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Том 301, 2003 г.

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ON REPRESENTATION THEORY OF SYMMETRIC GROUPS

1. Introduction.

The purpose of this note is to present a new approach, due to Andrei Okounkov and Anatoly Vershik ([2]), to description of finite-dimensional complex irreducible representations of symmetric groups. Its aim is to give an alternative construction to the combinatorial one using tabloids, polytabloids and Specht modules, and to show how the combinatorial objects we introduce (Young diagrams and tableaux) come from the inside structure of symmetric groups. For this reason this method is more abstract than the classical one. We use a few results about representations of finite groups in general, as they are set out in [9]. The main result we obtain is the branching rule for representations of S_n (Which irreducible representations of S_{n-1} are contained in a given irreducible representation of S_n?). Moreover, from what is set out here, it is easy to show that the representations of symmetric groups are defined over $\mathbb{Q}$, and to describe characters of S_n.

I would like to thank Etienne Ghys and Tullio Ceccherini–Silberstein for their support during this work and Anatoly Vershik for his attention.

2. Multiplicities of representations of symmetric groups.

In this text we will denote by S_n the group of permutations of the set $\{1, \cdots, n\}$. For $i \leqslant n$, if nothing is specified, we will consider S_i as the subgroup of S_n acting on the set $\{1, \cdots, i\}$. From this we deduce an injection of the group algebra $\mathbb{C}[S_i]$ in $\mathbb{C}[S_n]$. We denote by $S_n^\wedge$ the set of finite-dimensional irreducible complex representations of S_n, and by definition, $S_1^\wedge = \{\lambda_1\}$. If λ is in $S_n^\wedge$, we will denote by V^λ the space of the representation. The main object we are going to deal with is an infinite graph, called the *Bratteli diagram*, whose vertices are

$$\coprod_{n \geqslant 1} S_n^\wedge .$$

We will put k oriented edges between a representation $\lambda \in S_n^\wedge$ and a representation $\mu \in S_{n-1}^{\wedge}$ if μ is contained k times in λ, considering λ as a representation of S_{n-1} (k equals the dimension of the space $\mathrm{Hom}_{S_{n-1}}(V^{\mu}, V^{\lambda})$). We write

$$\mu \nearrow \lambda$$

in this case. We will see that symmetric groups are multiplicity free, that is, if $\mu \in S_{n-1}^{\wedge}$ and $\lambda \in S_{n}^{\wedge}$, then

$$\dim \mathrm{Hom}_{S_{n-1}}(V^{\mu}, V^{\lambda}) \in \{0, 1\}.$$

Our aim is to describe this graph, that is to answer the following question: *Given an irreducible representation of S_n, which irreducible representations of S_{n-1} does it contain?*

Answering this question leads to combinatorial objects such as Young diagrams and tableaux. In the classical approach of representation theory of symmetric groups, we construct some S_n-modules using these combinatorial objects, and we observe *a posteriori* that they contain all the irreducible S_n-modules. In the present approach we start from the branching of the irreducible representations, and we try to understand it.

We denote by Z_n the center of the algebra $\mathbb{C}[S_n]$, and by X_n the element

$$(1, n) + \cdots + (n-1, n)$$

(with $X_1 = 0$). We then define A_n as the algebra generated by $Z_1, \cdots, Z_n$ in $\mathbb{C}[S_n]$. This algebra is commutative and contains the elements X_i, because

$$X_i = \sum_{S_i} \text{transpositions} - \sum_{S_{i-1}} \text{transpositions}.$$

We are going to prove the following theorem.

