

Groups, Fields, and Vector Spaces

Overview

The goal is to understand the foundations of the mathematical methods for analyzing (neurophysiologic) data, and models of neurophysiologic processes. The specific targets are Fourier analysis and principal components analysis. The main challenge is that data are intrinsically multivariate – a time series, or an image, or an image that changes in time. We have lots of choices as to how to represent these quantities mathematically – even if at first, this might not seem to be the case. Some of these options, though at first un-natural, lead to important simplifications. We want to understand why this is the case, so that these simplifications no longer seem accidental, and we can see how to both generalize and specialize these basic mathematical approaches.

We will (temporarily) replace familiar objects with mathematical abstractions: signals, images, and movies will be considered elements in a “vector space.” Ordinary numbers will be replaced by “fields.” But the key structure is the “group”, an (abstract) set of transformations with that have a few key properties. These properties formalize the notion that a group is a set of transformations of an object *that preserves some specified aspects of that object’s structure*.

Things become interesting because of the properties of groups, and because elements can play multiple roles: field operations form groups, and field elements operate on vector space elements in a way that forms a group.

Three kinds of mathematical structures

In order of increasing number of kinds of components:

- Groups: one kind of element, one operation
- Fields: one kind of element, two operations (“addition” and “multiplication”)
- Vector spaces: two kinds of elements (vectors and scalars); scalars form a field, and operations that apply to (vector, vector) pairs and to (vector, scalar) pairs

A particularly interesting kind of vector space is the set of mappings from elements of a group to a field.

Structure-preserving transformations and natural coordinates

These are the key to identifying natural “coordinates.” Here, “coordinates” is used in a very general way, essentially as “labels”.

Structure-preserving transformations can be sought for groups, fields, or vector spaces. Structure-preserving transformations always form a group, in their own right. This is a useful way to understand the generic nature of groups, rather than some of the simpler examples (real numbers under addition), since these “simpler examples” often have properties that are not generic to groups.

We will look at structure-preserving transformations of certain vector spaces, and use them to identify particularly natural basis sets for the vector spaces. We will apply this to vector spaces consisting of mappings from a group to a field. Fourier theory falls out from this.

Looking ahead: for a group $G = \mathbb{Z}_n$ (the integers, with addition as the group operation), we will get the discrete Fourier transform. For $G = \mathbb{R}$ (the real numbers, with addition as the group operation), we will get the Fourier transform. For $G = \{\text{rotations of a circle}\}$, we will get Fourier series.

Other groups lead to other useful constructs, though we won't pursue them here. For example, with $G = \{\text{rotations of a sphere}\}$, we get spherical harmonics. With $G = \{\text{permutations of } n \text{ objects}\}$, translations in Euclidean n -space, or translations and rotations in Euclidean n -space, we get other useful things.

Groups

Group axioms

A group is a set of elements a, b, \dots , along with an operation \circ that is a mapping from a pair of elements to a third element, i.e. $a \circ b = c$ (formally, $\circ: G \times G \rightarrow G$), for which the following hold:

G1: Associativity: $a \circ (b \circ c) = (a \circ b) \circ c$.

G2: Identity: There is a special element $e \in G$ for which, for every a in G , $a \circ e = a$ and $e \circ a = a$.

G3: Existence of inverses. For every a in G , there is a corresponding group element a^{-1} for which $a \circ a^{-1} = e$ and $a^{-1} \circ a = e$.

Other properties that many groups have, but are not required:

The group operation need not be commutative (i.e., satisfy $a \circ b = b \circ a$). A commutative group is also called an Abelian group.

A group may have a finite or an infinite number of elements.

An infinite group may, or may not, have a notion of “nearness” of elements. A group which has a notion of nearness (appropriately defined) is called a Lie group. (The notion of “nearness” must be preserved by the group operation. That is, if a is near b , then $a \circ c$ must be near $b \circ c$ (and similarly for $c \circ a$ and $c \circ b$).

A set that satisfies G1 but not G2 or G3 is a “semigroup”. You can always make it satisfy G2 by adding an identity element, if it doesn’t already have one.

