

# Pacific Journal of Mathematics

**THE COCHRAN SEQUENCES OF SEMI-BOUNDARY LINKS**

GYO TAEK JIN

# THE COCHRAN SEQUENCES OF SEMI-BOUNDARY LINKS

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For a 1-dimensional semi-boundary link, Cochran constructed a sequence of Sato-Levine invariants of successively derived links. This is a linear recurrence sequence and conversely any linear recurrence sequence can be constructed in this way. An upper bound for the growth of this sequence is obtained.

**1. Introduction.** An ordered pair  $L = (M, K)$  of oriented circles which are disjointly and smoothly embedded in  $S^3$  is called a *semi-boundary link* if the linking number  $\text{lk}(M, K)$  is equal to zero [Sa]. If  $L = (M, K)$  is a semi-boundary link, then there exist Seifert surfaces  $V$  of  $M$  and  $W$  of  $K$  which intersect only in the interiors and transversely. We call  $(V, W)$  a *Seifert pair* for  $L$ .

The orientations on  $V$  and  $W$ , which induce the orientation of  $L$  on the boundaries, determine a normal 2-frame field on  $V \cap W$ . The *Sato-Levine invariant*  $\beta(L)$  of the link  $L$  is the homotopy class in  $\pi_3 S^2 \cong \mathbb{Z}$  which is represented by the Thom-Pontryagin construction on the 2-frame field. It is proven in [Sa] that this integer is independent of the choice of the Seifert surfaces and that it is a link-concordance invariant. The following well-known proposition is included for completeness.

**PROPOSITION 1.1.** *If  $L = (M, K)$  is a semi-boundary link, then*

- (a)  $\beta(L) = 0$  if  $L$  is a boundary link.
- (b)  $\beta(\bar{L}) = \beta(L)$  where  $\bar{L} = (K, M)$ .
- (c)  $\beta(L^\times) = \beta(L)$  where  $L^\times$  is the same as  $L$  with the orientation of either  $M$  or  $K$  reversed.
- (d)  $\beta(-L) = -\beta(L)$  where  $-L$  is a mirror image of  $L$ .

*Proof.* (a) is obvious by the definition of the Sato-Levine invariant. (b), (c) and (d) easily follows from the fact that

$$[g \circ f \circ h] = \{\deg(g)\}^2 \deg(h)[f]$$

in  $\pi_3 S^2$  where  $f: S^3 \rightarrow S^2$ ,  $g: S^2 \rightarrow S^2$  and  $h: S^3 \rightarrow S^3$  are continuous maps [Hu]. □

Let  $(V, W)$  be a Seifert pair for a semi-boundary link  $L = (M, K)$ . We may assume that the intersection  $F = V \cap W$  is connected, by a surgery on the Seifert surfaces. In this case, we call  $(V, W)$  a *special Seifert pair* for  $L$ . Since  $W$  is oriented, we can push a small tubular neighborhood of  $F$  in  $W$  off  $F$  in a normal direction of  $W$ . Call this surface  $W'$ . Then  $W'$  is a Seifert surface for  $K$  such that  $F \cap W' = \emptyset$ . Therefore  $D(L) = (F, K)$  is a new semi-boundary link derived from  $L = (M, K)$ . We follow Cochran in calling  $D(L)$  a *derived link* or a *derivative* of  $L$ .  $D(L)$  is well defined only up to an equivalence relation called *weak-cobordism* which is weaker than the link-concordance [C]. Since  $D(L)$  is a semi-boundary link, its Sato-Levine invariant is defined. We can iterate this procedure to get a sequence of integers as follows:

- (i)  $\beta_1(L) = \beta(L)$ ,
- (ii)  $\beta_i(L) = \beta(D^{i-1}(L))$ , for  $i \geq 2$ .

This sequence  $\{\beta_i(L)\}_{i=1}^\infty$  is well defined and depends only on the weak-cobordism class of  $L$ . We call it the *Cochran sequence* of  $L$ .

