On the Rainbow Turán number of paths

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Abstract

Let $F$ be a fixed graph. The *rainbow Turán number* of $F$ is defined as the maximum number of edges in a graph on $n$ vertices that has a proper edge-coloring with no rainbow copy of $F$ (where a rainbow copy of $F$ means a copy of $F$ all of whose edges have different colours). The systematic study of such problems was initiated by Keevash, Mubayi, Sudakov and Verstraëte.

In this paper, we show that the rainbow Turán number of a path with $k+1$ edges is less than $\frac{9n}{k^7} + 2n$, improving an earlier estimate of Johnston, Palmer and Sarkar.

1 Introduction

Given a graph $F$, the maximum number of edges in a graph on $n$ vertices that contains no copy of $F$ is known as the *Turán number* of $F$, and is denoted by $\text{ex}(n, F)$. An edge-colored graph is called *rainbow* if all its edges have different colors. Given a graph $F$, the *rainbow Turán number* of $F$ is defined as the maximum number of edges in a graph on $n$ vertices that has a proper edge-coloring with no rainbow copy of $F$, and it is denoted by $\text{ex}^*(n, F)$.

The systematic study of rainbow Turán numbers was initiated in [6] by Keevash, Mubayi, Sudakov and Verstraëte. Clearly, $\text{ex}^*(n, F) \geq \text{ex}(n, F)$. They determined $\text{ex}^*(n, F)$ asymptotically for any non-bipartite graph $F$, by showing that $\text{ex}^*(n, F) = (1 + o(1))\text{ex}(n, F)$. For bipartite $F$ with a maximum degree of $s$ in one of the parts, they proved $\text{ex}^*(n, F) = O(n^{1/s})$. This matches the upper bound for the (usual) Turán numbers of such graphs.

Keevash, Mubayi, Sudakov and Verstraëte also studied the rainbow Turán problem for even cycles. More precisely, they showed that $\text{ex}^*(n, C_{2k}) = \Omega(n^{1+1/k})$ using the construction of large $B_k^*$-sets of Bose and Chowla [2]—it is conjectured that the same lower bound holds for

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$ex^*(n, C_{2k})$ and is a well-known difficult open problem in extremal graph theory. They also proved a matching upper bound in the case of six-cycle $C_6$, so it known that $ex^*(n, C_6) = \Theta(n^{4/3}) = ex(n, C_6)$. However, interestingly, they showed that $ex^*(n, C_6)$ is asymptotically larger than $ex(n, C_6)$ by a multiplicative constant. Recently, Das, Lee and Sudakov [3] showed that $ex^*(n, C_{2k}) = O(n^{1 + \frac{(1+o(1)) \ln k}{k}})$, where $\epsilon_k \to 0$ as $k \to \infty$.

For an integer $k$, let $P_k$ denote a path of length $k$, where the length of a path is defined as the number of edges in it. Erdős and Gallai [4] proved that $ex(n, P_{k+1}) \leq \frac{3}{2}n$; moreover, they showed that if $k + 1$ divides $n$, then the unique extremal graph is the vertex-disjoint union of $\frac{n}{k+1}$ copies of $K_{k+1}$. On the other hand, Keevash, Mubayi, Sudakov and Verstraëte [6] showed that in some cases, the rainbow Turán number of $P_k$ can be strictly larger than the usual Turán number of $P_k$: Maamoun and Meyniel [7] gave an example of a proper coloring of $K_{2^k}$ containing no rainbow path with $2^k - 1$ edges. By taking a vertex-disjoint union of such $K_{2^k}$’s, Keevash et. al. showed that $ex^*(n, P_{2^k-1}) \geq \left(\frac{3}{2}\right) \left\lceil \frac{n}{2^k - 1} \right\rceil = (1+o(1))\frac{2^{k-1}}{2^k}ex(n, P_{2^k-1})$ - so $ex^*(n, P_{2^k-1})$ is not asymptotically equal to $ex(n, P_{2^k-1})$. They also mentioned that determining the asymptotic behavior of $ex^*(n, P_{k+1})$ is an interesting open problem, and stated the natural conjecture that the optimal construction is a disjoint union of cliques of size $c(k)$, where $c(k)$ is chosen as large as possible so that the cliques can be properly colored with no rainbow $P_{k+1}$. For $P_4$, this conjecture was disproved by Johnston, Palmer and Sarkar [5]: Since any properly edge-colored $K_5$ contains a rainbow $P_4$, and $K_4$ does not contain a $P_4$, the conjecture for $P_4$ would be that $ex^*(n, P_4) \sim \frac{3n}{2}$. But they show that in fact, $ex^*(n, P_4) \sim 2n$ by showing a proper edge-coloring of $K_{4,4}$ without any rainbow $P_4$, and then taking $\frac{3}{8}$ vertex-disjoint copies of $K_{4,4}$. For general $k$, they proved the following:

**Theorem 1** (Johnston, Palmer and Sarkar [5]). For any positive integer $k$, we have

$$\frac{k}{2}n \leq ex^*(n, P_{k+1}) \leq \left[\frac{3k}{2} + 1\right] n.$$

We improve the above bound by showing the following:

**Theorem 2.** For any positive integer $k$, we have

$$ex^*(n, P_{k+1}) < \left(\frac{9k}{7} + 2\right) n.$$

We remark that using the ideas introduced in this paper, it is conceivable that the upper bound may be further improved. However, it would be very interesting (and seems to be difficult) to prove an upper bound less than $kn$.

