SUMS, PRODUCTS AND RATIOS ALONG THE EDGES OF A GRAPH

NOGA ALON, IMRE RUZSA, AND JÓZSEF SOLYMOSI

Abstract. In their seminal paper Erdös and Szemerédi formulated conjectures on the size of sumset and product set of integers. The strongest form of their conjecture is about sums and products along the edges of a graph. In this paper we show that this strong form of the Erdős-Szemerédi conjecture does not hold. We give upper and lower bounds on the cardinalities of sumsets, product sets and ratio sets along the edges of graphs.

1. Introduction

1.1. Sum-product problems. Given a finite set \( A \) of a ring, the sumset \( A + A \) and the product set \( AA \) are defined by
\[
A + A = \{ A + B : A, B \in A \},
\]
and
\[
AA = \{ AB : A, B \in A \}.
\]

Erdős and Szemerédi raised the following conjecture

Conjecture 1. [5] Every finite set of integers \( A \) having large enough cardinality, satisfies
\[
\max(|A + A|, |AA|) \geq |A|^{2 - \varepsilon},
\]
where \( \varepsilon \to 0 \) as \( |A| \to \infty \).

They proved that
\[
\max(|A + A|, |AA|) = \Omega(|A|^{1 + \delta}),
\]
for some \( \delta > 0 \). Here and in what follows we use the asymptotic notation \( \Omega(\cdot), O(\cdot) \) and \( \Theta(\cdot) \). For two functions over the reals, \( f(x) \) and \( g(x) \), we write \( f(x) = \Omega(g(x)) \) if there is a positive constant, \( B > 0 \), and a threshold, \( D \), such that \( f(x) \geq B \cdot g(x) \) for all \( x \geq D \). We write \( f(x) = O(g(x)) \) if there is a positive constant, \( B > 0 \), and a threshold, \( D \), such that \( f(x) \leq B \cdot g(x) \) for all \( x \geq D \). Finally, \( f(x) = \Theta(g(x)) \) if \( f(x) = O(g(x)) \) and \( f(x) = \Omega(g(x)) \).

Erdős and Szemerédi formulated an even stronger conjecture. In this variant one considers a subset of the possible pairs in the sumset and product set. Let \( G_n \) be a graph on \( n \) vertices, \( v_1, v_2, \ldots, v_n \), with \( n^{1+\varepsilon} \) edges for some real \( \varepsilon > 0 \). Let \( \mathcal{A} \) be an \( n \)-element set of real numbers, \( \mathcal{A} = \{ a_1, a_2, \ldots, a_n \} \). The sumset of \( \mathcal{A} \) along \( G_n \), denoted by \( \mathcal{A} + G_n \mathcal{A} \), is the set \( \{ a_i + a_j : (i, j) \in E(G_n) \} \). The product set along \( G_n \) is defined similarly,
\[
\mathcal{A} \cdot G_n \mathcal{A} = \{ a_i \cdot a_j : (i, j) \in E(G_n) \}.
\]

The Strong Erdős-Szemerédi Conjecture is the following.

Conjecture 2. [5] For every \( c > 0 \) and \( \varepsilon > 0 \), there is a threshold, \( n_0 \), such that if \( n \geq n_0 \) then for any \( n \)-element subset of integers \( \mathcal{A} \subset \mathbb{N} \) and any graph \( G_n \) with \( n \) vertices and at least \( n^{1+c} \) edges
\[
|\mathcal{A} + G_n \mathcal{A}| + |\mathcal{A} \cdot G_n \mathcal{A}| \geq |\mathcal{A}|^{1+c-\varepsilon}.
\]
The original conjecture, inequality (1), would follow from this stronger conjecture by taking the complete graph, $G_n = K_n$.

For more details on the sum-product problem, we refer to a recent survey [6].

Here we refute Conjecture 2 by giving constructions with small sumsets along a graph where the product set is also small. A similar problem – which is closely related to the original sum-product conjecture – is to bound the number of sums and ratios along the edges of a graph. We give upper and lower bounds on these quantities.

