

Box-Ball Systems and Robinson–Schensted–Knuth Tableaux

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Slides available at egunawan.github.io/talks/21/december/lancaster21/main.pdf

Lancaster University Pure Maths Seminar, 15 December 2021

Solitary waves (solitons)

Scott Russell's first encounter of solitary waves at the Union Canal (near Edinburgh):

'I was observing the motion of a boat which was rapidly drawn along a narrow channel by a pair of horses, when the boat suddenly stopped—not so the mass of water in the channel which it had put in motion; it accumulated round the prow of the vessel in a state of violent agitation, then suddenly leaving it behind, rolled forward with great velocity, assuming the form of a large solitary elevation, a rounded, smooth and well-defined heap of water, which continued its course along the channel apparently **without change of form or diminution of speed**. I followed it on horseback, and overtook it still rolling on at a rate of some eight or nine miles an hour, preserving its original figure some thirty feet long and a foot to a foot and a half in height. Its height gradually diminished, and after a chase of one or two miles I lost it in the windings of the channel. Such, in the month of August 1834, was my first chance interview with that singular and beautiful phenomenon which I have called the Wave of Translation.'



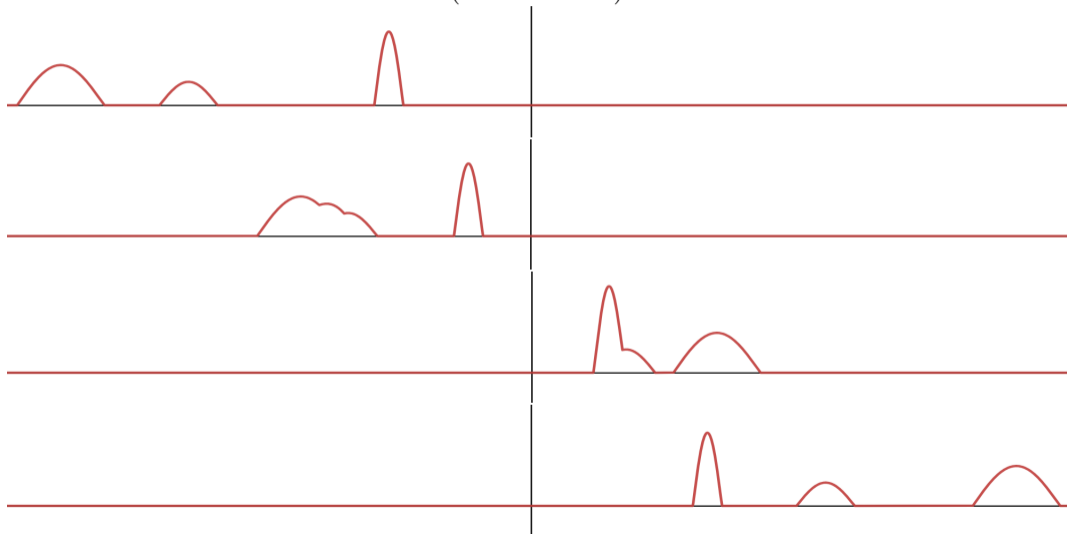
Soliton on the Scott Russell Aqueduct on the Union Canal near Heriot-Watt University, July 1995

Credit:

ma.hw.ac.uk/solitons/press.html

Solitary waves

(Desmos link)



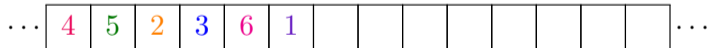
Multicolor box-ball system (BBS), Takahashi 1993

A *box-ball system* (BBS) is a dynamical system of BBS configurations.

- ▶ At each configuration, balls are labeled by numbers 1 through n in an infinite strip of boxes.
- ▶ Each box can fit at most one ball.

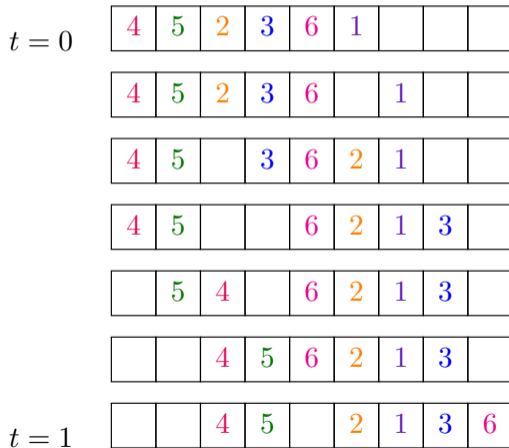
Example

A possible BBS configuration:

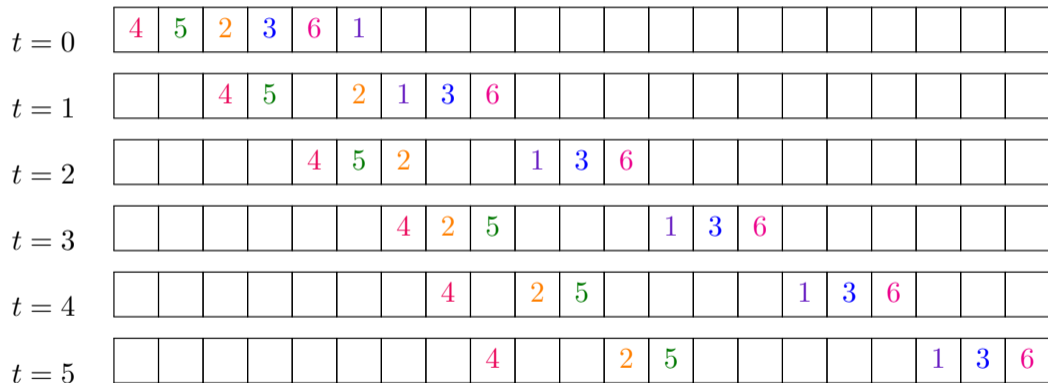


Box-ball move (from $t = 0$ to $t = 1$)

Balls take turns jumping to the first (leftmost) empty box, starting with the smallest-numbered ball.



Box-ball moves ($t = 0$ through $t = 5$)



Solitons and steady state

Definition

A *soliton* of a box-ball system is an increasing run of balls that moves at a speed equal to its length and is preserved by all future box-ball moves.

Example

The strings **4**, **25**, and **136** are solitons:



After a finite number of BBS moves, the system reaches a *steady state* where:

- ▶ the system is decomposed into solitons, i.e., each ball belongs to one soliton
- ▶ the lengths of the solitons are weakly decreasing from right to left

Tableaux (English notation)

Definition

- ▶ A *tableau* is an arrangement of numbers $\{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ into rows whose lengths are weakly decreasing.
- ▶ A tableau is *standard* if its rows and columns are increasing.

Example

Standard Tableaux:

1	2	4
3	5	
6	7	

1	3	6
2	5	
4		

1	3	4
2		
5		
6		

Not a tableau:

1	2	
3	5	4

Nonstandard Tableau:

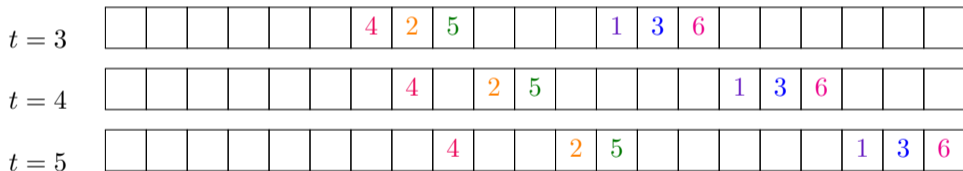
1	2	3
5	6	7
4		

Soliton decomposition

Definition

To construct *soliton decomposition* $SD(w)$ of a permutation w , stack solitons so that the rightmost soliton is placed on the first row, the soliton to its left is placed on the second row, and so on.

Example



$$SD(452361) = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 3 & 6 \\ \hline 2 & 5 & \\ \hline 4 & & \\ \hline \end{array} \text{ with shape } (3, 2, 1).$$

RSK algorithm

The Robinson–Schensted–Knuth (RSK) insertion algorithm is a bijection

$$\pi \mapsto (P(\pi), Q(\pi))$$

from S_n onto pairs of size- n standard tableaux of equal shape.

Example

Let $w = \mathbf{452361}$. $P(w) =$

1	3	6
2	5	
4		

 and $Q(w) =$

1	2	5
3	4	
6		

.

The Q tableau determines the dynamics of a box-ball system

Theorem (SUMRY 2021)

If $Q(\pi) = Q(w)$, then the box-ball systems of π and w are identical if we ignore the ball labels, in particular:

- ▶ π and w first reach steady state at the same time, and
- ▶ the soliton decompositions of π and w have the same shape

Example

$$\pi = 21435 \text{ and } w = 31425$$

$$Q(\pi) = Q(w) = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 3 & 5 \\ \hline 2 & 4 & \\ \hline \end{array}$$

Both π and w first reach steady state at $t = 1$.

$$SD(\pi) = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 3 & 5 \\ \hline 4 & & \\ \hline 2 & & \\ \hline \end{array} \quad SD(w) = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 2 & 5 \\ \hline 4 & & \\ \hline 3 & & \\ \hline \end{array}$$

Questions (steady-state time)

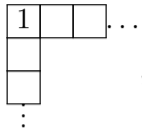
The time when a permutation w first reaches steady state is called the *steady-state time* of w .