We give a construction which shows that $ex^*(n, P_{2k}) > ex^*(n, P_{2k})$ for any $k \geq 2$.

**Construction.** Let us first show a proper edge-coloring of $K_{2^k, 2^k}$ (a complete bipartite graph with parts $A$ and $B$, each of size $2^k$) with no rainbow $P_{2k}$. The vertices of $A$ and $B$ are both identified with the vectors $\mathbb{F}_2^k$. Each edge $uv$ with $u \in A$ and $v \in B$ is assigned the color $c(uv) := u - v$. Clearly this gives a proper edge-coloring of $K_{2^k, 2^k}$. Moreover, if it contains
a rainbow path \(v_0v_1\ldots v_{2k}\) then such a path must use all of the colors from \(\mathbb{F}_2^k\). Therefore \(\sum_{i=0}^{2k-1} c(v_iv_{i+1}) = 0\). On the other hand, \(\sum_{i=0}^{2k-1} c(v_iv_{i+1}) = \sum_{i=0}^{2k-1} (v_i - v_{i+1}) = v_0 - v_{2k}\). Thus, \(v_0 - v_{2k} = 0\). But notice that since the length of the path \(v_0v_1\ldots v_{2k}\) is even, its terminal vertices \(v_0\) and \(v_{2k}\) are either both in \(A\) or they are both in \(B\). So they could not have been identified with the same vector in \(\mathbb{F}_2^k\), a contradiction. Taking a vertex-disjoint union of such \(K_{2k, 2k}\)'s we obtain that \(ex^r(n, P_{2k}) \geq (2^k)^2 \left\lceil n/2^{k+1} \right\rceil = (1 + o(1)) \frac{2^k}{k-1} ex(n, P_{2k})\).

**Remark.** This construction provides a counterexample to the above mentioned conjecture of Keevash, Mubayi, Sudakov and Verstraete [6] whenever the largest clique that can be properly colored without a rainbow \(P_{2k}\) has size \(2^k\). This is the case for \(k = 2\), as noted before. The question of determining whether this is the case for any \(k \geq 3\) remains an interesting open question (see [1] for results in this direction).

**Overview of the proof and organization.** Let \(G\) be a graph which has a proper edge-coloring with no rainbow \(P_{k+1}\). By induction on the length of the path, we assume there is a rainbow path \(v_0v_1\ldots v_k\) in \(G\). Roughly speaking, we will show that the sum of degrees of the terminal vertices of the path, \(v_0\) and \(v_k\) is small. Our strategy is to find a set of distinct vertices \(M := \{a_1, b_1, a_2, b_2, \ldots, a_m, b_m\} \subseteq \{v_0, v_1, \ldots, v_k\}\) (whose size is as large as possible) such that for each \(1 \leq i \leq m\), there is a rainbow path \(P\) of length \(k\) with \(a_i\) and \(b_i\) as terminal vertices and \(V(P) = \{v_0, v_1, \ldots, v_k\}\); then we show that there are not many edges of \(G\) incident to the vertices of \(M\), which will allow us to delete the vertices of \(M\) from \(G\) and apply induction. To this end, we define the set \(T \subseteq \{v_0, v_1, \ldots, v_k\}\) as the set of all vertices \(v \in \{v_0, v_1, \ldots, v_k\}\) where \(v\) is a terminal vertex of some rainbow path \(P\) with \(V(P) = \{v_0, v_1, \ldots, v_k\}\); we call \(T\) the set of terminal vertices. We will then find \(M\) as a subset of \(T\); moreover, it will turn out that if the size of \(T\) is large, then the size of \(M\) is also large—therefore, the heart of the proof lies in showing that \(T\) is large.

In Section 2.1 we introduce the notation and prove some basic claims. Using these claims, in Section 2.2 we will show that \(T\) is large (i.e., that there are many terminal vertices). Then in Section 2.3 we will find the desired subset \(M\) of \(T\) (which has few edges incident to it).

## 2 Proof of Theorem [2]

Let \(G\) be a graph on \(n\) vertices, and suppose it has a proper edge-coloring \(c : E(G) \to \mathbb{N}\) without a rainbow path of length \(k + 1\). Consider a longest rainbow path \(P^*\) in \(G\). We may suppose it is of length \(k\), otherwise we are done by induction on \(k\). For the base case \(k = 1\), notice that any path of length \(2\), has to be a rainbow path. Thus \(G\) can contain at most \(\frac{n}{2} < (\frac{9}{7} + 2)n\) edges, so we are done.

### 2.1 Basic claims and Notation

In the rest of the paper, the degree of a vertex \(v \in V(G)\) be denoted by \(d(v)\).

**Definition 1.** Let \(P^* = v_0v_1\ldots v_k\). Suppose the color of the edge \(v_{i-1}v_i\) is \(c(v_{i-1}v_i) = c_i\) for each \(1 \leq i \leq k\). Let \(L\) and \(R\) denote the sets of colors of edges incident to \(v_0\) and \(v_k\)
respectively. (Notice that since the edges of $G$ are colored properly, we have $|L| = d(v_0)$ and $|R| = d(v_k)$.)

