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# On the Cayleyness of bipartite Kneser graphs

# Seyed Morteza Mirafzal\*

Department of Pure Mathematics, Lorestan University, Khorramabad, I. R. Iran

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**Abstract.** For any given  $n, k \in \mathbb{N}$  with 2k < n, the bipartite Kneser graph H(n,k) is defined as the graph whose vertex set is the family of *k*-subsets and (n - k)-subsets of  $[n] = \{1, 2, ..., n\}$  in which any two vertices are adjacent if and only if one of them is a subset of the other. In this paper, we study some algebraic properties of the bipartite Kneser graph H(n,k). In particular, we determine the values of n,k for which the bipartite Kneser graph H(n,k) is a Cayley graph.

**Keywords:** bipartite Kneser graph, vertex-transitive graph, automorphism group, Cayley graph. **Mathematics Subject Classification (2010):** Primary 05C25 Secondary 94C15.

## 1 Introduction

For a positive integer n > 1, let  $[n] = \{1, 2, ..., n\}$  and V be the set of all k-subsets and (n - k)-subsets of [n]. The *bipartite Kneser graph* H(n,k) has V as its vertex set, and vertices A, B are adjacent if and only if  $A \subset B$  or  $B \subset A$ . If n = 2k, it is obvious that we do not have any edges, and in such a case, H(n,k) is a null graph, and hence we assume that  $n \ge 2k + 1$ . It follows from the definition of the graph H(n,k), that it has  $2\binom{n}{k}$  vertices and the degree of each of its vertex is  $\binom{n-k}{k} = \binom{n-k}{n-2k}$ , hence it is a regular graph. It is clear that H(n,k) is a bipartite graph. In fact, if  $V_1 = \{v \in V(H(n,k)) | |v| = k\}$  and  $V_2 = \{v \in V(H(n,k)) | |v| = n - k\}$ , then  $\{V_1, V_2\}$  is a partition of V(H(n,k)) and every edge of H(n,k) has a vertex in  $V_1$  and a vertex in  $V_2$  and  $|V_1| = |V_2|$ .

It is easy to show that the graph H(n,k) is a connected graph. The bipartite Kneser graph

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<sup>\*</sup>Corresponding author(*Emial address*:mirafzal.m@lu.ac.ir)

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H(2n - 1, n - 1) is known as the middle cube  $MQ_{2n-1}$  [19,27] or regular hyper-star graph HS(2n,n) [11,13,16,18]. The graph  $MQ_{2n-1}$  has been studied by various authors and some of the papers about it are [11,13,19,20]. Figure 1. shows the bipartite Kneser graph H(5,2) in the plane. Note that in Figure 1, the set  $\{i, j, k\}$  ( $\{i, j\}$ ) is denoted by *ijk* (*ij*).



Figure 1. Bipartite Kneser graph H(5,2).

In this paper, among various interesting properties of the bipartite Kneser graph H(n,k), we interested in its automorphism group. We want to show how this group acts on the vertex set. Mirafzal [13] determined the automorphism group of  $MQ_{2n-1} = HS(2n,n) = H(2n - 1, n - 1)$  and showed that HS(2n,n) is a vertex-transitive non Cayley graph. Also, he showed that H(2n - 1, n - 1) is arc-transitive. Later, he determined the automorphism group of the graph H(n,k) and show that this graph is a vertex-transitive graph for all values of n,k [16,20]. We think that the following question is an unanswered question;

**Question** For what values of *n*, *k* the bipartite Kneser graph H(n,k) is a Cayley graph?

In this paper, we answer the question.

#### 2 Preliminaries

In this paper, a graph  $\Gamma = (V, E)$  is considered as a finite undirected simple graph, where  $V = V(\Gamma)$  is the vertex set and  $E = E(\Gamma)$  is the edge set. For all the terminology and notation not defined here, we follow [4,5,7].

The graphs  $\Gamma_1 = (V_1, E_1)$  and  $\Gamma_2 = (V_2, E_2)$  are called *isomorphic*, if there is a bijection  $\alpha : V_1 \longrightarrow V_2$  such that  $\{a, b\} \in E_1$  if and only if  $\{\alpha(a), \alpha(b)\} \in E_2$  for all  $a, b \in V_1$ . In such a case the bijection  $\alpha$  is called an isomorphism. An *automorphism* of a graph  $\Gamma$  is an isomorphism of  $\Gamma$  with itself. The set of automorphisms of  $\Gamma$  with the operation of composition of functions is a group, called the *automorphism group* of  $\Gamma$  and denoted by  $Aut(\Gamma)$ .

