ON THE NOTION OF CANONICAL DIMENSION FOR ALGEBRAIC GROUPS

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Abstract. We define and study a numerical invariant of an algebraic group action which we call the canonical dimension. As an application of the resulting theory we give estimates on the minimal number of parameters required to define a generic hypersurface of degree d in $\mathbb{P}^{n-1}$.

Contents

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1. Introduction

Many important objects in algebra can be parametrised by a non-abelian cohomology set of the form $H^1(K, G)$, where K is a field and G is a linear algebraic group defined over K. For example, elements of $H^1(K, \mathrm{O}_n)$ can be identified with n-dimensional quadratic forms over K, elements of $H^1(K, \mathrm{PGL}_n)$ with central simple algebras of degree n, elements of $H^1(K, G_2)$ with octonion algebras, etc; cf. [Se_3] or [KMRT]. Recall that $H^1(K, G)$ has a marked (split) element but usually no group structure. Thus, a priori there are only two types of elements in $H^1(K, G)$, split and non-split. However, it is often intuitively clear that some non-split elements are closer to being split than others. This intuitive notion can be quantified by considering degrees or Galois groups of splitting field extensions L/K for α; see, e.g., [T], [RY_2]. Another "measure" of how far α is from being split is its essential dimension (here we assume that K contains a copy of a base field k and G is defined over k); for details and further references, see Section 2.1 and the first paragraph of Section 14.

In this paper we introduce and study yet another numerical invariant that "measures" how far α is from being split. We call this new invariant the *canonical dimension* and denote it by $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha)$. We give several equivalent descriptions of $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha)$; one of them is that $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha) = \min \mathrm{trdeg}_K(L)$, where the minimum is taken over all generic splitting fields L/K for α (see Section 9). Generic splitting fields have been the object of much research in the context of central simple algebras (i.e., for $G = \mathrm{PGL}_n$; see, e.g., [A], [Ar], [Roq_1], [Roq_2]) and quadratic forms (i.e., for $G = \mathrm{O}_n$ or SO_n; see, e.g., [Kn_1], [Kn_2], [KS]); related results for Jordan pairs can be found in [Pe]. Kersten and Rehmann [KR], who, following on the work of Knebusch, studied generic splitting fields in a setting rather similar to ours (cf. Remark 9.5), remarked, on p. 61, that the question of determining the minimal possible transcendence degree of a generic splitting field (or $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha)$, in our language) appears to be difficult in general. Much of this paper may be viewed as an attempt to address this question from a geometric point of view.

We will always assume that k is an algebraically closed base field of characteristic zero and K is finitely generated over k. In this context every $\alpha \in H^1(K, G)$ is represented by a (unique, up to birational isomorphism) generically free G-variety X, with $k(X)^G = K$; see e.g., [Po, (1.3.3)]. We will often work with X, rather than α, writing $\mathrm{cd}(X, G)$ instead of $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha)$ and using the language of invariant theory, rather than Galois cohomology. An advantage of this approach is that $\mathrm{cd}(X, G)$ is well defined for G-varieties X that are not necessarily generically free (see Definition 3.3), and the interplay between generically free and non-generically free varieties can sometimes be used to gain insight into their canonical dimensions; cf., e.g., Lemma 6.1. If S is the stabilizer in general position for a G-variety X, then $\mathrm{cd}(X, G)$ can be related to the essential dimension of S. This connection is explored in Sections 5 – 6.

In Sections 7 - 13 we study canonical dimensions of generically free G-varieties or, equivalently, of classes $\alpha \in H^1(K, G)$. We will be particularly interested in the maximal possible value of $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha)$ for a given group G; we call this number *the canonical dimension of* G and denote it by $\mathrm{cd}(G)$. The canonical dimension $\mathrm{cd}(G)$, like the essential dimension $\mathrm{ed}(G)$, is a numerical invariant of G; if G is connected, both measure, in different ways, how far G is from being "special" (for the definition and a brief discussion of special groups, see Section 2.5 below). While $\mathrm{cd}(G)$ and $\mathrm{ed}(G)$ share some common properties (note, in particular, the similarity between the results of Section 7 in this paper and those of [R, Sections 3.1, 3.2]) they do not appear to be related to each other. For example, since $\mathrm{cd}(G) = 0$ for every finite group G (see Lemma 7.5(b)), the rich theory of essential dimension for finite groups (see [BR], [BR$_2$], [JLY, Section 8]) has no counterpart in the setting of canonical dimension. On the other hand, our classification of simple groups of canonical dimension 1 in Section 13 has no counterpart in the context of essential dimension, because connected groups of essential dimension 1 do not exist; see [R, Corollary 5.7].

In Section 8 we prove a strong necessary condition for $\alpha \in H^1(K, G)$ to be of canonical dimension ≤ 2. A key ingredient in our proof is the classification of minimal models for rational surfaces, due to Iskovskih [I]; see Proposition 8.2. In Sections 11 and 12 we study canonical dimensions of the groups GL_n/μ_d, SL_n/μ_e, SO_n and Spin_n. Our arguments there heavily rely on the recent results of Merkurjev [M$_2$] and Karpenko-Merkurjev [KM].

Our definition of canonical dimension naturally extends to the setting of functors $\mathcal{F}$ from the category of field extensions of k to the category of pointed sets; $\mathrm{cd}(G)$ is then a special case of $\mathrm{cd}(\mathcal{F})$, with $\mathcal{F} = H^1(\_, G)$ (see Section 10). A similar notion in the context of essential dimension is due to Merkurjev [M$_1$]; see also [BF$_2$] and the beginning of Section 14.

In the last two sections we apply the theory developed in this paper to the problem of computing the minimal number $\mathrm{ed}(H_{n,d})$ of independent parameters, required to define the general degree d hypersurface in $\mathbb{P}^{n-1}$. (For a precise statement of the problem, see Section 14.) We show that if $d \geq 3$ and $(n, d) \neq (2, 3), (2, 4)$ or $(3, 3)$, our problem reduces to that of computing the canonical dimension of the group $\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_{\gcd(n,\, d)}$. In particular, combining Theorem 14.3 with Corollary 11.4, we obtain following theorem.

Theorem 1.1. *Let n and d be positive integers such that $d \geq 3$ and $(n, d) \neq (2, 3)$, $(2, 4)$ or $(3, 3)$. Suppose $\gcd(n, d) = p^j$ for some prime p and some* *integer* $j \geq 0$. *Write* $n = p^i n_0$, *where* $\gcd(p, n_0) = 1$. *Then*

$$\mathrm{ed}(H_{n,d}) = \binom{n+d-1}{d} - n^2 + \begin{cases} 0, \ \text{if } j = 0 \\ p^i - 1, \ \text{if } j \geq 1. \end{cases}$$

If $d \leq 2$ or $(n, d) = (2, 3), (2, 4), (3, 3)$, then our problem reduces to computing canonical dimensions for certain group actions that are not generically free; this is done in Section 15. Related results for $(n, d) = (2, 3)$ and $(3, 3)$ can be found in [BF$_1$].

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2. Notation and preliminaries

Throughout this paper we will work over an algebraically closed base field k of characteristic zero. Unless otherwise specified, all algebraic varieties, algebraic groups, group actions, fields and all maps between them are assumed to be defined over k, all algebraic groups are assumed to be linear (but not necessarily connected), and all fields are assumed to be finitely generated over k.

By a G-variety we shall mean an algebraic variety X with a (regular) action of an algebraic group G. We will usually assume that X is irreducible and focus on properties of X that are preserved by (G-equivariant) birational isomorphisms. In particular, we will call a subgroup $S \subset G$ *a stabilizer in general position* for X if $\mathrm{Stab}(x)$ is conjugate to S for $x \in X$ in general position. It is known that many G-varieties have a stabilizer in general position; for an overview of this topic, see [PV, Section 7]. As usual, if $S = \{1\}$, i.e., G acts freely on a dense open subset of X, then we will say that the G-variety X (or equivalently, the G-action on X) is *generically free.*

2.1. **Essential dimension.** Let X be a generically free G-variety. The essential dimension $\mathrm{ed}(X, G)$ of X is the minimal value of $\dim(Y) - \dim(G)$, where the minimum is taken over all dominant rational maps $X \dashrightarrow Y$ of G-varieties with Y generically free. For a given algebraic group G, $\mathrm{ed}(X, G)$ attains its maximal value in the case where $X = V$ is a (generically free) linear representation of G. This value is called the essential dimension of G and is denoted by $\mathrm{ed}(G)$ (it is independent of the choice of V). For details, see [R, Section 3].

2.2. **Rational quotients.** The rational quotient for a G-variety X is an algebraic variety Y such that $k(Y) = k(X)^G$. The inclusion $k(Y) \hookrightarrow k(X)$ then induces a rational quotient map $\pi \colon X \dashrightarrow Y$. Note that Y and π are only defined up to birational isomorphism; one usually writes X/G in place of Y. We shall say that *G-orbits in X are separated by regular invariants* if π is a regular map and $\pi^{-1}(y)$ is a single G-orbit for every k-point $y \in Y$. By a theorem of Rosenlicht, X has a G-invariant dense open subset U, where G-orbits are separated by regular invariants. For a detailed discussion of the rational quotient and Rosenlicht's theorem, see [PV, Section 2.4].

2.3. **Split generically free varieties.** Let X be a generically free G-variety, where the G-orbits are separated by regular invariants. We will call a rational map $s\colon X/G \dashrightarrow X$ *a rational section* for π if $s \circ \pi = \mathrm{id}$ on X/G. (Note that since the fibers of π are precisely the G-orbits in X, $G \cdot s(X/G)$ is dense in X. Consequently, some translate of s will "survive" if X is replaced by a birationally equivalent G-variety.) We shall say that X is *split* if one of the following equivalent conditions holds:

(i) X is birationally isomorphic to $G \times X/G$,

(ii) π has a rational section,

(iii) X represents the trivial class in $H^1(K, G)$,

(iv) $\mathrm{ed}(X, G) = 0$.

For a proof of equivalence of these four conditions, see [Po, (1.4.1)] and [R, Lemma 5.2].

2.4. **The groups** GL_n / μ_d **and** SL_n / μ_e**.** In this section we will review known results about the Galois cohomology sets $H^1(K, G)$, where $G = \mathrm{GL}_n / \mu_d$ or SL_n / μ_e, μ_d is the unique cyclic subgroup of GL_n of order d, and e divides n.

Lemma 2.1. *Let $G = \mathrm{GL}_n / \mu_d$ (respectively, $G = \mathrm{SL}_n / \mu_e$), $f\colon G \longrightarrow \mathrm{PGL}_n$ be the canonical projection, and K/k be a field extension. Then*

(a) The map $f_*\colon H^1(K, G) \to H^1(K, \mathrm{PGL}_n)$ has trivial kernel.

(b) The image of f_* consists of those classes which represent central simple algebras of degree n and exponent dividing d (respectively, dividing e).

Proof. (a) The exact sequence $1 \longrightarrow \mathrm{Ker}(f) \overset{i}{\hookrightarrow} G \overset{f}{\longrightarrow} \mathrm{PGL}_n \longrightarrow 1$ of algebraic groups, gives rise to an exact sequence

$$H^1(K, \mathrm{Ker}(f)) \xrightarrow{i_*} H^1(K, G) \xrightarrow{f_*} H^1(K, \mathrm{PGL}_n)$$

of pointed sets; cf. [Se$_2$, pp. 123 - 126]. It is thus enough to show that i_* is the trivial map (i.e., its image is $\{1\}$). If $G = \mathrm{GL}_n / \mu_d$ this is obvious, since $\mathrm{Ker}(f) \simeq \mathbb{G}_m$, and thus $H^1(K, \mathrm{Ker}(f)) = \{1\}$. If $G = \mathrm{SL}_n / \mu_e$ then $\mathrm{Ker}(f) = \mu_{\frac{n}{e}}$, and the commutative diagram

$$\begin{tikzcd} 1 \arrow[r] & \mu_n \arrow[r] \arrow[d, "\times e"] & \mathrm{SL}_n \arrow[r] \arrow[d] & \mathrm{PGL}_n \arrow[r] \arrow[d, equal] & 1 \\ 1 \arrow[r] & \mu_{\frac{n}{e}} \arrow[r, "i"] & \mathrm{SL}_n / \mu_e \arrow[r] & \mathrm{PGL}_n \arrow[r] & 1, \end{tikzcd} \tag{2.1}$$

of group homomorphisms induces the commutative diagram

$$\begin{tikzcd} H^1(K,\mu_n) \arrow[r] \arrow[d] & H^1(K,\mathrm{SL}_n) \arrow[d] \\ H^1(K,\mu_{\frac{n}{e}}) \arrow[r, "i_*"] & H^1(K,\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e) \end{tikzcd}$$

of maps of pointed sets. Since the left vertical map is surjective (it is the natural projection $K^\times/(K^\times)^n \longrightarrow K^\times/(K^\times)^{\frac{n}{e}}$), and $H^1(K,\mathrm{SL}_n) = \{1\}$ (see [Se$_2$, p. 151]), we see that the image of i_* is trivial, as claimed.

(b) We will assume $G = \mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e$; the case $G = \mathrm{GL}_n/\mu_d$ is similar and will be left to the reader. We now focus on the connecting maps

$$\begin{tikzcd} & H^1(K,\mathrm{PGL}_n) \arrow[r, "\delta"] \arrow[d, equal] & H^2(K,\mu_n) \arrow[d, "\times e"] \\ H^1(K,\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e) \arrow[r, "f_*"] & H^1(K,\mathrm{PGL}_n) \arrow[r, "\delta'"] & H^2(K,\mu_{\frac{n}{e}}) \end{tikzcd}$$

induced by the diagram (2.1). It is well known that $H^2(K,\mu_n)$ is the n-torsion part of the Brauer group of K and δ sends a central simple algebra A to its Brauer class $[A]$; see [Se$_2$, Section X.5]. Hence, $\delta'(A) = e \cdot [A]$, and $\mathrm{Im}(f_*) = \mathrm{Ker}(\delta')$ consists of algebras A of degree n and exponent dividing e, as claimed. $\square$

2.5. **Special groups.** An algebraic group G is called *special* if $H^1(E,G) = \{1\}$ for every field extension E/k. Equivalently, G is special if every generically free G-variety is split. Special groups were introduced by Serre [Se$_1$] and classified by Grothendieck [Gro, Theorem 3] as follows: G is special if and only if its maximal semisimple subgroup is a direct product of simply connected groups of type SL or Sp; cf. also [PV, Theorem 2.8]. The following lemma can be easily deduced from Grothendieck's classification; we will instead give a proof based on Lemma 2.1.