We define the following subsets of $L$, $R$ and $\{c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_k\}$ corresponding to $P^*$.

- Let $L_{out}$ (respectively $R_{out}$) be the set of colors of the edges connecting $v_0$ (respectively $v_k$) to a vertex outside $P^*$.

  Note that $L_{out} \subseteq \{c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_k\}$ and $R_{out} \subseteq \{c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_k\}$, otherwise we can extend $P^*$ to a rainbow path longer than $k$ in $G$.

- Let $L_{in} = L \setminus L_{out}$ and $R_{in} = R \setminus R_{out}$.

- Let $L_{old} = L \cap \{c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_k\}$ and $L_{new} = L \setminus \{c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_k\}$. Similarly, let $R_{old} = R \cap \{c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_k\}$, $R_{new} = R \setminus \{c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_k\}$.

- Let $S_L = \{ c(v_{j-1} v_j) = c_j \mid v_0 v_j \in E(G) \text{ and } c(v_0 v_j) \in L_{new} \text{ and } 2 \leq j \leq k \}$ and $S_R = \{ c(v_{j+1} v_j) = c_{j+1} \mid v_k v_j \in E(G) \text{ and } c(v_k v_j) \in R_{new} \text{ and } 0 \leq j \leq k - 2 \}$.

  Notice that $|S_L| = |L_{new}|$ and $|S_R| = |R_{new}|$.

- Let $L_{nice} = L \cap S_R$ and let $R_{nice} = R \cap S_L$.

- Let $L_{res} = L_{in} \setminus (L_{new} \cup L_{nice}) = L_{old} \setminus (L_{nice} \cup L_{out})$, and $R_{res} = R_{in} \setminus (R_{new} \cup R_{nice}) = R_{old} \setminus (R_{nice} \cup R_{out})$.

**Notation 3.** For convenience, we let $|L| = l$ and $|R| = r$. Moreover, let $|L_{out}| = l_{out}$, $|L_{old}| = l_{old}$, $|L_{nice}| = l_{nice}$, $|L_{new}| = l_{new}$ and $|R_{out}| = r_{out}$, $|R_{old}| = r_{old}$, $|R_{nice}| = r_{nice}$, $|R_{new}| = r_{new}$.

Note that

$$d(v_0) = l_{in} + l_{out} = l_{new} + l_{old}$$

and

$$d(v_k) = r_{in} + r_{out} = r_{new} + r_{old}.$$ 

Now we prove some inequalities connecting the quantities defined in Definition 1 for the path $P^*$.

**Claim 1.** $L_{out} \cap S_R = \emptyset = R_{out} \cap S_L$. This implies that $L_{out} \cap L_{nice} = \emptyset = R_{out} \cap R_{nice}$ (since $L_{nice} \subseteq S_R$ and $R_{nice} \subseteq S_L$).

**Proof.** Suppose for a contradiction that $L_{out} \cap S_R \neq \emptyset$. So there exists a vertex $w \notin \{v_0, v_1, \ldots, v_k\}$ such that $c(v_k v_j) \in R_{new}$ and $c(w v_0) = c(v_j v_{j+1})$ for some $0 \leq j \leq k - 2$.

Consider the path $v_{j+1} v_{j+2} \ldots v_k v_j v_{j-1} \ldots v_0 w$. The set of colors of the edges in this path is $\{c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_k\} \setminus \{c(v_j v_{j+1})\} \cup \{c(w v_0), c(v_k v_j)\} = \{c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_k\} \cup \{c(v_k v_j)\}$, so it is a rainbow path of length $k + 1$ in $G$, a contradiction.

Similarly, by a symmetric argument, we have $R_{out} \cap S_L = \emptyset$. \hfill $\square$

**Claim 2.** $l_{out} \leq k - r_{new}$ and $r_{out} \leq k - l_{new}$. 

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Proof. By Claim 1, $L_{out} \cap S_R = \emptyset$. Since both $L_{out}$ and $S_R$ are subsets of $\{c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_k\}$, this implies, $|L_{out}| = l_{out} \leq k - |S_R| = k - r_{new}$, as desired. Similarly, $r_{out} \leq k - l_{new}$. □

We will prove Theorem 2 by induction on the number of vertices $n$. For the base cases, note that for all $n \leq k$, the number of edges is trivially at most $\binom{n}{2} \leq \frac{kn^2}{2} < \frac{9k}{7} n + 2\sum n$, so the statement of the theorem holds. If $d(v) < \frac{9k}{7} + 2$ for some vertex $v$ of $G$, then we delete $v$ from $G$ to obtain a graph $G'$ on $n - 1$ vertices. By induction hypothesis, the number of edges in $G'$ is less than $\left(\frac{9k}{7} + 2\right)(n - 1)$. So the total number of edges in $G$ is less than $\left(\frac{9k}{7} + 2\right)n$, as desired.

