Abstract

In this paper, we analyze the linear equation system behind the Lights Out game. We have discussed how to do the solvable initial setting and how to get the minimal play solution. The main analyzing tool is MATLAB. We also design a window application for this game based on the above math analyzing.

§1. Introduction

*Lights Out* is an electronic game, released by Tiger Toys in 1995.

The game consists of a 5 by 5 grid of lights (buttons). When the game starts, a random number or a stored pattern of these lights is switched on. Pressing any of the lights will toggle it and the four adjacent lights. The goal of the game is to switch all the lights off, preferably in as few button presses as possible.

The basic topics in this paper are

1. For what kind of initial lights setting, the game has solution?
2. If it has solution, how to find the solution with minimal plays?
3. How to design a window software application for this game?

Notes:

1. Two consecutive different button plays are commutative, which means to exchange the playing order will not change the output. This because if a light button is involved those two plays, then it’s light would not be changed after two plays; if a light button only in involved one play action, then it’s light would be always changed after two plays. Therefore any two button plays are commutative even they are not in consecutive order.
2. Two consecutive same button plays will be equivalent to no play at all.

From those two notes, we conclude that for any solvable initial setting, each button only needs to be pressed at most once and the plays can be in any order.
§2. The linear equation system behind the game

We have two pictures below:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
    b_1 & b_2 & b_3 & b_4 & b_5 & x_1 & x_2 & x_3 & x_4 & x_5 \\
    b_6 & b_7 & b_8 & b_9 & b_{10} & x_6 & x_7 & x_8 & x_9 & x_{10} \\
    b_{11} & b_{12} & b_{13} & b_{14} & b_{15} & x_{11} & x_{12} & x_{13} & x_{14} & x_{15} \\
    b_{16} & b_{17} & b_{18} & b_{19} & b_{20} & x_{16} & x_{17} & x_{18} & x_{19} & x_{20} \\
    b_{21} & b_{22} & b_{23} & b_{24} & b_{25} & x_{21} & x_{22} & x_{23} & x_{24} & x_{25} \\
\end{array}
\]

The numbers \(b_1, b_2, \ldots, b_{25}\) represent the initial lights setting and the numbers \(x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_{25}\) represent the button pressing plays. Each number \(b_i\) \((1 \leq i \leq 25)\) is 1 or 0 such that 1 means light on and 0 means light off. Each number \(x_i\) \((1 \leq i \leq 25)\) is also 1 or 0 such that 1 means press this button and 0 means no play action on this button. All numbers are in module group \(Z_2\), satisfying:

- Addition rule: \(0 + 0 = 0,\) \(0 + 1 = 1,\) \(1 + 0 = 1,\) \(1 + 1 = 0\)
- Subtraction rule: \(1 - 1 = 0,\) \(1 - 0 = 1,\) \(0 - 0 = 0,\) \(0 - 1 = 1\)

When playing \(x_1\), the light \(b_1\) becomes \(b_1 + x_1\). To make \(b_1\) to be zero, we need plays \(x_2\) and \(x_6\) too. Therefore \(b_1 + x_1 + x_2 + x_6 = 0\) and we have equation

\[
x_1 + x_2 + x_6 = b_1
\]

To make \(b_2\) to be zero, we need plays \(x_1, x_2, x_3\) and \(x_7\). Therefore we have

\[
x_1 + x_2 + x_3 + x_7 = b_2
\]

To make \(b_3\) to be zero, we need to play \(x_2, x_3, x_4\) and \(x_8\). Therefore we have

\[
x_2 + x_3 + x_4 + x_8 = b_3
\]

Similarly, we can get the following 22 equations:

\[
\begin{align*}
x_1 + x_3 + x_4 + x_9 &= b_4 \\
x_2 + x_3 + x_5 + x_{10} &= b_5 \\
x_1 + x_5 + x_6 + x_{11} &= b_6 \\
x_1 + x_6 + x_7 + x_{12} &= b_7 \\
x_3 + x_4 + x_5 + x_{13} &= b_8 \\
x_4 + x_5 + x_6 + x_{14} + x_{15} &= b_9 \\
x_3 + x_5 + x_{10} + x_{14} &= b_{10} \\
x_4 + x_6 + x_{11} + x_{15} &= b_{11} \\
x_5 + x_{11} + x_{12} + x_{16} &= b_{12} \\
x_7 + x_{12} + x_{13} + x_{17} &= b_{13} \\
x_8 + x_{12} + x_{13} + x_{14} + x_{18} &= b_{14} \\
x_5 + x_{13} + x_{14} + x_{19} &= b_{15} \\
x_3 + x_{14} + x_{16} + x_{19} &= b_{16} \\
x_5 + x_{15} + x_{18} + x_{20} &= b_{17} \\
x_7 + x_{16} + x_{19} + x_{21} &= b_{18} \\
x_8 + x_{17} + x_{18} + x_{21} + x_{22} &= b_{19} \\
x_5 + x_{19} + x_{20} + x_{22} + x_{23} &= b_{20} \\
x_7 + x_{20} + x_{21} + x_{23} + x_{24} &= b_{21} \\
x_6 + x_{21} + x_{22} + x_{24} + x_{25} &= b_{22} \\
x_5 + x_{22} + x_{23} + x_{25} + x_{26} &= b_{23} \\
x_8 + x_{23} + x_{25} + x_{27} &= b_{24} \\
x_9 + x_{25} + x_{26} + x_{28} &= b_{25}
\end{align*}
\]
Let $A$ be the equation coefficient matrix, $X$ be the column vector of plays $\{x_i\}$ and $b$ be the column vector of lights' initial setting $\{b_i\}$, then we have a linear equation system $AX = b$.

