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Stephan Dominique Andres, Winfried Hochstättler, Christiane Schallück:

The game chromatic index of wheels

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Stephan Dominique Andres[1,a,*]

Winfried Hochstättler[1,b,+]

Christiane Schallück[1]

[1]Department of Mathematics and Computer Science,
FernUniversität in Hagen
Lützowstr. 125, 58084 Hagen, Germany
[a]Email: dominique.andres@fernuni-hagen.de
[b]Email: winfried.hochstaettler@fernuni-hagen.de
[+]URL: http://www.fernuni-hagen.de/MATHEMATIK/DMO
[*]*Corresponding author*

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Abstract

We prove that the game chromatic index of n-wheels is n for $n \geq 6$.

Key words: game chromatic number, game chromatic index, wheel,
exact game chromatic index, graph colouring game
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1 Introduction

We consider the following games, played on an — initially uncoloured — graph G with a colour set C. Two players, Alice and Bob, alternately colour an uncoloured edge of G with a colour from C, so that adjacent edges receive distinct colours. In the first game we consider, Alice has the first move, in

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the second game, Bob begins. The respective game ends when no move is possible any more. If at the end every edge is coloured, Alice wins, otherwise Bob wins. The smallest size of a colour set C with which Alice has a winning strategy in the game played on G is called *game chromatic index* of G and denoted by $\chi'_{g_A}(G)$ for the first game and $\chi'_{g_B}(G)$ for the second game.

The game chromatic index $\chi'_{g_A}(G)$ was introduced by Cai and Zhu [10] resp. Lam et al. [20] and is denoted usually as $\chi'_g(G)$. It is the edge colouring variant of the more general game chromatic number introduced by Bodlaender [8]. The game chromatic number is based on a vertex colouring instead of edge colouring game. Variants of the game chromatic number — besides the game chromatic index — are, e.g., the game colouring number [25], and the incidence game chromatic number [4].

Initiated by the paper of Faigle et al. [14] there have been a lot of attempts to bound or determine the game chromatic number of several classes of graphs. The first publications on this topic aimed to improve the upper bound for the game chromatic number of planar graphs. Kierstead and Trotter [18] proved that there is such a global upper bound, namely 33. This bound was improved by Dinski and Zhu [12] to the value 30, by Zhu [25] to the value 19, by Kierstead [16] to the value 18, and finally by Zhu [26] to the value 17. The last three bounds were obtained by considering the game colouring number, which is a natural upper bound for the game chromatic number. For a recent survey on graph colouring games on planar graphs see [6]. We remark that it is not known whether even the latest bound of Zhu is best possible. It has been shown by Wu and Zhu [24] that there is a planar graph with game colouring number 11, graphs with higher game colouring number are not known. Kierstead and Trotter [18] gave an example of a planar graph with game chromatic number 8. This leaves a gap of 6 for the maximum game colouring number and a gap of 9 for the maximum game chromatic number of planar graphs.

One of the rare classes of graphs for which the maximum game chromatic number has been determined exactly is the class of forests, here 4 colours are sufficient [14] and there is a tree for which 4 colours are needed [8]. Even for outerplanar graphs there is still an unclosed gap between 6 and 7 for the maximum game chromatic number [15].

In the last years some variations of the game chromatic number came up, in particular concerning a relaxed game, where there are many publications following on the introductory paper of Chou et al. [11]. Kierstead [17] introduced an asymmetric game which provoked further research as well. Also

different generalizations of the game on oriented graphs (introduced in [22]) and arbitrary digraphs (introduced in [3]) were considered. Furthermore game-theoretic analoga of the list-chromatic index resp. the list-chromatic number were introduced recently by Marte [21] resp. by Borowiecki et al. [9].

