ANOTHER CONFORMAL STRUCTURE ON IMMERSED SURFACES OF NEGATIVE CURVATURE

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1. Everyone is familiar with the ordinary conformal structure on oriented surfaces immersed smoothly in $E^3$. This standard structure is obtained by using the first fundamental form as metric tensor. It is possible, however, to define very different conformal structures which are still vitally connected with the geometry of a surface’s immersion in $E^3$.

Consider, for instance, the conformal structure induced upon a strictly convex surface (oriented so that mean curvature $H > 0$) by using its positive definite second fundamental form as metric tensor. (See [3] and [4].) This particular structure coincides with the usual one only on spheres.

The present paper is devoted, principally, to a description of the corresponding non-standard conformal structure on oriented surfaces of negative Gaussian curvature immersed smoothly in $E^3$. This new structure is obtained by using a specific linear combination of the first and second fundamental forms as metric tensor. It will be seen that our new structure coincides with the usual one only on minimal surfaces.

Also included below is a section describing the arithmetic of certain expressions associated with the various fundamental forms on an immersed surface. These expressions become quadratic differentials whenever any particular conformal structure is introduced on a surface.

The paper closes with a theorem which generalizes a well known fact about minimal surfaces. For investigations related to the material which follows, see [5].

2. Consider an oriented surface $S$ which is $C^3$ immersed in $E^3$. We may number the principal curvatures so that

(1) $k_1 \geq k_2$

holds over all of $S$. For convenience of notation, lines of curvature coordinates $x, y$ will always be chosen so that $k_1$ is the principal curvature in the $y \equiv$ constant direction, while $k_2$ is the principal curvature in the $x \equiv$ constant direction.

We now define the function

$$H' = \frac{k_2 - k_1}{2} = -\sqrt{H^2 - K}.$$
Note that the zeros of $H'$ coincide with the umbilics on $S$, that $H'$ is never positive, and that the value of $H'$ (unlike $H$) is independent of the orientation on $S$. If we set

$$(2) \quad H' \Gamma = K I - H I I,$$

we obtain a new "fundamental form" $II'$, defined at all non-umbilic points on $S$. Of course, $I$ is determined by $II$ and $II'$ wherever $K \neq 0$, and $II$ is determined by $I$ and $II'$ wherever $H \neq 0$. Moreover, $II'$ (unlike $II$) is independent of the orientation on $S$. The relationship of $II$ to $II'$ can be more clearly seen in the following lemma.

**LEMMA 1.** If $x, y$ are lines of curvature coordinates on $S$, so that

$$I = Edx^2 + Gdy^2,$$

$$(3) \quad II = k_1 Edx^2 + k_2 Gdy^2,$$

then, where $II'$ is defined,

$$(4) \quad II' = k_1 Edx^2 - k_2 Gdy^2.$$

**Proof.** Suppose $II' = L'dx^2 + 2M'dxy + M'dy^2$. Then (2) yields

$$H' L' = k_1 k_2 E - \left( k_1 + k_2 \right) k_1 E = H' k_1 E.$$

If $II'$ is defined at all, $H' \neq 0$, so that $L' = k_1 E$. Similarly, $M' = 0$, and $N' = -k_2 G$, as claimed.

**COROLLARY.** $II'$ is positive definite on $S$ if and only if $K < 0$.

**Proof.** Wherever $II'$ is defined or $K < 0$, there are no umbilics to consider. Thus (4) applies, and, using (1), the result is obvious.

**LEMMA 2.** Just as $H' = 0$ characterizes points where $I \alpha II$, $H = 0$ characterizes points where $I \alpha II'$, and $K = 0$ characterizes points where $II' \alpha II'$.

**Proof.** The first fact merely recalls the definition of an umbilic point. The remaining facts follow easily from (2), recalling that $H' \neq 0$ wherever $II'$ is defined.

**REMARK.** Elementary application of (2) reveals that lines of

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1 By continuity, $II'$ could be sensibly defined at certain umbilics. We assume throughout this paper, however, that $II'$ is defined only at non-umbilics.
curvature coordinates are characterized by $M' = F = 0$ wherever $H \neq 0$, and by $M' = M = 0$ wherever $K \neq 0$.

