

## 1 Abstract group theory

Much of the material in this chapter is in the syllabus for the level 3 course MAS305 Algebraic Structures II, and will therefore be treated mainly as revision. However, in practice not all of it may have been covered thoroughly in Algebraic Structures II, so please let me know how much detail you require me to give in the lectures as we go along. Also let me know if there are significant parts you have not seen before, that you need me to cover in more detail.

### 1.1 Groups, subgroups and cosets

**Definition 1.1** A *group* is a (finite) set  $G$  with an *identity* element  $1$ , a (binary) *multiplication*  $x.y$  (or  $xy$ ) and a (unary) *inverse*  $x^{-1}$  satisfying the *associative law*  $(xy)z = x(yz)$ , the *identity laws*  $x1 = 1x = x$  and the *inverse laws*  $xx^{-1} = x^{-1}x = 1$  for all  $x, y, z \in G$  (and the *closure laws*  $xy \in G$  and  $x^{-1} \in G$  which we take for granted). It is *abelian* if  $xy = yx$  for all  $x, y \in G$ , *non-abelian* otherwise.

**Definition 1.2** A *subgroup* is a subset  $H$  closed under multiplication and inverses. (It is sufficient to check  $xy^{-1} \in H$  for all  $x, y \in H$ . For then  $xx^{-1} = 1 \in H$ , so  $1.y^{-1} = y^{-1} \in H$ , and then  $x.(y^{-1})^{-1} \in H$ .) *Left cosets* of  $H$  in  $G$  are subsets  $gH = \{gh \mid h \in H\}$  and *right cosets* are  $Hg = \{hg \mid h \in H\}$ .

The left (or right) cosets all have the same size, and partition  $G$ , so that  $|G| = |H||G : H|$  (*Lagrange's Theorem*), where  $|G|$  is the *order* of  $G$  (i.e. the number of elements in  $G$ ) and  $|G : H|$  is the *index* of  $H$  in  $G$ , i.e. the number of left (or right) cosets.

**Definition 1.3** If  $S$  is a set of elements of a group  $G$ , then the subgroup generated by  $S$ , written  $\langle S \rangle$ , is the smallest subgroup of  $G$  which contains all these elements. I.e.  $\langle S \rangle$  contains all elements  $x_1^{\pm 1}.x_2^{\pm 1}.\dots.x_k^{\pm 1}$  for  $x_i \in S$ . Cyclic groups are generated by a single element  $g$ . Thus  $\langle g \rangle = \{1, g, g^2, \dots\}$ . If  $n$  is the smallest positive integer with  $g^n = 1$ , then  $\langle g \rangle = \{1, g, g^2, \dots, g^{n-1}\}$ . Then  $n$  is the *order* of  $g$ .

**Definition 1.4** The *exponent* of  $G$  is the lowest common multiple of the orders of the elements, that is the smallest positive integer  $e$  such that  $g^e = 1$  for all  $g \in G$ .

## 1.2 Homomorphisms and quotient groups

**Definition 1.5** A *homomorphism* is a map  $\phi : G \rightarrow H$  which preserves the multiplication,  $\phi(xy) = \phi(x)\phi(y)$  (from which it follows that  $\phi(1) = 1$  and  $\phi(x^{-1}) = \phi(x)^{-1}$ ). The *kernel* of  $\phi$  is  $\ker\phi = \{g \in G \mid \phi(g) = 1\}$ , and is a subgroup which satisfies  $g(\ker\phi) = (\ker\phi)g$ , i.e. its left and right cosets are equal (such a subgroup  $N$  is called *normal*, written  $N \trianglelefteq G$ , or  $N \triangleleft G$  if also  $N \neq G$ ). An *isomorphism* is a bijective homomorphism, i.e. one satisfying  $\ker\phi = \{1\}$  and  $\phi(G) = H$ : in this case we write  $G \cong H$ .

**Definition 1.6** If  $N$  is a normal subgroup of  $G$ , the *quotient* group  $G/N$  has elements  $xN$  (for all  $x \in G$ ) and group operations  $(xN)(yN) = (xy)N$ , and  $(xN)^{-1} = x^{-1}N$ .

**Theorem 1.7** (*First isomorphism theorem*). If  $\phi : G \rightarrow H$  is a homomorphism then the image of  $\phi$ ,  $\phi(G) \cong G/\ker\phi$  (and the isomorphism is given by  $\phi(x) \mapsto x\ker\phi$ ).

**Theorem 1.8** (*Correspondence theorem*). The subgroups  $H/N$  of  $G/N$  are in one-to-one correspondence with the subgroups  $H$  of  $G$  which contain  $N$ . The normal subgroups of  $G/N$  are in one-to-one correspondence with the normal subgroups  $K$  of  $G$  which contain  $N$ .

**Theorem 1.9** (*Second isomorphism theorem*).  $(G/N)/(K/N) \cong G/K$ .

*Proof.* Let  $\phi : G/N \rightarrow G/K$  be defined by  $\phi(gN) = (gK)$ . This is well-defined because  $N \subseteq K$ , and is obviously a group homomorphism. Its kernel is  $\{gN \mid gK = K, \text{ i.e. } g \in K\} = K/N$ , so the result follows by the first isomorphism theorem.  $\square$

If  $H$  is any subgroup of  $G$ , and  $N$  is any normal subgroup of  $G$ , then  $HN = \{xy \mid x \in H, y \in N\}$  is a subgroup of  $G$  and  $N \cap H$  is a normal subgroup of  $H$ .

**Theorem 1.10** (*Third isomorphism theorem*).  $HN/N \cong H/(N \cap H)$ .

*Proof.* Let  $\phi : H \rightarrow KH/K$  be defined by  $\phi(h) = hK = Kh$ . This is obviously a group homomorphism, and its kernel is  $\{h \in H \mid hK = K, \text{ i.e. } h \in K\} = H \cap K$ .  $\square$

**Example 1.11** To illustrate the first isomorphism theorem, consider the symmetric group  $S_3 = \{1, (1,2,3), (1,3,2), (1,2), (1,3), (2,3)\}$  and its normal subgroup the alternating group  $A_3 = \{1, (1,2,3), (1,3,2)\} \cong C_3$ . The multiplication table of  $S_3$  looks like this:

1	(1,2,3)	(1,3,2)	(1,2)	(2,3)	(1,3)
(1,2,3)	(1,3,2)	1	(2,3)	(1,3)	(1,2)
(1,3,2)	1	(1,2,3)	(1,3)	(1,2)	(2,3)
(1,2)	(1,3)	(2,3)	1	(1,3,2)	(1,2,3)
(2,3)	(1,2)	(1,3)	(1,2,3)	1	(1,3,2)
(1,3)	(2,3)	(1,2)	(1,3,2)	(1,2,3)	1

The four boxes enclose the cosets  $A_3$  and  $A_3(1,2) = (1,2)A_3$  and show the multiplication table of  $S_3/A_3 \cong C_2$ .

**Example 1.12**  $S_4$  has a subgroup  $V = \{1, (1,2)(3,4), (1,3)(2,4), (1,4)(2,3)\}$ , which is normal.

$$\begin{aligned} V.(1,2,3) &= \{(1,2,3), (1,3,4), (2,4,3), (1,4,2)\} \\ &= V.(1,3,4) = V.(2,4,3) = V.(1,4,2) \\ &= (1,2,3).V \end{aligned}$$

The six cosets of  $V$  are  $V, V.(1,2,3), V.(1,3,2), V.(1,2), V.(2,3), V.(1,3)$ , so we see  $S_4/V \cong S_3$ . To illustrate the correspondence theorem,  $A_3$  normal in  $S_3$  corresponds to  $A_4$  normal in  $S_4$ . A subgroup  $S_2$  of  $S_3$  corresponds to a subgroup  $D_8$  of  $S_4$ .

### 1.3 Simple groups and composition series

**Definition 1.13** A group  $S$  is *simple* if it has exactly two normal subgroups (1 and  $S$ ).

In particular, an abelian group is simple if and only if it has prime order. A series

$$1 = G_0 \triangleleft G_1 \triangleleft G_2 \triangleleft \cdots \triangleleft G_{n-1} \triangleleft G_n = G \quad (1)$$

for a group  $G$  is called a *composition series* if all the factors  $G_i/G_{i-1}$  are simple (and they are then called *composition factors*). A *normal series* is one in which all terms  $G_i$  are normal in  $G$ , and if it has no proper refinements it is called a *chief series*, and its factors  $G_i/G_{i-1}$  *chief factors*.

**Example 1.14**  $S_4$  has a composition series

$$1 \triangleleft C_2 \triangleleft V \triangleleft A_4 \triangleleft S_4$$

and the composition factors are  $C_2, C_2, C_3$  and  $C_2$ . It has a chief series

$$1 \triangleleft V \triangleleft A_4 \triangleleft S_4$$

since  $C_2$  is not normal in  $S_4$ .

**Theorem 1.15** (*Fourth isomorphism theorem, or Zassenhaus's butterfly lemma*). If  $X \triangleleft Y \leq G$  and  $A \triangleleft B \leq G$  then

$$\frac{(Y \cap B)X}{(Y \cap A)X} \cong \frac{(Y \cap B)}{(Y \cap A)(X \cap B)} \cong \frac{(Y \cap B)A}{(X \cap B)A}.$$

*Proof.* Define the map  $\phi : Y \cap B \rightarrow (Y \cap B)X/(Y \cap A)X$  by  $\phi(y) = y(Y \cap A)X$ . This is easily seen to be a group homomorphism (exercise: where does this use the fact that  $X \triangleleft Y$ ? Where does it use the fact that  $A \triangleleft B$ ?). Moreover, since  $Y \cap A \subseteq Y \cap B$ , it is easy to see that the image of  $\phi$  is  $(Y \cap B)X/(Y \cap A)X$ . The tricky part of the proof is to identify the kernel of  $\phi$ : we need to prove that  $\ker \phi = (Y \cap A)(X \cap B)$ . On the one hand, if  $y \in Y \cap A$  then  $\phi(y)$  is the identity coset  $(Y \cap A)X$ . Similarly, if  $y \in X \cap B$  then

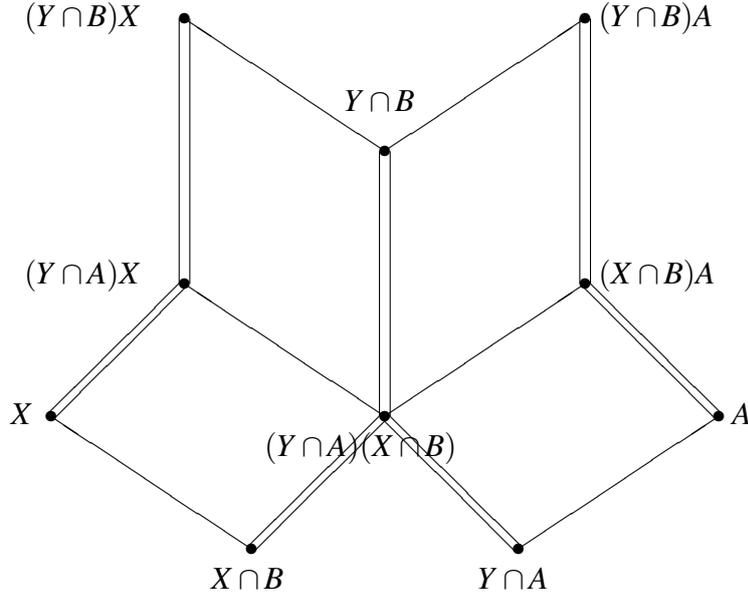


Figure 1: Zassenhaus's butterfly

$\phi(y) = y(Y \cap A)X \subseteq X(Y \cap A)X \subseteq (Y \cap A)X$  since  $X \triangleleft Y$ . Therefore  $(Y \cap A)(X \cap B) \subseteq \ker \phi$ . Conversely, if  $y \in \ker \phi$  then  $y \in (Y \cap A)X$ , so we can write  $y = ax$  with  $a \in Y \cap A$  and  $x \in X$ . But now  $y \in B$  and  $a \in B$  so  $x \in B$  and therefore  $y \in (Y \cap A)(X \cap B)$ , showing that  $\ker \phi \subseteq (Y \cap A)(X \cap B)$ . So we have  $\ker \phi = (Y \cap A)(X \cap B)$  and the result follows from the first isomorphism theorem.  $\square$

In Figure 1, single lines represent subgroups, and double lines represent normal subgroups. For example,  $X$  is normal in  $(Y \cap A)X$ , since  $X$  is normal in  $Y$ , but  $X \cap B$  is not necessarily normal in  $X$ . More accurately, the double lines represent *quotient groups*, and any two parallel double lines represent isomorphic quotient groups. The isomorphisms of the vertical lines are given by Zassenhaus's butterfly lemma. The bottom two parallelograms consist of two instances of isomorphisms of the form  $PQ/Q \cong P/(P \cap Q)$ . Indeed, so do the top two parallelograms, although this is not so easy to see.

