Cover time of a random graph with given degree sequence

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November 24, 2009

Abstract

In this paper we establish the cover time of a random graph $G(\mathbf{d})$ chosen uniformly at random from the set of graphs with vertex set $[n]$ and degree sequence $\mathbf{d}$. We show that under certain restrictions on $\mathbf{d}$, the cover time of $G(\mathbf{d})$ is **whp** asymptotic to $\frac{d-1}{d-2}\frac{\theta}{d} n \log n$. Here θ is the average degree and d is the *effective minimum degree.*

1 Introduction

Let $G = (V, E)$ be a connected graph with $|V| = n$ vertices and $|E| = m$ edges. For $v \in V$, let C_v be the expected time taken for a simple random walk $\mathcal{W}_v$ on G starting at v, to visit every vertex of G. The *vertex cover time* C_G of G is defined as $C_G = \max_{v \in V} C_v$. The vertex cover time of connected graphs has been extensively studied. It is a classic result of Aleliunas, Karp, Lipton, Lovász and Rackoff [1] that $C_G \leq 2m(n-1)$. It was shown by Feige [5], [6], that for any connected graph G, the cover time satisfies $(1 - o(1))n \log n \leq C_G \leq (1 + o(1))\frac{4}{27}n^3$. Between these two extremal examples, the cover time, both exact and asymptotic, has been determined for a number of different classes of graphs.

In this paper we study the cover time of random graphs $\mathcal{G}(\mathbf{d})$ picked uniformly at random (uar) from the set $\mathcal{G}(\mathbf{d})$ of simple graphs with vertex set $V = [n]$ and degree sequence $\mathbf{d} = (d_1, d_2, \ldots, d_n)$. We make the following definitions: Let $V_j = \{i \in V : d_i = j\}$ and let $n_j = |V_j|$. Let $\sum_{i=1}^n d_i = 2m$ and let $\theta = 2m/n$ be the average degree.

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Let $0 < \alpha < 1$ be constant, $0 < c < 1/8$ be constant and let d be a positive integer. Let $\gamma \to \infty$ with n. We suppose the degree sequence $\mathbf{d}$ satisfies the following conditions:

(i) Average degree $\theta = o(\sqrt{\log n})$.

(ii) Minimum degree $\delta \geq 3$.

(iii) For $\delta \leq i < d$, $n_i = O(n^{ci/d})$.

(iv) $n_d = \alpha n + o(n)$. We call d the *effective minimum degree.*

(v) Maximum degree $\Delta = O(n^{c(d-1)/d})$.

(vi) Upper tail size $\displaystyle\sum_{j=\gamma\theta}^{\Delta} n_j = O(\Delta)$.

We call a degree sequence $\mathbf{d}$ which satisfies conditions (i)–(vi) *nice*, and apply the same adjective to $\mathcal{G}(\mathbf{d})$.

Theorem 1. *Let $G(\boldsymbol{d})$ be chosen* **uar** *from $\mathcal{G}(\boldsymbol{d})$, where $\boldsymbol{d}$ is nice. Then* **whp**

$$C(G(\boldsymbol{d})) \sim \frac{d-1}{d-2}\frac{\theta}{d}\, n \log n.$$

We note that if $d \sim \theta$, i.e. the graph is pseudo-regular, then

$$C(G) \sim \frac{d-1}{d-2}\, n \log n,$$

which extends the result of [3] for random d-regular graphs.

Structure of the paper

The proof of Theorem 1 is based on an application of (5) below. Put simply, (5) says that, if we ignore which vertices the random walk visits during the mixing time, the probability a vertex v is not visited by step t is asymptotic to $\exp(-\pi_v t/R_v)$. Here $\pi_v = d(v)/2m$ and R_v is the expected number of returns to v during the mixing time, for a walk starting at v. We estimate R_v in Section 4, and describe and prove the required **whp** graph properties in Section 3. The proof that (5) is valid **whp** for $\mathcal{G}(\mathbf{d})$ is similar to proofs in earlier papers and is given in the Appendix. The cover time $C(G)$ is established as follows in Section 5. Firstly a general upper bound is proved in Section 5.1. In Section 5.2 a lower bound is determined by the set of vertices S which maximize $\sum_{v\in S} \exp(-\pi_v t/R_v)$.

2 Estimating first visit probabilities

Convergence of the random walk

In this section G denotes a fixed connected graph with n vertices. A random walk $\mathcal{W}_u$ is started from a vertex u. Let $\mathcal{W}_u(t)$ be the vertex reached at step t, let P be the matrix of transition probabilities of the walk and let $P_u^{(t)}(v) = \mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{W}_u(t) = v)$. We assume that the random walk $\mathcal{W}_u$ on D is ergodic with stationary distribution π, where $\pi_v = d(v)/(2m)$, and $d(v)$ is the degree of vertex v.

Let

$$d(t) = \max_{u,x \in V} |P_u^{(t)}(x) - \pi_x|,$$

and let T be a positive integer such that for $t \geq T$

$$\max_{u,x \in V} |P_u^{(t)}(x) - \pi_x| \leq n^{-3}. \tag{1}$$

Fix two vertices u, v. Considering the walk $\mathcal{W}_v$, starting at v, let $r_t = \mathbf{Pr}(\mathcal{W}_v(t) = v)$ be the probability that this walk returns to v at step $t = 0, 1, \ldots$. Let

$$R_T(z) = \sum_{j=0}^{T-1} r_j z^j \tag{2}$$

and

$$\lambda = \frac{1}{KT} \tag{3}$$

for a sufficiently large constant K.

For $t \geq T$ let $\boldsymbol{A}_v(t)$ be the event that $\mathcal{W}_u$ does not visit v in steps $T, T+1, \ldots, t$.

Lemma 2. *Suppose that*

(a) *For some constant $\theta > 0$, we have*

$$\min_{|z| \leq 1+\lambda} |R_T(z)| \geq \theta.$$

(b) *$T^2 \pi_v = o(1)$ and $T\pi_v = \Omega(n^{-2})$ for all $v \in V$.*

There exists

$$p_v = \frac{\pi_v}{R_v(1 + O(T\pi_v))}, \tag{4}$$

where

$$R_v = R_T(1)$$

is from (2), such that for all $v \in V$ and $t \geq T$,

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\boldsymbol{A}_v(t)) = \frac{(1 + O(T\pi_v))}{(1 + p_v)^t} + O(T^2 \pi_v e^{-\lambda t/2}). \tag{5}$$

3 Required graph properties

3.1 Mixing time

Given a graph G, the *conductance* $\Phi(G)$ of a random walk $\mathcal{W}_u$ on G is defined by

$$\Phi(G) = \min_{\pi(S) \leq 1/2} \frac{e(S : \overline{S})}{d(S)}$$

where $d(S) = \sum_{i \in S} d_i$, and $e(A : B)$ denotes the number of edges with one endpoint in A and the other in B. The lemma below follows from Lemma 10 of the Appendix by applying (8).

Lemma 3. *Let* $\boldsymbol{d}$ *be a nice degree sequence and let* $G(\boldsymbol{d})$ *be chosen uniformly at random from the* $\mathcal{G}(\boldsymbol{d})$*, then* **whp**

$$\Phi(G) \geq 0.01.$$

Note that $\Phi(G) \geq 0.01$ in Lemma 3 implies $G(\mathbf{d})$ is connected.