We will focus here on the results concerning the game chromatic number of line graphs, i.e. the results on the game chromatic index of graphs. Cai and Zhu [10] proved that the game chromatic index of k-degenerate graphs with maximum degree Δ is at most $\Delta+3k-1$, which implies the bound $\Delta+2$ for forests. In the case of forests with maximum degree $\Delta \geq 5$ this bound was tightened to the value $\Delta + 1$ by work of Erdös et al. [13] and Andres [2]. The bound $\Delta + 1$ also holds for forests of maximum degree $\Delta = 3$ (see [1], for a partial result see [10]), but for forests of maximum degree $\Delta = 4$ the exact bound is still an open question. For the results in case $\Delta \neq 4$ it does not matter whether we consider the first or the second game. Bartnicki and Grytczuk [5] improved the result of Cai and Zhu and showed that the game chromatic index even of graphs of arboricity k with maximum degree Δ is at most $\Delta+3k-1$. An interesting question was for a long time whether there is a constant c, so that, for every graph G with maximum degree Δ, the game chromatic index of G is at most $\Delta + c$. Beveridge et al. [7] answered this question to the negative.

In spite of the fact that upper bounds or even tight upper bounds are known for the game chromatic index of some non-trivial classes of graphs, the problem of determining the exact value for the game chromatic index of the members of these classes is still open. Apart from paths, cycles, and some small graphs hardly anything is known about exact game chromatic indices. Even the characterization of forests of maximum degree $\Delta \neq 4$ with game chromatic index Δ resp. $\Delta+1$ is still an open question. Also the game chromatic index of the complete graph K_n seems not to be known for $n \geq 7$ (cf. [23]). In this note we determine the exact game chromatic indices of wheels.

An *n-wheel*, $n \geq 3$, is a graph with $n + 1$ vertices, one of which, say v_0, is adjacent to every other vertex, and if the hub v_0 and its incident edges are deleted, the remaining graph is an n-cycle. The edges adjacent to v_0 are called *spokes* and the edges of the n-cycle are called *rim edges*. Obviously, the game chromatic index of an n-wheel is at least n. Lam et al. [20] proved that, if Alice begins, the game chromatic index of an n-wheel, $n \geq 4$, is at most $n + 1$. In this paper we tighten this upper bound, moreover we prove

Theorem 1. *Let W_n be the n-wheel. Then*

(a) $\chi'_{g_A}(W_n) = n$ *if* $n \geq 6$,

(b) $\chi'_{g_B}(W_n) = n$ *if* $n \geq 3$.

By easy calculations, one observes $\chi'_{g_A}(W_3) = 5$, $\chi'_{g_A}(W_4) = 5$, and $\chi'_{g_A}(W_5) = 6$. Therefore by Theorem 1 the problem of determining the game chromatic index of wheels is completely solved. In particular, for large wheels, the game chromatic index equals to the trivial lower bound n for the game chromatic index. Note that there is a similar result for the incidence game chromatic number of wheels stated in [4] and proved by Kim [19]: the incidence game chromatic number of large wheels equals to the trivial lower bound $\left\lceil \frac{3n}{2} \right\rceil$ for the incidence game chromatic number of graphs with maximum degree n.

2   Proof of Theorem 1 (b)

We describe a winning strategy for Alice for the second game played on W_n, $n \geq 3$, with n colours. We number the spokes s_i and the rim edges r_i cyclically in such a way that s_i is adjacent to r_{i+1} and r_{i+2} where we take the indices modulo n. Therefore the spoke s_i and the rim edge r_i are independent for any $i = 0, \ldots, n - 1$, since $n \geq 3$.

Alice's strategy is that after each of her moves, for any i, either s_i and r_i are coloured both, or none of them is coloured. She achieves this goal by matching moves. In a *matching move*, if Bob colours r_i (resp. s_i) with a new colour, then Alice colours its partner s_i (resp. r_i) with the same colour, and if Bob colours r_i with a colour which has already been used before, then Alice colours s_i with a new colour. Note that Bob cannot colour a spoke with an old colour, since by this strategy the set of colours of the rim edges is a subset of the set of colours of the spokes. After Alice's k-th move, exactly k colours are used for spokes. Thus Alice wins.