Examples of groups

Some examples of groups in which the group operation is familiar addition or multiplication

- The (positive and negative) integers \mathbb{Z} , \circ is ordinary addition
- The rational numbers \mathbb{Q} , \circ is ordinary addition
- The real numbers \mathbb{R} , \circ is ordinary addition
- The complex numbers \mathbb{C} , \circ is ordinary addition
- \mathbb{Q} , \mathbb{R} , or \mathbb{C} with 0 omitted, \circ is ordinary multiplication
- $m \times n$ matrices with entries drawn from \mathbb{Z} , \mathbb{Q} , \mathbb{R} , or \mathbb{C} , \circ is matrix addition
- $m \times m$ invertible matrices with entries drawn from \mathbb{Q} , \mathbb{R} , or \mathbb{C} , \circ is matrix multiplication

Some examples of groups in which the group operation is the composition of transformations:

- Rotations of a regular k -gon
- Rotations of a circle (limiting case of the above, “ $k \rightarrow \infty$ ”)
- Rotations and reflections of a regular k -gon
- Rotations and reflections of a circle
- Translations along a line
- Translations and rotations in Euclidean n -space
- Rotations of an n -sphere
- Permutations of a set of n objects

What kinds of structure do the above groups preserve?

Which of the above are commutative?

Are any of the above abstractly identical?

Which of the have an infinite number of elements? Of those, which have a notion of “nearness”?

It will be very helpful to identify properties of groups that apply both to finite groups and to infinite ones – especially if we are thinking of the group element as representing translation in time or in space.

Some basic group properties

We're doing this not just to provide "practice" with the group axioms, but also because of what they mean.

There is only one identity element. For if e and f were both identity elements, then
 $e \circ f = e$ by G2, since f is an identity
 $e \circ f = f$ by G2, since e is an identity
from which it follows that $e = f$.

An element can have only one inverse. For if $a \circ b = e$, then
 $b = e \circ b$ by G2, since e is the identity
 $b = (a^{-1} \circ a) \circ b$ by G3, since a^{-1} is an inverse of a
 $b = a^{-1} \circ (a \circ b)$ by G1
 $b = a^{-1} \circ e$ since we assumed that $a \circ b = e$
and hence,
 $b = a^{-1}$ by G2, since e is the identity.

No element can have a "private" left or right identity. In other words, if an element f is an identity for some group element a , then it is the identity e for the whole group. For if $a \circ f = a$ (f is a "right identity"), then
 $f = e \circ f$ by G2, since e is the identity
 $f = (a^{-1} \circ a) \circ f$ by G3
 $f = a^{-1} \circ (a \circ f)$ by G1
 $f = a^{-1} \circ a$ since we assumed that f was a private identity for a , i.e., $a \circ f = a$,
and hence,
 $f = e$, i.e., f is the group identity. (A similar argument works if we had assumed $f \circ a = a$, i.e., that f is a "left identity"). Another consequence of this (that we will use below) is that if $f \circ f = f$, then $f = e$. This is because $f \circ f = f$ means that f is a "private: identity for f ."

The group operation is one-to-one. That is, if $a \circ c = b \circ c$, then $a = b$. This, essentially, allows us to "cancel." Equivalently, if $x \circ z = y$, then $x = y \circ z^{-1}$

To show this: if $a \circ c = b \circ c$, then
 $(a \circ c) \circ c^{-1} = (b \circ c) \circ c^{-1}$, then
 $a \circ (c \circ c^{-1}) = b \circ (c \circ c^{-1})$ by G1,
 $a \circ e = b \circ e$ by G3
 $a = b$ by G2

The inverse of the product is the product of the inverses, in reverse order. To show this, we need to show that $(a \circ b)^{-1} = b^{-1} \circ a^{-1}$, i.e., that $(a \circ b) \circ (b^{-1} \circ a^{-1}) = e$.

$$(a \circ b) \circ (b^{-1} \circ a^{-1}) = ((a \circ b) \circ b^{-1}) \circ a^{-1} = (a \circ (b \circ b^{-1})) \circ a^{-1}, \text{ each step by G1}$$

$$(a \circ (b \circ b^{-1})) \circ a^{-1} = (a \circ e) \circ a^{-1} = a \circ a^{-1} = e, \text{ by G3, G2, and G3.}$$

Intrinsic properties of group elements

The “order” of a group element a is the least (nonzero) integer n for which an n -fold product $a \circ a \circ \dots \circ a$ is the identity, i.e., $a^n = e$. Note that associativity means that we don’t have to specify how to put parentheses around $a \circ a \circ \dots \circ a$; any way of doing it gives the same answer.

