GROUPS WHICH HAVE A FAITHFUL REPRESENTATION OF DEGREE LESS THAN \((p - 1/2)\)

WALTER FEIT AND JOHN GRIGGS THOMPSON
1. Introduction. Let $G$ be a finite group which has a faithful representation over the complex numbers of degree $n$. H. F. Blichfeldt has shown that if $p$ is a prime such that $p > (2n + 1)(n - 1)$, then the Sylow $p$-group of $G$ is an abelian normal subgroup of $G$ [1]. The purpose of this paper is to prove the following refinement of Blichfeldt's result.

**Theorem 1.** Let $p$ be a prime. If the finite group $G$ has a faithful representation of degree $n$ over the complex numbers and if $p > 2n + 1$, then the Sylow $p$-subgroup of $G$ is an abelian normal subgroup of $G$.

Using the powerful methods of the theory of modular characters which he developed, R. Brauer was able to prove Theorem 1 in case $p^2$ does not divide the order of $G$ [2]. In case $G$ is a solvable group, N. Ito proved Theorem 1 [4]. We will use these results in our proof.

Since the group $SL(2, p)$ has a representation of degree $n = (p - 1)/2$, the inequality in Theorem 1 is the best possible.

It is easily seen that the following result is equivalent to Theorem 1.

**Theorem 2.** Let $A, B$ be $n$ by $n$ matrices over the complex numbers. If $A^r = I = B^s$, where every prime divisor of $rs$ is strictly greater than $2n + 1$, then either $AB = BA$ or the group generated by $A$ and $B$ is infinite.

For any subset $S$ of a group $G$, $C_G(S), N_G(S), |S|$ will mean respectively the centralizer, normalizer and number of elements in $S$. For any complex valued functions $\xi, \xi$ on $G$ we define

$$(\xi, \xi)_G = \frac{1}{|G|} \sum_{x \in G} \xi(x)\xi(x),$$

and $||\xi||_G^2 = (\xi, \xi)_G$. Whenever it is clear from the context which group is involved, the subscript $G$ will be omitted. $H \triangleleft G$ will mean that $H$ is a normal subgroup of $G$. For any two subsets $A, B$ of $G$, $A - B$ will denote the set of all elements in $A$ which are not in $B$. If a subgroup of a group is the kernel of a representation, then we will also say that it is the kernel of the character of the given representation. All groups

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considered are assumed to be finite.

2. Proof of Theorem 1. We will first prove the following preliminary result.

**Lemma 1.** Assume that the Sylow $p$-group $P$ of $N$ is a normal subgroup of $N$. If $x$ is any element of $N$ such that $C_N(x) \cap P = \{1\}$, then $\lambda(x) = 0$ for any irreducible character $\lambda$ of $N$ which does not contain $P$ in its kernel.

*Proof.* Since $|C_N(x)|$ is not divisible by $p$, it is easily seen that $C_N(x)$ is mapped isomorphically into $C_{N/P}(\overline{x})$, where $\overline{x}$ denotes the image of $x$ in $N/P$ under the natural projection. Let $\mu_1, \mu_2, \cdots$ be all the irreducible characters of $N$ which contain $P$ in their kernel and let $\lambda_1, \lambda_2, \cdots$ be all the other irreducible characters of $N$. The orthogonality relations yield that

$$\sum_{i} |\mu_i(x)|^2 = |C_{N/P}(\overline{x})| \geq |C_N(x)| = \sum_{i} |\mu_i(x)|^2 + \sum_{i} |\lambda_i(x)|^2.$$ 

This implies the required result.

From now assume that $G$ is a counter example to Theorem 1 of minimal order. We will show that $p^3$ does not divide $|G|$, then Brauer's theorem may be applied to complete the proof. The proof is given in a series of short steps.

Clearly every subgroup of $G$ satisfies the assumption of Theorem 1, hence we have

(I) *The Sylow $p$-group of any proper subgroup $H$ of $G$ is an abelian normal subgroup of $H.*

Let $P$ be a fixed Sylow $p$-group of $G$. Let $Z$ be the center of $G$.

(II) *$P$ is abelian.*

As $P$ has a faithful representation of degree $n < p$, each irreducible constituent of this representation has degree one. Therefore in completely reduced form, the representation of $P$ consists of diagonal matrices. Consequently these matrices form an abelian group which is isomorphic to $P$.