The group of all permutations of a set V is denoted by Sym(V) or just Sym(n) when

|V| = n. A *permutation group G* on *V* is a subgroup of Sym(V). In this case we say that *G* acts on *V*. If *X* is a graph with vertex set *V*, then we can view each automorphism as a permutation of *V*, and so Aut(X) is a permutation group. If *G* acts on *V*, we say that *G* is *transitive* (or *G* acts *transitively* on *V*), when there is just one orbit. This means that given any two elements *u* and *v* of *V*, there is an element  $\beta$  of *G* such that  $\beta(u) = v$ .

The graph  $\Gamma$  is called *vertex-transitive* if  $Aut(\Gamma)$  acts transitively on  $V(\Gamma)$ . For  $v \in V(\Gamma)$  and  $G = Aut(\Gamma)$ , the stabilizer subgroup  $G_v$  is the subgroup of G consisting of all automorphisms that fix v. In the vertex-transitive case all stabilizer subgroups  $G_v$  are conjugate in G, and consequently isomorphic. In this case, the index of  $G_v$  in G is given by the equation,  $|G:G_v| = \frac{|G|}{|G_v|} = |V(\Gamma)|$ . If each stabilizer  $G_v$  is the identity group, then every element of G, except the identity, does not fix any vertex, and we say that G acts semiregularly on V. We say that G acts regularly on V if and only if G acts transitively and semiregularly on V and in this case we have |V| = |G|.

Let *G* be any abstract finite group with identity 1, and suppose  $\Omega$  is a set of *G*, with the properties:

(i)  $x \in \Omega \Longrightarrow x^{-1} \in \Omega$ ; (ii)  $1 \notin \Omega$ .

The *Cayley graph*  $\Gamma = \Gamma(G; \Omega)$  is the (simple) graph whose vertex-set and edge-set defined as follows :

 $V(\Gamma) = G$ ,  $E(\Gamma) = \{\{g,h\} \mid g^{-1}h \in \Omega\}$ . It can be shown that a connected graph  $\Gamma$  is a Cayley graph if and only if  $Aut(\Gamma)$  contains a subgroup H, such that H acts regularly on  $V(\Gamma)$  [4, chap 16].

#### 3 Main results

**Proposition 3.1.** *The graph* H(n,k) *is a vertex-transitive graph.* 

*Proof.* Let  $[n] = \{1, 2, ..., n\}$ ,  $\Gamma = H(n, k)$  and  $V = V(\Gamma)$ . It is easy to prove that the graph  $\Gamma$  is a regular bipartite graph. In fact, if  $V_1 = \{v \in V | |v| = k\}$  and  $V_2 = \{v \in V | |v| = n - k\}$ , then  $V = V_1 \cup V_2$  and  $|V_1| = |V_2| = {n \choose k}$ , and every edge of  $\Gamma$  has a vertex in  $V_1$  and a vertex in  $V_2$ . Suppose  $u, v \in V$ . In the following steps, we show that  $\Gamma$  is a vertex-transitive graph.

(i) If both vertices *u* and *v* lie in  $V_1$  and  $|u \cap v| = t$ , then we may assume

$$u = \{x_1, \ldots, x_t, u_1, \ldots, u_{k-t}\}$$

and  $v = \{x_1, ..., x_t, v_1, ..., v_{k-t}\}$ , where  $x_i, u_j, v_h \in [n]$ . Let  $\sigma$  be a permutation of Sym([n]) such that  $\sigma(x_i) = x_i, \sigma(u_i) = v_i$  and  $\sigma(w_j) = w_j$ , where  $w_j \in [n] - (u \cup v)$ . Therefore,  $\sigma$  induces an automorphism  $f_{\sigma} : V(\Gamma) \to V(\Gamma)$  by the rule,

$$f_{\sigma}\{x_1,...,x_t,u_1,...,u_{k-t}\} = \{\sigma(x_1),...,\sigma(x_t),\sigma(u_1),...,\sigma(u_{k-t})\}.$$

Hence  $f_{\sigma}(u) = v$ .

(ii) We now assume that both vertices u and v lie in  $V_2$ . We can see by an easy argument that the mapping  $\alpha : V(\Gamma) \to V(\Gamma)$ , defined by the rule  $\alpha(v) = v^c$ , where  $v^c$  is the complement of the set v in [n] (for every v in V), is an automorphism of  $\Gamma$ . Therefore  $\alpha(u), \alpha(v) \in V_1$ , and hence there is an automorphism  $f_{\sigma}$  in  $Aut(\Gamma)$  such that  $f_{\sigma}(\alpha(u)) = \alpha(v)$ . Thus  $(\alpha^{-1}f_{\sigma}\alpha)(u) = v$ , where  $(\alpha^{-1}f_{\sigma}\alpha) \in Aut(\Gamma)$ .

