

# Rational Functions and Arithmetic Progressions



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# Introduction

We are interested in  $f \in k(x)$  that are decomposable as rational functions, i.e. for which

$$f(x) = g(h(x))$$

with  $g, h \in k(x)$ ,  $\deg g, \deg h \geq 2$  holds.

Such a decomposition is only unique up to a linear fractional transformation

$$\lambda = \frac{ax + b}{cx + d}$$

with  $ad - bc = \pm 1$ , since we may always replace  $g(x)$  by  $g(\lambda(x))$  and  $h(x)$  by  $\lambda^{-1}(h(x))$  without affecting the equation  $f(x) = g(h(x))$ .

## Related results

1949: **Rényi** and **Erdős** conjectured independently: bound for the number of terms of  $h(x)^2$  implies a bound for the terms of  $h(x)$ .

1987: **Schinzel** ingenious proof in the case  $h(x)^d$ .

**Schinzel** conjectured that if for fixed  $g$  the polynomial  $g(h(x))$  has at most  $l$  non-constant terms, then the number of terms of  $h$  is bounded only in terms of  $l$ . A more general form of this conjecture was proved by **Zannier** in 2008.

1922: **Ritt** proved that if  $f = p_1 \circ p_2 \circ \cdots \circ p_s = q_1 \circ q_2 \circ \cdots \circ q_r$ , then  $s = r$  and the sets of degrees of the polynomials are equal.

Extensions by **Beardon**, **Pakovich**, **Zieve** and many others.

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Extensions by **Beardon**, **Pakovich**, **Zieve** and many others. It is not true that all complete decompositions of a rational function have the same length. **Gutierrez** and **Sevilla** provided an example with rational coefficients as follows

$$f = \frac{x^3(x+6)^3(x^2-6x+36)^3}{(x-3)^3(x^2+3x+9)^3},$$

$$f = g_1 \circ g_2 \circ g_3 = x^3 \circ \frac{x(x-12)}{x-3} \circ \frac{x(x+6)}{x-3},$$

$$f = h_1 \circ h_2 = \frac{x^3(x+24)}{x-3} \circ \frac{x(x^2-6x+36)}{x^2+3x+9}.$$

Several arithmetical applications, equations of type  $f(x) = g(y)$  :

- **Davenport, Lewis and Schinzel**
- **Fried**
- **Beukers, Shorey and Tijdeman**
- **Bilu and Tichy**
- **Györy**
- **Brindza and Pintér**



In this talk we are interested in rational functions

$$f = \frac{P}{Q}$$

with a **bounded number of zeros and poles** (i.e. the number of distinct roots of  $P, Q$  in a reduced expression of  $f$  is bounded).

We assume that the number of zeros and poles are fixed, whereas the actual values of the zeros and poles and their multiplicities are considered as variables.

## Theorem by Fuchs and Pethő

Let  $n$  be a positive integer. Then there exists a positive integer  $J \leq 2nn^{2n}$  and, for every  $i \in \{1, \dots, J\}$ , an affine algebraic variety  $\mathcal{V}_i$  defined over  $\mathbb{Q}$  and with  $\mathcal{V}_i \subset \mathbb{A}^{n+t_i}$  for some  $2 \leq t_i \leq n$ , such that:

(i) If  $f, g, h \in k(x)$  with  $f(x) = g(h(x))$  and with  $\deg g, \deg h \geq 2$ ,  $g$  not of the shape  $(\lambda(x))^m$ ,  $m \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $\lambda \in \text{PGL}_2(k)$ , and  $f$  has at most  $n$  zeros and poles altogether, then there exists for some  $i \in \{1, \dots, J\}$  a point  $P = (\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_n, \beta_1, \dots, \beta_{t_i}) \in \mathcal{V}_i(k)$ , a vector  $(k_1, \dots, k_{t_i}) \in \mathbb{Z}^{t_i}$  with  $k_1 + k_2 + \dots + k_{t_i} = 0$  or not depending on  $\mathcal{V}_i$ , a partition of  $\{1, \dots, n\}$  in  $t_i + 1$  disjoint sets  $S_\infty, S_{\beta_1}, \dots, S_{\beta_{t_i}}$  with  $S_\infty = \emptyset$  if  $k_1 + k_2 + \dots + k_{t_i} = 0$ , and a vector  $(l_1, \dots, l_n) \in \{0, 1, \dots, n-1\}^n$ , also both depending only on  $\mathcal{V}_i$ , such that



$$f(x) = \prod_{j=1}^{t_i} (w_j/w_\infty)^{k_j}, \quad g(x) = \prod_{j=1}^{t_i} (x - \beta_j)^{k_j},$$

