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# EXPONENTIAL SUMS OVER GF($2^n$)

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**Let $F = GF(q)$ denote the finite field with $q = 2^n$ elements. For $f(X) \in F[X]$ we let**

$$S(f) = \sum_{x \in F} e(f(x)) .$$

**A deep result of Carlitz and Uchiyama states that if $f(X) \neq g(X)^2 + g(X) + b$, $g(X) \in F[X]$, $b \in F$, then**

$$|S(f)| \leqq (\deg f - 1)q^{1/2} .$$

**This estimate is proved in an elementary way when $\deg f = 3, 4, 5$ or $6$. In certain cases the estimate is improved.**

If $a \in F$ then $a^{2^n} = a$ and $a$ has a unique square root in $F$ namely $a^{2^{n-1}}$. We let

$$t(a) = a + a^2 + a^{2^2} + \cdots + a^{2^{n-1}} , \tag{1.1}$$

so that $t(a) \in GF(2)$, that is $t(a) = 0$ or $1$. We define

$$e(a) = (-1)^{t(a)} , \tag{1.2}$$

so that $e(a)$ has the following easily verified properties: for $a_1, a_2 \in F$

$$e(a_1 + a_2) = e(a_1)e(a_2)$$

and

$$\sum_{x \in F} e(a_1 x) = \begin{cases} q, \text{ if } a_1 = 0 , \\ 0, \text{ if } a_1 \neq 0 . \end{cases} \tag{1.3}$$

Let $X$ denote an indeterminate. For $f(X) \in F[X]$ we consider the exponential sum

$$S(f) = \sum_{x \in F} e(f(x)) . \tag{1.4}$$

We note that $S(f)$ is a real number. Since $S(f) = e(f(0))S(f - f(0))$ it suffices to consider only those $f$ with $f(0) = 0$. This will be assumed throughout.

If $f(X) \in F[X](f(0) = 0)$ is such that

$$f(X) = g(X)^2 + g(X) , \tag{1.5}$$

for some $g(X) \in F[X]$, then $f(X)$ is called exceptional over $F$, otherwise it is termed regular. Clearly $f$ can be exceptional only if deg $f$ is even. If $f(X)$ is regular over $F$, Carlitz and Uchiyama [2] have proved (as a special case of a more general result) that

(1.6) $$|S(f)| \leqq (\deg f - 1)q^{1/2} .$$

Their method appeals to a deep result of Weil [3] concerning the roots of the zeta function of algebraic function fields over a finite field. It is of interest therefore to prove (1.6) in a completely elementary way. That this is possible when $\deg f = 1$ follows from (1.3) and when $\deg f = 2$ from the recent work of Carlitz [1]. In this paper we show that (1.6) can also be proved in an elementary way when $\deg f = 3$, 4, 5 or 6. Moreover in some cases more precise information than that given by (1.6) is obtained. Unfortunately the method used does not appear to apply directly when $\deg f \geqq 7$. The method depends on knowing $S(f)$ exactly, when $\deg f = 2$ and when $f$ is exceptional over $F$. These sums are evaluated in § 2, 3 respectively.

**2. $\deg f = 2$.** In this section we evaluate $S(f)$, when $\deg f = 2$. This slightly generalizes a result of Carlitz [1]. We prove

THEOREM 1. *If $f(X) = a_2X^2 + a_1X \in F[X]$, then*

$$S(f) = \begin{cases} q, & \text{if } a_1^2 = a_2 , \\ 0, & \text{if } a_1^2 \neq a_2 . \end{cases}$$

*Proof.* We note that the result includes the case $a_2 = 0$ in view of (1.3). If $a_2 \neq 0$ then $S(f) = \sum_{x \in F} e((a_2^{2^{n-1}}x)^2 + a_1a_2^{-2^{n-1}}(a_2^{2^{n-1}}x)) = \sum_{x \in F} e(x^2 + a_1a_2^{-2^{n-1}}x)$, since $x \longrightarrow a_2^{-2^{n-1}}x$ is a bijection on $F$. By Carlitz's result [1]

$$S(f) = \begin{cases} q, & \text{if } a_1a_2^{-2^{n-1}} = 1 , \\ 0, & \text{if } a_1a_2^{-2^{n-1}} \neq 1 . \end{cases}$$

This proves the theorem as $a_1a_2^{-2^{n-1}} = 1$ is equivalent to $a_1^2 = a_2$ in $F$.

