LECTURE 3. DECOMPOSITION OF A REPRESENTATION. ONE-DIMENSIONAL REPRESENTATIONS.

Please treat each unproven proposition in this text as an exercise.

1. Existence of a Decomposition of a Completely Reducible Representation

Let us formally define "the smallest blocks" of the representation T in the vector space V.

Definition 1.1. Let $T : G \to \mathrm{GL}(V)$ be a representation of a group G. A subspace $U \subset V$ is called minimal invariant if U is a non-zero invariant subspace containing no other non-zero invariant subspace.

One can prove the following useful results about completely reducible representations.

Proposition 1.2. *Every subrepresentation of a completely reducible representation is completely reducible.*

Proposition 1.3. *Suppose that $T : G \to \mathrm{GL}(V)$ is a completely reducible representation and $U \subset V$ is an invariant subspace. Then the quotient representation*

$$T_{V/U} : G \to \mathrm{GL}(V/U) \tag{1.1}$$

is also completely reducible.

Using mathematical induction and Proposition 1.2, we can deduce the existence statement.

Proposition 1.4. *Let $T : G \to \mathrm{GL}(V)$ be a completely reducible representation. Then V can be decomposed into a direct sum of minimal invariant subspaces*

$$V = \bigoplus_{i=1}^{k} V_i. \tag{1.2}$$

2. Uniqueness of a Decomposition of a Representation

We have already seen that the decomposition of V into a direct sum of minimal invariant subspaces is not uniquely determined. Next, we will establish the uniqueness property for the multiset of corresponding subrepresentations

$$T \cong \bigoplus_{i=1}^{k} T|_{V_i}. \tag{2.1}$$

Proposition 2.1. *Suppose $T : G \to \mathrm{GL}(V)$ is a representation of the group G and*

$$T \cong \bigoplus_{i=1}^{k} T_i \cong \bigoplus_{j=1}^{m} S_j, \tag{2.2}$$

where $T_1, \ldots, T_k, S_1, \ldots, S_m$ are irreducible representations. Then $k = m$ and there exists $\sigma \in S_k$ such that $T_{\sigma(i)} \simeq S_i$, $\forall 1 \leq i \leq k$.

Date: September 23, 2026.

One approach to proving this proposition can be found in Vinberg, Section 3.2, Theorem 4. Next, we will try to expand on another proof suggested by Fulton and Harris, Proposition 1.8.

Using the images of the minimal invariant subspaces corresponding to the subrepresentations S_j we can formulate a statement that is equivalent to Proposition 2.1.

Proposition 2.2. *Suppose $T : G \to \mathrm{GL}(V)$ is a representation of the group G and*

$$V = \bigoplus_{i=1}^{k} V_i = \bigoplus_{j=1}^{m} U_j, \tag{2.3}$$

where the V_i and U_j are minimal invariant subspaces. Then $k = m$ and $\exists \sigma \in S_k$ such that

$$T|_{V_{\sigma(i)}} \cong T|_{U_i}, \ \forall 1 \leq i \leq k. \tag{2.4}$$

Proof. We can relabel the subspaces U_i grouping together the ones corresponding to the isomorphic subrepresentations. Then we obtain a set of subspaces

$$\{U_b^{(a)} \mid 1 \leq a \leq r, 1 \leq b \leq t_a\} \text{ for some } r \in \mathbb{Z}_+ \text{ and } t_1, \ldots, t_r \in \mathbb{Z}_+, \tag{2.5}$$

where

$$\left(T|_{U_b^{(a)}} \cong T|_{U_d^{(c)}}\right) \iff (a = c). \tag{2.6}$$

By construction, we have that

$$\{U_b^{(a)} \mid 1 \leq a \leq r, 1 \leq b \leq t_a\} = \{U_j \mid 1 \leq j \leq m\}. \tag{2.7}$$

Thus,

$$V = \bigoplus_{a=1}^{r} \left(\bigoplus_{b=1}^{t_a} U_b^{(a)} \right). \tag{2.8}$$

Denote by $p_b^{(a)}$ the projection operator onto $U_b^{(a)}$ corresponding to this decomposition.

Exercise 2.3. Show that

$$\mathrm{Id} = \sum_{a=1}^{r} \left(\sum_{b=1}^{t_a} p_b^{(a)} \right). \tag{2.9}$$

Therefore, for every $1 \leq i \leq k$ there exists a pair $1 \leq a \leq r, 1 \leq b \leq t_a$ such that

$$p_b^{(a)}(V_i) \neq \{0\}. \tag{2.10}$$

If (2.10) holds, then the restriction of $p_b^{(a)}$ to the subspace V_i is an isomorphism between V_i and $U_b^{(a)}$.

Exercise 2.4. Show that

$$\left((p_b^{(a)}(V_i) \neq \{0\}) \text{ and } (p_d^{(c)}(V_i) \neq \{0\}) \right) \implies (a = c). \tag{2.11}$$

Therefore, we can also relabel the subspaces V_i, grouping together those corresponding to isomorphic subrepresentations. So we obtain a set of subspaces

$$\{V_b^{(a)} \mid 1 \leq a \leq r, 1 \leq b \leq l_a\} \text{ for some } l_1, \ldots, l_r \in \mathbb{Z}_+, \tag{2.12}$$

such that

$$\left(T|_{V_b^{(a)}} \cong T|_{V_d^{(c)}}\right) \iff (a = c) \tag{2.13}$$

and

$$T|_{V_b^{(a)}} \cong T|_{U_d^{(a)}}, \quad \forall 1 \leq a \leq r, \forall 1 \leq b \leq l_a, \forall 1 \leq d \leq t_a. \tag{2.14}$$

Again we have that

$$V = \bigoplus_{a=1}^{r} \left(\bigoplus_{b=1}^{l_a} V_b^{(a)} \right). \tag{2.15}$$

Pick an arbitrary $1 \leq a \leq r$. If $c \neq a$, then $p_d^{(c)}(V_b^{(a)}) = \{0\}$, $\forall 1 \leq d \leq t_c$, $\forall 1 \leq b \leq l_a$.