and

$$h(x) = \begin{cases} \beta_j + \frac{w_j}{w_\infty} \quad (j = 1, \dots, t_i), & \text{if } k_1 + k_2 + \dots + k_{t_i} \neq 0, \\ \frac{\beta_{j_1} w_{j_2} - \beta_{j_2} w_{j_1}}{w_{j_2} - w_{j_1}} \quad (1 \leq j_1 < j_2 \leq t_i), & \text{otherwise,} \end{cases}$$

where

$$w_j = \prod_{m \in S_{\beta_j}} (x - \alpha_m)^{l_m}, \quad j = 1, \dots, t_i,$$

$$w_\infty = \prod_{m \in S_\infty} (x - \alpha_m)^{l_m}.$$

Moreover, we have  $\deg h \leq (n-1)/(t_i-1) \leq n-1$ .

(ii) Conversely for given data  $P \in \mathcal{V}_i(k), (k_1, \dots, k_{t_i}), (l_1, \dots, l_n), S_\infty, S_{\beta_1}, \dots, S_{\beta_{t_i}}$ , as described in (i) one defines by the same equations rational functions  $f, g, h$  with  $f$  having at most  $n$  zeros and poles altogether for which  $f(x) = g(h(x))$  holds.

(iii) The integer  $J$  and equations defining the varieties  $\mathcal{V}_i$  are effectively computable only in terms of  $n$ .

## Tools from the theory of valuation

The **Mason-Stothers (1984) theorem** says: Let  $f, g \in k(x)$ , not both constant and let  $S$  be any set of valuations of  $k(x)$  containing all the zeros and poles in  $\mathbb{P}^1(k)$  of  $f$  and  $g$ . Then we have  $\max\{\deg f, \deg g\} \leq |S| - 2$ . Best possible.

More generally **Zannier (1995)** proved: Let  $S$  is any set of valuations of  $k(x)$  containing all the zeros and poles in  $\mathbb{P}^1(k)$  of  $g_1, \dots, g_m$ . If  $g_1, \dots, g_m \in k(x)$  span a  $k$ -vector space of dimension  $\mu < m$  and any  $\mu$  of the  $g_i$  are linearly independent over  $k$ , then

$$-\sum_{v \in \mathcal{M}} \min\{v(g_1), \dots, v(g_m)\} \leq \frac{1}{m - \mu} \binom{\mu}{2} (|S| - 2).$$

Since  $k$  is algebraically closed we can write

$$f(x) = \prod_{i=1}^n (x - \alpha_i)^{f_i}$$

with pairwise distinct  $\alpha_i \in k$  and  $f_i \in \mathbb{Z}$  for  $i = 1, \dots, n$ .

Similarly we get

$$g(x) = \prod_{j=1}^t (x - \beta_j)^{k_j}$$

with pairwise distinct  $\beta_j \in k$  and  $k_j \in \mathbb{Z}$  for  $j = 1, \dots, t$  and  $t \in \mathbb{N}$ .

Thus we have

$$\prod_{i=1}^n (x - \alpha_i)^{f_i} = f(x) = g(h(x)) = \prod_{j=1}^t (h(x) - \beta_j)^{k_j}.$$

We now distinguish two cases depending on  $k_1 + k_2 + \dots + k_t \neq 0$  or not; observe that this condition is equivalent to  $v_\infty(g) \neq 0$  or not.

We shall write  $h(x) = p(x)/q(x)$  with  $p, q \in k[x]$ ,  $p, q$  coprime.

The case  $k_1 + k_2 + \cdots + k_t \neq 0$

There is a subset  $S_\infty$  of the set  $\{1, \dots, n\}$  such that the  $\alpha_m$  for  $m \in S_\infty$  are precisely the poles in  $\mathbb{A}^1(k)$  of  $h$ , i.e.

$$q(x) = \prod_{m \in S_\infty} (x - \alpha_m)^{l_m}, \quad l_m \in \mathbb{N}.$$

Furthermore  $h$  and  $h(x) - \beta_j$  have the same number of poles counted by multiplicity, which means that their degrees are equal.

There is a partition of the set  $\{1, \dots, n\} \setminus S_\infty$  in  $t$  disjoint subsets  $S_{\beta_1}, \dots, S_{\beta_t}$  such that

$$h(x) = \beta_j + \frac{1}{q(x)} \prod_{m \in S_{\beta_j}} (x - \alpha_m)^{l_m},$$

where  $l_m \in \mathbb{N}$  satisfies  $l_m k_j = f_m$  for  $m \in S_{\beta_j}, j = 1, \dots, t$ .

