - ▷ *An arbitrary extra move can never be a disadvantage in Hex.*
  - **We have obtained a contradiction, and thus the second player cannot win from the initial empty board.**
  - **Since we have proved there is no draw, and there is always a winner, and both players cannot win at the same time, the first player must have a winning strategy from the initial empty board.**

Strategy-stealing argument: proof (1/3)

- **Assume the second player P_2 has a winning function $f(B)$ that tells the next ply towards winning when seeing the board B.**
  - **Assume the initial board position is B_0 which is an empty board.**
  - **$f(B)$ has a value only for the case B is a legal position for the second player only.**
    - ***$f(B)$ returns the x-y coordinates of a location and the color of the piece to play.***
  - **$rev(m)$: flip the color and coordinate of a ply m.**
    - ***Let $m = (x_m, y_m)$ be the location to play.***
    - ***Let c be the color of the piece to play.***
    - ***Let $\bar{c}$ be the color flipped.***
    - ***Return the location (y_m, x_m) and the color $\bar{c}$.***

Strategy-stealing argument: proof (2/3)

- **The steps taken by the first player P_1 to also win:**
  - P_1 **makes an arbitrary 1st ply** m_1**. Call it** m^***.**
  - P_2 **makes the 2nd ply** $m_2 = f(B_0 + m_1)$**.**
  - P_1 **makes the 3rd ply** $m_3 = rev(f(B_0 + rev(m_2)))$**.**
    - ▷ ***If*** $m_3 = m^*$***, then make another arbitrary ply and let it be the new*** m^****.***
  - P_2 **makes the 4th ply** $m_4 = f(B_0 + m_1 + m_2 + m_3)$**.**
  - P_1 **makes the 5th ply** $m_5 = rev(f(B_0 + rev(m_2) + rev(m_3) + rev(m_4)))$**.**
    - ▷ ***If*** $m_5 = m^*$***, then make another arbitrary ply and let it be the new*** m^****.***
  - P_2 **makes the 6th ply** $m_6 = f(B_0 + m_1 + m_2 + m_3 + m_4 + m_5)$**.**
  - $\cdots$

Strategy-stealing argument: proof (3/3)

- **Hence we know the first player also has a winning connection.**
- **We also know the followings.**
  - **The game is finite and deterministic.**
  - **There is at least one winner before or when the board is completely filled.**
  - **There cannot be two winners.**
  - **Hence we can enumerate the whole solution search tree.**
    - ▷ ***In this solution search tree, there is a way for one player to win all of the times no matter what the opponent reacts.***
- **Thus the assumption of the second player having a winning strategy f is not valid.**

Strategy-stealing argument: comments

- This is not a constructive proof.
- It only shows the first player has a winning strategy from the initial empty board, not from an arbitrary position.
- The strategy-stealing argument may not be good for other games.
- The argument works for any game when
  - there is a way for the first player not to lose at the first ply,
  - the second player cannot win at the second ply,
  - it is symmetric,
  - it is history independent,
  - it always has exactly one winner, and
    - ▷ *namely, it cannot have a draw by having no winner or two winners,*
  - an arbitrary extra move can always be made and can never be a disadvantage.
    - ▷ *Note: it requires that a player is always possible to place an arbitrary move which may not be true for some games.*

Properties of Hex

- **Variations of Hex**
  - **The one-move-equalization rule: one player plays an opening move and the other player then has to decide which color to play for the reminder of the game.**
    - ▷ ***The revised version is a second-player-win game (ultra-weakly).***
- **Hex exhibits considerable mathematical structure.**
  - **Hex in its general form has been proved to be PSPACE-complete by Even and Tarjan in 1976 by converting it to a Shannon switching game.**
  - **The state-space and decision complexities are comparable to those of Go on an equally-sized board.**
- **Solutions**
  - **(Weakly or strongly) solved on a $6 * 6$ board in 1994.**
  - **Maybe possible to solve the $7 * 7$ case.**
    - ▷ ***The $7 * 7$ case was solved in 2001. [Yang et al. 2001]***
  - **Not likely to solve the $8 * 8$ case without fundamental breakthroughs.**
    - ▷ ***The $8 * 8$ case was solved in 2009. [Henderson et al. 2009]***
  - **The $9 * 9$ case was solved in 2013. [Pawlewicz et al. 2013]**
  - **The most-central opening was solved for the $10 * 10$ case in 2014. [Pawlewicz et al. 2013]**

More divergent games (1/3)