(iii) Now let  $u \in V_1$  and  $v \in V_2$ , thus  $\alpha(v) \in V_1$  and hence there is an automorphism  $f_{\sigma}$  in  $Aut(\Gamma)$  such that  $f_{\sigma}(u) = \alpha(v)$ , thus  $(\alpha^{-1}f_{\sigma})(u) = v$ .

The study of vertex-transitive graphs has a long and rich history in discrete mathematics. Prominent examples of vertex-transitive graphs are Cayley graphs which are important in both theory as well as applications. Some of the recent studies on Cayley graphs include [2,10,12]. Vertex-transitive graphs that are not Cayley graphs, for which we use the abbreviation VTNCG, have been an object of a systematic study since 1980 [3,6]. In trying to recognize whether or not a vertex-transitive graph is a Cayley graph, we are left with the problem of determining whether the automorphism group contains a regular subgroup [4. chapter 16]. The reference [1] is an excellent source for studying graphs that are VTNCG. In particular, determining the automorphism group of a given graph can be very useful in determining whether this graph is a Cayley graph. Although, to find the automorphism group of a graph may be difficult, but it is one of the research area in algebraic graph theory. Some of the recent works include [13-26]. On the automorphism group of the graph H(n,k), we have the following result.

**Theorem 3.2.** [16] Let *n* and *k* be integers with  $\frac{n}{2} > k \ge 1$ , and let  $\Gamma = (V, E) = H(n, k)$  be a bipartite Kneser graph with partition  $V = V_1 \cup V_2$ ,  $V_1 \cap V_2 = \emptyset$ , where  $V_1 = \{v \mid v \in [n], |v| = k\}$  and  $V_2 = \{w \mid w \in [n], |w| = n - k\}$ . Then  $Aut(\Gamma) \cong Sym([n]) \times \mathbb{Z}_2$ , where  $\mathbb{Z}_2$  is the cyclic group of order 2.

We now want to investigate Cayley properties of the bipartite Kneser graph H(n,k). In the first step, we show that if k = 1, then H(n,k) is a Cayley graph.

**Proposition 3.3.** [18] The bipartite Kneser graph H(n, 1) is a Cayley graph.

*Proof.* Let  $[n] = \{1, 2, ..., n\}$ ,  $\Gamma = H(n, 1)$  and  $\Lambda = Cay(\mathbb{D}_{2n}, \Omega)$ , where  $\mathbb{D}_{2n} = \langle a, b | a^n = b^2 = 1, ba = a^{n-1}b \rangle$  is the dihedral group of order 2n, and  $\Omega = \{ab, a^2b, ..., a^{n-1}b\}$ . Note that  $\Omega$  is an inverse-closed subset of  $\mathbb{D}_{2n} - \{1\}$  (note that  $(a^ib)^2 = 1$ ). We show that  $\Lambda$  is isomorphic to the graph H(n, 1). Consider the following mapping f;

$$f: V(\Gamma) \longrightarrow V(\Lambda)$$
$$f(v) = \begin{cases} a^i & v = \{i\}, i \in [n]\\ a^j b & v = [n] - \{j\}, j \in [n]. \end{cases}$$

It is is clear that *f* is a bijective mapping. Let  $\{i\}$  and  $[n] - \{j\}$  be two vertices of  $\Gamma$ , then

$$\{i\} \leftrightarrow [n] - \{j\} \Leftrightarrow \{i\} \subset [n] - \{j\} \Leftrightarrow i \neq j$$

$$\Leftrightarrow (a^i)^{-1}a^jb \in \Omega \Leftrightarrow a^i \leftrightarrow a^jb.$$

Note that if i = j then  $(a^i)^{-1}a^jb = b \notin \Omega$ . Therefore  $H(n, 1) \cong \Lambda = Cay(\mathbb{D}_{2n}, \Omega)$ .