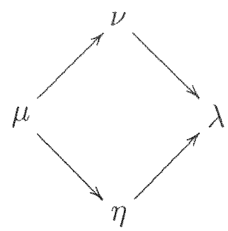
Theorem 2.1. *Let V^{λ} be an irreducible representation of S_{l+k} and V^{μ} an irreducible representation of S_l. Then the multiplicity of V^{μ} in V^{λ} is at most $k!$.*

In particular, any irreducible representation of S_{n-1} is contained at most once in an irreducible representation of S_n. If $k = 2$, there are three possible situations:

- The representation μ is not contained in λ.
- The multiplicity of μ in λ is 1. Then the part of the Bratteli diagram between λ and μ is (with $\nu \in S_{l+1}$)

$$\mu \to \nu \to \lambda.$$

- The multiplicity of μ in λ is 2. Since μ is contained only once in each irreducible representation of S_{l+1}, we have (with $\eta, \nu \in S_{l+1}$):



Let G be a finite group, H a subgroup of G, $\rho_1 : G \to GL(V)$ and $\rho_2 : H \to GL(U)$ some irreducible representations. Then the centralizer

$$\mathbb{C}[G]^H = \{x \in \mathbb{C}[S_n],\, hxh^{-1} = x,\, \forall h \in H\}$$

acts on $\mathrm{Hom}_H(U, V)$ by $f^g = \rho_1(g) \circ f$ ($f \in \mathrm{Hom}_H(U, V)$, $g \in \mathbb{C}[G]^H$), with ρ_1 extended linearly to $\mathbb{C}[G]$. We can easily check that $\mathrm{Hom}_H(U, V)$ is an irreducible $\mathbb{C}[G]^H$-module. We can apply this with $G = S_{l+k}$ and $H = S_l$ and write $Z_{k,l} = \mathbb{C}[S_{l+k}]^{S_l}$. We will use the following theorem, proved in [6] and [2].

Theorem 2.2. *The algebra $Z_{k,l}$ is generated by:*

1. *the elements $X_{l+1}, \cdots, X_{l+k}$;*
2. *the group S_k considered as the group of permutations of the set $\{l+1, \cdots, l+k\}$;*
3. *the algebra Z_l.*

Let us now prove Theorem 2.1. Since the X_i's commute, they have a common eigenvector v in $\mathrm{Hom}_{S_l}(V^\mu, V^\lambda)$. We consider the space V spanned by the vectors

$$s(v) \quad \text{with} \quad s \in S_k.$$

Since Z_l is in the center of $Z_{k,l}$, it acts linearly on the irreducible $Z_{k,l}$-module. Then Z_l stabilizes V. Moreover, the elements of S_k stabilize V, and the relations

$$\begin{aligned} s_i X_j &= X_j s_i, \quad j \notin \{i, i+1\}, \\ X_{i+1} &= s_i X_i s_i + s_i \end{aligned}$$

combined with the choice of v show that the X_i's also stabilize V. Hence we have

$$V = \mathrm{Hom}_{S_l}(V^\mu, V^\lambda)$$

and the inequality on the dimension required by Theorem 2.1.

3. Canonical basis of V^λ.

Here, we shall see how to construct a particular basis of the spaces V^λ. Since the irreducible representations of S_{n-1} are multiplicity free in V^λ, the decomposition

$$V^\lambda = \bigoplus_{\mu \in S_{n-1}^\wedge, \mu \nearrow \lambda} V^\mu$$

is canonical. Decomposing each space V^μ in irreducible representations of S_{n-2}, and iterating this, we get a decomposition of V^λ in lines

$$V^\lambda = \bigoplus_T V_T,$$

where $T = \lambda_1 \nearrow \cdots \nearrow \lambda_n = \lambda$ runs over the set of paths from λ_1 to λ in the Bratteli diagram. A *Young basis* of V^λ is any basis corresponding to this decomposition into one-dimensional subspaces. Applying this to each irreducible representation of S_n, we get a particular basis (defined up to scalars) of the space

$$\bigoplus_{\lambda \in S_n^\wedge} V^\lambda.$$

We still call it the *Young basis* and denote it by $\{v_T\}_T$. Here T runs over the set of all paths of length n starting from λ_1 in the Bratteli diagram. Using the isomorphism

$$\mathbb{C}[S_n] \simeq \bigoplus_{\lambda \in S_n^\wedge} \mathrm{End}\,(V^\lambda),$$

we can identify $\mathbb{C}[S_n]$ with a subalgebra of the algebra of endomorphisms of the space $\bigoplus_{\lambda \in S_n^\wedge} V^\lambda$. Then we have the following proposition.