To prove the last statement (and hence get an alternative proof of Zassenhaus's lemma using the third isomorphism theorem) use the so-called *Dedekind modular law*

**Theorem 1.16** (*Dedekind modular law*). *If  $P$ ,  $Q$ , and  $R$  are subgroups of a group  $G$ , and  $R \subseteq P$ , then  $P \cap (QR) = (P \cap Q)R$ .*

*Proof.* If  $x \in (P \cap Q)R$  then  $x = yz$  with  $y \in P \cap Q \subseteq P$  and  $z \in R \subseteq P$ , so  $x \in P$ ; clearly  $x \in QR$ , so  $x \in P \cap (QR)$ . Conversely, if  $x \in P \cap (QR)$  then  $x = qr$  with  $q \in Q$  and  $r \in R \subseteq P$ , and therefore  $q = xr^{-1} \in P$ , so  $x \in (P \cap Q)R$ .  $\square$

Now to deduce Zassenhaus's lemma, observe that by Dedekind's law,  $(Y \cap B) \cap A(X \cap B) = (Y \cap B \cap A)(X \cap B) = (Y \cap A)(X \cap B)$ . Then the result follows from the third isomorphism theorem.

We use Zassenhaus's lemma to prove the Jordan–Hölder theorem.

**Theorem 1.17** (*Jordan–Hölder Theorem*). *Any two series for  $G$  have isomorphic refinements, and by induction on the length of a composition series, any two composition series for a finite group have the same composition factors, counted with multiplicities.*

*Proof.* If

$$\begin{aligned} 1 = G_0 \triangleleft G_1 \triangleleft G_2 \triangleleft \cdots \triangleleft G_{n-1} \triangleleft G_n = G \\ 1 = H_0 \triangleleft H_1 \triangleleft H_2 \triangleleft \cdots \triangleleft H_{m-1} \triangleleft H_m = G \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

are two composition series of  $G$ , then we use the second series to refine the first: in the gap between  $G_i$  and  $G_{i+1}$  we put the series

$$\begin{aligned} G_i = (G_{i+1} \cap H_0)G_i \trianglelefteq (G_{i+1} \cap H_1)G_i \trianglelefteq (G_{i+1} \cap H_2)G_i \trianglelefteq \\ \cdots \trianglelefteq (G_{i+1} \cap H_{m-1})G_i \trianglelefteq (G_{i+1} \cap H_m)G_i = G_{i+1} \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

Similarly, we use the first series to refine the second: in the gap between  $H_j$  and  $H_{j+1}$  we put the series

$$\begin{aligned} H_j = (H_{j+1} \cap G_0)H_j \trianglelefteq (H_{j+1} \cap G_1)H_j \trianglelefteq (H_{j+1} \cap G_2)H_j \trianglelefteq \\ \cdots \trianglelefteq (H_{j+1} \cap G_{n-1})H_j \trianglelefteq (H_{j+1} \cap G_n)H_j = H_{j+1} \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

Then Zassenhaus's lemma says the quotients in the refinement of the first series are equal (in some order) to the quotients in the refinement of the second series. Most of these quotients will be the trivial group: deleting repetitions gives back the two composition series.  $\square$

## 1.4 Soluble groups

**Definition 1.18** A group is *soluble* if it has a composition series with abelian (hence cyclic of prime order) composition factors. A *commutator* is an element  $x^{-1}y^{-1}xy$ , denoted  $[x, y]$ , and the subgroup generated by all commutators  $[x, y]$  of elements  $x, y \in G$  is the *commutator subgroup* (or *derived subgroup*), written  $[G, G]$  or  $G'$ .

Writing  $G^{(0)} = G$  and  $G^{(n)} = (G^{(n-1)})'$ , it follows that  $G$  is soluble if and only if  $G^{(n)} = 1$  for some  $n$ . It is easy to see that  $G' \trianglelefteq G$ . Also  $G/G'$  is the *largest abelian quotient* of  $G$ , in the sense that

**Theorem 1.19**  $G/N$  is abelian if and only if  $N$  contains  $G'$ .

*Proof.* First assume  $G/N$  is abelian, so  $gN.hN = hN.gN$  for all  $g, h \in G$ . Therefore  $gh.N = hg.N$ , so  $g^{-1}h^{-1}ghN = N$ , so  $[g, h] \in N$ . Conversely, if  $[g, h] \in N$  then reversing the steps of the argument gives  $gN.hN = hN.gN$ , so  $G/N$  is abelian.  $\square$

## 1.5 Group actions and conjugacy classes

The *right regular representation* of a group  $G$  is the identification of each element  $g \in G$  with the permutation  $x \mapsto xg$  of the elements of  $G$ . This shows that

**Theorem 1.20** (*Cayley's theorem*). *Every finite group is isomorphic to a group of permutations*

If  $G$  is a group of permutations on a set  $\Omega$ , and  $a \in \Omega$ , the *stabilizer* of  $a$  is the subgroup  $H$  of all permutations in  $G$  which map  $a$  to itself. (Exercise: verify that  $H$  is a subgroup.) Then Lagrange's theorem can be re-written as

**Theorem 1.21** (*Orbit-stabilizer theorem*).  $|G|/|H|$  equals the number of images of  $a$  under  $G$  (i.e. the length of the orbit of  $a$ ).

*Proof.* Indeed, there is a natural bijection between the orbit  $\Omega$  and the set  $\{Hg \mid g \in G\}$  of (right) cosets of the stabilizer  $H$  of a point  $a \in \Omega$ , given by  $Hg \leftrightarrow a^g$ . This is well-defined and injective (one-to-one) because  $Hg = Hk$  iff  $gk^{-1} \in H$ , iff  $a^{gk^{-1}} = a$ , iff  $a^g = a^k$ . It is surjective (onto) by definition, so is a bijection.  $\square$

More generally, we say a group  $G$  *acts on* a set  $\Omega$  if there is a homomorphism  $\phi$  from  $G$  to a subgroup of  $\text{Sym}\Omega$ . If  $\ker\phi = 1$  we say the action is *faithful*; in this case  $G$  is isomorphic to the image of  $\phi$ , and we might as well say  $G = \text{im}\phi$ .

**Example 1.22** Now let  $G$  act on itself by conjugation,  $g : x \mapsto g^{-1}xg$ , so that the orbits are the *conjugacy classes*  $[x] = \{g^{-1}xg \mid g \in G\}$ , and the stabilizer of  $x$  is the *centralizer* of  $x$ ,  $C_G(x) = \{g \in G \mid g^{-1}xg = x\}$ . In particular, the conjugacy classes partition  $G$ , and their sizes divide the order of  $G$ . Also, the centralizer of any element is a subgroup of  $G$ .

An element  $x$  is in a conjugacy class of size 1 if and only if  $x$  *commutes* with every element of  $G$ , i.e.  $x \in Z(G) = \{y \in G \mid g^{-1}yg = y \text{ for all } g \in G\}$ , the *centre* of  $G$ , which is a normal subgroup of  $G$ . Indeed, the centre of  $G$  is exactly the kernel of the given action. Notice that  $Z(G) = G$  if and only if  $G$  is abelian.

**Definition 1.23** If  $H \leq G$ , define  $N_G(H) = \{x \in G \mid H^x = H\}$ , the *normalizer* in  $G$  of  $H$ .

It is a subgroup because it is the stabilizer of  $H$  in the action of  $G$  by conjugation on the conjugates  $H^g$  of  $H$ . It is the largest subgroup of  $G$  in which  $H$  is normal.

## 1.6 $p$ -groups and nilpotent groups

**Example 1.24**  $G = D_8 = \langle (1, 2, 3, 4), (1, 3) \rangle$  has centre  $Z = Z(D_8) = \{1, (1, 3)(2, 4)\}$ . Then the quotient

$$D_8/Z = \{Z, Z(1, 3), Z(1, 2)(3, 4), Z(1, 2, 3, 4)\} \cong V,$$

the Klein four-group. In particular,  $V$  is abelian, so  $Z(V) = V$ . In other words the centre of  $D/Z$  is given by  $Z(D_8/Z(D_8)) = D_8/Z(D_8)$ .

More generally, for any group  $G$  we can define  $Z_1(G) = Z(G)$  and  $Z_n(G)/Z_{n-1}(G) = Z(G/Z_{n-1}(G))$ . We prove by induction on  $n$  that  $Z_n(G) \trianglelefteq G$ . For if  $Z_i(G) \trianglelefteq G$  then  $Z(G/Z_i(G)) \trianglelefteq G/Z_i(G)$  so by the correspondence theorem,  $Z_{i+1}(G) \trianglelefteq G$ .

**Definition 1.25** A finite group is called a  $p$ -group if its order is a power of the prime  $p$  (and so by Lagrange's Theorem all its elements have order some power of  $p$ ).

Every conjugacy class in  $G$  has  $p^a$  elements for some  $a$ , and  $\{1\}$  is a conjugacy class, so there are at least  $p$  conjugacy classes of size 1, and  $Z(G)$  has order at least  $p$ . Therefore by induction, if  $G$  is a  $p$ -group then  $Z_n(G) = G$  for some  $n$ .

**Definition 1.26** A group with this property  $Z_n(G) = G$  (for some  $n$ ) is called *nilpotent* (of class at most  $n$ ), and the series

$$1 = Z_0(G) \triangleleft Z_1(G) \triangleleft Z_2(G) \triangleleft \cdots$$

is called the *upper central series*.

**Theorem 1.27** (Cauchy's theorem). If  $q$  is a prime, and  $q$  divides the order of the group  $G$ , then  $G$  contains an element of order  $q$ .

*Proof.* Let  $\Omega = \{(g_1, \dots, g_q) \mid g_i \in G, g_1 g_2 \cdots g_q = 1\}$ . Then  $|\Omega| = |G|^{q-1}$  so is divisible by  $q$ . Let  $C_q = \langle x \rangle$  act on  $\Omega$  by  $x : (g_1, \dots, g_q) \mapsto (g_q, g_1, \dots, g_{q-1})$ . This is an action because  $g_1 g_2 \cdots g_q = 1$  implies

$$1 = g_1^{-1} g_1 g_2 \cdots g_q g_1 = g_2 g_3 \cdots g_q g_1.$$

The orbit lengths divide the order of the group  $C_q$ , so are 1 or  $q$ . Now  $\{(1, 1, \dots, 1)\}$  is an orbit of length 1, so there are at least  $q - 1$  other orbits of length 1. Any such orbit is  $\{(g, g, \dots, g)\}$  with  $q^q = 1$  but  $g \neq 1$ .  $\square$

A consequence of this is that any group all of whose elements have order a power of  $p$ , has order a power of  $p$ . For otherwise, there is a prime  $q$  dividing the order of  $G$ , so by Cauchy's theorem  $G$  has elements of order  $q$ .

**Definition 1.28** The *direct product*  $G_1 \times \cdots \times G_k$  of groups  $G_1, \dots, G_k$  is defined on the set  $\{(g_1, \dots, g_k) \mid g_i \in G_i\}$  by the group operations  $(g_1, \dots, g_k)^{-1} = (g_1^{-1}, \dots, g_k^{-1})$  and  $(g_1, \dots, g_k)(h_1, \dots, h_k) = (g_1 h_1, \dots, g_k h_k)$ .

**Theorem 1.29** A finite group is nilpotent if and only if it is a direct product of  $p$ -groups.

*Proof.* A proof in one direction follows from the fact that if  $G$  and  $H$  are nilpotent then  $G \times H$  is nilpotent. This is because  $Z(G \times H) = Z(G) \times Z(H)$ . For  $(x, y) \in Z(G \times H)$  iff  $(x, y)(g, h) = (g, h)(x, y)$  for all  $(g, h) \in G \times H$ , iff  $(xg, yh) = (gx, hy)$ , iff  $xg = gx$  and  $yh = hy$ , iff  $x \in Z(G)$  and  $y \in Z(H)$ , iff  $(x, y) \in Z(G) \times Z(H)$ . (We shall not give the proof in the other direction.)  $\square$

**Theorem 1.30**  $G/Z(G)$  is not cyclic (unless it is trivial, in which case  $G$  is abelian).

*Proof.* If  $G/Z(G)$  is cyclic, generated by  $xZ$ , say, where  $Z = Z(G)$ , then  $G/Z = \{Z, xZ, x^2Z, \dots\}$  so every element of  $G$  is of the form  $x^kz$  for some integer  $k$  and some  $z \in Z$ . But then  $x^kz_1 \cdot x^n z_2 = x^{k+n}z_2 \cdot x^kz_1$  so  $G$  is abelian, i.e.  $G = Z(G)$ .  $\square$

**Example 1.31** Non-abelian groups of order  $p^3$ . Such a group  $G$  must have centre of order  $p$ , since centres of order 1 or  $p^2$  are excluded by the above theorems. Moreover,  $G/Z(G)$  is non-cyclic, so isomorphic to  $C_p \times C_p$ . So if we take generators  $xZ$  and  $yZ$  for  $G/Z$  then we have  $1 \neq [x, y] \in Z$ , so  $z = [x, y]$  generates  $Z = Z(G)$ . We now have  $x^p, y^p \in Z$ , and there are various possibilities for which powers of  $z$  these are.