3   Proof of Theorem 1 (a)

We describe a winning strategy for Alice for the first game played on W_n, $n \geq 6$, with n colours. Here the situation is more complex since Alice has

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the disadvantage of the first move. However, Alice tries to act much in the way as in the strategy of the previous section.

Again, we number the spokes s_i and the rim edges r_i cyclically in such a way that s_i is adjacent to r_{i+1} and r_{i+2} where we take the indices modulo n, so that the spoke s_i and the rim edge r_i are independent for any $i = 0, \ldots, n-1$, since $n \geq 3$. During the game, Alice will keep in mind one special index i_0 and possibly change the special index several times. We denote s_{i_0} by s and r_{i_0} by r.

Alice's strategy is two-fold. The first part of Alice's strategy will consist of the first $n-3$ moves of Alice and the first $n-4$ moves of Bob. The second part concerns the end-game of colouring the last seven edges.

In her first move, Alice chooses an index as special index and colours the spoke s. In the next $n-4$ moves, she reacts on Bob's play in the following way: If Bob colours a spoke $s_i \neq s$ or a rim edge $r_i \neq r$, Alice answers by a matching move. If Bob colours r with a colour c, Alice chooses a new special index i_0, so that s_{i_0} is uncoloured and not adjacent to the old r, and colours s_{i_0} with c if c was a new colour before Bob's move, otherwise with a new colour. Note that there is such an index i_0, since the colour c at rim r can block at most two spokes, but before Alice plays her move there are still at least four uncoloured spokes. By playing in this way, after Alice's k-th move, exactly k colours are used for spokes and at most $k-1$ colours are used for rim edges, and the set of colours of the rim edges is a subset of the colours of the spokes. At that moment, there are three uncoloured spokes and four uncoloured rim edges, and, for any i, if the rim edge r_i is coloured, then the spoke s_i is coloured, too.

In the end-game, Alice has to avoid the situation that the last two uncoloured spokes are blocked by a new colour on the rim edge adjacent to both spokes or that the last uncoloured spoke is blocked by a new colour. The next lemma shows that in certain situations when there are only five uncoloured edges left, Alice has a winning strategy. After the proof of the lemma we will describe how Alice can mostly achieve one of these situations in her $(n-2)$-nd move and how she reacts otherwise.

Lemma 2. *If there are only two uncoloured spokes s_{i_1} and s_{i_2} and three uncoloured rim edges e_1, e_2, e_3 left, and e_1 is not adjacent to s_{i_2} (but may be adjacent to s_{i_1}), e_2 is not adjacent to s_{i_1} (but may be adjacent to s_{i_2}), and e_3 is neither adjacent to s_{i_1} nor to s_{i_2}, and there are two unused colours, then Alice has a winning strategy.*

Proof. If none of the e_j is adjacent to s_{i_1} or s_{i_2}, then the connected components of uncoloured edges are paths of length 1, 2, or 3 (length 3 cannot occur, but we will not use this fact). For a collection of such paths, Alice has an obvious winning strategy with (the unused) two colours. So we may assume that e_1 is adjacent to s_{i_1}.

It is Bob's turn at the beginning. An *old colour* is a colour used before Bob's turn. We distinguish several cases.

If Bob colours a spoke, Alice colours the other spoke, and the last three rim edges can be coloured since $n \geq 5$.

If Bob colours e_1 (resp. e_2), then Alice colours s_{i_2} (resp. s_{i_1}), preferably with the same colour, otherwise with a new colour. Here, the remaining uncoloured spoke can be coloured with the last colour in any case.

The last case is that Bob colours e_3. In this case, Alice colours the rim edge e_1 with an old colour. This is possible, since e_1 has at most three coloured adjacent edges, there are two new colours, and $n \geq 6$, so there is at least a fourth old colour. The three remaining uncoloured edges form a path of three edges, or a path of two edges and a single rim edge. It is easy to see that Alice has a winning strategy on the remaining uncoloured path consisting of two or three edges since there are still two colours unused for the adjacent edges of this path. (One colour might have been used for e_3.)

