

Rice's Theorem is a general statement about the decidability of a language. Informally, if a language L asks a nontrivial question about languages, then $L \notin \text{DEC}$. Let's formalize this.

A property of languages (or an I/O property) is a set $P \subseteq \mathcal{P}(\Sigma^*)$.

Define the set

$$L_P = \{ \langle M \rangle \mid L(M) \in P \}$$

A property P is trivial if $L_P = \emptyset$ or L_P is the set of all TMs. P is nontrivial if L_P contains at least one TM but not all of them (i.e. not trivial).

A property P is a property of the TM's language if for all TMs M_1 and M_2 for which $L(M_1) = L(M_2)$, $\langle M_1 \rangle \in L_P$ iff $\langle M_2 \rangle \in L_P$.

- Ex) $P = \emptyset$ is trivial
 $P = \mathcal{P}(\Sigma^*)$ is trivial
 $P = \text{RE}$ is trivial (L_P contains all TMs)
 \bar{P} where P is trivial is trivial

$P = \{ L \mid \exists \text{ TM } M \text{ with } L(M) = L \text{ and } M \text{ has an even \# of states} \} = \text{RE}$
 is not a property of the TM's language

Obs) Any trivial property P has $L_P \in \text{DEC}$.

Why?

You either always accept or always reject.

Obs) All properties P are properties of the TM's language.

Thm) (Rice's Theorem) For any nontrivial property P , $L_P \notin \text{DEC}$.

Pf We give a reduction from A_{TM} to L_p .
Assume wlog that $\emptyset \notin P$ (we get the same result from \bar{P} if so).
Since P is non-trivial, $\exists \langle M \rangle \in P$ and $\exists \langle N \rangle \notin P$; $L(N) \neq L$.

Now consider the TM $D_{M,w}$.

$D_{M,w}$ = "On input v ,

- 1) Run $M(w)$.
- 2) If $M(w)$ does not accept, reject
- 3) Run $N(v)$ and accept if it does
- 4) Reject."

Clearly, $L(D_{M,w}) = \begin{cases} \emptyset & M(w) \text{ does not accept} \\ L & M(w) \text{ accepts.} \end{cases}$

This yields $\langle D_{M,w} \rangle \in L_p$ iff $M(w)$ accepts. ($\emptyset \notin P$, P is a property of the TM's language.)

Now assume $L_p \in \text{DEC}$. Then there is a decider R with $L(R) = L_p$.

Consider the TM D :

D = "On input $\langle M, w \rangle$

- 1) Run $R(\langle D_{M,w} \rangle)$.
- 2) Accept if $R(\langle D_{M,w} \rangle)$ accepts and reject otherwise"

Clearly, $L(D) = \{ \langle M, w \rangle \mid M(w) \text{ accepts} \} = A_{TM}$, so D decides A_{TM} .

→ ←

∴ L_p is not decidable. □

Ex) $ALL_{TM} = \{ \langle M \rangle \mid L(M) = \Sigma^* \}$ is not decidable.

Not all TMs accept Σ^* , so this is a non-trivial property.

Moreover, if $L(M_1) = L(M_2)$ for TM M_1, M_2 , then $\langle M_1 \rangle, \langle M_2 \rangle \in ALL_{TM}$

iff $L(M_1) = L(M_2) = \Sigma^*$, hence this is a property of the TM's language.

By Rice's Theorem, ALL_{TM} is undecidable.

Given a predicate $\phi: \Sigma^* \rightarrow \{0,1\}$, we can determine if the language

$$L = \{ \omega \mid \phi(\omega) \}$$

has a nontrivial I/O property (which is a property of languages).

If $\phi(\omega)$ for any ω for which ω is not the encoding of a TM, then L is not an I/O property.

We can now rewrite L as

$$L = \{ \langle M \rangle \mid \phi(\langle M \rangle) \}$$

for convenience. Then if ϕ satisfies for all M_1, M_2

$$L(M_1) = L(M_2) \Rightarrow \phi(\langle M_1 \rangle) = \phi(\langle M_2 \rangle),$$

then ϕ represents an I/O property.

To show that ϕ is nontrivial, it suffices to show that there is some M_1 and M_2 such that $\phi(\langle M_1 \rangle)$ and $\neg \phi(\langle M_2 \rangle)$.

In other words, there is a TM that satisfies ϕ and another TM which does not.

With this, we can rewrite Rice's Theorem as follows.

Thm (Rice's Theorem) Let P be a language consisting of TM encodings, suppose P satisfies the following properties.

i) $\exists M_1, M_2$ such that $\langle M_1 \rangle \in P$ and $\langle M_2 \rangle \notin P$.

ii) $\forall M_1, M_2, L(M_1) = L(M_2) \Rightarrow \langle M_1 \rangle \in P \text{ iff } \langle M_2 \rangle \in P$.

Then P is undecidable.