Since we assume that  $g$  is not of the shape  $(\lambda(x))^m$  it follows that  $t \geq 2$ . Let  $1 \leq i < j \leq t$  be given. We have at least two different representations of  $h$  and thus we get

$$\beta_i + \frac{1}{q(x)} \prod_{r \in S_{\beta_i}} (x - \alpha_r)^{l_r} = \beta_j + \frac{1}{q(x)} \prod_{s \in S_{\beta_j}} (x - \alpha_s)^{l_s}$$

or equivalently  $\beta(u_i - u_j) = 1$ , where  $\beta = 1/(\beta_j - \beta_i)$  and

$$u_i = \frac{1}{q(x)} \prod_{r \in S_{\beta_i}} (x - \alpha_r)^{l_r} = \frac{w_i}{w_\infty}.$$

The case  $k_1 + k_2 + \cdots + k_t = 0$

Here we have

$$\prod_{i=1}^n (x - \alpha_i)^{f_i} = \prod_{j=1}^t \left( \frac{p(x)}{q(x)} - \beta_j \right)^{k_j} = \prod_{j=1}^t (p(x) - \beta_j q(x))^{k_j}.$$

There is a partition of the set  $\{1, \dots, n\}$  in  $t$  disjoint subsets  $S_{\beta_1}, \dots, S_{\beta_t}$  such that

$$(p(x) - \beta_j q(x))^{k_j} = \prod_{m \in S_{\beta_j}} (x - \alpha_m)^{f_m}.$$

Thus  $k_j$  divides  $f_m$  for all  $m \in S_{\beta_j}, j = 1, \dots, t$ . On putting  $l_m = f_m/k_j$  for  $m \in S_{\beta_j}$  we obtain

$$p(x) - \beta_j q(x) = \prod_{m \in S_{\beta_j}} (x - \alpha_m)^{l_m}, j = 1, \dots, t.$$

Let us choose  $1 \leq j_1 < j_2 < j_3 \leq t$ . From the corresponding three equations the so called **Siegel identity**  $v_{j_1, j_2, j_3} + v_{j_3, j_1, j_2} + v_{j_2, j_3, j_1} = 0$  follows, where

$$v_{j_1, j_2, j_3} = (\beta_{j_1} - \beta_{j_2}) \prod_{m \in S_{\beta_{j_3}}} (x - \alpha_m)^{l_m}.$$

The quantities  $v_{j_1, j_2, j_3}$  are non-constant rational functions and they are  $S$ -units. Observe that by taking  $j_1 = 1, j_2 = i, j_3 = j$  with  $1 \leq i < j \leq t$  the Siegel identity can be rewritten as

$$\frac{\beta_j - \beta_1}{\beta_j - \beta_i} \frac{w_i}{w_1} + \frac{\beta_1 - \beta_i}{\beta_j - \beta_i} \frac{w_j}{w_1} = 1.$$



## An algorithm to compute solutions

**Pethő** and **Tengely** provided an algorithm implemented in MAGMA:

- 1) Let  $S_\infty, S_{\beta_1}, \dots, S_{\beta_t}$  be a partition of  $\{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ .
- 2) For the partition and a vector  $(l_1, \dots, l_n) \in \{0, 1, \dots, n-1\}^n$  compute the corresponding variety  $V = \{v_1, \dots, v_r\}$ , where  $v_i$  is a polynomial in  $\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_n, \beta_1, \dots, \beta_t$ . Here we used Groebner basis technique.
- 3) To remove contradictory systems we compute  $\Phi = \prod_{i \neq j} (\alpha_i - \alpha_j) \prod_{i \neq j} (\beta_i - \beta_j)$ .
- 4) For all  $v_i$  compute

$$u_{i_1} = \frac{v_i}{\gcd(v_i, \Phi)},$$

and

$$u_{i_k} = \frac{u_{i_{k-1}}}{\gcd(u_{i_{k-1}}, \Phi)},$$

until  $\gcd(u_{i_{k-1}}, \Phi) = 1$ .