Lemma 2.2. GL_n/μ_d *is special if and only if* $\gcd(n,d) = 1$.

Proof. If n and d are relatively prime then every central simple algebra of degree d and exponent dividing n is split. By Lemma 2.1, f_* has trivial image and trivial kernel, showing that $H^1(E,\mathrm{GL}_n/\mu_d) = \{1\}$ for every E, i.e., GL_n/μ_d is special. Conversely, suppose $e = \gcd(n,d) > 1$. Let $E = k(a,b)$, where a and b are algebraically independent variables over k, and $D = (a,b)_e$ = generic symbol algebra of degree e. Then $A = M_{\frac{n}{e}}(D)$ is a central simple algebra of degree n and exponent e, with center E. This algebra defines a class in $H^1(E,\mathrm{PGL}_n)$; since e divides d, Lemma 2.1 tells us that this class is the image of some $\alpha \in H^1(E,\mathrm{GL}_n/\mu_d)$. Since A is not split, $\alpha \neq 1$, and hence GL_n/μ_d is not special, as claimed. $\square$

3. The canonical dimension of a G-variety

Let X be an irreducible G-variety (not necessarily generically free). We shall say that a rational map $F\colon X \dashrightarrow X$ is a *canonical form* map if $F(x) = f(x) \cdot x$ for some rational map $f\colon X \dashrightarrow G$. Here we think of $F(x)$ as a "canonical form" of x. Note that F and f are not required to be G-equivariant.

Remark 3.1. If the G-action on X is generically free and $F\colon X \dashrightarrow X$ is a rational map then the following conditions are equivalent:

(a) F is a canonical form map,

(b) $\pi \circ F = \pi$, where $\pi\colon X \dashrightarrow X/G$ is the rational quotient map.

(b) $F(x) \in G \cdot x$ for $x \in X$ in general position,

The proof is easy, and we leave it as an exercise for the reader.

Example 3.2. Let $X = \mathrm{M}_n$, with the conjugation action of $G = \mathrm{GL}_n$. We claim that the rational map $F\colon \mathrm{M}_n \dashrightarrow \mathrm{M}_n$, taking A to its companion matrix

$$F(A) = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 & \dots & 0 & -c_n \\ 1 & 0 & \dots & 0 & -c_{n-1} \\ 0 & 1 & \dots & 0 & -c_{n-2} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & \vdots \\ 0 & 0 & \dots & 1 & -c_1 \end{pmatrix},$$

is a canonical form map. Here $t^n + c_1 t^{n-1} + \dots + c_n = \det(tI - A)$ is the characteristic polynomial of A.

To prove the claim, fix a non-zero column vector $v \in k^n$ and define $f(A)$ as the matrix whose columns are $v, Av, \dots, A^{n-1}v$. It is now easy to see that $f\colon A \mapsto f(A)$ is a rational map $\mathrm{M}_n \dashrightarrow \mathrm{GL}_n$, and $f(A)^{-1}Af(A)$ is the companion matrix $F(A)$. $\square$

Our definition of a canonical form map is quite general; for example it includes the trivial case, where $f(x) = 1_G$ and thus $F(x) = x$ for every $x \in X$. Usually we would like to choose f so that the canonical form of every element lies in some subvariety of X of small dimension. With this in mind, we give the following:

Definition 3.3. The canonical dimension $\mathrm{cd}(X, G)$ of a G-variety X is defined as

$$\mathrm{cd}(X, G) = \min\,\{\dim\, F(X) - \dim(X/G)\},$$

where the minimum is taken over all canonical form maps $F\colon X \dashrightarrow X$. If the G-action on X is generically free, and X represents $\alpha \in H^1(K, G)$, we will also write $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha)$ in place of $\mathrm{cd}(X, G)$.

Note that the symbol cd does not stand for and should not be confused with cohomological dimension.

Lemma 3.4. *The integer* $\operatorname{cd}(X,G)$ *is the minimal value of* $\dim F(G\cdot x)$ *for* $x \in X$ *in general position. Here the minimum is taken over all canonical form maps* $F\colon X \dashrightarrow X$.

Proof. Let $\pi\colon X \dashrightarrow X/G$ is the rational quotient map for the G-action on X. Then for any canonical form map $F\colon X \dashrightarrow X$, we have $\pi = \pi \circ F$. In particular, $\pi F(X) = X/G$. Applying the fiber dimension theorem to

$$\pi_{|\,F(X)}\colon F(X) \dashrightarrow X/G\,,$$

we see that $\dim F(X) - \dim(X/G) = \dim F(G\cdot x)$ for $x \in X$ in general position. By Definition 3.3, $\operatorname{cd}(X,G)$ is the minimal value of this quantity, as F ranges over all canonical form maps $F\colon X \dashrightarrow X$. □

Example 3.5. Let $X = \mathrm{M}_n$, with the conjugation action of $G = \mathrm{GL}_n$. Then the canonical form map F constructed in Example 3.2 takes every orbit in X to a single point. This shows that $\operatorname{cd}(\mathrm{M}_n, \mathrm{GL}_n) = 0$. The same argument shows that $\operatorname{cd}(\mathrm{M}_n, \mathrm{PGL}_n) = 0$; cf. also Lemma 4.3 below.

4. First properties

4.1. Subgroups.

Lemma 4.1. *If* X *be a* G*-variety and* H *be a closed subgroup of* G *then*

$$\operatorname{cd}(X,G) + \dim X/G \le \operatorname{cd}(X,H) + \dim X/H\,.$$

Proof. The left hand side is the minimal value of $\dim F(X)$, as F ranges over canonical form maps $F\colon X \dashrightarrow X$ corresponding to $f\colon X \dashrightarrow G$. The right hand side is the same, except that f is only allowed to range over rational maps $X \dashrightarrow H$. Since there are more rational maps from X to G than from X to H, the inequality follows. □

4.2. Connected components.

Lemma 4.2. *Let* X *be a* G*-variety and let* G^0 *be the connected component of* G*. Then* $\operatorname{cd}(X,G^0) = \operatorname{cd}(X,G)$.

Proof. The inequality $\operatorname{cd}(X,G) \le \operatorname{cd}(X,G^0)$ follows from Lemma 4.1, with $H = G^0$. To prove the opposite inequality, let $F\colon X \dashrightarrow X$ be a canonical form map such that $\dim F(G\cdot x) = \operatorname{cd}(X,G)$ for $x \in X$ in general position. Here $F(x) = f(x)\cdot x$ for some rational map $f\colon X \dashrightarrow G$. Since X is irreducible, the image of f lies in some irreducible component of G. Let g be an element of this component. Then we can replace f by $f'\colon X \dashrightarrow G^0$, where $f'(x) = g^{-1}f(x)$, and F by $F'\colon X \dashrightarrow X$ given by $F'(x) = f'(x)\cdot x = g^{-1}\cdot F(x)$. (Note that here g is independent of x.) Since $F'(G\cdot x)$ is a translate of $F(G\cdot x)$, we conclude that $\operatorname{cd}(X,G^0) \le \dim F'(G^0\cdot x) \le \dim F'(G\cdot x) = \dim F(G\cdot x) = \operatorname{cd}(X,G)$. □

4.3. **Quotient groups.**

Lemma 4.3. *Let* $\alpha\colon G \longrightarrow \overline{G}$ *be a surjective map of algebraic groups and* $N = \mathrm{Ker}(\alpha)$. *Suppose* X *is a* $\overline{G}$*-variety or, equivalently, a* G*-variety with* N *acting trivially. Then*

(a) $\mathrm{cd}(X, G) \geq \mathrm{cd}(X, \overline{G})$.

(b) If N *is special then* $\mathrm{cd}(X, G) = \mathrm{cd}(X, \overline{G})$.

Proof. Part (a) follows from Definition 3.3, because $f\colon X \dashrightarrow G$ and

$$\overline{f} = f \pmod{N}\colon X \dashrightarrow \overline{G}$$

give rise to the same canonical form map $F\colon X \dashrightarrow X$. Note that equality may not hold in general, because not every rational map $\overline{f}\colon X \dashrightarrow \overline{G}$ can be lifted to $f\colon X \dashrightarrow G$.

(b) If N is special then α has a rational section $\beta\colon \overline{G} \dashrightarrow G$. (Note that β is a rational map of varieties; it is not required to respect the group structure.) Now choose $\overline{f}\colon X \dashrightarrow \overline{G}$ such that the canonical form map $F\colon X \dashrightarrow X$ given by $F(x) = f(x) \cdot x$ has the property that $F(G \cdot x) = F(\overline{G} \cdot x)$ has dimension $\mathrm{cd}(X, \overline{G})$ for $x \in X$ in general position. In order to show that $\mathrm{cd}(X, G) \leq \mathrm{cd}(X, \overline{G})$, it is enough to lift $\overline{f}$ to $f\colon X \dashrightarrow G$. If $\overline{f}(X)$ does not lie entirely in the indeterminacy locus of β, we can take $f = \beta \circ \overline{f}$, thus completing the proof. Otherwise we choose $\overline{g} \in \overline{G}$ so that $\overline{g}\overline{f}(X)$ does not lie entirely in the indeterminacy locus of β. Then we may replace $\overline{f}$ by $\overline{f}_{\overline{g}}\colon X \dashrightarrow G$, where $\overline{f}_{\overline{g}}(x) = \overline{g}\overline{f}(x)$, and lift $\overline{f}_{\overline{g}}$ to G as before. □

4.4. **Direct products.**

Lemma 4.4. *Let* X_i *be a* G_i*-variety for* $i = 1, 2$, $G = G_1 \times G_2$ *and* $X = X_1 \times X_2$. *Then* $\mathrm{cd}(X, G) \leq \mathrm{cd}(X_1, G_1) + \mathrm{cd}(X_2, G_2)$.

Proof. If $F_i\colon X_i \dashrightarrow X_i$ are canonical form maps associated to $f_i\colon X_i \dashrightarrow G$ (for $i = 1, 2$) then $F = (F_1, F_2)\colon X \dashrightarrow X$ is a canonical form map associated to $f = (f_1, f_2)\colon X = X_1 \times X_2 \dashrightarrow G_1 \times G_2$. Clearly,

$$F(G \cdot x) = F_1(G_1 \cdot x_1) \times F_2(G_2 \cdot x_2)$$

for any $x = (x_1, x_2)$ and thus $\dim(F \cdot x) = \dim(F_1 \cdot x_1) + \dim(F_2 \cdot x_2)$. The desired inequality now follows from Lemma 3.4. □

4.5. **Split varieties.**

Lemma 4.5. *Let* X *be a generically free* G*-variety and let* $\pi\colon X \dashrightarrow X/G$ *be the rational quotient map.*

(a) If X *is split (cf. Section 2.3) then* $\mathrm{cd}(X, G) = 0$.

(b) Suppose G *is connected. Then the converse to part (a) holds as well.*

Proof. (a) Since X is split, we may assume $X = G \times X_0$, where $X_0 = X/G$; see Section 2.3(i). The map $F\colon X \longrightarrow X$, given by $F\colon (g, x_0) \mapsto (1_G, x_0)$ is clearly a canonical form map, with dim $F(X) = \dim(X/G)$, and the desired equality follows.

(b) After replacing X be a G-invariant dense open subset, we may assume that the G-orbits in X are separated by regular invariants. Suppose $\mathrm{cd}(X,G) = 0$, i.e., $\dim F(X) = \dim(X/G)$ for some canonical form map $F\colon X \dashrightarrow X$. It is enough to show that $\pi_{|F(X)}\colon F(X) \dashrightarrow X/G$ is a birational isomorphism. Indeed, if we can prove this then

$$\pi_{|F(X)}^{-1}\colon X/G \overset{\simeq}{\dashrightarrow} F(X) \hookrightarrow X$$

will be a rational section (as defined in Section 2.3).

To prove that $\pi_{|F(X)}$ is a birational isomorphism, consider the fibers of this map. If $x \in X$ is a point in general position and $y = \pi(x) \in X/G$ then $\pi_{|F(X)}^{-1}(y) = F(G \cdot x)$. Since G is connected, $G \cdot x$ is irreducible, and so is $F(G\cdot x)$. On the other hand, since $\mathrm{cd}(X,G) = 0$, $\pi_{|F(X)}^{-1}(y)$ is 0-dimensional. We thus conclude that $\pi_{|F(X)}^{-1}(y)$ is a single k-point for $y \in X/G$ in general position. Hence, $\pi_{|F(X)}$ is a birational isomorphism (cf., e.g., [Hu, Section I.4.6]), and the proof is complete. □

5. A lower bound

Definition 5.1. Let S be an algebraic group and Y be a generically free S-variety. We define $e(Y,S)$ as the smallest integer e with the following property: given a point $y \in Y$ in general position, there is an S-equivariant rational map $f\colon Y \dashrightarrow Y$ such that $f(Y)$ contains y and $\dim f(Y) \leq e + \dim(S)$.

Remark 5.2. Note that this definition is similar to the definition of the essential dimension $\mathrm{ed}(Y,S)$ of Y; cf. Section 2.1. The difference is that $\mathrm{ed}(Y,S)$ is the minimal value of $\dim f(Y) - \dim(S)$, where f is allowed to range over a wider class of rational S-equivariant maps. In particular, $e(Y,S) \geq \mathrm{ed}(Y,S)$. Note also that $e(Y,S)$ depends only on the birational class of Y, as an S-variety.

Remark 5.3. In the sequel we will be particularly interested in the case where Y is itself an algebraic group, S is a closed subgroup of Y, and the S-action on Y is given by translations (say, by right translations, to be precise). In this situation, $e(Y,S)$ is simply the minimal possible value of $\dim f(Y) - \dim(S)$, where f ranges over all S-equivariant rational maps $Y \dashrightarrow Y$. Indeed, after composing f with a suitable left translation $g\colon Y \longrightarrow Y$, we may assume that $f(Y)$ contains any given $y \in Y$.

Lemma 5.4. *Let Y be a generically free S-variety.*

(a) If Y is split (cf. Section 2.3) then $e(Y,S) = 0$.