2. Products

In the next construction we define a set and a graph with many edges such that both the set and the product set are small.

**Theorem 3.** For arbitrary large $m_0$, there is a set of integers, $A$, and graph on $|A| = m \geq m_0$ vertices, $G_m$, with $\Omega(m^{5/3}/\log^{1/3} m)$ edges such that

$$|A + G_m A| + |A \cdot G_m A| = O \left( (|A| \log |A|)^{4/3} \right).$$

**Proof:** It is easier to describe our construction using rational numbers instead of integers. Multipliering then with the least common multiple of the denominators will not affect the size of the set or the product set, giving a construction for integers.

We define the set $A$ first and then the graph. Below, the function $\text{lpf}(m)$ denotes the least prime factor of $m$. We write $(v, w) = 1$ if $v$ and $w$ are relatively prime.

$$A := \left\{ \frac{uv}{v} \mid u, v, w \in \mathbb{N}, \text{ where } v, w \leq n^{1/6}, u \leq n^{2/3}, (v, w) = 1, \text{ and } \text{lpf}(u) > n^{1/6} \right\}.$$

The number of $u, v, w$ triples with $v, w \leq n^{1/6}, u \leq n^{2/3}$ is about $n$, but there are further restrictions. The $\text{lpf}(u) > n^{1/6}, u \leq n^{2/3}$ conditions allow us to select about $n^{2/3}/\log(n^{1/6})$ numbers for $u$, and there are $\sim 6n^{1/3}/\pi^2$ coprime $v, w$ pairs up to $n^{1/6}$. We are going to define a graph $G_m$ with vertex set $A$, where $|A| = m = O(n/\log n)$. Two elements, $a, b \in A$ are connected by an edge if in the definition of $A$ above $a = \frac{uv}{v}$ and $b = \frac{uw}{w}$. There are at least

$$\Omega(n^{1/6} n^{5/6} (n^{2/3}/\log(n^{1/6}))^2) = \Omega(n^{5/3}/\log^{2} n)$$

edges (the number of quadruples $u, v, w, z$ satisfying $v, w \leq n^{1/6}, u, z \leq n^{2/3}, (v, w) = 1$, and $\text{lpf}(z), \text{lpf}(u) > n^{1/6}$).

The products of pairs of elements of $A$ along an edge of $G_m$ are integers of size at most $n^{4/3}$. The sums along the edges are of the form

$$\frac{wu}{v} + \frac{wz}{w} = \frac{w^2 u + v^2 z}{vw}.$$

The denominator is a positive integer of size at most $n^{1/3}$ and the numerator is a positive integer of size at most $2n$, hence the number of sums is at most $2n^{4/3}$.

Modifying the construction above we give a counterexample to the Strong Erdős-Szemerédi Conjecture for every $1 > c > 0$. For the sake of simplicity we will ignore logarithmic multipliers, using the asymptotic notations $\Omega(\cdot), O(\cdot)$ and $\Theta(\cdot)$. For two functions over the reals, $f(x)$ and $g(x)$, we write $f(x) = \Omega(g(x))$ if there is a constant, $B \leq 0$, and a threshold, $D$, such that $f(x) \geq \log^B x \cdot g(x)$ for all $x \geq D$. We write $f(x) = O(g(x))$ if there is a positive constant, $B \geq 0$, and a threshold, $D$, such that $f(x) \leq \log^B x \cdot g(x)$ for all $x \geq D$. $f(x) = \Theta(g(x))$ if $f(x) = O(g(x))$ and $f(x) = \Omega(g(x))$.