- (a)  $x^p = y^p = 1$ . Then we have specified the group multiplication completely, so there is a unique group of this form. For  $p = 2$  it is  $D_8$ . For  $p$  odd we calculate

$$\begin{aligned} (xy)^p &= xyxyxy \cdots xy \\ &= [y^{-1}, x^{-1}]^{p(p-1)/2} x^p y^p \\ &= 1 \end{aligned}$$

where the commutator  $[y^{-1}, x^{-1}]$  appears once for each time a  $y$  and an  $x$  are swapped: a total of  $1 + 2 + 3 + \cdots + (p-1)$  times. So we see that  $xy$  has order  $p$ , and by induction so do all elements  $x^k y$ . Therefore all non-trivial elements of the group have order  $p$ .

- (b)  $x^p = 1, y^p \neq 1$ . In this case, note that  $[x^k, y] = z^k$ : proof by induction on  $k$ . True for  $k = 1$ . Then

$$\begin{aligned} [x^{k+1}, y] &= x^{-k-1} y^{-1} x^{k+1} y \\ &= x^{-k} x^{-1} y^{-1} x y y^{-1} x^k y \\ &= x^{-k} z y^{-1} x^k y \\ &= z x^{-k} y^{-1} x^k y \\ &= z^{k+1} \end{aligned}$$

which completes the proof. Hence, replacing  $x$  by a suitable power of itself, we can assume that  $y^p = z$ . Again, the group is now specified completely. In the case  $p = 2$  it is  $D_8$  again. In the case  $p$  odd, it has elements of order  $p^2$ , so is definitely a different group from the first case.

- (c) Both  $x^p \neq 1$  and  $y^p \neq 1$ . By the same argument as above, we can assume that  $y^p = z$ , and applying the argument again,  $x^p = z$ . So the group is completely determined. In the case  $p = 2$ , this group is the quaternion group  $Q_8$ . For  $p$  odd, it is the same group as in the previous case. To see this, the calculation as in the first case gives  $(xy)^p = x^p y^p$  and similarly  $(xy^{-1})^p = x^p y^{-p} = 1$ .

Thus for every  $p$  there are exactly two non-abelian groups of order  $p^3$ .

## 1.7 Sylow's theorems

**Theorem 1.32** (*Sylow's theorems*) *If  $G$  is a finite group of order  $p^k n$ , where  $p$  is prime and  $n$  is not divisible by  $p$ , then*

- (a)  $G$  has subgroups of order  $p^k$ , called Sylow  $p$ -subgroups;
- (b) these Sylow  $p$ -subgroups are all conjugate; and
- (c) the number  $s_p$  of Sylow  $p$ -subgroups satisfies  $s_p \equiv 1 \pmod{p}$ . (Note also that, by the orbit–stabilizer theorem,  $s_p$  is a divisor of  $n$ ).

*Proof.* (Remark: In Sylow's original paper of 1872, he stated the first and third parts as a single theorem, and proved them first. The proof given here is usually attributed to Wielandt.)

To prove the first statement, let  $G$  act by right multiplication on the set  $\Omega$  of all subsets  $S$  of  $G$  of size  $p^k$ : thus  $g : S \mapsto Sg = \{xg \mid x \in S\}$ . Now the number of these subsets is

$$|\Omega| = \binom{p^k n}{p^k} = \frac{p^k n \cdot (p^k n - 1) \cdots (p^k n - p) \cdots (p^k n - p^n + 1)}{p^k \cdot (p^k - 1) \cdots (p^k - p) \cdots 1}$$

and the powers of  $p$  in the terms on the top are equal to the powers of  $p$  in the corresponding terms on the bottom, so  $|\Omega|$  is not divisible by  $p$ . Therefore there is an orbit of length not divisible by  $p$ , so the corresponding point stabilizer has order divisible by  $p^k$ . But if  $x$  is any element of  $S$  and  $g$  is in the stabilizer of  $S$ , then  $xg \in S$ , so there are at most  $p^k$  choices for  $xg$ , and therefore at most  $p^k$  choices for  $g$ . Therefore the stabilizer has order equal to  $p^k$ , and is a subgroup of  $G$ .

To prove the second statement, and also to prove that any  $p$ -subgroup is contained in a Sylow  $p$ -subgroup, let any  $p$ -subgroup  $Q$  act on the right cosets  $Pg$  of any Sylow  $p$ -subgroup  $P$  by right multiplication. Since the number of cosets is not divisible by  $p$ , but all orbits have length a power of  $p$ , by the orbit–stabilizer theorem, there is an orbit  $\{Pg\}$  of length 1, so  $PgQ = Pg$  and  $gQg^{-1}$  lies inside  $P$ . In particular, if  $P$  and  $Q$  have the same order, then  $gQg^{-1} = P$ , so all Sylow  $p$ -subgroups are conjugate in  $G$ .

To prove the third statement, let a Sylow  $p$ -subgroup  $P$  act by conjugation on the set  $\Omega$  of all the other Sylow  $p$ -subgroups: we want to show that  $|\Omega|$  is divisible by  $p$ . Now the orbit lengths are powers of  $p$ , so it is sufficient to show that there is no orbit of length 1. But if  $\{Q\}$  is such an orbit, then  $Q^x = Q$  for all  $x \in P$ . Therefore  $P \leq N(G(Q))$  and  $Q \leq N_G(Q)$  are two distinct Sylow  $p$ -subgroups of  $N_G(Q)$ . But this is a contradiction, since  $Q$  is normal in  $N_G(Q)$ , so it is the unique Sylow  $p$ -subgroup of  $N_G(Q)$ .  $\square$

An important corollary of Sylow's theorems is the *Frattini argument*:

**Theorem 1.33** (*Frattini argument*). *If  $N \triangleleft G$  and  $P$  is a Sylow  $p$ -subgroup of  $N$ , then  $G = N_G(P)N$ .*

*Proof.* Pick any  $g \in G$  and consider the subgroup  $P^g$ . We have  $P^g \leq N^g = N$ , so both  $P$  and  $P^g$  are Sylow  $p$ -subgroups of  $N$ . Therefore they are conjugate inside  $N$ , that is, there exists  $h \in N$  such that  $P^g = P^h$ . Hence  $P^{gh^{-1}} = P$ , so  $gh^{-1} \in N_G(P)$ , and  $g \in N_G(P).N$ , as required.  $\square$

## 1.8 Applications of Sylow's theorems

**Example 1.34** Groups of order  $pq$ , where  $p, q$  are distinct primes, say  $p > q$ . The number of Sylow  $p$ -subgroups divides  $q$  and is congruent to 1 mod  $p$ , so is 1. Therefore  $G$  has a normal Sylow  $p$ -subgroup  $N$ , and  $G/N$  has order  $q$ . In particular  $G$  is soluble. The number of Sylow  $q$ -subgroups divides  $p$ , so is either 1 or  $p$ . In the first case, both Sylow subgroups are normal, so  $G \cong C_p \times C_q \cong C_{pq}$ . In the second case we must have  $p \equiv 1 \pmod q$  by Sylow's theorem.

**Example 1.35** Consider the case  $q = 2$ , so  $P \cong C_p = \langle g \rangle \triangleleft G$  of index 2, and  $Q \cong C_2 = \langle h \rangle$  acts on  $P$ . So  $g^h = g^r$  for some integer  $r$ . Therefore  $g = g^{h^2} = g^{r^2}$ , so  $r^2 \equiv 1 \pmod p$ , which means  $r \equiv \pm 1 \pmod p$ . The case  $r = 1$  gives  $C_p \times C_2 \cong C_{2p}$  again, and the case  $r = -1$  gives the dihedral group  $D_{2p}$ .

**Example 1.36** Similarly in the general case, the same argument gives  $g = g^{h^q} = g^{r^q}$  so  $r^q \equiv 1 \pmod p$ . There are  $q - 1$  non-trivial solutions, all giving isomorphic groups (by replacing  $h$  by  $h^2, h^3, \dots$ ). For example, if  $p = 7$  and  $q = 3$  we could have  $r = 1, 2, 4$ . The first gives  $C_7 \times C_3 \cong C_{21}$ , and the other two gives groups  $\langle g, h \mid g^7 = h^3 = 1, g^h = g^2 \rangle$  and  $\langle g, k \mid g^7 = k^3 = 1, g^k = g^4 \rangle$ , which are isomorphic via  $k \leftrightarrow h^2$ .

## 1.9 Automorphism groups

**Definition 1.37** An *automorphism* of a group  $G$  is just an isomorphism of  $G$  with itself.

The set of all automorphisms of  $G$  is easily seen to form a group under composition, and is denoted  $\text{Aut}(G)$ . The *inner* automorphisms are the automorphisms  $\phi_g$  for  $g \in G$ , defined by  $\phi_g : x \mapsto g^{-1}xg$ . To see that this is an automorphism, observe that  $\phi_g(x, y) = \phi_g(x)\phi_g(y)$ . These form a subgroup  $\text{Inn}(G)$  of  $\text{Aut}(G)$ . Indeed, if  $\alpha \in \text{Aut}(G)$ , then it is easy to check that  $\phi_g^\alpha = \phi_{g^\alpha}$  (where  $\phi_g^\alpha = \alpha^{-1}\phi_g\alpha$ , read from left to right for conformity with our notation for permutations), so that

**Theorem 1.38**  $\text{Inn}(G)$  is a normal subgroup of  $\text{Aut}(G)$ .

*Proof.* If  $\phi_g \in \text{Inn}(G)$  and  $\alpha \in \text{Aut}(G)$ , then  $\alpha^{-1}\phi_g\alpha$  maps  $x$  via  $x^{\alpha^{-1}}$  and  $g^{-1}x^{\alpha^{-1}}g$  to

$$(g^{-1}x^{\alpha^{-1}}g)^\alpha = ((g^\alpha)^{-1}(x^{\alpha^{-1}})^\alpha g^\alpha) = (g^\alpha)^{-1}xg^\alpha.$$

But  $\phi_{g^\alpha}$  maps  $x$  to the same element, for all  $x$ . Therefore  $\alpha^{-1}\phi_g\alpha = \phi_{g^\alpha} \in \text{Inn}(G)$ .  $\square$

Now it is easy to check that  $\phi_{gh} = \phi_g \phi_h$ , and that  $\phi_g = \phi_h$  if and only if  $gh^{-1} \in Z(G)$ , so the map  $\phi$  defined by  $\phi : g \mapsto \phi_g$  is a homomorphism from  $G$  onto  $\text{Inn}(G)$  with kernel  $\{g \in G \mid \phi_g = \text{id}\} = \{g \in G \mid g^{-1}xg = x\} = Z(G)$ . Therefore  $\text{Inn}(G) \cong G/Z(G)$  and, in particular, if  $Z(G) = 1$  then  $G \cong \text{Inn}(G)$ . In this case, we can therefore identify  $G$  with  $\text{Inn}(G)$ , and thus embed  $G$  as a normal subgroup of  $\text{Aut}(G)$ .

We define  $\text{Out}(G) = \text{Aut}(G)/\text{Inn}(G)$ , called the *outer automorphism group* of  $G$ . Note that, despite its name, its elements are not automorphisms! It is a quotient group, not a subgroup, of  $\text{Aut}(G)$ .

**Example 1.39**  $G = C_p$ ,  $p$  prime. Say  $G = \langle g \rangle$ . Then  $Z(G) = G$ , so  $\text{Inn}(G) = \{1\}$ . Now any map  $\alpha : g \mapsto g^r$  defines an automorphism (for  $r = 1, 2, \dots, p-1$ ). So  $\text{Aut}(G)$  has order  $p-1$ . In fact  $\text{Aut}(G) \cong C_{p-1}$  since primitive roots exist. (We'll not prove this here, but it's in other courses, e.g. cryptography.)

## 1.10 The structure theorem for finite abelian groups

**Theorem 1.40** *If  $A$  is a finite abelian group then*

$$A \cong C_{n_1} \times C_{n_2} \times \cdots \times C_{n_r},$$

*with each  $n_{i+1}$  dividing  $n_i$ . Moreover, the  $n_i$  are uniquely determined by  $A$ .*

*Proof.* (by induction on the order of  $A$ ) Let  $n_1$  be the largest order of any element of  $A$ . Then the order of every element divides  $n_1$  (For if not, there is an element  $x$  of order  $n_1$  and an element  $y$  of order  $k$  not dividing  $n_1$ , so there is an element  $z = y^{\gcd(k, n_1)}$  of order  $k' = k/\gcd(k, n_1)$ , which is coprime to  $n_1$ . Therefore  $xz$  has order  $k'n_1 > n_1$ , which contradicts the choice of  $n_1$ .)

Now let  $B = \langle x \rangle \cong C_{n_1}$ , so that  $C = A/B$  is abelian of smaller order, so by induction

$$C \cong C_{n_2} \times \cdots \times C_{n_r}$$

with each  $n_{i+1} | n_i$ . Also  $n_2 | n_1$  because  $n_2$  is the order of some element  $yB$  in  $C = A/B$ , which divides the order of  $y$  in  $A$ .