Proposition 3.1. *The algebra A_n is the algebra of diagonal operators in the Young basis.*

Proof. Let $\mathcal{A}$ be the algebra of diagonal operators in the Young basis. Clearly, it is a maximal commutative subalgebra of $\mathrm{End}\,(\oplus_\lambda V^\lambda)$. Since

A_n is commutative it suffices to prove that $\mathcal{A} \subset A_n$. We choose a path $T = \lambda_1 \nearrow \cdots \nearrow \lambda_n$ of length n in the Bratteli diagram. Let

$$p_{\lambda_i} = \frac{\dim(V^{\lambda_i})}{i!} \sum_{g \in S_i} \chi_{\lambda_i}(g) g$$

(χ_i being the character of the representation λ_i). The endomorphism p_{λ_n} is the projection from $\bigoplus_{\lambda \in S_n^\wedge} V^\lambda$ onto V^{λ_n}, and for each i, the restriction to $V^{\lambda_{i+1}}$ of p_{λ_i} is the projection onto V^{λ_i}. Hence the product

$$p = p_{\lambda_1} \cdots p_{\lambda_n}$$

is the projection onto V_T. Moreover, $p_{\lambda_i} \in Z_i$, so p is in A_n. Since the projections onto the lines V_T span $\mathcal{A}$ this finishes the proof.

Another important consequence of Theorem 2.2 is the following result.

Proposition 3.2. *The elements $X_1, \cdots, X_n$ generate A_n.*

Proof. We prove this result by induction. It is obvious if $n = 2$. Then, $X_1, \cdots, X_{n-1}$ generate A_{n-1}, and in particular Z_{n-1}. By Theorem 2.2, X_n and Z_{n-1} generate $Z_{1,n}$, which contains Z_n.

Now we can consider a map from the set of all paths from λ_1 to an element of $S_n^\wedge$ in the Bratteli diagram (equivalently, from the one-dimensional subspaces corresponding to the Young basis of $\bigoplus_{\lambda \in S_n^\wedge} V^\lambda$):

$$T \mapsto \phi(T) = (a_1, \cdots, a_n) \in \mathbb{C}^n$$

with $X_i(v_T) = a_i v_T$. This map is injective. Indeed, if two paths T and T' have the same image under ϕ, then for every f in $\mathcal{A}$ we have

$$f(v_T) = c v_T$$
$$f(v_{T'}) = c v_{T'}.$$

Taking f equal to the projection onto V_T, we see that the lines V_T and $V_{T'}$ are equal, so the paths T and T' are the same. We will denote by Spec (n) the image of ϕ. If $\alpha \in$ Spec (n), we will denote by v_α a vector (which is defined only up to a scalar) whose image under ϕ is α. Finally, we define an equivalence relation on the set Spec (n) as follows: $\alpha \sim \beta$ if and only if the vectors v_α and v_β are in the same irreducible representation of S_n, or, in other words, if the corresponding paths in the Bratteli diagram have the same end. In what follows, we will describe the form of the set Spec (n).

We now denote by $s_i = (i, i+1)$ the Coxeter generators of the symmetric group S_n. Let v_T be a Young basis vector, and let s_i be one of these generators. If $i \leqslant k-1$, s_i is in S_k, and the vectors v_T and $s_i(v_T)$ are in the same isotypical component for S_k. If $i \geqslant k+1$, then s_i commute with the elements of S_k, so $s_i(v_T)$ and v_T are still in the same isotypical component. Since a vector $v_{T'}$ ($T' = \lambda'_1 \nearrow \cdots \nearrow \lambda'_n$) lies in the isotypical component λ'_i of S_i, this establishes the following result.

