

Pacific Journal of Mathematics

**SEQUENCES IN GROUPS WITH DISTINCT PARTIAL
PRODUCTS**

BASIL GORDON

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1. In an investigation concerning a certain type of Latin square, the following problem arose:

Can the elements of a finite group G be arranged in a sequence a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n so that the partial products $a_1, a_1a_2, \dots, a_1a_2 \dots a_n$ are all distinct?

In the present paper a complete solution will be given for the case of Abelian groups, and the application to Latin squares will be indicated. Let us introduce the term *sequenceable group* to denote groups whose elements can be arranged in a sequence with the property described above. The main result is then contained in the following theorem.

THEOREM 1. *A finite Abelian group G is sequenceable if and only if G is the direct product of two groups A and B , where A is cyclic of order 2^k ($k > 0$), and B is of odd order.*

Proof (i). To see the necessity of the condition, suppose that G is sequenceable, and let a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n be an ordering of the elements of G with $a_1, a_1a_2, \dots, a_1a_2 \dots a_n$ all distinct. The notation $b_i = a_1a_2 \dots a_i$ will be used throughout the remainder of the paper. It is immediately seen that $a_1 = b_1 = e$, the identity element of G ; for if $a_i = e$ for some $i > 1$, then $b_{i-1} = b_i$, contrary to assumption. Hence $b_n \neq e$, i.e., the product of all the elements of G is not the identity. It is well known (cf [2]) that this implies that G has the form $A \times B$ with A cyclic of order 2^k ($k > 0$) and B of odd order.

(ii) To prove sufficiency of the condition, suppose that $G = A \times B$, with A and B as above. We then show that G is sequenceable by constructing an ordering a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n of its elements with distinct partial products. From the general theory of Abelian groups, it is known that G has a basis of the form c_0, c_1, \dots, c_m , where c_0 is of order 2^k , and where the orders $\delta_1, \delta_2, \dots, \delta_m$ of c_1, c_2, \dots, c_m are odd positive integers each of which divides the next, i.e., $\delta_i | \delta_{i+1}$ for $0 < i < m$. If j is any positive integer, then there exist unique integers j_0, j_1, \dots, j_m such that

$$\begin{aligned}
 (1) \quad & j \equiv j_0 \pmod{\delta_1 \delta_2 \dots \delta_m} \\
 & j_0 = j_1 + j_2\delta_1 + j_3\delta_1\delta_2 + \dots + j_m\delta_1 \dots \delta_{m-1} \\
 & 0 \leq j_1 < \delta_1
 \end{aligned}$$

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$$\begin{aligned} 0 &\leq j_2 < \delta_2 \\ &\vdots \\ 0 &\leq j_m < \delta_m . \end{aligned}$$

The proof of the existence and uniqueness of this expansion will be omitted here; it is entirely analogous to the expansion of an integer in powers of a number base.

We are now in a position to define the desired sequencing of G . It is convenient to define the products b_1, b_2, \dots, b_n directly, to prove they are all distinct, and then to verify that the corresponding a_i , as calculated from the formula $a_1 = e, a_i = b_{i-1}^{-1}b_i$, are all distinct. If i is of the form $2j + 1 (0 \leq j < n/2)$, let

$$b_{2j+1} = c_0^{-j}c_1^{-j_1}c_2^{-j_2} \dots c_m^{-j_m} ,$$

where j_1, j_2, \dots, j_m are the integers defined in (1). On the other hand, if i is of the form $2j + 2 (0 \leq j < n/2)$, let

$$b_{2j+2} = c_0^{j+1}c_1^{j_1+1}c_2^{j_2+1} \dots c_m^{j_m+1} .$$

The elements b_1, b_2, \dots, b_n thus defined are all distinct. For if $b_s = b_t$ with $s = 2u + 1, t = 2v + 1$, then

$$(2) \quad \begin{aligned} u &\equiv v \pmod{2^k} \\ u_1 &\equiv v_1 \pmod{\delta_1} \\ &\vdots \\ u_m &\equiv v_m \pmod{\delta_m} . \end{aligned}$$

From the inequalities in (1) we conclude that $u_1 = v_1, \dots, u_m = v_m$. Hence $u_0 = v_0$, so that $u \equiv v \pmod{\delta_1 \dots \delta_m}$; coupled with the first of equations (2), this gives $u \equiv v \pmod{n}$, which implies $u = v$. Similarly $b_{2u+2} = b_{2v+2}$ implies $u = v$, so that the ‘‘even’’ b ’s are distinct.

