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Unique Difference Bases of $\mathbb{Z}$

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Abstract

For $n \in \mathbb{Z}, A \subset \mathbb{Z}$, let $\delta_A(n)$ denote the number of representations of n in the form $n = a - a'$, where $a, a' \in A$. A set $A \subset \mathbb{Z}$ is called a unique difference basis of $\mathbb{Z}$ if $\delta_A(n) = 1$ for all $n \neq 0$ in $\mathbb{Z}$. In this paper, we prove that there exists a unique difference basis of $\mathbb{Z}$ whose growth is logarithmic. These results show that the analogue of the Erdős-Turán conjecture fails to hold in $(\mathbb{Z}, -)$.

1 Introduction

For sets A and B of integers and for any integer c, we define the set

$$A - B = \{a - b : a \in A, b \in B\},$$

and the translations

$$A - c = \{a - c : a \in A\},$$
$$c - A = \{c - a : a \in A\}.$$

The counting function for the set A is

$$A(y, x) = \text{card}\{a \in A : y \leq a \leq x\}.$$

For $n \in \mathbb{Z}$, we write

$$\delta_A(n) = \text{card}\{(a, a') \in A \times A : a - a' = n\},$$

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$$\sigma_A(n) = \mathrm{card}\{(a, a') \in A \times A : a + a' = n\}.$$

We call $A \subset \mathbb{Z}$ a difference basis of $\mathbb{Z}$ if $\delta_A(n) \geq 1$ for all $n \in \mathbb{Z}$, and a unique difference basis of $\mathbb{Z}$ if $\delta_A(n) = 1$ for all $n \neq 0$ in $\mathbb{Z}$. We call A a subset of $\mathbb{N}$ an additive asymptotic basis of $\mathbb{N}$ if there is $n_0 = n_0(A)$ such that $\sigma_A(n) \geq 1$ for all $n \geq n_0$. The celebrated Erdős-Turán conjecture [1] states that if $A \subset \mathbb{N}$ is an additive asymptotic basis of $\mathbb{N}$, then the representation function $\sigma_A(n)$ must be unbounded. In 1990, Ruzsa [5] constructed a basis of $A \subset \mathbb{N}$ for which $\sigma_A(n)$ is bounded in the square mean. Pŭs [4] first established that the analogue of the Erdős-Turán conjecture fails to hold in some abelian groups. Nathanson [3] constructed a family of arbitrarily sparse unique additive representation bases for $\mathbb{Z}$. In 2004, Haddad and Helou [2] showed that the analogue of the Erdős-Turán conjecture does not hold in a variety of additive groups derived from those of certain fields. Let K be a finite field of characteristic $\neq 2$ and G the additive group of $K \times K$. Recently, Chi-Wu Tang and Min Tang [6] proved there exists a set $B \subset G$ such that $1 \leq \delta_B(g) \leq 14$ for all $g \neq 0$.

It is natural to consider the analogue of the Erdős-Turán conjecture in $(\mathbb{Z}, -)$. In this paper, we obtain the following results.

Theorem 1. *There exists a family of unique difference bases of* $\mathbb{Z}$*.*

Theorem 2. *There exists a unique difference basis* A *of* $\mathbb{Z}$ *such that*

$$\frac{2\log(3x+3)}{\log 3} - \frac{2\log 5}{\log 3} < A(0,x) \leq \frac{2\log(x+3)}{\log 2} - 2 \text{ for all } x \geq 1.$$

2 Proof of Theorem 1.

We shall construct an ascending sequence $A_1 \subseteq A_2 \subseteq \cdots$ of finite sets of nonnegative integers such that

$$|A_k| = 2k, \text{ for all } k \geq 1,$$

$$\delta_{A_k}(n) \leq 1, \text{ for all } n \neq 0.$$

We shall prove that the infinite set

$$A = \bigcup_{k=1}^{\infty} A_k$$

is a unique difference basis of $\mathbb{Z}$.

We construct the sets A_k by induction. Let $A_1 = \{0, 1\}$. We assume that for some $k \geq 1$ we have constructed sets $A_1 \subseteq \cdots \subseteq A_k$ such that $|A_i| = 2i$ and $\delta_{A_i}(n) \leq 1$ for all $1 \leqslant i \leqslant k$ and all integers $n \neq 0$. We define the integers

$$d_k = \max\{a : a \in A_k\},$$

$$b_k = \min\{|b| : b \notin A_k - A_k\}.$$

To construct the set A_{k+1}, we choose an integer c_k such that $c_k > d_k$. Let

$$A_{k+1} = A_k \cup \{2c_k, b_k + 2c_k\}.$$

Then $|A_{k+1}| = 2k+2 = 2(k+1)$ for all $k \ge 1$, and $A_k \subseteq [0, d_k],\ A_k - A_k \subseteq [-d_k, d_k]$.