(III) *$G$ contains no proper normal subgroup whose index in $G$ is a power of $p.*$

Suppose this is false. Let $H$ be a normal subgroup of $G$ of minimum
Let $P_0$ be a Sylow $p$-group of $H$. Then by (I) $P_0 \triangleleft H$, hence $P_0 \triangleleft G$, thus $C_G(P_0) \triangleleft G$. If $C_G(P_0) \neq G$, then by (I) and (II), $P \triangleleft C_G(P_0)$, thus $P \triangleleft G$ contrary to assumption. Therefore $C_G(P_0) = G$. Burnside's Theorem ([3], p. 203) implies that $H$ contains a normal $p$-complement which must necessarily be normal in $G$. The minimal nature of $H$ now yields that $p$ does not divide $|H|$. If $q$ is any prime dividing $|H|$, then it is a well known consequence of the Sylow theorems that it is possible to find a Sylow $q$-group $Q$ of $H$ such that $P \subseteq N(Q)$. Hence $PQ$ is a solvable group which satisfies the hypotheses of Theorem 1. Ito's Theorem [4] now implies that $P \triangleleft PQ$, thus $Q \subseteq N(P)$. As $q$ was an arbitrary prime dividing $|H|$, we get that $|H|$ divides $|N(P)|$. Consequently $N(P) = G$, contrary to assumption.

(IV) $Z$ is the unique maximal normal subgroup of $G$. $G/Z$ is a non-cyclic simple group. $|Z|$ is not divisible by $p$.

Let $H$ be a maximal normal subgroup of $G$, hence $G/H$ is simple. Let $P_0$ be a Sylow $p$-group of $H$. Then by (I) $P_0 \triangleleft H$, hence $P_0 \triangleleft G$, thus $C(H) \triangleleft G$. If $C(H) \neq G$, then by (I) and (II) $P \triangleleft C(H)$, hence $P \triangleleft G$ contrary to assumption. Therefore $C(H) = G$. If $P_0 \neq [1]$, then it is a simple consequence of Grün's Theorem ([3], p. 214) that $G$ contains a proper normal subgroup whose index is a power of $p$. This contradicts (III). Hence $P_0 = [1]$ and $p$ does not divide $|H|$. By (III) $PH \neq G$, hence by (I) $P \triangleleft PH$. Consequently $PH = P \times H$, and $P \subseteq C(H) \triangleleft G$. If $C(H) \neq G$, then (I) yields that $P \triangleleft C(H)$. Hence once again $P \triangleleft G$, contrary to assumption. Consequently $C(H) = G$. Therefore $H \subseteq Z$. As $G$ is not solvable, neither is $G/H$. Now the maximal nature of $H$ yields that $H = Z$ and suffices to complete the proof.

(V) $P \cap xP^{-1} = \{1\}$ unless $x$ is in $N(P)$.

Let $D = P \cap xP^{-1}$ be a maximal intersection of Sylow $p$-groups of $G$. Then $P$ is not normal in $N(D)$. Hence by (I) $N(D) = G$, or $D \triangleleft G$. However (IV) now implies that $D \subseteq Z$. Hence (IV) also yields that $D = \{1\}$ as was to be shown.

Define the subset $N_0$ of $N(P)$ by

$$N_0 = \{x \mid x \in N(P), C(x) \cap P \neq \{1\}\}.$$  

Clearly $\{P, Z\} \subseteq N_0$.

(VI) $N(N_0) = N(P)$. $(N_0 - Z) \cap x(N_0 - Z)x^{-1}$ is empty unless $x \in N(P)$.

Clearly $N(P) \subseteq N(N_0)$. Since $P$ consists of all elements in $N_0$ whose
order is a power of $p$, it follows that $N(N_0) \subseteq N(P)$.

Suppose $y \in (N_0 - Z) \cap x(N_0 - Z)x^{-1}$. Then $y$ and $x^{-1}yx$ are both contained in $(N_0 - Z)$. Let $P_0 = C(y) \cap P$, $P_1 = C(x^{-1}yx) \cap P$. By assumption $P_0 \neq \{1\} \neq P_1$. It follows from the definitions that $P_0$ and $xP_1x^{-1}$ are both contained in $C(y)$. Since $y$ is not in $Z$, $C(y) \neq G$. Hence (I) yields that $P_0$ and $xP_1x^{-1}$ generate a $p$-group. Thus by (II) $xP_1x^{-1} \subseteq C(P_0)$. Now (V) implies that $xP_1x^{-1} \subseteq N(P)$. Consequently $xP_1x^{-1} \subseteq P$. By (V), this yields that $x \in N(P)$ as was to be shown.