By Proposition 1.1(a),  $\{\beta_i(L)\}_{i=1}^\infty$  is identically zero if  $L$  is a boundary link. One of the most important properties of this sequence is that it is additive under componentwise oriented connected sum of semi-boundary links [C].

**2. Kojima's function.** Recall the definition of Kojima's function first given in [KY]. Let  $L = (M, K)$  be a semi-boundary link and let  $\tilde{X}_K$  be the infinite cyclic cover of  $S^3 \setminus K$  whose covering transformation group is generated by  $t$ . Denote by  $\ell$  a zero-push-off of  $M$ , i.e.,  $\ell$  is isotopic to  $M$  in a small tubular neighborhood of  $M$  and  $\text{lk}(\ell, M) = 0$ . Let  $\tilde{\ell}$  and  $\tilde{M}$  be near-by lifts of  $\ell$  and  $M$  in  $\tilde{X}_K$ . Since the Alexander polynomial  $\Delta_K(t)$  of  $K$  annihilates the  $\mathbb{Z}[t, t^{-1}]$ -module  $H_1(\tilde{X}_K)$ ,  $\Delta_K(t)\tilde{\ell}$  bounds a 2-chain  $\zeta$  in  $\tilde{X}_K$ .

DEFINITION.

$$\eta_L(t) = \frac{\sum_{n=-\infty}^\infty \text{Int}(\zeta, t^n \tilde{M}) t^n}{\Delta_K(t)}$$

where  $\text{Int}(\ , \ )$  stands for the usual intersection number in  $\tilde{X}_K$ .

For any semi-boundary link  $L = (M, K)$ ,  $\eta_L(t)$  is an invariant of  $I$ -equivalence class of  $L$  satisfying the following properties:

- (iii)  $\eta_L(t^{-1}) = \eta_L(t)$ ,
- (iv)  $\eta_L(1) = 0$ .

Since  $\Delta_K(t)$  can be normalized to satisfy  $\Delta_K(t^{-1}) = \Delta_K(t)$ , one can change the variable by  $x = (1 - t)(1 - 1/t)$  to get a rational function

$h_L(x)$  from  $\eta_L(t)$ . Cochran proved in [C] that  $\eta_L(t)$  is equivalent to the sequence  $\{\beta_i(L)\}_{i=1}^\infty$ . The relation is given by the Maclaurin series expansion.

$$(v) \quad h_L(x) = \sum_{i=1}^\infty \beta_i(L) x^i.$$

In other words,  $h_L(x)$  is the generating function for the Cochran sequence  $\{\beta_i(L)\}_{i=1}^\infty$ .

### 3. Linear recurrence sequences.

**DEFINITION.** An infinite sequence  $\{n_i\}_{i=1}^\infty$  of integers is a *linear recurrence sequence* if there exist integers  $N > 0$ ,  $a_1, \dots, a_d$  such that

$$n_{i+d} + a_1 n_{i+d-1} + \dots + a_d n_i = 0$$

for all  $i > N$ .

**PROPOSITION 3.1.** (a)  $\{n_i\}_{i=1}^\infty$  is a linear recurrence sequence if and only if its generating function is of the form

$$\frac{b_1 x + b_2 x^2 + \dots + b_m x^m}{1 + a_1 x + a_2 x^2 + \dots + a_d x^d}$$

for some integers  $d > 0$ ,  $m > 0$ ,  $a_1, \dots, a_d$  and  $b_1, \dots, b_m$ .

(b) If  $\{n_i\}_{i=1}^\infty$  is a linear recurrence sequence whose generating function is as in (a), then for all sufficiently large  $i$ ,

$$n_i = \sum_{j=1}^k P_j(i) \gamma_j^i$$

where  $1 + a_1 x + a_2 x^2 + \dots + a_d x^d = \prod_{j=1}^k (1 - \gamma_j x)^{d_j}$ , the  $\gamma_j$ 's are distinct, and  $P_j(i)$  is a polynomial in  $i$  of degree  $d_j - 1$ .