We note a result from Sinclair [8], that

$$|P_u^{(t)}(x) - \pi_x| \leq (\pi_x/\pi_u)^{1/2}(1 - \Phi^2/2)^t. \tag{6}$$

Referring to Lemma 3 and (6), if we choose A sufficiently large and

$$T = A \log n \tag{7}$$

then (1) holds.

There is a technical point here. The result (6) assumes that the walk is lazy. A lazy walk moves to a neighbour with probability 1/2 at any step. This assumption halves the conductance. Asymptotically, the cover time, and the value of $R_T(1)$ are also doubled. Otherwise, the lazy assumption has a negligible effect on the analysis. We will ignore this assumption for the rest of the paper, and continue as though there are no lazy steps.

3.2 Structural properties of $G(\mathbf{d})$

We make our calculations in the configuration model, see Bollobás [2]. Let $W = [2m]$ be our set of *configuration points* and let $W_i = [d_1 + \cdots + d_{i-1} + 1, d_1 + \cdots + d_i]$, $i \in [n]$, partition W. The function $\phi : W \to [n]$ is defined by $w \in W_{\phi(w)}$. Given a pairing F (i.e. a partition of W into m pairs) we obtain a (multi-)graph G_F with vertex set $[n]$ and an edge $(\phi(u), \phi(v))$ for each $\{u, v\} \in F$. Choosing a pairing F uniformly at random from among all possible pairings of the points of W produces a random (multi-)graph G_F. Let $\nu = \sum_i d_i(d_i - 1)/(2m)$. Assuming that $\Delta = o(m^{1/3})$ (as it will be for nice sequences), the probability that G_F is simple is given by

$$P_S = \mathbf{Pr}(G_F \text{ is simple}) \sim e^{-\frac{\nu}{2}-\frac{\nu^2}{4}}, \tag{8}$$

(see e.g. [7]), and each simple graph $G \in \mathcal{G}(\mathbf{d})$ is equiprobable.

Observe that our assumptions (i)–(vi) that $\mathbf{d}$ is nice imply that $\nu = o(\sqrt{\log n})$. Indeed if $\theta = \sqrt{\log n}/\gamma^3$ where $\gamma \to \infty$ then

$$\nu \le \frac{1}{\theta n}\left(\sum_{j=3}^{\gamma\theta} n_j j^2 + \sum_{j=\gamma\theta}^{\Delta} n_j j^2\right) \le \frac{1}{\theta n}(n\gamma^2\theta^2 + O(\Delta^3)) = o(\sqrt{\log n}).$$

All the **whp** statements in this paper fail with probability at most $n^{-\Omega(1)}$, whereas P_S in (8) is at least $e^{-o(\log n)}$. This justifies our use of the configuration model.

Let C be a large constant and let

$$\omega = \log\log\log n, \qquad \omega' = C\log\log n. \tag{9}$$

We use these values for ω, ω' throughout the paper. A cycle C or path P is *small*, if it has at most $2\omega' + 1$ vertices, otherwise it is *large*.

Let

$$\ell = B\log^2 n \tag{10}$$

for some large constant B. A vertex v is *light* if it has degree at most ℓ, otherwise it is *heavy*. A small path is *light* if all vertices are light. A small cycle is *light* if it has at most one heavy vertex.

For a vertex v, let G_v be the subgraph induced by the set of vertices within a distance ω of v. A vertex v is *locally tree-like* if G_v is a tree. A vertex v is *r-regular*, if it is locally tree-like and each vertex of G_v, (with the possible exception of v), has degree r. A vertex v is *r-compliant*, if there exists a tree subgraph $\mathcal{T}_v$ of G_v rooted at v, in which each vertex of $\mathcal{T}_v$ (with the possible exception of v) has degree r.

Lemma 4. Whp*:*

(a) *No pair of small light cycles are connected by a small light path.*

(b) *No pair of vertices on a small light cycle are joined by a small light path.*

Proof We first note a useful inequality. For integer $x > 0$, let $F(2x) = \frac{(2x)!}{2^x x!}$, then

$$\frac{F(\theta n - 2x)}{F(\theta n)} = \frac{(\theta n - 2x)!}{\left(\frac{\theta n}{2} - x\right)! 2^{\frac{\theta n}{2}-x}} \frac{\left(\frac{\theta n}{2}\right)! 2^{\frac{\theta n}{2}}}{(\theta n)!} = \left(\prod_{i=1}^{x} \theta n - 2i + 1\right)^{-1} \le \left(\frac{1}{\theta n - 2x + 1}\right)^x.$$

We prove part **(a)** in detail; the calculations for part **(b)** are similar.

(a) Let μ denote the expected number of light cycle-path-cycle subgraphs consisting of cycles of length a, b joined by a path length c. Then

$$\mu \leq \sum_{a=3}^{2\omega'+1} \sum_{b=3}^{2\omega'+1} \sum_{c=1}^{2\omega'+1} \binom{n}{a}\binom{n}{b}\binom{n}{c} \frac{(a-1)!}{2} \frac{(b-1)!}{2} c! ab \ell^{2(a+b+c-2)} \Delta^6 \frac{\mathcal{F}(\theta n - 2(a+b+c+1))}{\mathcal{F}(\theta n)} \tag{11}$$

Explanation. Choose a vertices for one cycle, b vertices for the other and c vertices for the path. At most one vertex in a cycle is not light, and has degree more than ℓ (and at most Δ). Each light vertex has up to $\ell(\ell-1)$ ways to connect to a neighbour, for a total of (at least) $((a-1)+(b-1)+c)$ light vertices, explaining the exponent of ℓ. The remaining, possibly heavy vertex in each cycle can connect in up to $\Delta(\Delta-1)$ ways to neighbours in the cycle and $\Delta - 2$ ways from a cycle to a path. Thus μ is bounded by

$$\begin{aligned} \mu &= \sum_{a=3}^{2\omega'+1} \sum_{b=3}^{2\omega'+1} \sum_{c=1}^{2\omega'+1} n^a n^b n^c \ell^{2(a+b+c-2)} \Delta^6 \left(\frac{1}{\theta n - 12\omega' + 6} \right)^{a+b+c} \\ &\leq \frac{\Delta^6}{\theta n - 12\omega' + 6} \sum_a \sum_b \sum_c \left(\frac{n\ell^2}{\theta n - 12\omega' + 6} \right)^{a+b+c} \\ &= O\left(\frac{\Delta^6 \ell^{12\omega'+6} \omega'^3}{\theta n} \right). \end{aligned}$$

Thus $\mathbf{Pr}(\mu > 0) = o(n^{-\epsilon})$, for some constant $\epsilon > 0$, since $\Delta = O(n^{c(d-1)/d})$ where $c < 1/6$. □

Lemma 5. Whp*:*
(a) The number of vertices $v \in V$ that are not d-compliant is at most $n^{4c(d-1)/d}$.
(b) There is no small *vertex v, $\delta \leq d(v) < d$ which is not d-compliant.*

Proof (a) We lower bound the probability P that v is d-compliant by the success, in the configuration model, of the following process.
Process $\mathcal{P}$: For $0 \leq i \leq \omega - 1$, and for each vertex w at level i, the first $d-1$ unpaired points of w pair with points of distinct unused vertices u of degree $d(u) \geq d$.