**Theorem 4.** For every $1 > c > 0$ there is a $\delta > 0$, such that for arbitrary large $n$ there is an $n$-element subset of integers, $A \subset \mathbb{N}$, and a graph $H_n$ with $\Omega(n^{1+c})$ edges such that

$$|A + H_n A| + |A \cdot H_n A| = O(|A|^{1+c-\delta}).$$

**Proof:** We consider two cases separately, when $0 < c \leq 2/3$ and when $2/3 < c < 1$. 

2
\textbf{Case 1.} \((2/3 < c < 1)\) We define \(\mathcal{A}\) similar to the previous construction, but now the ranges of \(u, v\) and \(w\) are different.

\[ \mathcal{A} := \left\{ \frac{uw}{v} \mid v, w \leq n^{1\frac{c}{2}}, (v, w) = 1, u \leq n^c, \text{lpf}(u) > n^{1-c} \right\}. \]

The number of \(u, w, v\) triples satisfying the conditions is \(\Omega_l(n)\). If \(|\mathcal{A}| = m\) then let \(H_m\) be the graphs with vertex set \(\mathcal{A}\). Two elements, \(a, b \in \mathcal{A}\), are connected by an edge if they can be written as \(a = \frac{uw}{v}\) and \(b = \frac{uw}{w}\). There are at least \(\Omega_l(n^{1+c})\) edges in \(H_m\). The products of two such elements of \(\mathcal{A}\) are integers of size at most \(n^{2c}\). A typical sum is

\[ \frac{uw}{v} + \frac{uw}{w} = \frac{w^2u + \frac{v^2z}{w}}{vw}. \]

The numerator is an integer of size at most \(2n\) and the denominator is an integer of size at most \(n^{1-c}\). Therefore the sum along the edges of \(H_m\) has size at most \(2n^{2-c}\). Since \(2c > 2 - c\) in this range of \(c\), we set \(\delta = 1 - c\). (Note that \(n = O_l(m)\))

\textbf{Case 2.} \((0 < c \leq 2/3)\) It is possible to describe a construction similar to that in the first case, but we prefer to take a subgraph of the graph \(G_m\) in Theorem 3. Let \(p\) be a parameter satisfying \(0 < p \leq 1\), to be specified later. In \(G_m\) take first the edges with the most popular products. This gives a graph \(G_m\) with at least \(\Omega_l(p^m 3/4)\) edges and with \(O_l(p^m 5/3)\) products and at most \(O_l(p^m 4/3)\) sums. Now in \(G_m\) take the most popular \(p^m 4/3\) sums to get the subgraph \(H_m\) with at least \(\Omega_l(p^m 5/3)\) edges, with \(O_l(p^m 4/3)\) products and \(O_l(p^m 4/3)\) sums. Choosing \(p\) to be \(n^{c}/2/n^{1/3}\) we get \(\Omega_l(n^{1+c})\) edges and \(O_l(n^{1+c}/2)\) sums and products. 

\[ \square\]

\section{3. Ratios}

In this section, we consider a problem similar to the Strong Erdős-Szemerédi Conjecture, but we change products to ratios. Define

\[ \mathcal{A}/G_n\mathcal{A} = \{a_i/a_j | (i, j) \in E(G_n)\}. \]

(Note that each edge \((i, j)\) here provide two ratios: \(a_i/a_j\) and \(a_j/a_i\).) Changing product to ratio is a common technique in sum-product bounds. When one is using the multiplicative energy (like in [10] and [7] for example) then the role of product and ratio are interchangeable. The multiplicative energy of a set \(\mathcal{A}\) is the number of quadruples \((a, b, c, d) \in \mathcal{A}^4\) such that \(ab = cd\), which is clearly the same as the number of quadruples where \(a/c = d/b\). But the symmetry fails in the Strong Erdős-Szemerédi Conjecture. We are going to show examples when the sumsets and ratiomsets are even smaller than in the previous construction.