Proposition 3.1 is a version of Theorem 4.1 in [St].

**THEOREM 3.2.** (a) For any semi-boundary link  $L$ ,  $\{\beta_i(L)\}_{i=1}^\infty$  is a linear recurrence sequence.

(b) For any linear recurrence sequence  $\{n_i\}_{i=1}^\infty$ , there is a semi-boundary link  $L$  such that  $\{\beta_i(L)\}_{i=1}^\infty = \{n_i\}_{i=1}^\infty$ .

*Proof.* (a) Using the fact that  $\Delta_K(1) = \pm 1$ , it is easy to see that  $h_L(x)$  is of the form

$$\frac{b_1 x + b_2 x^2 + \dots + b_m x^m}{1 + a_1 x + a_2 x^2 + \dots + a_d x^d}$$

for some integers  $d > 0$ ,  $m > 0$ ,  $a_1, \dots, a_d$  and  $b_1, \dots, b_m$ . Then

(a) follows from Proposition 3.2 (a) and the identity (v).

(b) Let

$$h(x) = \frac{b_1x + b_2x^2 + \cdots + b_mx^m}{1 + a_1x + a_2x^2 + \cdots + a_dx^d}$$

be the generating function for a linear recurrence sequence  $\{n_i\}_{i=1}^\infty$ . Substituting  $(1-t)(1-1/t)$  for  $x$  in  $h(x)$ , we get

$$\eta(t) = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^m d_j(2-t^j-t^{-j})}{1 + \sum_{i=1}^d c_i(2-t^i-t^{-i})}$$

for some integer  $c_i$ 's and  $d_j$ 's. We may assume that  $d \geq m$  by adding terms with coefficient zero, if necessary. We will construct a semi-boundary link  $L_j$ , for each  $j$  with  $\varepsilon_j \neq 0$ , satisfying

$$\eta_{L_j}(t) = \frac{\varepsilon_j(2-t^j-t^{-j})}{1 + \sum_{i=1}^d c_i(2-t^i-t^{-i})}$$

where, for each  $k = 1, \dots, m$ ,

$$\varepsilon_k = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } d_k > 0, \\ 0 & \text{if } d_k = 0, \\ -1 & \text{if } d_k < 0. \end{cases}$$

First we will construct a knot whose Alexander polynomial is

$$\Delta(t) = \varepsilon_j \left( 1 + \sum_{i=1}^d c_i(2-t^i-t^{-i}) \right)$$

as follows [L, R1, R2].

Let  $K$  be an unknot. Embed a solid torus  $T$  in  $S^3 \setminus K$  so that

(1) the centerline  $C(T)$  of  $T$  is unknotted,

(2)  $\text{lk}(K, C(T)) = 0$ ,

(3) there are  $\varepsilon_j c_1, \dots, \varepsilon_j c_d$  twists in  $T$  separated by strands of  $T$ , each of which links once around  $K$  as shown in Figure 1.

Let  $\lambda$  be a longitude of  $T$  such that  $\text{lk}(\lambda, C(T)) = \varepsilon_j$  when  $\lambda$  and  $C(T)$  are oriented in the same direction. Since  $S^3 \setminus \text{int}(T)$  is another solid torus, there is a homeomorphism

$$h: S^3 \setminus \text{int}(T) \rightarrow S^3 \setminus \text{int}(T)$$

sending  $\lambda$  into a meridian curve  $\mu$  of  $T$ . Let  $K_h = h(K) \subset S^3$  and let  $\tilde{X}$  be the infinite cyclic covering space of  $S^3 \setminus K_h$  obtained by attaching solid tori to the infinite cyclic covering space of  $S^3 \setminus (\text{int}(T) \cup K)$ . Then  $\Delta(t)$  is the Alexander polynomial of  $K_h$ .