- ▶ Given a Q tableau, find a formula to compute the steady-state time for all permutations in the Q -tableau class.
- ▶ Find an upper bound for steady-state time.

L-shaped soliton decompositions

Theorem (SUMRY 2021)

If a permutation has an L-shaped soliton decomposition $SD =$



then its steady-state time is either $t = 0$ or $t = 1$.

Example

Such permutations include noncrossing involutions and column reading words of standard tableaux.

Both $\pi = 21435$ and $w = 31425$ have steady-state time $t = 1$.

$$SD(\pi) = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 3 & 5 \\ \hline 4 & & \\ \hline 2 & & \\ \hline \end{array} \quad SD(w) = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 2 & 5 \\ \hline 4 & & \\ \hline 3 & & \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$\pi = 21435 = (12)(34)$ and $w = 31425$ is the column reading word of $\begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 2 & 5 \\ \hline 3 & 4 & \\ \hline \end{array}$.

Maximum steady-state time

Theorem (UConn 2020)

If $n \geq 5$ and

$$Q(w) = \begin{array}{|c|c|} \hline 1 & 2 \\ \hline 3 & 4 \\ \hline n & \\ \hline \end{array} \dots \begin{array}{|c|c|} \hline n-2 & n-1 \\ \hline \end{array},$$

then the steady-state time of w is $n - 3$.

Conjecture

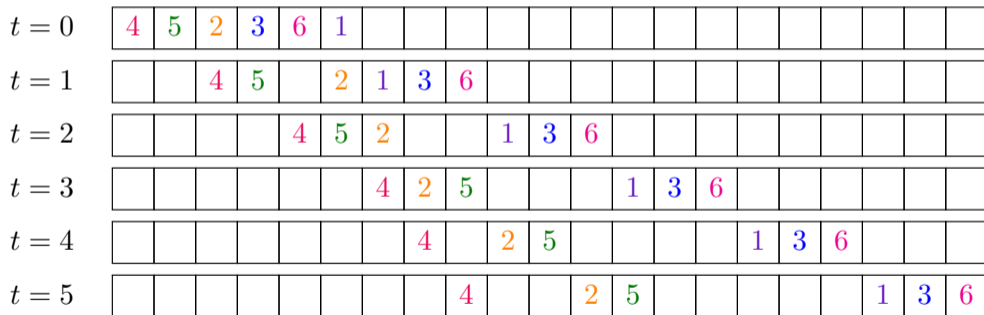
For $n \geq 4$, the steady-state time of a permutation in S_n is at most $n - 3$.

Partial Result (SUMRY 2021)

If the shape of $Q(w)$ is $(n - 3, 2, 1)$, the steady-state time is at most $n - 3$.

Box-Ball System Example ($t = 0$ through 5)

Let $w = 452361$. Then $Q(w) = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 2 & 5 \\ \hline 3 & 4 & \\ \hline 6 & & \\ \hline \end{array}$ and the steady-state time of w is $3 = n - 3$.



Questions (soliton decomposition)

- ▶ When is the soliton decomposition SD a standard tableau?
- ▶ Can we classify permutations with standard SD using pattern avoidance?

When is SD standard?

Example

$$\text{SD}(452361) = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 3 & 6 \\ \hline 2 & 5 & \\ \hline 4 & & \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$$\text{SD}(21435) = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 3 & 5 \\ \hline 4 & & \\ \hline 2 & & \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$$\text{SD}(31425) = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 2 & 5 \\ \hline 4 & & \\ \hline 3 & & \\ \hline \end{array}$$

Theorem (UConn 2020)

Given $w \in S_n$, the following are equivalent:

1. $\text{SD}(w)$ is standard
2. $\text{SD}(w) = P(w)$
3. the shape of $\text{SD}(w)$ is equal to the shape of $P(w)$

Definition

We say that a permutation w is *good* if the tableau $\text{SD}(w)$ is standard.

$Q(w)$ determines whether w is good

Proposition

Given a Q -equivalence class, either all permutations in it are good or all of them are not good.