From now on we will use the following notation:

$$|P| = p^t, \quad |Z| = z, \quad |N(P)| = p^t z t.$$

Let $\chi_0 = 1, \chi_1, \ldots$ be all the irreducible characters of $G$. Define $\alpha_i, \beta_i, b_i$ by

$$\chi_{i, N(P)} = \alpha_i + \beta_i, \quad b_i = \beta_i(1)$$

where $\alpha_i$ is a sum of irreducible characters of $N(P)$, none of which contain $P$ in their kernel and $\beta_i$ is a character of $N(P)$ which contains $P$ in its kernel.

(VII) If $i \neq 0$, then $b_i < (1/p^t z t) \chi_i(1)$.

By (VI) $(N_0 - Z)$ has $|G|/p^t z t$ distinct conjugates and no two of them have any elements in common. Since $\chi_i$ is a class function on $G$, this yields that

$$1 = ||\chi_i||^2 > \frac{1}{|G|} \frac{|G|}{p^t z t} \Sigma_{N_0 - Z} |\chi_i(x)|^2$$

$$= \frac{1}{p^t z t} \left\{-\Sigma_x |\chi_i(x)|^2 + \Sigma_{N_0} |\alpha_i(x) + \beta_i(x)|^2\right\}.$$

If $x \in Z$, then $|\chi_i(x)|^2 = |\chi_i(1)|^2$. As $P \subseteq N_0$, we get that

$$1 > \frac{1}{p^t z t} \left[-|\chi_i(1)|^2z + \Sigma_{N_0}(|\alpha_i(x)|^2 + |\alpha_i(x)\beta_i(x) + \overline{\alpha_i(x)}\beta_i(x)|^2) + \Sigma_{P^t z} |\beta_i(x)|^2\right].$$

Since $P$ is in the kernel of $\beta_i$, we get that $|\beta_i(x)| = b_i$ for $x \in PZ$. Lemma 1 implies that $\alpha$ vanishes on $N(P) - N_0$. Hence

$$1 > \frac{-|\chi_i(1)|^2}{p^t t} + ||\alpha_i||^2_{P^t(P)} + (\alpha_i, \beta_i)_{N(P)} + (\alpha_i, \overline{\beta_i})_{N(P)} + \frac{b_i}{t}.$$

By definition $(\alpha_i, \beta_i) = 0$, hence

$$\frac{|\chi_i(1)|^2}{p^t t} > ||\alpha_i||^2_{P^t(P)} - 1 + \frac{b_i}{t}.$$

By (IV) the normal subgroup generated by $P$ is all of $G$, hence $\alpha_i \neq 0$. 

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**W. Feit and J. G. Thompson**
Therefore $\|\alpha_i\|_{N(P)} \geq 1$. This finally yields that
\[
\frac{|\chi_i(1)|^2}{p^s t} > \frac{b_i}{t},
\]
which is equivalent to the statement to be proved.

(VIII) If $\Gamma$ is the character of $G$ induced by the trivial character $1_P$ of $P$, then $(\Gamma, \chi_i) = b_i$.

If $\lambda$ is an irreducible character of $N(P)$ which does not contain $P$ in its kernel, then $\lambda$ is not a constituent of the character of $N(P)$ induced by $1_P$. Hence by the Frobenius reciprocity theorem $(\lambda, 1_p)_P = 0$. Consequently $(\alpha_{i,P}, 1_P)_P = 0$. The Frobenius reciprocity theorem now implies that
\[
(\chi_i, \Gamma) = (\chi_{i,P}, 1_P)_P = (\beta_{i,P}, 1_P) = b_i.
\]

From now on let $\chi$ be an irreducible character of minimum degree greater than one. Define the integers $a_i$ by
\[
a_i = (\chi, \chi \chi).
\]

(IX) $\chi(1) - 1 \leq \sum_{i \neq 0} a_i b_i$.

