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Almost k-wise independence versus k-wise independence

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Abstract

We say that a distribution over $\{0,1\}^n$ is almost k-wise independent if its restriction to every k coordinates results in a distribution that is close to the uniform distribution. A natural question regarding almost k-wise independent distributions is how close they are to some k-wise independent distribution. We show that the latter distance is essentially $n^{\Theta(k)}$ times the former distance.

Keywords: Small probability spaces, k-wise independent distributions, almost k-wise independent distributions, small bias probability spaces.

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1 Introduction

Small probability spaces of limited independence are useful in various applications. Specifically, as observed by Luby [4] and others, if the analysis of a randomized algorithm only relies on the hypothesis that some objects are distributed in a k-wise independent manner then one can replace the algorithm's random-tape by a string selected from a k-wise independent distribution. Recalling that k-wise independent distributions over $\{0,1\}^n$ can be generated using only $O(k \log n)$ bits (see, e.g., [1]), this yields a significant saving in the randomness complexity as well as to derandomization in time $n^{O(k)}$. (This number of random bits is essentially optimal; see [3], [1].)

Further saving is possible whenever the analysis of the randomized algorithm can be carried out also in case its random-tape is only "almost k-wise independent" (i.e., every k bits are distributed almost uniformly). The reason being that the latter distributions can be generated using fewer random bits (i.e., $O(k+\log(n/\epsilon))$ bits suffice, where ϵ is the variation distance of these k-projections to the uniform distribution): See the work of Naor and Naor [5] (as well as subsequent simplifications in [2]).

Note that, in both cases, replacing the algorithm's random-tape by strings taken from a distribution of a smaller support requires verifying that the original analysis still holds for the replaced distribution. It would have been nicer, if instead of re-analyzing the algorithm for the case of almost k-wise independent distributions, we could just re-analyze it for the case of k-wise independent distributions and apply a generic result. Such a result may say that if the algorithm behaves well under any k-wise independent distribution then it would behave essentially as well also under any almost k-wise independent distribution, provided that the parameter ϵ governing this measure of closeness is small enough. Of course, the issue is how small should ϵ be.

A generic approach towards the above question is to ask what is the statistical distance δ between any almost k-wise independent distribution and some k-wise independent distribution. Specifically, how does this distance δ depend on n and k (and on the parameter ϵ). Note that we will have to set ϵ sufficiently small so that δ will be small (e.g., $\delta = 0.1$ may do).

Our original hope was that $\delta = \mathrm{poly}(2^k, n) \cdot \epsilon$ (or $\delta = \mathrm{poly}(2^k, n) \cdot \epsilon^{1/O(1)}$). If this were the case, we could have set $\epsilon = \mathrm{poly}(2^{-k}, n^{-1}, \delta)$, and use an almost k-wise independent sample space of size $\mathrm{poly}(n/\epsilon) = \mathrm{poly}(2^k, n, \delta^{-1})$ (instead of size $n^{\Theta(k)}$ as for perfect k-wise independence). Unfortunately, the answer is that $\delta = n^{\Theta(k)} \cdot \epsilon$, and so this generic approach does not lead to anything better than just using an adequate k-wise independent sample space. In fact we show that every distribution with support less than $n^{\Theta(k)}$ has large statistical distance to *any* k-wise independent distribution.

2 Formal Setting

We consider distributions and random variables over $\{0,1\}^n$, where n (as well as k and ϵ) is a parameter. A distribution D_X over $\{0,1\}^n$ assigns each $z \in \{0,1\}^n$ a value $D_X(z) \in [0,1]$ such that $\sum_z D_X(z) = 1$. A random variable X over $\{0,1\}^n$ is associated with a distribution D_X and randomly selects a $z \in \{0,1\}^n$, where $\mathsf{Pr}[X = z] = D_X(z)$. Throughout the paper we use interchangeably the notation of a random variable and a distribution. The statistical distance, denoted $\Delta(X,Y)$, between two random variables X and Y over $\{0,1\}^n$ is defined as

$$\begin{aligned}\Delta(X,Y) &\stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \frac{1}{2} \cdot \sum_{z \in \{0,1\}^n} |\mathsf{Pr}[X=z] - \mathsf{Pr}[Y=z]| \\ &= \max_{S \subset \{0,1\}^n} \{\mathsf{Pr}[X \in S] - \mathsf{Pr}[Y \in S]\}\end{aligned}$$

If $\Delta(X,Y) \leq \epsilon$ the we say that X is ϵ-close to Y. (Note that $2\Delta(X,Y)$ is equivalent to $\|D_X - D_Y\|_1$, where $\|\vec{v}\|_1 = \sum |v_i|$.)

A distribution $X = X_1 \cdots X_n$ is called an (ϵ, k)-approximation if for every k (distinct) coordinates $i_1, ..., i_k \in \{1, ..., n\}$ it holds that $X_{i_1} \cdots X_{i_k}$ is ϵ-close to the uniform distribution over $\{0,1\}^k$. An $(0,k)$-approximation is sometimes referred to as a k-wise independent distribution (i.e., for every k (distinct) coordinates $i_1, ..., i_k \in \{1, ..., n\}$ it holds that $X_{i_1} \cdots X_{i_k}$ is uniform over $\{0,1\}^k$).