The tree created by process $\mathcal{P}$ involves $N_1 - 1 = d_v \sum_{i=0}^{i=\omega-1} (d-1)^i \leq \Delta(d-1)^\omega$ pairings. Let σ represent the sum of degrees of vertices of degree less than d. Thus

$$P \geq \prod_{i=1}^{N_1} \frac{\theta n - i\Delta - \sigma}{\theta n - 2i + 1} \geq \left(1 - \frac{N_1 \Delta + \sigma}{\theta n}\right)^{N_1}.$$

Let X count the number of vertices v that are not d-compliant. Using the inequality $1 - (1 - x)^y \leq xy$ for real x, y, $0 \leq x \leq 1, y \geq 1$, we have

$$\mathbf{E}[X] \leq n(1-P) = n\left(1 - \left(1 - \frac{N_1\Delta + \sigma}{\theta n}\right)^{N_1}\right) \leq \frac{N_1(N_1\Delta + \sigma)}{\theta}. \tag{12}$$

We have that $\Delta = O(n^{c(d-1)/d})$, and from $n_i = O(n^{ci/d})$ we find that $\sigma = O(n^{c(d-1)/d})$. Thus

$$E[X] = \tilde{O}(\Delta^3 + \Delta\sigma) = \tilde{O}(n^{3c(d-1)/d}) \leq K \log^L n n^{3c(d-1)/d}$$

for some $K, L > 0$. Then,

$$\mathbf{Pr}(X \geq n^{4c(d-1)/d}) = \tilde{O}(n^{-c(d-1)/d}). \tag{13}$$

(b) In this case we have that the number of small vertices is $O(n^{c(d-1)/d})$ and so $\mathbf{E}[X] = \tilde{O}(n^{2c(d-1)/d}/n)$. □

Lemma 6. whp: *There are $n^{1-o(1)}$ d-regular vertices $v \in V$ with $d(v) = d$.*

Proof We consider d-regular vertices that have a root vertex v of degree d. Recall that $n_d = |V_d| = \alpha n + o(n)$ for some constant $\alpha > 0$. Let $N_2 = 1 + d(d-1)^\omega$. A d-regular tree of depth ω contains N_2 vertices. We proceed in a similar manner to Lemma 5, and bound the probability P that a vertex v is d-regular by bounding the probability of success of the construction of a d-regular tree in the configuration model.

$$P = \mathbf{Pr}(\text{a vertex } v \text{ is } d\text{-regular}) = \prod_{i=1}^{N_2-1} \frac{d(n_d - i)}{\theta n - 2i + 1} \geq \left(d\frac{n_d - N_2}{\theta n} \right)^{N_2}. \tag{14}$$

Let M count the number of d-regular vertices, then $\mathbf{E}[M] = \mu = n_d P$, and

$$\mu = \mathbf{E}[M] \geq n^{1-o(1)}. \tag{15}$$

To estimate $\mathbf{Var}[M]$, let I_v be the indicator that vertex v is d-regular. We have

$$\mathbf{E}[M^2] = \mu + \sum_{v \in V_d} \sum_{w \in V_d, w \neq v} \mathbf{E}[I_v I_w], \tag{16}$$

and

$$\mathbf{E}[I_v I_w] = \mathbf{Pr}(v, w \text{ are } d\text{-regular}, G_v \cap G_w = \emptyset) + \mathbf{Pr}(v, w \text{ are } d\text{-regular}, G_v \cap G_w \neq \emptyset).$$

Now

$$\mathbf{Pr}(v, w \text{ are } d\text{-regular}, G_v \cap G_w = \emptyset) = \prod_{i=1}^{2N_2-2} \frac{d(n_d - i - 1)}{\theta n - 2i + 1} \leq P^2. \tag{17}$$

For any vertex v, the number of vertices u such that $G_v \cap G_w \neq \emptyset$ is bounded from above by $N_2 + dN_2^2$. Using this and (17), we can bound (16) as from above by $\mu + \mu^2 + \mu(N_2 + dN_2^2)$.

By the Chebychev Inequality, for some constant $0 < \tilde{\epsilon} < 1$,

$$\mathbf{Pr}\left(|M - \mu| > \mu^{\frac{1}{2}+\tilde{\epsilon}}\right) \leq \frac{\mathbf{Var}[M]}{\mu^{1+2\tilde{\epsilon}}} = \frac{\mathbf{E}[M^2] - \mathbf{E}[M]^2}{\mu^{1+2\tilde{\epsilon}}} \leq \frac{\mu + \mu N_2 + \mu d N_2^2}{\mu^{1+2\tilde{\epsilon}}} = O(n^{-\epsilon}).$$

The lemma now follows from (15). □

4 Expected number of returns in the mixing time

The local graph Γ_v. For vertex v, inductively define a sub-graph Γ_v of G_v as follows: If $u \in G_v$ is heavy, delete an edge $(u,w) \in G_v$ iff there is no (w,v)-path that is light. After this process is completed, let Γ_v be the connected component of G_v rooted at v. The following lemma is a consequence of this construction.

Lemma 7. *Either Γ_v is a tree, or Γ_v contains a unique light cycle C.*

Denote by Γ_v° the subset of the vertices of Γ_v consisting of pruned heavy vertices, and vertices at distance ω from the root v.

Lemma 8. *Let $\mathcal{W}_v^*$ denote the walk on Γ_v starting at v with Γ_v° made into absorbing states. Let $R_v^* = \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} r_t^*$ where r_t^* is the probability that $\mathcal{W}_v^*$ is at vertex v at time t. There exists a constant $\zeta \in (0,1)$ such that*

$$R_v = R_v^* + O(\zeta^\omega).$$

Proofs of a lemma similar to Lemma 8 are given in e.g. [3]. For completeness the proof of Lemma 8 is given in the Appendix.

Lemma 9. *Let $G(\boldsymbol{d})$ be good. For a vertex $v \in V$,*

(a) *If v is d-regular, then $R_v = \frac{d-1}{d-2} + O(\zeta^\omega)$.*

(b) *If v is d-compliant then $R_v \leq \frac{d-1}{d-2}(1+o(1))$.*

(c) *For any v, $R_v \leq \frac{\delta-1}{\delta-2}(1+o(1))$.*

(a) We calculate R_v^* for a walk $\mathcal{W}_v^*$ on an d-regular tree Γ_v with Γ_v° made into absorbing states. For a biased random walk on $(0,1,...,k)$, starting at vertex 1, with absorbing states $0,k$, and with transition probabilities at vertices $(1,\ldots,k-1)$ of $q = \mathbf{Pr}(\text{move left})$, $p = \mathbf{Pr}(\text{move right})$; then

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\text{absorption at } k) = \frac{(q/p)-1}{(q/p)^k - 1}. \tag{18}$$

We project $\mathcal{W}_v^*$ onto $(0,1,\ldots,\omega)$ with $p = \frac{d-1}{d}$ and $q = \frac{1}{d}$ giving

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\text{ absorption at } \Gamma_v^\circ) = \left(1 - \frac{1}{d-1}\right)\left(1 + O\left(\frac{1}{(d-1)^\omega}\right)\right).$$

Let f_v be the probability of a return to v. Then

$$R_v^* = \frac{1}{1-f_v} = \frac{d-1}{d-2} + O\left(\frac{1}{(d-1)^\omega}\right) \tag{19}$$

and part **(a)** of the lemma follows.