\subsection{3.1. Connection to the original conjecture.}

What is the connection of the Strong Erdős-Szemerédi Conjecture to the original conjecture (when \(G_n = K_n\))? Similar questions were investigated in [2]. Here we consider the connections to the sum-ratio problem along a graph. If there was a counterexample to Conjecture 1, that would imply the existence of a set with very small sumset and ratiomset along a dense graph. In our first result let us suppose that both the product set and ratiomset are small.

\begin{theorem}
Let us suppose that there is a set of \(n\) real numbers, \(\mathcal{A}\), such that \(|\mathcal{A} + \mathcal{A}| \leq n^{2-\alpha}, |\mathcal{A}\mathcal{A}| = \Theta(n^{2-\beta})\) and \(|\mathcal{A}/\mathcal{A}| \leq n^{2-\beta}\) for some \(\alpha, \beta > 0\) real numbers. Then there is a set \(\mathcal{B}\) with \(N > n\) elements and a graph \(G_N\) with \(\Omega(N^{2/3})\) edges such that

\[ |\mathcal{B}/G_N\mathcal{B}| = O(N), \]

and

\[ |\mathcal{B} + G_N\mathcal{B}| = O(N^{2/3}). \]

\end{theorem}

\textbf{Proof:} Let \(\mathcal{B} = \{a \pm \zeta bc \mid a, b, c \in \mathcal{A}\}\), where \(\zeta \in R\) is selected such that all sums are distinct, \(\mathcal{B}\) has cardinality \(2|\mathcal{A}||\mathcal{A}\mathcal{A}| = N = \Theta(n^{2-\beta})\). In the graph, \(G_N\), every \(a - \zeta ac\) is connected to \(b + \zeta ac\) by an edge.
The number of edges is \( n^3 = \Omega\left(N^{\frac{2}{3}}\right) \). The number of sums along the edges is \(|A + A| = O\left(N^{\frac{2}{3}}\right)\), and ratios along the edges have the form

\[
\frac{a + \zeta ac}{b - \zeta ac} = \frac{1 + \zeta c}{b/a - \zeta c}
\]

so the cardinality of the ratio set is at most \(|A||A/A| = O(N)\). \(\square\)

A bound on the cardinality of the product set does not imply a similar bound on the ratio set. Or, equivalently, a bound on the cardinality of the sumset does not imply a similar bound on the difference set. A classical construction of the second author [9] is an example for that. It uses the observation that \( S = \{0, 1, 3\} \) satisfies \(|S + S| = 6\) and \(|S - S| = 7\). If we consider the set of numbers, \( A \), of the form \( a = \sum_{i=0}^{k-1} \alpha_i(a)10^i \), where \( \alpha_i(a) \in S \), then \(|A| = 3^k\), \(|A + A| = 6^k\), and \(|A - A| = 7^k\).

Note that in this construction, the multiplicity of a member \( a - a' = \sum_{i=0}^{k-1} (\alpha(a) - \alpha(a'))10^i \) of \( A - A \) along the edges of the complete graph on \( A \) is \( 3^r \), where \( r \) is the number of indices satisfying \( \alpha(a) = \alpha(a') \). It is easy to see that for every fixed small \( \delta > 0 \) the fraction of edges in which the parameter \( r \) exceeds \((1/3 + \delta)k\) is at most \( e^{-\Omega(\delta^2k)} \). Therefore, any graph on \( A \) with at least \( (9^k)^{1-c\delta^2} \) edges, for an appropriate absolute positive constant \( c \), has on at least half of its edges a value of the difference with multiplicity at most \( 3^{(1/3+\delta)k} \), implying that the number of distinct differences along the edges is at least

\[
0.5 \left(\frac{9^k}{3^{(1/3+\delta)k}}\right)^{c\delta^2}.
\]

As \( 9/3^{1/3} > 6 \) and the number of sums is only \( 6^k \), this shows that for small \( \delta \) the number of differences along the edges of any such graph is significantly larger than the number of sums.

The above discussion shows that we need a modified statement to transform a possible counterexample to Conjecture 1 to a statement about few sums and ratios along a graph. We are going to apply the following lemma.