Let  $M$  be another unknot in  $S^3 \setminus (\text{int}(T) \cup K)$  which goes once around the  $j$ -th twist of  $T$  in Figure 1. Let  $M_h = h(M) \subset S^3$ . Then



where  $\sigma$  is a 2-chain in  $\bigcup_{k=-\infty}^{\infty} t^k \partial \tilde{T}$ . Let

$$\zeta = (1 - t^j)(\tilde{\delta} + \sigma) + \Delta(t)(\tilde{\theta}' - \gamma).$$

Then  $\partial \zeta = \Delta(t) \widetilde{M}'$ . It is clear that, for any  $n$ ,

$$\text{Int}(\sigma, t^n \widetilde{M}) = \text{Int}(\tilde{\theta}', t^n \widetilde{M}) = \text{Int}(\gamma, t^n \widetilde{M}) = 0.$$

Therefore,

$$\eta_L(t) = \frac{\sum_{n=-\infty}^{\infty} \text{Int}((1 - t^j) \tilde{\delta}, t^n \widetilde{M}) t^n}{\Delta(t)} = \frac{\varepsilon_j(2 - t^j - t^{-j})}{1 + \sum_{i=1}^d c_i(2 - t^i - t^{-i})}$$

Then, by the identity (v) and the additivity of the Cochran sequence,

$$L = \underbrace{(L_1 \# \cdots \# L_1)}_{|d_1|} \# \cdots \# \underbrace{(L_m \# \cdots \# L_m)}_{|d_m|}$$

satisfies  $\eta_L(t) = \eta(t)$ . Finally,  $\{\beta_i(L)\}_{i=1}^{\infty} = \{n_i\}_{i=1}^{\infty}$ .  $\square$

**COROLLARY 3.3.** (a) *Any sequence of integers which eventually becomes a geometric progression is a Cochran sequence.*

(b) *Any sequence of integers which eventually becomes an arithmetic progression is a Cochran sequence.*

(c) *The Fibonacci sequence  $\{1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, \dots\}$  is a Cochran sequence.*

(d) *For any positive integer  $d$ ,  $\{n^d\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$  is a Cochran sequence.*

*Proof.* (a)  $n_{i+1} - rn_i = 0$  is the linear recurrence relation for a geometric progression with common ratio  $r$ .

(b)  $n_{i+2} - 2n_{i+1} + n_i = 0$  is the linear recurrence relation for an arithmetic progression.

(c)  $n_{i+2} - n_{i+1} - n_i = 0$  is the linear recurrence relation for the Fibonacci sequence. Figure 2 shows a link whose Cochran sequence is the Fibonacci sequence.

(d) The following identity

$$\sum_{k=0}^{d+1} (-1)^k \binom{d+1}{k} (n+k)^d = 0$$

is a linear recurrence relation for the sequence  $\{n^d\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ .  $\square$

It is obvious that Cochran sequences can be unbounded. But they cannot grow arbitrarily fast.

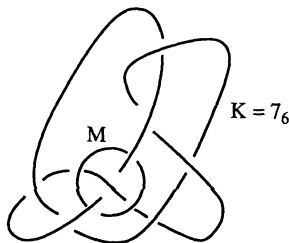


FIGURE 2. Fibonacci link

**COROLLARY 3.4.** *For a semi-boundary link  $L = (M, K)$ , there exist constants  $C > 0$  and  $\gamma > 0$  such that*

$$|\beta_n(L)| \leq Cn^s\gamma^n$$

*for all  $n$ , where  $s$  is a nonnegative integer less than a half of the degree of the Alexander polynomial of  $K$ .*

*Proof.* This is an easy consequence of Proposition 3.1(b).  $\square$

For example,  $\{n^n\}_{n=1}^\infty$  and  $\{n!\}_{n=1}^\infty$  cannot be Cochran sequences since, for any  $C, s, \gamma > 0$ ,

$$n^n > Cn^s\gamma^n \quad \text{and} \quad n! > Cn^s\gamma^n$$

for all sufficiently large  $n$ .

