

# Uniform triples and fixed point spaces

Gunter Malle

TU Kaiserslautern

16. April 2010

Joint with Robert M. Guralnick (USC)

# Fixed point spaces

$k$  a field,  $V = k^n$ ,

# Fixed point spaces

$k$  a field,  $V = k^n$ ,  $G \leq \text{GL}(V)$  a linear group

# Fixed point spaces

$k$  a field,  $V = k^n$ ,  $G \leq \text{GL}(V)$  a linear group

What can be said about eigenspaces of elements  $g \in G$ ?

# Fixed point spaces

$k$  a field,  $V = k^n$ ,  $G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  a linear group

What can be said about eigenspaces of elements  $g \in G$ ?

Here: how small are fixed point spaces?

# Fixed point spaces

$k$  a field,  $V = k^n$ ,  $G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  a linear group

What can be said about eigenspaces of elements  $g \in G$ ?

Here: how small are fixed point spaces?

Assume  $G$  irreducible

# Fixed point spaces

$k$  a field,  $V = k^n$ ,  $G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  a linear group

What can be said about eigenspaces of elements  $g \in G$ ?

Here: how small are fixed point spaces?

Assume  $G$  irreducible

$G = \mathrm{SO}_3(k)$  is irreducible, but any  $g \in G$  has 1-dimensional fixed space.



# Fixed point spaces

$k$  a field,  $V = k^n$ ,  $G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  a linear group

What can be said about eigenspaces of elements  $g \in G$ ?

Here: how small are fixed point spaces?

Assume  $G$  irreducible

$G = \mathrm{SO}_3(k)$  is irreducible, but any  $g \in G$  has 1-dimensional fixed space.

Here,  $\dim C_V(g) \geq \frac{1}{3} \dim V$ .

# Some history

## Some history

Theorem (P. Neumann (1966))

$G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  finite irreducible solvable  $\implies$  there exists  $g \in G$  with

$$\dim C_V(g) \leq \frac{7}{18} \dim V. \quad (7/18 \approx 0.3888)$$

## Some history

Theorem (P. Neumann (1966))

$G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  finite irreducible solvable  $\implies$  there exists  $g \in G$  with

$$\dim C_V(g) \leq \frac{7}{18} \dim V. \quad (7/18 \approx 0.3888)$$

Theorem (Segal–Shalev (1999))

$G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  finite irreducible  $\implies$  there exists  $g \in G$  with

$$\dim C_V(g) \leq \frac{3}{4} \dim V.$$

## Some history

Theorem (P. Neumann (1966))

$G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  finite irreducible solvable  $\implies$  there exists  $g \in G$  with

$$\dim C_V(g) \leq \frac{7}{18} \dim V. \quad (7/18 \approx 0.3888)$$

Theorem (Segal–Shalev (1999))

$G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  finite irreducible  $\implies$  there exists  $g \in G$  with

$$\dim C_V(g) \leq \frac{3}{4} \dim V.$$

Uses classification of finite simple groups (CFSG)

# Recent results

## Recent results

$G$  finite,  $p$  smallest prime divisor of  $|G|$

## Recent results

$G$  finite,  $p$  smallest prime divisor of  $|G|$

Theorem (Isaacs–Keller–Meierfrankenfeld–Moretó (2006))

$G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  irreducible  $\implies$  there exists  $g \in G$  with

$$\dim C_V(g) \leq \frac{1}{p} \dim V.$$



## Recent results

$G$  finite,  $p$  smallest prime divisor of  $|G|$

Theorem (Isaacs–Keller–Meierfrankenfeld–Moretó (2006))

$G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  irreducible  $\implies$  there exists  $g \in G$  with

$$\dim C_V(g) \leq \frac{1}{p} \dim V.$$

Theorem (Guralnick–Maróti (2010))

$G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  without trivial composition factor  $\implies$  there exists  $g \in G$  with

$$\dim C_V(g) < \frac{1}{p} \dim V.$$

## Recent results

$G$  finite,  $p$  smallest prime divisor of  $|G|$

Theorem (Isaacs–Keller–Meierfrankenfeld–Moretó (2006))

$G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  irreducible  $\implies$  there exists  $g \in G$  with

$$\dim C_V(g) \leq \frac{1}{p} \dim V.$$

Theorem (Guralnick–Maróti (2010))

$G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  without trivial composition factor  $\implies$  there exists  $g \in G$  with

$$\dim C_V(g) < \frac{1}{p} \dim V.$$

Both use CFSG

# Main result

# Main result

$G \neq 1$  arbitrary group

# Main result

$G \neq 1$  arbitrary group

## Theorem A

$G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  irreducible  $\implies$  there exists  $g \in G$  with

$$\dim C_V(g) \leq \frac{1}{3} \dim V.$$

# Main result

$G \neq 1$  arbitrary group

## Theorem A

$G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$  irreducible  $\implies$  there exists  $g \in G$  with

$$\dim C_V(g) \leq \frac{1}{3} \dim V.$$

Best possible by example of  $\mathrm{SO}_3(k)$ .

# Large dimension

# Large dimension

Better bounds for larger dimensions?



# Large dimension

Better bounds for larger dimensions?

## Theorem B

*For any  $\epsilon > 0$  there exists  $N > 0$  with the following property:*

# Large dimension

Better bounds for larger dimensions?

## Theorem B

*For any  $\epsilon > 0$  there exists  $N > 0$  with the following property:  
 $G$  finite quasi-simple  $\implies$  there is  $g \in G$  such that for all irreducible  $\mathbb{C}G$ -modules  $V$  with  $\dim V > N$ :  
every eigenspace of  $g$  has dimension  $\leq \epsilon \dim V$ .*

# Large dimension

Better bounds for larger dimensions?