**Lemma 6.** Let \( A \) be an \( n \)-element subset of an abelian group and suppose that \(|A + A| \leq K|A|\). Then there is an integer parameter, \( M \), and a graph, \( H_n \), with vertex set \( A \), and at least \( \sqrt{\frac{M|A|^3}{4K\log |A|}} \) edges, such that \(|A - H_n A| \leq M\). Moreover, \( M \) satisfies the following inequalities:

\[
\frac{|A|}{K\log |A|} \leq M \leq 4K\log |A||A|.
\]

**Proof:** The additive energy of \( A \), denoted by \( E(A) \), is the number of \( a, b, c, d \) quadruples from \( A \) such that \( a + b = c + d \). This is the same as the number of quadruples satisfying \( a - c = d - b \). By the Cauchy-Schwarz inequality \( E(A) \geq |A|^3/K \). Denote the elements of the difference set as follows \( A - A = \{t_1, t_2, \ldots, t_\ell\} \). For every element we can define its multiplicity, \( m(t_i) = \{|a, b \in A|a - b = t_i\}| \). With these notations we can write the additive energy as

\[
E(A) = \sum_{i=1}^{\ell} m^2(t_i) = \sum_{k=1}^{\log n} \sum_{2^k \leq m(t_i) < 2^{k+1}} m^2(t_i).
\]

There is a \( k \) such that

\[
2^k \leq m(t_i) < 2^{k+1}
\]

(3)

\[
\sum_{2^k \leq m(t_i) < 2^{k+1}} m^2(t_i) \geq \frac{|A|^3}{K\log |A|}.
\]

Let \( T_k = \{t_i \in A - A \mid 2^k \leq m(t_i) < 2^{k+1}\} \), and set \( M = |T_k| \). The edges of \( H_n \) are defined as follows; \( (a, b) \in A^2 \) is an edge iff \( a - b = t_i \in T_k \). The number of the edges is \( \sum_{t_i \in T_k} m(t_i) \). From inequality (3) we have a lower bound on \( m(t_i) \)-s,

\[
m(t_i) \geq \frac{|A|^{3/2}}{2\sqrt{MK\log |A|}}.
\]
so the number of edges is at least

\[ \sqrt{\frac{M|A|^3}{4K \log |A|}}. \]

In order to bound the magnitude of \( M \), note that since \( \sum_{t_i \in T_n} m(t_i) \leq |A|^2 \), the largest \( m(t_i) \) for an element \( t_i \) in \( T_n \) satisfies the trivial inequality \( \max_{t \in T_n} (m(t_i)) \leq 2|A|^2/M \). Replacing \( m(t_i) \)-s by \( 2|A|^2/M \) on the left side of inequality (3) we get the desired upper bound on \( M \). The lower bound follows from the same inequality and from the fact that \( m(t_i) \leq |A| \) for every \( t_i \in A - A \).

In the proof of Theorem 5, in \( G_N \), the edges were defined by pairs of vertices having the form \((a - \zeta ac, b + \zeta ac)\). If we have a bound on the product set only, \( |AA| \leq n^{2-\alpha} \), then in our new graph, \( G'_N \), we connect \( a - \zeta ac \) and \( b + \zeta ac \) only if \((a, b)\) is an edge in \( H_n \), where \( H_n \) is defined in Lemma 6 applied to the set \( A \) in the multiplicative group. This guarantees that the ratio set along the edges is not (much) larger than the product set along edges of \( G_N \). The new graph \( G'_N \) is a subgraph of the graph \( G_N \) in Theorem 5.

The new parameter, \( M \), makes the description of our next result a bit complicated, but the important feature of this construction is that it shows that if there is a counterexample to Conjecture 1 then there is a set of numbers, \( B \), and graph, \( G'_N \), with many edges so that the sumset and ratio set are both small. The number of edges might be less than in Theorem 5, but then the size of the ratio set along this graph is much smaller. We will state a simpler, but weaker statement in a corollary below.