For a semi-boundary link  $L = (M, K)$ ,  $\bar{L} = (K, M)$  is also a semi-boundary link satisfying  $\beta(\bar{L}) = \beta(L)$  as in Proposition 1.1 (b). Therefore the two sequences  $\{\beta_i(L)\}_{i=1}^\infty$  and  $\{\beta_i(\bar{L})\}_{i=1}^\infty$  have the same first entries. By the following theorem, this is the only relation between them.

**THEOREM 3.5.** *For any two linear recurrence sequences  $\{n_i\}_{i=1}^\infty$  and  $\{m_i\}_{i=1}^\infty$  such that  $n_1 = m_1$ , there exists a semi-boundary link  $L$  satisfying  $\{\beta_i(L)\}_{i=1}^\infty = \{n_i\}_{i=1}^\infty$  and  $\{\beta_i(\bar{L})\}_{i=1}^\infty = \{m_i\}_{i=1}^\infty$ .*

For a semi-boundary link  $L$ , and for any integer  $m$ , Cochran constructed a new semi-boundary link  $\int_m L$  called an  $m$ -antiderivative of  $L$ , which is well defined up to weak-cobordism satisfying

- (vi)  $\beta_1(\int_m L) = m$ ,
- (vii)  $D(\int_m L)$  is weakly-cobordant to  $L$  and hence

$$\beta_i\left(\int_m L\right) = \beta_{i-1}(L) \quad \text{for } i \geq 2.$$

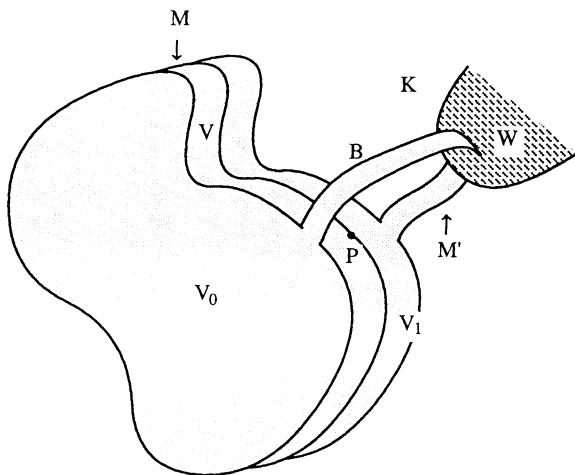


FIGURE 3

LEMMA 3.6.  $D(\overline{\int_0^1 L})$  is weakly-cobordant to a boundary link for any semi-boundary link  $L$ .

*Proof.* Here we use Cochran's construction of antiderivatives. Let  $L = (M, K)$  be a semi-boundary link with a special Seifert pair  $(V, W)$ . Let  $c: V \times [0, 1] \hookrightarrow S^3$  be a collar of  $V$  such that

$$c(V \times \{\frac{1}{2}\}) = V \quad \text{and} \quad c(V \times [0, 1]) \cap K = \emptyset.$$

Let  $V_i = c(V \times \{i\})$  for  $i \in [0, 1]$ . Choose orientations on  $V_0$ ,  $V_1$ , and  $c(M \times [0, 1])$  so that they agree on boundaries. In the procedure we smooth all the corners whenever necessary. Let  $\gamma$  be a smooth nonsingular path joining two points  $P \in M$  and  $Q \in K$  such that

$$\text{int}(\gamma) \cap (c(V \times [0, 1]) \cup W) = \emptyset.$$

Let  $J$  be a small closed interval on  $M$  centered at  $P$ . Push a copy of  $c(J \times (0, 1))$  off  $c(M \times [0, 1])$  along  $\gamma$  passing  $Q$  slightly, so that the image of  $c(J \times [0, 1])$  becomes a band  $B$  connecting  $V_0$  and  $V_1$ , which intersects  $\text{int}(W)$  transversely on the image of  $c(J \times \{\frac{1}{2}\})$  in a small neighborhood of  $Q$ . See Figure 3. Then

