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On Confluence of Parallel-Innermost Term Rewriting*

Thaïs Baudon¹, Carsten Fuhs², and Laure Gonnord^{3,1}

¹ LIP (UMR CNRS/ENS Lyon/UCB Lyon1/INRIA), Lyon, France

² Birkbeck, University of London, United Kingdom

³ LCIS (UGA/Grenoble INP/Ésisar), Valence, France

Abstract

We revisit parallel-innermost term rewriting as a model of parallel computation on inductive data structures. We propose a simple sufficient criterion for confluence of parallel-innermost rewriting based on non-overlappingness. Our experiments on a large benchmark set indicate the practical usefulness of our criterion. We close with a challenge to the community to develop more powerful dedicated techniques for this problem.

1 Introduction

This extended abstract deals with a practical approach to proving confluence of *(max-)parallel-innermost* term rewriting. We consider term rewrite systems (TRSs) as *intermediate representation* for programs operating on *inductive data structures* such as trees. More specifically, TRSs can be seen as an abstraction of *pattern matching on algebraic data types (ADTs)*, which are particularly well-suited to the implementation of operations on inductive data structures. This class of programs is gaining in importance in *high-performance computing (HPC)*: among other examples, the scheduler of the Linux kernel uses red-black trees; and many (also systems-level) programming languages like Rust used in HPC feature ADTs. This leads to the need for compilation techniques for pattern matching on ADTs that yield a highly efficient output. One aspect of this problem pertains to the *parallelisation* of such programs. A small example for such a program is given in [Figure 1](#).

Here, the recursive calls to `left.size()` and `right.size()` can be done in parallel. In the following, we shall consider a corresponding parallel-innermost rewrite relation. Evaluation of TRSs (as a simple functional programming language) with innermost rewrite strategies in massively parallel

```
fn size(&self) -> int {
  match self {
    &Tree::Node { v, ref left, ref right }
      => left.size() + right.size() + 1,
    &Tree::Empty => 0 , } }
```

Figure 1: Tree size computation in Rust

settings such as GPUs is currently a topic of active research [12]. Confluence of parallel-innermost rewriting enters the picture in several ways: for TRSs, confluence determines whether the specific choice of rules makes a difference; moreover, confluence can be a prerequisite for applicability of program analysis techniques (e.g., for finding complexity bounds).

In [Section 2](#), we recapitulate standard definitions and fix notations. [Section 3](#) recapitulates the notion of parallel-innermost rewriting on which we focus in this extended abstract. In [Section 4](#), we provide a first criterion for confluence of parallel-innermost rewriting. [Section 5](#) provides experimental evidence of the practicality of our criterion on a large standard benchmark set. We conclude in [Section 6](#).

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2 Preliminaries

We assume familiarity with term rewriting (see, e.g., [2]) and recall standard definitions.

Definition 1 (Term Rewrite System, Innermost Rewriting). $\mathcal{T}(\Sigma, \mathcal{V})$ denotes the set of terms over a finite signature Σ and the set of variables \mathcal{V} . For a term t , the set $\text{Pos}(t)$ of its positions is given as: (a) if $t \in \mathcal{V}$, then $\text{Pos}(t) = \{\varepsilon\}$, and (b) if $t = f(t_1, \dots, t_n)$, then $\text{Pos}(t) = \{\varepsilon\} \cup \bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq n} \{i\pi \mid \pi \in \text{Pos}(t_i)\}$. The position ε is the root position of term t . For $\pi \in \text{Pos}(t)$, $t|_\pi$ is the subterm of t at position π , and we write $t[s]_\pi$ for the term that results from t by replacing the subterm $t|_\pi$ at position π by the term s .

For a term t , $\mathcal{V}(t)$ is the set of variables in t . If t has the form $f(t_1, \dots, t_n)$, $\text{root}(t) = f$ is the root symbol of t . A term rewrite system (TRS) \mathcal{R} is a set of rules $\{\ell_1 \rightarrow r_1, \dots, \ell_n \rightarrow r_n\}$ with $\ell_i, r_i \in \mathcal{T}(\Sigma, \mathcal{V})$, $\ell_i \notin \mathcal{V}$, and $\mathcal{V}(r_i) \subseteq \mathcal{V}(\ell_i)$ for all $1 \leq i \leq n$. The rewrite relation of \mathcal{R} is $s \rightarrow_{\mathcal{R}} t$ iff there are a rule $\ell \rightarrow r \in \mathcal{R}$, a position $\pi \in \text{Pos}(s)$, and a substitution σ such that $s = s[\ell\sigma]_\pi$ and $t = s[r\sigma]_\pi$. Here, σ is called the matcher and the term $\ell\sigma$ is called the redex of the rewrite step. If $\ell\sigma$ has no proper subterm that is also a possible redex, $\ell\sigma$ is an innermost redex, and the rewrite step is an innermost rewrite step, denoted by $s \xrightarrow{i}_{\mathcal{R}} t$.