(b) Suppose there exists a dominant rational S-equivariant map $\alpha\colon V \dashrightarrow Y$, where V is a vector space with a linear S-action. Then $e(Y,S) = \mathrm{ed}(S)$.

(c) If $Y = G$ is a special algebraic group, S is a subgroup of G and the S-action on Y is given by translations then $e(Y,S) = \mathrm{ed}(S)$.

Note that the condition of part (a) is always satisfied if S is a special group.

Proof. (a) If Y is split, it is birationally isomorphic to $S \times Z$, where S acts by translations on the first factor and trivially on the second. In fact, we may assume without loss of generality that $Y = S \times Z$. Now for any $z_0 \in Z$ consider $f_{z_0} : S \times Z \dashrightarrow S \times Z$, given by $(s, z) \mapsto (s, z_0)$. As z_0 ranges over Z, the images of f_{z_0} cover Y. Each of these images has the same dimension as S; this yields $e(Y, S) = 0$.

(b) Let $\beta : Y \dashrightarrow Y_0$ be the dominant S-equivariant rational map from Y to a generically free S-variety Y_0 of minimal possible dimension, $\mathrm{ed}(S) + \dim(S)$; cf. Remark 5.3. Then for any $v \in V$, there is a rational G-equivariant map $\gamma : Y_0 \dashrightarrow V$ such that v lies in the image of γ; see [R, Proposition 7.1]. Taking $f = \alpha \circ \gamma \circ \beta : Y \dashrightarrow Y$ in Definition 5.1 and varying v over V, we see that $e(Y, S) \leq \dim(Y_0) - \dim(S) = \mathrm{ed}(S)$. The opposite inequality was noted in Remark 5.2.

(c) Let V be a generically free linear representation of G (and thus of S). Since G is special, V is split; cf. Section 2.3. Consequently, there is a dominant rational map $V \dashrightarrow G$ of G-varieties (and hence, of S-varieties). The desired conclusion now follows from part (b). $\square$

Proposition 5.5. *Let G be a connected group and X be an irreducible G-variety with a stabilizer S in general position. Then*

(a) $\mathrm{cd}(X, G) \geq e(G, S)$*, where S acts on G by translations.*

In particular,

(b) $\mathrm{cd}(X, G) \geq \mathrm{ed}(G, S)$*, and*

(c) if G is special then $\mathrm{cd}(X, G) \geq \mathrm{ed}(S)$*.*

Proof. (b) and (c) follow from (a) by Remark 5.2 and Lemma 5.4(c) respectively.

To prove part (a), let $F : X \dashrightarrow X$ be a canonical form map such that $\dim F(G \cdot x) = \mathrm{cd}(X, G)$ for x in general position; cf. Lemma 3.4. Let $f : X \dashrightarrow G$ be a rational map such that $F(x) = f(x) \cdot x$.

Choose x in general position, and consider the orbit map $\phi : G \longrightarrow G \cdot x$. Identifying $G \cdot x$ with G/S, where $S = \mathrm{Stab}_G(x)$, we see that ϕ is simply the canonical projection $G \longrightarrow G/S$ (where, as usual, the action of S on G is given by $s \cdot g = gs^{-1}$). The rational map $F_{|G \cdot x} : G \cdot x \dashrightarrow G \cdot x$ can now be lifted to $F' : G \dashrightarrow G$ given by $F'(g) = f(\phi(g))g$. Since $\phi(gs^{-1}) = \phi(g)$ for every $s \in S$, we see that F' is S-equivariant, with respect to the S-action on G (via translations on the right). Since S acts freely on G (and hence, on $F'(G)$), we conclude that $F' : G \dashrightarrow F'(G)$ is an S-compression, and thus, by the definition of $e(G, S)$,

$$\dim F'(G) - \dim(S) \geq e(G, S) .$$

Moreover, since $F'(G)$ is S-invariant, and $F(G\cdot x) = \phi\, F'(G) = F'(G)/S$, we have
$$\dim\, F(G\cdot x) = \dim\, F'(G) - \dim(S) \geq e(G,S)\,,$$
as claimed. $\square$

Remark 5.6. The same argument shows that if $e(G, \mathrm{Stab}(x)) \geq d$ for x in a Zariski dense open subset of X then $\mathrm{cd}(X,G) \geq d$.

Corollary 5.7. *Let G be a connected group, S be a closed subgroup, and $X = G/S$ be a homogeneous space. Then*

(a) $\mathrm{cd}(X,G) = e(G,S)$*, where S acts on G by translations.*

(b) If G is special then $\mathrm{cd}(X,G) = \mathrm{ed}(S)$.

Proof. Part (b) follows from part (a) and Lemma 5.4(c).

To prove (a), note that by Proposition 5.5, we only need to show that $\mathrm{cd}(X,G) \leq e(G,S)$, i.e., to construct a canonical form map $F\colon X \dashrightarrow X$ such that

$$\dim\, F(G\cdot x) = e(G,S) \tag{5.1}$$

for x in general position. We will define F by reversing the construction in Proposition 5.5. Let $F'\colon G \dashrightarrow G$ be an S-equivariant rational map (with respect to the right translation action of S on G), such that $\dim\, F'(G)$ assumes its minimal possible value, $e(G,S) + \dim(S)$; cf. Remark 5.3. Then $f'\colon G \dashrightarrow G$ given by $f'(g) = F'(g)g^{-1}$ is S-invariant (with respect to the right translation action of S on G). Hence, f' descends to $f\colon G/S \dashrightarrow G$. Thus we have a commutative diagram

$$\begin{array}{ccc} G & \overset{F'}{\dashrightarrow} & G \\ \downarrow & & \downarrow \\ G/S & \overset{F}{\dashrightarrow} & G/S \end{array}$$

where $F(x) = f(x)\cdot x$. Here F is, by construction, a canonical form map, and
$$\dim\, F(G/S) = \dim\, F'(G) - \dim\, S = e(G,S)\,,$$
as desired. $\square$

6. A comparison lemma

Lemma 6.1. *Let $\alpha\colon X \dashrightarrow Y$ be a dominant rational map of irreducible G-varieties. Suppose* $\dim(G\cdot x) = d$ *and* $\dim(G\cdot y) = e$ *for $x \in X$ and $y \in Y$ in general position. Then* $\mathrm{cd}(X,G) \leq \mathrm{cd}(Y,G) + d - e$.

Proof. Let $f\colon Y \dashrightarrow G$ be a rational map such that $\dim\, F(G\cdot y) = \mathrm{cd}(Y,G)$ for Y in general position. Here, as usual, $F\colon Y \dashrightarrow Y$ is defined by $F(y) = f(y)\cdot y$.

Now consider $f' = f\circ\alpha\colon X \dashrightarrow G$ and the induced canonical form map $F'\colon X \dashrightarrow X$ given by $F'(x) = f'(x)\cdot x$. The relationship between F and

F' is illustrated by the following commutative diagram, where x is a point in general position in X and $y = \alpha(x) \in Y$.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} G \cdot x & \overset{F'}{\dashrightarrow} & F'(G \cdot x) \\ \alpha \downarrow & & \downarrow \alpha \\ G \cdot y & \overset{F}{\dashrightarrow} & F(G \cdot y) \,. \end{array}$$

Each fiber of $\alpha \colon G \cdot x \longrightarrow G \cdot y$ has dimension $d - e$. Hence, each fiber of the right vertical map $\alpha_{|F'(G \cdot x)}$ has dimension $\leq d - e$. Applying the fiber dimension theorem to this map, we obtain

$$\dim\, F'(G \cdot x) \leq \dim\, F(G \cdot y) + d - e = \mathrm{cd}(Y, G) + d - e \,,$$

and the proposition follows; cf. Lemma 3.4. □

Let X be a G-variety and H be a closed subgroup of G. Recall that an H-invariant (not necessarily irreducible) subvariety $Y \subset X$ is called a (G, H)-section if (i) $G \cdot Y$ is dense in X and (ii) for $y \in Y$ in general position, $g \cdot y \in Y \Leftrightarrow g \in H$. Note that in some papers a (G, H)-section is called a *relative section* (cf. [PV, Section 2.8]) or a *standard relative section with normalizer* H (cf [Po, (1.7.6)]).

Corollary 6.2. *Let X be an irreducible G-variety.*

(a) If X has a (G, H)-section then $\mathrm{cd}(X, G) \leq e(G, H) + d - \dim(G) + \dim(H)$*, where $d = \dim(G \cdot x)$ for $x \in X$ in general position.*

(b) If X has stabilizer S in general position then

$$e(G, S) \leq \mathrm{cd}(X, G) \leq e(G, N) - \dim(S) + \dim(N) \,,$$

where N is the normalizer of S in G.

Proof. (a) The existence of a (G, H)-section is equivalent to the existence of a G-equivariant rational map $X \dashrightarrow G/H$; see [Po, Theorem 1.7.5]. Thus by Lemma 6.1, $\mathrm{cd}(X, G) \leq \mathrm{cd}(G/H, G) - d + \dim(G/H)$. By Corollary 5.7(a) $\mathrm{cd}(G/H, G) = e(G, H)$, and part (a) follows.

(b) The inequality $e(G, S) \leq \mathrm{cd}(X, G)$ follows from Proposition 5.5(a). To prove the inequality

$$\mathrm{cd}(X, G) \leq e(G, N) - \dim(S) + \dim(N) \,, \tag{6.1}$$

note that by [Po, (1.7.8)], X has a (G, N)-section. Substituting $H = N$ and $d = \dim(G) - \dim(S)$ into the inequality of part (a), we obtain (6.1). □

7. The canonical dimension of a group

In this section we will define the canonical dimension of an algebraic group G. We begin with a simple lemma.

Lemma 7.1. *Let X be an irreducible G-variety, and let Z be an irreducible variety with trivial action of G. Then* $\mathrm{cd}(X \times Z, G) = \mathrm{cd}(X, G)$.

Proof. The inequality $\mathrm{cd}(X \times Z, G) \leq \mathrm{cd}(X, G)$ follows from Lemma 6.1, applied to the projection map $\alpha \colon X \times Z \longrightarrow X$. To prove the opposite inequality, let $c = \mathrm{cd}(X \times Z, G)$ and choose $f \colon X \times Z \dashrightarrow G$ such that $\dim F(G \cdot (x, z)) = c$. Here, as usual, $F(y) = f(y) \cdot y$ for $y \in Y$. It is now easy to see that for $z_0 \in Z$ in general position, the map $f_{z_0} \colon X \dashrightarrow G$ given by $f_{z_0}(x) = f(x, z_0)$ gives rise to a canonical form map $F_{z_0} \colon X \dashrightarrow X$ such that $\dim F_0(G \cdot x) = c$. In other words, $\mathrm{cd}(X, G) \leq c$, as claimed. □

Proposition 7.2. *Let V be a generically free linear representation of G.*

(a) If X is an irreducible generically free G-variety then $\mathrm{cd}(X, G) \leq \mathrm{cd}(V, G)$.

(b) If W is another generically free G-representation, then $\mathrm{cd}(V, G) = \mathrm{cd}(W, G)$.

Proof. (a) By [R, Corollary 2.20], there is a dominant rational map $\alpha \colon X \times \mathbb{A}^d \dashrightarrow V$ of G-varieties, where $d = \dim(V)$, and G acts trivially on $\mathbb{A}^d$. Now

$$\mathrm{cd}(X, G) \overset{\text{by Lemma 7.1}}{=} \mathrm{cd}(X \times \mathbb{A}^d, G) \overset{\text{by Lemma 6.1}}{\leq} \mathrm{cd}(V, G)\,,$$

as claimed.

(b) $\mathrm{cd}(W, G) \leq \mathrm{cd}(V, G)$ by part (a). To prove the opposite inequality, interchange the roles of V and W. □

Definition 7.3. We define the canonical dimension $\mathrm{cd}(G)$ of an algebraic group G to be $\mathrm{cd}(V, G)$, where V is a generically free linear representation of G. By Proposition 7.2 this number is independent of the choice of V. Moreover, $\mathrm{cd}(G) = \max\{\mathrm{cd}(X, G)\}$, as X ranges over all irreducible generically free G-varieties.

Corollary 7.4. *Suppose W is a linear representation of G such that $\mathrm{Stab}_G(w)$ is finite for $w \in W$ in general position. Then* $\mathrm{cd}(G) \leq \mathrm{cd}(W, G)$.

Proof. Let V be a generically free linear representation of G. Then so is $X = V \times W$. The desired inequality is now a consequence of Lemma 6.1, applied to the projection map $\alpha \colon V \times W \longrightarrow W$. □

Lemma 7.5. *(a)* $\mathrm{cd}(G) \leq \mathrm{cd}(H) + \dim(G) - \dim(H)$, *for any closed subgroup $H \subset G$.*

(b) $\mathrm{cd}(G) = \mathrm{cd}(G^0)$.

(c) $\mathrm{cd}(G) = 0$ *if and only if G^0 is special.*

(d) $\mathrm{cd}(G_1 \times G_2) \leq \mathrm{cd}(G_1) + \mathrm{cd}(G_2)$.

Proof. (a) Follows from Lemma 4.1(b), with $X = V =$ generically free linear representation of G.

(b) Immediate from Lemma 4.2.

(c) By part (b), we may assume $G = G^0$ is connected. The desired conclusion now follows from Lemma 4.5.

(d) Follows from Lemma 4.4, by taking $X_i = V_i$ to be a generically free representation of G_i for $i = 1, 2$. □

Example 7.6. Consider the subgroup

$$H = \{ \begin{pmatrix} & & b_1 \\ & A & \vdots \\ & & b_{n-1} \\ 0 \dots 0 & & 1 \end{pmatrix} \mid A \in \mathrm{GL}_{n-1}\, ,\, b_1, \dots, b_{n-1} \in k \}\, ,$$

of $G = \mathrm{PGL}_n$. The Levi subgroup of H is special (it isomorphic to GL_{n-1}); hence, H itself is special. (This follows from the theorem of Grothendieck stated in Section 2.5 or alternatively, from [San, Theorem 1.13].) Since $\dim(H) = n^2 - n$, Lemma 7.5(a) yields $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PGL}_n) \leq n - 1$. In particular, $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PGL}_2) = 1$. (Note that $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PGL}_2) \geq 1$ by Lemma 7.5(c)).