Proposition 3.3. *The vector $s_i(v_T)$ is a linear combination of vectors $v_{T'}$ such that*

$$\lambda'_j = \lambda_j \quad \textit{if} \quad j \neq k.$$

Using Theorem 2.1, there are only two possibilities: there are at most two paths that satisfy the condition of the previous proposition, because the multiplicity of λ_{k-1} in λ_{k+1} is at most two. Hence if v_T is not an eigenvector for the action of s_i, then it is a linear combination of two Young basis vectors.

In $\mathbb{C}[S_n]$, the elements s_i, X_i, X_{i+1} generate an algebra denoted by A. The representation of A in a subspace of V^λ is always totally reducible. Indeed, in $\mathbb{C}[S_n]$, transpositions act by left translations as symmetric operators (for the inner product, $\langle g_1, g_2\rangle = \delta_{g_1 g_2}$; g_1, $g_2 \in S_n$). The generators of A are sums of transpositions, hence they are symmetric with respect to this inner product, which implies that the representation of A in $\mathbb{C}[S_n]$ is totally reducible. Since $\mathbb{C}[S_n]$ contains each V^λ, its representations in each V^λ are totally reducible.

Proposition 3.4. *Let $\alpha = (a_1, \cdots, a_n)$ be an element of* Spec (n)*. It satisfies the following conditions:*

1. $a_i \neq a_{i+1}$;
2. $a_{i+1} = a_i \pm 1 \Leftrightarrow s_i(v_\alpha) = \pm v_\alpha$;
3. *If $a_{i+1} \neq a_i \pm 1$, then $\beta = s_i(\alpha) = (a_1, \cdots, a_{i+1}, a_i, \cdots, a_n)$ is still an element of* Spec (n) *and $\beta \sim \alpha$. Moreover,*

$$v_\beta = \left(s_i - \frac{1}{a_{i+1} - a_i}\right) v_\alpha.$$

In the basis (v_α, v_β), the elements s_i, X_i, X_{i+1} act as follows:

$$\begin{pmatrix} \frac{1}{a_{i+1}-a_i} & 1 - \frac{1}{(a_{i+1}-a_i)^2} \\ 1 & \frac{1}{a_i - a_{i+1}} \end{pmatrix}, \quad \begin{pmatrix} a_i & 0 \\ 0 & a_{i+1} \end{pmatrix}, \quad \begin{pmatrix} a_{i+1} & 0 \\ 0 & a_i \end{pmatrix}.$$

Proof.

- Suppose first that v_α and $s_i(v_\alpha)$ are linearly independent. The relations that define the algebra A show that the plane they span is stable under the actions of s_i, X_i, and X_{i+1}. They act in this basis as follows:

$$\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}, \quad \begin{pmatrix} a_i & -1 \\ 0 & a_{i+1} \end{pmatrix}, \quad \begin{pmatrix} a_{i+1} & 1 \\ 0 & a_i \end{pmatrix}.$$

  If $a_i = a_{i+1}$, then X_i is not diagonalizable in the subspace we consider, which is impossible (it is in V^λ, hence in each stable subspace). So $a_i \neq a_{i+1}$.
- If v_α and $s_i(v_\alpha)$ are not linearly independent, then $s_i(v_\alpha) = \pm v_\alpha$ and the relation $X_{i+1} = s_i X_i s_i + s_i$ shows that $a_{i+1} = a_i \pm 1$.

This proves the first claim.

Suppose that $s_i(v_\alpha)$ and v_α are linearly independent and that $a_{i+1} = a_i + \epsilon$ with $\epsilon = \pm 1$. In this case we can check by a simple computation that there is only one line stable under the action of A in the plane spanned by these two vectors (it is generated by $s_i(v_\alpha) - \epsilon v_\alpha$). This is impossible because of the total reducibility of the representation of A. Hence if $a_{i+1} = a_i + \epsilon$, then $s_i(v_\alpha)$ and v_α are proportional and we can check that $s_i(v_\alpha) = \epsilon v_\alpha$. This proves the second claim.