$\Sigma_d^{\mathcal{R}} = \{f \mid f(\ell_1, \dots, \ell_n) \rightarrow r \in \mathcal{R}\}$ and $\Sigma_c^{\mathcal{R}} = \Sigma \setminus \Sigma_d^{\mathcal{R}}$ are the defined and constructor symbols of \mathcal{R} . We may also just write Σ_d and Σ_c .

For a relation \rightarrow , \rightarrow^+ is its transitive closure and \rightarrow^* its reflexive-transitive closure. An object o is a normal form wrt a relation \rightarrow iff there is no o' with $o \rightarrow o'$. A relation \rightarrow is confluent iff $s \rightarrow^* t$ and $s \rightarrow^* u$ implies that there exists an object v with $t \rightarrow^* v$ and $u \rightarrow^* v$.

Example 1 (size). Consider the TRS \mathcal{R} with the following rules modelling the code of Figure 1.

$$\begin{array}{l|l} \text{plus}(\text{Zero}, y) \rightarrow y & \text{size}(\text{Nil}) \rightarrow \text{Zero} \\ \text{plus}(\text{S}(x), y) \rightarrow \text{S}(\text{plus}(x, y)) & \text{size}(\text{Tree}(v, l, r)) \rightarrow \text{S}(\text{plus}(\text{size}(l), \text{size}(r))) \end{array}$$

Here $\Sigma_d^{\mathcal{R}} = \{\text{plus}, \text{size}\}$ and $\Sigma_c^{\mathcal{R}} = \{\text{Zero}, \text{S}, \text{Nil}, \text{Tree}\}$. We have the following innermost rewrite sequence, where the used innermost redexes are underlined:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{size}(\text{Tree}(\text{Zero}, \text{Nil}, \text{Tree}(\text{Zero}, \text{Nil}, \text{Nil}))) \xrightarrow{i}_{\mathcal{R}} \text{S}(\text{plus}(\text{size}(\text{Nil}), \text{size}(\text{Tree}(\text{Zero}, \text{Nil}, \text{Nil})))) \\ \xrightarrow{i}_{\mathcal{R}} \text{S}(\text{plus}(\text{Zero}, \text{size}(\text{Tree}(\text{Zero}, \text{Nil}, \text{Nil})))) \xrightarrow{i}_{\mathcal{R}} \text{S}(\text{plus}(\text{Zero}, \text{S}(\text{plus}(\text{size}(\text{Nil}), \text{size}(\text{Nil})))) \\ \xrightarrow{i}_{\mathcal{R}} \text{S}(\text{plus}(\text{Zero}, \text{S}(\text{plus}(\text{Zero}, \text{size}(\text{Nil})))) \xrightarrow{i}_{\mathcal{R}} \text{S}(\text{plus}(\text{Zero}, \text{S}(\text{plus}(\text{Zero}, \text{Zero})))) \\ \xrightarrow{i}_{\mathcal{R}} \text{S}(\text{plus}(\text{Zero}, \text{S}(\text{Zero}))) \xrightarrow{i}_{\mathcal{R}} \text{S}(\text{S}(\text{Zero})) \end{array}$$

This rewrite sequence uses 7 steps to reach a normal form.

3 Parallel-Innermost Rewriting

The notion of parallel-innermost rewriting dates back at least to the year 1974 [13]. Informally, in a parallel-innermost rewrite step, all innermost redexes are rewritten simultaneously. This corresponds to executing all function calls in parallel using a call-by-value strategy on a machine with unbounded parallelism [3]. In the literature [11], this strategy is also known as “max-parallel-innermost rewriting”.

Definition 2 (Parallel-Innermost Rewriting [5]). A term s rewrites innermost in parallel to t with a TRS \mathcal{R} , written $s \Downarrow_{\mathcal{R}}^i t$, iff $s \xrightarrow{i}_{\mathcal{R}}^+ t$, and either (a) $s \xrightarrow{i}_{\mathcal{R}} t$ with s an innermost redex, or (b) $s = f(s_1, \dots, s_n)$, $t = f(t_1, \dots, t_n)$, and for all $1 \leq k \leq n$ either $s_k \Downarrow_{\mathcal{R}}^i t_k$ or $s_k = t_k$ is a normal form.