Alternatively, we can deduce the inequality $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PGL}_n) \leq n-1$ by applying Lemma 6.1 to the projection map $\mathrm{M}_n \times \mathrm{M}_n \longrightarrow \mathrm{M}_n$ to the first factor, where PGL_n acts on M_n by conjugation. The PGL_n-action on $\mathrm{M}_n \times \mathrm{M}_n$ is generically free; hence, $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PGL}_n) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{M}_n \times \mathrm{M}_n, \mathrm{PGL}_n)$. On the other hand, $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{M}_n, \mathrm{PGL}_n) = 0$; see Example 3.5. Now Lemma 6.1 tells us that

$$\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PGL}_n) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{M}_n \times \mathrm{M}_n, \mathrm{PGL}_n) \leq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{M}_n, \mathrm{PGL}_n) + n - 1 - 0 = n - 1\, .$$

For a third proof of this inequality, see Example 9.8.

8. Splitting fields

Throughout this section we will assume that G/k is a connected linear algebraic group. Unless otherwise specified, the fields E, K, L, etc., are assumed to be finitely generated extensions of the base field k.

Let X be a generically free irreducible G-variety, $E = k(X)^G = k(X/G)$, $\pi\colon X \dashrightarrow X/G$ be the rational quotient map and $F\colon X \dashrightarrow X$ be a canonical form map. Recall that F commutes with π, so that $F(X)$ may be viewed as an algebraic variety over E.

Lemma 8.1. *Let X be a generically free G-variety such that G-orbits in X are separated by regular invariants and let $F\colon X \dashrightarrow X$ be a canonical form map. Denote the class represented by X in $H^1(E, G)$ by α. Then for any field extension K/E the following conditions are equivalent:*

(a) $\alpha_K = 1$,

(b) X is rational over K,

(c) $F(X)$ is unirational over K,

(d) K-points are dense in $F(X)$,

(e) $F(X)$ has a K-point.

Proof. We begin by proving the lemma in the case where $E = K$.

(a) $\Rightarrow$ (b): If $\alpha = 1$ then X is birationally isomorphic to $X/G \times G$ (over X/G). Now recall that the underlying variety of a connected algebraic group

G is rational over k. Hence, $X \times G$ is rational over X/G, i.e., X is rational over E.

(b) $\Rightarrow$ (c): The rational map $F\colon X \dashrightarrow F(X)$ is, by definition, dominant. If X is rational, this makes $F(X)$ unirational.

(c) $\Rightarrow$ (d) and (d) $\Rightarrow$ (e) are obvious.

(e) $\Rightarrow$ (a): An E-point in $F(X)$ is a rational section $s\colon X/G \dashrightarrow F(X) \subset X$ for π. The existence of such a section implies that X is split, and hence, so is α; see Section 2.3.

To prove the general case, note that since the G-orbits in X are separated by regular invariants, we can choose a regular model of the rational quotient variety X/G, so that the rational quotient map $\pi\colon X \longrightarrow X/G$ is regular and its fibers are exactly the G-orbits in X. After making X/G smaller if necessary, we may also assume that our field extension K/E is represented by a surjective morphism $Y \longrightarrow X/G$ of algebraic varieties. Then α_K is represented by the G-variety $X_K = X \times_{X/G} Y$. It is easy to see that the regular map $X_K \longrightarrow Y$ (projection to the second component) separates the G-orbits in X_K and that F naturally extends to a canonical form map $F_K\colon X_K \dashrightarrow X_K$ given by $F_K(x, y) = (F(x), y)$, so that $F_K(X_K) = F(X) \times_{X/G} Y$. Replacing X by X_K and F by F_K, we reduce the lemma to the case we just proved (where $K = E$). $\square$

Let $\alpha \in H^1(E, G)$. As usual, we will call a field extension K/E a *splitting field* for α if the image α_K of α under the natural map $H^1(E, G) \longrightarrow H^1(K, G)$ is split. If α is represented by a generically free G-variety X, with $k(X)^G = E$ then we will also sometimes say that K is a splitting field for X.

Proposition 8.2. *Suppose $\alpha \in H^1(E, G)$.*

(a) If $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha) = 1$ then there exist $0 \neq a, b \in E$ such that a field extension K/E splits α if and only if the quadratic form $q(x, y, z) = x^2 + ay^2 + bz^2$ is isotropic over K. In particular, α has a splitting field K/E of degree 2.

(b) If $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha) = 2$ then α has a splitting field K/E of degree 2, 3, 4, or 6.

Note that if K/E is a splitting field for α then $[K : E] = 1$ is impossible in either part. Indeed, otherwise α itself is split, and $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha) = 0$ by see Lemma 4.5(a).

Proof. Choose a canonical form map $F\colon X \dashrightarrow X$, such that $\dim F(X) - \dim(X/G) = \mathrm{cd}(\alpha)$. By Lemma 8.1, $F(X)$ is unirational over every splitting field K of α; in particular, it is unirational over the algebraic closure $\overline{E}$ of E.

(a) Here $F(X)$ is a curve over E, and Lüroth's theorem tells us that $F(X)$ is rational over $\overline{E}$. It is well known that any such curve is birationally isomorphic to a conic Z in $\mathbb{P}^2_E$ (see, e.g., [MT, Proposition 1.1.1]) and that K-points are dense in Z if and only if $Z(K) \neq \emptyset$ (see, e.g., [MT, Theorem 1.2.1]). Writing the equation of $Z \subset \mathbb{P}^2_E$ in the form $x^2 + ay^2 + bz^2 = 0$, we deduce the first assertion of part (a). The second assertion is an immediate consequence of the first; for example, $K = E(\sqrt{-a})$ is a splitting field for α.

(b) Here $F(X)$ is a surface over E, which becomes unirational over the algebraic closure $\overline{E}$. By a theorem of Castelnuovo, $F(X)$ is, in fact, rational over $\overline{E}$. Let Z be a complete smooth minimal surface, defined over E, which is birationally isomorphic to $F(X)$ via $\phi\colon F(X) \overset{\sim}{\dashrightarrow} Z$ and let $U \subset Z$ be an open subset such that ϕ is an isomorphism over U. Part (b) now follows from Lemma 8.1 and Lemma 8.3 below. $\square$

Lemma 8.3. *Let E be a field of characteristic zero, Z be a complete minimal surface defined over E and rational over $\overline{E}$, and let U be a dense open subset of Z (defined over E). Then U contains a K-point for some field extension K/E of degree* 1*,* 2*,* 3*,* 4 *or* 6*.*

Proof. By a theorem of Iskovskih, Z is isomorphic to $\mathbb{P}^2_E$, a conic bundle or a del Pezzo surface; see [I, Theorem 1] or [MT, Theorem 3.1.1]. If $Z = \mathbb{P}^2_E$, then E-points are dense in Z, and the lemma is obvious.

If $f\colon Z \longrightarrow C$ is a conic bundle over a rational curve C, then after replacing E by a quadratic extension E', we may assume that $C_{E'} \simeq \mathbb{P}^1_{E'}$. For every E'-point $z \in C$, $f^{-1}(z)$ is a rational curve over E'. Taking $z \in C_{E'}$ so that $f^{-1}(z) \cap U \neq \emptyset$, we can choose an extension K/E' of degree 1 or 2 so that $f^{-1}(z)_K \simeq \mathbb{P}^1_K$. Now $[K : E] = 1$, 2 or 4, and K-points are dense in $f^{-1}(z)$, so that one of them will lie in U.

From now on we may assume that Z is a del Pezzo surface. Recall that the anticanonical divisor $-\Omega_Z$ on a del Pezzo surface is ample, and the degree $d = \Omega_Z \cdot \Omega_Z$ can range from 1 to 9.

If $d = 1$ the linear system $|-2\Omega_Z|$ defines a (ramified) double cover $f\colon Z \longrightarrow Q$, where Q is a quadric cone in $\mathbb{P}^3_E$; see [I, p. 30]. Then $Q_{E'} \simeq \mathbb{P}^2_{E'}$ for some extension E'/E of degree 1 or 2. Now choose an E'-point $x \in f(U) \subset Q$ and split $f^{-1}(x)$ over a field extension K/E' of degree 1 or 2. Then $[K : E] = 1$, 2 or 4 and U contains a K-point.

If $d = 2$ then the linear system $|-\Omega_Z|$ defines a (ramified) double cover $Z \longrightarrow \mathbb{P}^2_E$ (see [I, p. 30]), and points of degree 2 are clearly dense in Z.

If $3 \leq d \leq 9$ then it is enough to show that $Z(K) \neq \emptyset$ for some field extension K/E of degree 1, 2, 3, 4 or 6. Indeed, if $Z(K) \neq \emptyset$ then Z_K is unirational over K (see [MT, Theorem 3.5.1]) and thus K-points are dense in Z. Note also that for $3 \leq d \leq 9$, Z is isomorphic to a surface in $\mathbb{P}^d$ of degree d. Intersecting this surface by two hyperplanes in general position, we see that Z has a point of degree dividing d. This proves the lemma for $d = 3$, 4, and 6.

For $d = 5$ and 7, Z always has an E-point (see [MT, Theorem 7.1.1]), so the lemma holds trivially in these cases. For $d = 8$, Z has a point of order dividing 4 and for $d = 9$, Z has a point of order dividing 3 (see [MT, p. 80]). The proof of the lemma is now complete. $\square$

Example 8.4. Suppose $\alpha \in H^1(K, \mathrm{PGL}_n)$ is represented by a central simple algebra of index d. Then the degree of every splitting field for α is divisible by d (cf. e.g, [Row, Theorem 7.2.3]); hence, $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha) \geq \begin{cases} 2, \text{ if } d \geq 3, \\ 3, \text{ if } d \neq 1, 2, 3, 4 \text{ or } 6. \end{cases}$.

In particular, $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PGL}_n) \geq \begin{cases} 2, \text{ if } n \geq 3, \\ 3, \text{ if } n \neq 1, 2, 3, 4 \text{ or } 6. \end{cases}$ For sharper results on $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PGL}_n)$, see Section 11.

Example 8.5. Let V be a generically free linear representation of $G = F_4$, E_6 of E_7 (adjoint or simply connected), $K = k(V)^G$ and $\alpha \in H^1(K, G)$ be the class represented by the G-variety V. Then the degree of any splitting field L/K for $\alpha \in H^1(k(V)^G, G)$ is divisible by 6; [RY$_2$, p. 223]. We conclude that $\mathrm{cd}(G) \geq 2$ for these groups.

Example 8.6. $\mathrm{cd}(G) \geq 3$, if $G = E_8$ or adjoint E_7; see [RY$_2$, Corollaries 5.5 and 5.8].

Remark 8.7. Let G be a connected linear algebraic group defined over k and let H be a finite abelian p-subgroup of G, where p is a prime integer. Recall that the *depth* of H is the smallest value of i such that $[H : H \cap T] = p^i$, as T ranges over all maximal tori of G; see [RY$_2$, Definition 4.5]. Note that H has of depth 0 if and only if it lies in a torus of G. A prime p is called a *torsion prime* for G if and only if G has a finite abelian p-subgroup of depth ≥ 1. (This is one of many equivalent definitions of torsion primes; see [St, Theorem 2.28].) The inequalities of Examples 8.4 - 8.6 may be viewed as special cases of the following assertion:

Suppose a connected linear algebraic group G has a p-subgroup H of depth d.

(a) If $\mathrm{cd}(G) \leq 1$ then $p^d = 1$ or 2.

(b) If $\mathrm{cd}(G) \leq 2$ then $p^d = 1,\ 2,\ 3$ or 4.

The proof is immediate from Proposition 8.2 and [RY$_2$, Theorem 4.7] (where we take X to be a generically free linear representation of G).

9. Generic splitting fields

Definition 9.1. Let K/E be a (finitely generated) field extension. Following Saltman [Sal, Chapter 11], we shall say that a (finitely generated) field extension L/E

(a) is a *dense specialization* of K/E, if for every $0 \neq a \in K$ there is a place $\phi \colon K \longrightarrow L \cup \{\infty\}$ (defined over k) such that $\phi(a) \neq 0, \infty$.

(b) is a *rational specialization* of K/E if there is an embedding $K \hookrightarrow L(t_1, \ldots, t_r)$, over E, for some $r \geq 0$.

In geometric language, (a) and (b) can be restated as follows. Suppose the field extensions K/E and L/E are induced by dominant rational maps $V \dashrightarrow Z$ and $W \dashrightarrow Z$ of irreducible algebraic k-varieties, respectively. Then (a′) W is a dense specialization of V if for every closed subvariety V_0 of V there is a rational map $W \dashrightarrow V$, over Z, whose image is not contained in V_0.

(b′) W is a rational specialization of V if for some $r \geq 0$ there is a dominant map $W \times \mathbb{A}^r \dashrightarrow V$, over Z.

Remark 9.2. In the definition of rational specialization we may assume without loss of generality that $r = \max\{0, \mathrm{trdeg}_E(L) - \mathrm{trdeg}_E(K)\}$; see [Roq$_2$, Lemma 1].

Definition 9.3. Let $\alpha \in H^1(E, G)$. A splitting field K/E for α is called *generic* (respectively, *very generic*) if every splitting field L/E for α is a dense (respectively rational) specialization of K/E.

Remark 9.4. It is easy to see that a rational specialization is dense, (cf. [Sal, Lemma 11.1]) and hence, a very generic splitting field is generic.

Remark 9.5. The generic splitting field of α in Definition 9.3 is closely related to the generic splitting field for the twisted group ${}_\alpha G$, as defined by Kersten and Rehmann [KR]. The main difference between the two definitions is that in [KR] a generic splitting field K/E is only required to have a single specialization to any other splitting field K/E. However, as far as we can determine, the particular generic splitting fields constructed in [KR] have the dense specialization property, i.e., are also generic in the stronger sense of our Definition 9.3.

Lemma 9.6. *Let G be a connected algebraic group, X be an irreducible generically free G-variety, $E = k(X)^G = k(X/G)$ and $F \colon X \dashrightarrow X$ be a canonical form map. Then $k(F(X))/E$ is a very generic splitting field for the class $\alpha \in H^1(E, G)$ represented by X.*

Proof. After replacing X by a G-invariant open subset, we may assume that G-orbits in X are separated by regular invariants. The generic point of $F(X)$ is a $k(F(X))$-point; hence, by Lemma 8.1, $F(X)/E$ is a splitting field for α.