3. Suppose now that $K < 0$ on the surface $S$ discussed above, so that $H'$ is a $C^1$ positive definite form on $S$. Then $C^2$ coordinates $x, y$ may be found in the neighborhood of any point on $S$ in terms of which

$$II' = \mu'(x, y)(dx^2 + dy^2) ,$$

with $\mu' > 0$. (See § 4 of [1].) Such coordinates will be called disothermal. It is well known that distinct pairs of disothermal coordinates are related by the Cauchy Riemann equations, and that coordinates so related to a pair of disothermals are themselves disothermal. Thus we obtain on $S$ the structure of a Riemann surface $R'_n$, with conformal parameters $z = x + iy$ corresponding to disothermals $x, y$.

Of course, there is still the usual structure of a Riemann surface $R_n$ on $S$, determined by using conformal parameters $z = x + iy$ corresponding to isothermal coordinates $x, y$ in terms of which

$$I = \lambda(x, y)(dx^2 + dy^2) .$$

By Lemma 2, $R_n$ and $R'_n$ coincide on $S$ if and only if $S$ is a minimal surface. (We will also have occasion to mention below the Riemann surface $R'_n$ determined on strictly convex surfaces by using conformal parameters $z = x + iy$ corresponding to bisothermal coordinates $x, y$ in terms of which

$$II = \mu(x, y)(dx^2 + dy^2)$$

with $\mu > 0$.)

Assume now that $x, y$ are disothermals on $S$. Then (2) becomes

$$HL + H'\mu' = KE ,$$
$$HN + H'\mu' = KG ,$$
$$HM = KF .$$

Thus, for instance, the equation for the directions of principal curvature reads

$$-Fdx^2 + (E - G) dxdy + Fdy^2 = 0 .$$

This is, incidentally, exactly the form which the same equation takes when using bisothermal coordinates on a strictly convex surface. (See [3] or [4].) Note that (6) depends only on $I$.

REMARK. Recalling the remark which closes § 2, we see that all
conjugate disothermals are lines of curvature coordinates. And, where \( H 
eq 0 \), all orthogonal disothermals are lines of curvature coordinates.

It will be helpful to note that since

\[
K = \frac{LN - M^2}{EG - F^2},
\]

(7)

\[
H = \frac{EN - 2FM + GL}{2(EG - F^2)},
\]

asymptotic coordinates, which are characterized by \( L = N = 0 \), always yield the third equation of (5), so that \( M' = 0 \). Moreover, by (2), coordinates are asymptotic if and only if \( H'L' = KE, H'N' = KG \). Thus the following can be said.

**REMARK.** Asymptotic coordinates are disothermal if and only if \( E = G \).

The previous remark and the two results which follow characterize disothermal coordinates on \( S \) in terms of the coefficients of \( I \) and \( II \). Lemma 3 is a trivial consequence of (2), (5), and the fact that \( K < 0 \) on \( S \).

**LEMMA 3.** Coordinates are disothermal on \( S \) if and only if

\[
H(L - N) = K(E - G),
\]

\[
HM = KF.
\]

**LEMMA 4.** Nonasymptotic coordinates are disothermal on a \( C^3 \) immersed surface if and only if

\[
L = -N \neq 0,
\]

\[
HM = KF.
\]

**Proof.** Using (7), we obtain

\[
2H(LN - M^2) = K(EN - 2FM + GL).
\]

(9)

If \( x, y \) are disothermals, (5) holds. Thus \( HM = KF \), and we may multiply the equations of (5) by \( N, L \) and \( M \) respectively, and combine the resulting expressions so as to obtain the right side of (9). This yields

\[
\]

Since \( H'\mu' \neq 0 \), assuming \( x, y \) to be nonasymptotic, we have \( L = -N \neq 0 \). Suppose, on the other hand, that (8) holds when using coordinates \( x, y \). Then multiplying the equations of (2) by \( L, N \) and \( M \) respectively, and proceeding as above, we obtain
\[ 2H(LN - M^2) = -2H(L^2 + M^2) + LH'(N' - L') . \]

Since \( L = -N \neq 0 \) while \( H' \neq 0 \), it follows that \( L' = N' \). But \( M' = 0 \) by (8) and (2), so that \( x, y \) are disothermals.

