

A NOTE ON THE SUFFICIENCY OF SOKOLOWSKI'S CRITERION FOR CONTEXT-FREE LANGUAGES

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Received 10 May 1982

Keywords: Context-free languages, pumping lemmas

Sokolowski [5] introduced a condition on languages which can be used to show that a language is not context-free. This condition is the following: Let $L \subseteq \Sigma^*$ be a context-free language. For every subset Σ' of Σ containing at least two distinct letters and for every u, v, w in Σ^* , if $\{uxvxw \mid x \text{ in } \Sigma'^+\} \subseteq L$, then there exist two different words x', x'' in Σ'^+ , such that $ux'vx''w$ is in L . In [5] the non-context-free language

$$L = \{xc^kx \mid k > 0 \text{ and } x \in \{a, b\}^+\} \cup \{a, b\}^+$$

is used as an example to show that the "Classical Pumping Lemma" [1] cannot be used to determine that L is non-context-free, while the above given criterion simply leads to the conclusion that L is not context-free.

In [5] the question is raised whether the criterion is not only a necessary, but also a sufficient one. The answer is negative and this can be understood with the help of a simple variation of L . Consider the language

$$L' = \{xcxx \mid x \in \{a, b\}^+\} \cup \{xcx \mid x \in \{a, b\}^+\}.$$

For $u = \varepsilon$, $v = c$ and $w = \varepsilon$ we have $\{xcx \mid x \in \{a, b\}^+\} \subseteq L'$. However, there exist two different words x and xx such that $xcxx$ is also in L' . Hence, the criterion is satisfied while L' is not context-free.

It is interesting to note that the Ogden-like

languages (cf. [3]) of the form $B_p = A_p \cup X^*\{aa, bb\}X^*$ with $X = \{a, b\}$ and $A_p = \{(ab)^n \mid n \in P\}$, where P is a subset of the natural numbers, also satisfy Sokolowski's criterion. Notice that P can be chosen in such a way that A_p and therefore B_p is not context-free, not context-sensitive, not recursive or not recursively enumerable. The languages B_p illustrate that although Sokolowski's criterion is a very useful tool in determining non-context-free-ness, it only considers one of the many conditions of a language being non-context-free.

References

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