Therefore, from now on, we assume that for all $v \in V(G)$,

$$d(v) \geq \frac{9k}{7} + 2.$$ 

Since $d(v_0) = l = l_{old} + l_{new}$ and $l_{old} \leq k$, we have that

$$l_{new} \geq \frac{2k}{7} + 2. \quad (1)$$

Similarly,

$$r_{new} \geq \frac{2k}{7} + 2. \quad (2)$$

Claim 3. We have

$$l_{nice} + r_{nice} \geq l + r - 2k \geq \frac{4k}{7} + 4,$$

Proof. First notice that $L_{res} \cap S_R = \emptyset$. Indeed, by definition, $L_{res} \cap S_R = (L_{res} \cap L) \cap S_R = L_{res} \cap (L \cap S_R) = L_{res} \cap L_{nice} = \emptyset$. Moreover, by Claim 1, $L_{out} \cap S_R = \emptyset$. Therefore, we have $(L_{res} \cup L_{out}) \cap S_R = \emptyset$. Moreover, $(L_{res} \cup L_{out}) \cup S_R \subseteq \{c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_k\}$. Therefore, $l_{res} + l_{out} \leq k - |S_R| = k - r_{new}$. On the other hand, by definition, $l_{res} + l_{out} = l - l_{new} - l_{nice}$. So

$$l - l_{new} - l_{nice} \leq k - r_{new}.$$

By a symmetric argument, we get

$$r - r_{new} - r_{nice} \leq k - l_{new}.$$

Adding the above two inequalities and rearranging, we get $l + r - l_{nice} - r_{nice} \leq 2k$, so

$$l_{nice} + r_{nice} \geq l + r - 2k = d(v_0) + d(v_k) - 2k \geq \frac{4k}{7} + 4,$$

as required. □
2.2 Finding many terminal vertices

Definition 2 (Set of terminal vertices). Let $T$ be the set of all vertices $v \in \{v_0, v_1, v_2, \ldots, v_k\}$ such that $v$ is a terminal (or end) vertex of some rainbow path $P$ with $V(P) = \{v_0, v_1, v_2, \ldots, v_k\}$.

For convenience, we will denote the size of $T$ by $t$.

The next lemma yields a lower bound on the number of terminal vertices and is crucial to the proof of Theorem 2.

Lemma 4. We have

$$|T| = t \geq \frac{3k}{T} + 1.5.$$  

The rest of this subsection is devoted to the proof of Lemma 4.

Proof of Lemma 4

Recall that $P^* = v_0v_1 \ldots v_k$ and $c(v_jv_{j+1}) = c_j$. First we make a simple observation.

Observation 5. If $c(v_0v_k) \in L_{new} \cup R_{new}$, then every vertex $v_i \in T$. Indeed, the path $v_iv_{i-1}v_{i-2} \ldots v_0v_kv_{k-1} \ldots v_{i+1}$ is a rainbow path with $v_i$ as a terminal vertex. Thus $|T| = k + 1 \geq \frac{3k}{T} + 1.5$, and we are done. So from now on, we assume $c(v_0v_k) \notin L_{new} \cup R_{new}$.

This implies that $c(v_0v_1) \notin L_{nice}$ and $c(v_kv_{k-1}) \notin R_{nice}$, because $c(v_0v_1) \notin S_R$ and $c(v_kv_{k-1}) \notin S_L$.

Claim 4. If $v_0v_i$ is an edge such that $c(v_0v_i) \in L_{new}$ then $v_{i-1} \in T$.

**Proof.** Consider the path $v_{i-1}v_{i-2} \ldots v_0v_iv_{i+1} \ldots v_k$. Clearly it is a rainbow path of length $k$ in which $v_{i-1}$ is a terminal vertex. 

Suppose $v_0v_i$ is an edge such that $c(v_0v_i) \in L_{nice}$. Since $c(v_0v_k) \notin R_{new}$, by the definition of $L_{nice}$, there exists an integer $j$ (with $1 \leq j \leq k - 2$) such that $c(v_kv_j) \in R_{new}$ and $c(v_0v_i) = c(v_jv_{j+1}) = c_j$.

Claim 5. If $c(v_0v_i) \in L_{nice}$ then $v_{i-1} \in T$ or $v_{i+1} \in T$.

Moreover, let $j$ be an integer (with $1 \leq j \leq k - 2$) such that $c(v_kv_j) \in R_{new}$ and $c(v_0v_i) = c(v_jv_{j+1}) = c_j$.

If $j \geq i$, then $v_{i-1} \in T$, and if $j < i$ then $v_{i+1} \in T$.

**Proof.** Observe that since $c(v_0v_i) \in L_{nice} \subset S_R$, we have that $c(v_kv_j) \in R_{new}$ (by definition of $S_R$).

First let $j \geq i$. In this case consider the path $v_{i-1}v_{i-2} \ldots v_0v_iv_{i+1} \ldots v_jv_kv_{k-1} \ldots v_{j+1}$. It is easy to see that the set of colors of the edges in this path is $\{c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_k\} \setminus \{c_i\} \cup \{c(v_jv_k)\}$. As $c(v_kv_j) \in R_{new}$, the path is rainbow with $v_{i-1}$ as a terminal vertex. So $v_{i-1} \in T$.

If $j < i$, then consider the path $v_{j+1}v_{j+2} \ldots v_0v_1 \ldots v_jv_kv_{k-1} \ldots v_{i+1}$. It is easy to see that the set of colors of the edges in this path is $\{c_1, c_2, \ldots, c_k\} \setminus \{c_{i+1}\} \cup \{c(v_jv_k)\}$, so the path is rainbow again, with $v_{i+1}$ as a terminal vertex. So $v_{i+1} \in T$. 