#### **4** Direct products of graphs

If  $\Gamma_1, \Gamma_2$  are graphs, then their direct product is the graph  $\Gamma_1 \times \Gamma_2$  with vertex set

$$\{(v_1, v_2) \mid v_1 \in \Gamma_1, v_2 \in \Gamma_2\}$$

and for which vertices  $(v_1, v_2)$  and  $(w_1, w_2)$  are adjacent precisely if  $v_1$  is adjacent to  $w_1$  in  $\Gamma_1$  and  $v_2$  is adjacent to  $w_2$  in  $\Gamma_2$ . It can be shown that the direct product is commutative and associative [8]. The following theorem, first proved by Weichsel (1962) characterizes connectedness in direct products of two factors [8].

**Theorem 4.1.** [8] Suppose  $\Gamma_1$  and  $\Gamma_2$  are connected nontrivial graphs. If at least one of  $\Gamma_1$  or  $\Gamma_2$  has an odd cycle, then  $\Gamma_1 \times \Gamma_2$  is connected. If both  $\Gamma_1$  and  $\Gamma_2$  are bipartite, then  $\Gamma_1 \times \Gamma_2$  has exactly two components.

We need the following theorem in the sequel.

**Theorem 4.2.** Let  $G_1$  and  $G_2$  be groups,  $S_1 \subset G_1$ ,  $S_2 \subset G_2$ ,  $S_1 = S_1^{-1}$ ,  $S_2 = S_2^{-1}$  and  $1 \notin S_1$ ,  $1 \notin S_2$ . *Then* 

$$Cay(G_1, S_1) \times Cay(G_1, S_1) = Cay(G_1 \times G_2, S_1 \times S_2)$$

where  $G_1 \times G_2$  is the direct product of groups  $G_1$  and  $G_2$ .

*Proof.* The proof is straightforward.

We recall that, the *Kneser graph* K(n,k) is the graph with the familiy of *k*-subsets of [n] as its vertex-set, in which two vertices v, w are agjacent when  $v \cap w = \emptyset$ . We now want to investigate Cayley properties of the bipartite Kneser graph H(n,k). In the first step, we show that if k = 1, then H(n,k) is a Cayley graph.

**Theorem 4.3.** Let n,k be positive integers and  $K_2$  be the complete graph on the set  $\{0,1\}$ . Then for the bipartite Kneser graph H(n,k), we have

$$H(n,k) \cong K(n,k) \times K_2.$$

*Proof.* We define the mapping  $f : V(H(n,k)) \to V(K(n,k) \times K_2)$  by the rule

$$f(v) = \begin{cases} (v,0) & if \quad |v| = k \\ (v^{c},1) & if \quad |v| = n - k, \end{cases}$$

where  $v^c$  is the complement of the set v in the set [n]. It is an easy task to show that f is a bijection. Let  $\{v, w\}$  be an edge in the graph H(n,k), with |v| = k, then  $v \subset w$ , and hence  $v \cap w^c = \emptyset$ . Therefore v and  $w^c$  are adjacent vertices in the Kneser graph K(n,k). Hence f(v) = (v,0) and  $f(w) = (w^c, 1)$  are adjacent vertices in the graph  $K(n,k) \times K_2$ .

It is not difficult to show that the Kneser graph K(n,k) has odd cycles, hence we can deduce by Theorem 3.4, Theorem 3.5 and Theorem 3.6 that the bipartite Kneser graph H(n,k) is a connected graph.

*Remark* 1. Note that  $K_2 = Cay(\mathbb{Z}_2, S)$ , where  $S = \{1\}$ . Therefore, if for some n, k the Kneser graph K(n,k) is a Cayley graph, then by Theorem 3.5. and Theorem 3.6. we conclude that the bipartite Kneser graph H(n,k) is a Cayley graph.

We are now ready to determine for what values of n,k the bipartite Kneser graph H(n,k) is a Cayley graph.

A permutation group *G*, acting on a set V(|V| = n) is *k*-homogeneous if its induced action on  $V^{\{k\}}$  is transitive, where  $V^{\{k\}}$  is the set of all *k*-subsets of *V*. Also we say that *G* is *ktransitive* if *G* is transitive on  $V^{(k)}$ , where  $V^{(k)}$  is the set of *k*-tuples of distinct elements of *V*. Note that if *G* is *k*-homogeneous, then we have  $\binom{n}{k} |G|$  and if *G* is *k*-transitive, then we have  $\frac{n!}{(n-k)!} |G|$ . If the group *G* acts regularly on  $V^{(k)}$ , then *G* is said to be sharply *k*-transitive on *V*. This means that for given two *k*-tuples in  $V^{(k)}$ , there is a unique permutation in *G* mapping one *k*-tuple to the other. In this scope, we have the following result [5. Theorem 9.4B, 9] which is a deep result in group theory.