(b) If v is d-compliant, we can prune G_v removing edges from each vertex (other than v) until v is d-regular. Treating the edges as having unit resistance, this pruning process cannot decrease the effective resistance between v and a hypothetical vertex ζ that is connected by a zero-resistance edge to each of the vertices in Γ_v° (and no others). Then by part **(a)** and Rayleigh's monotonicity law part **(b)** of the lemma follows. (Here we are using the the fact that the probability of reaching ζ before returning to v is equal to $\frac{1}{d(v)R}$ where R is the effective resistance between v and ζ. Rayleigh's Law states that deleting edges increases R).

(c) All vertices on a path from v to Γ_v° have degree at least δ. Thus in expectation there are at most $(\delta-1)/(\delta-2)+o(1)$ returns to v before absorption. If absorption is at distance ω, the arguments in (a), (b) above apply. If not, absorption is at a heavy vertex $u \in \Gamma_v^\circ$, that is at distance less then ω from v. Such a vertex will have at most two paths back (on the unique light cycle). All other paths to v in $G(\mathbf{d})$ go via other heavy vertices. Hence if a particle is at u, with probability at most $2/\ell$ it will enter a path to v in Γ_v and probability at least $1-2/\ell$ enter a path in which it will only reach v by going through another vertex in Γ_v° first. Thus the probability of reaching v in time T after having visited a heavy vertex in Γ_v° is at most $O(T/\ell)$. So $\sum_{t=0}^{\omega} r_t - r_t^* = O(\omega T/l) = o(1)$. □

5 Cover time of $G(\mathbf{d})$

5.1 Upper bound on cover time

Let $T_G(u)$ be the time taken by the random walk $\mathcal{W}_u$ to visit every vertex of a connected graph G. Let U_t be the number of vertices of G which have not been visited by $\mathcal{W}_u$ at step t. We note the following:

$$C_u = \mathbf{E}[T_G(u)] \;=\; \sum_{t>0} \mathbf{Pr}(T_G(u) \geq t), \tag{20}$$

$$\mathbf{Pr}(T_G(u) \geq t) = \mathbf{Pr}(T_G(u) > t-1) \;=\; \mathbf{Pr}(U_{t-1} > 0) \leq \min\{1, \mathbf{E}[U_{t-1}]\}. \tag{21}$$

Recall from (5) that $\boldsymbol{A}_s(v)$ is the event that vertex v has not been visited by time s. It follows from (20), (21) that

$$C_u \leq t+1+\sum_{s\geq t} \mathbf{E}[U_s] = t+1+\sum_{v}\sum_{s\geq t} \mathbf{Pr}(\boldsymbol{A}_s(v)). \tag{22}$$

Let $t_0 = \left(\frac{d-1}{d-2}\frac{\theta}{d}\right) n\log n$ and $t_1 = (1+\epsilon)\,t_0$, were $\epsilon = o(1)$ is sufficiently large that all inequalities claimed below hold. We will use the notation d_v for $d(v)$. We assume that the high probability claims of Sections 3, 4 hold. In the Appendix, we establish that condition (a) of

Lemma 2 holds. Condition (b) of Lemma 2, that $T\pi_v = o(1)$, holds trivially as the maximum degree is $n^a, a < 1$.

Recall from (4) that $p_v = (1 + (T\pi_v))d_v/(\theta n R_v)$. Thus by (5), the probability that $\mathcal{W}_u$ has not visited v during $[T, t]$ is given by

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{Pr}(\boldsymbol{A}_t(v)) &= (1+o(1))e^{-tp_v} + O(T^2\pi_v e^{-\lambda t/2}) & (23)\\ &= (1+o(1))e^{-tp_v}. & (24)\end{aligned}$$

Thus

$$\begin{aligned} \sum_{t\geq t_1}(1+o(1))e^{-tp_v} &= (1+o(1))e^{-t_1p_v}\sum_{t\geq t_1} e^{-(t-t_1)p_v} \\ &\leq 2p_v^{-1}e^{-t_1p_v} \\ &= O(1)\frac{\theta n R_v}{d_v}\exp\left\{-(1+\Theta(\epsilon))\frac{d_v}{d}\frac{d-1}{d-2}\frac{\log n}{R_v}\right\}. & (25)\end{aligned}$$

We consider the following partition of V:
(i) $V_A = \bigcup_{\delta\leq i<d} V_i$.
(ii) $V_B = \bigcup_{i\geq\delta}\{v \in V_i : v \text{ is } d\text{-compliant}\}$.
(iii)$V_C = \bigcup_{i\geq\delta}\{v \in V_i : v \text{ is not } d\text{-compliant}\}$.

Case (i): $\delta \leq d_v < d$.
For these vertices, Γ_v is d-compliant by Lemma 5. Consider vertices in V_i, $i < d$. By Lemma 9 **(b)**, $R_v \leq (1+o)1))\frac{d-1}{d-2}$ so for $v \in V_i$ (25) is bounded by $O(\theta n)n^{-(1+o(1))\frac{i}{d}}$. Recall that $|V_i| = O(n^{ci//d})$ where $c < 1$. Thus

$$\sum_{v\in V_i}\sum_{t\geq t_1}(1+o(1))e^{-tp_v} \leq O(\theta n)n^{ci/d}n^{-(1+o(1))i/d} \quad = \quad o(t_1).$$

Case (ii): $d \leq d_v$, v is d-compliant.
For $v \in V_B$ (25) is bounded by $O(\theta)n^{-\Theta(\epsilon)}$. Therefore

$$\sum_{v\in V_B}\sum_{t\geq t_1}(1+o(1))e^{-tp_v} \leq \sum_{v\in V_B} O(\theta)n^{-\Theta(\epsilon)} = O(\theta n)n^{-\Theta(\epsilon)} = o(t_1).$$

Case (iii): $d \leq d_v$, v is not d-compliant.
For vertices $v \in V_C$ (25) is bounded by $O(\theta n)n^{-(1+\Theta(\epsilon))\frac{\delta-2}{\delta-1}\frac{d-1}{d-2}}$. By Lemma 5, $|V_C| \leq n^{4c(d-1)/d}$ where $4c < 1/2 \leq \frac{d}{d-2}\frac{\delta-2}{\delta-1}$. Hence

$$\begin{aligned}\sum_{v\in V_C}\sum_{t\geq t_1}(1+o(1))e^{-tp_v} &= \sum_{v\in V_C} O(\theta n)n^{-(1+\Theta(\epsilon))\frac{\delta-2}{\delta-1}\frac{d-1}{d-2}} \\ &= O(n^{c(d-1)/d}\theta n)n^{-(1+\Theta(\epsilon))\frac{\delta-2}{\delta-1}\frac{d-1}{d-2}} \\ &= o(t_1).\end{aligned}$$

In each of the cases above, the term $\sum_v \sum_{s\geq t} \mathbf{Pr}(\boldsymbol{A}_s(v)) = o(t_1)$ and thus, from (22), $C_u \leq (1+o(1))t_1$ as required. This completes the proof of the upper bound on cover time of $G(\mathbf{d})$. $\square$

5.2 Lower bound on cover time

Let $t_2 = (1-\epsilon)t_0$, were $\epsilon = o(1)$ is sufficiently large that all inequalities claimed below hold. For vertex u of degree d, we exhibit a set of vertices S such that at time t_2 the probability the set S is covered by the walk $\mathcal{W}_u$ tends to zero. Hence $T_G(u) > t_2$, **whp** which implies that $C_G \geq t_0 - o(t_0)$.