Note that

$$\begin{aligned} A_{k+1} - A_{k+1} &= (A_k - A_k) \cup (A_k - (b_k + 2c_k)) \\ &\cup ((b_k + 2c_k) - A_k) \cup (A_k - 2c_k) \cup (2c_k - A_k) \cup \{b_k, -b_k\}. \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

We shall show that $A_{k+1} - A_{k+1}$ is the disjoint union of the above six sets.
If $u \in A_k - A_k$, then

$$-d_k \le u \le d_k. \tag{2}$$

If $v_1 \in A_k - (b_k + 2c_k)$ and $v_2 \in (b_k + 2c_k) - A_k$, then there exist $a, a' \in A_k$ such that $v_1 = a - (b_k + 2c_k)$ and $v_2 = (b_k + 2c_k) - a'$. Since $0 \le a, a' \le d_k$, we have

$$-b_k - 2c_k \le v_1 \le -b_k - 2c_k + d_k, \tag{3}$$

$$b_k + 2c_k - d_k \le v_2 \le b_k + 2c_k. \tag{4}$$

If $w_1 \in A_k - 2c_k$ and $w_2 \in 2c_k - A_k$, similarly, we have

$$-2c_k \le w_1 \le -2c_k + d_k, \tag{5}$$

$$2c_k - d_k \le w_2 \le 2c_k. \tag{6}$$

For any $n \in \mathbb{Z}$, if $n \in A_k - A_k$, then $-n \in A_k - A_k$, thus by the definition of b_k, we have

$$b_k \notin A_k - A_k \text{ and } -b_k \notin A_k - A_k. \tag{7}$$

Assume $(2c_k - A_k) \cap ((b_k + 2c_k) - A_k) \neq \emptyset$, then there exist $a, a' \in A_k$ such that $b_k + 2c_k - a = 2c_k - a'$, $b_k = a - a' \in A_k - A_k$ which contradicts with the fact $b_k \notin A_k - A_k$. Similarly, we have $(A_k - (b_k + 2c_k)) \cap (A_k - 2c_k) = \emptyset$.

Moreover, we have $d_k \in A_k - A_k$, hence $b_k \neq d_k$. If $b_k < d_k$, it is easy to see that the set $\{-b_k, b_k\}$ is disjoint with the other five sets. If $b_k > d_k$, since $d_k \in A_k - A_k$ and by the definition of b_k, we have $b_k = d_k + 1$. Then $2c_k - d_k \geqslant 2(d_k + 1) - d_k = d_k + 2 > b_k$ and $-2c_k + d_k \leqslant -2(d_k + 1) + d_k = -d_k - 2 < -b_k$, thus the set $\{-b_k, b_k\}$ is disjoint with the other five sets.

By Eq. (1)–(6) and the above discussion, we know that the sets $A_k - A_k,\ A_k - (b_k + 2c_k),\ (b_k + 2c_k) - A_k,\ A_k - 2c_k,\ 2c_k - A_k,\ \{b_k, -b_k\}$ are pairwise disjoint. That is, $\delta_{A_{k+1}}(n) \le 1$ for all integers $n \neq 0$.

Let $A = \bigcup_{k=1}^{\infty} A_k$. Then for all $k \ge 1$, by (7) and the definition of b_k, we have

$$\{-b_k + 1, -b_k + 2, \cdots, -1, 1, \cdots, b_k - 2, b_k - 1\} \subset A_k - A_k \subset A - A,$$

and the sequence $\{b_k\}_{k \geqslant 1}$ is strictly increasing, since $A_k - A_k \subset A_{k+1} - A_{k+1}$ and $\pm b_k \in A_{k+1} - A_{k+1}$ but $\pm b_k \notin A_k - A_k$. Thus A is a difference basis of $\mathbb{Z}$. If $\delta_A(n) \ge 2$ for some n, then by construction, $\delta_{A_k}(n) \ge 2$ for some k, which is impossible. Therefore, A is a unique difference basis of $\mathbb{Z}$.

It completes the proof of Theorem 1.