$$M' = \partial(c(M \times [0, 1]) \cup B)$$

is a knot intersecting  $W$  in two points. Replacing a small tubular neighborhood of  $M' \cap W$  in  $W$  by a tube that goes along the lower half of  $M'$ , we get a Seifert surface  $W_0$  for  $K$  such that  $W_0 \cap M' = \emptyset$ . Then

$$(c(M \times [0, 1]) \cup B, W_0)$$

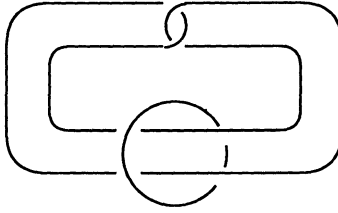


FIGURE 4. Whitehead link

is a special Seifert pair for  $(M', K)$ . It is easy to see that

$$((c(M \times [0, 1]) \cup B) \cap W_0, K)$$

is ambient isotopic to  $(M, K)$ . Since  $c(M \times [0, 1])$  is untwisted, we have  $\beta(M', K) = 0$ . Therefore  $(M', K) = \int_0 L$ . Using the same Seifert surfaces for  $\overline{\int_0 L} = (K, M')$ , we get  $D(\overline{\int_0 L}) = (M, M')$ . Since  $V \cap (V_0 \cup V_1 \cup B) = \emptyset$ ,

$$(M, M') = (\partial V, \partial(V_0 \cup V_1 \cup B))$$

is a boundary link. □

**COROLLARY 3.7.**  $\{\beta_i(\overline{\int_0 L})\}_{i=1}^\infty$  is identically zero.

*Proof of Theorem 3.5.* By Theorem 3.2, there are semi-boundary links  $L_1$  and  $L_2$  such that  $\{\beta_i(L_1)\}_{i=1}^\infty = \{n_j\}_{j=2}^\infty$  and  $\{\beta_i(L_2)\}_{i=1}^\infty = \{m_j\}_{j=2}^\infty$ .

Let  $W$  be the Whitehead link as in Figure 4. Then it is easy to see that

$$\{\beta_i(W)\}_{i=1}^\infty = \{\beta_i(\overline{W})\}_{i=1}^\infty = \{1, 0, 0, \dots\}$$

and

$$\{\beta_i(-W)\}_{i=1}^\infty = \{\beta_i(\overline{-W})\}_{i=1}^\infty = \{-1, 0, 0, \dots\}$$

where  $-W$  is the mirror image of  $W$ . Let

$$H = \begin{cases} W & \text{if } n_1 \geq 0, \\ -W & \text{if } n_1 < 0. \end{cases}$$

Define

$$L = \underbrace{H \# \dots \# H}_{|n_1|} \# \int_0 L_1 \# \overline{\int_0 L_2}.$$

Then, by the additivity of the Cochran sequence and Corollary 3.7, we have

$$\begin{aligned}\beta_i(L) &= |n_1| \beta_i(H) + \beta_i \left( \int_0 L_1 \right) + \beta_i \left( \int_0 L_2 \right) \\ &= \begin{cases} n_1 + 0 + 0 & \text{if } i = 1, \\ 0 + n_i + 0 & \text{if } i > 1 \end{cases} \\ &= n_i \quad \text{for all } i.\end{aligned}$$

Similarly,

$$\begin{aligned}\beta_i(\overline{L}) &= |n_1| \beta_i(\overline{H}) + \beta_i \left( \int_0 \overline{L_1} \right) + \beta_i \left( \int_0 \overline{L_2} \right) \\ &= \begin{cases} m_1 + 0 + 0 & \text{if } i = 1, \\ 0 + 0 + m_i & \text{if } i > 1 \end{cases} \\ &= m_i, \quad \text{for all } i. \quad \square\end{aligned}$$

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