A related notion is that of having bounded bias on (non-empty) sets of size at most k. Recall that the bias of a distribution $X = X_1 \cdots X_n$ on a set I is defined as

$$\begin{aligned}\text{bias}_I(X) &\stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathsf{E}[(-1)^{\sum_{i \in I} X_i}] \\ &= \mathsf{Pr}[\oplus_{i \in I} X_i = 0] - \mathsf{Pr}[\oplus_{i \in I} X_i = 1] \;=\; 2\mathsf{Pr}[\oplus_{i \in I} X_i = 0] - 1\end{aligned}$$

Clearly, for any (ϵ, k)-approximation X, the bias of the distribution X on every non-empty subset of size at most k is bounded above by ϵ. On the other hand, if X has bias at most ϵ on every non-empty subset of size at most k then X is an $(2^{k/2} \cdot \epsilon, k)$-approximation (see [7] and the Appendix in [2]).

Since we are willing to give up on $\exp(k)$ factors, we state our results in terms of distributions of bounded bias.

Theorem 2.1 (Upper Bound): *Let $X = (X_1 .... X_n)$ be a distribution over $\{0,1\}^n$ such that the bias of X on any non-empty subset of size upto k is at most ϵ. Then X is $\delta(n,k,\epsilon)$-close to some k-wise independent distribution, where $\delta(n,k,\epsilon) \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \sum_{i=1}^{k} \binom{n}{i} \cdot \epsilon \leq n^k \cdot \epsilon$.*

The proof appears in Section 3.1. It follows that any (ϵ, k)-approximation is $\delta(n,k,\epsilon)$-close to some $(0,k)$-approximation. We show that the above result is nearly tight in the following sense.

Theorem 2.2 (Lower Bound): *For every n, every even k and every ϵ such that $\epsilon > 2k^{k/2}/n^{(k/4)-1}$ there exists a distribution X over $\{0,1\}^n$ such that*

1. *The bias of X on any non-empty subset is at most ϵ.*
2. *The distance of X from any k-wise independent distribution is at least $\frac{1}{2}$.*

The proof appears in Section 3.2. In particular, setting $\epsilon = n^{-k/5}/2$ (which, for sufficiently large $n \gg k \gg 1$, satisfies $\epsilon > 2k^{k/2}/n^{(k/4)-1}$), we obtain that $\delta(n,k,\epsilon) \geq 1/2$, where $\delta(n,k,\epsilon)$ is as in Theorem 2.1. Thus, if $\delta(n,k,\epsilon) = f(n,k) \cdot \epsilon$ (as is natural and is indeed the case in Theorem 2.1) then it must hold that

$$f(n,k) \;\geq\; \frac{1}{2\epsilon} \;=\; n^{-k/5}$$

A similar analysis holds also in case $\delta(n,k,\epsilon) = f(n,k) \cdot \epsilon^{1/O(1)}$. We remark that although Theorem 2.2 is shown for an even k, a bound for an odd k can be trivially derived by replacing k by $k-1$.

3 Proofs

3.1 Proof of Theorem 2.1

Going over all non-empty sets, I, of size upto k, we make the bias over these sets zero, by augmenting the distribution as follows. Say that the bias over I is exactly $\epsilon > 0$ (w.l.o.g., the bias is positive); that is, $\mathsf{Pr}[\oplus_{i \in I} X_i = 0] = (1+\epsilon)/2$. Then (for $p \approx \epsilon$ to be determined below), we define a new distribution $Y = Y_1 ... Y_n$ as follows.

1. With probability $1-p$, we let $Y = X$.
2. With probability p, we let Y be uniform over the set $\{\sigma_1 \cdots \sigma_n \in \{0,1\}^n : \oplus_{i\in I}\sigma_i = 1\}$.

Then $\mathsf{Pr}[\oplus_{i\in I} Y_i = 0] = (1-p)\cdot((1+\epsilon)/2) + p\cdot 0$. Setting $p = \epsilon/(1+\epsilon)$, we get $\mathsf{Pr}[\oplus_{i\in I} Y_i = 0] = 1/2$ as desired. Observe that $\Delta(X,Y) \le p < \epsilon$ and that we might have only decreased the biases on all other subsets. To see the latter, consider a non-empty $J \neq I$, and notice that in Case (2) Y is unbiased over J. Then

$$\begin{aligned}\left|\mathsf{Pr}[\oplus_{i\in J} Y_i = 1] - \frac{1}{2}\right| &= \left|\left((1-p)\cdot \mathsf{Pr}[\oplus_{i\in J} X_i = 1] + p\cdot\frac{1}{2}\right) - \frac{1}{2}\right| \\ &= (1-p)\cdot\left|\mathsf{Pr}[\oplus_{i\in J} X_i = 1] - \frac{1}{2}\right|\end{aligned}$$