Definition 3. Let $b$ be the largest integer such that $c(v_0v_b) \in L_{new}$ and there exists $b' > b$ with $c(v_0v_b') \in L_{new}$. (In other words, $b$ is the second largest and $b'$ is the largest integer $j$ such that $c(v_0v_j) \in L_{new}$.) Let $a$ be the smallest integer such that $c(v_kv_a) \in R_{new}$ and there exists $a' < a$ with $c(v_kv_{a'}) \in R_{new}$. (That is, $a$ is the second smallest and $a'$ is the smallest integer $j$ such that $c(v_kv_j) \in R_{new}$.)

Notation 6. For any integers, $0 \leq x \leq y \leq k$, let

$$T^{x,y} = \{ v_i \in T \mid x \leq i \leq y \},$$

and $|T^{x,y}| = t^{x,y}$.

Notice that $t = t^{0,k} = 2 + t^{1,k-1}$, as $v_0$ and $v_k$ are both terminal vertices.

Now we will show that if $a > b$, then Lemma 4 holds. Suppose $a > b$. Then by the definition of $a$ and $b$, we have

$$|\{ i \mid 2 \leq i \leq b \text{ and } c(v_0v_i) \in L_{new}\}| = |L_{new}| - 1 = l_{new} - 1.$$ 

By Claim 4, we know that whenever $c(v_0v_i) \in L_{new}$, we have $v_{i-1} \in T$. This shows that $t^{1,b} \geq l_{new} - 1$. Similarly, by a symmetric argument, we get $t^{a+1,k-1} \geq r_{new} - 1$. Therefore,

$$t = 2 + t^{1,k-1} = 2 + t^{1,b-1} + t^{b,a} + t^{a+1,k-1} \geq 2 + (l_{new} - 1) + (r_{new} - 1) = l_{new} + r_{new}.$$ 

Now using (1) and (2), we have

$$t = l_{new} + r_{new} \geq \frac{2k}{7} + 2 + \frac{2k}{7} + 2 = \frac{4k}{7} + 4,$$

proving Lemma 4. Therefore, from now on, we always assume $a \leq b$.

Claim 6. If $c(v_0v_i) \in L_{new}$ or $c(v_kv_i) \in R_{new}$, and $a \leq i \leq b$, then $v_{i-1} \in T$ and $v_{i+1} \in T$.

Proof of Claim. First suppose $c(v_0v_i) \in L_{new}$. Then by Claim 4, $v_{i-1} \in T$. We want to show that $v_{i+1} \in T$.

Observe that if $i = a$, then by Claim 4 again, we have $v_{i+1} \in T$ because $v_kv_i \in R_{new}$. So let us assume $a < i$ and show that $v_{i+1} \in T$. Notice that there exists $a^* \in \{a,a'\}$ (see Definition 3 for the definition of $a$ and $a'$) such that $c(v_0v_i) \neq c(v_{a^*}v_k)$. Now consider the path $v_{a^*+1}v_{a^*+2}\ldots v_iv_0v_1\ldots v_{a^*}v_kv_{k-1}\ldots v_{i+1}$. The set of colors of the edges in this path are $\{c_1,c_2,\ldots,c_k\} \setminus \{c_{a^*+1},c_{i+1}\} \cup \{c(v_0v_i),c(v_{a^*}v_k)\}$, and it is easy to check that all the colors are different, so the path is rainbow with $v_{i+1}$ as a terminal vertex.

Now suppose $c(v_kv_i) \in R_{new}$. Then a similar argument shows that $v_{i-1} \in T$ and $v_{i+1} \in T$ again, completing the proof of the claim. \hfill \Box

Now we introduce some helpful notation.
So there are pairs \((L, R)\) of terminal vertices in different ranges (i.e., sometimes both). Similarly, each edge of a terminal vertex \(e, x\) creates \(\text{Claim 5}\) and \(\text{Claim 7}\). Therefore, using that \(|L_{nice}| = r_{nice}^{x,y} = r_{new}^{x,y}\) and \(|R_{nice}| = r_{nice}^{x,y} = r_{new}^{x,y}\).

Note that by definition of \(a, b\), \(l_{new} = \#^{0,a-1} + \#_{new}^{a,b} + 1\) and \(r_{new} = 1 + r_{new}^{a,b} + r_{new}^{b+1,a}\).

Using Observation \(\text{Notation 7}\) for any integer \(z\), we have the following:

\[
L_{nice}^{0,z} = L_{new}^{2,z} \quad \text{and} \quad R_{nice}^{a,k} = R_{new}^{z,k-2}. \tag{3}
\]

Moreover, by definition of \(L_{new}\) and \(R_{new}\), we have

\[
L_{new}^{0,z} = L_{new}^{2,z} \quad \text{and} \quad R_{new}^{a,k} = R_{new}^{z,k-2}. \tag{4}
\]

Informally speaking, \(\text{Claim 5}\) and \(\text{Claim 6}\) assert that each edge \(e = v_0v_i\) such that \(c(v_0v_i) \in L_{new} \cup L_{nice}\) “creates” a terminal vertex \(x = v_{i-1} \in T\) or \(x = v_{i+1} \in T\) (or sometimes both). Similarly, each edge \(e = v_kv_i\) such that \(c(v_kv_i) \in R_{new} \cup R_{nice}\) “creates” a terminal vertex \(x = v_{i-1} \in T\) or \(x = v_{i+1} \in T\) (or both). In the next two claims, by double counting the total number of such pairs \((e, x)\), we prove lower bounds on the number of terminal vertices in different ranges (i.e., \(t^{0,a-1}, t^{b+1,k}\) and \(t^{a,b}\)), in terms of \(l_{new}, r_{new}, l_{nice}\) and \(r_{nice}\).