It remains to show that every splitting field L/E for α is a rational specialization of $k(F(X))/E$. After replacing X by a smaller G-invariant dense open subset, we may assume that L/E is induced by a surjective morphism $Y \longrightarrow X/G$ of algebraic varieties. Then $\alpha_L = 1_L$ is represented by the generically free G-variety $X_L = X \times_{X/G} Y$. Since X_L is split, it is rational over L; see Lemma 8.1. The morphisms

$$X_L \xrightarrow{\mathrm{pr}_1} X \xrightarrow{F} F(X) \xrightarrow{\pi} X/G$$

now tell us that $k(F(X)) \hookrightarrow k(X_L) = L(t_1, \ldots, t_r)$, over E, where $t_1, \ldots, t_r$ are independent variables and $r = \dim(G)$. (Here pr_1 is the projection $X_L = X \times_{X/G} Y \longrightarrow X$ to the first factor.) This shows that L/E is a rational specialization of $k(F(X))/E$, as claimed. $\square$

Proposition 9.7. *Let E/k be a finitely generated field extension. Then for every $\alpha \in H^1(E, G)$,*

$$\begin{aligned} \mathrm{cd}(\alpha) &= \min\{\mathrm{trdeg}_E(K) \mid K/E \textit{ is a generic splitting field for } \alpha\} \\ &= \min\{\mathrm{trdeg}_E(L) \mid L/E \textit{ is a very generic splitting field for } \alpha\}. \end{aligned}$$

Proof. Let X be a generically free G-variety representing α; in particular, $E = k(X)^G = k(X/G)$. Since $\mathrm{cd}(X, G)$ is, by definition, the minimal value of $\dim F(X) - \dim(X/G) = \mathrm{trdeg}_E\, k(F(X))$ as F ranges over all canonical form maps $X \dashrightarrow X$, Lemma 9.6 tells us that

$$\mathrm{cd}(\alpha) = \mathrm{cd}(X, G) \geq \min\{\mathrm{trdeg}_E(L) \mid L/E \text{ is a very splitting field for } \alpha\}.$$

Now let K/E be a generic splitting field for α. It remains to show that

$$\mathrm{cd}(X, G) \leq \mathrm{trdeg}_E(K) \tag{9.1}$$

Choose a variety Y whose function field $k(Y)$ is K; the inclusion $E \subset K$ then gives rise to a rational map $Y \dashrightarrow X/G$. By Lemma 9.6 (with $F = id$), $k(X)/E$ is a very generic (and hence, a generic; cf. Remark 9.4) splitting field of α. Since $k(X)/E$ and K/E are both generic splitting fields, each is a dense specialization of the other. Geometrically, this means that there exist rational maps $f_1 \colon X \dashrightarrow Y$ and $f_2 \colon Y \dashrightarrow X$ such that the diagram

$$\begin{tikzcd} X \arrow[r, dashed, "f_1"] \arrow[dr, dashed] & Y \arrow[r, dashed, "f_2"] \arrow[d, dashed] & X \arrow[dl, dashed] \\ & X/G & \end{tikzcd}$$

commutes. Moreover, having chosen f_1, the dense specialization property allows us to choose f_2, so that the indeterminacy locus of f_2 does not contain the image of f_1. In other words, $F = f_2 \circ f_1$ is a well defined rational map $X \dashrightarrow X$ which commutes with the rational quotient map $\pi \colon X \dashrightarrow X/G$. By Remark 3.1, F is a canonical form map. Thus

$$\begin{aligned} &\mathrm{cd}(X, G) \leq \dim F(X) - \dim X/G \leq \dim f_2(Y) - \dim X/G \leq \\ &\quad \dim(Y) - \dim(X/G) = \mathrm{trdeg}_k(K) - \mathrm{trdeg}_k(E) = \mathrm{trdeg}_E(K) \end{aligned}$$

Thus completes the proof of (9.1) and thus of Proposition 9.7. □

Example 9.8. Let $\alpha \in H^1(E, \mathrm{PGL}_n)$ be represented by a central simple E-algebra A and let K be the function field of the Brauer-Severi variety of A. Then K/E is a very generic splitting field for α (see, e.g., [Sal, Corollary 13.9]) and $\mathrm{trdeg}_E(K) = n - 1$. By Proposition 9.7, $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha) \leq n - 1$. This gives yet another proof of the inequality $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PGL}_n) \leq n - 1$ of Example 7.6.

10. The canonical dimension of a functor

The results of the previous section naturally lead to the following definitions. Let $\mathcal{F}$ be a functor from the category $\mathbf{Fields}_k$ of finitely generated extensions of the base field k to the category $\mathbf{Sets}^*$ of pointed sets. We will denote the marked element in $\mathcal{F}(E)$ by 1_E (and sometimes simply by 1, if the reference to the field E is clear from the context). Given a field extension L/E, we will denote the image of $\alpha \in \mathcal{F}(E)$ in $\mathcal{F}(L)$ by α_L.

The notions of splitting field and generic splitting field naturally extend to this setting. That is, given $\alpha \in \mathcal{F}$, we will say that L/E is a *splitting field* for α if $\alpha_L = 1_L$. We will call a splitting field K/E for α *generic* (respectively, *very generic*) if every splitting field L/E for α is a dense (respectively, rational) specialization of K/E. Moreover, we can now define $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha)$ by

$$\mathrm{cd}(\alpha) = \min\{\mathrm{trdeg}_E(K) \mid K/E \text{ is a generic splitting field for } \alpha\}$$

and $\mathrm{cd}(\mathcal{F})$ by

$$\mathrm{cd}(\mathcal{F}) = \max\{\mathrm{cd}(\alpha) \,|\, E/k \text{ is a finitely generated extension, } \alpha \in \mathcal{F}(E)\ \}.$$

Proposition 9.7 says that if G is a connected algebraic group and $\mathcal{F} = H^1(\_, G)$ then the above definition of $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha)$ agrees with Definition 3.3. Moreover, Definition 7.3 tells us that for this $\mathcal{F}$, $\mathrm{cd}(\mathcal{F}) = \mathrm{cd}(G)$.

Note that none of the above definitions require k to be algebraically closed. In particular, it now makes sense to talk about the canonical dimension of an algebraic group defined over a non-algebraically closed field. This opens up interesting directions for future research, but we shall not pursue them in this paper. Instead we will continue to assume that k is algebraically closed, and our main focus will remain on the functors $H^1(\_, G)$. However, even in this (more limited but already very rich) context, we will take advantage of the notion of canonical dimension for a functor by considering certain subfunctors of $H^1(\_, G)$.

We also remark that it is a priori possible that for some functors $\mathcal{F}$, some fields E/k and some $\alpha \in \mathcal{F}(E)$ there will not exist a generic splitting field; if this happens, then, according to our definition, $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathcal{F}) = \infty$. However, Proposition 9.7 tells us that this does not occur for any functor of the form $H^1(\_, G)$, where G is a linear algebraic group, and consequently, for any of its subfunctors.

Example 10.1. Isomorphic functors clearly have the same canonical dimension. In particular, suppose G is a linear algebraic group and U is a normal unipotent subgroup of G. Then the natural map $H^1(\_, G) \longrightarrow H^1(\_, G/U)$ is and isomorphism (see, e.g., [San, Lemma 1.13]) and hence, $\mathrm{cd}(G) = \mathrm{cd}(G/U)$. Taking U to be the unipotent radical of G, we see that that $\mathrm{cd}(G) = \mathrm{cd}(G_{\mathrm{red}})$, where G_{red} is the Levi subgroup of G.

The following simple lemma slightly extends the observation that isomorphic functors have the same canonical dimension. This lemma will turn out to be surprisingly useful in the sequel.

Lemma 10.2. *Suppose $\tau\colon \mathcal{F}_1 \longrightarrow \mathcal{F}_2$ is a morphism of functors with trivial kernel. Then for every finitely generated field extension E/k,*

(a) $\mathrm{cd}(\alpha) = \mathrm{cd}(\tau(\alpha))$ *for any $\alpha \in \mathcal{F}_1(E)$.*

(b) $\mathrm{cd}(\mathcal{F}_1) \leq \mathrm{cd}(\mathcal{F}_2)$.

(c) Moreover, if τ is surjective then $\mathrm{cd}(\mathcal{F}_1) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathcal{F}_2)$.

Proof. Since τ has trivial kernel, α and $\tau(\alpha)$ have the same splitting fields and hence, the same generic splitting fields. This proves part (a). Parts (b) and (c) follow from part (a) and the definition of $\mathrm{cd}(\mathcal{F})$. $\square$

Example 10.3. Recall that the cohomology set $H^1(\_, \mathrm{PSO}_{2n})$ classifies pairs (A, σ), where A is a central simple algebras of degree $2n$ with an orthogonal involution σ of determinant 1; see [KMRT, p. 405]. (Note that [KMRT] uses the symbol PGO^+ instead of PSO. Since we are working over an algebraically closed field k of characteristic zero, for us $\mathrm{PGO}^+ = \mathrm{PSO}$.) Consider the morphism of functors $f\colon H^1(\_, \mathrm{SO}_{2n}) \longrightarrow H^1(\_, \mathrm{PSO}_{2n})$ sending a quadratic form q of dimension $2n$ to the the pair $(M_{2n}(K), \sigma_q)$, where σ_q is the involution of $M_{2n}(K)$ associated to q. Since we are assuming that K contains an algebraically closed field k of characteristic zero, the $2n$-dimensional unit form $\langle 1, \dots, 1\rangle$ is hyperbolic over K. Hence, f has trivial kernel, and Lemma 10.2(b) tells us that $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PSO}_{2n}) \geq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_{2n})$.

Example 10.4. The exact sequence

$$1 \longrightarrow \mu_2 \longrightarrow \mathrm{Spin}_n \xrightarrow{\pi} \mathrm{SO}_n \longrightarrow 1$$

of algebraic groups gives rise to the exact sequence

$$\mathrm{SO}_n(\_) \xrightarrow{\delta} H^1(\_, \mu_2) \longrightarrow H^1(\_, \mathrm{Spin}_n) \xrightarrow{\pi_*} H^1(\_, \mathrm{SO}_n)$$

of cohomology sets, where δ is the spinor norm; see, e.g., [Gar, p. 688]. Since -1 is a square in k, the unit form is hyperbolic, hence δ is surjective and thus π has trivial kernel. On the other hand, the image of π_* consists of quadratic forms q of discriminant 1 such that

$$q' = \begin{cases} q, \text{ if } n \text{ is even,} \\ q \oplus \langle 1\rangle, \text{ if } n \text{ is odd} \end{cases}$$

has trivial Hasse-Witt invariant. Thus $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_n) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{HW}_n)$, where HW_n is the set of n-dimensional quadratic forms q such that q' has trivial discriminant and trivial Hasse-Witt invariant.

Example 10.5. Define the functors Pf_r and GPf_r by $\mathrm{Pf}_r(E) = r$-fold Pfister forms defined over E and $\mathrm{GPf}_r(E) =$ scaled r-fold Pfister forms defined over E. Since Pf_r is a subfunctor of GPf_r, we have $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Pf}_r) \leq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{GPf}_r)$. On the other hand, since q and $\langle c\rangle \otimes q$ have the same splitting fields for every $q \in \mathrm{Pf}_r(E)$ and every $c \in E^*$, we actually have equality $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Pf}_r) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{GPf}_r)$.

Now suppose $q \in \mathrm{Pf}_r(E)$. Let q' be a subform of q of dimension $2^{r-1}+1$. The argument in [KS, p. 29] shows that $K = E(q')$ is a generic splitting field for α. Recall that $E(q')$ is defined as the function field of the quadric hypersurface $q' = 0$ in $\mathbb{P}_E^{2^{r-1}}$; in particular, $\mathrm{trdeg}_E\, E(q) = 2^{r-1} - 1$. Proposition 9.7 now tells us that $\mathrm{cd}(q) \leq 2^{r-1} - 1$. On the other hand, if q is anisotropic, a theorem of Karpenko and Merkurjev [KM, Theorem 4.3] tells us that, in fact $\mathrm{cd}(q) = 2^{r-1} - 1$. We conclude that

$$\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{GPf}_r) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Pf}_r) = 2^{r-1} - 1\,. \tag{10.1}$$

We remark that the setting considered in [KM] is a bit different from ours. First of all, in [KM] a field K/E is called splitting for a quadratic form q/E if q_K is isotropic, where as we use this term to indicate that q_K is hyperbolic. However, if q is a Pfister form then the two definitions coincide. Also a generic splitting field in [KM] is only required to have a single specialization to any other splitting field, where as our Definition 9.3 requires such specializations to be dense. Consequently, for a Pfister form, any generic splitting field in our sense is also generic in the sense of [KM], and the lower bound on the transcendence degree given by [KM, Theorem 4.3] remains valid in our setting.

Example 10.6. Consider the exceptional group G_2. The functors $H^1(\_, G_2)$ and Pf_3 are isomorphic; see, e.g., [KMRT, Corollary 33.20]. Hence, $\mathrm{cd}(G_2) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Pf}_3) = 3$; see (10.1).

11. Groups of type A

In this section we will study canonical dimensions of the groups GL_n/μ_d and SL_n/μ_e, where e divides n. We define the functor

$$C_{n,e}\colon \mathbf{Fields}_k \longrightarrow \mathbf{Sets}^* \tag{11.1}$$

by $C_{n,e}(E/k) = \{$isomorphism classes of central simple E-algebras of degree n and exponent dividing $e\}$. The marked element in $C_{n,e}(E/k)$ is the split algebra $\mathrm{M}_n(E)$. Clearly, $C_{n,e}$ is a subfunctor of $H^1(\_, \mathrm{PGL}_n)$.

Lemma 11.1. *Let n and d be positive integers and e be their greatest common divisor. Then $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{GL}_n/\mu_d) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{GL}_n/\mu_e) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e) = \mathrm{cd}(C_{n,d}) = \mathrm{cd}(C_{n,e})$.*

Proof. By Lemma 2.1, there are surjective morphisms of functors

$$\begin{aligned} &H^1(\_, \mathrm{GL}_n/\mu_d) \longrightarrow C_{n,d}\,,\\ &H^1(\_, \mathrm{GL}_n/\mu_e) \longrightarrow C_{n,e} \quad \text{and}\\ &H^1(\_, \mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e) \longrightarrow C_{n,e}\end{aligned}$$

with trivial kernels. Basic properties of the index and the exponent of a central simple algebra tell us that $C_{n,d} = C_{n,e}$; the rest follows from Lemma 10.2(c). □

Lemma 11.2. *Let n and e be positive integers such that e divides n,*

(a) If $e' \mid e$ and $n' \mid n$ then $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e) \geq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_{n'}/\mu_{e'})$.