We note that Ayad and Fleischmann implemented a MAGMA code to find decompositions of a given rational function, as an example they considered the rational function

$$f = \frac{x^4 - 8x}{x^3 + 1}$$

and they obtained that  $f(x) = g(h(x))$ , where

$$g = \frac{x^2 + 4x}{x + 1} \quad \text{and} \quad h = \frac{x^2 - 2x}{x + 1}.$$

## Using our MAGMA procedure

`CFunc(3,7,1:PSet:=[[{1},{2,3},{4,5},{6,7}]],exptup:=[[1,1,1,1,1,1,1]]);`

we get the system of equations

$$\begin{aligned}\alpha_1\beta_1 - \alpha_1\beta_3 + \alpha_3^2 - \alpha_3\alpha_6 - \alpha_3\alpha_7 - \alpha_3\beta_1 + \alpha_3\beta_3 + \alpha_6\alpha_7 &= 0, \\ \alpha_1\beta_2 - \alpha_1\beta_3 + \alpha_5^2 - \alpha_5\alpha_6 - \alpha_5\alpha_7 - \alpha_5\beta_2 + \alpha_5\beta_3 + \alpha_6\alpha_7 &= 0, \\ \alpha_2 + \alpha_3 - \alpha_6 - \alpha_7 - \beta_1 + \beta_3 &= 0, \\ \alpha_3^2\beta_2 - \alpha_3^2\beta_3 - \alpha_3\alpha_6\beta_2 + \alpha_3\alpha_6\beta_3 - \alpha_3\alpha_7\beta_2 + \alpha_3\alpha_7\beta_3 - \\ \alpha_3\beta_1\beta_2 + \alpha_3\beta_1\beta_3 + \alpha_3\beta_2\beta_3 - \alpha_3\beta_3^2 - \alpha_5^2\beta_1 + \alpha_5^2\beta_3 + \\ \alpha_5\alpha_6\beta_1 - \alpha_5\alpha_6\beta_3 + \alpha_5\alpha_7\beta_1 - \alpha_5\alpha_7\beta_3 + \alpha_5\beta_1\beta_2 - \alpha_5\beta_1\beta_3 - \\ \alpha_5\beta_2\beta_3 + \alpha_5\beta_3^2 - \alpha_6\alpha_7\beta_1 + \alpha_6\alpha_7\beta_2 &= 0, \\ \alpha_4 + \alpha_5 - \alpha_6 - \alpha_7 - \beta_2 + \beta_3 &= 0.\end{aligned}$$

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We note that the above system has a solution

$$\begin{aligned}(\alpha_1, \alpha_2, \alpha_3, \alpha_4, \alpha_5, \alpha_6, \alpha_7, \beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3) = \\ (-1, 0, 2, -1 - \sqrt{-3}, -1 + \sqrt{-3}, \frac{1 - \sqrt{-3}}{2}, \frac{1 + \sqrt{-3}}{2}, 0, -4, -1).\end{aligned}$$

It corresponds to the example given by Ayad and Fleischmann, that is

$$f = \frac{x^4 - 8x}{x^3 + 1}, \quad g = \frac{x^2 + 4x}{x + 1}, \quad h = \frac{x^2 - 2x}{x + 1}.$$

Let  $k$  be an algebraically closed field of characteristic zero. **Pethő** and **Tengely** provided two families of decomposable rational functions having 3 zeros and poles altogether.

- (a)  $\frac{(x-\alpha_1)^{k_1}(x+1/4-\alpha_1)^{2k_2}}{(x-1/4-\alpha_1)^{2k_1+2k_2}}$  for some  $\alpha_1 \in k$  and  $k_1, k_2 \in \mathbb{Z}, k_1 + k_2 \neq 0$ ,
- (b)  $\frac{(x-\alpha_1)^{2k_1}(x+\alpha_1-2\alpha_2)^{2k_2}}{(x-\alpha_2)^{2k_1+2k_2}}$  for some  $\alpha_1, \alpha_2 \in k$  and  $k_1, k_2 \in \mathbb{Z}, k_1 + k_2 \neq 0$ .

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We note that in both cases the zeros and poles form an arithmetic progression:

$$\alpha_1 - \frac{1}{4}, \alpha_1, \alpha_1 + \frac{1}{4}, \quad \text{difference} = \frac{1}{4}$$

and

$$\alpha_1, \alpha_2, 2\alpha_2 - \alpha_1, \quad \text{difference} = \alpha_2 - \alpha_1.$$

Problem: determine decomposable rational functions having zeros and poles forming an arithmetic progression.

If  $S_\infty \neq \emptyset$ , then we take  $S_{\beta_i}$  and  $S_{\beta_j}$  two partitions having minimal cardinality. The zeros and poles satisfy  $\alpha_i = \alpha_0 + k_i d$ .