We have  $C = \langle x_2B \rangle \times \langle x_3B \rangle \times \cdots \times \langle x_rB \rangle$  where  $x_iB$  has order  $n_i$  in  $A/B$ , and we need to choose coset representatives  $x'_i \in x_iB$  such that

$$C \cong \langle x'_2 \rangle \times \cdots \times \langle x'_r \rangle \leq A.$$

We know that  $y_i = (x_i)^{n_i} \in B$ . Now the order of  $x_i$  divides  $n_1$  so the order of  $y_i$  divides  $n_1/n_i$ . Since  $B$  is a cyclic group of order  $n_1$ , there is an element  $z_i \in B$  with  $(z_i)^{n_i} = y_i$ , so if we define  $x'_i = x_i z_i^{-1}$  then we have  $(x'_i)^{n_i} = y_i y_i^{-1} = 1$ . Therefore

$$C \cong \langle x'_2 \rangle \times \cdots \times \langle x'_r \rangle \leq A$$

as required.

Let  $D = \langle x'_2, \dots, x'_r \rangle$ . Then  $A = BD$ . But also  $|A| = |B| \cdot |D|$  so  $B \cap D = \{1\}$ . Therefore  $A \cong B \times D$ .

Finally we need to prove that the  $n_i$  are determined by the group, i.e. if we choose a different element  $x$  then we still get the same answer. So suppose that

$$C_{n_1} \times \cdots \times C_{n_r} \cong C_{m_1} \times \cdots \times C_{m_s},$$

with  $n_{i+1} | n_i$  and  $m_{i+1} | m_i$ . Then the largest order of any element is  $n_1$  and also  $m_1$ , so  $m_1 = n_1$ . Let  $i$  be the smallest integer such that  $n_i \neq m_i$ , say  $n_i < m_i$ . Then the number of elements of order dividing  $n_i$  is

$$(n_i)^i \cdot n_{i+1} \cdot n_{i+2} \cdots n_r = (n_i)^i |A| / (n_1 \cdots n_i).$$

But calculating this in the second representation of the group gives

$$(n_i)^i \cdot m_{i+1} \cdots m_s = (n_i)^i |A| / (n_1 \cdots n_{i-1} \cdot m_i).$$

Therefore  $m_i = n_i$ . Contradiction. □

### End of Chapter 1

## 2 Permutation groups

**Definition 2.1** The *symmetric group*  $\text{Sym}(\Omega)$  on a set  $\Omega$  is the group of all permutations of that set. Here a *permutation* is simply a bijection from the set to itself.

If  $\Omega$  has cardinality  $n$ , then we might as well take  $\Omega = \{1, \dots, n\}$ . The resulting symmetric group is denoted  $S_n$ , and called *the* symmetric group of degree  $n$ .

Since a permutation  $\pi$  of  $\Omega$  is determined by the images  $\pi(1)$  ( $n$  choices),  $\pi(2)$  ( $n - 1$  choices, as it must be distinct from  $\pi(1)$ ),  $\pi(3)$  ( $n - 2$  choices), and so on, we have that the number of permutations is  $n(n - 1)(n - 2) \dots 2 \cdot 1 = n!$  and therefore  $|S_n| = n!$ .

A permutation  $\pi$  may be written simply as a list of the images  $\pi(1), \dots, \pi(n)$  of the points in order, or more explicitly, as a list of the points  $1, \dots, n$  with their images  $\pi(1), \dots, \pi(n)$  written underneath them. For example,  $\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 \\ 1 & 5 & 2 & 3 & 4 \end{pmatrix}$  denotes the permutation fixing 1, and mapping 2 to 5, 3 to 2, 4 to 3, and 5 to 4. If we draw lines between equal numbers in the two rows, the lines cross over each other, and the crossings indicate which pairs of numbers have to be interchanged in order to produce this permutation. In this example, the line joining the 5s crosses the 4s, 3s and 2s in that order, indicating that we may obtain this permutation by first swapping 5 and 4, then 5 and 3, and finally 5 and 2.

### 2.1 The alternating groups

A single interchange of two elements is called a *transposition*, so we have seen how to write any permutation as a product of transpositions. However, there are many different ways of doing this. But if we write the identity permutation as a product of transpositions, and the line connecting the  $i$ s crosses over the line connecting the  $j$ s, then they must cross back again: thus the number of crossings for the identity element is even. If we follow one permutation by another, it is clear that the number of transpositions required for the product is the sum of the number of transpositions for the two original permutations. It follows that if  $\pi$  is written in two different ways as a product of transpositions, then either the number of transpositions is even in both cases, or it is odd in both cases. Therefore the map  $\phi$  from  $S_n$  onto the group  $\{\pm 1\}$  of order 2 defined by  $\phi(\pi) = 1$  whenever  $\pi$  is the product of an even number of transpositions, is a (well-defined) group homomorphism. As  $\phi$  is onto, its kernel is a normal subgroup of index 2, which we call the *alternating* group of degree  $n$ . It has order  $\frac{1}{2}n!$ , and its elements are called the *even* permutations. The other elements of  $S_n$  are the *odd* permutations.

A possibly more convincing proof that the sign of a permutation is well-defined may be obtained by letting  $S_n$  act on the set  $\{\pm 1\}$  by multiplying by

$$\prod_{i>j} \frac{i^\pi - j^\pi}{i - j},$$

and proving that this does define a group action, with kernel  $A_n$ . The hard part of this is to prove that it really is a group action, that is, the action of  $gh$  is the same as the action of  $g$  followed by the action of  $h$ . To see this,  $gh$  acts as multiplication by

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\prod(j^{gh} - i^{gh})}{\prod(j - i)} &= \frac{\prod(j^{gh} - i^{gh}) \prod(j^g - i^g)}{\prod(j^g - i^g) \prod(j - i)} \\ &= \frac{\prod(a^h - b^h) \prod(j^g - i^g)}{\prod(a - b) \prod(j - i)} \end{aligned}$$

where  $\{a, b\}$  runs over all unordered pairs of  $\{i, j\}$ , but in a different order.

The notation for permutations as functions (where  $\pi\rho$  means  $\rho$  followed by  $\pi$ ) is unfortunately inconsistent with the normal convention for permutations that  $\pi\rho$  means  $\pi$  followed by  $\rho$ . Therefore we adopt a different notation, writing  $a^\pi$  instead of  $\pi(a)$ , to avoid this confusion. We then have  $a^{\pi\rho} = \rho(\pi(a))$ , and permutations are read from left to right, rather than right to left as for functions.

## 2.2 Transitivity

Given a group  $H$  of permutations, i.e. a subgroup of a symmetric group  $S_n$ , we are interested in which points can be mapped to which other points by elements of the group  $H$ .

**Definition 2.2** If every point in  $\Omega$  can be mapped to every other point by an element of  $H$ , we say  $H$  is *transitive* on the set  $\Omega$ .

In symbols, this is expressed by saying that for all  $a$  and  $b$  in  $\Omega$ , there exists  $\pi \in H$  with  $a^\pi = b$ . In any case, the set  $\{a^\pi \mid \pi \in H\}$  of points reachable from  $a$  is called the *orbit* of  $H$  containing  $a$ . It is easy to see that the orbits of  $H$  form a partition of the set  $\Omega$ .

More generally, if we can simultaneously map  $k$  points wherever we like, the group is called *k-transitive*. This means that for every list of  $k$  distinct points  $a_1, \dots, a_k$  and every list of  $k$  distinct points  $b_1, \dots, b_k$  there exists an element  $\pi \in H$  with  $a_i^\pi = b_i$  for all  $i$ . In particular, 1-transitive is the same as transitive.

**Example 2.3** It is easy to see that the symmetric group  $S_n$  is  $k$ -transitive for all  $k \leq n$ , and that the alternating group  $A_n$  is  $k$ -transitive for all  $k \leq n - 2$ .

It is obvious that if  $H$  is  $k$ -transitive then  $H$  is  $(k - 1)$ -transitive, and is therefore  $m$ -transitive for all  $m \leq k$ . There is however a concept intermediate between 1-transitivity and 2-transitivity which is of interest in its own right. This is the concept of primitivity, which is best explained by defining what it is not.

## 2.3 Primitivity

**Definition 2.4** A *block system* for a subgroup  $H$  of  $S_n$  is a partition of  $\Omega$  preserved by  $H$ ; we call the elements of the partition *blocks*.

In other words, if two points  $a$  and  $b$  are in the same block of the partition, then for all elements  $\pi \in H$ , the points  $a^\pi$  and  $b^\pi$  are also in the same block as each other. There are two block systems which are always preserved by every group: one is the partition consisting of the single block  $\Omega$ ; at the other extreme is the partition in which every block consists of a single point. These are called the trivial block systems. A non-trivial block system is often called a *system of imprimitivity* for the group  $H$ . If  $n \geq 3$  then any group which has a system of imprimitivity is called *imprimitive*, and any non-trivial group which is not imprimitive is called *primitive*. (It is usual also to say that  $S_2$  is primitive, but that  $S_1$  is neither primitive nor imprimitive.)

It is obvious that

**Theorem 2.5** *If  $H$  is primitive, then  $H$  is transitive.*

*Proof.* For, if  $H$  is not transitive, then the orbits of  $H$  form a system of imprimitivity for  $H$ , so  $H$  is not primitive.  $\square$

On the other hand, there exist plenty of transitive groups which are not primitive.

**Example 2.6** In  $S_4$ , the subgroup  $H$  of order 4 generated by  $\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 \\ 2 & 1 & 4 & 3 \end{pmatrix}$  and  $\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 \\ 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 \end{pmatrix}$  is transitive, but preserves the block system  $\{\{1,2\}, \{3,4\}\}$ . It also preserves the block systems  $\{\{1,3\}, \{2,4\}\}$  and  $\{\{1,4\}, \{2,3\}\}$ .

**Example 2.7**  $D_8$  acting on 4 vertices 1,2,3,4 of a square, generated by the rotation  $(1,2,3,4)$  and a reflection  $(1,3)$ , preserves the partition  $\{\{1,3\}, \{2,4\}\}$ , in the sense that every group element maps each part of the partition to itself or another part of the partition. So here  $(1,3)$  fixes the two parts of the partition, while  $(1,2,3,4)$  maps  $\{1,3\}$  to  $\{2,4\}$  and vice versa. The permutation action on the parts of the partition gives rise to a quotient group. In this example the quotient is  $S_2$ , and the generators of  $D_8$  map to  $-1$  and  $1$  respectively in the quotient. The kernel of this action is the normal subgroup  $\{1, (1,3), (2,4), (1,3)(2,4)\} \cong C_2 \times C_2$ .

Another important basic result about primitive groups is that

**Theorem 2.8** *Every 2-transitive group is primitive.*

*Proof.* If  $H$  is imprimitive, we can choose three distinct points  $a, b$  and  $c$  such that  $a$  and  $b$  are in the same block, while  $c$  is in a different block. (This is possible since the blocks have at least two points, and there are at least two blocks.) Then there can be no element of  $H$  taking the pair  $(a,b)$  to the pair  $(a,c)$ , so it is not 2-transitive.  $\square$

**Example 2.9**  $D_8$  in its natural action on 4 points is transitive but not primitive.  $D_{10}$  in its natural action on 5 points is primitive but not 2-transitive.

**Example 2.10**  $S_5$  acting on unordered pairs of 5 points is transitive, but not 2-transitive, since it is not possible to map  $\{1, 2\}$  to itself and simultaneously map  $\{1, 3\}$  to  $\{4, 5\}$ . To see this another way, look at the stabilizer of  $\{1, 2\}$ . This is a group  $S_2 \times S_3$  generated by  $(1, 2), (3, 4), (4, 5)$ , and its orbits on the pairs have lengths 1, 3 and 6. Therefore any block containing  $\{1, 2\}$  would be a union of some of these orbits, so would have length 4 or 7. But neither of these numbers divides 10, so the action is primitive.

## 2.4 Group actions and maximal subgroups

Suppose that  $G$  is a subgroup of  $S_n$  acting transitively on  $\Omega$ . Let  $H$  be the stabilizer of the point  $a \in \Omega$ , that is,  $H = \{g \in G : a^g = a\}$ . Recall (the orbit–stabilizer theorem) that the points of  $\Omega$  are in natural bijection with the (right) cosets  $Hg$  of  $H$  in  $G$ . This bijection is given by  $Hx \leftrightarrow a^x$ . In particular,  $|G : H| = n$ .

We can turn this construction around, so that given any subgroup  $H$  in  $G$ , we can let  $G$  act on the right cosets of  $H$  according to the rule  $(Hx)^g = Hxg$ . Numbering the cosets of  $H$  from 1 to  $n$ , where  $n = |G : H|$ , we obtain a permutation action of  $G$  on these  $n$  points, or in other words a group homomorphism from  $G$  to  $S_n$ .

This correspondence between transitive group actions on the one hand, and subgroups on the other, permits many useful translations between combinatorial properties of  $\Omega$  and properties of the group  $G$ . For example, a primitive group action corresponds to a maximal subgroup, where a subgroup  $H$  of  $G$  is called *maximal* if there is no subgroup  $K$  with  $H < K < G$ . More precisely:

**Theorem 2.11** *Suppose that the group  $G$  acts transitively on the set  $\Omega$ , and let  $H$  be the stabilizer of  $a \in \Omega$ . Then  $G$  acts primitively on  $\Omega$  if and only if  $H$  is a maximal subgroup of  $G$ .*

*Proof.* We prove both directions of this in the contrapositive form. First assume that  $H$  is not maximal, and choose a subgroup  $K$  with  $H < K < G$ . Then the points of  $\Omega$  are in bijection with the (right) cosets of  $H$  in  $G$ . Now the cosets of  $K$  in  $G$  are unions of  $H$ -cosets, so correspond to sets of points, each set containing  $|K : H|$  points. But the action of  $G$  preserves the set of  $K$ -cosets, so the corresponding sets of points form a system of imprimitivity for  $G$  on  $\Omega$ .