Thus, in any case, Alice wins. □

Now we consider the situation described above: there are three spokes x, y, z and four rim edges a, b, c, d left and it is Bob's turn. We distinguish three cases:
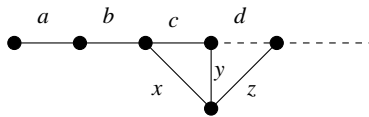

Figure 1: Case 1

Case 1: x, y, z are subsequent spokes, i.e. there is an index i, so that $x = s_i$, $y = s_{i+1}$, and $z = s_{i+2}$ (indices modulo n).

By Alice's moves played so far we may assume that $a = r_i$, $b = r_{i+1}$, $c = r_{i+2}$, and d is an arbitrary other rim edge, see Fig. 1. Note that a is not adjacent to z.

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If Bob colours b, c, y, or z, Alice answers by a matching move. If Bob colours d, then Alice colours x. And vice versa, if Bob colours x, then Alice colours d. In all these cases, if Bob uses a new colour, Alice uses the same colour, if he uses an old colour, she uses a new colour. Playing this way, there are still two unused colours after Alice's move, and the situation is exactly as in the preconditions of Lemma 2. By Lemma 2, Alice wins.

We are left with the case that Bob colours a. Then Alice colours c with an old colour. After that the three uncoloured spokes x, y, z can still be coloured with three colours unused so far, except possibly for a. It is easy to see that Alice has a winning strategy: If Bob colours b, then Alice colours y by a matching move. If Bob colours d, then Alice colours x, preferably with the same colour. If Bob colours x, then Alice colours d, preferably with the same colour. If Bob colours y or z, then Alice colours d. If d is adjacent to y and/or z, then Alice uses a colour already used for a spoke, which is possible since $n \geq 6$ and d has at most three coloured adjacent edges. The remaining path with two or three edges can be coloured with two colours if Alice takes care that the middle edge is coloured after her last move. So, also in this case, Alice wins.
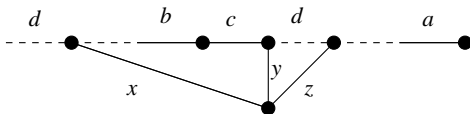

Figure 2: Case 2

Case 2: x is a single spoke, and y, z are subsequent, i.e. there are indices i, j, so that $x = s_i$, $y = s_j$, and $z = s_{j+1}$, and $|j - i| \geq 2$ and $|i - (j+1)| \geq 2$.

Assume that $a = r_i$, $b = r_j$, and $c = r_{j+1}$. Then a may be adjacent to z, but not to x or y, b may be adjacent to x, but not to y or z, and c is adjacent to y, but not to x or z. Note that, since $n \geq 6$, if a is adjacent to z, then b is not adjacent to x. The edge d may be adjacent to either y and z, or z, or x or to none of them. See Fig. 2.

If Bob colours x, then Alice colours d, if possible with the same colour (i.e. in the case that x and d are not adjacent), otherwise with an old colour. If Bob colours y, then Alice colours a, b or d with the same colour. She chooses the edge to colour in such a way that after her move there is no uncoloured spoke left with two adjacent uncoloured rim edges. This is possible because

of the remarks above. If Bob colours z or c, Alice answers by a matching move. If Bob colours d, Alice colours a spoke not adjacent to d, preferably one of subsequent spokes, preferably with the same colour. Now consider the case that Bob colours a. If d and b are adjacent to x, then Alice colours x, preferably with the same colour. In all other cases (d or b are not adjacent to x), Alice colours y, preferably in the same colour as a. In all cases, after Alice's move we are in a situation as in the precondition of Lemma 2, and by Lemma 2 Alice wins.