We remark that $a_2X^2 + a_1X$ is exceptional over $F$ precisely when $a_1^2 = a_2$.

**3. $f$ exceptional over $F$.** In this section we evaluate $S(f)$, when $f$ is exceptional over $F$. We prove

THEOREM 2. *If $f(X) \in F[X]$ is exceptional over $F$ then $S(f) = q$.*

*Proof.* As $f$ is exceptional over $F$ there exists $g(X) \in F[X]$ such that

$$f(X) = g(X)^2 + g(X) .$$

Hence for $x \in F$ we have

$$t(f(x)) = t(g(x)^2 + g(x)) = g(x)^{2^n} + g(x) = 0 ,$$

so that $e(f(x)) = 1$, giving $S(f) = q$.

4. $\deg f = 3$. We prove

THEOREM 3. *If* $f(X) = a_3X^3 + a_2X^2 + a_1X \in F[X]$, *where* $a_3 \neq 0$, *then*

$$|S(f)| = K(f)q^{1/2},$$

*where* $K(f) > 0$ *is such that*

$$K(f)^2 = 1 + (-1)^n \sum_{\substack{t \in F \\ t^3 = 1/a_3}} e(a_2t^2 + a_1t) .$$

(In particular if $t^3 = 1/a_3$ has 0, 1, 3 solutions $t$ in $F$ then $K(f) = 1$, $K(f) = 0$ or $\sqrt{2}$, $K(f) \leqq 2$ respectively. Thus we have the Carlitz-Uchiyama estimate $|S(f)| \leqq 2q^{1/2}$, and by arranging $K(f) = 2$ in the last of the three possibilities indicated we see that it is best possible).

*Proof.* We have

$$S(f)^2 = \sum_{x,y \in F} e(a_3(x^3 + y^3) + a_2(x^2 + y^2) + a_1(x + y)) ,$$

so on changing the summation over $x, y$ into one over $x, t(= x + y)$ we obtain

$$S(f)^2 = \sum_{t \in F} e(a_3t^3 + a_2t^3 + a_1t) \sum_{x \in F} e(a_3tx^2 + a_3t^2x) .$$

By Theorem 1 we have

$$\sum_{x \in F} e(a_3tx^2 + a_3t^2x) = \begin{cases} q, \text{ if } a_3t = (a_3t^2)^2 , \\ 0, \text{ if } a_3t \neq (a_3t^2)^2 , \end{cases}$$

so that, as $a_3 \neq 0$, this gives

$$\begin{aligned} S(f)^2 &= q \sum_{\substack{t \in F \\ a_3t^4 - t = 0}} e(a_3t^3 + a_2t^2 + a_1t) \\ &= q\{1 + (-1)^n \sum_{\substack{t \in F \\ t^3 = 1/a_3}} e(a_2t^2 + a_1t)\} , \end{aligned}$$

as $e(1) = (-1)^n$, which completes the proof of the theorem .

5. $\deg f = 4$. We begin by giving necessary and sufficient conditions for $f(X) = a_4X^4 + a_3X^3 + a_2X^2 + a_1X \in F[X]$, where $a_4 \neq 0$, to be exceptional.

THEOREM 4. $f(X) = a_4X^4 + a_3X^3 + a_2X^2 + a_1X \in F[X]$, *where* $a_4 \neq 0$, *is exceptional over* $F$ *if and only if* $a_4 = a_2^2 + a_1^4$ *and* $a_3 = 0$.