**Theorem 4.4.** Let *G* be a *k*-homogeneous group on a finite set  $\Omega$ ,  $|\Omega| = n$ , where  $2 \le k \le \frac{n}{2}$ . Then *G* is (k-1)-transitive, and with the following exceptions *G* is *m*-transitive:

(a) k = 4 and,  $G = PGL_2(8)$ ,  $P\Gamma L_2(8)$ ,  $P\Gamma L_2(32)$ ;

- (b)  $k = 3 \text{ and}, PSL_2(q) \le G \le P\Sigma L_1(q), q \equiv 3 \pmod{4};$
- (c) k = 3 and,  $G = AGL_1(8)$ ,  $A\Gamma L_1(8)$ ,  $A\Gamma L_1(32)$ ;
- (d)  $k = 2 \text{ and}, ASL_1(q) \le G \le A\Sigma L_1(q), q \equiv 3 \pmod{4}.$

Godsil [6], by using the above theorem, proved the following result.

**Theorem 4.5.** [6] *Except in the following cases, the Kneser graph* K(n,k) *is not a Cayley graph.* 

- (1) k = 2, *n* is a prime-power and  $n \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$ .
- (2) k = 2, n = 8 or 32.

We are now ready to prove the following important result.

**Theorem 4.6.** Let  $n \ge 5$  and  $k \ge 2$ . If  $\Gamma = H(n,k)$  is a bipartite Kneser graph, then except in the following cases, the graph  $\Gamma$  is not a Cayley graph:

- (1) k = 2, *n* is a prime-power and  $n \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$ .
- (2) k = 2, n = 8 or 32.

*Proof.* We know by Theorem 3.2, that  $Aut(H(n,k)) = H = \{f_{\gamma}\alpha^i \mid \gamma \in Sym([n]), 0 \le i \le 1\} (\cong Sym([n]) \times \mathbb{Z}_2)$ , where  $\alpha$  and  $f_{\gamma}$  are automorphisms of the graph  $\Gamma$  which are defined in Proposition 3.1. Suppose that  $\Gamma = H(n,k)$  is a Cayley graph. Then, Aut(H(n,k)) has a subgroup R such that R acts regularly on the set V(H(n,k)). Then  $|R| = |V(\Gamma)| = 2\binom{n}{k} = 2\frac{n!}{(k!)(n-k)!}$ . If r is an element of R, then by Theorem 3.7 r has a form such as  $f_{\sigma}\alpha^i$ , where  $\sigma \in Sym([n])$  and  $i \in \{0,1\}$ . It is an easy task to show that  $\alpha f_{\sigma} = f_{\sigma}\alpha$ , for every  $\sigma \in Sym([n])[16]$ . If  $f_{\sigma}\alpha^i \in R$ , then

$$(f_{\sigma}\alpha^{i})(f_{\sigma}\alpha^{i}) = f_{\sigma}f_{\sigma}(\alpha^{i})^{2} = f_{\sigma}^{2} = f_{\sigma^{2}} \in \mathbb{R}.$$

Then there are elements of the form  $f_{\theta}$ ,  $\theta \in Sym([n])$  in R. Let  $M_1 = \{f_{\phi} \mid f_{\phi} \in R\}$ , we can easily see that  $M_1$  is a subgroup of R. Since R acts transitively on V(H(n,k)), hence R contains elements of the form  $f_{\theta}\alpha$ . We let  $M_2 = \{f_{\theta}\alpha \mid f_{\theta}\alpha \in R\}$ . Let  $f_{\theta_0}\alpha$  be a fixed element of  $M_2$ . Then  $M_2f_{\theta_0}\alpha \subseteq M_1$ , because  $(f_{\theta}\alpha)(f_{\theta_0}\alpha) = f_{\theta}f_{\theta_0}(\alpha)^2 = f_{\theta}f_{\theta_0} = f_{\theta\theta_0}$ . Then,  $|M_2| \leq |M_1|$ . Since  $M_1f_{\theta_0}\alpha \subseteq M_2$ ,  $|M_1| \leq |M_2|$ , and hence  $|M_1| = |M_2| = (1/2)|R| = {n \choose k}$ . We can see that the group  $M_1$  is transitive on the set  $V_1 = \{v \mid v \subset [n], |v| = k\}$ . Moreover, we can see that  $M_1$  is a subgroup of the automorphism group of the Kneser graph K(n,k) that acts regularly on its vertex-set. In other words, the Kneser graph K(n,k) is a Cayley graph. Now, by Theorem 3.9 and Remark 1 the result follows.

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