Proof

1. The tableau $Q(w)$ determines the shape of $SD(w)$.
2. $SD(w)$ is standard iff $sh SD(w) = sh P(w)$

Suppose $Q(w) = Q(\pi)$. Then

$$\begin{aligned} SD(w) \text{ is standard} &\implies sh SD(\pi) = sh SD(w) = sh P(w) = sh P(\pi) \\ &\implies SD(\pi) \text{ is standard, that is, } \pi \text{ is also good} \end{aligned}$$

Definition (Good tableaux)

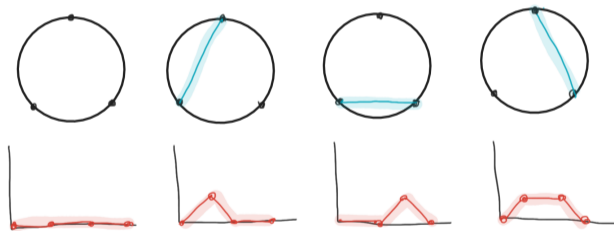
A standard tableau T is *good* if each permutation whose Q tableau equals T is good.

Good tableaux and Motzkin numbers

Conjecture

The good standard tableaux, $\{Q(w) \mid w \in S_n \text{ and } SD(w) \text{ is standard}\}$, are counted by the Motzkin numbers.

Some objects counted by Motzkin numbers:



$$n = 3$$

The first few Motzkin numbers are 1, 2, 4, 9, 21, 51, 127, 323, 835.

Consecutive pattern avoidance

Lemma (SUMRY 2021)

If a standard tableau T is good, then the tableau T' obtained by removing the largest k cells from T is also good.

Example

$T =$

1	2	3	7
4	5	6	
8			

 is good.

$T' =$

1	2	3
4	5	

 is also good.

Consecutive pattern avoidance

Definition

A permutation σ is a *consecutive pattern* of another permutation w if w has a consecutive subsequence whose elements are in the same relative order as σ .

Example

$w = 314592687$ contains $\sigma = 2413$ because the consecutive subsequence 5926 is ordered in the same way as $\sigma = 2413$.

Theorem (SUMRY 2021)

The good permutations are closed under consecutive pattern containment. That is, if a permutation is good, then any consecutive subpermutation is also good.

Corollary

The good permutations can be characterized by a (possibly infinite) set of consecutive avoided patterns.

Knuth Relations

Suppose $\pi, w \in S_n$ and $x < y < z$.

1. π and w differ by a Knuth relation of the **first kind** (K_1) if

$$\pi = x_1 \dots yxz \dots x_n \text{ and } w = x_1 \dots yzx \dots x_n \text{ or vice versa}$$

2. π and w differ by a Knuth relation of the **second kind** (K_2) if

$$\pi = x_1 \dots xzy \dots x_n \text{ and } w = x_1 \dots zxy \dots x_n \text{ or vice versa}$$

In addition, π and w differ by a Knuth relation of **both kinds** (K_B) if they differ by K_1 and they differ by K_2 , that is,

$$\pi = x_1 \dots y_1 xzy_2 \dots x_n \text{ and } w = x_1 \dots y_1 zxy_2 \dots x_n \text{ or vice versa}$$

where $x < y_1, y_2 < z$

Example

$$326154 \sim^{K_1} 362154$$

$$362154 \sim^{K_B} 362514$$

We say that π and w are *Knuth equivalent* if they differ by a finite sequence of Knuth relations.

P -tableaux and Knuth moves

Theorem (Knuth, 1970)

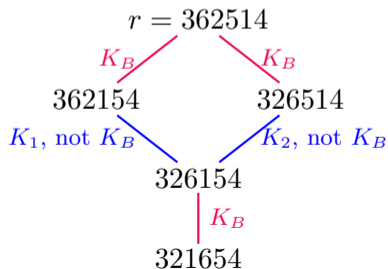
- ▶ *There is a path of Knuth moves from w to the row reading word of $P(w)$.*
- ▶ *Two permutations have the same P tableau iff they are in the same Knuth equivalence class.*

Example

The Knuth equivalence class of the row reading word $r = 362514$ of

1	4
2	5
3	6

:



Soliton decompositions and Knuth moves

The soliton decomposition is preserved by non- K_B Knuth moves, but one K_B move changes the soliton decomposition.