Next suppose

$$b_{2u+1} = b_{2v+2} .$$

Then

$$\begin{aligned} -u &\equiv v + 1 \pmod{2^k} \\ -u_1 &\equiv v_1 + 1 \pmod{\delta_1} \\ &\vdots \\ -u_m &\equiv v_m + 1 \pmod{\delta_m} \end{aligned}$$

or equivalently,

$$(3) \quad u + v + 1 \equiv 0 \pmod{2^k}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 u_1 + v_1 + 1 &\equiv 0 \pmod{\delta_1} \\
 \vdots \\
 u_m + v_m + 1 &\equiv 0 \pmod{\delta_m}.
 \end{aligned}$$

Since $0 < u_1 + v_1 + 1 \leq 2(\delta_1 - 1) + 1 < 2\delta_1$, we must have $u_1 + v_1 + 1 = \delta_1$. Reasoning similarly for $i = 2, \dots, m$ we obtain

$$\begin{aligned}
 u_1 + v_1 + 1 &= \delta_1 \\
 u_2 + v_2 + 1 &= \delta_2 \\
 \vdots \\
 u_m + v_m + 1 &= \delta_m.
 \end{aligned}$$

Multiplying the $(i + 1)$ 'st equation of this system by $\delta_1\delta_2 \cdots \delta_i$ ($1 \leq i < m$) and adding, we get $u_0 + v_0 + 1 = \delta_1 \cdots \delta_m$, which implies $u + v + 1 \equiv o(\delta_1 \cdots \delta_m)$. Combining this with the first of equations (3), we find that $u + v + 1 \equiv 0 \pmod{n}$, which, on account of the inequality $0 < u + v + 1 < n$, is impossible. Hence b_1, b_2, \dots, b_n are all distinct.

Next we calculate a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n . If $i = 2j + 2$ ($0 \leq j < n/2$), then

$$a_i = b_{i-1}^{-1}b_i = c_0^{2j+1}c_1^{2j_1+1} \cdots c_m^{2j_m+1}.$$

These are all different by the same argument as above. If $i = 2j + 1$, and $j_1 \neq 0$, then

$$a_i = c_0^{-2j}c_1^{-2j_1}c_2^{-2j_2-1} \cdots c_m^{-2j_m-1}.$$

If $i = 2j + 1$ and $j_1 = 0$, but $j_2 \neq 0$, then $a_i = c_0^{-2j}c_2^{-2j_2}c_3^{-2j_3-1} \cdots c_m^{-2j_m-1}$, while if $j_1 = j_2 = 0$ but $j_3 \neq 0$, then $a_i = c_0^{-2j}c_3^{-2j_3}c_4^{-2j_4-1} \cdots c_m^{-2j_m-1}$, etc. These a_i 's are obviously distinct from each other by the same reasoning as before. Because of the exponent of c_0 they are also distinct from the a_i with i even. This completes the proof of the theorem.

As an example of the construction of Theorem 1, consider the group $G = C_2 \times C_3 \times C_3$. We use basis elements c_0, c_1, c_2 of orders 2, 3, 3 respectively. Using the notation (α, β, γ) for the element $c_0^\alpha c_1^\beta c_2^\gamma$, the sequences a_i and b_i are then the following:

a_i	b_i
(0 0 0)	(0 0 0)
(1 1 1)	(1 1 1)
(0 1 2)	(1 2 0)
(1 0 1)	(0 2 1)
(0 2 2)	(0 1 0)
(1 2 1)	(1 0 1)
(0 0 1)	(1 0 2)
(1 1 0)	(0 1 2)

a_i	b_i
(0 1 0)	(0 2 2)
(1 0 0)	(1 2 2)
(0 2 0)	(1 1 2)
(1 2 0)	(0 0 2)
(0 0 2)	(0 0 1)
(1 1 2)	(1 1 0)
(0 1 1)	(1 2 1)
(1 0 2)	(0 2 0)
(0 2 1)	(0 1 1)
(1 2 2)	(1 0 0)