*Proof.* $f(X)$ is exceptional over $F$ if and only if there exists $rX^2 + sX \in F[X]$ such that

$$a_4X^4 + a_3X^3 + a_2X^2 + a_1X = (rX^2 + sX)^2 + (rX^2 + sX) .$$

This is possible if and only if

$$a_4 = r^2,\ a_3 = 0,\ a_2 = s^2 + r,\ a_1 = s ,$$

that is, if and only if,

$$a_4 = r^2 = (a_2 + s^2)^2 = a_2^2 + s^4 = a_2^2 + a_1^4 \text{ and } a_3 = 0 .$$

We now evaluate $|S(f)|$. We prove

THEOREM 5. *If* $f(X) = a_4X^4 + a_3X^3 + a_2X^2 + a_1X \in F[X]$, *where* $a_4 \neq 0$, *then* $|S(f)|$ *is given as follows*:

(i) $a_3 = 0$

$$S(f) = \begin{cases} q, & \text{if } a_4 = a_2^2 + a_1^4 , \\ 0, & \text{if } a_4 \neq a_2^2 + a_1^4 . \end{cases}$$

(ii) $a_3 \neq 0$

$$|S(f)| = K(f)q^{1/2} ,$$

*where* $K(f) > 0$ *is such that*

$$K(f)^2 = 1 + (-1)^n \sum_{\substack{t \in F \\ t^3 = 1/a_3}} e(a_4t^4 + a_2t^2 + a_1t) .$$

(Thus in particular when $f$ is regular we have $K(f) \leqq 2$ so the Carlitz-Uchiyama estimate $|S(f)| \leqq 3q^{1/2}$ can be improved to $|S(f)| \leqq 2q^{1/2}$).

*Proof.* (i) For $l \in F$ we define

$$T(l) = \sum_{x \in F} e((a_2^2 + a_1^4 + l)x^4 + a_2x^2 + a_1x) .$$

By Theorem 4 $(a_2^2 + a_1^4)X^4 + a_2X^2 + a_1X$ is exceptional over $F$ so that by Theorem 2, $T(0) = q$. Now

$$\begin{aligned} T(l)^2 &= \sum_{x,y \in F} e((a_2^2 + a_1^4 + l)(x^4 + y^4) + a_2(x^2 + y^2) + a_1(x + y)) \\ &= \sum_{x,t \in F} e((a_2^2 + a_1^4 + l)t^4 + a_2t^2 + a_1t) , \end{aligned}$$

on setting $y = x + t$. Thus we have $T(l)^2 = qT(l)$, so that $T(l) = 0$ or $q$. But we have

$$\sum_{l \in F} T(l) = \sum_{x \in F} e((a_2^2 + a_1^4)x^4 + a_2x^2 + a_1x) \sum_{l \in F} e(lx^4) = q ,$$

that is,

$$\sum_{0 \neq l \in F} T(l) = 0 ,$$

giving $T(l) = 0$, when $l \neq 0$. This completes the proof of case (i).

(ii) We have as before

$$S(f)^2 = \sum_{t \in F} e(a_4t^4 + a_3t^3 + a_2t^2 + a_1t) \sum_{x \in F} e(a_3tx^2 + a_3t^2x) .$$

Now by Theorem 1 we have

$$\sum_{x \in F} e(a_3tx^2 + a_3t^2x) = \begin{cases} q, \text{ if } a_3t = (a_3t^2)^2 , \\ 0, \text{ if } a_3t \neq (a_3t^2)^2 , \end{cases}$$

so that, as $a_3 \neq 0$, we obtain

$$\begin{aligned} S(f)^2 &= q \sum_{\substack{t \in F \\ a_3t^4 - t = 0}} e(a_4t^4 + a_3t^3 + a_2t^2 + a_1t) \\ &= q\{1 + (-1)^n \sum_{\substack{t \in F \\ t^3 = 1/a_3}} e(a_3t^4 + a_2t^2 + a_1t)\} , \end{aligned}$$

which completes the proof of the theorem.

6. $\deg f = 5$. We prove the Carlitz-Uchiyama estimate in an elementary way.

THEOREM 6. *If* $f(X) = a_5X^5 + a_4X^4 + a_3X^3 + a_2X^2 + a_1X \in F[X]$, *where* $a_5 \neq 0$, *then* $|S(f)| \leqq 4q^{1/2}$.