We construct S as follows. Let S_d be the set of d-regular vertices of degree d. Lemma 6 tells us that $|S_d| = n^{1-o(1)}$. Let $\omega' = C \log\log n$ for some large C. Let S be a maximal subset of S_d such that the distance between any two elements of S is least ω'. Thus $|S| = \Omega(n^{1-o(1)}/d^{\omega'})$.

Let $S(t)$ denote the subset of S which has not been visited by $\mathcal{W}_u$ after step t. Let $v \in S$, then

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\boldsymbol{A}_v(t_2)) = (1+o(1))e^{-t_2 p_v(1-O(p_v))} + o(n^{-2}).$$

Hence

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbf{E}(|S(t_2)|) &\geq (1+o(1))|S|e^{-(1-\epsilon)t_0 p_v} && (26)\\ &= \Omega\left(\frac{n^{\epsilon/2-o(1)}}{d^{\omega'}}\right) \to \infty. && (27)\end{aligned}$$

Let $Y_{v,t}$ be the indicator for the event $\boldsymbol{A}_t(v)$. Let $Z = \{v,w\} \subset S$. We will show (below) that that for $v,w \in S$

$$\mathbf{E}(Y_{v,t_2}Y_{w,t_2}) = \frac{1+O(T\pi_v)}{(1+p_Z)^{t_2}} + o(n^{-2}), \tag{28}$$

where $p_Z \sim p_v + p_w + o(1/\log n)$. Thus

$$\mathbf{E}(Y_{v,t_2}Y_{w,t_2}) = (1+o(1))\mathbf{E}(Y_{v,t_2})\mathbf{E}(Y_{w,t_2})$$

which implies

$$\mathbf{E}(|S(t_2)|(|S(t_2)|-1)) \sim \mathbf{E}(|S(t_2)|)(\mathbf{E}(|S(t_2)|)-1). \tag{29}$$

It follows from (27) and (29), that

$$\mathbf{Pr}(S(t_2) \neq \emptyset) \geq \frac{\mathbf{E}(|S(t_2)|)^2}{\mathbf{E}(|S(t_2)|^2)} = \frac{1}{\frac{\mathbf{E}(|S(t_2)|(|S(t_2)|-1))}{\mathbf{E}(|S(t_2)|)^2} + \mathbf{E}(|S(t_2)|)^{-1}} = 1-o(1).$$

Proof of (28). Let $\widehat{G}$ be obtained from G by merging v,w into a single node Z. This node has degree $2d$ and is d-regular. $R_Z = (R_v+R_w)/2+\rho$ where ρ is the expected number of passages between v, w in T steps. By Lemma 4 the number of light paths between v, w is at most 2. Using arguments similar to Lemma 9, we find $\rho = O(T/(\delta-1)^{\omega'}) = o(1/\log n)$.

There is a natural measure-preserving mapping from the set of walks in G which start at u and do not visit v or w, to the corresponding set of walks in $\widehat{G}$ which do not visit Z. Thus the probability that $\mathcal{W}_u$ does not visit v or w in steps $T...t$ is asymptotically equal to the probability that a random walk $\widehat{\mathcal{W}_u}$ in $\widehat{G}$ which also starts at u does not visit Z in steps steps $T...t$. The detailed argument is given in [4].

We apply Lemma 2 to $\widehat{G}$. That $\pi_Z = \frac{2d}{\theta n}$ is clear. Furthermore, the vertex Z is tree-like up to distance ω in $\widehat{G}$. The derivation of R_Z as in Lemma 9(a) is valid. The fact that the root vertex of the corresponding infinite tree has degree $2d$ does not affect the calculation of R_Z^*. □

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Appendix

Proof of conductance bound in Lemma 3

By the conductance of a configuration C, we mean the conductance of a random walk on the underlying multi-graph $M(C)$. It is however, the configurations we sample uar in the proof of Lemma 10.

Lemma 10. *Let $\boldsymbol{d} = (d_1, d_2, ..., d_n)$ be a sequence of natural numbers, satisfying $\min d_i \geq 3$ and $\theta \leq n^{1/4}$. With probability $1 - o(n^{-1/9})$ the conductance Φ of a uar sampled configuration $C(\boldsymbol{d})$ satisfies $\Phi \geq 0.01$.*

Proof Let $F(a) = a!/((a/2)!2^{(a/2)})$. With this notation,

$$\frac{F(b)F(a-b)}{F(a)} = \frac{\binom{a/2}{b/2}}{\binom{a}{b}} = O(1)\left(\frac{b}{a}\right)^{b/2}\left(1-\frac{b}{a}\right)^{(a-b)/2}. \tag{30}$$

For any $S \subseteq V$ let $d(S)$ denote the sum of the degrees of the vertices of S. A set S is *small* if $d(S) \leq (\theta n)^{1/4}$. A set is *large* if $(\theta n)^{1/4} \leq d(S) \leq \theta n/2$. Let $\beta < 1$ be a positive constant. We choose $\beta = 0.99$.

SMALL SETS ($\delta|S| \leq d(S) \leq (\theta n)^{1/4}$).
Let $N(s, \beta)$ be the expected number of small sets S of size s with at least $\beta d(S)$ induced edges.

$$N(s, \beta) = \sum_S \binom{d(S)}{\beta d(S)} \frac{F(\beta d(S))F(\theta n - \beta d(S))}{F(\theta n)}. \tag{31}$$

Thus using (30), $\delta s \leq d(s) \leq (\theta n)^{1/4}$ and $\delta \geq 3$ we find

$$\begin{aligned} N(s,\beta) &\leq O(1)\sum_S \left(\frac{e}{\beta}\right)^{\beta d(S)} \left(\frac{\beta d(S)}{\theta n}\right)^{\beta d(S)/2} \\ &\leq O(1)\left(\frac{ne}{s}\left(\frac{e^2}{\beta(\theta n)^{3/4}}\right)^{3\beta/2}\right)^s \\ &= O(n^{-(9\beta/8-1)s}). \end{aligned}$$

Thus

$$\sum_{\substack{|S|=s \\ S \text{ Small}}} N(s,\beta) = O(n^{-(9\beta/8-1)}).$$

LARGE SETS($(\theta n)^{1/4} \leq d(S) \leq \theta n/2$).
Let $N(s, \beta)$ be the expected number of large sets S of size s inducing at least $\beta d(S)$ edges.