We have that

$$\begin{aligned}\beta_i - \beta_j &= \frac{\prod_{s \in S_{\beta_j}} (\alpha_r - \alpha_s)^{l_s}}{\prod_{m \in S_\infty} (\alpha_r - \alpha_m)^{l_m}} \\ \beta_i - \beta_j &= - \frac{\prod_{r \in S_{\beta_i}} (\alpha_s - \alpha_r)^{l_r}}{\prod_{m \in S_\infty} (\alpha_s - \alpha_m)^{l_m}}.\end{aligned}$$

Hence

$$\frac{u_1 d^{v_1}}{u_2 d^{v_2}} = - \frac{u_3 d^{v_3}}{u_4 d^{v_2}} \Rightarrow - \frac{u_1 u_4}{u_2 u_3} = d^{v_3 - v_1}.$$

If  $S_\infty = \emptyset$ , then we take  $S_{\beta_{j_1}}$ ,  $S_{\beta_{j_2}}$  and  $S_{\beta_{j_3}}$  three partitions having minimal cardinality. **Siegel identity** yields

$$v_{j_1, j_2, j_3}(\alpha_{j_1}) + v_{j_3, j_1, j_2}(\alpha_{j_1}) = 0$$

$$v_{j_1, j_2, j_3}(\alpha_{j_2}) + v_{j_2, j_3, j_1}(\alpha_{j_2}) = 0$$

$$v_{j_3, j_1, j_2}(\alpha_{j_3}) + v_{j_2, j_3, j_1}(\alpha_{j_3}) = 0.$$

After eliminating  $\beta_{j_1}, \beta_{j_2}, \beta_{j_3}$  one obtains that

$$\gamma = d^\delta.$$

In both cases we get a finite list of possible values of  $d$  and a finite list of special tuples  $(k_1, \dots, k_n, l_1, \dots, l_n)$  for which  $v_3 - v_1 = 0$  and  $-\frac{u_1 u_4}{u_2 u_3} = 1$  or  $\delta = 0$  and  $\gamma = 1$ .



## Example

Let  $n = 5$  and  $|S_\infty| = 1, |S_{\beta_1}| = |S_{\beta_2}| = 2$ . We have the following system of equations

$$\begin{aligned}x = \alpha_1 : \quad \beta_1 - \beta_2 &= \frac{(k_1 - k_3)^{l_3}(k_1 - k_4)^{l_4} d^{l_3+l_4}}{(k_1 - k_5)^{l_5} d^{l_5}} \\x = \alpha_2 : \quad \beta_1 - \beta_2 &= \frac{(k_2 - k_3)^{l_3}(k_2 - k_4)^{l_4} d^{l_3+l_4}}{(k_2 - k_5)^{l_5} d^{l_5}} \\x = \alpha_3 : \quad \beta_1 - \beta_2 &= -\frac{(k_3 - k_1)^{l_1}(k_3 - k_2)^{l_2} d^{l_1+l_2}}{(k_3 - k_5)^{l_5} d^{l_5}} \\x = \alpha_4 : \quad \beta_1 - \beta_2 &= -\frac{(k_4 - k_1)^{l_1}(k_4 - k_2)^{l_2} d^{l_1+l_2}}{(k_4 - k_5)^{l_5} d^{l_5}}.\end{aligned}$$

If  $l_1 + l_2 - l_3 - l_4 \neq 0$ , then  $d$  is an element of a finite set having 100 elements.

## Example

In case  $(k_1, k_2, k_3, k_4, k_5) = (0, 4, 1, 3, 2)$  and  $(l_1, l_2, l_3, l_4, l_5) = (1, 1, 2, 2, 2)$  we have that  $d = \frac{2\sqrt{3}}{3}$  and

$$g(x) = (x - \beta_1)(x - \beta_1 + 3)$$

$$h(x) = \beta_1 + \frac{(x - \alpha_0)(x - \alpha_0 - 4d)}{(x - \alpha_0 - 2d)^2}$$

$$f(x) = \frac{4(x - \alpha_0)(x - \alpha_0 - d)(x - \alpha_0 - 3d)(x - \alpha_0 - 4d)}{(x - \alpha_0 - 2d)^4}.$$

## Example

In case  $(k_1, k_2, k_3, k_4, k_5) = (1, 4, 3, 0, 2)$  and  $(l_1, l_2, l_3, l_4, l_5) = (1, 1, 1, 1, 1)$  we have that  $l_1 + l_2 - l_3 - l_4 = 0$  and

$$g(x) = (x - \beta_1)(x - \beta_1 + 2d)$$

$$h(x) = \beta_1 + \frac{(x - \alpha_0 - d)(x - \alpha_0 - 4d)}{(x - \alpha_0 - 2d)}$$

$$f(x) = \frac{(x - \alpha_0)(x - \alpha_0 - d)(x - \alpha_0 - 3d)(x - \alpha_0 - 4d)}{(x - \alpha_0 - 2d)}.$$



# My favorite sequence

Number Theory and Its  
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Sára Tengely: July 4, 2015.