**Theorem 7.** Let us suppose that there is a set of \( n \) real numbers, \( A \), such that \(|A + A| \leq n^{2-\alpha}\) and \(|AA| = \Theta(n^{2-\beta})\) for some \( \alpha > 0, \beta > 1/2 \) real numbers. Then there is a set \( B \) with \( N > n \) elements, a parameter \( M \) in the range

\[ \Omega(N^{\frac{2-\beta}{3}}) \leq M \leq O(N^{\frac{2-\beta}{3}}), \]

and a graph \( G'_N \) with \( \Omega(M^{2}N^{\frac{4+\beta}{3}}) \) edges such that

\[ |B/G'_N B| = O(N^{\frac{2-\beta}{3}}), \]

and

\[ |B + G'_N B| = O(N^{\frac{2-\beta}{3}}). \]

Note that the number of edges in \( G'_N \) is at least \( \Omega(N^{\frac{2+\beta}{3}}) \) which is bigger than the cardinalities of the sumset and ratio set along its edges.

**Corollary 8.** Let us suppose that there is a set of \( n \) real numbers, \( A \), such that \(|A + A| \leq n^{2-\alpha}\) and \(|AA| = \Theta(n^{2-\beta})\) for some \( \alpha > 0, \beta > 1/2 \) real numbers. Then there is a set \( B \) with \( N > n \) elements, and a graph \( G'_N \) with \( \Omega(N^{\frac{2+\beta}{3}}) \) edges such that

\[ |B/G'_N B| = O(N), \]

and

\[ |B + G'_N B| = O(N^{\frac{2-\beta}{3}}). \]

**Proof of Theorem 7:** Applying Lemma 6 to the multiplicative subgroup of real numbers with \( K = |A|^{1-\beta} \) we get a graph \( H_n \) as in the lemma. We connect \( a - \zeta ac \) and \( b + \zeta ac \) in \( G'_N \) only if \((a, b)\) is an edge in \( H_n \). For given \( a \) and \( b \) we can choose any \( c \in A \), so the number of edges is \( \Omega(|A| \sqrt{M|AA|^{1+\beta}}) = \Omega(\sqrt{M|AA|^{1+\beta}}) \). The size of the ratio set along the edges is \(|A|M\), and the sumset is not larger than \( O(N^{\frac{2-\beta}{3}}) \) since \( G'_N \) is a subgraph of \( G_N \). \( \square \)
3.2. Constructions. In the next construction we define a set and a graph with many edges such that both the subset and the ratio set are very small. It can be viewed as a special case of Theorem 5 with \( \alpha = 0 \) and \( \beta = 1 \).

**Theorem 9.** For arbitrary large \( n \), there is a set of reals and graph, \( G_n \), with \( \Omega(n^{3/2}) \) edges such that
\[
|A + G_n A| + |A \cdot G_n A| \leq O(|A|).
\]

**Proof:** As before, in the construction we define the set \( A \) first and then \( G_n \). Let \( A = \{ \pm(2^i - 2^j) | 1 \leq j < i \leq \sqrt{n} \} \). Two elements, \( 2^i - 2^j \) and \( 2^k - 2^l \), are connected by an edge iff \( j = \ell \). Along this \( G_n \) both the sumsets and the ratio sets are small,
\[
|A + G_n A| = |\{ 2^i - 2^k | 1 \leq i, k \leq \sqrt{n} \}| \leq n,
\]
and
\[
|A / G_n A| = |\{ -1 \cdot (2^s - 1) / (2^t - 1) | 1 \leq s, t \leq \sqrt{n} - 1 \}| < n.
\]
In this construction
\[
|A| = 2 \left( \left\lfloor \frac{\sqrt{n}}{2} \right\rfloor \right) \sim n,
\]
and the number of edges is a little more than
\[
2 \left( \left\lfloor \frac{\sqrt{n}}{3} \right\rfloor \right) \geq \left( \frac{1}{3} - o(1) \right) n^{3/2}.
\]
\( \Box \)

3.3. Matchings. Erdős and Szemerédi mentioned in their paper that maybe even for a linear number of edges (when \( c = 0 \) the Strong Erdős-Szemerédi Conjecture holds, but noted that it is not true for reals. There are sets of reals such that \( G_n \) is a perfect matching and
\[
|A + G_n A| + |A \cdot G_n A| = O(|A|^{1/2}).
\]
It was shown by Alon, Angel, Benjamini, and Lubetzky in [1] that if we assume the Bombieri-Lang conjecture (see details in [2]), then for any set of integers \( A \), if \( G_n \) is a matching,
\[
|A + G_n A| + |A \cdot G_n A| = \Omega(|A|^{4/7}).
\]
It is possible that 4/7 can be improved to a number close to 1, but if we change multiplication to ratio, then just the trivial bound, \( \Omega(\sqrt{n}) \), holds.