(b) Suppose $n = n_1 n_2$ and $e = e_1 e_2$, where $e_i \mid n_i$ and n_1, n_2 are relatively prime. Then

$$\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_{n_1}/\mu_{e_1} \times \mathrm{SL}_{n_2}/\mu_{e_2}) \leq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_{n_1}/\mu_{e_1}) + \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_{n_2}/\mu_{e_2})$$

(c) Let $n = \prod p^{a_p}$ be the prime factorization of n (here the product is taken over all primes p and $a_p = 0$ for all but finitely many primes) and $m = \prod_{p|e} p^{a_p}$. Then $\operatorname{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e) = \operatorname{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_m/\mu_e)$,

Proof. (a) The morphism of functors $C_{n',e'} \longrightarrow C_{n,e}$ given by $A \mapsto \mathrm{M}_{\frac{n}{n'}}(A)$ has trivial kernel. By Lemma 10.2(b), $\operatorname{cd}(C_{n,e}) \geq \operatorname{cd}(C_{n',e'})$. The desired inequality now follows from Lemma 11.1.

(b) First note that the functors

$$H^1(\_, \mathrm{SL}_{n_1}/\mu_{e_1} \times \mathrm{SL}_{n_2}/\mu_{e_2}) \text{ and } H^1(\_, \mathrm{SL}_{n_1}/\mu_{e_1}) \times H^1(\_, \mathrm{SL}_{n_2}/\mu_{e_2})$$

are isomorphic. Thus by Lemma 2.1, there is a surjective morphism of functors

$$H^1(\_, \mathrm{SL}_{n_1}/\mu_{e_1} \times \mathrm{SL}_{n_2}/\mu_{e_2}) \longrightarrow C_{n_1,e_1} \times C_{n_2,e_2}$$

with trivial kernel. By Lemma 10.2(c),

$$\operatorname{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_{n_1}/\mu_{e_1} \times \mathrm{SL}_{n_2}/\mu_{e_2}) = \operatorname{cd}(C_{n_1,e_1} \times C_{n_2,e_2})$$

and by Lemma 11.1, $\operatorname{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e) = \operatorname{cd}(C_{n,e})$. The equality in part (a) now follows from the fact that for relatively prime n_1 and n_2 the functors $C_{n_1,e_1} \times C_{n_2,e_2}$ and $C_{n,e}$ are isomorphic via $(A_1, A_2) \mapsto A_1 \otimes A_2$. The inequality in part (a) is a special case of Lemma 7.5(d). Part (b) is obtained from part (a) by setting $e_1 = n_1$ and $e_2 = n_2$.

(c) By Lemma 11.1, $\operatorname{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e) = \operatorname{cd}(C_{n,e})$ and $\operatorname{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_m/\mu_e) = \operatorname{cd}(C_{m,e})$. On the other hand, basic properties of the index and the exponent of a central simple algebra tell us that the functors $C_{m,e}$ and $C_{n,e}$ are isomorphic via $A \longrightarrow \mathrm{M}_{n/m}(A)$. □

Theorem 11.3. *(Merkurjev) Let $\alpha \in H^1(E, \mathrm{PGL}_n)$ be the class of a division algebra A of degree $n = p^i$, where p is a prime. Then $\operatorname{cd}(\alpha) = n - 1$.*

Proof. Let X be the Brauer-Severi variety of A. A theorem of Merkurjev [M_2, Section 7.2] says, in particular, that every rational map $X \dashrightarrow X$ defined over E is necessarily dominant. Theorem 11.3 is an easy consequence of this result; we outline the argument below.

The function field $K = E(X)$ is a generic splitting field for A; in particular, as we pointed out in Example 9.8, $\operatorname{cd}(\alpha) \leq n-1$. To prove the opposite inequality, assume the contrary: A has a generic splitting field L/E of transcendence degree $< n-1$. Let Y be a variety (defined over E) with function field L. Since $k(X)/E$ and K/E are both generic splitting fields for α, each is a dense specialization of the other. Arguing as in the proof of proof of Proposition 9.7, we see that there exist rational maps $f_1 \colon X \dashrightarrow Y$ and $f_2 \colon Y \dashrightarrow X$ such that the diagram

$$\begin{tikzcd}
X \arrow[r, dashed, "f_1"] \arrow[dr, dashed] & Y \arrow[r, dashed, "f_2"] \arrow[d, dashed] & X \arrow[dl, dashed] \\
& X/G &
\end{tikzcd}$$

commutes and $f_2 \circ f_1$ is a well defined rational map $X \dashrightarrow X$. Now

$$\dim f_2 \circ f_1(X) \leq \dim(Y) < n-1 = \dim(X)\,,$$

contradicting Merkurjev's theorem. □

Corollary 11.4. *Suppose $n = p^i n_0$ and $e = p^j$, where $\gcd(p, n_0) = 1$ and $i \geq j$. Then* $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e) = \begin{cases} 0, \text{ if } j = 0, \\ p^i - 1, \text{ if } j \geq 1. \end{cases}$

Proof. If $j = 0$ then $\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e = \mathrm{SL}_n$ is special and hence, has canonical dimension 0. Thus we only need to consider the case where $j \geq 1$. By Lemma 11.2(c), $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_{p^i}/\mu_{p^j})$. Thus we may also assume that $n_0 = 1$, i.e., $n = p^i$.

By Lemma 11.1, $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e) = \mathrm{cd}(C_{n,e})$. Since $C_{n,e}$ is, by definition, a subfunctor of $H^1(\_, \mathrm{PGL}_n)$, Example 7.6 tells us that $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e) \leq n - 1 = p^i - 1$. To prove the opposite inequality, let A be a division algebra of degree p^i and exponent p^j (such algebras are known to exist; see, e.g., [Row, Appendix 7C]) and let α be the class of A in $H^1(E, \mathrm{PGL}_n)$. Then by Theorem 11.3, $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e) \geq \mathrm{cd}(\alpha) = n-1$, as desired. □

Corollary 11.5. *Let $n = 2^i n_0$, where $i \geq 1$ and n_0 is odd. Then* $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PSp}_n) = 2^i - 1$.

Proof. Recall that every $\alpha \in H^1(\_, \mathrm{PSp}_n)$ is represented by a pair (A, σ), where A is a central simple algebra of degree $2n$ and exponent ≤ 2, and σ is a symplectic involution on A. A central simple algebra has a symplectic involution if and only if its exponent is 1 or 2; moreover, a symplectic involution of a split algebra is necessarily hyperbolic. In other words, the morphism of functors

$$H^1(\_, \mathrm{PSp}_n) \longrightarrow C_{n,2}\,,$$

given by $\alpha \mapsto A$ is surjective and has trivial kernel. Here $C_{n,2}$ is the functor of central simple algebras of degree n and exponent dividing 2, as in (11.1). Thus

$$\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PSp}_n) = \mathrm{cd}(C_{n,2}) \overset{\text{by Lemma 11.1}}{=} \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_2) \overset{\text{by Corollary 11.4}}{=} 2^i - 1\,,$$

as claimed. □

12. Orthogonal and Spin groups

Lemma 12.1. *(a)* $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_{n-1}) \leq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_n)$ *for every $n \geq 2$. Moreover, equality holds if n is even.*

(b) $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_{n-1}) \leq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_n)$ *for every $n \geq 2$. Moreover, equality holds if n is even.*

(c) $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_n) \geq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_n)$ *for every $n \geq 2$. Moreover, if $n \geq 2^r$, where $r \geq 3$ is an integer then* $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_n) \geq 2^{r-1} - 1$.

Proof. (a) The morphism $\tau\colon H^1(\_, \mathrm{SO}_{n-1}) \to H^1(\_, \mathrm{SO}_n)$, sending a quadratic form q to $\langle 1\rangle \oplus q$ has trivial kernel. Lemma 10.2(b) now tells us that $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_{n-1}) \leq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_n)$.

To prove the opposite inequality for n is even, let $q = \langle a_1, \dots, a_n\rangle \in \mathrm{SO}_n$. Then $q = \langle a_1\rangle \otimes \tilde{q}$, where $\tilde{q} = \langle 1, a_1a_2, \dots, a_1a_n\rangle$ lies in the image of τ. (Note that here we use the assumption that n is even to conclude that $\tilde{q}$ has discriminant 1.) Since q and $\tilde{q}$ have the same splitting fields, $\mathrm{cd}(q) = \mathrm{cd}(\tilde{q})$. On the other hand, since $\tilde{q}$ lies in the image of τ, Lemma 10.2(a) tells us that $\mathrm{cd}(\tilde{q}) \leq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_{n-1})$. Thus $\mathrm{cd}(q) \leq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_{n-1})$ and consequently, $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_n) \leq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_{n-1})$, as desired.

(b) is proved by the same argument as (a), using the identity $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_n) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{HW}_n)$ of Example 10.4. The first assertion follows from the fact that τ restricts to a morphism $\mathrm{HW}_{n-1} \longrightarrow \mathrm{HW}_n$. In the proof of the second assertion, the key point is that if a quadratic form $q = \langle a_1\rangle \otimes \tilde{q}$, of even dimension n, has trivial discriminant and trivial Hasse-Witt invariant then so does $\tilde{q}$; the rest of the argument goes through unchanged.

(c) The first inequality follows from the fact that HW_n is a subfunctor of $H^1(\_, \mathrm{SO}_n)$. To prove the second inequality, note that by part (b) we may assume $n = 2^r$. Since the discriminant and the Hasse-Witt invariant of an r-fold Pfister form are both trivial for any $r \geq 3$, we see that Pf_r is a subfunctor of HW_n and thus

$$\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_n) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{HW}_n) \geq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Pf}_r) = 2^{r-1} - 1\,;$$

see Example 10.5. □

Example 12.2. (a) $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_n) = \begin{cases} 0, \text{ if } n = 1 \text{ or } 2, \\ 1, \text{ if } n = 3 \text{ or } 4, \\ 3, \text{ if } n = 5 \text{ or } 6. \end{cases}$

(b) $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_n) = 0$ for $n = 3$, 4, 5 or 6.

(c) $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_n) = 3$ for $n = 7$, 8, 9 or 10.

Proof. (a) Note that $\mathrm{SO}_1 = \{1\}$, $\mathrm{SO}_3 \simeq \mathrm{PGL}_2$, and $\mathrm{SO}_6 \simeq \mathrm{SL}_4/\mu_2$. Hence, $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_1) = 0$, and (by Corollary 11.4) $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_3) = 1$ and $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_6) = 3$. The remaining cases follow from Lemma 12.1(a).

(b) In view of Lemma 12.1(b), it is enough to show that $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_6) = 0$. By the Arason-Pfister theorem [Lam, Theorem 10.3.1], the only 6-dimensional form with trivial discriminant and trivial Hasse-Witt invariant is the split form. In other words, HW_6 is the trivial functor and thus

$$\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_6) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{HW}_6) = 0\,.$$

Alternative proof of (b): Exceptional isomorphisms of simply connected simple groups tell us that $\mathrm{Spin}_3 \simeq \mathrm{SL}_2$, $\mathrm{Spin}_5 \simeq \mathrm{Sp}_4$ and $\mathrm{Spin}_6 \simeq \mathrm{SL}_4$ are all special and hence, have canonical dimension 0; cf. Lemma 7.5(c).

(c) Using the Arason-Pfister theorem once again, we see that every 8-dimensional quadratic form with trivial discriminant and trivial Hasse-Witt invariant, is a scaled Pfister form; see [Lam, Corollary 10.3.3]. Thus

$$\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_7) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_8) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{GPf}_3) = 3\,;$$

see Example 10.5. On the other hand, by a theorem of Pfister every $q \in \mathrm{HW}_{10}$ is isotropic, i.e., has the form $\langle 1, -1\rangle \oplus q'$, where $q' \in \mathrm{HW}_8$; see [Pf, Proof of Satz 14] (cf. also [KM, Theorem 4.4]).

Applying Lemma 10.2(a) to the morphism $\mathrm{HW}_8 \longrightarrow \mathrm{HW}_{10}$ given by $q' \longrightarrow \langle 1, -1\rangle \oplus q'$, we see that

$$\mathrm{cd}(q) = \mathrm{cd}(q') \leq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{HW}_8) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_8)\,.$$

This shows that $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_9) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_{10}) \leq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_8) = 3$. The opposite inequality is given by Lemma 12.1(b). □

Proposition 12.3. $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_{2m}) \leq \frac{m(m-1)}{2}$ *for every* $m \geq 1$.

Proof. Write $\mathrm{SO}_{2m} = \mathrm{SO}(q)$, where q is a non-degenerate quadratic form on k^{2m}. Let $X = \mathrm{Gr}_{iso}(m, 2m)$ be the Grassmannian of maximal (i.e., m-dimensional) q-isotropic subspaces of k^{2m}, i.e., of m-dimensional subspaces contained in the quadric $Q \subset k^{2m}$ given by $q = 0$. It is well known that X is a projective variety with two irreducible components X_1 and X_2, each of dimension $\frac{m(m-1)}{2}$; see e.g., [GH, Section 6.1]. Using the Witt Extension Theorem (see, e.g., [Lam, p. 26]), it is easy to see that the full orthogonal group $\mathrm{O}(q)$ acts transitively on X and $\mathrm{SO}(q)$ acts transitively on each component X_i $(i = 1, 2)$. Fix an isotropic subspace $L \in X_1$ and let $P = \mathrm{Stab}_{\mathrm{SO}(q)}(L)$. By Lemma 7.5(a), with $G = \mathrm{SO}(q)$ and $H = P$, we have

$$\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_{2m}) \leq \mathrm{cd}(P) + \dim(\mathrm{SO}_{2m}) - \dim(P) = \\ \mathrm{cd}(P) + \dim(X_1) = \mathrm{cd}(P) + \frac{m(m-1)}{2}\,.$$

It remains to show that $\mathrm{cd}(P) = 0$. We claim that the Levi subgroup of P is naturally isomorphic to $\mathrm{GL}(L) \simeq \mathrm{GL}_m$ via $f\colon P \longrightarrow \mathrm{GL}(L)$, where $f(g) = g_{|L}$. Once this claim is established, Example 10.1 tells us that $\mathrm{cd}(P) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{GL}_m) = 0$. (The last equality follows from the fact that GL_m is special.)