Conversely, suppose that  $G$  acts imprimitively, and let  $\Omega_1$  be the block containing  $a$  in a system of imprimitivity. Since  $G$  is transitive, it follows that the stabilizer of  $\Omega_1$  acts transitively on  $\Omega_1$ , but not on  $\Omega$ . Therefore this stabilizer strictly contains  $H$  and is a proper subgroup of  $G$ , so  $H$  is not maximal.  $\square$

**Example 2.12** Consider  $S_n$  acting on the set  $\Omega = \{\{1, 2\}, \dots, \{n-1, n\}\}$  of  $n(n-1)/2$  unordered pairs from  $n$  points. The stabilizer  $H$  of  $\{1, 2\}$  is  $S_2 \times S_{n-2}$ , and provided  $n > 4$  this subgroup is maximal: if  $g \notin H$ , then there are points  $i, j > 2$  such that

$i^g \in \{1, 2\}$  but  $j^g$  is not. Then the transposition  $(i^g, j^g)$  is in the subgroup generated by  $H$  and  $g$ , and therefore so are all the transpositions. It follows that  $S_n$  acts primitively on the given  $n(n-1)/2$  objects.

## 2.5 Wreath products

The concept of imprimitivity leads naturally to the idea of a *wreath product* of two permutation groups. Recall the definitions of direct and semidirect products.

**Definition 2.13** The *direct product* of two groups  $G$  and  $H$  is

$$G \times H = \{(g, h) : g \in G, h \in H\} \quad (5)$$

with identity element  $1_{G \times H} = (1_G, 1_H)$  and group operations

$$\begin{aligned} (g_1, h_1)(g_2, h_2) &= (g_1g_2, h_1h_2) \\ (g, h)^{-1} &= (g^{-1}, h^{-1}). \end{aligned} \quad (6)$$

**Definition 2.14** The *semidirect product*  $G:H$  or  $G:\phi H$ , where  $\phi : H \rightarrow \text{Aut}(G)$  describes an action of  $H$  on  $G$ , is defined by  $G:H = \{(g, h) : g \in G, h \in H\}$  with identity element  $1_{G:H} = (1_G, 1_H)$  and group operations

$$\begin{aligned} (g_1, h_1)(g_2, h_2) &= (g_1g_2^{\phi(h_1^{-1})}, h_1h_2) \\ (g, h)^{-1} &= ((g^{-1})^{\phi(h)}, h^{-1}). \end{aligned} \quad (7)$$

Most of the group axioms are obvious, but associativity takes a little work to check:

$$\begin{aligned} ((g_1, h_1)(g_2, h_2))(g_3, h_3) &= (g_1g_2^{\phi(h_1^{-1})}, h_1h_2)(g_3, h_3) \\ &= (g_1g_2^{\phi(h_1^{-1})}g_3^{\phi((h_1h_2)^{-1})}, h_1h_2h_3) \\ (g_1, h_1)((g_2, h_2)(g_3, h_3)) &= (g_1, h_1)(g_2g_3^{\phi(h_2^{-1})}, h_2h_3) \\ &= (g_1(g_2g_3)^{\phi(h_2^{-1})})^{\phi(h_1^{-1})}, h_1h_2h_3) \end{aligned}$$

which is the same thing since  $\phi$  is a group homomorphism.

**Example 2.15**  $G = C_2 \times C_2 = \{1, a, b, ab\}$  with  $a^2 = b^2 = (ab)^2 = 1$ , and  $H = C_3 = \langle h \rangle$ , with action given by  $\phi(h) : a \mapsto b \mapsto ab \mapsto a$ . Then for example  $(a, h)(b, h) = (ab^{\phi(h^{-1})}, h^2) = (aa, h^2) = (1, h^2)$ . You can check that  $G:\phi H \cong A_4$  via  $(a, 1) \mapsto (1, 2)(3, 4)$ ,  $(b, 1) \mapsto (1, 3)(2, 4)$ ,  $(1, h) \mapsto (1, 3, 2)$ . (Don't get confused by the notation  $(a, 1)$  meaning an ordered pair and the same notation  $(1, 2)$  meaning the transposition swapping 1 and 2.)

The subgroup  $\{(g, 1) \mid g \in G\}$  is obviously isomorphic to  $G$ . Moreover it is normal, since

$$\begin{aligned} (g, h)^{-1}(g_1, 1)(g, h) &= ((g^{\phi(h)})^{-1}, h^{-1})(g_1, 1) \\ &= (g_2, h) \end{aligned}$$

for some  $g_2 \in G$ . The subgroup  $\{(1, h) \mid h \in H\}$  is obviously isomorphic to  $H$ , but is not normal in general. The special case when  $\phi(h) = 1$  for all  $h$  is the direct product.

In fact the semi-direct product is characterised by these properties, in the sense that

**Theorem 2.16** *If  $G$  has a normal subgroup  $A$  and a subgroup  $B$  such that  $A \cap B = \{1\}$  and  $AB = G$ , then  $G \cong A :_{\phi} B$ , where  $\phi(b) : a \mapsto a^b = b^{-1}ab$ .*

*Proof.* We need only check that the product  $a_1 b_1 a_2 b_2 = a_1 a_2^{b_1^{-1}} b_1 b_2$  in  $G$  corresponds to the product  $(a_1, b_1)(a_2, b_2) = (a_1 a_2^{\phi(b_1)^{-1}}, b_1 b_2)$  in  $A \times B$  and similarly  $(ab)^{-1} = b^{-1} a^{-1} = (a^{-1})^b b^{-1}$  corresponds to  $(a, b)^{-1} = ((a^{-1})^{\phi(b)}, b^{-1})$ .  $\square$

Now suppose that  $H$  is a permutation group acting on  $\Omega = \{1, \dots, n\}$ . Define  $G^n = G \times G \times \dots \times G = \{(g_1, \dots, g_n) : g_i \in G\}$ , the direct product of  $n$  copies of  $G$ , and let  $H$  act on  $G^n$  by permuting the  $n$  subscripts. That is  $\phi : H \rightarrow \text{Aut}(G^n)$  is defined by

$$\phi(\pi) : (g_1, \dots, g_n) \mapsto (g_{1\pi^{-1}}, \dots, g_{n\pi^{-1}}). \quad (8)$$

Then the wreath product  $G \wr H$  is defined to be  $G^n :_{\phi} H$ . For example, if  $H \cong S_n$  and  $G \cong S_m$  then the wreath product  $S_m \wr S_n$  can be formed by taking  $n$  copies of  $S_m$ , each acting on one of the sets  $\Omega_1, \dots, \Omega_n$  of size  $m$ , and then permuting the subscripts  $1, \dots, n$  by elements of  $H$ . This gives an imprimitive action of  $S_m \wr S_n$  on  $\Omega = \bigcup_{i=1}^n \Omega_i$ , preserving the partition of  $\Omega$  into the  $\Omega_i$ . More generally, any (transitive) imprimitive group can be embedded in a wreath product: if the blocks of imprimitivity for  $G$  are  $\Omega_1, \dots, \Omega_k$ , then  $G$  is a subgroup of  $\text{Sym}(\Omega_1) \wr S_k$ .

## 2.6 Iwasawa's Lemma and simplicity

The key to proving simplicity of many of the finite simple groups is Iwasawa's Lemma:

**Theorem 2.17** *If  $G$  is a finite perfect group, acting faithfully and primitively on a set  $\Omega$ , such that the point stabilizer  $H$  has a normal abelian subgroup  $A$  whose conjugates generate  $G$ , then  $G$  is simple.*

*Proof.* For otherwise, there is a normal subgroup  $K$  with  $1 < K < G$ , which does not fix all the points of  $\Omega$ , so we may choose a point stabilizer  $H$  with  $K \not\leq H$ . Therefore  $HK$  is a subgroup (since  $K$  is normal) which is strictly bigger than  $H$ , and so  $G = HK$  since  $H$  is a maximal subgroup of  $G$ . So any  $g \in G$  can be written  $g = hk$  with  $h \in H$  and  $k \in K$ , and therefore every conjugate of  $A$  is of the form  $g^{-1}Ag = k^{-1}h^{-1}Ahk = k^{-1}Ak \leq AK$ ,

since  $A$  is normal in  $H$  and  $K$  is normal in  $G$ . But  $G$  is generated by these  $A^k$  so  $G = AK$ . Therefore  $G/K = AK/K \cong A/A \cap K$  is abelian, contradicting the assumption that  $G$  is perfect.  $\square$

To see this in action, let us prove that

**Example 2.18**  $A_n$  is simple whenever  $n \geq 7$ . (The argument also works for  $n = 5$ , but needs slight modification if  $n = 6$ .) Let  $\Omega$  be the set of unordered triples (i.e. subsets of size 3) from the set  $\{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ . The stabilizer of one of these triples is  $A_n \cap (S_3 \times S_{n-3})$ , which has a normal subgroup of order 3, cyclically permuting the three points in the triple. These 3-cycles generate the alternating group. Also, provided  $n \geq 5$ , they are commutators, since  $(a, b, c) = (a, b)(d, e)(a, c)(d, e) = [(ac)(de), (bc)(de)]$ . Therefore every one of the generators is in the commutator subgroup, so the commutator subgroup is the whole group. To show that the action of  $A_n$  on triples is faithful, observe that if  $\{a, b, c\}$  and  $\{a, d, e\}$  are fixed, then so is the point  $a$ : thus if all triples are fixed, then all points are fixed. Finally, we need to show that the action of  $A_n$  on  $\Omega$  is primitive. We can prove this by showing by brute force that the stabilizer  $H$  of a triple is maximal. (It isn't maximal if  $n = 6$ , so we need a different proof in this case.) Then apply Iwasawa's Lemma.

To show maximality of  $H$ , let  $H$  be the stabilizer of the triple  $\{1, 2, 3\}$  and let  $g$  be any element of  $A_n$  not in  $H$ . Letting  $K = \langle H, g \rangle$ , we want to show that  $K$  contains all the 3-cycles. Without loss of generality we can assume  $g$  maps 4 to 1 and 5 to a point not in the triple. Then 6 could map either into or outside the triple. Therefore  $g$  conjugates the 3-cycle  $(4, 5, 6)$  either to w.l.o.g.  $(1, 6, 2)$  or  $(1, 6, 7)$ . In the former case it contains also  $(2, 7, 3)$  and therefore contains  $(1, 6, 2)^{(2, 7, 3)} = (1, 6, 7)$ , and in the latter case it contains also  $(2, 6, 7)$  and therefore contains  $(1, 6, 7)^{(2, 6, 7)} = (1, 7, 2)$ . Now in both cases, conjugating these 3-cycles by elements of  $H$  gives us all the 3-cycles in  $A_n$ , as required.

In the case  $n = 6$ , the action on triples is *not* primitive, because each triple comes with its complement. So the 20 triples come in 10 pairs of complementary triples, thus:  $(123|456)$ ,  $(124|356)$  etc. It is easy to see that the stabilizer of  $(123|456)$  contains the 3-cycles  $(1, 2, 3)$  and  $(4, 5, 6)$  and is transitive on the other 9 objects. Therefore  $A_6$  acts 2-transitively, so primitively.

## 2.7 More on automorphisms

If  $G \trianglelefteq H$ , then each element of  $H$  induces an automorphism of  $G$ , by conjugation in  $H$ . Thus for example if  $n \geq 4$  then  $S_n$  is (isomorphic to) a subgroup of  $\text{Aut}(A_n)$ . It turns out that for  $n \geq 7$  it is actually the whole of  $\text{Aut}(A_n)$ . We shall not prove this here.

Observe that, since  $(a, b, c)(a, b, d) = (a, d)(b, c)$ , the group  $A_n$  is generated by its 3-cycles. Indeed, it is generated by the 3-cycles  $(1, 2, 3)$ ,  $(1, 2, 4)$ ,  $\dots$ ,  $(1, 2, n)$ . Also note that for  $n \geq 5$ ,  $A_n$  has no subgroup of index  $k$  less than  $n$ —for if it did there would be a homomorphism from  $A_n$  onto a transitive subgroup of  $A_k$ , contradicting the fact that  $A_n$  is simple.

## 2.8 The outer automorphism of $S_6$

Of all the symmetric groups,  $S_6$  is perhaps the most remarkable. One manifestation of this is its exceptional outer automorphism. This is an isomorphism from  $S_6$  to itself which does not correspond to a permutation of the underlying set of six points. What this means is that there is a completely different way for  $S_6$  to act on six points.

To construct a non-inner automorphism  $\phi$  of  $S_6$  we first note that  $\phi$  must map the point stabilizer  $S_5$  to another subgroup  $H \cong S_5$ . However,  $H$  does not fix one of the six points on which  $S_6$  acts. Therefore  $H$  is transitive on these six points.