A simple construction demonstrating this is the following. Take \( n = k^2 \) and distinct primes, \( p_1, \ldots, p_k, q_1, \ldots, q_k \). The matching consists of all pairs \( (p_i/q_j, (q_j - 1)p_i/q_j) \) \( (i, j = 1, \ldots, k) \). Then all these rationals are pairwise distinct, the sums along the matching edges are the \( p_i \) \( s \), the quotients (of large divided by small) along the edges are \( (q_j - 1) \). For this set \( A \) and matching \( G_n \) we have
\[
|A + G_n A| + |A \cdot G_n A| = O(|A|^{1/2}),
\]
which is as small as possible.

4. Lower bounds

Lower bounds on the number of sums and products along graphs were obtained in [1]. Under assuming the Bombieri-Lang conjecture they proved that if \( A \) is an \( n \)-element set of integers and \( G_n \) a graph with \( m \) edges then
\[
|A + G_n A| + |A \cdot G_n A| = \Omega \left( \min \left( \frac{m^{8/14}}{n^{1/14}}, \frac{m}{n^{1/2}} \right) \right).
\]
For the unconditional case (without the Bombieri-Lang conjecture) they proved that
\[
|A + G_n A| + |A \cdot G_n A| = \Omega \left( \frac{m^{19/9 - o(1)}}{n^{28/9 + o(1)}} \right).
\]
We will apply a variant of Elekes’ proof, used in his sum-product estimate in [4] to get better estimates.
Theorem 10. Let $A$ be an $n$-element set of reals and $G_n$ a graph with $m$ edges. Then

$$|A +_{G_n} A| + |A \cdot_{G_n} A| \geq \Omega \left( \frac{m^{3/2}}{n^{7/4}} \right).$$

Proof: Let us consider the Cartesian product, $(A +_{G_n} A) \times (A \cdot_{G_n} A)$, where the sums and the products are considered along a graph $G_n$. Define a set of $n^2$ lines $L$, where the lines are $y = (x-a)b$ for every $a, b \in A$. For any $u$, an element of $A$, if in the graph $u$ has two neighbours $w_1, w_2$, then $((u+w_1) - w_1)w_2$ is in $A \cdot_{G_n} A$. Thus $(u + w_1, uw_2)$ lies on the line $y = (x - w_1)w_2$ and hence the lines give at least the sum of the squares of degrees incidences in the Cartesian product $(A +_{G_n} A) \times (A \cdot_{G_n} A)$. If the graph has $m$ edges, then by the Cauchy-Schwartz inequality the number of incidences is at least $n(2m/n)^2$. On the other hand, by the Szemerédi-Trotter theorem [14], we have at most $O(n^{8/3}(|A + A|,|A/A|)^{2/3})$ incidences. We conclude that $m^2/n < cn^{4/3}(|A + A|,|A/A|)^{2/3}$. This implies the required $\Omega((m^6/n^7)^{1/4})$ lower bound on $|A +_{G_n} A| + |A \cdot_{G_n} A|$. □

Since the values of the product and sum along an edge determine the values in the end-vertices, there is an obvious lower bound, $|A +_{G_n} A| + |A \cdot_{G_n} A| \geq \sqrt{n}$. Note that Theorem 10 gives stronger bound only if the number of edges is larger than $n^{7/4}$. Our result improves the (conditional) inequality in (4) if the number of edges is larger than $n^{47/26} \sim n^{1.8}$, and it is always stronger than the bound in (5).

