IMAGES OF LOCALLY FINITE DERIVATIONS OF POLYNOMIAL ALGEBRAS IN TWO VARIABLES

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Abstract. In this paper we show that the image of any locally finite k-derivation of the polynomial algebra $k[x, y]$ in two variables over a field k of characteristic zero is a Mathieu subspace. We also show that the two-dimensional Jacobian conjecture is equivalent to the statement that the image $\operatorname{Im} D$ of every k-derivation D of $k[x, y]$ such that $1 \in \operatorname{Im} D$ and $\operatorname{div} D = 0$ is a Mathieu subspace of $k[x, y]$.

1. Introduction

Kernels of derivations have been studied in many papers. On the other hand, only a few results are known concerning images of derivations.

In this paper we consider the question if the image of a derivation of a polynomial algebra in two variables over a field k is a Mathieu subspace of the polynomial algebra.

The notion of the Mathieu subspaces was introduced recently by the third-named author in [Z2] in order to study the Mathieu conjecture [M], the image conjecture [Z1] and the Jacobian conjecture (see [BCW] and [E1]). We will recall its definition in Section 2 below.

Throughout this paper we fix the following notation: k is a field of characteristic zero and x, y are two free commutative variables. We denote by A the polynomial algebra $k[x, y]$ over the field k.

The contents of the paper are arranged as follows.

In Section 2 we recall some facts concerning Mathieu subspaces and show that the image of a k-derivation of A needs not be a Mathieu subspace (see Example 2.4).

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In Section 3 we prove in Theorem 3.1 that for every locally finite k-derivation D of A, the image $\operatorname{Im} D$ is a Mathieu subspace. Finally in Section 4 we show in Theorem 4.3 that the two-dimensional Jacobian conjecture is equivalent to the following: *if D is a k-derivation of A with $\operatorname{div} D = 0$ such that $1 \in \operatorname{Im} D$, then $\operatorname{Im} D$ is a Mathieu subspace of A.*

2. **Preliminaries**

We start with the following notion introduced in [Z2].

Definition 2.1. *Let R be any commutative k-algebra and M a k-subspace of R. Then M is a Mathieu subspace of R if the following condition holds: if $a \in R$ is such that $a^m \in M$ for all $m \geq 1$, then for any $b \in R$, there exists an $N \in \mathbb{N}$ such that $ba^m \in M$ for all $m \geq N$.*

Obviously every ideal of R is a Mathieu subspace of R. However not every Mathieu subspace of R is an ideal of R. Before we give some examples, we first recall the following simple lemma proved in Lemma 4.5, [Z2], which will be very useful for our later arguments. For the sake of completeness, we here also include a proof.

Lemma 2.2. *If M is a Mathieu subspace of R and $1 \in M$, then $M = R$.*

Proof: Since $1 \in M$, it follows that $1^m = 1 \in M$ for all $m \geq 1$. Then for every $a \in R$, $a = a1^m \in M$ for all large m. Hence $R \subseteq M$ and $R = M$. $\square$

Example 2.3. *Let $R := k[t, t^{-1}]$ be the algebra of Laurent polynomials in the variable t. For each $c \in k$, let D_c be the differential operator $\frac{d}{dt} + ct^{-1}$ of R. Then $\operatorname{Im} D_c := D_c R$ is a Mathieu subspace of R if and only if $c \notin \mathbb{Z}$ or $c = -1$.*

Note that the conclusion above follows directly by applying Lefschetz's principle to Proposition 2.6 [Z2]. Since Proposition 2.6 in [Z2] is for multi-variable case and its proof is quite involved, we here include a self-contained proof for the one variable case.

Proof: Note first that for any $m \in \mathbb{Z}$, $D_c t^m = (m + c)t^{m-1}$. So, if $c \notin \mathbb{Z}$, then $\operatorname{Im} D_c = R$. Hence a Mathieu subspace of R.

If $c \in \mathbb{Z}$ but $c \neq -1$, then $D_c t = (1 + c) \neq 0$. So $1 \in \operatorname{Im} D_c$. Since $D_c t^{-c} = (-c + c)t^{-c-1} = 0$, it is easy to see that $t^{-c-1} \notin \operatorname{Im} D_c$. Hence $\operatorname{Im} D_c \neq R$. Then by Lemma 2.2, $\operatorname{Im} D_c$ is not a Mathieu subspace of R.