As before, $N(s,\beta)$ is given by (31). Let $d(S) = \alpha\theta n$ where $0 < \alpha \leq 1/2$. Let $\varepsilon = 1 - \beta$. We note the following approximation:

$$\binom{d(s)}{\beta d(S)} = \binom{\alpha\theta n}{\beta\alpha\theta n} = \frac{O(1)}{\sqrt{\varepsilon\beta\alpha\theta n}} \frac{1}{\beta^{\beta\alpha\theta n}\varepsilon^{\varepsilon\alpha\theta n}}.$$

Thus

$$N(s,\beta) \leq \sum_S \frac{O(1)}{\sqrt{\varepsilon\beta\alpha\theta n}} \left(\frac{(\alpha\beta)^{\alpha\beta}(1-\alpha\beta)^{1-\alpha\beta}}{(\varepsilon^\varepsilon\beta^\beta)^{2\alpha}}\right)^{\frac{\theta n}{2}} = \sum_S f(S). \tag{32}$$

Let $s = cn$. We henceforth assume that we choose the value $\alpha = \alpha^*$ which maximizes $f(S)$ for $|S| = cn$. With this convention we can write

$$N(cn,\beta) \leq \frac{O(1)}{\sqrt{\varepsilon\beta c(1-c)\alpha\theta n^2}} \left(\left(\frac{(\alpha\beta)^{\alpha\beta}(1-\alpha\beta)^{1-\alpha\beta}}{(\varepsilon^\varepsilon\beta^\beta)^{2\alpha}}\right)^{\frac{\theta}{2}} \frac{1}{c^c(1-c)^{1-c}}\right)^n. \tag{33}$$

We split the proof for large sets into two parts: Those sets for which $\alpha \leq 1/\theta$ and those for which $1/\theta \leq \alpha \ \leq 1/2$.

Case of $\alpha \leq 1/\theta$.
We need to remove the dependence on c in the right hand side of the expression (33) for $N(cn,\beta)$. We first deal with the square root term. Since $\frac{1}{n} \leq c \leq \frac{(n-1)}{n}$, we have that $c(1-c) \geq \frac{n-1}{n^2}$ and so

$$c(1-c)\alpha\theta n^2 \geq \frac{n-1}{n^2}(\theta n)^{1/4} n \geq (\theta n)^{1/4}/2.$$

Therefore, as β, ε are positive constants,

$$\frac{1}{\sqrt{\varepsilon\beta c(1-c)\alpha\theta n^2}} = \frac{O(1)}{(\theta n)^{1/8}}.$$

We next consider the main term of (33). For $0 \leq x \leq 1/2$, the function

$$g(x) = x^x(1-x)^{1-x}$$

satisfies, $g(0) = 1$ and is monotonically decreasing with minimum $g(1/2) = 1/2$.

Since $d(S) \geq 3s$, and $s = cn$, from $d(S) = \alpha\theta n$ we deduce that $c \leq \alpha\theta/3$. As $\alpha \leq 1/\theta$ then $c \leq \alpha\theta/3 \leq 1/3$. Therefore $g(c) \geq g(\alpha\theta/3)$, and we can replace c by $\alpha\theta/3$ in (33). Hence

$$\begin{aligned} N(cn,\beta) &= \frac{O(1)}{(\theta n)^{1/8}} \left(\frac{(\alpha\beta)^{\alpha\beta\theta/2}(1-\alpha\beta)^{1-\alpha\beta\theta/2}}{(\alpha\theta/3)^{\alpha\theta/3}(1-\alpha\theta/3)^{1-\alpha\theta/3}} \frac{(1-\alpha\beta)^{\theta/2-1}}{(\varepsilon^\varepsilon\beta^\beta)^{\alpha\theta}}\right)^n \\ &= \frac{O(1)}{(\theta n)^{1/8}}(\phi(\alpha,\beta,\theta))^n. \end{aligned}$$

We next maximize $\phi(\alpha,\beta,\theta)$. Let $h(x,y)=(yx)^x(1-yx)^{1-x}$ for $0<x,y\le 1$. Considering $h(x,y)$ as a function of y, there is a unique maximum at $y=1$, given by

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial y}\ \log(h(x,y)) = x\left(\frac{1}{y}-\frac{1-x}{1-yx}\right)=0,$$
$$\frac{\partial^2}{\partial y^2}\ \log(h(x,y)) = -x\left(\frac{1}{y^2}+\frac{x(1-x)}{(1-yx)^2}\right)<0.$$

Therefore $h(x,y)<h(x,1)=g(x)$. So $h(\alpha\beta\theta/2,2/\theta)<g(\alpha\beta\theta/2)<g(\alpha\theta/3)$. Hence

$$\phi(\alpha,\beta,\theta)\le \frac{(1-\alpha\beta)^{\theta/2-1}}{(\varepsilon^\varepsilon\beta^\beta)^{\alpha\theta}}.$$

We prove below, that

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial\theta}\left\{\frac{(1-\alpha\beta)^{\theta/2-1}}{(\varepsilon^\varepsilon\beta^\beta)^{\alpha\theta}}\right\}<0. \tag{34}$$

Since $\theta\ge\delta\ge 3$, we have that

$$\frac{(1-\alpha\beta)^{\theta/2-1}}{(\varepsilon^\varepsilon\beta^\beta)^{\alpha\theta}}\le\frac{e^{-\alpha\beta/2}}{(\varepsilon^\varepsilon\beta^\beta)^{3\alpha}}\le\lambda^\alpha,$$

where $\lambda<0.7$, provided $\beta\ge 0.99$.

Now since $\alpha\theta n\ge(\theta n)^{1/4}$ for large sets, and $\theta\le n^{1/4}$ by conditions of the lemma, we have that $\alpha n\ge n^{1/16}$. Thus

$$N(cn,\beta)=\frac{O(1)}{(\theta n)^{1/8}}(\phi(\alpha,\beta,\theta))^n$$
$$=O(\lambda^{n^{1/16}}).$$

As $s=cn$ can take at most n values we have that $\sum N(cn,\beta)=O(n\lambda^{n^{1/16}})$.

Proof of (34)**.**

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial\theta}\left\{\frac{(1-\alpha\beta)^{\theta/2-1}}{(\varepsilon^\varepsilon\beta^\beta)^{\alpha\theta}}\right\}=\frac{1}{1-\alpha\beta}\left(\frac{(1-\alpha\beta)^{\frac12}}{(\varepsilon^\varepsilon\beta^\beta)^{\alpha}}\right)^\theta\log\left(\frac{(1-\alpha\beta)^{\frac12}}{(\varepsilon^\varepsilon\beta^\beta)^{\alpha}}\right).$$

Let

$$f(\alpha,\beta)=\frac{(1-\alpha\beta)}{(\varepsilon^\varepsilon\beta^\beta)^{2\alpha}}.$$

When $\alpha=0$, $f(\alpha,\beta)=1$. We prove that, for $\beta\ge 0.99$, $f(\alpha,\beta)<1$ for $\alpha>0$, which will establish the result. Note that

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial\alpha}\ f(\alpha,\beta)=\frac{-1}{(\varepsilon^\varepsilon\beta^\beta)^{2\alpha}}\left(\beta+(1-\alpha\beta)\log(\varepsilon^\varepsilon\beta^\beta)^2\right). \tag{35}$$

Consider

$$\frac{d}{d\beta}\left\{\log(\varepsilon^{\varepsilon}\beta^{\beta})^2+\beta\right\} \equiv \frac{d}{d\beta}\left\{\log((1-\beta)^{1-\beta}\beta^{\beta})^2+\beta\right\}$$
$$= 2\log\left(\frac{\beta}{1-\beta}\right)+1.$$

For $\beta > \frac{1}{2}$, the last line above is positive, and thus $\log(\varepsilon^{\varepsilon}\beta^{\beta})^2 > -\beta$. It follows that (35) is negative, as required.