The theorem follows. ■

3.2 Proof of Theorem 2.2

On one hand, we know (cf., [2], following [5]) that there exists ϵ-bias distributions of support size $(n/\epsilon)^2$. On the other hand, we will show (in Lemma 3.1) that every k-wise independent distribution, not only has large support (as proven, somewhat implicitly, in [6] and explicitly in [3] and [1]), but also has a large min-entropy bound. It follows that every k-wise independent distribution must be far from any distribution that has a small support, and thus be far from any such ϵ-bias distribution. Recall that a distribution Z has min-entropy m if $\mathsf{Pr}[Z = \alpha] \le 2^{-m}$ holds for every α. (Note that min-entropy is equivalent to $\lceil \log_2 \|D_Z\|_\infty \rceil$, where $\|\vec{v}\|_\infty = \max_i |v_i|$.)

Lemma 3.1 *For every n and every even k, any k-wise independent distribution over $\{0,1\}^n$ has min-entropy at least $-\log_2(k^k n^{-k/2})$.*

Let us first see how to prove Theorem 2.2, using Lemma 3.1. First we observe, that a distribution Y that has min-entropy m must be at distance at least $1/2$ from any distribution X that has support $2^m/2$. This follows because

$$\begin{aligned}\Delta(Y,X) &\ge \mathsf{Pr}[Y \in (\{0,1\}^n \setminus \text{support}(X))] \\ &= 1 - \sum_{\alpha\in\text{support}(X)} \mathsf{Pr}[Y = \alpha] \\ &\ge 1 - |\text{support}(X)|\cdot 2^{-m} \ \ge\ \frac{1}{2}\end{aligned}$$

Now, letting X be an ϵ-bias distribution (i.e., having bias at most ϵ on every non-empty subset) of support $(n/\epsilon)^2$ and using Lemma 3.1 (while observing that $\epsilon > 2k^{k/2}/n^{(k/4)-1}$ implies $(n/\epsilon)^2 < 2^m/2$ for $m = \log_2(n^{k/2}/k^k)$), Theorem 2.2 follows. In fact we can derive the following corollary.

Corollary 3.2 *For every n, every even k, and for every k-wise independent distribution Y, if distribution X has support smaller than $n^{k/2}/2k^k$ then $\Delta(X,Y) \ge \frac{1}{2}$.*

Proof of Lemma 3.1: Let Y be a k-wise independent distribution, and α be a string maximizing $\mathsf{Pr}[Y = \alpha]$. Assume (w.l.o.g., by shifting/XORing Y by α) that α is the all-zero string. We consider the k-th moment of Y; i.e., $\mathsf{E}[(\sum_i (Y_i - 0.5))^k]$.

Upper bound: Following standard manipulation, we let $Z_i = Y_i - 0.5$, (note that $\mathsf{E}[Z_i] = 0$) and write

$$\mathsf{E}\left[\left(\sum_i Z_i\right)^k\right] = \sum_{i_1,\ldots,i_k \in [n]} \mathsf{E}[Z_{i_1} \cdots Z_{i_k}]\,. \tag{1}$$

Observe that all (r.h.s) terms in which some index appears only once are zero (i.e., if for some j and all $h \neq j$ it holds that $i_j \neq i_h$ then $\mathsf{E}[\prod_h Z_{i_h}] = \mathsf{E}[Z_{i_j}] \cdot \mathsf{E}[\prod_{h \neq j} Z_{i_h}] = 0$). All the remaining terms are such that each index appears at least twice. The number of these terms is bounded above by $\binom{n}{k/2} \cdot (k/2)^k < (k/2)^k \cdot n^{k/2}$, and each contributes at most 1 to the sum. Thus, Eq. (1) is strictly smaller than $(k/2)^k \cdot n^{k/2}$.

Lower bound: We write the formal expression for expectation (of the l.h.s of Eq. (1)).

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathsf{E}\left[\left(\sum_i Z_i\right)^k\right] &= \mathsf{E}\left[\left(\left(\sum_i Y_i\right) - (n/2)\right)^k\right] \\
&= \sum_{\sigma_1 \cdots \sigma_n \in \{0,1\}^n} \mathsf{Pr}[(\forall i)\ Y_i = \sigma_i] \cdot \left(\left(\sum_i \sigma_i\right) - (n/2)\right)^k \\
&\geq \mathsf{Pr}[(\forall i)\ Y_i = 0] \cdot (-n/2)^k
\end{aligned}$$

where we use the fact that all terms are non-negative (because k is even).

Combining the two bounds on Eq. (1), we infer than $(n/2)^k \cdot \mathsf{Pr}[Y = 0^n] < (k/2)^k n^{k/2}$, and we get $\mathsf{Pr}[Y = 0^n] < ((k/2)^k n^{k/2})/(n/2)^k = k^k n^{-k/2}$. The lemma follows. ■

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