Finally, assume $c = -1$. Since $D_{-1}t^m = (m-1)t^{m-1}$ for all $m \in \mathbb{Z}$, it is easy to see that $\operatorname{Im} D_{-1}$ is the subspace of the Laurent polynomials in R without constant term. Then by the Duistermaat-van der Kallen theorem [DK], M is a Mathieu subspace of R. $\square$

Note that when $c = -1$, $\operatorname{Im} D_{-1}$ is a Mathieu subspace of R. But it clearly is not an ideal of R. For more examples of Mathieu subspaces which are not ideals, see Section 4 in [Z2].

When $c = 0$, we see that $\operatorname{Im} d/dt$ is not a Mathieu subspace of R. Now observe that $k[t, t^{-1}] \simeq k[x, y]/(xy - 1)$, where t corresponds to the class of x and t^{-1} to the class of y. Then the derivation d/dt of R can be lifted to a k-derivation D of $k[x, y]$, which maps x to $\frac{d}{dt}t = 1$ and y to $\frac{d}{dt}t^{-1} = -t^{-2}$, i.e., $-y^2$. This leads to the following example.

Example 2.4. *Let $D = \partial_x - y^2\partial_y$. Then $\operatorname{Im} D$ is not a Mathieu subspace of $k[x, y]$.*

Proof: Note that $1 = Dx \in \operatorname{Im} D$. However $y \notin \operatorname{Im} D$ since for any $g \in k[x, y]$ the y-degree of Dg can not be 1. So by Lemma 2.2, $\operatorname{Im} D$ is not a Mathieu subspace of $k[x, y]$. $\square$

The following lemma will also be needed in Section 3.

Lemma 2.5. *Let R be any k-algebra, L a field extension of k and M a k-subspace of R. Assume that $L \otimes_k M$ is a Mathieu subspace of the L-algebra $L \otimes_k R$. Then M is a Mathieu subspace of the k-algebra R.*

Proof: We view $L \otimes_k R$ as a k-algebra in the obvious way. Since $L \otimes_k M$ is a Mathieu subspace of the L-algebra $L \otimes_k R$, from Definition 2.1 it is easy to see that $L \otimes_k M$ (as a k-subspace) is also a Mathieu subspace of the k-algebra $L \otimes_k R$.

Now we identify R with the k-subalgebra $1 \otimes_k R$ of the k-algebra $L \otimes_k R$. Then from Definition 2.1 again, it is easy to check that the intersection $(L \otimes_k M) \cap R = M$ is a Mathieu subspace of R. $\square$

Note that by the lemma above, when we prove that a k-subspace of a polynomial algebra over k is a Mathieu subspace of the polynomial algebra, we may freely replace k by any field extension of k. For instance, we may assume that k is algebraically closed.

To conclude this section we recall a result from [EWZ] which will be used in Section 3 below.

Let $z = (z_1, z_2, ..., z_n)$ be n commutative free variables and $k[z, z^{-1}]$ the algebra of Laurent polynomials in z_i $(1 \le i \le n)$. For any non-zero $f(z) = \sum_{\alpha \in \mathbb{Z}^n} c_\alpha z^\alpha \in k[z, z^{-1}]$, we denote by $\operatorname{Supp}(f)$ the *support* of

$f(z)$, i.e., the set of all $\alpha \in \mathbb{Z}^n$ such that $c_\alpha \neq 0$, and $\mathrm{Poly}\,(f)$ the *(Newton) polytope* of $f(z)$, i.e., the convex hull of $\mathrm{Supp}\,(f)$ in $\mathbb{R}^n$.

Theorem 2.6. ([EWZ]) *Let* $0 \neq f \in k[z, z^{-1}]$ *and* u *any rational point, i.e., a point with all coordinates being rational, of* $\mathrm{Poly}\,(f)$*. Then there exists* $m \geq 1$ *such that* $(\mathbb{R}_+ u) \cap \mathrm{Supp}\,(f^m) \neq \emptyset$*.*

3. Images of Locally Finite Derivations of $k[x, y]$

Let D be any k-derivation of $A(= k[x, y])$. Then D is said to be *locally finite* if for every $a \in A$ the k-vector space spanned by the elements $D^i a$ $(i \geq 1)$ is finite dimensional.

The main result of this section is the following theorem.

Theorem 3.1. *Let D be any locally finite k-derivation of A. Then* $\mathrm{Im}\, D$ *is a Mathieu subspace of A.*

To prove this theorem, we need the following result, which is Corollary 4.7 in [E2].