**Claim 7.** We have,

\[
t^{0,a-1} \geq \frac{1}{2} \left( t_{nice}^{0,a} + t_{new}^{0,a} + \frac{r_{new}^{0,a}}{2} \right),
\]

and

\[
t^{b+1,k} \geq \frac{1}{2} \left( t_{nice}^{b,k} + t_{new}^{b,k} + \frac{r_{new}^{b,k}}{2} \right).
\]

**Proof of Claim.** By Claim \(\text{Claim 5}\) and by the fact that there is only one \(j\) such that \(c(v_kv_j) \in R_{new}^{0,a-1}\), it is easy to see that for all but at most one \(i\), we have the following: if \(c(v_0v_i) \in L_{nice}^{0,a} = L_{new}^{2,a}\) (equality here follows from \(\text{Claim 3}\) ), then \(v_{i-1} \in T^{1,a-1}\). So there are at least \(t_{nice}^{2,a} - 1\) pairs \((v_0v_i, x)\) such that \(c(v_0v_i) \in L_{nice}^{2,a}\) and \(x = v_{i-1} \in T^{1,a-1}\).

If \(c(v_0v_i) \in L_{new}^{0,a} = L_{new}^{2,a}\) (equality here follows from \(\text{Claim 4}\) ), then by Claim \(\text{Claim 4}\), \(v_{i-1} \in T^{1,a-1}\). So there are \(t_{new}^{2,a} - 1\) pairs \((v_0v_i, x)\) such that \(c(v_0v_i) \in L_{new}^{2,a}\) and \(x = v_{i-1} \in T^{1,a-1}\).

Adding the previous two bounds, the total number of pairs \((v_0v_i, x)\) such that \(c(v_0v_i) \in L_{nice}^{0,a} \cup L_{new}^{0,a} = L_{nice}^{2,a} \cup L_{new}^{2,a}\) and \(x = v_{i-1} \in T^{1,a-1}\), is at least \(t_{nice}^{2,a} - 1 + t_{new}^{2,a}\). This implies \(t^{1,a-1} \geq t_{nice}^{2,a} - 1 + t_{new}^{2,a}\). Therefore, using that \(v_0\) is also a terminal vertex, we have

\[
t^{0,a-1} \geq t_{nice}^{2,a} + t_{new}^{2,a}. \tag{5}
\]
If \( c(v_kv_i) \in R_{nice}^{0,a-1} \), then by Claim 5 there is a vertex \( x \in \{v_{i-1}, v_{i+1}\} \) such that \( x \in T \). So the number of pairs \((v_kv_i, x)\) such that \( c(v_kv_i) \in R_{nice}^{0,a-1} \), \( x \in \{v_{i-1}, v_{i+1}\} \) and \( x \in T \), is at least \( r_{nice}^{0,a-1} \). By the pigeon-hole principle, either the number of pairs \((v_kv_i, v_{i-1})\) with \( c(v_kv_i) \in R_{nice}^{0,a-1}, v_{i-1} \in T \), or the number of pairs \((v_kv_i, v_{i+1})\) with \( c(v_kv_i) \in R_{nice}^{0,a-1}, v_{i+1} \in T \), is at least \( r_{nice}^{0,a-1}/2 \). In the first case, we get \( t_1^{0,a-2} \geq r_{nice}^{0,a-1}/2 \) and in the second case, we get \( t_1^{0,a-2} \). As \( t_1^{0,a-1} \geq t_1^{0,a-2} \) and \( t_1^{0,a-1} \), in both cases we have,

\[
t_1^{0,a-1} \geq r_{nice}^{0,a-1}/2.
\]

Therefore, adding up (5) and (6), we get

\[
2t_1^{0,a-1} \geq l_{nice}^{2,a} + l_{new}^{2,a} + l_{nice}^{0,a-1}/2 = r_{nice}^{0,a} + r_{new}^{0,a} + r_{nice}^{0,a}/2.
\]

Note that the equality follows from (3) and the fact that \( r_{nice}^{0,a-1} = r_{nice}^{0,a} \) because \( c(v_kv_a) \in R_{new} \). By a symmetric argument, we have

\[
2t_1^{b+1,k} \geq r_{nice}^{b,k-2} + r_{new}^{b,k-2} + l_{nice}^{b+1,k}/2 = r_{nice}^{b,k} + r_{new}^{b,k} + r_{nice}^{b,k}/2.
\]

This finishes the proof of the claim. \( \square \)

Now we prove a lower bound on \( t_1^{a,b} \).

Claim 8.

\[
t_1^{a,b} \geq \frac{1}{4} \left( r_{nice}^{a+1,b-1} + r_{nice}^{a+1,b-1} + 2(l_{new}^{a+1,b} + r_{new}^{a,b-1}) - 2 \right).
\]

Proof of Claim. Let us construct a set \( S \) of pairs \((e,x)\) such that \( e \in L_{in} \cup R_{in} \) and \( x \in T \) with certain properties.

