

Accidental Degeneracy of an Elliptic Differential Operator: a Clarification in Terms of Ladder Operators


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Article

Accidental Degeneracy of an Elliptic Differential Operator: A Clarification in Terms of Ladder Operators

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Abstract: We consider the linear, second-order elliptic, Schrödinger-type differential operator $\mathcal{L} := -\frac{1}{2}\nabla^2 + \frac{r^2}{2}$. Because of its rotational invariance, that is it does not change under $SO(3)$ transformations, the eigenvalue problem $\left[-\frac{1}{2}\nabla^2 + \frac{r^2}{2}\right]f(x, y, z) = \lambda f(x, y, z)$ can be studied more conveniently in spherical polar coordinates. It is already known that the eigenfunctions of the problem depend on three parameters. The so-called *accidental degeneracy* of \mathcal{L} occurs when the eigenvalues of the problem depend on one of such parameters only. We exploited ladder operators to reformulate accidental degeneracy, so as to provide a new way to describe degeneracy in elliptic PDE problems.

Keywords: degeneracy; elliptic PDE; ladder operator; commuting operator; eigenvalues

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Elliptic operator

We consider the linear, second order elliptic differential operator

$$\mathcal{L} := -\frac{1}{2} \nabla^2 + \frac{r^2}{2} \quad (1)$$

defined on the Hilbert space

$$\mathcal{H} = \left\{ f \in L^2(\mathbb{R}^3) \cap C^2(\mathbb{R}^3) : \lim_{r \rightarrow \infty} f(x, y, z) = 0 \right\}, \quad (2)$$

where ∇^2 denotes the *Laplacian operator* Polar Laplacian

$$\nabla^2 = \frac{\partial^2}{\partial x^2} + \frac{\partial^2}{\partial y^2} + \frac{\partial^2}{\partial z^2}$$

and r is the *norm* $r = \sqrt{x^2 + y^2 + z^2}$ of the vector $\mathbf{r} = (x, y, z)$.

Eigenvalue problem of the operator \mathcal{L}

The eigenvalue problem of the operator \mathcal{L} is

$$\left[-\frac{1}{2} \nabla^2 + \frac{r^2}{2} \right] f(x, y, z) = \lambda f(x, y, z), \quad (3)$$

but since the operator \mathcal{L} has rotational invariance, it can be studied more conveniently in spherical polar coordinates.

Polar eigenvalue equation

Rotational invariance

The operator \mathcal{L} in (1) has the property of rotational invariance, that is, if the matrix R is a tridimensional *rotation* and we consider the transformation $\mathbf{r}' = (x', y', z') = R\mathbf{r}$, the form invariance of the operator

$$\mathcal{L}' = -\frac{1}{2} \nabla'^2 + \frac{r'^2}{2} = -\frac{1}{2} \nabla^2 + \frac{r^2}{2} = \mathcal{L},$$

follows, because a *rotation* R satisfies the condition

$$R^T R = R R^T = \mathbb{I}.$$

Spherical polar coordinates

Since the operator \mathcal{L} in (1) has the rotational invariance, it is more convenient to study its eigenvalue problem in spherical polar coordinates given by

$$\begin{cases} x = r \sin \theta \cos \varphi \\ y = r \sin \theta \sin \varphi \\ z = r \cos \theta \end{cases}$$

with the conditions

$$r \in [0, \infty), \quad \theta \in [0, \pi], \quad \varphi \in [0, 2\pi].$$

Spherical polar coordinates

By inversion, we get the polar variables

$$\begin{cases} r = \sqrt{x^2 + y^2 + z^2} \\ \theta = \arccos(z/r) \\ \varphi = \arctan(y/x) \end{cases}$$

and if we apply the well-known Leibnitz *chain formula*

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial x} = \frac{\partial r}{\partial x} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} + \frac{\partial \theta}{\partial x} \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} + \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial x} \frac{\partial}{\partial \varphi}$$

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial y} = \frac{\partial r}{\partial y} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} + \frac{\partial \theta}{\partial y} \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} + \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial y} \frac{\partial}{\partial \varphi}$$

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial z} = \frac{\partial r}{\partial z} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} + \frac{\partial \theta}{\partial z} \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} + \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial z} \frac{\partial}{\partial \varphi},$$