Conversely, if $a_{i+1} - a_i \neq \pm 1$, then the vectors $s_i(v_\alpha)$ and v_α are linearly independent by what has just been done. Then

$$v_\beta = \left(s_i - \frac{1}{a_{i+1} - a_i} \right) v_\alpha$$

satisfies

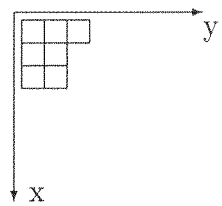
$$X_k(v_\beta) = b_k v_\beta$$

with $b_i = a_{i+1}$, $b_{i+1} = a_i$, and $b_k = a_k$ otherwise. This implies that v_β is a Young basis vector in the same irreducible representation as v_α (since $i \leqslant n-1$). Hence $\beta = (a_1, \cdots, a_{i+1}, a_i, \cdots, a_n)$ is an element of Spec (n) and $\alpha \sim \beta$.

In the latter case, the transposition s_i will be called *admissible* for α.

4. Young diagrams.

A partition of n is a decreasing sequence of integers whose sum equals n. We can represent it by a Young diagram. For instance, the following diagram stands for the partition $(l^1, l^2, l^3) = (3, 2, 2)$ of 7.



A *box* in a Young diagram will be described by its coordinates (x, y): its *content* is by definition the integer $c((x, y)) = y - x$. We can now introduce a second graph, called the *Young graph*. Its vertices are all the Young diagrams (of any size). A diagram α with $n-1$ boxes is connected to a diagram β with n boxes if $\alpha \subset \beta$. We denote by λ_1 the only diagram with one box. We shall see that the Bratteli diagram and the Young graph are isomorphic.

If λ is a Young diagram with n boxes, a *Young tableau* (associated to λ) is a path from λ_1 to λ in the Young graph. Equivalently, to obtain a tableau we have to enumerate the boxes of λ in such a way that for every k, the k first boxes form a Young diagram associated to some partition of k. We refer here to the terminology of [2], different from the classical one used in others books on symmetric groups. For instance, in [7], a tableau is just an enumeration of the boxes of a diagram, whereas a tableau with the previous property is called a standard tableau.

Thus a Young tableau of length n can be denoted by $(\nu_1, \cdots, \nu_n)$, ν_i being a Young diagram with i boxes, $\nu_{i-1} \subset \nu_i$. In this case $\nu_i \setminus \nu_{i-1}$ is just one box. So we can consider the element

$$(c(\nu_1), c(\nu_2 \setminus \nu_1), \cdots, c(\nu_n \setminus \nu_{n-1}))$$

of $\mathbb{Z}^n$. The first box of any diagram always has coordinates $(1, 1)$, so we always have $c(\nu_1) = 0$. Moreover, when we place the ith box, the space which is over and on the left of this box is already filled by the previous boxes. In particular, there is a box just over or just at the left of the ith box. This implies $\{c(\nu_i/\nu_{i-1}) - 1, c(\nu_i/\nu_{i-1}) + 1\} \cap \{c(\nu_1), \cdots, c(\nu_{i-1}/\nu_{i-2})\} \neq \emptyset$. Finally, if a box has coordinates $(b, b + a)$ and so is on the line $y - x = a$, and if we want to put a second box on the same line, we must first fill one of these two boxes: $(b + 1, b + a)$ or $(b, b + a + 1)$. This leads us to defining the following set.