If \( c(e) \in L_{nice}^{a+1,b-1} \cup R_{nice}^{a+1,b-1} \), then by Claim 5 there is a vertex \( x \in \{v_{i-1}, v_{i+1}\} \) such that \( x \in T \) (in particular, \( x \in T^{a,b} \)). Add all such pairs \((e,x)\) to \( S \). Therefore, the number of pairs \((e,x)\) added to \( S \) so far, is \( r_{nice}^{a+1,b-1} \).

For each \( e \) such that \( c(e) \in L_{new}^{a+1,b} \cup R_{new}^{a,b-1} \), we have both \( v_{i-1}, v_{i+1} \in T \) by Claim 6 we add both the pairs \((e,v_{i-1})\) and \((e,v_{i+1})\) to \( S \). Therefore the number of pairs \((e,x)\) added to \( S \) in this step is \( 2(l_{new}^{a+1,b} + r_{new}^{a,b-1}) \). Thus,

\[
|S| = l_{nice}^{a+1,b-1} + r_{nice}^{a+1,b-1} + 2(l_{new}^{a+1,b} + r_{new}^{a,b-1}).
\]

Note that except the pairs \((v_kv_0, v_{b+1})\), \((v_0v_a, v_{a-1})\), all other pairs \((e,x)\) in \( S \) are such that \( x \in T^{a,b} \). Moreover, for each \( x \in T^{a,b} \), there are at most four pairs \((e,x)\) in \( S \). Therefore, we have

\[
4t_1^{a,b} \geq |S| - 2 \geq l_{nice}^{a+1,b-1} + r_{nice}^{a+1,b-1} + 2(l_{new}^{a+1,b} + r_{new}^{a,b-1}) - 2,
\]

finishing the proof of the claim. \( \square \)
By Claim 7 and Claim 8, we have
\[
2\left(2^{0,a-1} + 2^{t+1,b} + 4t^{a,b}\right) \geq 2\left(t^{0,a} + t^{0,a} + \frac{r^{0,a}_{nice}}{2} + r^{b,k}_{nice} + \frac{r^{b,k}_{nice}}{2}\right)
\]
\[+ r^{a+1,b-1}_{nice} + r^{a+1,b-1}_{nice} + 2\left(t^{a+1,b}_{new} + r^{a,b-1}_{new}\right) - 2
\]
This implies,
\[
4t \geq l_{nice} + r_{nice} + 2l^{0,b}_{new} + 2r^{a,l}_{new} + l^{0,a}_{nice} + r^{b,l}_{nice} - 2.
\]
By the definition of \(a\) and \(b\), \(l^{0,b}_{new} = l_{new} - 1\) and \(r^{a,l}_{new} = r_{new} - 1\). So, we get
\[
4t \geq l_{nice} + r_{nice} + 2l_{new} + 2r_{new} + l^{0,a}_{nice} + r^{b,l}_{nice} - 6
\]
\[\geq l_{nice} + r_{nice} + 2(l_{new} + r_{new}) - 6.
\]
Now by Claim 3 and inequalities (1) and (2), we get that
\[
4t \geq 4k + 4 + 2\left(2\frac{k}{t} + 2 + \frac{2k}{t} + 2\right) - 6 = \frac{12k}{t} - 6.
\]
Therefore,
\[
t \geq \frac{3k}{7} + 1.5,
\]
completing the proof of Lemma 4.

2.3 Finding a large subset of vertices with few edges incident to it

Now we define an auxiliary graph \(H\) with the vertex set \(V(H) = T\) and edge set \(E(H)\) such that \(ab \in E(H)\) if and only if there is a rainbow path \(P\) in \(G\) with \(a\) and \(b\) as its terminal vertices and \(V(P) = V(P^*) = \{v_0, v_1, \ldots, v_k\}\).

Claim 9. The degree of every vertex \(u\) in \(H\) is at least \(\frac{2k}{t} + 2\).

Proof of Claim. As \(u \in V(H) = T\), \(u\) is a terminal vertex. So there is a rainbow path \(P = u_0u_1 \ldots u_k\) in \(G\) such that \(u_0 = u\) and \(\{u_0, u_1, \ldots, u_k\} = \{v_0, v_1, \ldots, v_k\}\). We define the sets \(L, R, L_{new}, R_{new}\) corresponding to \(P\) in the same way as we did for \(P^*\) (in Definition 1). Moreover, since \(P^*\) was defined as an arbitrary rainbow path of length \(k\), (2) holds for \(P\) as well – i.e., \(|R_{new}| = r_{new} \geq \frac{2k}{t} + 2\). We claim that if \(u_ku_j\) is an edge in \(G\) such that \(c(u_ku_j) \in R_{new}\), then \(uu_{j+1} \in E(H)\). Indeed, consider the path \(u_0u_1 \ldots u_ju_ku_{k-1} \ldots u_{j+1}\). This is clearly a rainbow path with terminal vertices \(u = u_0\) and \(u_{j+1}\). So \(u\) and \(u_{j+1}\) are adjacent in \(H\), as required. This shows that degree of \(u\) in \(H\) is at least \(r_{new} \geq \frac{2k}{t} + 2\), as desired.