Operators in spherical polar coordinates

the *Laplacian operator* **Cartesian Laplacian** assumes the form

$$\nabla^2 = \frac{\partial^2}{\partial r^2} + \frac{2}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} - \frac{A(\theta, \varphi)}{r^2}, \quad (4a)$$

where we have set

$$A(\theta, \varphi) := -\frac{\partial^2}{\partial \theta^2} - \frac{\cos \theta}{\sin \theta} \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} + \frac{(\mathbb{M}_3)^2}{\sin^2 \theta} \quad (4b)$$

and

$$\mathbb{M}_3 = -i \frac{\partial}{\partial \varphi}. \quad (4c)$$

Analysis of L, A, M_3

Eigenvalue problem of the operator \mathcal{L} in spherical coordinates

Since the operator \mathcal{L} has rotational invariance, its associated eigenvalue problem in cartesian form

Cartesian eigenvalue equation can be studied more conveniently in spherical polar coordinates, that is

$$\frac{1}{2} \left[-\frac{\partial^2}{\partial r^2} - \frac{2}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} + \frac{A(\theta, \varphi)}{r^2} + r^2 \right] \psi(r, \theta, \varphi) = \lambda \psi(r, \theta, \varphi),$$

on the modified Hilbert space

$$\tilde{\mathcal{H}} = \left\{ f : \mathbb{R}^3 \longrightarrow \mathbb{R} : \psi(r, \theta, \varphi + 2\pi) = \psi(r, \theta, \varphi), \lim_{r \rightarrow \infty} f = 0 \right\}.$$

Eigenvalue problem of the operator \mathcal{L}

It is a standard fact that an operator A acting on a vector space of finite dimension, that is a matrix A , has at most as many eigenvalues as its order, that one can find from the equation

$$A\mathbf{v} = \lambda\mathbf{v}.$$

Since the eigenvalue problem

$$\frac{1}{2} \left[-\frac{\partial^2}{\partial r^2} - \frac{2}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} + \frac{A(\theta, \varphi)}{r^2} + r^2 \right] \psi(r, \theta, \varphi) = \lambda \psi(r, \theta, \varphi) \quad (5)$$

is defined on a Hilbert space of infinite dimension, it follows that there are infinite eigenvalues λ , which form a countably infinite set of *rational numbers*.

Eigenvalues and eigenfunctions of the operator \mathcal{L}

The *spectrum* of the operator \mathcal{L} is then given by the countably infinite set of eigenvalues

Meaning of nat degen

Vect \mathbf{v}

Accident degen

Eigenvalues of A

$$\lambda \equiv \lambda_n = n + \frac{3}{2} \quad (6)$$

and the corresponding eigenfunctions $\psi(r, \theta, \varphi)$ are

Begin L

$$\psi(r, \theta, \varphi) \equiv \psi_{n\ell m}(r, \theta, \varphi) = R_{n\ell}(r) Y_{\ell m}(\theta, \varphi), \quad (7)$$

with the following conditions on the three parameters n, ℓ, m

- n is every non-negative integer number $n = 0, 1, 2, 3, \dots$
- ℓ is every non-negative integer number less than or equal to n , having the same parity as n
- m is every integer number such that $-\ell \leq m \leq \ell$.

Actions of T_1 on ψ

Degeneracy of the spectrum and statement of the problem

Since for every n there are

$$d_n = \frac{(n+1)(n+2)}{2}$$

linearly independent eigenfunctions $\psi_{n\ell m}(r, \theta, \varphi)$ associated to the eigenvalue λ_n , we say that the *spectrum* of the operator

$$\mathcal{L} = \frac{1}{2} \left\{ -\frac{\partial^2}{\partial r^2} - \frac{2}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} + \frac{A(\theta, \varphi)}{r^2} + r^2 \right\}$$

has a *degeneracy*. [Begin analysis of L](#)

The aim of our paper is to explain and to clarify a particular type this *degeneracy* through the so called *ladder operators*.

Fundamental theorem for a *Ladder Operator*

First of all, we introduce for two given operators A, B , the notation

$$[A, B] = AB - BA,$$

called *commutator* of the operators A, B .

Ladder operator example

Delta eigenvalue A by T_2 in accidental degen

Theorem (shift theorem)

Let us consider an operator \mathbb{O} , acting on a Hilbert space, having an eigenfunction \mathbf{v} with eigenvalue λ . If another operator \mathbb{T} satisfies the condition $[\mathbb{O}, \mathbb{T}]\mathbf{v} = \mu\mathbb{T}\mathbf{v}$, where the coefficient μ is a real number, then it follows that either the function $\mathbb{T}\mathbf{v}$ is the null function or it is another eigenfunction of the operator \mathbb{O} with eigenvalue $\lambda + \mu$.

