

Subdivided graphs have linear Ramsey numbers

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Abstract

It is shown that the Ramsey number of any graph with n vertices in which no two vertices of degree at least 3 are adjacent is at most $12n$. In particular, the above estimate holds for the Ramsey number of any n -vertex subdivision of an arbitrary graph, provided each edge of the original graph is subdivided at least once. This settles a problem of Burr and Erdős.

1 Introduction

The *Ramsey number* of a graph G , denoted by $r(G)$, is the minimum integer t such that in any coloring of the edges of the complete graph K_t on t vertices by red and blue, there is always a monochromatic copy of G . We say that a family of graphs \mathcal{F} is a *linear family* if there is a constant $c > 0$ such that for every member G of \mathcal{F} , $r(G) \leq cn$, where n is the number of vertices of G . In this note we prove the following result, conjectured by Burr and Erdős ([1], page 236) in 1973.

Theorem 1.1 *The family of all graphs that have no two adjacent vertices of degree at least 3 is a linear family.*

This strengthens a result of [1] that asserts that the family of all graphs in which the distance between any two vertices of degree at least 3 is strictly bigger than 2, is a linear family.

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If G is a graph and H is obtained from G by replacing each edge of G by a path of length at least 2, then H is called an *essential subdivision of G* . An immediate corollary of our theorem is the following.

Corollary 1.2 *The family of all essential subdivisions is a linear family.*

A special case of that corollary, that asserts that the family of all essential subdivisions of the complete graphs is a linear family, has been proved in [1].

Theorem 1.1 is a (very) special case of the main conjecture of Burr and Erdős raised in [1], which states that for any fixed constant d , the family of all graphs in which every subgraph has a minimum degree that does not exceed d is linear. This general conjecture is still open, although several special cases of it have been proved. An interesting one is the main result of [3] that asserts that for every fixed d , the family of all graphs of maximum degree at most d is a linear family. This result has recently been extended in [2], where it is also shown, as a corollary of that extension, that the family of all planar graphs is linear. Unlike the results of [3] and [2], our proof of Theorem 1.1 does not involve any huge constants. In fact, we actually prove the following more explicit version of the theorem.

Proposition 1.3 *Let $G = (V, E)$ be a graph with n vertices in which no two vertices of degree at least 3 are adjacent. Then $r(G) \leq 12n$*

The constant 12 can be somewhat improved. We make no attempt to optimize it here.

2 The proof

We need the following Ramsey-theoretic result, which has been conjectured by Harary and proved, independently, by Sidorenko [7] and by Goddard and Kleitman [5]. We note that the precise estimate in this theorem is not essential for our purpose here, and we can derive Proposition 1.3 from the weaker, previously known estimates obtained in [4] or in [6].

Theorem 2.1 ([7], [5]) *Let H be an arbitrary graph with m edges and no isolated vertices. Then any graph on $2m + 1$ vertices that has no independent set of size 3 contains a subgraph isomorphic to H .*

Proof of Proposition 1.3 Let $W = \{w_1, \dots, w_k\} \subset V$ be a maximal (with respect to containment) independent set of G containing all the vertices of degree at least 3 of G . Observe that each vertex $v \in V - W$ has at least one neighbor in W , and its degree in G is at most 2. Therefore, the induced subgraph of G on $V - W$ has maximum degree at most 1 and is thus a union of isolated edges and isolated vertices. Each isolated vertex in this induced subgraph has either one or two neighbors in W , whereas each of the two ends of an isolated edge in this induced subgraph has precisely one neighbor in W , (it is possible, of course, that they both have the same neighbor). Define a graph $H = (W', F)$, where $W' = \{w'_1, \dots, w'_k\}$, and two vertices w'_i and w'_j are adjacent iff there is a path in G between w_i and w_j all of whose internal vertices lie in $V - W$. Note that such a path is always of length 2 or 3, and all the paths of this type are internally vertex-disjoint. It thus follows that the number of edges of H is at most $n - k \leq n$.