2. **Application to Latin squares.** Consider the following Latin square:

1	2	3	4
2	4	1	3
3	1	4	2
4	3	2	1

Given any ordered pair $(\alpha\beta)$ with $\alpha \neq \beta$, it occurs as a pair of consecutive entries in some row of this square. In general, an $n \times n$ Latin square (c_{st}) whose elements are the integers $1, \dots, n$ will be called *horizontally complete* if for every ordered pair (α, β) with $1 \leq \alpha, \beta \leq n$ and $\alpha \neq \beta$, the equations

$$(4) \quad \begin{aligned} c_{st} &= \alpha \\ c_{s,t+1} &= \beta \end{aligned}$$

are solvable. Similarly a vertically complete square is one for which

$$\begin{aligned} c_{st} &= \alpha \\ c_{s+1,t} &= \beta \end{aligned}$$

can be solved for any such choice of α, β . A square which is both horizontally and vertically complete is called complete.

Note that in a horizontally complete square, the solution of equations (4) is unique, since the total number of consecutive pairs $a_{st}, a_{s,t+1}$ is equal to the total number of order pairs (α, β) with $\alpha \neq \beta$. Conversely, uniqueness implies existence for the same reason.

Complete Latin squares are useful in the design of experiments in which it is desired to investigate the interaction of nearest neighbors.

THEOREM 2. *Suppose that G is a sequenceable group, and let a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n be an ordering of its elements such that b_1, b_2, \dots, b_n are distinct. Then the matrix $(c_{st}) = (b_s^{-1}b_t)$ is a complete Latin square.*

Proof. It is immediately seen that (c_{st}) is a Latin square, since either $b_s^{-1}b_t = b_s^{-1}b_u$ or $b_t^{-1}b_s = b_u^{-1}b_s$ imply $t = u$ by elementary properties of groups. To show that (c_{st}) is horizontally complete, suppose

$$c_{st} = c_{uv}$$

$$c_{s,t+1} = c_{u,v+1}.$$

We must show that $s = u$ and $t = v$. From the definition of c_{st} ,

$$(5) \quad b_s^{-1}b_t = b_u^{-1}b_v$$

$$(6) \quad b_s^{-1}b_{t+1} = b_u^{-1}b_{v+1}.$$

Inverting both sides of (5) yields $b_t^{-1}b_s = b_u^{-1}b_v$. Combining this with (6) we get $(b_t^{-1}b_s)(b_s^{-1}b_{t+1}) = (b_u^{-1}b_v)(b_u^{-1}b_{v+1})$, or $b_t^{-1}b_{t+1} = b_v^{-1}b_{v+1}$, i.e., $a_{t+1} = a_{v+1}$. This implies $t = v$. Substituting in (5) we obtain $b_s^{-1}b_t = b_u^{-1}b_t$, from which $s = u$ follows immediately. The proof that (c_{st}) is vertically complete is entirely similar and will be omitted.

This method enables one to construct a complete Latin square of order n for any even n (note that B may be trivial in Theorem 1). Whether or not complete, or even horizontally complete, squares exist for odd n is an open question.

3. Extension to non-Abelian groups. The problem of determining which non-Abelian groups G are sequenceable is unsolved at the present time. Considerable information about the nature of a sequence a_1, \dots, a_n with distinct partial products, if one exists, can be obtained by mapping G onto the Abelian group G/C , where C is the commutator subgroup. Using this technique, for example, it can be shown that the non-Abelian group of order 6 and the two non-Abelian groups of order 8 are not sequenceable. On the other hand the non-Abelian group of order 10 is sequenceable. To see this, denote its elements by $e, a, b, ab, ba, aba, bab, abab, baba, ababa$, where $a^2 = b^2 = (ab)^5 = e$. A suitable ordering is then given by $e, ab, abab, ababa, bab, aba, b, a, baba, ba$, the partial products being $e, ab, baba, a, abab, bab, ba, b, aba, ababa$. In view of Theorem 1 and the results of [2], one might conjecture that G is sequenceable if and only if it does not possess a complete mapping. However, the symmetric group S_3 does not possess a complete mapping (cf [1]) and is also not sequenceable. Whether or not the two properties are at least mutually exclusive is still an open question.

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