*Proof*. As before we have

$$S(f)^2 = \sum_{t \in F} e(a_5t^5 + \cdots + a_1t) \sum_{x \in F} e(a_5tx^4 + a_3tx^2 + (a_5t^4 + a_3t^2)x) .$$

By Theorem 5 we have

$$\sum_{x \in F} e(a_5tx^4 + a_3tx^2 + (a_5t^4 + a_3t^2)x) = \begin{cases} q, \text{ if } a_5t = (a_3t)^2 + (a_5t^4 + a_3t^2)^4 , \\ 0, \text{ if } a_5t \neq (a_3t)^2 + (a_5t^4 + a_3t^2)^4 , \end{cases}$$

and as $a_5^2t^{16} + a_3^2t^8 + a_3^2t^2 + a_5t = 0$ has at most 16 solutions $t$ in $F$ we have

$$|S(f)|^2 \leqq 16\, q, \ |S(f)| \leqq 4\, q^{1/2} .$$

7. $\deg f = 6$. We begin by giving necessary and sufficient conditions for $f(X) = a_6X^6 + \cdots + a_1X \in F[X]$, where $a_6 \neq 0$, to be excep-

tional over $F$.

THEOREM 7. *$f(X) = a_6X^6 + a_5X^5 + a_4X^4 + a_3X^3 + a_2X^2 + a_1X \in F[X]$, where $a_6 \neq 0$, is exceptional over $F$ if and only if $a_6 = a_3^2$, $a_5 = 0$, $a_4 = a_2^2 + a_1^4$.*

*Proof.* $f(X)$ is exceptional over $F$ if and only if there exists $rX^3 + sX^2 + tX \in F[X]$ such that

$$a_6X^6 + \cdots + a_1X = (rX^3 + sX^2 + rX)^2 + (rX^3 + sX^2 + tX) .$$

This is possible if, and only if, we can solve the equations

$$a_6 = r^2,\ a_5 = 0,\ a_4 = s^2,\ a_3 = r,\ a_2 = t^2 + s,\ a_1 = t ,$$

that is if, and only if,

$$a_6 = a_3^2,\ a_5 = 0,\ a_4 = s^2 = (a_2 + t^2)^2 = a_2^2 + t^4 = a_2^2 + a_1^4 .$$

We now evaluate $|S(f)|$. We prove

THEOREM 8. *If $f(X) = a_6X^6 + a_5X^5 + a_4X^4 + a_3X^3 + a_2X^2 + a_1X \in F[X]$, where $a_6 \neq 0$, then $|S(f)|$ is given as follows:*

(i) $a_5 = 0$, $a_6 = a_3^2$

$$S(f) = \begin{cases} q, & \text{if } a_4 = a_2^2 + a_1^4 , \\ 0, & \text{if } a_4 \neq a_2^2 + a_1^4 . \end{cases}$$

(ii) $a_5 = 0$, $a_6 \neq a_3^2$

$$|S(f)| \leqq \sqrt{1 + n_1(f)}\, q^{1/2} ,$$

*where $n_1(f)$ denotes the number of solutions $t \in F$ of*

$$t^6 = \frac{1}{a_6 + a_3^2} .$$

(iii) $a_5 \neq 0$

$$|S(f)| \leqq \sqrt{1 + n_2(f)}\, q^{1/2} ,$$

*where $n_2(f)$ denotes the number of solutions $t \in F$ of*

$$(7.1) \qquad a_5^4t^{15} + (a_6^2 + a_3^4)t^7 + (a_6 + a_3^2)t + a_5 = 0 .$$

(Thus in particular when $f$ is regular we have

$$|S(f)| \leqq \sqrt{1 + 15}\, q^{1/2} = 4q^{1/2} ,$$

which improves the Carlitz-Uchiyama estimate $|S(f)| \leqq 5\, q^{1/2}$).