We are left with the case that Bob colours b. Then, by a matching move, Alice colours y. Now we are either in the situation of Lemma 2 or z is adjacent to a and d. The latter implies that x is not adjacent to any uncoloured rim edge. No matter what Bob does, Alice can ensure in her next move that z is coloured which will give her a win.
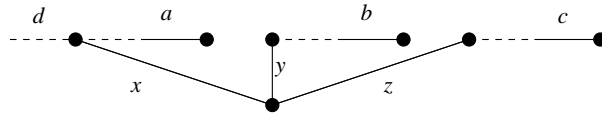

Figure 3: Case 3

Case 3: x, y, z are single spokes.

We may assume that a and d are neither adjacent to y nor to z, b is neither adjacent to x nor to z, c is neither adjacent to x nor to y, see Fig. 3. Hence y resp. z are adjacent to at most one coloured rim edge.

If Bob colours x, then Alice colours b with the same colour. If Bob colours y, then Alice colours d with the same colour. If Bob colours a, then Alice colours y, preferably with the same colour. If Bob colours b, then Alice colours x, preferably with the same colour. By reasons of symmetry we may restrict ourselves to these moves of Bob. After that, Alice wins by Lemma 2.

This proves Theorem 1 (b).

4 An application

Consider a broadcasting network with one central communication node and n other communication nodes which are grouped along a circle around the central node. The central node can communicate with each other node, the

other nodes only with the center and its two neighbours on the circle. So the communication network is an n-wheel. This is a reasonable assumption on a network topology.

If a pair of adjacent nodes wants to communicate, they have to choose a communication frequency which is different from the other frequencies used by the two nodes. So the problem of assigning a smallest number of frequencies (in order to have big bandwidth) reduces to a simple edge colouring problem of the wheel, where obviously n colours are sufficient, i.e. only n frequencies are needed when the frequencies are assigned by a global administrator.

Now consider the case that some pairs of adjacent nodes send using a frequency they choose in an anarchistic way by themselves. Think of choices of assignment in time, one-by-one. Then the main result of this paper says: if after each anarchistic choice (which corresponds to a move of Bob) the global administrator may choose another pair that does not communicate at this time and fixes its communication frequency (which corresponds to a move of Alice), then it can be guaranteed that as well only n different frequencies are needed (if the administrator follows Alice's winning strategy). In short: a half-way anarchistic wheel-network can be administered with the same performance as a non-anarchistic wheel-network.

5   Final remarks

By the results concerning wheels one might be misled to conjecture that in the edge colouring game beginning is always a disadvantage for Alice. This is not true. Consider $K_4 - e$, the complete graph on 4 vertices in which one edge is missing. Then $\chi'_{g_A}(K_4 - e) = 3$, but $\chi'_{g_B}(K_4 - e) = 4$. Here, beginning is a real advantage for Alice, she can ensure in her first move that the edge adjacent to all other edges is coloured.

In Fig. 4 we list 7 small graphs in which beginning is an advantage in the edge colouring game, among them $K_4 - e$. Some graphs where beginning is a disadvantage are depicted in Fig. 5. Fig. 6 presents a few small graphs G where beginning is neither advantage nor disadvantage, since here $\chi'_{g_A}(G) = \chi'_{g_B}(G)$. These figures were made by explicitly calculating the game chromatic indices of the respective graphs via complete game-tree search using a computer program [23].