So our first job is to construct a transitive action of  $S_5$  on six points. This may be obtained in a natural way as the action of  $S_5$  by conjugation on its six Sylow 5-subgroups. (If we wish to avoid using Sylow's theorems at this point we can simply observe that the 24 elements of order 5 belong to six cyclic subgroups  $\langle(1, 2, x, y, z)\rangle$ , and that these are permuted transitively by conjugation by elements of  $S_5$ .)

In other words, we have constructed a group homomorphism  $\phi : S_5 \rightarrow S_6$  such that  $\phi(S_5)$  is a transitive subgroup  $H$  of  $S_6$ . Now  $H$  has order 120, so index 6, and therefore we can construct the action of  $S_6$  by right multiplication on the 6 right cosets of  $H$ . In this action,  $H$  fixes the identity coset  $H$ , and permutes the other 5 cosets. Therefore this is a different action of  $S_6$  from the natural action, where  $H$  acts transitively. Any permutation in  $S_6$  acts in some way on the cosets of  $H$ : if we relabel these cosets with the numbers 1 to 6, then for each permutation in  $S_6$  we get another one, given by this action on the cosets of  $H$ . This gives us an automorphism of  $S_6$  which is not inner.

More explicitly, we have a group homomorphism  $\phi : S_6 \rightarrow \text{Sym}(\{Hg : g \in S_6\}) \cong S_6$ . The kernel of  $\phi$  is trivial, since  $S_6$  has no non-trivial normal subgroups of index 6 or more. Hence  $\phi$  is a group isomorphism, i.e. an automorphism of  $S_6$ . But  $\phi$  is not an inner automorphism, because it maps the transitive subgroup  $H$  to the stabilizer of the trivial coset  $H$ , whereas inner automorphisms preserve transitivity.

There is another, more concrete, way to see this outer automorphism. From the six points we get 15 unordered pairs. Each point corresponds to the 5 pairs it is contained in. Now consider the partitions into three pairs: each pair is in 3 such partitions, so the number of these partitions is also 15. Call these partitions 'synthemes', and write them as 12|34|56, 12|35|46, 12|36|45, ..., 16|25|34. Now our automorphism is going to swap the pairs with the synthemes, so what does it do to the points? A point must map to something corresponding to 5 synthemes. The 'obvious' thing is a set of 5 synthemes which between them contain all 15 pairs, once each. Such a set of synthemes is called a 'synthemetic total'. There are 6 such totals, as you can readily check:

<i>A</i> :	12 34 56, 13 25 46, 14 26 35, 15 36 24, 16 23 45
<i>B</i> :	12 34 56, 13 26 45, 14 25 36, 15 23 46, 16 35 24
<i>C</i> :	12 35 46, 13 24 56, 14 36 25, 15 26 34, 16 23 45
<i>D</i> :	12 35 46, 13 26 45, 14 23 56, 15 24 36, 16 34 25
<i>E</i> :	12 36 45, 13 24 56, 14 35 26, 15 23 46, 16 25 34
<i>F</i> :	12 36 45, 13 25 46, 14 23 56, 15 34 26, 16 24 35

The generators  $(1,2)$  and  $(2,3,4,5,6)$  act on these totals as  $(A,B)(C,D)(E,F)$  and  $(A,B,D,F,C)(E)$  respectively. Relabelling  $A,B,C,D,E,F$  as  $1,2,3,4,5,6$  we obtain an automorphism of  $S_6$  as

$$\begin{aligned}(1,2) &\mapsto (1,2)(3,4)(5,6) \\ (2,3,4,5,6) &\mapsto (1,2,4,6,3)\end{aligned}$$

**End of Chapter 2**

## 3 Linear groups

### 3.1 Finite fields

**Definition 3.1** A *field* is a set  $F$  with operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division satisfying the usual rules. That is,  $F$  has an element  $0$  such that  $(F, +, -, 0)$  is an abelian group, and  $F \setminus \{0\}$  contains an element  $1$  such that  $(F \setminus \{0\}, \cdot, /, 1)$  is an abelian group, and  $x(y + z) = xy + xz$ .

It is an easy exercise to show that the subfield  $F_0$  generated by the element  $1$  in a finite field  $F$  is isomorphic to the integers modulo  $p$ , for some  $p$ , and therefore  $p$  is prime (called the *characteristic* of the field). Moreover,  $F$  is a vector space over  $F_0$ , as the vector space axioms are special cases of the field axioms. As every finite-dimensional vector space has a basis of  $n$  vectors,  $v_1, \dots, v_n$ , say, and every vector has a unique expression  $\sum_{i=1}^n a_i v_i$  with  $a_i \in F_0$ , it follows that the field  $F$  has  $p^n$  elements.

Conversely, for every prime  $p$  and every positive integer  $d$  there is a field of order  $p^d$ , which is unique up to isomorphism. [See below.]

**Example 3.2** If  $f(x)$  is an irreducible polynomial of degree  $d$  over  $\mathbb{F}_p$ , where  $\mathbb{F}_p$  denotes the field of order  $p$ , then the quotient ring  $\mathbb{F}_p[x]/(f(x))$  is a field of order  $p^d$ . All the field axioms are obvious except for the existence of inverses. But if  $g(x)$  is a coset representative which is not divisible by  $f(x)$ , then by Euclid's algorithm for polynomials there are polynomials  $s(x)$  and  $t(x)$  such that  $1 = s(x)g(x) + t(x)f(x)$ , so that  $s(x)$  is an inverse to  $g(x)$  modulo  $f(x)$ .

**Example 3.3**  $\mathbb{F}_3[x]/(x^2 + 1) = \{0, \pm 1, \pm x, \pm x \pm 1\}$  is a field of order 9, where  $x^2 + 1 = 0$ , i.e.  $x^2 = -1$ .

The most important fact about finite fields which we need is

**Theorem 3.4** *The multiplicative group of all non-zero elements in a finite field is cyclic.*

*Proof.* For the polynomial ring  $F[x]$  over any field  $F$  is a Euclidean domain and therefore a unique factorization domain. In particular a polynomial of degree  $n$  has at most  $n$  roots. If the multiplicative group  $F^\times$  of a field of order  $q$  has exponent  $e$  strictly less than  $q - 1$ , then  $x^e - 1$  has  $q - 1$  roots, which is a contradiction. Therefore the exponent of  $F^\times$  is  $q - 1$ , so  $F^\times$  contains elements of order  $q - 1$ , since it is abelian, and therefore it is cyclic.  $\square$

Note also that all elements  $x$  of  $F$  satisfy  $x^q = x$ , and so the polynomial  $x^q - x$  factorizes in  $F[x]$  as  $\prod_{\alpha \in F} (x - \alpha)$ . Moreover, the number of solutions to  $x^n = 1$  in  $F$  is the greatest common divisor  $(n, q - 1)$  of  $n$  and  $q - 1$ .

We now show that

**Theorem 3.5** *Fields of order  $p^d$  exist and are unique up to isomorphism.*

*Proof.* Observe that if  $f$  is an irreducible polynomial of degree  $d$  over the field  $\mathbb{F}_p \cong \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$  of order  $p$ , then  $\mathbb{F}_p[x]/(f)$  is a field of order  $p^d$ .

Conversely, if  $F$  is a field of order  $p^d$ , let  $x$  be a generator for  $F^\times$ , so that the minimum polynomial for  $x$  over  $\mathbb{F}_p$  is an irreducible polynomial  $f$  of degree  $d$ , and  $F \cong \mathbb{F}_p[x]/(f)$ . One way to see that such a field exists is to observe that any field of order  $q = p^d$  is a splitting field for the polynomial  $x^q - x$ . Splitting fields always exist, by adjoining roots one at a time until the polynomial factorises into linear factors. But then the set of roots of  $x^q - x$  is closed under addition and multiplication, since if  $x^q = x$  and  $y^q = y$  then  $(xy)^q = x^q y^q = xy$  and  $(x + y)^q = x^q + y^q = x + y$ . Hence this set of roots is a subfield. This polynomial has no repeated roots, as it is coprime to its formal derivative, so the field has order  $q$ , as required.

To show that the field of order  $q = p^d$  does not depend on the particular irreducible polynomial we choose, suppose that  $f_1$  and  $f_2$  are two such, and  $F_i = \mathbb{F}_p[x]/(f_i)$ . Since  $f_2(t)$  divides  $t^q - t$ , and  $t^q - t$  factorizes into linear factors over  $F_1$ , it follows that  $F_1$  contains an element  $y$  with  $f_2(y) = 0$ . Hence the map  $x \mapsto y$  extends to a field homomorphism from  $F_2$  to a subfield of  $F_1$ . Moreover, the kernel is trivial, since fields have no quotient fields, so this map is a field isomorphism, since the fields are finite.  $\square$

If also  $f_1 = f_2$  then any automorphism of  $F = F_1 = F_2$  has this form, so is defined by the image of  $x$ , which must be one of the  $d$  roots of  $f_1$ . Hence the group of automorphisms of  $F$  has order  $d$ . On the other hand, the map  $y \mapsto y^p$  (for all  $y \in F$ ) is an automorphism of  $F$ , and has order  $d$ . Hence  $\text{Aut}(F)$  is cyclic of order  $d$ .

## 3.2 General linear groups

Let  $V$  be a vector space of dimension  $n$  over the finite field  $F = \mathbb{F}_q$  of order  $q$ . Then  $V$  has a basis  $\{v_1, \dots, v_n\}$ , say, and  $V = \{\sum_{i=1}^n \lambda_i v_i \mid \lambda_i \in F\}$ . Moreover, if  $\sum_{i=1}^n \lambda_i v_i = 0$  then all  $\lambda_i = 0$ . Since there are  $q$  choices for each  $\lambda_i$  we have  $|V| = |F|^n = q^n$ . Hence  $V$  is isomorphic to the standard space of  $n$ -tuples  $(\lambda_1, \dots, \lambda_n)$ , with vector space operations

$$\begin{aligned} (\lambda_1, \dots, \lambda_n) + (\mu_1, \dots, \mu_n) &= (\lambda_1 + \mu_1, \dots, \lambda_n + \mu_n) \\ \mu(\lambda_1, \dots, \lambda_n) &= (\mu\lambda_1, \dots, \mu\lambda_n) \end{aligned}$$

Linear maps on  $V$  are maps  $f : V \rightarrow V$  such that

$$f(\lambda v + w) = \lambda f(v) + f(w).$$

They can be represented by matrices with respect to a basis, i.e.

$$f(v_i) = \sum_{j=1}^n f_{ij} v_j.$$

**Definition 3.6** The *general linear group*  $\text{GL}(V)$  is the set of invertible linear maps from  $V$  to itself.

Without much loss of generality, we may take  $V$  as the vector space  $\mathbb{F}_q^n$  of  $n$ -tuples of elements of  $\mathbb{F}_q$ , and identify  $\text{GL}(V)$  with the group (denoted  $\text{GL}_n(q)$ ) of invertible  $n \times n$  matrices over  $\mathbb{F}_q$ .

There are certain obvious normal subgroups of  $G = \text{GL}_n(q)$ . For example:

**Theorem 3.7** *The centre,  $Z$  say, of  $\text{GL}_n(q)$  consists of all the scalar matrices  $\lambda I_n$ , where  $0 \neq \lambda \in \mathbb{F}_q$  and  $I_n$  is the  $n \times n$  identity matrix.*

*Proof.* Suppose  $A = (a_{ij}) \in Z$ . Then it must commute with the matrix  $I + e_{ij}$ , where  $e_{ij}$  denotes the matrix with 1 in the  $(i, j)$  entry and 0 elsewhere. Hence it commutes with  $e_{ij}$ . But  $e_{ij}A$  has the  $j$ th row of  $A$  in its  $i$ th row, and 0 elsewhere, whereas  $Ae_{ij}$  has the  $i$ th column of  $A$  in its  $j$ th column, and 0 elsewhere. This tells us first that  $a_{jk} = 0$  if  $k \neq j$ , and that  $a_{ki} = 0$  if  $k \neq i$ , and then that  $a_{ii} = a_{jj}$ . In other words  $A$  is a scalar matrix.  $\square$

Thus  $Z$  is a cyclic normal subgroup of order  $q - 1$ .

**Definition 3.8** The quotient  $\text{GL}_n(q)/\{\lambda I_n\}$  is called the *projective general linear group*, and denoted  $\text{PGL}_n(q)$ .

Also, since  $\det(AB) = \det(A)\det(B)$ , the determinant map is a group homomorphism from  $\text{GL}_n(q)$  onto the multiplicative group of the field, so its kernel is a normal subgroup of index  $q - 1$ . This kernel is called the special linear group.

**Definition 3.9** The *special linear group*  $\text{SL}_n(q)$  consists of all the matrices of determinant 1.

Similarly, we can quotient  $\text{SL}_n(q)$  by the subgroup of scalars it contains, to obtain the *projective special linear group*  $\text{PSL}_n(q)$ , sometimes abbreviated to  $\text{L}_n(q)$ . [The alert reader will have noticed that as defined here,  $\text{PSL}_n(q)$  is not necessarily a subgroup of  $\text{PGL}_n(q)$ . However, there is an obvious isomorphism between  $\text{PSL}_n(q)$  and a normal subgroup of  $\text{PGL}_n(q)$ , so we shall ignore the subtle distinction.]