For finite groups, every element has a (finite) order. To see this, consider the series $a^0 = e, a^1, a^2, a^3, \dots$. Since the group is finite, eventually it must repeat. So say $a^m = a^n$. Then (assuming $m < n$),

$a^m = a^n$ implies

$$e = (a^m)^{-1} \circ a^m = (a^m)^{-1} \circ a^n = (a^m)^{-1} \circ (a^m \circ a^{n-m}) = ((a^m)^{-1} \circ (a^m)) \circ a^{n-m} = a^{n-m}$$

so the order of a is at most $n - m$.

We can do better than this: for a finite group, the order of a group element is a factor of the size of the group. Here, size means number of elements, $\#(G)$.

We show this by showing something more general. First, define a subgroup: a subgroup of a group G is a subset of H of G that is, in its own right, a group. (Similarly: subfield, subspace, etc.) Note that the associativity law is automatic, so what must be shown is that H is closed under the group operation, and that it contains the identity (of G), and inverses of everything in itself.

Note also that if a is an element of G , and n is its order, then $H = \{e, a, a^2, \dots, a^{n-1}\}$ is a subgroup of G , and $\#(H) = n$. (Check: what is the group operation table for H ? are inverses always in H ?) H is also known as a “cyclic” group.

So if we can show that the size of every subgroup is a factor of the size of the group, then we will have also shown that the order of every element is a factor of the size of the group.

We’ll show this (that $\#(H)$ is a factor of $\#(G)$) by a counting argument: we will divide G up into pieces, each of which have the same size as H . The pieces are called “cosets.” The definition of a coset: for any element b in G , the coset Hb is the set of all of the elements g of G that can be written in the form $g = h \circ b$, for some element h in H .

Every element in G is in some coset: g is in the coset Hg , since $g = e \circ g$, and the identity, e , is in H .

So we now have to show that the cosets, are non-overlapping. That is, either two cosets are disjoint, or they are identical. Say Hb and Hc are two cosets that are not disjoint.

Then there is at least one element in common, i.e., for some h' and h'' $h' \circ b = h'' \circ c$.

This means that $b = (h')^{-1} \circ h'' \circ c$. Now we can see that every element in Hb is contained in Hc : A typical element $g = h \circ b$ is also

$g = h \circ ((h')^{-1} \circ h'' \circ c) = ((h \circ (h')^{-1}) \circ h'') \circ c$ (after several applications of the associative law); the latter shows that g is also in Hc .

So G is a disjoint union of cosets of any subgroup H . So its size must be a multiple of the size of H .

Several notes, in order of increasing importance to us:

Here we used “right cosets”. We also could have used “left cosets” bH . Note that a left coset bH is not necessarily the same as the right coset Hb . For non-commutative groups, a left coset and a right coset can overlap but the overlap can be only partial.

We can use facts about the order of group elements as an elementary way to establish the possibilities for the structure of groups of a given size. For prime numbers p , there is only one group (abstractly) that has size p , namely, the group generated by an element of order p . We can think of this as the rotations of a p -gon. For non-prime sizes, there are other possibilities; see homeworks for a few. This is the beginning of the broad problem of characterizing all possible groups.

We used a counting argument here, and counting arguments won't work for infinite groups. But the notion of “disjoint union” does work; even for infinite groups one can think of cosets as a way of decomposing a larger group G into “slices,” each of which is based on the template of the smaller group H . This basic idea is a model for building larger structures out of smaller ones. Think of G as a space, H as a special plane in G that runs through the origin, and the cosets of H as planes that are parallel to G .