- **Polyomino games: placing 2-D pieces of a connected subset of a square grid to construct a special form.**
  - **Pentominoes**
  - **Domineering**
  - **Games on smaller boards have been solved.**
- **Othello**
  - **M. Buro's LOGISTELLO beat the resigning World Champion by 6-0 in 1997.**
  - **Weakly solved on a $6 * 6$ board by J. Feinstein in 1993.**
    - ▷ ***Second-player-win***
  - **Weakly solved on a $8 * 8$ board by Hiroki Takizawa in 2023.**
    - ▷ ***Draw: a fair game***
- **Chess**
  - **DEEP BLUE beat the human World Champion in 1997!**

More divergent games (2/3)

- **Chinese chess**
  - **Professional 7-dan since 2007.**
  - **Still in progress, but lack of reporting recent advancement due to complications facing the using of deep learning based approaches.**
- **Shogi**
  - **Claimed to be professional 2-dan in 2007.**
  - **Defeat a lady professional player in 2010.**
  - **Defeat a 68-year old 1993 Meijin during 2011 and 2012.**
  - **Still in progress, but lack of reporting recent advancement due to complications facing the using of deep learning based approaches.**

More divergent games (3/3)

- **Go**
  - **5 by 5 Go was weakly solved in 2003 [Werf et al '03] and strongly solved in 2024 [Hsu et al '24].**
    - ▷ *First player wins and takes all cells using 22 plys.*
  - **Recent success and breakthrough using Monte Carlo UCT based methods between 2004 and 2012.**
  - **Amateur 1 – 4 kyu in 2008.**
    - ▷ *Beat a professional 8-dan by having an 8-stone advantage.*
    - ▷ *Beaten by a professional 9-dan by giving a 7-stone advantage.*
  - **Amateur 1 dan in 2010.**
  - **Amateur 3 dan in 2011.**
  - **The program Zen beat a 9-dan professional master at March 17, 2012.**
    - ▷ *First game: Five stone handicap and won by 11 points.*
    - ▷ *Second game: four stones handicap and won by 20 points.*
  - **Go (19 by 19) is now over human: AlphaGo beat a human top player by a margin of 4:1 at March 2016, and beat the human top player by 3:0 at May 2017.**

Table of complexities

Game	$\log_{10}$(state-space)	$\log_{10}$(game-tree size)
Nine Men's Morris	10	50
Pentominoes	12	18
Awari	12	32
Kalak(6,4)	13	18
Connect-four	14	21
EinStein würfelt nicht!	15	22
Domineering $(8 * 8)$	15	27
Dakon-6	15	33
Checkers	21	31
Othello	28	58
Qubic	30	34
Draughts	30	54
Chinese Dark Chess	37	135
Chess	46	123
Chinese chess	48	150
Hex $(11 * 11)$	57	98
Shogi	71	226
Renju $(15 * 15)$	105	70
Go-Moku $(15 * 15)$	105	70
Connect6 $(19 * 19)$	172	70
Go $(19 * 19)$	172	360

State-space versus game-tree size

- **In 1994, the boundary of solvability by complete enumeration was set at 10^{11}.**
  - **The current estimation is about 10^{13} (since the year 2007).**
- **It is often possible to use heuristics in searching a game tree to cut the number of nodes visited tremendously when the structure of the game is well studied.**
  - **Example: Connect-Four.**
  - **Good heuristics for some games are easier to design than the others.**

Remarks

- **With the same complexities, a stochastic game is usually more interesting and challenging than a deterministic game.**
  - **Example 1: EinStein würfelt nicht! (EWN) is definitely more challenging than Connect Four.**
  - **Example 2: Chinese Dark Chess (CDC) is more interesting than Chess.**
- **Rules of playing games also affect the fundamental properties of games.**
  - **Example: in Shogi you own the captured pieces and may turn them into yours in later plays.**

Methods developed for solving games

- **Brute-force methods**
  - Retrograde analysis
  - Enhanced transposition-table methods
- **Knowledge-based methods**
  - Threat-space search and λ-search
  - Proof-number search
  - Depth-first proof-number search
  - Pattern search
    - *To search for threat patterns, which are collections of cells in a position.*
    - *A threat pattern can be thought of as representing the relevant area on the board, an area that human players commonly identify when analyzing a position.*
- **Recent advancements:**
  - Monte Carlo UCT based game tree simulation.
    - *Monte Carlo method has a root from statistic.*
    - *Biased sampling.*
    - *Using methods from machine learning.*
    - *Combine domain knowledge with statistics.*
  - Combine searching with deep learning.