### 3.3 The orders of the linear groups

Now an invertible matrix takes a basis to a basis, and is determined by the image of an ordered basis. The only condition on this image is that the  $i$ th vector is linearly independent of the previous ones—but these span a space of dimension  $i - 1$ , which has  $q^{i-1}$  vectors in it, so

**Theorem 3.10** *The order of  $\text{GL}_n(q)$  is*

$$\begin{aligned} |\text{GL}_n(q)| &= (q^n - 1)(q^n - q)(q^n - q^2) \cdots (q^n - q^{n-1}) \\ &= q^{n(n-1)/2} (q - 1)(q^2 - 1) \cdots (q^n - 1). \end{aligned}$$

The orders of  $\mathrm{SL}_n(q)$  and  $\mathrm{PGL}_n(q)$  are equal, being  $|\mathrm{GL}_n(q)|$  divided by  $q - 1$ . To obtain the order of  $\mathrm{PSL}_n(q)$ , we need to know which scalars  $\lambda I_n$  have determinant 1. But  $\det(\lambda I_n) = \lambda^n$ , and the number of solutions to  $x^n = 1$  in the field  $\mathbb{F}_q$  is the greatest common divisor  $(n, q - 1)$  of  $n$  and  $q - 1$ . (This is because we know that  $x^{q-1} = 1$  for all non-zero elements  $x$ , so that  $x^n = 1$  is equivalent to  $x^{\gcd(n, q-1)} = 1$ : but the latter equation has exactly  $\gcd(n, q - 1)$  solutions in the cyclic group of order  $q - 1$ .) Thus

**Theorem 3.11** *The order of  $\mathrm{PSL}_n(q)$  is*

$$|\mathrm{PSL}_n(q)| = \frac{1}{(n, q-1)} q^{n(n-1)/2} \prod_{i=2}^n (q^i - 1),$$

where  $(n, q - 1)$  denotes the greatest common divisor of  $n$  and  $q - 1$ .

The groups  $\mathrm{PSL}_n(q)$  are all simple except for the small cases  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(2) \cong S_3$  and  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(3) \cong A_4$ . We shall prove the simplicity of these groups below. First let us look at the exceptional examples.

**Example 3.12**  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(2) \cong \mathrm{GL}_2(2)$ , and  $\mathrm{GL}_2(2)$  permutes the three non-zero vectors of  $\mathbb{F}_2^2$ ; moreover, any two of these vectors form a basis for the space, so the action of  $\mathrm{GL}_2(2)$  is 2-transitive, and faithful, so  $\mathrm{GL}_2(2) \cong S_3$ . More explicitly,

$$\mathrm{GL}_2(2) = \left\{ \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \right\}.$$

Writing  $a, b, c$  for the row vectors  $(1, 0)$ ,  $(0, 1)$ ,  $(1, 1)$  respectively, the matrix  $\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$  acts as the permutation  $(a, b)(c)$ , while the matrix  $\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}$  acts as  $(a, c)(b)$ , and these permutations generate  $S_3$ .

**Example 3.13**  $\mathrm{GL}_2(3)$  has order  $(3^2 - 1)(3^2 - 3) = 48$  so  $\mathrm{PGL}_2(3)$  has order 24. Similarly,  $\mathrm{GL}_2(3)$  permutes the four 1-dimensional subspaces of  $\mathbb{F}_3^2$ , spanned by the vectors  $(1, 0)$ ,  $(0, 1)$ ,  $(1, 1)$  and  $(1, -1)$ . The action is 2-transitive since the group acts transitively on ordered bases. Moreover, fixing the standard basis, up to scalars, the matrix  $\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix}$  interchanges the other two 1-spaces, so the action of  $\mathrm{GL}_2(3)$  is  $S_4$ . The kernel of the action is just the group of scalar matrices, and the matrices of determinant 1 act as even permutations, so  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(3) \cong A_4$ .

We use the term *linear group* loosely to refer to any of the groups  $\mathrm{GL}_n(q)$ ,  $\mathrm{SL}_n(q)$ ,  $\mathrm{PGL}_n(q)$  or  $\mathrm{PSL}_n(q)$ .

### 3.4 The projective line and some exceptional isomorphisms

There are many isomorphisms between the small linear groups and other groups. Some of the most interesting are

$$\begin{aligned} \mathrm{PSL}_2(2) &\cong S_3, \\ \mathrm{PSL}_2(3) &\cong A_4, \\ \mathrm{PSL}_2(4) \cong \mathrm{PSL}_2(5) &\cong A_5, \\ \mathrm{PSL}_2(9) &\cong A_6 \end{aligned} \tag{9}$$

We have already proved the first two of these. Next we use the projective line to prove the other three. It is convenient to work in  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(q)$  directly as a group of permutations of the 1-dimensional subspaces of  $\mathbb{F}_q^2$ , and to this end we label the 1-spaces by the ratio of the coordinates: that is  $\langle(x, 1)\rangle$  is labelled  $x$ , and  $\langle(1, 0)\rangle$  is labelled  $\infty$ .

Observe that the 2-dimensional vector space over  $\mathbb{F}_q$  has  $q^2 - 1$  non-zero vectors, so  $(q^2 - 1)/(q - 1) = q + 1$  subspaces of dimension 1, namely  $\langle(1, 0)\rangle$  (call this  $\infty = 1/0$ ) and  $\langle(x, 1)\rangle$  (call this  $x = x/1$ ). So  $\langle(x, y)\rangle = \langle y^{-1}(x, y)\rangle = \langle(y^{-1}x, 1)\rangle$  is called  $y^{-1}x$  or  $x/y$ . If  $y = 0$ , then  $\langle(x, y)\rangle = \langle(x, 0)\rangle = \langle(1, 0)\rangle$  which corresponds to  $\infty$ , and again  $x/y = \infty$ .

The group  $\mathrm{GL}_2(q)$  permutes these  $q + 1$  subspaces. The *projective line*  $\mathrm{PL}(q) = \mathbb{F}_q \cup \{\infty\}$ . Working with column vectors instead of row vectors we have

$$\begin{pmatrix} a & b \\ c & d \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} x \\ y \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} ax + by \\ cx + dy \end{pmatrix}$$

so this matrix acts as  $x/y \mapsto (ax + by)/(cx + dy)$  i.e.  $z \mapsto (az + b)/(cz + d)$ . For example, if  $q = 5$  then  $\begin{pmatrix} 2 & 1 \\ 3 & 3 \end{pmatrix} : z \mapsto (2z + 1)/(3z + 3)$  so acts as the permutation  $(0, 2)(1, 3)(4, \infty)$ .

This gives a homomorphism  $\mathrm{GL}_2(q) \rightarrow \mathrm{Sym}(\mathrm{PL}(q)) \cong S_{q+1}$ . To calculate the kernel of the action, note that if  $\begin{pmatrix} a & b \\ c & d \end{pmatrix}$  acts as the identity then it maps 0 to 0, so  $(a \cdot 0 + b)/(c \cdot 0 + d) = 0$  and therefore  $b = 0$ ; also  $\infty \mapsto \infty$  so  $(a\infty + b)/(c\infty + d) = \infty$  so  $a/c = \infty$  i.e.  $c = 0$ ; and  $1 \mapsto 1$  so  $(a + b)/(c + d) = 1$  so  $a = d$ . Conversely,  $\begin{pmatrix} a & 0 \\ 0 & a \end{pmatrix}$  maps  $z$  to  $az/a = z$  for all  $z$ . Therefore the kernel of the action is exactly the group of scalar matrices, and the quotient by the kernel is  $\mathrm{PGL}_2(q)$ .

Notice that any two points of the projective line determine a basis of the 2-space, up to scalar multiplications of the two basis vectors separately. Given any change of basis matrix we can multiply by a diagonal matrix to make the determinant of the product 1. Thus  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(q)$  is also 2-transitive on the points of the projective line.

### 3.5 The isomorphisms $\mathrm{PSL}_2(4) \cong \mathrm{PSL}_2(5) \cong A_5$

Now  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(4) \cong \mathrm{SL}_2(4)$  permutes the five points of  $\mathrm{PL}(4)$  2-transitively. The field  $\mathbb{F}_4$  of order 4 may be defined as  $\{0, 1, \omega, \bar{\omega}\}$  where  $\bar{\omega} = \omega^2$  and  $\omega^2 + \omega = 1$ . Fixing

the points 0 and  $\infty$  in  $\text{PL}(4) = \{\infty, 0, 1, \omega, \bar{\omega}\}$  we still have the map  $z \mapsto \bar{\omega}z/\omega = \omega z$  (defined by the matrix  $\begin{pmatrix} \bar{\omega} & 0 \\ 0 & \omega \end{pmatrix}$ ) which acts as a 3-cycle on the remaining three points 1,  $\omega$ ,  $\bar{\omega}$ . Thus the action of  $\text{PSL}_2(4)$  contains at least a group  $A_5$ . But the orders of  $\text{PSL}_2(4)$  and  $A_5$  are the same, and therefore the two groups are isomorphic.

**Example 3.14**  $q = 5$ . The projective line  $\text{PL}(5) = \{\infty, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4\}$ . We saw that  $\text{PGL}_2(5)$  has order  $(5^2 - 1)(5^2 - 5)/(5 - 1) = 120 = 5!$ , and in fact  $\text{PGL}_2(5) \cong S_5$ . To prove this, recall the action of  $S_5$  by conjugation on its 6 Sylow 5-subgroups. We show that we can label these subgroups by the 6 points of the projective line, in such a way that the action of  $S_5$  by conjugation on the subgroups is the same as the action of  $\text{PGL}_2(5)$  on the points of the projective line. Many such labellings are possible: here is one.

$$\begin{aligned} H_\infty &= \langle (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) \rangle \\ H_0 &= \langle (1, 2, 4, 3, 5) \rangle \\ H_1 &= \langle (2, 3, 5, 4, 1) \rangle \\ H_2 &= \langle (3, 4, 1, 5, 2) \rangle \\ H_3 &= \langle (4, 5, 2, 1, 3) \rangle \\ H_4 &= \langle (5, 1, 3, 2, 4) \rangle \end{aligned}$$

Check the generators  $(1, 2)$  and  $(1, 2, 3, 4, 5)$  for  $S_5$ . Now  $(1, 2, 3, 4, 5)$  acts on the  $H_i$  as  $(H_\infty)(H_0, H_1, H_2, H_3, H_4)$  so corresponds to the map  $z \mapsto (z + 1)/(2z + 4)$ , which is the permutation  $(\infty, 3)(0, 4)(1, 2)$  of the projective line.

So our homomorphism  $\phi : S_5 \rightarrow \text{PGL}_2(5)$  has image of size bigger than 2, so is onto (since the only normal subgroups of  $S_5$  are  $1, A_5, S_5$ ). But  $S_5$  and  $\text{PGL}_2(5)$  both have order 120, so they are isomorphic. It follows that the two maps  $z \mapsto z + 1$  and  $z \mapsto (z + 1)/(2z + 4)$  generate  $\text{PGL}_2(5)$ .

The isomorphism  $\text{PSL}_2(5) \cong A_5$  follows immediately, since  $\text{PSL}_2(5)$  has index 2 in  $\text{PGL}_2(5) \cong S_5$ , but  $A_5$  is the unique subgroup of index 2 in  $S_5$ .

### 3.6 Generators for $\text{PGL}_2(q)$ and $\text{PSL}_2(q)$

More generally,  $z \mapsto z + \lambda$  is in  $\text{PGL}_2(q)$  for any  $\lambda \in \mathbb{F}_q$ . These elements form a subgroup isomorphic to the additive group of the field. Similarly, if  $\lambda \neq 0$  then  $z \mapsto \lambda z$  is in  $\text{PGL}_2(q)$  (represented by the matrix  $\begin{pmatrix} \lambda & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \in \text{GL}_2(q)$ ). These form a subgroup isomorphic to the multiplicative group of the field. Moreover this subgroup normalizes the additive subgroup

$$z \mapsto \lambda z \mapsto \lambda z + \mu \mapsto \lambda^{-1}(\lambda z + \mu) = z + \lambda^{-1}\mu.$$

So these two subgroups together form a group of order  $q(q-1)$  consisting of all maps  $z \mapsto \lambda z + \mu$  with  $\lambda \neq 0$ . This group fixes  $\infty$  and conversely it is the full stabilizer of  $\infty$  (by the orbit-stabilizer theorem, since there are  $q-1$  points and the group  $\text{PGL}_2(q)$  has order  $(q^2-1)q = (q+1)q(q-1)$ ).

The map  $z \mapsto 1/z$  extends this subgroup to the whole of  $\text{PGL}_2(q)$ . The corresponding matrices  $\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}$ ,  $\begin{pmatrix} \lambda & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}$  and  $\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$  generate  $\text{GL}_2(q)$ .