Many formulas may be simplified, of course, by using disothermals and (8). We note here only that

\[ L' = N' = \mu' = \frac{K(E + G)}{2H'} , \]

while

\[ L = -N = \frac{K(E - G)}{2H} . \]

4. In [2] and [6], use is made of the quadratic differential \( \Omega_2 = \phi_2 dz^2 \) on \( R_2 \), where

\[ \phi_2 = \frac{L - N}{2} - iM . \]

In [4], use is made of the quadratic differential \( \Omega_1 = \phi_1 dx^2 \) on \( R_3 \) (for a strictly convex surface), where

\[ \phi_1 = \frac{E - G}{2} - iF . \]

We prove the following lemma in order to facilitate the definition of similar quadratic differentials on the various Riemann surfaces of interest here.

**Lemma 5.** Let \( A = Adx^2 + 2Bdxdy + Cdy^2 \) be a quadratic form on an oriented \( C^1 \) surface \( S \). Suppose \( R \) is a Riemann surface defined on \( S \). Then \( \Omega = \phi \, dx^2 \) with

\[ \phi = \frac{A - C}{2} - iB \]

is a quadratic differential on \( R \).

**Proof.** Let \( z = x + iy \) and \( w = u + iv \) be conformal parameters on \( R \). Then

\[ A = \hat{A}dw^2 + 2\hat{B}dudv + \hat{C}dv^2 \]

where

\[ \hat{A} = Ax^2 + 2Bx_uy_u + Cy_u , \]

\[ \hat{B} = Ax_ux_v + B(x_uy_v + x_vy_u) + Cy_vy_v , \]
\[ \hat{C} = Ax^2 + 2Bx_0y_0 + Cy_0^2. \]

Since
\[ x_u = y_v, \]
\[ x_0 = -y_0, \]

while,
\[ \frac{dz}{dw} = x_u - ix_v, \]
simple computation yields
\[ \left\{ \frac{\hat{A} - \hat{C}}{2} - i\hat{B} \right\} = \left\{ \frac{A - C}{2} - iB \right\} \left( \frac{dz}{dw} \right)^2, \]
as required.

**Remark.** The quadratic differential \( \Omega \) on \( R \) associated with \( A \neq 0 \) on \( S \) is identically zero if and only if \( R \) is determined by choosing conformal parameters \( z = x + iy \) on \( S \) corresponding to coordinates \( x, y \) in terms of which \( A = \lambda(x, y)(dx^2 + dy^2) \). Thus, for example, there is no \( R \) on which \( \Omega \equiv 0 \) if \( A \) is indefinite somewhere on \( S \).

**Remark.** Let \( R \) and \( \hat{R} \) be Riemann surfaces defined on \( S \). Suppose the identity mapping on \( S \) is not conformal from \( R \) to \( \hat{R} \) at \( p \). Then \( \Omega = 0 \) at \( p \) on both \( R \) and \( \hat{R} \) if and only if \( A = 0 \) at \( p \).

We are now free to discuss \( \Omega_1 \) and \( \Omega_2 \) on \( R, R_1 \) or \( R_2 \). We may also define the quadratic differential \( \Omega'_2 = \phi'_2 dz \) on any umbilic free portion of \( R, R_1 \) or \( R_2 \) with
\[ \phi'_2 = \frac{L' - N'}{2} - iM'. \]

And, for the sake of completeness, we will consider \( \Omega_3 \), the quadratic differential associated with
\[ III = 2HII - KI \]
on \( S \). As is well known, \( III \) yields, wherever \( K \neq 0 \), the first fundamental form on the unit spherical image of \( S \). The relation (2) implies that
\[ III = HII - H'II' = KI - 2H'II', \]
so that \( III \) is determined by any pair of the forms \( I, II \) and \( II' \).