*Proof.* (i) For $l \in F$ we define

$$T(l) = \sum_{x \in F} e(a_3^2 x^6 + (a_2^2 + a_1^4 + l)x^4 + a_3 x^3 + a_2 x^2 + a_1 x) .$$

By Theorem 7 $a_3^2 X^6 + (a_2^2 + a_1^4)X^4 + a_3 X^3 + a_2 X^2 + a_1 X$ is exceptional over $F$ so that by Theorem 2, $T(0) = q$. Now

$$T(l)^2 = \sum_{x,y \in F} e(a_3^2(x^6 + y^6) + (a_2^2 + a_1^4 + l)(x^4 + y^4) + a_3(x^3 + y^3) + a_2(x^2 + y^2) + a_1(x + y))$$
$$= \sum_{x,t \in F} e(a_3^2(x^4 t^2 + x^2 t^4 + t^6) + (a_2^2 + a_1^4 + l)t^4 + a_3(x^2 t + x t^2 + t^3) + a_2 t^2 + a_1 t) ,$$

on setting $y = x + t$. Thus we have

$$T(l)^2 = \sum_{t \in F} e(a_3^2 t^6 + (a_2^2 + a_1^4 + l)t^4 + a_3 t^3 + a_2 t^2 + a_1 t) \sum_{x \in F} e((a_3^2 t^2)x^4 + (a_3^2 t^4 + a_3 t)x^2 + (a_3 t^2)x) .$$

Now as $a_6 = a_3^2$ and $a_6 \neq 0$ we have $a_3 \neq 0$. Hence for $t \neq 0$ by Theorem 4 $(a_3^2 t^2)X^4 + (a_3^2 t^4 + a_3 t + a_3 t)X^2 + (a_3 t^2)X$ is exceptional as $a_3^2 t^2 \neq 0$ and

$$(a_3^2 t^4 + a_3 t)^2 + (a_3 t^2)^4 = a_3^4 t^8 + a_3^2 t^2 + a_3^4 t^8 = a_3^2 t^2 .$$

Thus for $t \neq 0$ by Theorem 2

$$\sum_{x \in F} e((a_3^2 t^2)x^4 + (a_3^2 t^4 + a_3 t)x^2 + (a_3 t^2)x) = q .$$

This is clearly true for $t = 0$ as well so that $T(l)^2 = qT(l)$, giving $T(l) = 0$ or $q$. But we have

$$\sum_{l \in F} T(l) = \sum_{x \in F} e(a_3^2 x^6 + (a_2^2 + a_1^4)x^4 + a_3 x^3 + a_2 x^2 + a_1 x) \sum_{l \in F} e(l x^4) = q ,$$

that is

$$\sum_{0 \neq l \in F} T(l) = 0 ,$$

giving $T(l) = 0$, when $l \neq 0$. This completes the proof of case (i).
(ii) As before we have

$$S(f)^2 = \sum_{t \in F} e(a_6 t^6 + a_4 t^4 + a_3 t^3 + a_2 t^2 + a_1 t) \times \sum_{x \in F} e((a_6 t^2)x^4 + (a_6 t^4 + a_3 t)x^2 + (a_3 t^2)x) .$$

By Theorems 1 and 5 we have

$$\sum_{x \in F} e((a_6 t^2)x^4 + (a_6 t^4 + a_3 t)x^2 + (a_3 t^2)x) = \begin{cases} q, \text{ if } a_6 t^2 = (a_6 t^4 + a_3 t)^2 + (a_3 t^2)^4 , \\ 0, \text{ if } a_6 t^2 \neq (a_6 t^4 + a_3 t)^2 + (a_3 t^2)^4 . \end{cases}$$

Thus

$$S(f)^2 = q \sum_{t \in F}{}' e(a_6t^6 + a_4t^4 + a_3t^3 + a_2t^2 + a_1t) ,$$

where the dash (′) denotes that the sum is over those $t$ such that

$$(a_6 + a_3^2)^2t^8 + (a_6 + a_3^2)t^2 = 0 .$$

For $t \neq 0$ this becomes

$$t^6 = \frac{1}{a_6 + a_3^2} ,$$

as $a_6 + a_3^2 \neq 0$ in view of $a_6 \neq a_3^2$. This completes case (ii).
(iii) As before we have

$$S(f)^2 = \sum_{t \in F} e(a_6t^6 + \cdots + a_1t) \sum_{x \in F} e((a_6t^2 + a_5t)x^4 + (a_6t^4 + a_3t)x^2 + (a_5t^4 + a_3t^2)x) .$$