Size of a matching is defined as the number of edges in it. The following proposition is folklore.
Proposition 8. Any graph $G$ with minimum degree $\delta(G)$ has a matching of size

$$\min \left\{ \delta(G), \left\lceil \frac{|V(G)|}{2} \right\rceil \right\}.$$ 

We know that $\delta(H) \geq \frac{2k}{l} + 2$ by Claim 2. Moreover $|V(H)| = |T| = t$. So applying Proposition 8 for the graph $H$ and using Lemma 4, we obtain that the graph $H$ contains a matching $M$ of size

$$m := \min \left\{ \frac{2k}{l} + 2, \left\lceil \frac{t}{2} \right\rceil \right\} \geq \frac{3k}{14}. \quad (7)$$

Let the edges of $M$ be $a_1b_1, a_2b_2, \ldots, a_mb_m$. Moreover, let

$$n_i = |\{xy \mid xy \notin E(G), x \in \{a_i, b_i\} \text{ and } y \in \{v_0, v_1, v_2, \ldots, v_k\} \setminus \{a_i, b_i\}\}|.$$ 

Claim 10. The number of edges in the subgraph of $G$ induced by $M$ is

$$|E(G[M])| \geq \left( \frac{2m}{2} \right) - \left( \sum_{i=1}^{m} \frac{n_i}{2} + m \right) = 2m^2 - 2m - \sum_{i=1}^{m} \frac{n_i}{2}.$$ 

Proof of Claim. Note that the sum $\sum_i n_i$ counts each pair $xy \notin E(G)$ with $x, y \in V(M)$ exactly twice unless $xy = a_ib_i$ for some $i$. Therefore, the number of pairs $xy \notin E(G)$ in the subgraph of $G$ induced by $M$ is at most $\sum_i \frac{n_i}{2} + m$. Thus the number of edges of $G$ in the subgraph induced by $M$ is at least $\left( \frac{2m}{2} \right) - (\sum_i \frac{n_i}{2} + m)$, which implies the desired claim. \[\square\]

Claim 11. The sum of degrees of $a_i$ and $b_i$ in $G$ is at most $3k - \frac{n_k}{2}$.

Proof of Claim. Since $a_ib_i$ is an edge in the auxiliary graph $H$, there is a rainbow path $P = u_0u_1 \ldots u_k$ in $G$ such that $u_0 = a_i$, $u_k = b_i$ and $\{u_0, u_1, \ldots, u_k\} = \{v_0, v_1, \ldots, v_k\}$. We define the sets $L, R, L_{in}, L_{out}, R_{in}, R_{new}, R_{new}$ corresponding to $P$ in the same way as we did for $P^*$ (in Definition 1). Therefore, degree of $a_i$ is $l \leq l_{new} + k$. Similarly, degree of $b_i$ is at most $r_{new} + k$. So the sum of degrees of $a_i$ and $b_i$ in $G$ is at most

$$2k + l_{new} + r_{new}. \quad (8)$$

On the other hand, the sum of degrees of $a_i$ and $b_i$ in $G$ is $l + r = l_{in} + l_{out} + r_{in} + r_{out}$. By Claim 2 this is at most $(l_{in} + r_{in}) + k - r_{new} + k - l_{new} = (l_{in} + r_{in}) + 2k - l_{new} - r_{new}$. Moreover, it is easy to see that $l_{in} + r_{in} \leq 2k - n_i$ by the definition of $n_i$. Therefore, the sum of degrees of $a_i$ and $b_i$ in $G$ is at most

$$2k - n_i + 2k - l_{new} - r_{new}. \quad (9)$$

Adding up (8) and (9) and dividing by 2, we get that the sum of degrees of $a_i$ and $b_i$ in $G$ is at most

$$\frac{(2k + 2k - n_i + 2k)}{2} = \frac{(6k - n_i)}{2} = 3k - \frac{n_i}{2},$$

as desired. \[\square\]
The sum \( \sum_{i=1}^{m}(d(a_i) + d(b_i)) \) counts each edge in the subgraph of \( G \) induced by \( M \) exactly twice (note that here \( d(v) \) denotes the degree of the vertex \( v \) in \( G \)). Therefore, the number of edges of \( G \) incident to the vertices of \( M \) is at most \( \sum_{i=1}^{m}(d(a_i) + d(b_i)) - |E(G[M])| \). Now using Claim 10 and Claim 11 the number of edges of \( G \) incident to the vertices of \( M \) is at most

\[
\sum_{i=1}^{m} \left( 3k - \frac{n_i}{2} \right) - \left( 2m^2 - 2m - \sum_{i=1}^{m} \frac{n_i}{2} \right) = 3km - 2m^2 + 2m = (3k + 2 - 2m)m.
\]

Now by (7), this is at most

\[
(3k + 2 - 2m)m \leq \left( 3k + 2 - 2 \left( \frac{3k}{14} \right) \right) m = \left( \frac{9k}{7} + 1 \right) 2m < \left( \frac{9k}{7} + 2 \right) 2m.
\]

We may delete the vertices of \( M \) from \( G \) to obtain a graph \( G' \) on \( n - 2m \) vertices. By induction hypothesis, \( G' \) contains less than \( (\frac{9k}{7} + 2)(n - 2m) \) edges. Therefore, \( G \) contains less than

\[
\left( \frac{9k}{7} + 2 \right) 2m + \left( \frac{9k}{7} + 2 \right) (n - 2m) = \left( \frac{9k}{7} + 2 \right) n
\]
edges, as desired. This completes the proof of Theorem 2.

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