All linear relations, such as (2), (10) or (11), among the forms \( I, \)

\[ \frac{\hat{A} - \hat{C}}{2} - i\hat{B} \]
II, II' and III hold also for their associated quadratic differentials. However, simplified versions of these relations are satisfied by $\Omega_1$, $\Omega_2$, $\Omega'_2$ and $\Omega_3$ on $R_1$, $R_2$, $R'_2$, and on the Riemann surface $R_3$ determined on $S$ by using the spherical image map (where $K \neq 0$) to carry back onto $S$ the ordinary conformal structure of the sphere. For on each of the Riemann surfaces $R_1$, $R_2$, $R'_2$ or $R_3$, at least one of the quadratic differentials $\Omega_1$, $\Omega_2$, $\Omega'_2$ or $\Omega_3$ vanishes identically.

**Lemma 6.** Let $R$ be a Riemann surface on the oriented surface $S$ immersed $C^3$ in $E^3$. Suppose $K$, $H$, $H' \neq 0$. Then $R = R_1$ if and only if

$$2H\Omega_2 = -2H'\Omega'_2 = \Omega_3$$
on $R$; $R = R_3$ if and only if

$$K\Omega_1 = H\Omega_3 = -\Omega_3$$
on $R$; $R = R'_2$ if and only if

$$K\Omega_1 = H\Omega_2 = \Omega_3$$
on $R$; and $R = R_3$ if and only if

$$K\Omega_1 = 2H\Omega_3 = 2H'\Omega'_2$$
on $R$.

**Proof.** Use (2), (10), (11), and the remarks which follow Lemma 5.

**Remark.** By Lemma 4, $\Omega_2 = (L - iM)dz^3$ on $R'_2$. By (2) and (7), $\Omega'_2 = (L' - iM')dz^2$ on $R_2$.

5. In [2] it is shown that $\Omega_2$ is holomorphic on $R_1$ if and only if $S$ is of constant mean curvature. In [3] it is shown that $\Omega_1$ is holomorphic on $R_3$ if and only if $S$ is of constant (positive) Gaussian curvature. We have the following (somewhat less satisfying) result of a similar nature.

**Theorem.** $\Omega_1$ is holomorphic on $R'_2$ if and only if the vector $X$ describing the immersion of $S$ in $E^3$ is a harmonic function of disothermal coordinates.

**Proof.** By the definition of $I$, it is easily checked, using

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial z} = \frac{1}{2} \left[ \frac{\partial}{\partial x} - i \frac{\partial}{\partial y} \right],$$

that
φ₁ = 2Xₐ · Xₐ.

But Ω₁ is holomorphic on R₁ if and only if

(φ₁)ᵢ = 0,

that is, by (12), if and only if

(13) Xₓ · Xᵢ = 0,

where z = x + iy is any conformal parameter on R₁', and

\[ \frac{∂}{∂z} = \frac{1}{2} \left( \frac{∂}{∂x} + i \frac{∂}{∂y} \right). \]

And (13) is equivalent to

(14) \( (X_{xx} + X_{yy}) \cdot X_x = (X_{xx} + X_{yy}) \cdot X_y = 0. \)

On the other hand, by Lemma 4, the Gauss equations in disothermals yield

\[ X_{xx} = \Gamma^{r}_{11} X_x + \Gamma^{r}_{12} X_y + LX \],
\[ X_{yy} = \Gamma^{r}_{22} X_x + \Gamma^{r}_{22} X_y - LX \],

where \( \perp X \) is the unit normal to S. Thus (14) holds if and only if \( X \) is a harmonic function of disothermal coordinates.

Note, however, that disothermal coordinates are isothermal on a minimal surface. Thus \( Ω₁ ≡ 0 \) is trivially holomorphic on R₁ if S is minimal. Our theorem therefore includes the well known fact that the vector immersing a minimal surface is a harmonic function of isothermal coordinates. It would be nice, of course, to have a geometric characterization of all surfaces for which \( X \) is a harmonic function of disothermals.

**References**

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