74 **Example 2** (Example 1 continued). The TRS \mathcal{R} from Example 1 allows the following parallel-
 75 innermost rewrite sequence, where innermost redexes are underlined:

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{size(Tree(Zero, Nil, Tree(Zero, Nil, Nil)))} \quad \Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}} \quad \text{S(plus(size(Nil), size(Tree(Zero, Nil, Nil))))} \\ \Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}} \quad \text{S(plus(Zero, S(plus(\underline{\text{size(Nil)}}, \underline{\text{size(Nil)}))))} \quad \Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}} \quad \text{S(plus(Zero, S(plus(Zero, Zero))))} \\ \Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}} \quad \text{S(plus(Zero, S(Zero)))} \quad \Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}} \quad \text{S(S(Zero))} \end{array}$$

76 In the second and in the third step, two innermost steps each happen in parallel. An innermost
 77 rewrite sequence without parallel evaluation necessarily needs two more steps to a normal form
 78 from this start term, as in Example 1.

79 4 Confluence of Parallel-Innermost Rewriting

80 Given a TRS \mathcal{R} , we wish to prove (or disprove) confluence of this relation $\Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}}$. Apart from
 81 intrinsic interest in confluence as an important property of a rewrite relation, we are also
 82 motivated by applications of confluence proofs to finding *lower bounds* for the length of the
 83 longest derivation with $\Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}}$ from *basic terms*, i.e., terms $f(t_1, \dots, t_k)$ where f is a defined
 84 symbol and all t_i are constructor terms. This notion of *complexity* of a TRS \mathcal{R} , which is
 85 parametric in the *size* of the start term, is also known as *runtime complexity* [8].¹

86 To this end, might we even reuse confluence of innermost rewriting or of full rewriting (and
 87 corresponding tools) as sufficient criteria for confluence of parallel-innermost rewriting?

88 Alas, by the following example, in general we have to answer this question in the negative.

89 **Example 3** (Confluence of $\dot{\rightarrow}_{\mathcal{R}}$ does not imply Confluence of $\Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}}$). To see that we cannot
 90 prove confluence of $\Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}}$ just by using a standard off-the-shelf tool for confluence analysis of
 91 innermost or full rewriting [4], consider the TRS $\mathcal{R} = \{a \rightarrow f(b, b), a \rightarrow f(b, c), b \rightarrow c, c \rightarrow b\}$.
 92 For this TRS, both $\dot{\rightarrow}_{\mathcal{R}}$ and $\rightarrow_{\mathcal{R}}$ are confluent. However, $\Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}}$ is not confluent: we can rewrite
 93 both $a \Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}} f(b, b)$ and $a \Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}} f(b, c)$, yet there is no term v such that $f(b, b) \Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}}^* v$ and
 94 $f(b, c) \Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}}^* v$. The reason is that the only possible rewrite sequences with $\Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}}$ from these terms
 95 are $f(b, b) \Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}} f(c, c) \Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}} f(b, b) \Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}} \dots$ and $f(b, c) \Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}} f(c, b) \Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}} f(b, c) \Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}} \dots$,
 96 with no terms in common.

97 Thus, in general a confluence proof for $\rightarrow_{\mathcal{R}}$ or $\dot{\rightarrow}_{\mathcal{R}}$ does not imply confluence for $\Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}}$.

98 To devise a sufficient criterion for confluence of $\Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}}$, recall that confluence means: if a term
 99 s can be rewritten to two different terms t_1 and t_2 in 0 or more steps, then it is always possible
 100 to rewrite t_1 and t_2 in 0 or more steps to one and the same term u . For parallel-innermost
 101 rewriting, the redexes that get rewritten are fixed: all the innermost redexes simultaneously.
 102 Thus, s can reach two *different* terms t_1 and t_2 only if at least one of these redexes can be
 103 rewritten in two different ways using $\dot{\rightarrow}_{\mathcal{R}}$.

104 The following standard definition of a non-overlapping TRS will be very helpful for a sufficient
 105 criterion of confluence of $\Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}}$.

106 **Definition 3** (Non-Overlapping). A TRS \mathcal{R} is non-overlapping iff for any two rules $\ell \rightarrow r, u \rightarrow$
 107 $v \in \mathcal{R}$ where variables have been renamed apart between the rules, there is no position π in ℓ
 108 such that $\ell|_{\pi} \notin \mathcal{V}$ and the terms $\ell|_{\pi}$ and u unify.

¹The details of our approach to finding complexity bounds are outside of the scope of the present extended abstract; what matters here is that it provides an *application* for techniques to prove confluence of parallel-innermost rewriting. Thus, more powerful techniques for proving confluence of parallel-innermost rewriting potentially allow for larger applicability of techniques for finding lower bounds for runtime complexity of parallel-innermost rewriting.