Definition 4.1. *We define* Cont(n) *as the set of elements* $\alpha = (a_1, \cdots, a_n) \in \mathbb{C}^n$ *such that the following conditions hold:*

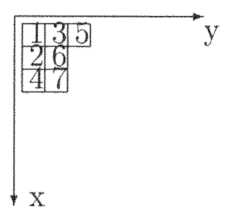
1. $a_1 = 0$;
2. $\{a_i + 1, a_i - 1\} \cap \{a_1, \cdots, a_{i-1}\} \neq \emptyset$ *if* $i \geqslant 2$;
3. *If* $a_p = a_q = a$ *with* $p < q$, *then*

$$\{a+1, a-1\} \subset \{a_{p+1}, \cdots, a_{q-1}\}.$$

We will denote by Tab(n) the set of all Young tableaux of length n, that is, the set of all paths of length n (from λ_1) in the Young graph. Given the previous observations, we have a map

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Tab}\,(n) &\to \text{Cont}\,(n) \subset \mathbb{Z}^n \\ (\nu_1, \cdots, \nu_n) &\mapsto (c(\nu_1), c(\nu_2/\nu_1), \cdots, c(\nu_n/\nu_{n-1})). \end{aligned}$$

We can easily check that this map is a bijection. For instance, to the tableau



we associate the element $(0, -1, 1, -2, 2, 0, -1)$ of $\mathbb{Z}^7$.

Now we are able to prove the following theorem.

Theorem 4.2. Spec$(n) \subset$ Cont(n).

Lemma 4.3. *Let* $\alpha = (a_1, \cdots, a_n) \in \mathbb{C}^n$ *be such that for some* i,

$$a_i = a_{i+1} + 1 = a_{i+2} \quad \text{or} \quad a_i = a_{i+1} - 1 = a_{i+2}.$$

Then α *is not in the set* Spec(n).

Proof of the lemma. Suppose that α is in Spec(n). We can use Proposition 3.4 and the Coxeter relation

$$s_i s_{i+1} s_i = s_{i+1} s_i s_{i+1}.$$

If $a_i = a_{i+1} + 1 = a_{i+2}$, then the left-hand side of the equation above multiplies v_α by -1, whereas the right-hand side multiplies it by 1. The argument is the same if $a_i = a_{i+1} - 1 = a_{i+2}$.

Proof of the theorem. Let us consider an element $\alpha = (a_1, \cdots, a_n)$ in Spec (n). It is obvious that $a_1 = 0$, since X_1 is zero. We will check the two other properties by induction on n.

• The value a_2 is in $\{\pm 1\}$, because it is an eigenvalue of an element of order two. Suppose now that the property is true for $i \leqslant n-1$, and suppose that $\{a_n + 1, a_n - 1\} \cap \{a_1, \cdots, a_{n-1}\} = \emptyset$. Then $(n-1, n)$ is admissible, so $(a_1, \cdots, a_{n-2}, a_n)$ is in Spec $(n-1)$. But the hypothesis we made implies, in particular, $\{a_n + 1, a_n - 1\} \cap \{a_1, \cdots, a_{n-2}\} = \emptyset$, which contradicts the induction hypothesis on Spec $(n-1)$. This establishes the second claim.

• First we notice that a_3 cannot be zero, otherwise α contains the sequence $(0, \pm 1, 0)$. Suppose now that $a_p = a_n = a$ with $p < n$. We may choose p to be the maximum integer such that $a \notin \{a_{p+1}, \cdots, a_{n-1}\}$; this does not change the result we have to prove. Suppose first that $a + 1 \notin \{a_{p+1}, \cdots, a_{n-1}\}$. The integer $a - 1$ is contained at most once in $\{a_{p+1}, \cdots, a_{n-1}\}$, otherwise, by the induction hypothesis, a would appear between two occurrences of $a - 1$, which contradicts our choice of p.

Now, applying admissible transpositions, we get an element of Spec (n) which contains one of the following sequences:

$$(\cdots a, a \cdots), \quad (\cdots, a, a-1, a, \cdots).$$

This is impossible by Proposition 3.4 and Lemma 4.3. We prove in the same way that $a - 1 \in \{a_{p+1}, \cdots, a_{n-1}\}$.