Concept of *Ladder Operator*

Definition

An operator \mathbb{T} satisfying the hypothesis of the *shift theorem* is called *ladder operator* for the operator \mathbb{O} and, in particular, *lowering operator* or *raising operator*, if the coefficient μ is negative or positive, respectively.

Commuting operators

Theorem (of two commuting operators)

If $\mathbb{O}_1, \mathbb{O}_2$ are two diagonalizable operators acting on a Hilbert space such that the equality

$$[\mathbb{O}_1, \mathbb{O}_2] = 0$$

holds, then there exists a basis of the Hilbert space given by a set of common eigenvectors of both operators $\mathbb{O}_1, \mathbb{O}_2$.

Important remark

If $[\mathbb{O}_1, \mathbb{O}_2] = \mathbb{O}_1\mathbb{O}_2 - \mathbb{O}_2\mathbb{O}_1 = 0$ and $\mathbb{O}_1 \mathbf{v} = \lambda \mathbf{v}$ hold, it then follows that $\mathbb{O}_2 \mathbf{v}$ is either the null vector or another eigenvector of \mathbb{O}_1 with respect to the same eigenvalue λ as \mathbf{v} .

LadderOperatExam

Action of T2 on ψ

Eigenval of $A(\theta, \varphi)$

Example of operator having spectrum with degeneracy

Let us consider the operator described by the following matrix

$$\mathbb{O}_1 = \begin{pmatrix} 2 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 2 \end{pmatrix}.$$

The matrix \mathbb{O}_1 has the *simple eigenvalue* $\lambda = 0$, associated to the eigenvector $\mathbf{v}_0 = (0, 1, -1, 0)$, and the eigenvalue $\lambda = 2$ with *algebraic multiplicity* 3, to which the tridimensional *eigenspace*

$$E(2) = \{(x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4) \in \mathbb{R}^4 : x_2 - x_3 = 0\}$$

is associated.

Example of operator having spectrum with degeneracy

Since the *eigenspace* $E(2)$ has a *degeneracy*, that is there is an “ambiguity” in the choice of its eigenvectors, we consider a second operator

$$\mathbb{O}_2 = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix},$$

commuting with \mathbb{O}_1 , such that there exists a basis of \mathbb{R}^4 formed by common eigenvectors of both $\mathbb{O}_1, \mathbb{O}_2$ without any ambiguity.

Example of operator having spectrum with degeneracy

The operator \mathbb{O}_1 has the two simple eigenvalues $\lambda = \pm 1$ and the eigenvalue $\lambda = 0$ with algebraic multiplicity 2.

Notation as ψ

The basis formed by four common eigenvectors of $\mathbb{O}_1, \mathbb{O}_2$ is

$$\mathbf{v}_{0,0} = (0, 1, -1, 0),$$

$$\mathbf{v}_{2,-1} = (0, 0, 0, 1), \quad \mathbf{v}_{2,0} = (0, 1, 1, 0), \quad \mathbf{v}_{2,1} = (1, 0, 0, 0),$$

Ladder operators on these eigenvectors where the notation $\mathbf{v}_{\lambda_1, \lambda_2}$ has the following meaning

$$\mathbb{O}_1 \mathbf{v}_{\lambda_1, \lambda_2} = \lambda_1 \mathbf{v}_{\lambda_1, \lambda_2} \quad \text{and} \quad \mathbb{O}_2 \mathbf{v}_{\lambda_1, \lambda_2} = \lambda_2 \mathbf{v}_{\lambda_1, \lambda_2}.$$

In this case one says that the *degeneracy* in the spectrum of the operator \mathbb{O}_1 has been removed.

Clarification of the degeneracy of \mathbb{O}_1 with ladder operators

If we now consider the two operators

$$\mathbb{T}_+ = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \quad \text{and} \quad \mathbb{T}_- = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix},$$

we obtain the following relations

$$1) [\mathbb{O}_1, \mathbb{T}_+] = [\mathbb{O}_1, \mathbb{T}_-] = 0,$$

$$2) [\mathbb{O}_2, \mathbb{T}_+] = \mathbb{T}_+,$$

$$3) [\mathbb{O}_2, \mathbb{T}_-] = -\mathbb{T}_-.$$

Clarification of the degeneracy of \mathbb{O}_1 with ladder operators

By virtue of the *shift theorem* (Shift theorem), the operators \mathbb{T}_+ , \mathbb{T}_- are the *ladder operators* for the operator \mathbb{O}_2 , the *raising* and the *lowering operator*, respectively, whereas by virtue of the remark (Commuting operat), the action of \mathbb{T}_+ , \mathbb{T}_- on the eigenvectors of \mathbb{O}_1 gives either the null vector or another eigenvector of \mathbb{O}_1 with respect to the same eigenvalue. Their action on the four basis eigenvectors