Proposition 3.2. *Let D be any locally finite k-derivation of A. Then up to the conjugation by a k-automorphism of A, D has one of the following forms:*

i) $D = (ax + by)\partial_x + (cx + dy)\partial_y$ *for some* $a, b, c, d \in k$*;*
ii) $D = \partial_x + by\partial_y$ *for some* $b \in k$*;*
iii) $D = ax\partial_x + (x^m + amy)\partial_y$ *for some* $a \in k$ *and* $m \geq 1$*;*
iv) $D = f(x)\partial_y$ *for some* $f(x) \in k[x]$*.*

Lemma 3.3. *With the same notations as in Proposition 3.2, the following statements hold.*

(a) *If D is of type ii), then D is surjective.*
(b) *If D is of type iii), then*

$$\mathrm{Im}\, D = \begin{cases} (x^m) & \text{if } a = 0. \\ (x, y) & \text{if } a \neq 0. \end{cases} \tag{3.1}$$

(c) *If D is of type iv), then* $\mathrm{Im}\, D = (f(x))$*.*

Proof: (a) is well-known, see [C] or [F] (p. 96). (c) is obvious, so it remains to prove (b).

If $a = 0$, then $D = x^m \partial_y$, and hence $\mathrm{Im}\, D = (x^m)$. So assume $a \neq 0$. Replacing D by $a^{-1}D$ (without changing the image $\mathrm{Im}\, D$), we may assume that $D = (x\partial_x + my\partial_y) + bx^m\partial_y$ for some nonzero $b \in k$. Observe that for any $i, j \in \mathbb{N}$, we have

$$D(x^i y^j) = (i + mj)x^i y^j + jbx^{m+i} y^{j-1}. \tag{3.2}$$

Next we use induction on $j \geq 0$ to show that $x^i y^j \in \operatorname{Im} D$ whenever $i + j > 0$.

First, assume $j = 0$. Then by Eq. (3.2), we have $Dx^i = ix^i$, and hence $x^i \in \operatorname{Im} D$ for all $i \geq 1$.

Now assume $j \geq 1$. Since $m \geq 1$, we have $m + i \geq 1$ for all $i \geq 0$. Then by the induction assumption, $jbx^{m+i}y^{j-1} \in \operatorname{Im} D$ for all $i \geq 0$. Combining this fact with Eq. (3.2), we get $x^i y^j \in \operatorname{Im} D$ since $i+mj \neq 0$ for all $i \geq 0$. Hence we have proved that $x^i y^j \in \operatorname{Im} D$ if $i+j > 0$. Note that 1 does not lie in $\operatorname{Im} D$ since this space is contained in the ideal generated by x and y. Therefore we have $\operatorname{Im} D = (x, y)$. $\square$

Lemma 3.4. *Let $z = (z_1, z_2, ..., z_n)$ be n free commutative variables and $D := \sum_{i=1}^n a_i z_i \partial_{z_i}$ for some $a_i \in k$ $(1 \leq i \leq n)$. Then $\operatorname{Im} D$ is a Mathieu subspace of $k[z]$.*

Note that D in the lemma is a locally finite derivation of the polynomial algebra $k[z]$. To show the lemma, let's first recall the following well-known results.

Lemma 3.5. *For any polynomials $f, g \in k[z]$ and a positive integer $m \geq 1$, we have*

$$\text{Poly}\,(fg) = \text{Poly}\,(f) + \text{Poly}\,(g), \tag{3.3}$$

$$\text{Poly}\,(f^m) = m\text{Poly}\,(f), \tag{3.4}$$

where the sum in the first equation above denotes the Minkowski sum of polytopes.

Proof: Eq. (3.3) is well-known, which was first proved by A. M. Ostrowski [O1] in 1921 (see also Theorem VI, p. 226 in [O2] or Lemma 2.2, p. 11 in [Stu]). To show Eq. (3.4), one can first check easily that the polytope $m\text{Poly}\,(f)$ and the polytope obtained by taking the Minkowski sum of m copies of $\text{Poly}\,(f)$ actually share the same set of extremal vertices, namely, the set of the vertices mv_i, where v_i runs through all extremal vertices of $\text{Poly}\,(f)$. Consequently, these two polytopes coincide. Then from this fact and Eq. (3.3), we see that Eq. (3.4) follows. $\square$

Proof of Lemma 3.4: If all a_i's are zero, then $D = 0$ and $\operatorname{Im} D = 0$. Hence the lemma holds in this case. So, we assume that not all a_i's are zero.