109 Using non-overlappingness, a sufficient criterion that a given redex has a unique result from
 110 a rewrite step is given in the following.

111 **Lemma 1** ([2], Lemma 6.3.9). *If a TRS \mathcal{R} is non-overlapping, and both $s \rightarrow_{\mathcal{R}} t_1$ and $s \rightarrow_{\mathcal{R}} t_2$
 112 with the used redex of both rewrite steps at the same position, then $t_1 = t_2$.*

113 With the above reasoning, this lemma directly gives us a sufficient criterion for confluence of
 114 *parallel-innermost* rewriting.

115 **Corollary 1** (Confluence of Parallel-Innermost Rewriting). *If a TRS \mathcal{R} is non-overlapping,
 116 then $\Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}}$ is confluent.*

117 Here left-linearity of \mathcal{R} (i.e., in all rules $\ell \rightarrow r \in \mathcal{R}$, every variable occurs at most once in ℓ),
 118 as in Rosen’s criterion for confluence of full rewriting [10], is not required.

119 **Example 4** (Example 2 continued). *Our TRS \mathcal{R} from Example 1 and Example 2 is non-
 120 overlapping and, by Corollary 1, its relation $\Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}}$ is confluent.*

121 The reasoning behind Corollary 1 can be generalised to *arbitrary* strategies where the redexes
 122 that are rewritten are fixed, such as (max-)parallel-outermost rewriting [11].

123 We get the following two follow-up questions:

- 124 1. How powerful is Corollary 1 for proving confluence of $\Downarrow^i_{\mathcal{R}}$ in practice?
- 125 2. Can we really not do better than Corollary 1?

126 5 Experiments

127 To assess the first question, we used the implementation of the non-overlappingness check
 128 in the automated termination and complexity analysis tool APROVE [6]. To demonstrate
 129 the effectiveness of our implementation, we have considered the 663 TRSs from category
 130 `Runtime.Complexity.Innermost.Rewriting` of the Termination Problem Database (TPDB),
 131 version 11.2 [15]. The TPDB is a collection of examples used at the annual *Termination and
 132 Complexity Competition* [7, 14]. The above category of the TPDB is the benchmark collection
 133 used specifically to compare tools that infer complexity bounds for runtime complexity of
 134 *innermost rewriting*. As both the TPDB and also COPS [9], the benchmark collection used
 135 in the Confluence Competition [4], currently do not have a specific benchmark collection for
 136 parallel-innermost rewriting, we used this benchmark collection instead.²

137 In our experiments, APROVE determined for 447 out of 663 TRSs (about 67.4%) that they
 138 are non-overlapping. By Corollary 1, this means that their parallel-innermost rewrite relations
 139 are confluent. Thus, already with the simple (and efficiently checkable) criterion of Corollary 1
 140 we cover a large number of TRSs occurring “in the wild”.

141 At the same time, this reinforces the second question: Can we not do better than this?
 142 Corollary 1 already fails for such natural examples as a TRS with the following rules to compute
 143 the maximum function on natural numbers:

$$\begin{aligned} \max(\text{Zero}, x) &\rightarrow x \\ \max(x, \text{Zero}) &\rightarrow x \\ \max(\text{S}(x), \text{S}(y)) &\rightarrow \text{S}(\max(x, y)) \end{aligned}$$

²Our experimental data as well as all examples are available online [1].

144 Here one can arguably see immediately that the overlap between the first and the second rule, at
145 root position, is harmless: if both rules are applicable to the same redex, the result of a rewrite
146 step with either rule will be the same ($\max(\text{Zero}, \text{Zero}) \xrightarrow{i}_{\mathcal{R}} \text{Zero}$). However, in general, more
147 powerful criteria for confluence of parallel-innermost rewriting would be desirable.

148 6 Conclusion

149 We are not aware of other work that explicitly discusses automatically checkable criteria for
150 confluence of parallel-innermost rewriting. As such, this extended abstract tries to make a
151 first attempt at filling this gap, by using non-overlappingness as a sufficient criterion. Our
152 experiments indicate that non-overlappingness provides a good “baseline” for a sufficient criterion
153 for confluence of parallel-innermost rewriting. At the same time, techniques based on checks
154 for non-overlappingness are one of the most basic tools in a confluence prover’s toolbox. Thus,
155 this paper also poses the challenge to the community to develop stronger techniques for proving
156 (and disproving!) confluence of parallel-innermost rewriting.

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