Case of $1/\theta \leq \alpha \ \leq 1/2$.
Continuing to evaluate $N(s,\beta)$ as before, and referring to $f(S)$ as given by the right hand side term of (32), let

$$A(\alpha) = \frac{(\alpha\beta)^{\alpha\beta}(1-\alpha\beta)^{1-\alpha\beta}}{(\varepsilon^{\varepsilon}\beta^{\beta})^{2\alpha}}.$$

Thus

$$\log(A(\alpha)) = (\alpha\beta)\log((\alpha\beta)) + (1-\alpha\beta)\log(1-\alpha\beta) - 2\alpha\log(\varepsilon^{\varepsilon}\beta^{\beta}),$$
$$\frac{\partial}{\partial\alpha}\log(A(\alpha)) = \beta\log(\alpha\beta) - \beta\log(1-\alpha\beta) - 2\log(\varepsilon^{\varepsilon}\beta^{\beta}).$$

Setting $\frac{\partial}{\partial\alpha}\log(A(\alpha)) = 0$ gives

$$\alpha = \frac{\varepsilon^{2\varepsilon/\beta}\beta}{1+\varepsilon^{2\varepsilon/\beta}\beta^2}.$$

Let α_0 be the solution to this when $\beta = 0.99$. Thus $\alpha_0 \approx 0.477$. Also,

$$\frac{\partial^2}{\partial\alpha^2}\log(A(\alpha)) = \beta\left(\frac{1}{\alpha}+\frac{\beta}{1-\alpha\beta}\right) > 0$$

hence the stationary point α_0 is a minima. As $\theta \geq 3$ and by inspection, $A(0.5) < A(1/3)$ then $A(\alpha_0) \leq A(1/\theta)$. We can use $\alpha^* = 1/\theta$ as the value of α maximizing $A(\alpha)$ in the range $1/\theta \leq \alpha \leq 1/2$. It follows that

$$\sum_{\substack{S Large\\ \alpha\geq 1/\theta}} f(S) = \left(\frac{1}{\sqrt{\theta n}}\right)2^n(A(1/\theta))^{\frac{\theta n}{2}}$$
$$= O(1)2^n\left(\frac{(\beta/\theta)^{\frac{\beta}{2}}(1-\beta/\theta)^{\frac{1}{2}(\theta-\beta)}}{\varepsilon^{\varepsilon}\beta^{\beta}}\right)^n.$$

Let

$$T(\theta) = \left(\frac{\beta}{\theta}\right)^{\beta}\left(1-\frac{\beta}{\theta}\right)^{\theta-\beta},$$

then

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial\theta}\log(T(\theta)) = \log\left(\frac{\theta-\beta}{\theta}\right).$$

Thus $T(\theta)$ is monotone decreasing in θ, and so $T(\theta) \le T(3)$. Finally

$$\sum N(s,\beta) \le O(n)2^n \left(\frac{(\beta/3)^{\frac{\beta}{2}}(1-\beta/3)^{\frac{1}{2}(3-\beta)}}{\varepsilon^{\varepsilon}\beta^{\beta}} \right)^n$$
$$= O\left(n\ (0.8)^n\right).$$

This completes the proof of the lemma. □

Proof of Lemma 8

For convenience, we restate the lemma.

Lemma 11. *Let $\mathcal{W}_v^*$ denote the walk on Γ_v starting at v with Γ_v° made into absorbing states. Let $R_v^* = \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} r_t^*$ where r_t^* is the probability that $\mathcal{W}_v^*$ is at vertex v at time t. There exists a constant $\zeta \in (0,1)$ such that*

$$R_v = R_v^* + O(\zeta^\omega).$$

Proof We bound $|R_v - R_v^*|$ by using

$$R_v - R_v^* = \left(\sum_{t=0}^{\omega} r_t - r_t^* \right) + \left(\sum_{t=\omega+1}^{T} r_t - r_t^* \right) - \sum_{t=T+1}^{\infty} r_t^*. \tag{36}$$

<u>*Case $t \le \omega$.*</u> When a particle starting from v is absorbed at Γ_v°, this is either at at distance ω, or by a heavy vertex u at distance less than ω from v. In the case of a heavy vertex u, by the light cycle condition, there are at most two light paths back to v from u of length at most ω. All other paths of length at most ω go via other heavy vertices. Hence if a particle is at u, with probability at most $2/\ell$ it will enter a light path to v. Thus the probability of reaching v in time ω after having landed on a heavy vertex of Γ_v° is at most $O(\omega/\ell) = o(\zeta^\omega)$. In the alternative case that absorption is at distance ω from v, then for $t < \omega$, $r_t^* = r_t$. Thus we can write

$$\left(\sum_{t=0}^{\omega} r_t - r_t^* \right) = o(\zeta^\omega). \tag{37}$$

<u>*Case $\omega + 1 \le t \le T$.*</u> Using (6) with $x = u = v$ and $\zeta = (1 - \Phi^2/2) < 1$, we have for $t \ge \omega$, that $r_t = \pi_v + O(\zeta^t)$. Since $\Delta = O(n^a), a < 1$, we have $T\pi_v = o(\zeta^\omega)$ and so

$$\sum_{t=\omega+1}^{T} |r_t - r_t^*| = \sum_{t=\omega+1}^{T} r_t \le \sum_{t=\omega+1}^{T} (\pi_v + \zeta^t) = O(\zeta^\omega). \tag{38}$$

<u>*Case $t \ge T + 1$.*</u> It remains to estimate $\sum_{t=T+1}^{\infty} r_t^*$. We upper bound r_t^* by a probability σ_t as follows. Assume first that Γ_v is a tree. Consider an unbiased random walk $X_0^{(b)}, X_1^{(b)}, \ldots$

starting at $|b| < a \leq \omega$ on the infinite line $(..., -a, ..., -1, 0, 1, ..., a, ...)$. $X_m^{(b)}$ is the sum of m independent ± 1 random variables. The central limit theorem implies that there exists a constant $c > 0$ such that

$$\mathbf{Pr}(|X_{ca^2}^{(0)}| < a) \leq e^{-1/2}. \tag{39}$$

Now for any t and b with $|b| < a$, we have

$$\mathbf{Pr}(|X_\tau^{(b)}| < a, \tau = 0, ..., t) \leq \mathbf{Pr}(|X_\tau^{(0)}| < a, \tau = 0, ..., t) \tag{40}$$

which is justified with the following game: We have two walks, A and B coupled to each other, with A starting at position 0 and B at position b, which, w.l.o.g, we shall assume is positive. The walk is a simple random walk which comes to a halt when either of the walks hits an absorbing state (that being, $-a$ or a). Since they are coupled, B will win iff they drift $(a-b)$ to the right from 0 and A will win iff they drift $-a$ to the left from 0. Given the symmetry of the walk, B has a higher chance of winning.