To prove the claim, note that by the Witt Extension Theorem, f is a surjective homomorphism. It remains to show that $\mathrm{Ker}(f)$ is unipotent. Indeed, choose a basis $e_1, \ldots, e_{2m}$ of k^{2m} so that

$$q(x_1e_1 + \cdots + x_{2m}e_{2m}) = x_1x_{m+1} + \cdots + x_mx_{2m}$$

and L is the span of $e_1, \ldots, e_m$. Then every $g \in \mathrm{Ker}(f)$ has the form

$$g = \begin{pmatrix} I_m & A \\ O_m & B \end{pmatrix}, \qquad (12.1)$$

for some $m \times m$-matrices A and B. (Here O_m and I_m are, respectively, the zero and the identity $m\times m$-matrices.) Our goal is to show that $B = I_m$ (and consequently, $\mathrm{Ker}(f)$ is unipotent). The condition that $g \in \mathrm{O}(q)$ translates into

$$g \begin{pmatrix} O_m & I_m \\ I_m & O_m \end{pmatrix} g^{\mathrm{Transpose}} = \begin{pmatrix} O_m & I_m \\ I_m & O_m \end{pmatrix} . \tag{12.2}$$

Substituting (12.1) into (12.2), we see that $B = I_m$. Formula (12.1) now shows that g is unipotent; consequently, $\mathrm{Ker}(f)$ is a unipotent group, as claimed. □

Conjecture 12.4. $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_{2m-1}) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_{2m}) = \frac{m(m-1)}{2}$ for every $m \geq 1$.

13. Groups of low canonical dimension

Theorem 13.1. *Assume that G is simple. Then $\mathrm{cd}(G) = 1$ if and only if $G \simeq \mathrm{SL}_{2m}/\mu_2$ or PSp_{2m}, where m is an odd integer.*

Proof. First of all, observe that if $G \simeq \mathrm{SL}_{2m}/\mu_2$ or PSp_{2m}, with m odd, then indeed, $\mathrm{cd}(G) = 1$; see Corollary 11.4 and Corollary 11.5. Thus we only need to show that no other simple group has this property. Our proof relies on the classification of simple algebraic groups; cf., e.g., [KMRT, §24 and 25] [1]. We begin by observing that $\mathrm{cd}(G) \geq 2$ for every simple group of exceptional type; see Examples 8.5, 8.6 and 10.6.

Now suppose $\mathrm{cd}(G) = 1$ and G is of type A. Then $G \simeq \mathrm{SL}_n/\mu_e$, where e divides n. Let p be a prime dividing e. Then we can write $e = p^j e_0$ and $n = p^i n_0$, where $i \geq j \geq 1$, and $\gcd(p, e_0) = \gcd(p, n_0) = 1$. Then

$$1 = \mathrm{cd}(G) \overset{\text{by Lemma 11.2(a)}}{\geq} \mathrm{SL}_{p^i}/\mu_{p^j} \overset{\text{by Corollary 11.4}}{\geq} p^i - 1 ,$$

which is only possible if $p = 2$ and $i = 1$. This implies that e cannot be divisible by 4 or by any prime $p \geq 3$; in other words, $e = 1$ or 2. If $e = 1$ then $G = \mathrm{SL}_n$ is special and thus $\mathrm{cd}(G) = 0$. If $e = 2$ then $i = 1$ implies that $n \equiv 2 \pmod 4$, as claimed.

Next suppose G is of type C. Then G is isomorphic to Sp_{2m} or PSp_{2m}. The groups Sp_{2m} are special and thus have canonical dimension 0. By Corollary 11.5, $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PSp}_{2m}) = 1$ if and only if m is odd. This completes the proof of Theorem 13.1 for groups of type A or C.

Now suppose G is of type B or D. We have already considered some of these groups. In particular,

- $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_n) \geq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_5) = 3$ for any $n \geq 5$ (see Lemma 12.1(a) and Example 12.2(a)),
- $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PSO}_{2n}) \geq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SO}_{2n}) \geq 3$ for any $n \geq 3$ (see Example 10.3),
- $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_n) = 0$ for $n = 3, 4, 5, 6$ (see Example 12.2(b)), and
- $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_n) \geq \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_7) = 3$ for any $n \geq 7$ (see Lemma 12.1 and Example 12.2(c)).

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[1] [KMRT] uses the symbols O^+ and PGSp instead of SO and PSp. Recall, however, that we are working over an algebraically closed base field k of characteristic zero; in particular, for us $\mathrm{O}^+ = \mathrm{SO}$ and $\mathrm{PGSp} = \mathrm{PSp}$.

We also remark that $\mathrm{SO}_2 \simeq \mathbb{G}_m$ and $\mathrm{SO}_4 \simeq (\mathrm{SL}_2 \times \mathrm{SL}_2)/\mu_2$ are not simple, and $\mathrm{SO}_3 \simeq \mathrm{PGL}_2 = \mathrm{SL}_2/\mu_2$ was considered above.

This covers every simple group of type B; the only simple groups of type D we have not yet considered are $G = \mathrm{Spin}_{4n}^{\pm}$ ($n \geq 2$); cf., e.g., [KMRT, Theorems 25.10 and 25.12]. The natural projection $\pi \colon \mathrm{Spin}_{4n} \longrightarrow \mathrm{SO}_{4n}$ factors through $\mathrm{Spin}_{4n}^{\pm}$:

$$\pi \colon \mathrm{Spin}_{4n} \xrightarrow{f} \mathrm{Spin}_{4n}^{\pm} \longrightarrow \mathrm{SO}_{4n} \ .$$

Since $\pi_* \colon H^1(\_, \mathrm{Spin}_{4n}) \longrightarrow H^1(\_, \mathrm{SO}_{4n})$ has trivial kernel (see Example 10.4), so does $f_* \colon H^1(\_, \mathrm{Spin}_{4n}) \longrightarrow H^1(\_, \mathrm{Spin}_{4n}^{\pm})$. Now for any $n \geq 2$,

$$\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_{4n}^{\pm}) \overset{\text{by Lemma 10.2(b)}}{\geq} \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_{4n}) \overset{\text{by Lemma 12.1(b)}}{\geq} \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{Spin}_8) \overset{\text{by Example 12.2(c)}}{=} 3 \, .$$

This completes the proof of Theorem 13.1. $\square$

Remark 13.2. The above argument also shows that if a simple classical group G has canonical dimension 2 then either (i) $G \simeq \mathrm{SL}_{3m}/\mu_3$, where m is prime to 3 or possibly (ii) $G \simeq \mathrm{SL}_{6m}/\mu_6$, where m is prime to 6. In case (i), we know that $\mathrm{cd}(G) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PGL}_3) = 2$; see Corollary 11.4. In case (ii), $\mathrm{cd}(G) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{PGL}_6)$ (see Corollary 11.2(c)); we do not know whether this number is 2 or 3.

14. Essential dimensions of homogeneous forms I

We now briefly recall the definition of essential dimension of a functor, due to Merkurjev [M_1].

Let $\mathcal{F}$ be a functor from the category of all field extensions K of k to the category of sets. (For our purposes, it is sufficient to consider only finitely generated extensions K/k.) Given $\alpha \in \mathcal{F}(K)$, we define $\mathrm{ed}(\alpha)$ as the minimal value of $\mathrm{trdeg}_k(K_0)$, where $k \subset K_0 \subset K$ and α lies in the image of the natural map $\mathcal{F}(K_0) \longrightarrow \mathcal{F}(K)$. The essential dimension $\mathrm{ed}(\mathcal{F})$ of the functor $\mathcal{F}$ is then defined as the maximal value of $\mathrm{ed}(\alpha)$, as α ranges over $\mathcal{F}(K)$ and K ranges over all field extensions of k. In the special case, where G is an algebraic group and $\mathcal{F} = H^1(\_, G)$ we recover the numbers defined in Section 2.1: $\mathrm{ed}(\alpha) = \mathrm{ed}(X, G)$, where $\alpha \in H^1(K, G)$ and X is a generically free G-variety representing α. Moreover, $\mathrm{ed}(H^1(\_, G)) = \mathrm{ed}(G)$. For details, see [$\mathrm{BF}_2$].

Now to each G-variety X we will associate the functor $\mathbf{Orb}_{X,G}$ given by $\mathbf{Orb}_{X,G}(L) = X(L)/\sim$, where $a \sim b$ for $a, b \in X(L)$, if $a = g \cdot b$ for some $g \in G(L)$. Given an L-point $a \in X(L)$, we shall denote $a \pmod{\sim}$ by $[a] \in \mathbf{Orb}_{X,G}(L)$. Using this terminology, Definition 3.3 can be rewritten as follows.

Proposition 14.1. $\mathrm{ed}\,[\eta] = \mathrm{cd}(X, G) + \dim X/G$, *where* $\eta \in X(k(X))$ *is the generic point of* X.

Proof. Let Y be a variety with function field $k(Y) = L$. Then $z \in X(L)$ may be viewed as a rational map $\phi_z \colon Y \dashrightarrow X$ and $g \in G(L)$ as a rational map

$f_g\colon Y \dashrightarrow G$. The point $g\cdot y$ of $X(L)$ corresponds to the map $F_{z,g}\colon Y \dashrightarrow X$ given by $F_{z,g}(y) = \phi_z(y)\cdot f(y)$. Consequently, the definition of $\mathrm{ed}([z])$ can be rewritten as

$$\mathrm{ed}\,[z] = \min_{g\in G(L)} \{\, \mathrm{trdeg}_k\ k(F_{z,g}(Y))\,\}\,. \tag{14.1}$$

Now set $z=\eta$, $L=k(X)$, $Y=X$, and $\phi = id_X$. The element $g\in G(L)$ is then a rational map $f=f_g\colon X \dashrightarrow G$, $F=F_{z,g}\colon X \dashrightarrow X$ is, by definition, a canonical form map (see the beginning of Section 3) and the proposition follows from (14.1) and Definition 3.3. $\square$

For the rest of this paper we will focus on the following example. Let $N = \binom{n+d-1}{d}$ and let $X=\mathbb{A}^N$ be the space of degree d forms in n variables $x=(x_1,\dots,x_n)$. That is, elements of $\mathbb{A}^N$ are forms $p(x_1,\dots,x_n)$ of degree d and elements of $\mathbb{P}^{N-1}$ are hypersurfaces $p(x_1,\dots,x_n)=0$. The generic point of $\mathbb{A}^N$ is the "general" degree d form in n variables as

$$\phi_{n,d}(x) = \sum_{i_1+\dots+i_d=n} a_{i_1,\dots,i_n} x_1^{i_1}\dots x_n^{i_n} \in K[x_1,\dots,x_n]\,,$$

where $a_{i_1,\dots,i_n}$ are independent variables, $K=k(\mathbb{A}^N)$ is the field these variables generate over k. The generic point of $\mathbb{P}^{N-1}$ is the "general" degree d hypersurface $\phi_{n,d}(x)=0$ in $\mathbb{P}^{N-1}(K)$, which we denote by $H_{n,d}$. Then

$$\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{n,d}) = \min_{g\in \mathrm{GL}_n(K)} \mathrm{trdeg}_k(b_{i_1,\dots,i_d}\,|i_1+\dots+i_n=d)\,, \tag{14.2}$$

where

$$\phi_{n,d}(g\cdot x) = \sum_{i_1+\dots+i_n=d} b_{i_1,\dots,i_n} x_1^{i_1}\dots x_n^{i_n}\,.$$

Similarly

$$\mathrm{ed}(H_{n,d}) = \min_{g\in \mathrm{GL}_n(K)} \mathrm{trdeg}_k(\frac{b_{i_1,\dots,i_n}}{b_{j_1,\dots,j_n}})\,, \tag{14.3}$$

where the minimum is taken over all $i_1,\dots,i_n,j_1,\dots,j_n \geq 0$ such that $i_1+\dots+i_n = j_1+\dots+j_n = d$ and $b_{j_1,\dots,j_n}\neq 0$; cf. [BF$_2$, Section 1]. It is natural to think of $\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{n,d})$ (respectively, $\mathrm{ed}(H_{n,d})$) as the minimal number of independent parameters required to define the general form of degree d in n variables (respectively, the general degree d hypersurface in $\mathbb{P}^{n-1}$).

It is clear from (14.2) and (14.3) that

$$\mathrm{ed}(H_{n,d}) \leq \mathrm{ed}(\phi_{n,d}) \leq \mathrm{ed}(H_{n,d})+1\,. \tag{14.4}$$

Lemma 14.2. *Let* $N = \binom{n+d-1}{d}$ *and*

$$D = \dim(\mathbb{A}^N/\,\mathrm{GL}_n) = \dim(\mathbb{P}^{N-1}/\,\mathrm{PGL}_n)\,.$$

Then

(a) $\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{n,d}) = D + \mathrm{cd}(\mathbb{A}^N,\mathrm{GL}_n)$,

(b) $\operatorname{ed}(H_{n,d}) = D + \operatorname{cd}(\mathbb{P}^{N-1}, \operatorname{GL}_n) = D + \operatorname{cd}(\mathbb{P}^{N-1}, \operatorname{PGL}_n)$.

Proof. Part (a) and the first equality in part (b) are immediate consequences of Proposition 14.1. The second equality in part (b) follows from Lemma 4.3(b). $\square$

Theorem 14.3. *Let n and d be positive integers such that $d \geq 3$ and $(n, d) \neq (2, 3)$, $(2, 4)$ or $(3, 3)$. Then*

$$\operatorname{ed}(H_{n,d}) = N - n^2 + \operatorname{cd}(\operatorname{GL}_n / \mu_d) = N - n^2 + \operatorname{cd}(\operatorname{SL}_n / \mu_{\gcd(n,d)}) \, ,$$

where $N = \binom{n+d-1}{d}$.

Proof. First observe that by Lemma 11.1, $\operatorname{cd}(\operatorname{GL}_n / \mu_d) = \operatorname{cd}(\operatorname{SL}_n / \mu_{\gcd(n,d)})$, so only the first equality needs to be proved.