Brute-force versus knowledge-based methods

- **Games with both a relative low state-space complexity and a low game-tree complexity have been solved by both methods.**
  - **Category 1**
  - **Connect-four and Qubic**
- **Games with a relative low state-space complexity have mainly been solved with brute-force methods.**
  - **Category 2**
  - **Namely by constructing endgame databases**
  - **Nine Men's Morris**
- **Games with a relative low game-tree-complexities have mainly been solved with knowledge-based methods.**
  - **Category 3**
  - **Namely, by intelligent (heuristic) searching**
  - **Sometimes, with the helps of endgame databases**
  - **Go-Moku, Renju, and k-in-a-row games**
- **Games in Category 4 are difficult to solve and may be solvable using learning based mthods.**

Advantage of the initiative

- **Theorem (or argument) made by Singmaster in 1981: The first player has advantages.**
  - **Two kinds of positions**
    - ▷ *P-positions: the previous player can force a win.*
    - ▷ *N-positions: the next player can force a win.*
  - **Arguments**
    - ▷ *For the first player to have a forced win, just one of the moves must lead to a P-position.*
    - ▷ *For the second player to have a forced win, all of the moves must lead to N-positions.*
    - ▷ *It is easier to the first player to have a forced win assuming all positions are randomly distributed.*
    - ▷ *Can be easily extended to games with draws.*
- **Remarks:**
  - **On small boards, the second player is able to draw or even to win for certain games.**
  - **Cannot be applied to an infinite board.**
  - **The assumption of all positions are randomly distributed may not be true for all games.**

How to make use of the initiative

- **A potential universal strategy for winning a game:**
  - **Try to obtain a small advantage by using the initiative.**
    - ▷ ***The opponent must react adequately on the moves played by the other player.***
  - **To reinforce the initiative the player searches for threats, and even a sequence of threats using an evaluation function E.**
  - **Force the opponent to always play the moves you expected.**
- **Threat-space search**
  - **Search for threats only!**

Offsetting the initiative

- **An example of a game with a huge initiative:**
  - **A connection $mn1$-game.**
    - ▷ ***Connect-1 was mentioned in a famous Sci-fi novel published 1979.***
  - **A connection $mn2$-game.**
  - **A connection $mn3$-game.**
  - **For a connection mni-game, you can have a feeling that the advantage given to the first player through initiative is gradually lessened when i gets larger.**
- **Need to offset the initiative.**
  - **The offsetting rule must be simple.**
  - **The revised game must be as fair as possible.**
    - ▷ ***It is difficult to prove a game is fair.***
    - ▷ ***Example: Paper-scissor-stone is fair.***
  - **The revised game needs to be fun to play with.**
  - **The revised game cannot be too much different from the original game.**
- **Knowing how to properly offsetting the initiative may uncover some fundamental properties of the game such as its level of difficulty.**

Examples (1/2)

- **Enforce rules so that the first player cannot win by selective patterns.**
  - **Renju.**
    - ▷ ***Still first-player-win.***
  - **Go** $(19 * 19)$**.**
    - ▷ ***The first player must win by more than 7 stones.***
    - ▷ ***Komi*** $= 7.5$ ***in 2011.***
    - ▷ ***The value of Komi changes with the time and may be different because of using different set of rules.***
- **The one-move-equalization rule: one player plays an opening move and the other player then has to decide which color to play for the reminder of the game.**
  - ▷ ***Hex***
  - ▷ ***Second-player-win if Hex uses this variant***

Examples (2/2)

- **The first move plays one stone, the rest plays two stones each.**
  - ▷ *Connect6.*
  - ▷ *Intuitively, in each turn the initiative goes to different players alternatively.*
  - ▷ *Still not able to prove the game is fair (upto the year 2021).*
- **The first player uses less resources.**
  - **For example: using less time.**
    - ▷ *Chinese chess.*
  - **A resource-auctioning scheme.**
- **General rules to redesign a game to make it fair are unknown which makes a very good and challenging research topic.**

Conclusions

- The knowledge-based methods mostly inform us on the structure of the game, while exhaustive enumeration rarely does.
- Many ad-hoc recipes are produced currently.
  - The database can be used as a corrector or verifier of strategies formulated by human experts.
- Monte-Carlo searching technique with deep learning seems to open a new avenue of researching.
- It may be hopeful to use data mining techniques to obtain cross-game methods.
  - Currently not very successful.
  - It is noted that Alpha Zero claimed on having a universal solution by using techniques from deep learning.