Remark. We know by the previous theorem that Spec $(n) \subset \mathbb{Z}^n$. We proved before that we always have $s_i(v_\alpha) = \pm v_\alpha$ or $s_i(v_\alpha) = v_\beta + \frac{1}{a_{i+1} - a_i} v_\alpha$. The coefficient 1 in front of v_β is in fact arbitrary, because Young basis vectors are defined only up to a scalar. But these formulas let us think that it is possible to define the representation over the field of rational numbers, if the choice of the generator of each line V_T of the Young basis is well done. It is shown in [2] how we can arbitrarily choose a vector v_T for a certain path T and then deduce a particular choice for all the other vectors so that the representation is well-defined over $\mathbb{Q}$.

The notion of admissible transposition for an element α of Spec (n) can be extended to an element α of Cont (n): the transposition s_i is admissible for α if it exchanges two consecutive coordinates whose difference is not ± 1. In terms of paths in the Young graph, an admissible transposition exchanges two consecutive boxes in a path that are neither in the same column nor in the same row.

We will now reach our first aim and prove that the Young graph and the Bratteli diagram are isomorphic. To do this, let us introduce an equivalence relation on Cont(n) as follows:

$$(a_1, \cdots, a_n) \approx (b_1, \cdots, b_n) \Leftrightarrow \exists\, \sigma \in S_n \quad \text{such that} \quad a_i = b_{\sigma(i)}.$$

We can interpret this relation in terms of tableaux: two tableaux are in relation if and only if they lie on the same diagram. In terms of paths in the Young graph, we have exactly the same interpretation as for the Bratteli diagram and the relation $\sim$ (two paths of length n are in relation if they have the same end).

Lemma 4.4. *Let T_1 and T_2 be two paths from λ_1 to λ in the Young graph. Then we can obtain T_2 from T_1 by admissible transpositions.*

Proof. It suffices to prove that from any path from λ_1 to $\lambda = (l^1, l^2, \cdots)$, we can obtain, by admissible transpositions, the path associated to the following tableau:

$$\begin{array}{ccccc} 1 & 2 & \cdots & \cdots & l^1 \\ l^1+1 & \cdots & l^1+l^2 & & \\ \cdots & & & & \end{array}$$

It is sufficient to prove that we can put the number n in the last box of the last row of the diagram (and then use induction). We denote by i the number that is initially in the last box of the last row of the tableau we consider. The numbers $\geqslant i+1$ cannot be in the same column as the number i: it is at the end of the column, and the other boxes of the column contain numbers $\leqslant i-1$. For the same reason, the numbers $i+1, \cdots, n$ cannot be in the same row as i. Hence the transpositions $(i, i+1), \cdots, (n-1, n)$ are admissible.

Suppose now that $\alpha \in \text{Spec}(n)$ and $\beta \in \text{Cont}(n)$ with $\alpha \approx \beta$. To say that $\alpha \approx \beta$ means that the tableaux associated to α and β are on the same diagram. By the previous lemma, we can pass from one to the other by admissible transpositions. Since these transpositions preserve the set Spec(n) (by Proposition 3.4) and also preserve the equivalence class for $\sim$, we have $\beta \in \text{Spec}(n)$ and $\alpha \sim \beta$.

Now we can observe that Spec$(n)/\sim$ and Cont$(n)/\approx$ have the same cardinality, which is the number of partitions of n. From what has just been done, an equivalence class for $\approx$ either contains no element of Spec(n) or is included in an equivalence class for $\sim$. This implies that the classes for $\approx$ and $\sim$ are the same and, moreover, that

$$\text{Spec}(n) = \text{Cont}(n) \text{ and the relations } \sim \text{ and } \approx \text{ are the same.}$$

Put differently, this means that for each integer n, the set of paths from the unique vertex of the first level to the vertices of level n in the Young graph and the Bratteli diagram are in bijection. Hence we have proved the following theorem.