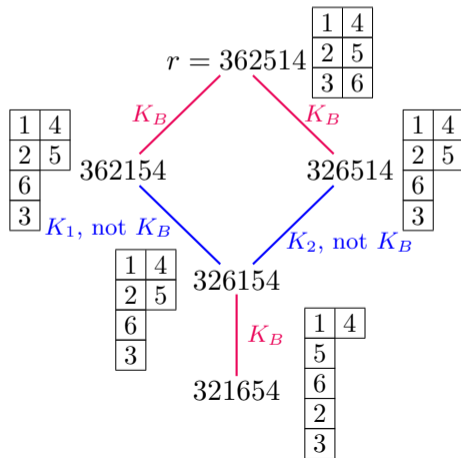
Theorem (UConn Math REU 2020)

Let r denote the row reading word of $P(w)$.

- ▶ If there exists a path of *non- K_B* Knuth moves from w to r , then $SD(w) = P(w)$. In particular, $SD(r) = P(r)$.
- ▶ If there exists a path from w to r containing an *odd* number of K_B moves, then $SD(w) \neq P(w)$.

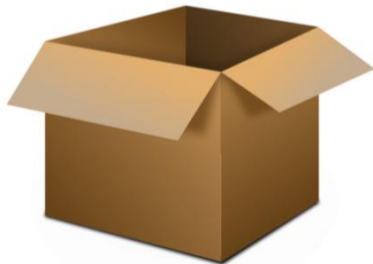
Example

Soliton decompositions of the Knuth equivalence class of 362154:



Thank you!

<i>Y</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>U</i>	!
<i>A</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>K</i>	
<i>T</i>	<i>H</i>		



Greene's theorem, slide 1/3

Definition (longest k -increasing subsequences)

A subsequence σ of w is called k -increasing if, as a set, it can be written as a disjoint union

$$\sigma = \sigma_1 \sqcup \sigma_2 \sqcup \cdots \sqcup \sigma_k$$

where each σ_i is an increasing subsequence of w . Let $i_k := i_k(w)$ denote the length of a longest k -increasing subsequence of w .

Example (Let $w = 5623714$.)

- ▶ The longest 1-increasing subsequences are 567, 237, and 234.
- ▶ The longest 2-increasing subsequence is given by $562374 = 567 \sqcup 234$.
- ▶ A longest 3-increasing subsequence (among others) is given by $5623714 = 56 \sqcup 237 \sqcup 14$.
- ▶ Thus,

$$i_1 = 3, \quad i_2 = 6, \quad \text{and} \quad i_k = 7 \text{ if } k \geq 3.$$

Greene's theorem, slide 2/3

Definition (longest k -decreasing subsequences)

Similarly, a subsequence σ of w is called k -decreasing if, as a set, it can be written as a disjoint union

$$\sigma = \sigma_1 \sqcup \sigma_2 \sqcup \cdots \sqcup \sigma_k$$

where each σ_i is an decreasing subsequence of w . Let $d_k := d_k(w)$ denote the length of a longest k -decreasing subsequence of w .

Example (Let $w = 5623714$.)

- ▶ The longest 1-decreasing subsequences are 521, 621, 531, and 631.
- ▶ A longest 2-decreasing subsequence (among others) is given by $52714 = 521 \sqcup 74$.
- ▶ A longest 3-decreasing subsequence (among others) is given by $5623714 = 52 \sqcup 631 \sqcup 74$.
- ▶ Thus,

$$d_1 = 3, \quad d_2 = 5, \quad \text{and} \quad d_k = 7 \text{ if } k \geq 3.$$

Greene's theorem, slide 3/3

Theorem (Greene, 1974)

Suppose $w \in S_n$. Let $\lambda = (\lambda_1, \lambda_2, \lambda_3, \dots)$ denote the RS partition of w , that is, let $\lambda = \text{sh } P(w)$. Let $\mu = (\mu_1, \mu_2, \mu_3, \dots)$ denote the conjugate of λ . Then, for any k ,

$$i_k(w) = \lambda_1 + \lambda_2 + \dots + \lambda_k,$$

$$d_k(w) = \mu_1 + \mu_2 + \dots + \mu_k.$$

Example

By Greene's theorem, the RS partition is equal to $\lambda = (i_1, i_2 - i_1, i_3 - i_2) = (3, 3, 1)$.

We can verify this by computing the RS tableaux

$$P(w) = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 3 & 4 \\ \hline 2 & 6 & 7 \\ \hline 5 & & \\ \hline \end{array}, \quad Q(w) = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 2 & 5 \\ \hline 3 & 4 & 7 \\ \hline 6 & & \\ \hline \end{array}.$$

A localized version of Greene's theorem, slide 1/3

Definition (A localized version of longest k -increasing subsequences)

Let $i(u) :=$ the length of a longest increasing subsequence of u .