Secondly, under our assumption on n and d, the PGL_n-action on $\mathbb{P}^{N-1}$ is generically free. For $n = 2$ this is classically known (cf., e.g., [PV, p. 231]), for $n = 3$, this is proved in [B] and for $n \geq 4$ in [MM]. Substituting

$$D = \dim(\mathbb{P}^{N-1}/ \operatorname{PGL}_n) = \dim(\mathbb{P}^{N-1}) - \dim(\operatorname{PGL}_n) = N - n^2$$

into Lemma 14.2(b), we reduce the theorem to the identity

$$\operatorname{cd}(\mathbb{P}^{N-1}, \operatorname{PGL}_n) = \operatorname{cd}(\operatorname{GL}_n / \mu_d) \, . \tag{14.5}$$

To prove (14.5), consider the morphism of functors $f \colon H^1(\_, \operatorname{GL}_n / \mu_d) \longrightarrow H^1(\_, \operatorname{PGL}_n)$ induced by the natural projection $\operatorname{GL}_n / \mu_d \longrightarrow \operatorname{PGL}_n$. Let $E = k(\mathbb{P}^{N-1})^{\operatorname{PGL}_n}$. Then the element of $\alpha \in H^1(E, \operatorname{PGL}_n)$ represented by the PGL_n-variety $\mathbb{P}^{N-1}$ is the image of $\beta \in H^1(E, \operatorname{GL}_n / \mu_d)$ represented by the $\operatorname{GL}_n / \mu_d$-variety $\mathbb{A}^N$. Note that $\mathbb{A}^N$ is a generically free linear representation of $\operatorname{GL}_n / \mu_d$ and thus, $\operatorname{cd}(\beta) = \operatorname{cd}(\operatorname{GL}_n / \mu_d)$. By Lemma 2.1(a), f has trivial kernel. Thus $\operatorname{cd}(\mathbb{P}^{N-1}, \operatorname{PGL}_n) = \operatorname{cd}(\alpha) = \operatorname{cd}(\beta)$ (see Lemma 10.2), and the proof of (14.5) is complete. $\square$

The results of Section 11 can now be used to determine $\operatorname{ed}(H_{n,d})$ for many values of n and d (and produce estimates for others). In particular, combining Theorem 14.3 with Corollary 11.4, we deduce Theorem 1.1 stated in the Introduction.

The number $\operatorname{ed}(\phi_{n,d})$ appears to be harder to compute than $\operatorname{ed}(H_{n,d})$. Of course, $\operatorname{cd}(\phi_{n,d}) = \operatorname{cd}(H_{n,d})$ or $\operatorname{cd}(\phi_{n,d}) = \operatorname{cd}(H_{n,d}) + 1$ (see (14.4)), but for most n and d, we do not know which of these cases occurs. One notable exception is given by the following corollary.

Corollary 14.4. *Suppose $d \geq 3$, $\gcd(n, d) = 1$ and $(n, d) \neq (2, 3)$. Then*

(a) $\operatorname{ed}(H_{n,d}) = \binom{n+d-1}{d} - n^2$ *and*

(b) $\operatorname{ed}(\phi_{n,d}) = \binom{n+d-1}{d} - n^2 + 1$.

Proof. Part (a) is a special case of Theorem 1.1 (with $i = 0$). We can also deduce it directly from Theorem 14.3 by noting that SL_n is a special group and thus $\mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{SL}_n) = 0$.

(b) In view of (14.4), we only need to prove that $\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{n,d}) \geq \mathrm{ed}(H_{n,d}) + 1$ or equivalently, $\mathrm{cd}(\mathbb{A}^N, \mathrm{GL}_n) \geq 1$; see Lemma 14.2. Recall that the central subgroup μ_d of GL_n acts trivially on $\mathbb{A}^N$, and (under our assumptions on n and d) the induced GL_n/μ_d-action is generically free. Thus the stabilizer in general position for the GL_n-action on $\mathbb{A}^N$ is μ_d, and by Proposition 5.5(c), $\mathrm{cd}(\mathbb{A}^N, \mathrm{GL}_n) \geq \mathrm{ed}(\mu_d) = 1$, as claimed. □

15. Essential dimensions of homogeneous forms II

In this section we will study $\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{n,d})$ and $\mathrm{ed}(H_{n,d})$ for the pairs (n, d) not covered by Theorem 14.3. We begin with a simple lemma.

Lemma 15.1. $\mathrm{ed}(H_{2,d}) \leq d - 2$ *for any* $d \geq 3$.

In the sequel we will only need this lemma for $d = 3$ and 4. (Note that substituting $n = 2$ into Theorem 1.1 shows that for any $d \geq 5$, $\mathrm{ed}(H_{2,d}) = d - 2$ if d is even and $d - 3$ if d is odd.) However, the proof below is valid for all $d \geq 3$.

Proof. The linear transformation

$$x_1 \mapsto x_1 - \frac{a_{n-1,1}}{n}\,, \quad x_2 \mapsto x_2$$

reduces the generic binary form

$$\phi_{2,d}(x_1, x_2) = a_{d,0}x_1^d + a_{d-1,1}x_1^{d-1}x_2 + \cdots + a_{0,d}x_2^d$$

to

$$b_{d,0}x_1^d + b_{d-2,2}x_1^{d-2}x_2^2 + \cdots + b_{1,d-1}x_1x_2^{d-1} + b_{0,d}x_2^d$$

for some $b_{i,d-i} \in K = k(a_{0,d}, \ldots, a_{d,0})$. After a further substitution

$$x_1 \mapsto \frac{b_{0,d}}{b_{1,d-1}}x_1\,, \quad x_2 \mapsto x_2$$

we may assume $b_{1,d-1} = b_{0,d}$. The field $k(b_{i,d-i}/b_{j,d-j} \,|\, i, j = 1, \ldots, n)$ now has transcendence degree $\leq d - 2$; this proves the lemma. □

We are now ready to proceed with the main result of this section.

Proposition 15.2. *(a)* $\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{n,1}) = \mathrm{ed}(H_{n,1}) = 0$.

(b) $\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{n,2}) = n$ *and* $\mathrm{ed}(H_{n,2}) = n - 1$.

(c) $\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{2,3}) = 2$ *and* $\mathrm{ed}(H_{2,3}) = 1$.

(d) $\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{2,4}) = 3$ *and* $\mathrm{ed}(H_{2,4}) = 2$.

(e) $\mathrm{ed}(H_{3,3}) = 3$.

We do not know whether $\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{3,3})$ is 3 or 4.

Proof. (a) A linear form $l(x_1, \dots, x_n)$ over K can be reduced to just x_1 by applying a linear transformation $g \in \mathrm{GL}_n(K)$. Thus $\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{n,1}) = \mathrm{ed}(H_{n,1}) = 0$.

(b) Here $d = 2$, $N = n(n+1)/2$, and elements of $\mathbb{A}^N$ are quadratic forms in n variables. Diagonalizing the generic quadratic form $\phi_{n,2}$ over K, we see that $\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{n,2}) \leq n$ and $\mathrm{ed}(H_{n,2}) \leq n-1$. In view of (14.4) it suffices to show that $\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{n,2}) = n$.

The GL_n-action on $\mathbb{A}^N$ has a dense orbit, consisting of non-singular forms. In particular, $D = \dim(\mathbb{A}^N/\mathrm{GL}_n) = 0$, so that by Lemma 14.2

$$\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{n,2}) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathbb{A}^N, \mathrm{GL}_n)\,.$$

Since the stabilizer of a non-singular form is the orthogonal group O_n, $\mathbb{A}^N$ is birationally G-equivariantly isomorphic to $\mathrm{GL}_n/\mathrm{O}_n$. Thus

$$\begin{aligned}\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{n,2}) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathbb{A}^N, \mathrm{GL}_n) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{GL}_n/\mathrm{O}_n, \mathrm{GL}_n) &\overset{\text{by Corollary 5.7(b)}}{=} \\ \mathrm{ed}(\mathrm{O}_n) &\overset{\text{by [R, Theorem 10.3]}}{=} n\,.\end{aligned}$$

This completes the proof of part (b).

(c) By Lemma 15.1, $\mathrm{ed}(H_{2,3}) \leq 1$. Thus in view of (14.4), we only need to show that $\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{2,3}) \geq 2$.

Here $N = 4$, and the GL_2-action on $\mathbb{A}^4$ has a dense orbit consisting of binary cubic forms with three distinct roots. Applying Lemma 14.2, with $D = \dim(\mathbb{A}^4/\mathrm{GL}_2) = 0$, as in part (b), we obtain

$$\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{2,3}) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathbb{A}^4, \mathrm{GL}_2) = \mathrm{cd}(\mathrm{GL}_2/S, \mathrm{GL}_2) \overset{\text{by Corollary 5.7(b)}}{=} \mathrm{ed}(S)\,,$$

where $S \subset \mathrm{GL}_2$ is the stabilizer of a binary cubic form with three roots, say of $x^3 + y^3$. Note that S is a finite group and that matrices that multiply x and y by third roots of unity form a subgroup of S isomorphic to $(\mathbb{Z}/3\mathbb{Z})^2$. Thus $\mathrm{ed}(S) \geq \mathrm{ed}\,(\mathbb{Z}/3\mathbb{Z})^2 = 2$ (cf. [BR, Lemma 4.1(a) and Theorem 6.1]), as desired.

(d) By Lemma 15.1, $\mathrm{ed}(H_{2,4}) \leq 2$. In view of (14.4), it remains to prove the inequality $\mathrm{ed}(\phi_{2,4}) \geq 3$. Note that since the invariant field $k(\mathbb{A}^5)^{\mathrm{GL}_2}$ is generated by one element (namely, the cross-ratio of the four roots of the quartic binary form), we have $D = \dim(\mathbb{A}^5/\mathrm{GL}_2) = 1$. Thus we only need to show that

$$\mathrm{cd}(\mathbb{A}^5, \mathrm{GL}_2) \geq 2\,. \tag{15.1}$$

Let S be the stabilizer of $f \in \mathbb{A}^4$ (i.e., of a degree 4 binary form) in general position. By Proposition 5.5(c),

$$\mathrm{cd}(\mathbb{A}^5, \mathrm{GL}_2) \geq \mathrm{ed}(S)\,.$$

To compute $\mathrm{ed}(S)$, recall that the stabilizer of f in PGL_2 is isomorphic to $(\mathbb{Z}/2\mathbb{Z})^2$; cf. e.g., [PV, p. 231]. It is now easy to see that S fits into the sequence

$$\{1\} \longrightarrow \mathbb{Z}/3\mathbb{Z} \longrightarrow S \longrightarrow (\mathbb{Z}/2\mathbb{Z})^2 \longrightarrow \{1\}\,.$$

In particular, $|S| = 12$ and S is not cyclic. By [BR, Theorem 6.2(a)], we have $\mathrm{ed}(S) \geq 2$. This concludes the proof of (15.1) and thus of part (d). For the sake of completeness, we remark that since S is a finite subgroup of GL_2, we also have $\mathrm{ed}(S) \leq 2$ and thus $\mathrm{ed}(S) = 2$.

(e) Here $N = 10$, and the rational quotient $\mathbb{P}^9/\mathrm{GL}_3$ is the j-line, so that $D = \dim \mathbb{P}^9/\mathrm{GL}_3 = 1$. Thus we only need to show

$$\mathrm{cd}(\mathbb{P}^9, \mathrm{GL}_3) = 2\,. \tag{15.2}$$

An element of $\mathbb{P}^9$ (i.e., a plane cubic curve) in general position can be written as $F_\lambda = x^3+y^3+z^3+3\lambda xyz$. Denote the stabilizer of F_λ by $S \subset \mathrm{GL}_3$. We will deduce (15.2) from Corollary 6.2(b). Indeed, let N be the normalizer of S in GL_3. Since GL_3 is a special group, $e(\mathrm{GL}_3, S) = \mathrm{ed}(S)$, $e(\mathrm{GL}_3, N) = \mathrm{ed}(N)$ (see Lemma 5.4(c)), and Corollary 6.2(b) assumes the following form:

$$\mathrm{ed}(S) \leq \mathrm{cd}(\mathbb{P}^9, \mathrm{GL}_3) \leq \mathrm{ed}(N) - \dim(S) + \dim(N)\,.$$

Let $\overline{S}$ and $\overline{N}$ be the images of S and N in PGL_3, under the natural projection $\mathrm{GL}_3 \longrightarrow \mathrm{PGL}_3$. Note that $\overline{S}$ is a finite group (this follows from the fact that $D = \dim \mathbb{P}^9/\mathrm{PGL}_3 = 1$). In particular, $\dim(S) = 1$. It thus suffices to show:

(e_1) $\mathrm{ed}(S) \geq 2$,

(e_2) $\overline{N}$ is a finite subgroup of PGL_3 (and consequently, $\dim(N) = 1$).

(e_3) $\mathrm{ed}(N) \leq 2$.

The inequality (e_1) is a consequence of [RY_1, Corollary 7.3], with $G = S$ and

$$H = \langle \mathrm{diag}(1, \zeta, \zeta^2), \sigma \rangle \simeq (\mathbb{Z}/3\mathbb{Z})^2\,, \tag{15.3}$$

where σ is a cyclic permutation of the variables x, y, z, and ζ is a primitive third root of unity. (Note that [RY_1, Corollary 7.3] applies because S has no non-trivial unipotent elements, and the centralizer of H in S is finite.)

To prove (e_2), note that $\overline{N}$ is the normalizer of $\overline{S}$ in PGL_n. The natural 3-dimensional representation of $S \subset \mathrm{GL}_3$ is irreducible (to see this, restrict to the subgroup H of S defined in (15.3)). Hence, by Schur's lemma, the centralizer $C_{\mathrm{PGL}_n}(\overline{S}) = \{1\}$, so that $\overline{N} = N_{\mathrm{PGL}_n}(\overline{S})/C_{\mathrm{PGL}_n}(\overline{S})$. The last group is naturally isomorphic to a subgroup of $\mathrm{Aut}(\overline{S})$, which is a finite group. This proves (e_2).

To prove (e_3), consider the natural representation of $N \subset \mathrm{GL}_3$ on $\mathbb{A}^3$. (e_2) implies that this representation is generically free; cf. [BF_1, Section 1]. Consequently, $\mathrm{ed}(N) \leq 3 - \dim(N) = 2$.

This completes the proof of part (e). □

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