This “coset decomposition” is the first instance of something that is easy to do with a finite group, and can be thought of as a toy example of a more general procedure that can be carried out for an infinite group. Another example is summing or averaging over the group. But infinite groups can be discrete or continuous, and if continuous, they can have a finite volume or an infinite volume (integers with ordinary addition is infinite but discrete; rotations of the circle is continuous and finite “volume”; reals with addition is continuous and infinite “volume”). Many aspects of the finite case are typically generic, but we need to keep in mind that some math – which we will skip – is necessary to prove this.

Relationships among groups: homomorphisms

A (group) *homomorphism* is a **structure-preserving map** between two groups. Formally: if G and H are groups (H not necessarily a subgroup of G), then $\varphi: G \rightarrow H$ is a mapping from G to H for which

$\varphi(g_1 \circ g_2) = \varphi(g_1) \circ \varphi(g_2)$. Note that on the left side of the equation, \circ is the group operation in G ; on the right, \circ is the group operation in H .

An *onto* homomorphism φ (a.k.a. “surjective” homomorphism) is a homomorphism from G and H for which all members of H are some $\varphi(g)$.

An *isomorphism* is an “onto” homomorphism φ from G to H if there is also an “onto” homomorphism $\varphi^{-1}: H \rightarrow G$, for which $\varphi^{-1}(\varphi(g)) = g$ (and also, $\varphi(\varphi^{-1}(h)) = h$).

An *automorphism* is an isomorphism from a group G to itself.

Each of these can also be defined in an analogous fashion for other algebraic structures, such as fields and vector spaces.

Examples of homomorphisms

The log is a homomorphism from $\Re > 0$ (with \circ as multiplication) to \Re (with \circ as addition).

$\varphi(n) = 2n$ is a homomorphism from \mathbb{Z} (with \circ as addition) to \mathbb{Z} (with \circ as addition).

$\varphi(n) = -n$ is a homomorphism from \mathbb{Z} (with \circ as addition) to \mathbb{Z} (with \circ as addition).

$\varphi(z) = e^z$ is a homomorphism from \mathbb{C} (with \circ as addition) to nonzero elements of \mathbb{C} (with \circ as multiplication)

The parity of a permutation is a homomorphism from any permutation group (with \circ as composition) to $G = \{+1, -1\}$ (with \circ as multiplication). Briefly, the “parity” of a permutation is defined as follows. Any permutation can be built from a sequence of pairwise swaps. If the number of pairwise swaps is even, the parity is +1. If the number of pairwise swaps is odd, the parity is -1. (One needs to show that this is in fact well-defined. We’ll do that much later.)

Which of these are onto? Which are isomorphisms? Which are automorphisms?

The kernel

The kernel of a homomorphism $\varphi : G \rightarrow H$ is the set of elements of G for which $\varphi(g) = e_H$. Here, e_H is the identity for H . (Unfortunately, there is no obvious relationship to other uses of the term “kernel”.)

The kernel of a homomorphism is always a subgroup. It’s obviously a subset, so we need to show that G2 and G3 hold.

To show G2 (that there is an identity), we need to show that e is in the kernel. That is, we need to show that $\varphi(e)$ is the identity for H . $\varphi(e) = \varphi(e \circ e) = \varphi(e) \circ \varphi(e)$. So $\varphi(e) = e_H$, since it is the “private” identity for $\varphi(e)$.

To show G3 (that if g is in the kernel, then so is g^{-1}), we need to show that $\varphi(g) = e$ implies that $\varphi(g^{-1}) = e$. To do this:

$e_H \circ \varphi(g^{-1}) = \varphi(g) \circ \varphi(g^{-1}) = \varphi(g \circ g^{-1}) = \varphi(e) = e_H$. (Second equality uses the fact that a homomorphism is structure-preserving, last equality uses what we just showed, that $\varphi(e) = e_H$.)