For $w \in S_n$ and $k \geq 1$, let $I_k(w) = \max_{w=u_1|\cdots|u_k} \sum_{j=1}^k i(u_j)$, where the maximum is taken over ways of writing w as a concatenation $u_1 | \cdots | u_k$ of consecutive subsequences.

Example

Let $w = 5623714$. For short, we write $I_k := I_k(w)$. Then

$I_1 = i(w) = 3$ (since the longest increasing subsequences are 567, 237, and 234),

$I_2 = 5$ (witnessed by 56|23714 or 56237|14),

$I_3 = 7$ (witnessed uniquely by 56|237|14), and

$I_k = 7$ for all $k \geq 3$.

A localized version of Greene's theorem, slide 2/3

Definition (A localized version of longest k -decreasing subsequences)

Let $D(u) := 1 + |\{\text{descents of } u\}|$.

For $w \in S_n$ and $k \geq 1$, let $D_k(w) = \max_{w=u_1 \sqcup \dots \sqcup u_k} \sum_{j=1}^k D(u_j)$, where the maximum is taken over ways to write w as the union of disjoint subsequences u_j of w .

Example

Let $w = 5623714$. For short, we write $D_k := D_k(w)$. Then

$$D_1 = D(w) = 1 + |\text{descents of } 5623714| = 1 + |\{2, 5\}| = 3,$$

$D_2 = 6$ (one can take subsequences 531 and 6274, among other partitions),

$D_3 = 7$ (one can take subsequences 52, 631, and 74, among other partitions), and

$D_k = 7$ for all $k \geq 3$.

A localized version of Greene's theorem, slide 3/3

Theorem (Lewis–Lyu–Pylyavskyy–Sen 2019)

Suppose $w \in S_n$. Let $\Lambda = (\Lambda_1, \Lambda_2, \Lambda_3, \dots)$ denote $\text{sh SD}(w)$. Let $M = (M_1, M_2, M_3, \dots)$ denote the conjugate of Λ . Then, for any k ,

$$\begin{aligned} I_k(w) &= \Lambda_1 + \Lambda_2 + \dots + \Lambda_k, \\ D_k(w) &= M_1 + M_2 + \dots + M_k. \end{aligned}$$

Example

Let $w = 5623714$. By the above theorem, $\text{sh SD}(w) = (I_1, I_2 - I_1, I_3 - I_2) = (3, 2, 2)$. We can verify this by computing the soliton decomposition $\text{SD}(w)$, which turns out to be the (non-standard) tableau

1	3	4
2	7	
5	6	

Note: $\text{sh SD}(w) = (3, 2, 2)$ is smaller than $\text{sh } P(w) = (3, 3, 1)$ in the dominance order.

Examples: permutations with L-shaped SD

A permutation with L-shaped SD which is not a column reading word:

$w = 3217654 = (13)(47)(56)$ is a noncrossing involution.

$$P(w) = Q(w) = \begin{array}{|c|c|} \hline 1 & 4 \\ \hline 2 & 5 \\ \hline 3 & 6 \\ \hline 7 & \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \text{and} \quad SD(w) = \begin{array}{|c|} \hline 1 & 4 \\ \hline 5 & \\ \hline 6 & \\ \hline 7 & \\ \hline 2 & \\ \hline 3 & \\ \hline \end{array}$$

An involution which is neither noncrossing nor a column reading word:

$\pi = 5274163 = (15)(37)$ has a crossing.

$$P(\pi) = Q(\pi) = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 3 & 6 \\ \hline 2 & 4 & \\ \hline 5 & 7 & \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \text{and} \quad SD(\pi) = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 3 & 6 \\ \hline 4 & & \\ \hline 2 & & \\ \hline 7 & & \\ \hline 5 & & \\ \hline \end{array}$$

Good permutations are not closed under classical pattern containment

Starting with $n = 5$, a good permutation in S_n may have a substring which is not good.

Example

- ▶ The permutation 25143 is good, but its subpermutation 2143 is not good.
- ▶ The permutation 35142 is good, but its subpermutation 3142 is not good.
- ▶ Let $w = 42513$, which is a good permutation, and let $\sigma = 4253$ be a substring of w . The standardization of σ is 3142, which is not good.

(Therefore, the good permutations cannot be characterized by a set of classical avoided patterns.)

Permutations connected by K_B moves and have the same SD

Two permutations with the same SD which are connected by K_B moves:

