

# Pacific Journal of Mathematics

**ON THE RIGIDITY OF SEMI-DIRECT PRODUCTS OF LIE  
ALGEBRAS**

ROGER WOLCOTT RICHARDSON, JR.

## ON THE RIGIDITY OF SEMI-DIRECT PRODUCTS OF LIE ALGEBRAS

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**Roughly speaking, a Lie algebra  $L$  is rigid if every Lie algebra near  $L$  is isomorphic to  $L$ . It is known that  $L$  is rigid if the Lie algebra cohomology space  $H^2(L, L)$  vanishes. In this paper we give an elementary set of necessary and sufficient conditions, independent of Lie algebra cohomology, for the rigidity of a semi-direct product  $L = S + {}_{\rho}W$ , where  $\rho$  is an irreducible representation of a semi-simple Lie algebra  $S$  on a vector space  $W$ . These conditions lead to a number of new examples of rigid Lie algebras. In particular, we obtain a rigid Lie algebra  $L$  with  $H^2(L, L) \neq 0$ .**

It follows from [9] that there is only a finite number of isomorphism classes of rigid Lie algebras with a given underlying vector space. The "rigidity theorem" of [9] shows that  $L$  is rigid if  $H^2(L, L) = 0$ . Thus semi-simple Lie algebras are rigid. In general, however, it is difficult to compute  $H^2(L, L)$  and there are few known examples of rigid Lie algebras which are not semi-simple. In considering the rigidity of semi-direct products  $L = S + {}_{\rho}W$ , we avoid the use of Lie algebra cohomology and appeal instead to the "stability theorem" of [10]. Our results essentially reduce the problem of rigidity for such semi-direct products to a classification problem in the theory of semi-simple Lie algebras.

In a series of papers [6] written with an eye towards applications to physics, R. Hermann has obtained results similar to ours in a number of special cases. His method involves a direct computation of  $H^2(L, L)$ .

**1. Preliminaries.** Let  $V$  be a finite-dimensional real or complex vector space and let  $A^2(V)$  denote the vector space of all alternating bilinear maps of  $V \times V$  into  $V$ . Let  $\mathcal{M}$  be the algebraic set in  $A^2(V)$  consisting of all Lie algebra multiplications on  $V$ . There is a canonical representation of the group  $G = GL(V)$  of all vector space automorphisms of  $V$  on the vector space  $A^2(V)$  defined as follows. If  $g \in G$  and  $\varphi \in A^2(V)$ , then  $(g \cdot \varphi)(x, y) = g(\varphi(g^{-1}x, g^{-1}y))$  for all  $x, y \in V$ . The algebraic set  $\mathcal{M}$  is stable under the corresponding action of  $G$  on  $A^2(V)$ . Moreover, the orbits of  $G$  on  $\mathcal{M}$  correspond precisely to the isomorphism classes of Lie algebra structures on  $V$ .

Let  $\mu \in \mathcal{M}$  and let  $L = (V, \mu)$  be the corresponding Lie algebra. Then  $L$  is rigid if the orbit  $G(\mu)$  is an open subset of  $\mathcal{M}$ . If  $V$  is

a complex (resp. real) vector space, then it follows from [9, Prop. 17.1, p. 21] that  $G(\mu)$  is in fact a Zariski-open subset of  $\mathcal{M}$  (resp. one component of a Zariski-open subset of  $\mathcal{M}$ ). Hence there exists only a finite number of isomorphism classes of rigid Lie algebras with underlying vector space  $V$ .

If  $\mu, \mu' \in \mathcal{M}$  and if  $L = (V, \mu)$  and  $L' = (V, \mu')$  are the corresponding Lie algebras, then  $L$  is a *contraction* of  $L'$  if  $\mu$  lies in the closure of the orbit  $G(\mu')$ . If  $L$  is rigid and is a contraction of  $L'$ , then it follows that  $L$  is isomorphic  $L'$ .

**2. Rigidity of semi-direct products.** Let  $S$  be a semisimple (real or complex) Lie algebra and let  $\rho$  be an irreducible representation of  $S$  on a finite-dimensional vector space  $W$ . We consider  $W$  as an abelian Lie algebra and form the corresponding semi-direct product  $L = S + {}_{\rho}W$ . (See [1, pp. 17-20] for the appropriate definitions.)

**THEOREM 2.1.** *Let  $L = S + {}_{\rho}W$  be as above. Then  $L$  is not rigid if and only if there exists a semi-simple Lie algebra  $L'$  which satisfies the following conditions: (a) there exists a semi-simple subalgebra  $S'$  of  $L'$  which is isomorphic to  $S$ ; (b) if we identify  $S$  and  $S'$  by an isomorphism, then  $L'/S'$  is isomorphic as an  $S$ -module to  $W$ .*

Here the  $S$ -module structure of  $L'/S'$  is determined by the adjoint representation of  $S'$  on  $L'$ .

*Proof.* Let  $V$  denote the vector space direct sum  $S \oplus W$ ;  $V$  is the underlying vector space of  $L$ . We identify  $S$  and  $W$  with subspaces of  $V$  in the usual manner. Let  $\mu$  be the Lie algebra multiplication on  $V$  corresponding to  $L$ . Suppose there exists a semi-simple Lie algebra  $L'$  satisfying conditions (a) and (b) above. We may assume that  $V$  is the underlying vector space of  $L'$ . If  $\mu'$  denotes the Lie algebra multiplication on  $V$  corresponding to  $L'$ , we may assume further that  $\mu(s, s') = \mu'(s, s')$  for every  $s, s' \in S$  and that  $\mu(s, w) = \mu'(s, w)$  for every  $s \in S, w \in W$ . Let  $F$  denote either the real field or the complex field. For each  $t \in F, t \neq 0$ , let  $g_t \in GL(V)$  be defined by:  $g_t(s) = s$  if  $s \in S$  and  $g_t(w) = tw$  if  $w \in W$ . We let  $\mu_t$  be the Lie algebra multiplication on  $V$  given by  $\mu_t(x, y) = g_t(\mu'(g_t^{-1}(x), g_t^{-1}(y)))$  for  $x, y \in V$ . Then the Lie algebra  $L_t = (V, \mu_t)$  is isomorphic to  $L'$ . It is easy to check the following conditions: if  $s, s' \in S$ , then  $\mu(s, s') = \mu_t(s, s')$ ; if  $s \in S, w \in W$ , then  $\mu(s, w) = \mu_t(s, w)$ ; if  $w, w' \in W$ , then

$$\mu^t(w, w') = t^{-1}\mu'(w, w').$$

It follows immediately that  $\lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} \mu_t = \mu$ . Thus  $L$  is a contraction of  $L'$  and hence  $L$  is not rigid.

Now for the converse. Let  $\mathcal{M}$  denote the set of Lie algebra multiplications on  $V$ . It follows from the "stability theorem" of [10] (see, in particular Corollary 11.4) that there exists a neighborhood  $U$  of  $\mu$  in  $M$  such that if  $\mu_1 \in U$ , then the Lie algebra  $L_1 = (V, \mu_1)$  is isomorphic to a Lie algebra  $L' = (V, \mu')$  which satisfies the following conditions: (1) if  $s, s' \in S$ , then  $\mu(s, s') = \mu'(s, s')$ ; (2) if  $s \in S$  and  $w \in W$ , then  $\mu(s, w) = \mu'(s, w)$ . If  $L$  is not rigid, we may assume that  $L'$  is not isomorphic to  $L$ . Let  $R$  denote the radical of  $L'$  and let  $pr_w: V \rightarrow W$  denote the projection with kernel  $S$ . Since  $R \cap S = \{0\}$ , it follows that the restriction of  $pr_w$  to  $R$  is an injection. Since the representation  $\rho$  of  $S$  on  $W$  is irreducible, it follows easily from (1) and (2) that either  $R = \{0\}$  or that  $pr_w$  maps  $R$  isomorphically onto  $W$ .

Suppose  $R \neq \{0\}$ . Then  $[R, R] \neq R$  and  $[R, R]$  is stable under the adjoint representation of  $S$  (considered as a subalgebra of  $L'$ ) on  $L'$ . The argument given above shows that  $[R, R] = \{0\}$ , hence that  $R$  is abelian. In this case, it is an easy consequence of the Levi-Whitehead Theorem that  $L'$  is isomorphic to  $L$ , thus giving a contradiction.

Thus  $R = \{0\}$ , and consequently the Lie algebra  $L'$  is semisimple. It follows immediately from (1) and (2) above that  $L'$  satisfies (a) and (b) of Theorem 2.1. This completes the proof.

**COROLLARY 2.2.** *Let  $L$  be as in Theorem 2.1 and let  $L_1$  be a Lie algebra with the same underlying vector space as  $L$  such that  $L$  is a contraction of  $L_1$ . Then either  $L_1$  is semisimple or  $L_1$  is isomorphic to  $L$ . Hence there exist only a finite number of isomorphism classes of Lie algebras  $L_1$  such that  $L$  is a contraction of  $L_1$ .*

This was proved in the course of the proof of Theorem 2.1.

**3. A classification problem.** If a Lie algebra  $L'$  satisfying conditions (a) and (b) of Theorem 2.1 exists, it follows easily that  $S'$  is a maximal semi-simple subalgebra of  $L'$ . Consider now the problem of finding, for each semi-direct product  $L = S + {}_\rho W$ , with  $S$  semi-simple and  $\rho$  irreducible, the set of all (isomorphism classes of) Lie algebras  $L'$  such that  $L$  is a contraction of  $L'$ . It follows from the results of § 2 that this problem reduces to the following classification problem:

*Classify to within isomorphism the set of all pairs  $(L', S')$ , where  $L'$  is a semi-simple Lie algebra and  $S'$  is a maximal semi-simple subalgebra of  $L'$  such that the adjoint representation of  $S'$  on  $L'/S'$  is irreducible. For each such pair describe the adjoint representation of  $S'$  on  $L'/S'$ .*

The maximal semi-simple subalgebras  $S'$  of a complex semisimple Lie algebra  $L'$  have been classified by Dynkin [3, 4]. There remains the problem of finding those pairs  $(L', S')$  for which the adjoint representation of  $S'$  on  $L'/S'$  is irreducible and, for each such pair, finding the highest weight of the representation of  $S'$  on  $L'/S'$ . In the case of real Lie algebras the problem becomes considerably more complicated.

**3. Some examples.** (1) Let  $\mathfrak{o}_n$  denote the Lie algebra of all skew symmetric  $n$  by  $n$  matrices with real entries. Let  $\rho$  denote the identity representation of  $\mathfrak{o}_n$  on  $\mathbf{R}^n$  and let  $\mathfrak{m}_n = \mathfrak{o}_n + {}_\rho\mathbf{R}^n$ ;  $\mathfrak{m}_n$  is the Lie algebra of the Lie group of all rigid motions of  $\mathbf{R}^n$ . We may imbed  $\mathfrak{o}_n$  as a subalgebra of  $\mathfrak{o}_{n+1}$  in an obvious manner. We consider  $\mathfrak{o}_{n+1}$  as an  $\mathfrak{o}_n$ -module via the adjoint representation. Then  $\mathfrak{o}_{n+1}$  splits, as an  $\mathfrak{o}_n$ -module, into a direct sum of  $\mathfrak{o}_n$  and an  $\mathfrak{o}_n$ -submodule which is isomorphic to  $\mathbf{R}^n$ . It follows from Theorem 2.1 that  $\mathfrak{m}_n$  is a contraction of  $\mathfrak{o}_{n+1}$ ; hence  $\mathfrak{o}_{n+1}$  is not rigid.

(2) Let  $S$  denote the unique simple Lie algebra of dimension three over the field  $\mathbf{C}$  of complex numbers. By a half-integer we mean an element of the set  $\{1/2, 1, 3/2, \dots\}$ . For each half-integer  $k$  let  $\rho_k$  denote the irreducible representation of weight  $k$  of  $S$  on  $\mathbf{C}^{2k+1}$ . Every irreducible representation of  $S$  is equivalent to some  $\rho_k$ . We denote by  $L_k$  the semidirect product  $S + {}_{\rho_k}\mathbf{C}^{2k+1}$ . If  $S$  is embedded as a subalgebra of a semisimple Lie algebra  $L$  of rank  $r$ , then it is shown in [8, p. 996, Th. 5.2] that the number of irreducible components occurring in the complete reduction of the adjoint representation of  $S$  on  $L$  is at least  $r$ . Moreover there always exists a three-dimensional simple subalgebra of  $L$  (the principal three-dimensional subalgebra) such that exactly  $r$  irreducible components occur. Combining this result with Theorem 2.1 it follows that  $L_k$  is not rigid if and only if there exists a semisimple Lie algebra of rank 2 and of dimension  $2k + 4$ . From the classification of simple Lie algebras over  $\mathbf{C}$ , it follows easily that  $L_k$  is rigid unless  $k = 1, 2, 3$  or  $5$ . If  $L_k$  is not rigid, there is precisely one semisimple Lie algebra  $L$  (to within isomorphism) such that  $L_k$  is a contraction of  $L$ .

**4. Remarks on Lie algebra cohomology.** A representation  $\rho$  of a Lie algebra  $L$  on a vector space  $X$  defines on  $X$  the structure of an  $L$ -module. If  $a \in L$  and  $x \in X$  we denote  $\rho(a).x$  simply by  $a.x$ . An element  $x \in X$  is an *invariant* of  $L$  if  $a.x = 0$  for every  $a \in L$ . The set of invariants of  $L$  forms an  $L$ -submodule of  $X$  which we denote by  $X^L$ . If  $\varphi: X \rightarrow Y$  is a homomorphism of  $L$ -modules, then  $\varphi(X^L) \subset Y^L$ . Let  $S$  be a semi-simple Lie algebra and let  $X \rightarrow Y \rightarrow Z$  be an exact sequence of finite-dimensional  $S$ -modules (and  $S$ -module

homomorphisms). It follows easily from the fact that every finite-dimensional  $S$ -module is semi-simple that the corresponding sequence  $X^s \rightarrow Y^s \rightarrow Z^s$  of  $S$ -modules is again exact.

We assume familiarity with Lie algebra cohomology. For details we refer the reader to [7]. If  $X$  is an  $L$ -module, we denote by  $C(L, X) = \bigoplus_n C^n(L, X)$  the cochain complex used to compute the cohomology of  $L$  with coefficients in  $X$ . We shall denote by

$$H(L, X) = \bigoplus_n H^n(L, X)$$

the corresponding cohomology group. If  $I$  is an ideal of  $L$ , then there is a natural  $L$ -module structure on  $C(I, X)$  and this induces an  $L$ -module structure on  $H(I, X)$ . Let  $0 \rightarrow X \rightarrow Y \rightarrow Z \rightarrow 0$  be an exact sequence of  $L$ -modules. Then the corresponding exact sequence

$$0 \rightarrow C(I, X) \rightarrow C(I, Y) \rightarrow C(I, Z) \rightarrow 0$$

of cochain complexes is also an exact sequence of  $L$ -modules. Consequently, the corresponding cohomology exact sequence

$$\dots \rightarrow H^{n-1}(I, Z) \rightarrow H^n(I, X) \rightarrow H^n(I, Y) \rightarrow H^n(I, Z) \rightarrow \dots$$

is an exact sequence of  $L$ -modules. Suppose now that there is a semi-simple subalgebra  $S$  of  $L$  which is supplementary (as a vector subspace of  $L$ ) to  $I$ . Then, by restriction, we can consider each  $H^n(I, X)$  (resp.  $H^n(I, Y)$ ,  $H^n(I, Z)$ ) as an  $S$ -module. Hence the cohomology exact sequence above gives rise to an exact sequence

$$\dots \rightarrow H^{n-1}(I, Z)^S \rightarrow H^n(I, X)^S \rightarrow H^n(I, Y)^S \rightarrow H^n(I, Z)^S \rightarrow \dots$$

5. A rigid Lie algebra with  $H^2(L, L) \neq 0$ . Let  $S$  be the simple 3-dimensional Lie algebra over  $C$ , let  $n$  be a positive integer, let  $W = C^{2n+1}$ , and let  $\rho$  be the irreducible representation of weight  $n$  of  $S$  on  $W$ . Let  $L = L_n$  denote the semi-direct product  $S +_\rho W$ . Then  $W$  is an abelian ideal in  $L$  and  $S$  is supplementary to  $W$  in  $L$ . We consider  $L$  as an  $L$ -module via the adjoint representation. If we consider  $C$  as a trivial  $S$ -module, then  $H^1(S, C) = 0 = H^2(S, C)$  (see [2, p. 113]). It follows from the Hochschild-Serre spectral sequence [7, p. 603, Th. 13] that  $H^2(L, L) = H^2(W, L)^L$ . But  $H^2(W, L)$  is a trivial  $W$ -module. Hence  $H^2(L, L) = H^2(W, L)^S$ .

Consider the exact sequence  $0 \rightarrow W \rightarrow L \rightarrow L/W \rightarrow 0$  of  $L$ -modules. It follows from the results of §4 that there is a corresponding cohomology exact sequence

$$\dots \rightarrow H^1(W, L/W)^S \rightarrow H^2(W, W)^S \rightarrow H^2(W, L)^S \rightarrow \dots$$

Since  $W$  is an abelian Lie algebra and  $W$  and  $L/W$  are trivial  $W$ -modules, it follows that  $H^n(W, W) = C^n(W, W)$  and  $H^n(W, L/W) =$

$C^n(W, L/W)$ . Assume now that  $n > 1$ . Then it is easy to see that  $C^1(W, L/W)^s = 0$  and hence that  $H^1(W, L/W)^s = 0$ . Thus we have an exact sequence  $0 \rightarrow H^2(W, W)^s(W, L)^s$ .

It follows from the Clebsch-Gordan formula [5, p. 251] that the tensor product representation of  $S$  on  $W \otimes_c W$  decomposes into a direct sum of representations of weight  $2n, 2n - 1, \dots, 1, 0$ . Let  $T$  denote the  $S$ -submodule of  $W \otimes_c W$  consisting of all skew-symmetric tensors. Then the representation of  $S$  on  $T$  decomposes into a direct sum of representations of odd weights  $2n - 1, 2n - 3, \dots, 1$ . In particular, if  $n$  is odd, the representation of weight  $n$  occurs in the complete reduction of  $T$  as a direct sum of irreducible  $S$ -modules. In this case, it follows immediately that  $H^2(W, W)^s = C^2(W, W)^s$  is 1-dimensional. Hence  $H^2(L, L) = H^2(W, L)^s \neq 0$ . Combining this with the results of (2) of § 3, we obtain :

PROPOSITION 5.1. For every odd integer  $n > 5$ , the Lie algebra  $L_n$  is a rigid Lie algebra with  $H^2(L_n, L_n) \neq 0$ .

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# Pacific Journal of Mathematics

Vol. 22, No. 2

February, 1967

Paul Frank Baum, <i>Local isomorphism of compact connected Lie groups</i> . . . .	197
Lowell Wayne Beineke, Frank Harary and Michael David Plummer, <i>On the critical lines of a graph</i> . . . . .	205
Larry Eugene Bobisud, <i>On the behavior of the solution of the telegraphist's equation for large velocities</i> . . . . .	213
Richard Thomas Bumby, <i>Irreducible integers in Galois extensions</i> . . . . .	221
Chong-Yun Chao, <i>A nonimbedding theorem of nilpotent Lie algebras</i> . . . . .	231
Peter Crawley, <i>Abelian <math>p</math>-groups determined by their Ulm sequences</i> . . . . .	235
Bernard Russel Gelbaum, <i>Tensor products of group algebras</i> . . . . .	241
Newton Seymour Hawley, <i>Weierstrass points of plane domains</i> . . . . .	251
Paul Daniel Hill, <i>On quasi-isomorphic invariants of primary groups</i> . . . . .	257
Melvyn Klein, <i>Estimates for the transfinite diameter with applications to conformal mapping</i> . . . . .	267
Frederick M. Lister, <i>Simplifying intersections of disks in Bing's side approximation theorem</i> . . . . .	281
Charles Wisson McArthur, <i>On a theorem of Orlicz and Pettis</i> . . . . .	297
Harry Wright McLaughlin and Frederic Thomas Metcalf, <i>An inequality for generalized means</i> . . . . .	303
Daniel Russell McMillan, Jr., <i>Some topological properties of piercing points</i> . . . . .	313
Peter Don Morris and Daniel Eliot Wulbert, <i>Functional representation of topological algebras</i> . . . . .	323
Roger Wolcott Richardson, Jr., <i>On the rigidity of semi-direct products of Lie algebras</i> . . . . .	339
Jack Segal and Edward Sandusky Thomas, Jr., <i>Isomorphic cone-complexes</i> . . . . .	345
Richard R. Tucker, <i>The <math>\delta^2</math>-process and related topics</i> . . . . .	349
David Vere-Jones, <i>Ergodic properties of nonnegative matrices. I</i> . . . . .	361