(Basis eigenvectors) is then

$$\mathbb{T}_+ \mathbf{v}_{0,0} = \mathbb{T}_- \mathbf{v}_{0,0} = \mathbf{0},$$

$$\mathbb{T}_+ \mathbf{v}_{2,-1} = \mathbf{v}_{2,0}, \quad \mathbb{T}_+ \mathbf{v}_{2,0} = 2\mathbf{v}_{2,1}, \quad \mathbb{T}_+ \mathbf{v}_{2,1} = \mathbf{0},$$

$$\mathbb{T}_- \mathbf{v}_{2,1} = \mathbf{v}_{2,0}, \quad \mathbb{T}_- \mathbf{v}_{2,0} = 2\mathbf{v}_{2,-1}, \quad \mathbb{T}_- \mathbf{v}_{2,-1} = \mathbf{0}.$$

The operator \mathcal{L} and its associated operators

The operator \mathcal{L} that we are studying **Definition of L** , given by

$$\mathcal{L} = \frac{1}{2} \left\{ -\frac{\partial^2}{\partial r^2} - \frac{2}{r} \frac{\partial}{\partial r} + \frac{A(\theta, \varphi)}{r^2} + r^2 \right\}$$

and having the eigenfunctions **Eigenfunctions of L**

$$\psi_{n\ell m}(r, \theta, \varphi) = R_{n\ell}(r) Y_{\ell m}(\theta, \varphi),$$

contains the two associated operators **Definition of A, M_3**

$$A(\theta, \varphi) := -\frac{\partial^2}{\partial \theta^2} - \frac{\cos \theta}{\sin \theta} \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} + \frac{(\mathbb{M}_3)^2}{\sin^2 \theta} \quad (8)$$

$$\mathbb{M}_3 = -i(\partial/\partial \varphi), \quad (9)$$

such that $[\mathcal{L}, A(\theta, \varphi)] = [\mathcal{L}, \mathbb{M}_3] = [A(\theta, \varphi), \mathbb{M}_3] = 0$.

Ladder operators T_{\pm} for accidental degeneracy

The operator \mathcal{L} and its associated operators

The eigenvalue equations of the operators $A(\theta, \varphi)$ and \mathbb{M}_3 are

$$A(\theta, \varphi)\psi_{n\ell m}(r, \theta, \varphi) = \ell(\ell + 1)\psi_{n\ell m}(r, \theta, \varphi),$$

$$\mathbb{M}_3\psi_{n\ell m}(r, \theta, \varphi) = m\psi_{n\ell m}(r, \theta, \varphi).$$

Commutat theorem

Shift for the accident degen

In the literature, the following *ladder operators* for \mathbb{M}_3

$$\mathbb{T}_1^{(+)} := e^{i\varphi} \left(\frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} + \frac{i \cos \theta}{\sin \theta} \frac{\partial}{\partial \varphi} \right),$$

$$\mathbb{T}_1^{(-)} := e^{-i\varphi} \left(\frac{i \cos \theta}{\sin \theta} \frac{\partial}{\partial \varphi} - \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} \right)$$

Eigenfunctions ψ

Meaning of the nat degen

Ladder operators of the so called *natural degeneracy*

explain and clarify the so called *natural degeneracy* of the operator \mathcal{L} , because it yields

$$\left[\mathcal{L}, \mathbb{T}_1^{(\pm)}\right] = 0, \quad \left[A(\theta, \varphi), \mathbb{T}_1^{(\pm)}\right] = 0, \quad \left[\mathbb{M}_3, \mathbb{T}_1^{(\pm)}\right] = \pm \mathbb{T}_1^{(\pm)},$$

from which the actions of the *ladder operators* on the eigenfunctions $\psi_{n,\ell,m}(r, \theta, \varphi)$ of \mathcal{L}

$$\mathbb{T}_1^{(\pm)} \psi_{n,\ell,m}(r, \theta, \varphi) = C \psi_{n,\ell,m \pm 1}(r, \theta, \varphi).$$

follow.