Exercise 2.5. Show that

$$\left(\sum_{i=1}^{t_a} p_i^{(a)}\right)|_{V_b^{(a)}} = \mathrm{Id}|_{V_b^{(a)}}. \tag{2.16}$$

Hence,

$$\bigoplus_{b=1}^{l_a} V_b^{(a)} \subset \bigoplus_{d=1}^{t_a} U_d^{(a)}. \tag{2.17}$$

Combining (2.15) and (2.17), we obtain the equality

$$\bigoplus_{b=1}^{l_a} V_b^{(a)} = \bigoplus_{d=1}^{t_a} U_d^{(a)}. \tag{2.18}$$

From (2.14) it follows that

$$l_a = t_a,\ \forall 1 \le a \le r, \tag{2.19}$$

which finishes the proof. □

Definition 2.6. Let G be a finite group. Denote by $\widehat{G}$ the set of equivalence classes of irreducible complex representations of the group G. Allowing a slight abuse of notation, we will also denote by $\widehat{G}$ an arbitrary set that contains one representative from each equivalence class of irreducible complex representations of the group G.

Definition 2.7. For a representation $T : G \to \mathrm{GL}(V)$ and a natural number m, we will denote:

$$mT := \underbrace{T \oplus T \oplus \cdots \oplus T}_{m \text{ times}}. \tag{2.20}$$

From Proposition 1.4, it follows that every complex representation T of a finite group G is isomorphic to the sum of irreducible representations with some multiplicities:

$$T \cong \bigoplus_{S \in \widehat{G}} m_S S \tag{2.21}$$

By Proposition 2.1, those multiplicities are uniquely determined by T.

Exercise 2.8. Suppose that T is a complex representation of the group G and

$$T \cong \bigoplus_{S \in \widehat{G}} m_s S. \tag{2.22}$$

Then

$$m_S = \dim(\mathrm{Mor}(S, T)) = \dim(\mathrm{Mor}(T, S)), \quad \forall S \in \widehat{G}. \tag{2.23}$$

James and Liebeck use (2.23) to prove Proposition 2.1 when $\mathbb{F} = \mathbb{C}$; see James and Liebeck, Section 11.

3. One-dimensional representations

Consider some examples first.

Exercise 3.1. The quaternion group Q_8 is generated by the elements i, j, ε such that $\varepsilon^2 = e$, $\varepsilon i = i\varepsilon$, $\varepsilon j = j\varepsilon$, $i^2 = j^2 = \varepsilon$, $ij = \varepsilon ji$. Find all its one-dimensional complex representations.

Exercise 3.2. The dihedral group D_n is generated by a rotation a and a reflection s such that $a^n = s^2 = e$, $sas = a^{-1}$. Find all one-dimensional complex representations of the group D_n. Note that the answer depends on the parity of n.

For a more general approach, let us recall useful constructions from group theory.

Definition 3.3. Let G be a group. For any $a, b \in G$ define the commutator $[a, b]$ by $[a, b] := aba^{-1}b^{-1}$. Define the derived subgroup $[G, G]$ as the subgroup generated by the set of elements $\{[a, b] \mid a, b \in G\}$.

Proposition 3.4. *Let G be a group. Then:*
a) $[G, G]$ is a normal subgroup of G;
b) the quotient group $G/[G, G]$ is abelian;
c) the subgroup $[G, G]$ is contained in every normal subgroup H of G with the property that the quotient group G/H is abelian.

Proposition 3.5. *Assume G is a group, and let $p : G \to G/[G, G]$ be the canonical projection. For every one-dimensional representation $\alpha : G/[G, G] \to \mathbb{F}^*$ we define the one-dimensional representation $\bar{\alpha} : G \to \mathbb{F}^*$ by $\bar{\alpha} = \alpha \circ p$. The map $\alpha \mapsto \bar{\alpha}$ is a bijection between the set of one-dimensional representations of the group $G/[G, G]$ and the set of one-dimensional representations of the group G.*

Exercise 3.6. Show that $[S_n, S_n] = A_n$, where $A_n := sgn^{-1}(1)$.

Exercise 3.7. Find all one-dimensional complex representations of the group S_n.

Exercise 3.8. Find all one-dimensional complex representations of the group A_4.

4. Dual Representation.

Definition 4.1. Let $T : G \to \mathrm{GL}(V)$ be a representation over a field F. Define its dual representation $T^* : G \to \mathrm{GL}(V^*)$ by

$$\boxed{T^*(g) = (T(g^{-1}))^*.} \tag{4.1}$$

Exercise 4.2. Show that T^* is indeed a representation of the group G.

Exercise 4.3. Define $T : \mathbb{Z} \to \mathrm{GL}(\mathbb{R}^3)$ as

$$T(n) = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & n & \frac{n^2+n}{2} \\ 0 & 1 & n \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}.$$

Prove that T is a representation. Find the matrix of $T^*(n)$ in the dual basis.

Exercise 4.4. Let $T : G \to \mathrm{GL}(V)$ be a representation. Is it always true that the representations T and $(T^*)^*$ are isomorphic?

Exercise 4.5. Let T be an irreducible representation of a group G. Is it possible that the representation T^* is not irreducible?

Chapters from the textbooks relevant to the lecture:

- Fulton, Harris, Section 1.2;
- James, Liebeck, Chapters 8, 9, 11;
- Vinberg, Sections 1.5, 3.1-3.4, 3.9.