The matrix $A$ can be calculated by the following MATLAB commands:

```matlab
>> A = zeros(25);
>> A(1,[1 2 6]) = 1;
>> A(2,[1:3 7]) = 1;
>> A(3,[2:4 8]) = 1;
>> A(4,[3:5 9]) = 1;
>> A(5,[4 5 10]) = 1;
>> A(6,[1 6 7 11]) = 1;
>> A(7,[2 6:8 12]) = 1;
>> A(8,[3 7:9 13]) = 1;
>> A(9,[4 8:10 14]) = 1;
>> A(10,[5 9 10 15]) = 1;
>> A(11,[6 11 12 16]) = 1;
>> A(12,[7 11:13 17]) = 1;
>> A(13,[8 12:14 18]) = 1;
>> A(14,[9 13:15 19]) = 1;
>> A(15,[10 14 15 20]) = 1;
>> A(16,[11 16 17 21]) = 1;
>> A(17,[12 16:18 22]) = 1;
>> A(18,[13 17:19 23]) = 1;
>> A(19,[14 18:20 24]) = 1;
>> A(20,[15 19:20 25]) = 1;
>> A(21,[16 21 22]) = 1;
>> A(22,[17 21:23]) = 1;
>> A(23,[18 22:24]) = 1;
>> A(24,[19 23:25]) = 1;
>> A(25,[20 24 25]) = 1;
```
The determinant of this matrix is 0, so matrix \( A \) is singular, which means the equation system \( AX = b \) might not have a solution for some initial setting of \( \{ b \} \).
Because each entry of \( A \) is either 1 or zero, calling Gauss-Jordan elimination operation on \( A \) would not create fractional numbers.
By call MATLAB command
\[
\triangleright \triangleright G = \text{mod}(\text{ref}(A), 2);
\]
We get matrix
\[
\begin{bmatrix}
1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\
0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
\end{bmatrix}
\]
\( G = \text{mod}(\text{rref}(A), 2); \)
Therefore the rank(A) is 23 and the dimension of null space of \( A \) is 2.

Now consider the homogenous equation system \( GX = \emptyset \)

Set \( x_{24} = 1, x_{25} = 0 \) or \( x_{24} = 0, x_{25} = 1 \), we obtain two independent vectors of the null space as the following:

\[
\begin{align*}
\mathbf{v}_1 &= [0 1 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 1 1 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 1 1 0]; \\
\mathbf{v}_2 &= [1 0 1 0 1 1 0 1 0 1 0 0 0 0 1 0 1 0 1 1 0 1 1];
\end{align*}
\]

Because \( A \) is symmetric, \( \text{null}(A) \perp \text{range}(A) \). So the equation system \( AX = b \)

has solution if and only if \( b \perp \mathbf{v}_1 \) and \( b \perp \mathbf{v}_2 \) (in \( \mathbb{Z}_2 \)).

§3. Generate the solvable initial setting

The following MATLAB function will generate the solvable initial setting:

```matlab
function b = generate()
    v1 = [0 1 1 1 0 1 0 1 1 1 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 1 1 0];
    v2 = [1 0 1 0 1 1 0 1 0 1 0 0 0 0 1 0 1 0 1 1 0 1];
    c = clock;
    rand('seed', c(6));
    while true
        b = mod(floor(rand(1, 25)*2), 2);
        if mod(dot(b,v1), 2)==1 | mod(dot(b,v2), 2)==1
            continue;
        end
        break
    end
end
```

Here we set seed for the random function `rand()` according to the clock such that we can get the different solvable initial setting at different time.

§ 3. Finding the solution for equation system \( AX = b \)

Now assume that equation system \( AX = b \) has solution. From linear algebra, the Gauss-Jordan elimination is equivalent to a multiplication by a matrix \( R \) from the left, which means that \( RA=G \). Then we get \( GX = Rb \). Because the last two rows of \( G \) are zeros, therefore the last two entries of \( Rb \) must be zeros too. So we can set \( x_{24}=0 \) and \( x_{25}=0 \), then \( GX = I_{25}X = X \), we get a solution \( X = Rb \). Other three solutions are \( Rb+v_1, Rb+v_2, Rb+v_1+v_2 \). Among them, the solution with the minimum sum (the regular sum) of entries will be the minimal playing solution. The matrix \( R \) is the following
To matrix $R$ can be generated by the following MATLAB function:

```matlab
function R = GJ(A)
    [m n] = size(A);
    A = round([A, eye(m)]);
    % add identity
    for i = 1:m
        if A(i, i) == 0
            for k = i+1:m
                if A(k, i) ~= 0
                    A([i k],:) = A([k i],:);
                    break;
                end
            end
        end
        if A(i, i) == 0
            break
        end
        for k = [1:i-1 i+1:m]
            A(k, :) = mod(A(k, :) + A(i, :) * A(k, i), 2);
        end
    end
    R = A(:,n+1:n+m);
    % read answer
end
```

To get minimal play solution, call command

```matlab
>> y = R*b;
>> y1 = mod(y + v1, 2);
>> y2 = mod(y + v2, 2);
>> y2 = mod(y + v1 + v2, 2);
```
> if sum(y) < sum(y1)
    y = y1;
end
> if sum(y) < sum(y2)
    y = y2;
end
> if sum(y) < sum(y3)
    y = y3;
end

§4. Window application for the game

Based on the above linear algebraic analyzing, we have designed a window application for the *Lights Out* game in Microsoft DOT NET C# language. Users can setup the initial lights manually or choose auto setting. The users also can choose either hand play or auto play. The following are some screen shots.

The complete code and the executable application can be downloaded from web site


† Delin Tan, Ph.D., Southern University at New Orleans, USA

References