As a corollary, note that

**Theorem 3.15**  $\text{PGL}_2(q)$  acts 3-transitively on the projective line.

*Proof.* It is obviously transitive, and  $z \mapsto z + \lambda$  fixes  $\infty$  and is transitive on the other  $q$  points. Finally,  $z \mapsto \lambda z$  fixes  $\infty$  and 0, and is transitive on the rest of the points.  $\square$

Now  $\text{PSL}_2(q)$  has index  $(2, q-1)$  in  $\text{PGL}_2(q)$ . So if  $q = 2^k$  then  $\text{PSL}_2(q) \cong \text{PGL}_2(q)$ . On the other hand, if  $q$  is odd then  $\text{PSL}_2(q)$  has index 2 in  $\text{PGL}_2(q)$ , generated by

$$\begin{aligned} z &\mapsto z + \lambda \\ z &\mapsto \lambda^2 z \\ z &\mapsto -1/z \end{aligned}$$

corresponding to the matrices of determinant 1:

$$\begin{pmatrix} 1 & \lambda \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} \lambda & 0 \\ 0 & \lambda^{-1} \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} 0 & -1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}.$$

The stabilizer of  $\infty$  then has order  $q(q-1)/2$  and consists of all maps of the form  $z \mapsto \lambda^2 z + \mu$ . Therefore the stabilizer of two points has order  $(q-1)/2$ , and in particular cannot act transitively on the remaining  $q-1$  points. It follows that (for  $q$  odd)  $\text{PSL}_2(q)$  acts 2-transitively but not 3-transitively on the projective line.

### 3.7 The isomorphism $\text{PSL}_2(9) \cong A_6$

The isomorphism  $\text{PSL}_2(9) \cong A_6$  is best shown by labelling the ten points of the projective line  $\text{PL}(9)$  with the ten partitions of six points into two subsets of size 3 (equivalently, the ten Sylow 3-subgroups of  $A_6$ ). Take  $\mathbb{F}_9 = \{0, \pm 1, \pm i, \pm 1 \pm i\}$ , where  $i^2 = -1$ . The additive group is  $C_3 \times C_3$ , generated by 1 and  $i$ . The multiplicative group is  $C_8$ , generated by  $1+i$ , say. So the stabilizer of the point  $\infty$  is generated by  $z \mapsto z+1$  and  $z \mapsto iz$ , and has order 36. We want this to correspond to the stabilizer of a partition of the 6 points into two threes. Now the stabilizer of  $(123|456)$  is generated by  $(1, 2, 3)$  and  $(1, 4)(2, 5, 3, 6)$ .

Let the 3-cycle  $(1, 2, 3)$  act on the points by  $z \mapsto z+1$  and let  $(4, 5, 6)$  act by  $z \mapsto z+i$ . Then the point  $\infty$  fixed by these two 3-cycles corresponds to the partition  $(123|456)$ ,

and we may choose the point 0 to correspond to the partition  $(423|156)$ , so that the rest of the correspondence is determined by the action of the 3-cycles above. We have

$$\begin{aligned}
\infty &\mapsto (123|456) \\
0 &\mapsto (423|156) \\
1 &\mapsto (431|256) \\
-1 &\mapsto (412|356) \\
i &\mapsto (523|164) \\
1+i &\mapsto (531|264) \\
-1+i &\mapsto (512|364) \\
-i &\mapsto (623|145) \\
1-i &\mapsto (631|245) \\
-1-i &\mapsto (612|345)
\end{aligned}$$

Now  $z \mapsto z+1$  corresponds to the permutation  $(1,2,3)$ , and  $z \mapsto iz$  corresponds to  $(1,4)(2,5,3,6)$ . We can now generate  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(9)$  by adjoining the map  $z \mapsto -1/z$ , which we can check acts on the points in the same way as the permutation  $(2,3)(1,4)$ . Thus we have a homomorphism from  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(9)$  onto  $A_6$ , and since these two groups have the same order, they are isomorphic. Notice incidentally that an odd permutation of  $S_6$  realises a field automorphism of  $\mathbb{F}_9$ : for example, the map  $z \mapsto z^3$  corresponds to the transposition  $(5,6)$ . Thus  $S_6 \cong \mathrm{P}\Sigma L_2(9)$ , defined as the extension of  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(9)$  by the field automorphism, and is not isomorphic to  $\mathrm{PGL}_2(9)$ . Indeed,  $\mathrm{PGL}_2(9)$  contains the element  $z \mapsto (1+i)z$  of order 8, but  $S_6$  has no elements of order 8.

### 3.8 The actions of $\mathrm{PSL}_2(11)$ on 11 points

(This section was not lectured in 2008.)

The action of  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(q)$  on the  $q+1$  points of the projective line is usually the smallest permutation action. However, we have seen that  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(5) \cong A_5$  so has an action on 5 points. Similarly,  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(7) \cong \mathrm{PSL}_3(2)$ , so has an action on 7 points (indeed, it has two such actions: one on the seven 1-dimensional subspaces, and one on the seven 2-dimensional subspaces: see below). The only other simple group  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(p)$  which has an action on fewer than  $p+1$  points is  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(11)$ , which has two distinct actions on 11 points.

Consider the partition of the projective line  $\mathrm{PL}(11)$  into six pairs

$$(\infty, 0)(1, 2)(3, 6)(4, 8)(5, X)(9, 7),$$

where we write  $X = 10$  to avoid confusion. It is easy to see that this partition has just 11 images under the subgroup 11:5 of  $\mathrm{PSL}_2(11)$  generated by  $z \mapsto z+1$  and  $z \mapsto 3z$ . Now consider the action of  $z \mapsto -1/z$  on these 11 partitions. Label them  $p_t$ , so that  $p_t$  is the partition in which  $\infty$  is paired with  $t$ . A small calculation shows that  $z \mapsto -1/z$  preserves this set of partitions, and acts as the permutation  $(1,9)(2,6)(4,5)(7,8)$  on

the  $p_t$ . Of course, the map  $z \mapsto z + 1$  on  $\text{PL}(11)$  acts as  $t \mapsto t + 1$ , and similarly  $z \mapsto 3z$  acts as  $t \mapsto 3t$ .

The other action on 11 points may be obtained by taking the image under  $z \mapsto -z$  of the partitions given above.

### 3.9 Simplicity of $\text{PSL}_n(q)$

We shall first prove

**Theorem 3.16**  $\text{PSL}_2(q)$  is simple if and only if  $q \geq 4$ .

*Proof.* First note that if  $q \leq 3$  we have  $\text{PSL}_2(2) \cong S_3$  and  $\text{PSL}_2(3) \cong A_4$ , neither of which is simple.

Conversely, we have shown that  $\text{PSL}_2(q)$  acts faithfully, and 2-transitively, so primitively, on the projective line  $\mathbb{F}_q \cup \{\infty\}$ . The stabilizer of the point  $\infty$  consists of all maps  $z \mapsto a^2z + b$ . (If  $q = 2^k$ , then the map  $a \mapsto a^2$  is an automorphism of the field, so  $a^2$  is an arbitrary non-zero element. If  $q$  is odd, exactly half of the non-zero elements of  $\mathbb{F}_q$  are squares.)

The subgroup  $A = \{z \mapsto z + b \mid b \in \mathbb{F}_q\}$  is an abelian normal subgroup of the point stabilizer. If  $q > 3$ , then  $\mathbb{F}_q$  contains a non-zero element  $x$  with  $x^2 \neq 1$ , and then the commutator

$$\left[ \begin{pmatrix} 1 & y \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} x & 0 \\ 0 & x^{-1} \end{pmatrix} \right] = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & y(x^2 - 1) \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}, \quad (10)$$

which is an arbitrary element of  $A$ . Therefore every conjugate of  $A$  lies in the derived subgroup. The only remaining thing to check is that  $\text{PSL}_2(q)$  is generated by conjugates of  $A$ . We can now apply Iwasawa's Lemma, and deduce that  $\text{PSL}_2(q)$  is simple provided  $q > 3$ .  $\square$

Now consider the case of  $\text{PSL}_n(q)$  where  $n \geq 3$ .

**Theorem 3.17**  $\text{PSL}_n(q)$  is simple whenever  $n \geq 3$ .

*Proof.* We let  $\text{SL}_n(q)$  act on the set  $\Omega$  of 1-dimensional subspaces of  $\mathbb{F}_q^n$ , so that the kernel of the action is just the set of scalar matrices, and we obtain an action of  $\text{PSL}_n(q)$  on  $\Omega$ . Moreover, this action is 2-transitive, and therefore primitive.

To study the stabiliser of a point, we might as well take this point to be the 1-space  $\langle (1, 0, \dots, 0) \rangle$ . The stabiliser then consists of all matrices whose first row is  $(\lambda, 0, \dots, 0)$ . It is easy to check that the subgroup of matrices of the shape  $\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0_{n-1} \\ v_{n-1} & I_{n-1} \end{pmatrix}$ , where  $v_{n-1}$  is an arbitrary column vector of length  $n - 1$ , is a normal abelian subgroup  $A$ . Moreover, all non-trivial elements of  $A$  are *transvections*, that is, matrices (or linear maps)  $t$  such that  $t - I_n$  has rank 1 and  $(t - I_n)^2 = 0$ . By suitable choice of basis (but remember that the base change matrix must have determinant 1) it is easy to see that every transvection is contained in some conjugate of  $A$ .

We have two more things to verify: first, that  $\mathrm{SL}_n(q)$  is generated by transvections, and second, that  $\mathrm{SL}_n(q)$  is perfect. The first fact is a restatement of the elementary result that every matrix of determinant 1 can be reduced to the identity matrix by a finite sequence of elementary row operations of the form  $r_i \mapsto r_i + \lambda r_j$ . To prove the second it suffices to verify that every transvection is a commutator of elements of  $\mathrm{SL}_n(q)$ . An easy calculation shows that the commutator

$$\left[ \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & x & 1 \end{pmatrix} \right] = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 \\ -x & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}, \quad (11)$$

so by suitable choice of basis we see that if  $n > 2$  then every transvection is a commutator in  $\mathrm{SL}_n(q)$ . We can now apply Iwasawa's Lemma, and deduce that  $\mathrm{PSL}_n(q)$  is simple provided  $n > 2$ .  $\square$

### 3.10 Projective planes

Analogous to the construction of a projective line from a 2-dimensional vector space, a 3-dimensional vector space gives rise to a *projective plane*. This consists of *points* (i.e. 1-dimensional subspaces of the vector space) and *lines* (i.e. 2-dimensional subspaces). If the underlying field is  $\mathbb{F}_q$ , then there are  $q^2 + q + 1$  points and  $q^2 + q + 1$  lines, with  $q + 1$  points on each line, and  $q + 1$  lines through each point.

**Example 3.18** If  $q = 2$  there are 7 points and 7 lines. If the points are labelled by integers modulo 7, then the lines may be taken as the seven sets  $\{t, t + 1, t + 3\}$ . The automorphism group  $\mathrm{PGL}_3(2)$  may then be generated by the permutations  $t \mapsto t + 1$ ,  $t \mapsto 2t$  and  $(1, 2)(3, 6)$  of the points.

To see this in more detail, label the seven non-zero vectors of  $\mathbb{F}_2^3$  as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} 0: & (1, 1, 1) \\ 1: & (0, 1, 1) \\ 2: & (1, 0, 1) \\ 3: & (1, 0, 0) \\ 4: & (1, 1, 0) \\ 5: & (0, 0, 1) \\ 6: & (0, 1, 0) \end{aligned}$$

Then the matrix  $\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$  acts as the permutation  $(0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)$ , and the matrix

$$\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \text{ acts as } (1, 2, 4)(3, 6, 5), \text{ while } \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \text{ acts as } (1, 2)(3, 6).$$

The group  $GL_3(2)$  has order  $(2^3 - 1)(2^3 - 2)(2^3 - 2^2) = 7 \cdot 6 \cdot 4 = 168 = 2^3 \cdot 3 \cdot 7$ . Therefore the stabilizer of a point has order 24. For example, the stabilizer of 0 contains  $(1, 2, 4)(3, 6, 5)$  and  $(1, 2)(3, 6)$  and  $(4, 5)(6, 2)$ . These permutations all fix the partition  $(13|26|45)$ , and it is quite easy to see that they generate the even part of the wreath product  $S_2 \wr S_3$  acting on this partition.

The stabilizer of a line also has order 24. For example, the line  $\{1, 2, 4\}$  is fixed by  $(1, 2, 4)(3, 6, 5)$  and  $(1, 2)(3, 6)$  and  $(5, 6)(0, 3)$ . These elements generate a group  $S_4$  permuting the points 0, 3, 5, 6, that is the complement of the line. The action on the line itself is as the quotient  $S_3$  of  $S_4$ .

**Example 3.19** Similarly if  $q = 3$  the thirteen points may be labelled by the integers modulo 13 (where for convenience we write  $X = 10$ ,  $E = 11$  and  $T = 12$ ) in such a way that the lines are  $\{t, t + 1, t + 3, t + 9\}$ . Then the automorphism group  $PGL_3(3)$  is generated by the permutations  $t \mapsto t + 1$ ,  $t \mapsto 3t$  and  $(1, 3)(2, 6)(8, E)(X, T)$  of the points.

As an exercise, you can investigate this group along the lines of the previous example.

### End of Chapter 3