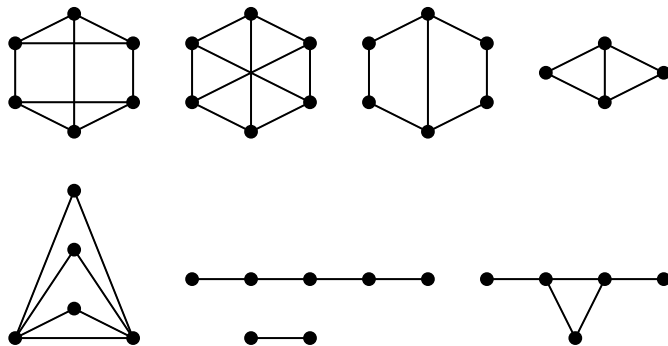What do we learn from these pictures? Apparently the classification into

Figure 4: Graphs G with $\chi'_{g_A}(G) < \chi'_{g_B}(G)$. Note that the second graph in the lower row is $P_5 \cup K_2$, a disconnected graph.
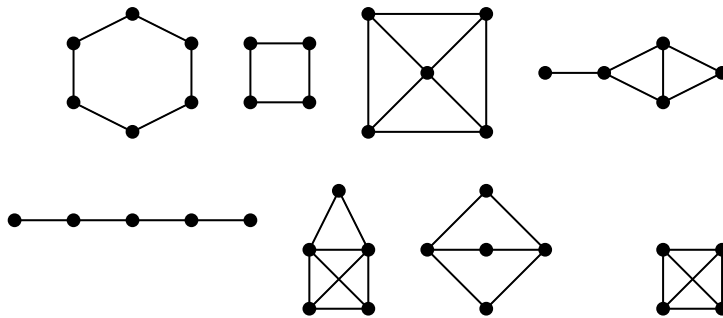

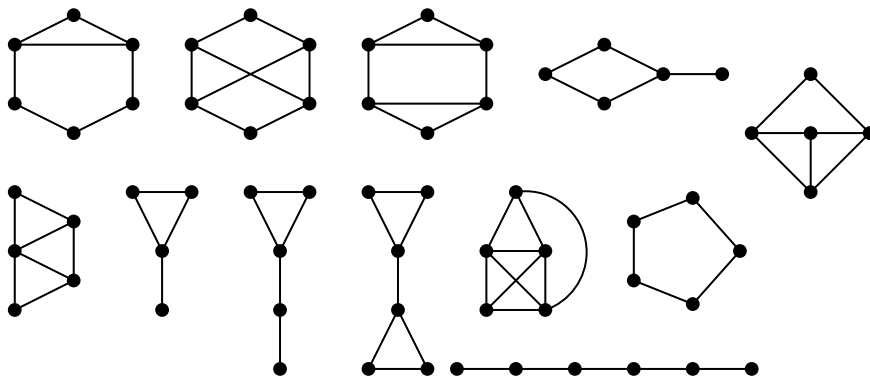Figure 5: Graphs G with $\chi'_{g_A}(G) > \chi'_{g_B}(G)$

Figure 6: Graphs G with $\chi'_{g_A}(G) = \chi'_{g_B}(G)$

the three classes seems to obey no trivial rule: there are bipartite graphs and non-bipartite graphs in each of the three classes; there are cographs (i.e. graphs with no induced P_4) and non-cographs in each of the three classes; and there are 2-connected and non-2-connected graphs in each of the three classes. So we formulate:

Open Problem 3. *Characterize classes of graphs G for which*

$$\chi'_{g_A}(G) \left\{ \begin{matrix} < \\ > \\ = \end{matrix} \right\} \chi'_{g_B}(G).$$

However, one observation can be made: the first three graphs of Fig. 4 can be obtained from the C_6 (which is in the second class) by adding an odd number of matching edges. Some other graphs from class 1 and class 3 can also be obtained in this way from a class 2 graph.

Open Problem 4. *Does, for any graph G with $\chi'_{g_A}(G) > \chi'_{g_B}(G)$ and any matching M of odd size of edges which are not in G,*

$$\chi'_{g_A}(G + M) \leq \chi'_{g_B}(G + M)$$

hold?

Maybe the converse problem is also of interest:

Open Problem 5. *Does, for any graph G with $\chi'_{g_A}(G) < \chi'_{g_B}(G)$ and any matching M of odd size of edges from G,*

$$\chi'_{g_A}(G - M) \geq \chi'_{g_B}(G - M)$$

hold?

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