Given a two-coloring of the edges of the complete graph K on $12n$ vertices by red and blue, let us call a vertex a *red vertex* if it has at least $6n$ red edges incident with it. Otherwise it has at least $6n$ blue edges incident with it and we call it a *blue vertex*. Without loss of generality we may assume that there are at least $6n$ red vertices. If uv is a red edge, let us call v a *red neighbor* of u , and vice versa. (Note that a red neighbor is not necessarily a red vertex.) Let U denote an arbitrary set of $6n$ red vertices. Define a new graph T on the set of vertices $\bar{U} = \{\bar{u} : u \in U\}$ by joining \bar{u} and \bar{v} by an edge iff u and v have at least $2n$ common red neighbors.

Claim There is no independent set of size 3 in T .

Proof If $\bar{u}_1, \bar{u}_2, \bar{u}_3$ is such an independent set, and we let $N(u_i)$ denote the set of all red neighbors of u_i in K , then the cardinality of the union $\cup_{i=1}^3 N(u_i)$ is at least $3 \cdot 6n - 3(2n - 1) > 12n$, which is impossible. \square

By the above claim and by Theorem 2.1 we conclude that T contains a copy of the graph H defined above. (Note that the Theorem implies it only for H that does not have isolated vertices. However, since H has $k \leq n$ vertices whereas T has $6n$ vertices the result clearly holds without this assumption as well). By the definition of T we conclude that our colored complete graph K contains a set $W'' = \{w_1'', \dots, w_k''\}$ of red vertices, so that for each pair i, j for which there is a path of G connecting w_i and w_j and having all its (one or two) internal vertices in $V - W$, w_i'' and w_j'' have at least $2n$ common red neighbors.

To complete the proof we show that either we can complete the set W'' to a red copy of G in K , in which each member w'' of W'' plays the role of w , or there is a blue complete graph on n vertices (and hence certainly a blue copy of G) in K . To this end, we try to complete W'' to a red copy of G in K by finding, for each vertex $v \in V - W$ of G an appropriate vertex v'' of K , so that the mapping $v \mapsto v''$ for all $v \in V$ defines a red copy of G . As mentioned above, each connected component of the induced subgraph of G on $V - W$ is either a single vertex or a single edge. Let us order these components arbitrarily and attempt to define the vertices v'' for the members v of each component in its turn. Suppose the vertices v'' have already been defined for all $v'' \in U$ where U is a union of some of the above components, such that the mapping $v \mapsto v''$ ($v \in W \cup U$) maps the induced subgraph of G on $W \cup U$ into a red copy of itself in K , and consider the next component C . There are two possible cases.

Case 1: C consists of a single vertex v . In this case, v may have either one or two neighbors in W . In the first case, if w_i is the neighbor of v in G , we merely have to choose v'' in K so that the edge $w_i''v''$ is red. However, since w_i'' is a red vertex of K it has at least $6n$ red neighbors, and since we have already used (as x'' for some $x \in W \cup U$) at most $n - 1$ of them so far there is certainly an appropriate choice for v'' among these red neighbors. If v has two neighbors w_i and w_j in W the situation is similar. By construction, w_i'' and w_j'' have at least $2n$ common red neighbors in K , and v'' can be chosen as any of these that have not been used already.

Case 2: C consists of two adjacent vertices u and v . In this case, each of the vertices u and v is connected in G to a unique member of W . Let w_i denote the unique neighbor of u in W and let w_j denote the unique neighbor of v in W . If i and j differ, let us try to choose both u'' and v'' among the common red neighbors of w_i'' and w_j'' . There are at least $2n$ such red neighbors, and hence there is a set S of more than n of them that have not been used so far. If there is a red edge connecting two members of S define its two ends to be u'' and v'' . Otherwise, there is a blue complete graph on (more than) n vertices and hence there is a blue copy of G .

It remains to check the case $i = j$, which is simpler. In this case, let S be any set of n red neighbors of w_i'' which have not been used so far. (Such a set certainly exists as w_i'' has at least $6n$ red neighbors and less than n of them have been used). If there is a red edge connecting two members of S let u'' and v'' be its ends. Otherwise, there is a blue copy of a complete graph on n vertices and hence of G . Therefore, in any case there is a monochromatic copy of G in K ,

completing the proof. \square

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