Comments

- **Can combine knowledge-based method with exhaustive enumeration.**
  - **For converging games, build endgame databases when the remaining state spaces is manageable.**
    - ▷ *Example: build endgames with at most 5 pieces in Chess and stop searching when the number of pieces on the board is less than 6.*
  - **For diverging games, pre-compute all possible opening moves and solve them one by one in sequence or in parallel.**
- **This is different from the usage of pattern databases in solving one-player games.**
  - **Patterns are used to guide the search in solving one-player games.**
  - **Endgame databases are used here to stop the search earlier which has a flavor like that of bi-directional search.**

1990's Predictions — 2000's Status

- **Predictions were made in 1990 [Allis et al. 1991] for the year 2000 concerning the expected playing strength of computer programs.**

solved	over champion	world champion	grand master	amateur
Connect-four	Checkers $(8 * 8)$	Chess	Go $(9 * 9)$	Go $(19 * 19)$
Qubic	Renju	Draughts $(10 * 10)$	Chinese chess	
Nine Men's Morris	Othello		Bridge	
Go-Moku	Scrabble			
Awari	Backgammon			

- **Very successful in using exhaustive enumeration.**
- **color code**
  - **Green: Performs much better than expected**
  - **Red: right on the target.**
  - **Black: have some progress towards the target.**
  - **Blue: not so.**

Predictions for 2010

- **Predictions were made at the year 2000 for the year 2010 concerning the expected playing strength of computer programs.**

solved	over champion	world champion	grand master	amateur
Awari	Chess	Go ($9 * 9$)	Bridge	Go ($19 * 19$)
Othello	Draughts ($10 * 10$)	Chinese chess	Shogi	
Checkers ($8 * 8$)	Scrabble	Hex		
	Backgammon	Amazons		
	Lines of Action			

Predictions for 2010 – Status

- My personal opinion about the status of Prediction-2010 at October, 2010, right after the Computer Olympiad held in Kanazawa, Japan.

solved	over champion	world champion	grand master	amateur
Awari	Chess	Go ($9 * 9$)	Bridge	Go ($19 * 19$)
Othello	Draughts ($10 * 10$)	Chinese chess	Shogi	
Checkers ($8 * 8$)	Scrabble	Hex		
	Backgammon	Amazons		
	Lines of Action			

- Successful in using knowledge based methods.
- color code
  - Red: right on the target.
  - Black: have some progress towards the target.
  - Blue: not so.

Concluding remarks

- **Very diverse development since year 1940 until 2010. New methods are techniques are discovered every couple of years.**
  - **Accompany the development of Computing Science.**
- **Between years 2010 and 2020, a lot of progress us achieved in Go-related research.**
  - **Mostly using deep learning techniques.**
  - **Mostly on better winning games.**
  - **Not much is done with regard to pure game-theoretical researches.**
- **A better link of game related research and bettering human life is needed.**

References and further readings (1/3)

- L.V. Allis, H.J. van den Herik, and I.S. Herschberg. Which games will survive? In: D.N.L. Levy, D.F. Beal (Eds.), Heuristic Programming in Artificial Intelligence 2: The Second Computer Olympiad, Ellis Horwood, Chichester, 1991, pp. 232-243.

* H. J. van den Herik, J. W. H. M. Uiterwijk, and J. van Rijswijck. Games solved: Now and in the future. *Artificial Intelligence*, 134:277–311, 2002.

- Jonathan Schaeffer. The games computers (and people) play. *Advances in Computers*, 52:190–268, 2000.
- L. V. Allis, M. van der Meulen, and H. J. van den Herik. Proof-number search. *Artificial Intelligence*, 66(1):91–124, 1994.

References and further readings (2/3)

- J. Yang, S. Liao, and M. Pawlak. A decomposition method for finding solution in game Hex 7x7. In *Proceedings of International Conference on Application nd Development of Computer games in the 21st century*, pages 93–112, November 2001.
- P. Henderson, B. Arneson, and R. B. Hayward. Solving 8x8 Hex. In *Proceedings of IJCAI*, pages 505–510, 2009.
- Werf, Erik, Herik, H., and Uiterwijk, Jos. (2003). Solving Go On Small Boards. ICGA journal. 26. 10.3233/ICG-2003-26205.
- Hsu, CM, Lin, HC, Chen, YT, Hsueh, CW, Hsu, TS. Construction, observation and knowledge abstraction for go endgames on small boards. Sci Rep. 2024 Mar 22;14(1):6903. doi: 10.1038/s41598-024-57338-x. PMID: 38519566; PMCID: PMC10959957.
- Stefan Edelkamp, Damian Sulewski and Cengizhan Yücel GPU Exploration of Two-Player Games with Perfect Hash Functions Proceedings of the Third Annual Symposium on Combinatorial Search (SOCS-10), pp. 23–30, 2010

References and further readings (3/3)

- Pawlewicz, Jakub; Hayward, Ryan (2013). "Scalable Parallel DFPN Search". Proc. Computers and Games.
- Hiroki Takizawa Othello is Solved. 2024, https://arxiv.org/abs/2310.19387