Objects playing several roles: automorphisms

We now show how the set of automorphisms of a group G can in turn be considered a group, which we will call $A(G)$. We need to define the group operation in $A(G)$, which must take a pair of automorphisms to a third. We’ll use composition. (Here, we will use \circ to denote the group operation in $A(G)$, and juxtaposition (e.g., gh) to denote the group operation in G .) Formally, to define $\varphi_1 \circ \varphi_2$, we need to define how it acts on an element of G , and to show that this definition of $\varphi_1 \circ \varphi_2$ is itself an automorphism:

$$\varphi_1 \circ \varphi_2(g) = \varphi_1(\varphi_2(g)).$$

To show that this is an automorphism:

$$\begin{aligned} \varphi_1 \circ \varphi_2(gh) &= \varphi_1(\varphi_2(gh)) \text{ (by the definition of the group operation in } A(G)) \\ &= \varphi_1(\varphi_2(g)\varphi_2(h)) \text{ (since } \varphi_2 \text{ is a homomorphism)} \\ &= \varphi_1(\varphi_2(g))\varphi_1(\varphi_2(h)) \text{ (since } \varphi_1 \text{ is a homomorphism)} \\ &= (\varphi_1 \circ \varphi_2(g))(\varphi_1 \circ \varphi_2(h)) \text{ (by the definition of the group operation in } A(G) \text{, applied to} \\ &\text{each factor)} \end{aligned}$$

We next need to show that this operation leads to a group structure on $A(G)$.

Associativity follows from the fact that the operation is a composition. The presence of an identity in $A(G)$ follows from the fact that the trivial map from G to itself is an

automorphism (but not an interesting one). The presence of inverses in $A(G)$ follows from the fact that an automorphism has an inverse (since it is an isomorphism).

A special set of automorphisms: the “inner” automorphisms. For any element α in G , let’s look at the map $\varphi_\alpha(g) = \alpha g \alpha^{-1}$. It’s easy to see that φ_α is an automorphism of G :

It preserves structure:

$$\varphi_\alpha(gh) = \alpha(gh)\alpha^{-1} = \alpha(g\alpha^{-1}\alpha h)\alpha^{-1} = (\alpha g \alpha^{-1})(\alpha h \alpha^{-1}) = \varphi_\alpha(g)\varphi_\alpha(h).$$

To see that the “inner” automorphism group contains identities and inverses (as automorphisms), we need to see how inner automorphisms compose:

$$(\varphi_\alpha \circ \varphi_\beta)(g) = \varphi_\alpha(\varphi_\beta(g)) = \varphi_\alpha(\beta g \beta^{-1}) = \alpha \beta g \beta^{-1} \alpha^{-1} = \alpha \beta g (\alpha \beta)^{-1} = \varphi_{\alpha\beta}(g)$$

so

$$\varphi_\alpha \circ \varphi_\beta = \varphi_{\alpha\beta} \text{ (where the subscript on the right is the group operation in } G\text{).}$$

As a consequence, $(\varphi_\alpha)^{-1} = \varphi_{\alpha^{-1}}$, i.e., φ_α is invertible and its inverse is also an inner automorphism.

We can think of the “inner” automorphisms as a model for change of coordinates.

Summing up: For any group G , we have a group of automorphisms $A(G)$, and a homomorphism from G into a subgroup of $A(G)$, the “inner” automorphisms: This mapping, the adjoint map, $Adj: G \rightarrow A(G)$, takes a group element α into the inner automorphism φ_α . The action of φ_α on G is defined by $\varphi_\alpha(g) = \alpha g \alpha^{-1}$.

What is the kernel of Adj ? Say γ is in the kernel of Adj . This means that φ_γ is the identity transformation on G . That is, $\varphi_\gamma(g) = g$ for all g in G . That is, $\gamma g \gamma^{-1} = g$ for all g in G . Or, $\gamma g = g \gamma$. In other words, the kernel of Adj is the set of elements γ in G that commute with all elements in G . (This is known as the “center” of G).

If G is commutative (i.e., everything commutes), the center of G is G itself, and Adj is trivial – in other words, all inner automorphisms are the identity. But there may still be some nontrivial members of $A(G)$.

Examples of automorphisms, inner automorphisms, etc.

\mathbb{Z} (with \circ as addition): It is commutative, so all inner automorphisms are trivial. But $\varphi(n) = -n$ is an automorphism (that is nontrivial, and not an inner automorphism).

Invertible $m \times m$ matrices: For generic matrices M , $\varphi_M(G) = MGM^{-1}$ is a nontrivial inner automorphism. The center of the group of invertible $m \times m$ matrices, i.e., the

matrices that commute with all others, and therefore lead to the trivial inner automorphisms, are multiples of the identity matrix.