For $t > T$, we define σ_t by

$$\sigma_t = \mathbf{Pr}(|X_\tau^{(0)}| < a,\ \tau = 0, 1, \ldots, t) \leq \left(e^{-1/2}\right)^{\lfloor t/(ca^2)\rfloor}. \tag{41}$$

The paths from v to Γ_v° in the tree satisfy $a \leq \omega$, and so

$$\sum_{t=T+1}^{\infty} \sigma_t \leq \sum_{t=T+1}^{\infty} e^{-t/(3c\omega^2)} \leq \frac{e^{-T/(3c\omega^2)}}{1 - e^{-1/(3c\omega^2)}} = O(\omega^2 e^{-\Theta(\frac{\log n}{\omega^2})}) = O(\zeta^\omega)$$

We now turn to the case where Γ_v contains a unique light cycle C. Let x be the furthest vertex of C from v in Γ_v. This is the only possible place where the random walk is more likely to get closer to v at the next step. We can see this by considering the breadth first construction of Γ_v. Thus we can compare our walk with random walk on $[-a, a]$ where there is a unique value $x < a$ such that only at $\pm x$ is the walk more likely to move towards the origin and even then this probability is at most 2/3. Using results (39), (40) for the unbiased walk on the line, we have

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\exists \tau \leq ca^2 :\ |X_\tau^{(b)}| \geq x) \geq 1 - e^{-1/2}.$$

The probability the particle walks from x to a without returning to the cycle is at least $1/3(a-x)$. Thus

$$\mathbf{Pr}(\exists \tau \leq ca^2 :\ |X_{\tau+a-x}^{(b)}| \geq a) \geq (1 - e^{-1/2})/3a \geq \frac{13}{100a},$$

and so

$$\sigma_t = \mathbf{Pr}(|X_\tau^{(0)}| < a,\ \tau = 0, 1, \ldots, t) \leq (1 - 13/(100a))^{\lfloor t/(2ca^2)\rfloor} \leq e^{-t/(20ca^3)}. \tag{42}$$

As $a \leq \omega$,

$$\sum_{t=T+1}^{\infty} \sigma_t \leq \sum_{t=T+1}^{\infty} e^{-t/(20c\omega^3)} \leq \frac{e^{-T/(20c\omega^3)}}{1 - e^{-1/(20c\omega^3)}} = O\left(\omega^3 e^{-O\left(\frac{\log n}{\omega^3}\right)}\right) = O(\zeta^\omega)$$

□

Condition (a) of Lemma 2

Lemma 12. *For $|z| \le 1+\lambda$, there exists a constant $\psi > 0$ such that $|R_T(z)| \ge \psi$.*

Proof As in Lemma 8, we consider the walk $\mathcal{W}_v^*$ on Γ_v, starting from v, and with absorption at Γ_v°. For this walk, let β_t be the probability of a first return to v at step t, and let r_t^* be the probability of a return to v at step t.

Let $\beta(z) = \sum_{t=1}^{T} \beta_t z^t$, let $\alpha(z) = 1/(1-\beta(z))$, and write $\alpha(z) = \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \alpha_t z^t$. Thus α_t is the probability of a return to v at time t for a walk $\mathcal{W}_v^\dagger$, all of whose excursions from v are length at most T. Observe that $\alpha_t \le r_t^* \le r_t$. We shall prove below that the radius of convergence of $\alpha(z)$ is at least $1 + \Omega(1/\omega^3)$.

We can write

$$\begin{aligned} R_T(z) &= \alpha(z) + Q(z) \\ &= \frac{1}{1-\beta(z)} + Q(z), \end{aligned} \tag{43}$$

where $Q(z) = Q_1(z) + Q_2(z)$, and

$$\begin{aligned} Q_1(z) &= \sum_{t=0}^{T} (r_t - \alpha_t) z^t \\ Q_2(z) &= -\sum_{t=T+1}^{\infty} \alpha_t z^t. \end{aligned}$$

We note that $Q(0) = 0$, $\alpha(0) = 1$ and $\beta(0) = 0$.

We claim that the expression (43) is well defined for $|z| \le 1+\lambda$. We will show below that

$$|Q_2(z)| = o(1) \tag{44}$$

for $|z| \le 1 + 2\lambda$ and thus the radius of convergence of $Q_2(z)$ (and hence $\alpha(z)$) is greater than $1+\lambda$. This will imply that $|\beta(z)| < 1$ for $|z| \le 1+\lambda$. For suppose there exists z_0 such that $|\beta(z_0)| \ge 1$. Then $\beta(|z_0|) \ge |\beta(z_0)| \ge 1$ and we can assume (by scaling) that $\beta(|z_0|) = 1$. We have $\beta(0) < 1$ and so we can assume that $\beta(|z|) < 1$ for $0 \le |z| < |z_0|$. But as ρ approaches 1 from below, (43) is valid for $z = \rho|z_0|$ and then $|R_T(\rho|z_0|)| \to \infty$, contradiction.

Recall that $\lambda = 1/KT$. Clearly $\beta(1) \le 1$ and so for $|z| \le 1+\lambda$

$$\beta(|z|) \le \beta(1+\lambda) \le \beta(1)(1+\lambda)^T \le e^{1/K}.$$

Using $|1/(1-\beta(z))| \ge 1/(1+\beta(|z|))$ we obtain

$$|R_T(z)| \ge \frac{1}{1+\beta(|z|)} - |Q(z)| \ge \frac{1}{1+e^{1/K}} - |Q(z)|. \tag{45}$$

We now prove that $|Q(z)| = o(1)$ for $|z| \leq 1 + \lambda$ and the lemma will follow.

Turning our attention first to $Q_1(z)$, we have

$$|Q_1(z)| \leq (1+\lambda)^T |Q_1(1)| \leq e^{2/K} \sum_{t=0}^{T} |r_t - \alpha_t| \tag{46}$$

From (37), (38) of the proof of Lemma 8, we see that $\sum_{t=0}^{T} |r_t - \alpha_t| = o(1)$, hence $|Q_1(z)| = o(1)$.

We now consider $Q_2(z)$. As in Lemma 8, let r_t^* be the probability that a walk $\mathcal{W}_v^*$ on Γ_v starting at v has not been absorbed at Γ_v° by step t. Then $\alpha_t \leq r_t^* \leq \sigma_t$, so

$$|Q_2(z)| \leq \sum_{t=T+1}^{\infty} \sigma_t |z|^t,$$

In the case where G_v is a tree we can use (41) to prove that the radius of convergence of $Q_2(z)$ is at least $e^{1/(3c\omega^2)} \gg 1 + 2\lambda$. So for $|z| \leq 1 + \lambda$,

$$|Q_2(z)| \leq \sum_{t=T+1}^{\infty} e^{\lambda t - t/(3c\omega^2)} = o(1).$$

In the case that G_v contains a unique cycle, we can use (42) to see that the radius of convergence of $Q_2(z)$ is at least $e^{\frac{1}{20c\omega^3}} \gg 1 + 2\lambda$. So for $|z| \leq 1 + \lambda$,

$$|Q_2(z)| \leq \sum_{t=T+1}^{\infty} e^{\lambda t - t/(20c\omega^3)} = o(1).$$

$\square$