By (VIII)
\[
a_0 b_0 + \sum_{i \neq 0} a_i b_i = (\Gamma, \chi \chi) = \frac{\chi(1)^2}{p^s} + \frac{1}{p^{s+1}} \sum_{p^s t} \chi \chi(x)
\]
\[
= \frac{1}{p^{s+1}} \sum_{p^s} \chi \chi(x) = \|\chi_P\|^2.
\]

By (II), $\chi_{i,P}$ is a sum of $\chi(1)$ linear characters of $P$. Consequently
\[
a_0 b_0 + \sum_{i \neq 0} a_i b_i \geq \chi(1).
\]

As $\chi$ is irreducible, $a_0 = 1$. Clearly $b_0 = 1$. This yields the desired inequality.

We will now complete the proof of Theorem 1.

It follows from (IX) that
\[
\chi(1) - 1 \leq \sum_{i \neq 0} a_i b_i.
\]

(VII) yields that
\[
\sum_{i \neq 0} a_i b_i < \frac{1}{p^{s+1}} \sum_{i \neq 0} a_i \chi_i(1).
\]
The definition of the integers $a_i$ implies that
\[
\sum_{i \neq 0} a_i \chi_i(1) = \chi(1)^2 - 1.
\]
Combining these inequalities we get that
\[
\chi(1) - 1 < \frac{\chi(1)^2 - 1}{p^{e/2}},
\]
or
\[
p^{e/2} < \chi(1) + 1.
\]
By assumption $\chi(1) < (p - 1)/2$, hence
\[
p^{e/2} < \chi(1) + 1 < p.
\]
This implies that $e < 2$. Thus $e \leq 1$.

R. Brauer's theorem [2] now yields that $P \vartriangleleft G$ contrary to assumption. This completes the proof of Theorem 1.

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Thomas Andrew Brown, Simple paths on convex polyhedra ............................. 1211
L. Carlitz, Some congruences for the Bell polynomials .................................... 1215
Paul Civin, Extensions of homomorphisms ....................................................... 1223
Paul Joseph Cohen and Milton Lees, Asymptotic decay of solutions of differential inequalities ................................. 1235
István Fáry, Self-intersection of a sphere on a complex quadric ........................ 1251
Walter Feit and John Griggs Thompson, Groups which have a faithful representation of degree less than \( p - 1/2 \) .................................................. 1257
William James Firey, Mean cross-section measures of harmonic means of convex bodies .................................................. 1263
Avner Friedman, The wave equation for differential forms ................................ 1267
Bernard Russel Gelbaum and Jesus Gil De Lamadrid, Bases of tensor products of Banach spaces .................................................. 1281
Ronald Kay Getoor, Infinitely divisible probabilities on the hyperbolic plane ........ 1287
Basil Gordon, Sequences in groups with distinct partial products ........................ 1309
Magnus R. Hestenes, Relative self-adjoint operators in Hilbert space .................. 1315
Fu Cheng Hsiang, On a theorem of Fejér ......................................................... 1359
John McCormick Irwin and Elbert A. Walker, On \( N \)-high subgroups of Abelian groups .................................................. 1363
John McCormick Irwin, High subgroups of Abelian torsion groups ..................... 1375
R. E. Johnson, Quotient rings of rings with zero singular ideal .......................... 1385
David G. Kendall and John Leonard Mott, The asymptotic distribution of the time-to-escape for comets strongly bound to the solar system .................. 1393
Kurt Kreith, The spectrum of singular self-adjoint elliptic operators .................. 1401
Lionello Lombardi, The semicontinuity of the most general integral of the calculus of variations in non-parametric form .................. 1407
Albert W. Marshall and Ingram Olkin, Game theoretic proof that Chebyshev inequalities are sharp .................................................. 1421
Wallace Smith Martindale, III, Primitive algebras with involution ....................... 1431
William H. Mills, Decomposition of holomorphs ............................................. 1443
James Donald Monk, On the representation theory for cylindric algebras ............ 1447
Shu-Teh Chen Moy, A note on generalizations of Shannon-McMillan theorem ..... 1459
Donald Earl Myers, An imbedding space for Schwartz distributions .................. 1467
John R. Myhill, Category methods in recursion theory ..................................... 1479
Paul Adrian Nickel, On extremal properties for annular radial and circular slit mappings of bordered Riemann surfaces ................................. 1487
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Robert James Thompson, On essential absolute continuity .............................. 1561
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