By Theorems 1 and 5 we have

$$\sum_{x \in F} e((a_6t^2 + a_5t)x^4 + (a_6t^4 + a_3t)x^2 + (a_5t^4 + a_3t^2)x) = \begin{cases} q, \text{ if } a_6t^2 + a_5t = (a_6t^4 + a_3t)^2 + (a_5t^4 + a_3t^2)^4 , \\ 0, \text{ if } a_6t^2 + a_5t \neq (a_6t^4 + a_3t)^2 + (a_5t^4 + a_3t^2)^4 . \end{cases}$$

Thus

$$S(f)^2 = q \sum_{t \in F}{}^{\dagger} e(a_6t^6 + \cdots + a_1t) ,$$

where the dagger (†) denotes that the sum is over those $t$ such that

$$a_5^4t^{16} + (a_6^2 + a_3^4)t^8 + (a_6 + a_3^2)t^2 + a_5t = 0 .$$

For $t \neq 0$ this becomes (7.1) which completes the proof of case (iii).

7. **Conclusion.** We conclude by remarking that the elementary method of this paper does not work when $\deg f(X) = 7$, since in this case we have

$$S(f)^2 = \sum_{t \in F} e(a_7t^7 + \cdots + a_1t) \sum_{x \in F} e(g_t(x)) ,$$

where

$$g_t(X) = (a_7t)X^6 + (a_7t^2)X^5 + (a_7t^3 + a_6t^2 + a_5t)X^4 + (a_7t^4)X^3 + (a_7t^5 + a_6t^4 + a_3t)X^2 + (a_7t^6 + a_5t^4 + a_3t^2)X$$

has a *nonzero* coefficient of $X^5$ for $t \neq 0$.

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**Pacific Journal of Mathematics**
Vol. 40, No. 2 October, 1972

Louis I. Alpert and L. V. Toralballa, *An elementary definition of surface area in $E^{n+1}$ for smooth surfaces* . . . . . 261
Eamon Boyd Barrett, *A three point condition for surfaces of constant mean curvature* . . . . . 269
Jan-Erik Björk, *On the spectral radius formula in Banach algebras* . . . . . 279
Peter Botta, *Matrix inequalities and kernels of linear transformations* . . . . . 285
Bennett Eisenberg, *Baxter's theorem and Varberg's conjecture* . . . . . 291
Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, *Approximation of curves* . . . . . 301
A. Hedayat, *An algebraic property of the totally symmetric loops associated with Kirkman-Steiner triple systems* . . . . . 305
Richard Howard Herman and Michael Charles Reed, *Covariant representations of infinite tensor product algebras* . . . . . 311
Domingo Antonio Herrero, *Analytic continuation of inner function-operators* . . . . . 327
Franklin Lowenthal, *Uniform finite generation of the affine group* . . . . . 341
Stephen H. McCleary, *0-primitive ordered permutation groups* . . . . . 349
Malcolm Jay Sherman, *Disjoint maximal invariant subspaces* . . . . . 373
Mitsuru Nakai, *Radon-Nikodým densities and Jacobians* . . . . . 375
Mitsuru Nakai, *Royden algebras and quasi-isometries of Riemannian manifolds* . . . . . 397
Russell Daniel Rupp, Jr., *A new type of variational theory sufficiency theorem* . . . . . 415
Helga Schirmer, *Fixed point and coincidence sets of biconnected multifunctions on trees* . . . . . 445
Murray Silver, *On extremal figures admissible relative to rectangular lattices* . . . . . 451
James DeWitt Stein, *The open mapping theorem for spaces with unique segments* . . . . . 459
Arne Stray, *Approximation and interpolation* . . . . . 463
Donald Curtis Taylor, *A general Phillips theorem for $C^*$-algebras and some applications* . . . . . 477
Florian Vasilescu, *On the operator $M(Y) = TYS^{-1}$ in locally convex algebras* . . . . . 489
Philip William Walker, *Asymptotics for a class of weighted eigenvalue problems* . . . . . 501
Kenneth S. Williams, *Exponential sums over* $\mathrm{GF}(2^n)$ . . . . . 511