Let S be the set of integral solutions $\beta \in \mathbb{Z}^n$ of the linear equation $\sum_{i=1}^n a_i \beta_i = 0$. Note that $S \neq \emptyset$ (since $0 \in S$) and is a finitely generated $\mathbb{Z}$-module. Let V be the subspace of $\mathbb{R}^n$ spanned by elements of S over

$\mathbb{R}$. Then V is a $\mathbb{R}$-subspace of $\mathbb{R}^n$ with $r := \dim_{\mathbb{R}} V < n$. Furthermore, V can be described as the set of common solutions of some linear equations with rational coefficients, since clearly the $\mathbb{Q}$-vector space generated by the $\mathbb{Z}$-generators of S can.

Note also that for any $\beta = (\beta_1, \beta_2, ..., \beta_n) \in \mathbb{N}^n$, we have $Dz^\beta = (\sum_{i=1}^n a_i\beta_i)z^\beta$. Hence, for any $\beta \in \mathbb{N}^n$, the monomial $z^\beta \in \operatorname{Im} D$ iff $\beta \notin S$, or equivalently, $\beta \notin V$. Consequently, for any $0 \neq h(z) \in \mathbb{C}[z]$, we have

$$h(z) \in \operatorname{Im} D \Leftrightarrow \operatorname{Supp}(h) \cap V = \emptyset. \tag{3.5}$$

Now, let $0 \neq f(z) \in \mathbb{C}[z]$ such that $f^m \in \operatorname{Im} D$ for all $m \geq 1$. We claim $\operatorname{Poly}(f) \cap V = \emptyset$.

Assume otherwise. Since all vertices of the polytope $\operatorname{Poly}(f)$ are rational (actually integral), every face of $\operatorname{Poly}(f)$ can be described as the set of common solutions of some linear equations with rational coefficients. Since this is also the case for V (as pointed above) and $\operatorname{Poly}(f) \cap V \neq \emptyset$ (by our assumption), it is easy to see that there exists at least one rational point $u \in \operatorname{Poly}(f) \cap V$. Then by Theorem 2.6, there exists $m \geq 1$ such that $(\mathbb{R}_+ u) \cap \operatorname{Supp}(f^m) \neq \emptyset$, and by Eq. (3.5), $f^m \notin \operatorname{Im} D$. Hence, we get a contradiction. Therefore, the claim holds.

Finally, we show that $\operatorname{Im} D$ is a Mathieu subspace as follows.

Let $f(z)$ be as above and d the distance between V and $\operatorname{Poly}(f)$. Then by the claim above and the fact that $\operatorname{Poly}(f)$ is a compact subset of $\mathbb{R}^n$, we have $d > 0$. Furthermore, for any $m \geq 1$, by Eq. (3.4) we have $\operatorname{Poly}(f^m) = m\operatorname{Poly}(f)$. Hence, the distance between V and $\operatorname{Poly}(f^m)$ is given by dm.

Now let $h(z)$ be an arbitrary element of $k[z]$. Note that by Eqs. (3.3) and (3.4) we have $\operatorname{Poly}(f^m h) = m\operatorname{Poly}(f) + \operatorname{Poly}(h)$ for all $m \geq 1$. Hence, for large enough m, the distance between V and $\operatorname{Poly}(f^m h)$ is positive, whence $\operatorname{Poly}(f^m h) \cap V = \emptyset$. In particular, $\operatorname{Supp}(f^m h) \cap V = \emptyset$, and by Eq. (3.5), $f^m h \in \operatorname{Im} D$ when $m \gg 0$. Then by Definition 2.1, we see that $\operatorname{Im} D$ is indeed a Mathieu subspace of $k[z]$. □

Now we can prove the main theorem of this section as follows.

Proof of Theorem 3.1: First, by Proposition 3.2, we only need to show that $\operatorname{Im} D$ is a Mathieu subspace of A in each of the four cases in Proposition 3.2. Furthermore, by Lemma 3.3 it only remains to prove case i). So assume $D = (ax+by)\partial_x + (cx+dy)\partial_y$ for some $a, b, c, d \in k$.

Second, by Lemma 2.5, we may assume that k is algebraically closed.

Third, note that D preserves the subspace $H := kx + ky \subset A$, so its restriction $D|_H$ on H is a linear endomorphism of H. Since k is algebraically closed, there exists a linear automorphism σ of H such that the conjugation $\sigma(D|_H)\sigma^{-1}$ gives the Jordan form of $D|_H$. Let $\tilde{\sigma}$ be the unique extension of σ to an automorphism of A. Then it is easy to see that $\tilde{\sigma}D\tilde{\sigma}^{-1}$ is also a k-derivation of A.

Note that $\operatorname{Im}\tilde{\sigma}D\tilde{\sigma}^{-1} = \tilde{\sigma}(\operatorname{Im} D)$ and in general Mathieu subspaces are preserved by k-algebra automorphisms. Therefore, we may replace D by $\tilde{\sigma}D\tilde{\sigma}^{-1}$, if necessary, and assume that $D = a(x\partial_x + y\partial_y) + x\partial_y$ (in case that the Jordan form of $D|_H$ is an 2×2 Jordan block) or $D = ax\partial_x + by\partial_y$ (in case that the Jordan form of $D|_H$ is diagonal).

For the former case, by Lemma 3.3, (b) with $m = 1$, we see that $\operatorname{Im} D$ is an ideal, and hence a Mathieu subspace of A. For the latter case, it follows from Lemma 3.4 that $\operatorname{Im} D$ also a Mathieu subspace of A. Therefore, the theorem holds. □

4. **Connection with the Two-Dimensional Jacobian Conjecture**

In the previous section we showed that the image of every locally finite k-derivation of A is a Mathieu subspace of A. However, as we have shown in Example 2.4, $\operatorname{Im} D$ needs not to be a Mathieu subspace of A for every k-derivation D of A. This leads to the question of which k-derivations D of A have the property that $\operatorname{Im} D$ is a Mathieu subspace of A. More precisely, we can ask

Question 4.1. *Let D be any k-derivation of A such that $\operatorname{div} D = 0$, where for any $D = p\partial_x + q\partial_y$ $(p, q \in A)$, $\operatorname{div} D := \partial_x p + \partial_y q$. Is $\operatorname{Im} D$ a Mathieu subspace of A?*

Adding one more condition, we get

Question 4.2. *Let D be any k-derivation of A such that $\operatorname{div} D = 0$. If $1 \in \operatorname{Im} D$, is $\operatorname{Im} D$ a Mathieu subspace of A?*

Note that by Lemma 2.2, this question is equivalent to asking if D is surjective under the further condition $1 \in \operatorname{Im} D$.

The motivation of the two questions above come from the following theorem.

Theorem 4.3. *Question 4.2 has an affirmative answer iff the two dimensional Jacobian conjecture is true.*

Proof: $(\Rightarrow)$ Assume that Question 4.2 has an affirmative answer. Let $F = (f, g) \in k[x, y]^2$ with $\det JF = 1$. Consider the k-derivation $D := g_y\partial_x - g_x\partial_y$. Then $\operatorname{div} D = 0$ and $1 = \det JF = Df \in \operatorname{Im} D$. Since by our hypothesis $\operatorname{Im} D$ is a Mathieu subspace of A, it follows from Lemma 2.2 that $\operatorname{Im} D = A$, i.e., D is surjective. Then it follows from a theorem of Stein [Ste] (see also [C]) that D is locally nilpotent.

Since $D = \partial/\partial f$, $\ker D = \ker \partial/\partial f = k[g]$ by Proposition 2.2.15 in [E1]. Since D has a slice f, it follows that $A = k[g][f]$, i.e., F is invertible over k. So the two-dimensional Jacobian conjecture is true.

($\Leftarrow$) Assume that the two-dimensional Jacobian conjecture is true. Let $D = p\partial_x + q\partial_y$ ($p, q \in A$) be a k-derivation of A such that $\operatorname{div} D = 0$ and $1 \in \operatorname{Im} D$.

Since $\operatorname{div} D = 0$, we have $\partial_x p = \partial_y(-q)$. Then by Poincaré's lemma, there exists $g \in A$ such that $p = \partial_y g$ and $q = -\partial_x g$. So $D = g_y\partial_x - g_x\partial_y$.

Since $1 \in \operatorname{Im} D$, we get $1 = Df$ for some $f \in A$. Let $F := (f, g) \in k[x, y]^2$. Then we have $\det JF = Df = 1$. Since by our hypothesis F is invertible, it follows that $k[x, y] = k[f, g]$. Hence, we have

$$\operatorname{Im} D = \operatorname{Im} \frac{\partial}{\partial f} = \frac{\partial}{\partial f}(k[f, g]) = k[f, g] = A.$$

In particular, $\operatorname{Im} D$ is a Mathieu subspace of A. $\square$

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