3 Proof of Theorem 2.

We apply the method of Theorem 1 with

$$c_k = d_k + 1 \text{ for all } k \geq 1.$$

This is essentially a greedy algorithm construction, since at each iteration we choose the smallest possible value of c_k. It is instructive to compute the first few sets A_k. Since

$$A_1 = \{0, 1\}, \quad A_1 - A_1 = \{-1, 0, 1\},$$

we have $b_1 = 2, d_1 = 1$, and $c_1 = d_1 + 1 = 2$. Then

$$A_2 = \{0, 1, 4, 6\}, \quad A_2 - A_2 = \{-6, -5, -4, -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6\},$$

hence $b_2 = 7, d_2 = 6$, $c_2 = d_2 + 1 = 7$. The next iteration of the algorithm produces the sets

$$A_3 = \{0, 1, 4, 6, 14, 21\},$$

$$\begin{aligned} A_3 - A_3 = \{&-21, -20, -17, -15, -14, -13, -10, -8, \\ &-7, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21\} \cup (A_2 - A_2), \end{aligned}$$

so we obtain $b_3 = 9, d_3 = 21, c_3 = 22$, and

$$A_4 = \{0, 1, 4, 6, 14, 21, 44, 53\}.$$

We shall compute upper and lower bounds for the counting function $A(0, x)$. We observe that if $x \geq d_1$ and k is the unique integer such that $d_k \leq x < d_{k+1}$, by the construction of A, we know $A_k = |2k|$ and $A_{k+1} = A_k \cup \{2c_k, 2c_k + b_k\}$, then

$$A(0, x) = A_{k+1}(0, x) = \begin{cases} 2k, & \text{if } d_k \leq x < 2c_k, \\ 2k + 1, & \text{if } 2c_k \leq x < 2c_k + b_k = d_{k+1}. \end{cases}$$

For $k \geq 1$, we have $1 < b_k \leq d_k + 1 = c_k$ and $c_{k+1} = d_{k+1} + 1 = 2c_k + b_k + 1$, hence

$$2c_k + 2 < c_{k+1} \leq 3c_k + 1.$$

Since $c_1 = d_1 + 1 = 2$, it follows by induction on k that

$$2^{k+1} - 2 \leq c_k \leq \frac{5}{2} \cdot 3^{k-1} - \frac{1}{2},$$

and so

$$\frac{\log \frac{6}{5}(c_k + \frac{1}{2})}{\log 3} \leq k \leq \frac{\log \frac{c_k + 2}{2}}{\log 2} \text{ for all } k \geq 1.$$

We obtain an upper bound for $A(0, x)$ as follows. If $d_k \leq x < 2c_k$, then $c_k \leq x + 1$, and

$$A(0, x) = A_{k+1}(0, x) = 2k \leq 2\frac{\log \frac{c_k + 2}{2}}{\log 2} = \frac{2 \log(c_k + 2)}{\log 2} - 2 \leq \frac{2 \log(x + 3)}{\log 2} - 2.$$

If $2c_k \le x < d_{k+1}$, then $c_k \le \frac{x}{2}$, and

$$A(0,x) = A_{k+1}(0,x) = 2k+1 \le \frac{2\log\frac{c_k+2}{2}}{\log 2} + 1 \le \frac{2\log\left(\frac{x}{4}+1\right)}{\log 2} + 1 = \frac{2\log(x+4)}{\log 2} - 3.$$

Therefore,

$$A(0,x) \le \frac{2\log(x+3)}{\log 2} - 2 \text{ for all } x \ge 1.$$

Similarly, we obtain a lower bound for $A(0,x)$. If $d_k \le x < 2c_k$, then

$$A(0,x) = 2k \ge \frac{2\log\frac{6}{5}\left(c_k+\frac{1}{2}\right)}{\log 3} > \frac{2\log\frac{3}{5}(x+1)}{\log 3} = \frac{2\log(3x+3)}{\log 3} - \frac{2\log 5}{\log 3}.$$

If $2c_k \le x < d_{k+1}$, then $d_{k+1} = b_k + 2c_k \le 3c_k$. So $c_k \ge \frac{1}{3}d_{k+1} > \frac{1}{3}x$ and

$$A(0,x) = 2k+1 \ge \frac{2\log\frac{6}{5}\left(c_k+\frac{1}{2}\right)}{\log 3} + 1 > \frac{2\log\frac{6}{5}\left(\frac{x}{3}+\frac{1}{2}\right)}{\log 3} + 1 = \frac{2\log(2x+3)}{\log 3} + 1 - \frac{2\log 5}{\log 3}.$$

Therefore,

$$A(0,x) > \frac{2\log(3x+3)}{\log 3} - \frac{2\log 5}{\log 3} \text{ for all } x \ge 1.$$

This completes the proof of Theorem 2.

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