Ladder operators of the so called *natural degeneracy*

The iteration of these actions is

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{T}_1^{(+)}\psi_{n,\ell,-\ell}(r,\theta,\varphi) &= \mathcal{C}\psi_{n,\ell,-\ell+1}(r,\theta,\varphi), \\ \mathbb{T}_1^{(+)}\psi_{n,\ell,-\ell+1}(r,\theta,\varphi) &= \mathcal{C}\psi_{n,\ell,-\ell+2}(r,\theta,\varphi), \\ &\vdots \\ \mathbb{T}_1^{(+)}\psi_{n,\ell,\ell-1}(r,\theta,\varphi) &= \mathcal{C}\psi_{n,\ell,\ell}(r,\theta,\varphi),\end{aligned}$$

in the direction *bottom-up*, or

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{T}_1^{(-)}\psi_{n,\ell,\ell}(r,\theta,\varphi) &= \mathcal{C}\psi_{n,\ell,\ell-1}(r,\theta,\varphi), \\ \mathbb{T}_1^{(-)}\psi_{n,\ell,\ell-1}(r,\theta,\varphi) &= \mathcal{C}\psi_{n,\ell,\ell-2}(r,\theta,\varphi), \\ &\vdots \\ \mathbb{T}_1^{(-)}\psi_{n,\ell,-\ell+1}(r,\theta,\varphi) &= \mathcal{C}\psi_{n,\ell,-\ell}(r,\theta,\varphi),\end{aligned}$$

in the direction *up-bottom*. **Conditions on n, ℓ, m**

Meaning of the *natural degeneracy*

In other words, the *natural degeneracy* is the independence of the eigenvalue λ_n from the parameter m **Eigenvalue di L** .

This kind of *degeneracy* is due to and explained by the existence of the couple of *ladder operators* $T_1^{(\pm)}$
Ladder operators T_1 .

Meaning of the *accidental degeneracy*

The so called *accidental degeneracy* is the independence of the eigenvalue λ_n also from the parameter ℓ **Eigenvalue di L**.

This kind of *degeneracy* is due to and explained by the existence of the couple of *ladder operators* $\mathbb{T}_2^{(\pm)}$ for the operator $A(\theta, \varphi)$ given by

$$\mathbb{T}_2^{(\pm)} := -\frac{\partial}{\partial x} \frac{\partial}{\partial y} + xy \pm \frac{i}{2} \left(\frac{\partial^2}{\partial x^2} - \frac{\partial^2}{\partial y^2} + y^2 - x^2 \right),$$

whose commutation rules with the operators $\mathcal{L}, A(\theta, \varphi), \mathbb{M}_3$ are the following

L, A, M_3 for commutat with T_2

Commutation rules for the *accidental degeneracy*

$$\begin{aligned} [\mathcal{L}, \mathbb{T}_2^{(+)}] &= 0, & [A(\theta, \varphi), \mathbb{T}_2^{(+)}] &\approx (4\ell + 6)\mathbb{T}_2^{(+)}, \\ [\mathbb{M}_3, \mathbb{T}_2^{(+)}] &= 2\mathbb{T}_2^{(+)}, \end{aligned}$$

from which we get the action of the *ladder operator* $\mathbb{T}_2^{(+)}$ on the eigenfunctions $\psi_{n,\ell,m}(r, \theta, \varphi)$ of \mathcal{L}

Remark on commuting operat

$$\mathbb{T}_2^{(+)}\psi_{n,\ell,\ell} = C\psi_{n,\ell+2,\ell+2},$$

where it yields Shift theorem Eigenvalues of A shifted

$$4\ell + 6 = [(\ell + 2)(\ell + 3)] - [\ell(\ell + 1)].$$

Actions of the ladder operators for the *accidental degeneracy*

The iterated actions of the *ladder operators* $\mathbb{T}_2^{(\pm)}$ are:

$$\text{for every even number } n \quad \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \mathbb{T}_2^{(+)} \psi_{n,0,0} = C \psi_{n,2,2}, \\ \mathbb{T}_2^{(+)} \psi_{n,2,2} = C \psi_{n,4,4}, \\ \vdots \\ \mathbb{T}_2^{(+)} \psi_{n,n-2,n-2} = C \psi_{n,n,n}, \end{array} \right.$$

and analogously

$$\text{for every odd number } n \quad \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \mathbb{T}_2^{(+)} \psi_{n,1,1} = C \psi_{n,3,3}, \\ \mathbb{T}_2^{(+)} \psi_{n,3,3} = C \psi_{n,5,5}, \\ \vdots \\ \mathbb{T}_2^{(+)} \psi_{n,n-2,n-2} = C \psi_{n,n,n}. \end{array} \right.$$

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**GRAZIE A TUTTI PER
L'ATTENZIONE E LA PAZIENZA**