The very same technique can be applied to give a similar lower bound on the number of sums and ratios. Consider the Cartesian product, $(A +_{G_n} A) \times (A/_{G_n} A)$, and the set of lines $L$, where the lines are $y = (x-a)/b$ for every $a, b \in A$. Applying the Szemerédi-Trotter theorem as above, we have

$$|A +_{G_n} A| + |A/_{G_n} A| \geq \Omega \left( \frac{m^{3/2}}{n^{7/4}} \right).$$

Elekes’ bound was improved in [11], using the Szemerédi-Trotter theorem in a different way. The argument there can be modified to bound the number of sums and ratios along a graph. The proof is rather technical, it follows [11] step by step, but with more parameters in order to deal with the density version of the original proof. We do not think that this estimate is close to the truth and it is rather technical, it follows [11] step by step, but with more parameters in order to deal with the argument there can be modified to bound the number of sums and ratios along a graph. The proof without the detailed proof.

Claim 11. Let $A$ be an $n$-element set of reals and $G_n$ a graph with $m$ edges. Then

$$|A +_{G_n} A| + |A/_{G_n} A| \geq \Omega \left( \frac{m^{18/11}}{n^2} \right).$$

5. Arrangements of pencils

The following question was asked by Misha Rudnev [8]. An $n$-pencil in the plane is a set of $n$ concurrent lines. The center of a pencil is the common intersection point of its lines.

Problem 12. If the centers of four $n$-pencils are not collinear, then what is the maximum possible number of points with four incident lines (one from each pencil)?

Chang and Solymosi proved in [3] that the number of such points is at most $O(n^{2-\delta})$ for some $\delta > 0$. (They did not calculate $\delta$ explicitly.) Using the construction in Theorem 9 we show that $\delta \leq 1/2$.

Claim 13. For arbitrary large $n$, there are arrangements of four non-collinear $n$-pencils which determine $\Omega(n^{3/2})$ points incident to four lines.

Proof: In this construction we refer to Theorem 9. If a set of reals, $A$, has small sumset then the geometric interpretation of this fact is that the points of the Cartesian product $A \times A$ can be covered by a small number of slope $-1$ lines. Similarly, if the ratio-set is small then $A \times A$ can be covered by a small number of lines through the origin. The set of points where four lines intersect is defined as

$$P := \{(2^i - 2^j, -(2^k - 2^l)) \in \mathbb{R}^2 | 1 \leq j \leq i, k \leq \sqrt{n}\}.\]
The four pencils are

The vertical lines with a point in \( P \),
\[ L_1 := \{ x = 2^i - 2^j | 1 \leq j \leq i \leq \sqrt{n} \} \]

The horizontal lines with a point in \( P \),
\[ L_2 := \{ y = -2^i + 2^j | 1 \leq j \leq i \leq \sqrt{n} \} \]

The slope \(-1\) lines with a point in \( P \),
\[ L_3 := \{ x - (2^i - 2^j) = -(y + (2^k - 2^j)) | 1 \leq j \leq i, k \leq \sqrt{n} \} \]

Lines through the origin with a point in \( P \),
\[ L_4 := \{ y = -\frac{2^i - j - 1}{2^k - j - 1} x | 1 \leq j \leq i, k \leq \sqrt{n} \} \]

Note that in the definition of \( L_3 \) and \( L_4 \) the same lines are listed multiple times. Ignoring these repetitions it is easy to see that all four families have size approximately \( n \), and \(| P | = \Omega(n^{3/2}) \). One can apply a projective transformation to shift the centers of the pencils from infinity to \( \mathbb{R}^2 \).

Acknowledgement

We are thankful to Misha Rudnev, whose question on pencils initiated this work.

References


Schools of Mathematics and Computer Science, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv 69978, Israel and Department of Mathematics, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08544, USA

Email address: nogaa@tau.ac.il

Alfréd Rényi Institute of Mathematics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, POB 127, H-1364 Budapest, Hungary

Email address: ruzsa.z.imre@renyi.mta.hu

Department of Mathematics, University of British Columbia, 1984 Mathematics Road, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z2, Canada

Email address: solymosi@math.ubc.ca