Theorem 4.5. *The sets* $\mathrm{Spec}\,(n)$ *and* $\mathrm{Cont}\,(n)$ *are equal. The Young graph and the Bratteli diagram are isomorphic, and the relations* $\sim$ *and* $\approx$ *are the same.*

Remark. This theorem contains the branching rule for the restriction of representations:

An irreducible representation of S_n *contains an irreducible representation of* S_{n-1} *if and only if the corresponding diagrams are contained one in the other.*

Combining this with the Frobenius reciprocity formula, we can get the same result for the induction.

Let V^μ (resp., V^λ) be an irreducible representation of S_{n-1} (resp., S_n). Then V^λ is contained in $\mathrm{Ind}\,_{S_{n-1}}^{S_n} V^\mu$ if and only if the diagram associated to μ is included in the diagram associated to λ.

The approach to the representation theory of S_n developed in [2] presents many advantages. First, the results we presented here allow us to establish the branching rule for representations simultaneously with the description of the representations themselves. Another point is that the description of the representations is recursive: to describe representations of S_n we use the descriptions of representations of $S_{n-1}, S_{n-2} \dots$

5. An application.

As an application, we can now see how this method allow us to describe the spectrum of the element $X_n = (1,n) + \cdots + (n-1,n)$ which acts on $\mathbb{C}[S_n]$ by left translations.

If λ is a partition of n, we now describe the spectrum of X_n in the isotypical component $(\dim V^\lambda)V^\lambda$ of $\mathbb{C}[S_n]$. We denote by λ^- any partition of $n-1$ obtained by deleting a box of λ (the box λ/λ^- is called an "inner corner" in [7]). Then λ/λ^- is the last box of $\dim V^{\lambda^-}$ paths from λ_1 to λ in the Bratteli diagram. Hence the integer $c(\lambda/\lambda^-)$ is an eigenvalue for X_n with multiplicity $\dim V^{\lambda^-}$ in V^λ. All the eigenvalues of X_n are integers, and since they have the form

$$y - x, \ \ x, y \in \{1, \cdots, n\},$$

they are integers from $\{1-n, \cdots, n-1\}$. Using the partitions

$$(n-k, \underbrace{1, \cdots, 1}_{k \text{ times}}),$$

it is easy to see that all the integers from $\{1-n, \cdots, n-1\}$ are eigenvalues of X_n.

But computing the multiplicity in $\mathbb{C}[S_n]$ of a given integer is quite difficult: first because we have to determine all the partitions λ of n for which the integer occurs in V^λ, and second because explicitly computing the multiplicity inside V^λ requires knowing the dimensions of irreducible representations of S_n (for which there is no simple formulas). For instance, we can compute the multiplicities of the two highest eigenvalues: the only representation in which the value $n-1$ can occur is the one-dimensional representation associated to the partition (n) (the corresponding representation is the trivial one: $S_n \to \{1\}$), hence $n-1$ has multiplicity one in $\mathbb{C}[S_n]$. To compute the multiplicity of $n-2$, we have to see for which integers from $\{1, \cdots, n\}$ we can have

$$y - x = n - 2.$$

The case $(x, y) = (2, n)$ is impossible (the corresponding Young diagram would have more than $2n$ boxes); the case $(x, y) = (1, n-1)$ can only occur in the representation associated to the partition $(n-1, 1)$, which is of dimension $n-1$. The representation of S_{n-1} that we get by deleting the box with coordinates $(n-1, 1)$ is $n-2$ dimensional. Finally, the multiplicity of $n-2$ in $\mathbb{C}[S_n]$ is $(n-1)(n-2)$.

Remark. If we consider the Laplacian $\Delta = n - 1 - X_n$, which acts on $\mathbb{C}[S_n]$, then what has just been done shows that its first positive eigenvalue is one with multiplicity $(n-1)(n-2)$. This result has already been proved in [3] and [4], without using representation theory. Moreover, these computations had already been done using classical methods from representation theory in [1], [8], and [5].

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Поступило 14 октября 2003 г.
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