## Theorem B

*For any  $\epsilon > 0$  there exists  $N > 0$  with the following property:  
 $G$  finite quasi-simple  $\implies$  there is  $g \in G$  such that for all irreducible  $\mathbb{C}G$ -modules  $V$  with  $\dim V > N$ :  
every eigenspace of  $g$  has dimension  $\leq \epsilon \dim V$ .*

So:  $G$  quasi-simple,  $\dim V$  large  $\implies$  all eigenspaces are small

# Large dimension

Better bounds for larger dimensions?

## Theorem B

*For any  $\epsilon > 0$  there exists  $N > 0$  with the following property:  
 $G$  finite quasi-simple  $\implies$  there is  $g \in G$  such that for all irreducible  $\mathbb{C}G$ -modules  $V$  with  $\dim V > N$ :  
every eigenspace of  $g$  has dimension  $\leq \epsilon \dim V$ .*

So:  $G$  quasi-simple,  $\dim V$  large  $\implies$  all eigenspaces are small

## Example

$G_m = \mathfrak{A}_5 \times \dots \times \mathfrak{A}_5$  ( $m$  copies) acting on

$V_m = W \otimes \dots \otimes W$  ( $m$  copies),  $W$  5-dim'l irred.  $\mathbb{C}\mathfrak{A}_5$ -module

# Large dimension

Better bounds for larger dimensions?

## Theorem B

*For any  $\epsilon > 0$  there exists  $N > 0$  with the following property:  
 $G$  finite quasi-simple  $\implies$  there is  $g \in G$  such that for all irreducible  $\mathbb{C}G$ -modules  $V$  with  $\dim V > N$ :  
every eigenspace of  $g$  has dimension  $\leq \epsilon \dim V$ .*

So:  $G$  quasi-simple,  $\dim V$  large  $\implies$  all eigenspaces are small

## Example

$G_m = \mathfrak{A}_5 \times \dots \times \mathfrak{A}_5$  ( $m$  copies) acting on  
 $V_m = W \otimes \dots \otimes W$  ( $m$  copies),  $W$  5-dim'l irred.  $\mathbb{C}\mathfrak{A}_5$ -module

$$\implies \dim C_{V_m}(g) > \frac{1}{50} \dim V_m \quad \text{for all } g \in G_m.$$

## Reductions for Thm. A

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$ ,  $V = k^n$ , irreducible.

## Reductions for Thm. A

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$ ,  $V = k^n$ , irreducible.

Step 1: wlog  $G$  absolutely irreducible

## Reductions for Thm. A

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$ ,  $V = k^n$ , irreducible.

Step 1: wlog  $G$  absolutely irreducible

*Over splitting field,  $V$  is sum of Galois conjugates, all with same fixed spaces.*



## Reductions for Thm. A

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$ ,  $V = k^n$ , irreducible.

Step 1: wlog  $G$  absolutely irreducible

*Over splitting field,  $V$  is sum of Galois conjugates, all with same fixed spaces.*

Step 2: wlog  $G$  finitely generated

## Reductions for Thm. A

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$ ,  $V = k^n$ , irreducible.

Step 1: wlog  $G$  absolutely irreducible

*Over splitting field,  $V$  is sum of Galois conjugates, all with same fixed spaces.*

Step 2: wlog  $G$  finitely generated

*Indeed, there are  $g_1, \dots, g_n \in G$  which generate irreducible subgroup*

## Reductions for Thm. A

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$ ,  $V = k^n$ , irreducible.

Step 1: wlog  $G$  absolutely irreducible

*Over splitting field,  $V$  is sum of Galois conjugates, all with same fixed spaces.*

Step 2: wlog  $G$  finitely generated

*Indeed, there are  $g_1, \dots, g_n \in G$  which generate irreducible subgroup*

Step 3: wlog  $G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(R)$  with  $R$  finitely generated over  $\mathbb{Z}$  or  $\mathbb{F}_p$

## Reductions for Thm. A

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}(V)$ ,  $V = k^n$ , irreducible.

Step 1: wlog  $G$  absolutely irreducible

*Over splitting field,  $V$  is sum of Galois conjugates, all with same fixed spaces.*

Step 2: wlog  $G$  finitely generated

*Indeed, there are  $g_1, \dots, g_n \in G$  which generate irreducible subgroup*

Step 3: wlog  $G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(R)$  with  $R$  finitely generated over  $\mathbb{Z}$  or  $\mathbb{F}_p$

*Indeed, take entries of  $g_1^{\pm 1}, \dots, g_n^{\pm 1}$*

## Reductions, continued

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(R)$  abs. irred.,  $R$  finitely generated

## Reductions, continued

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(R)$  abs. irred.,  $R$  finitely generated

Step 4: wlog  $G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(q)$  finite

## Reductions, continued

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(R)$  abs. irred.,  $R$  finitely generated

Step 4: wlog  $G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(q)$  finite

*Clear for  $|R| < \infty$ .*

## Reductions, continued

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(R)$  abs. irred.,  $R$  finitely generated

Step 4: wlog  $G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(q)$  finite

*Clear for  $|R| < \infty$ .*

*Else take  $n^2$  elements  $h_i \in G$  which span  $R^{n \times n}$ .*



## Reductions, continued

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(R)$  abs. irred.,  $R$  finitely generated

Step 4: wlog  $G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(q)$  finite

Clear for  $|R| < \infty$ .

Else take  $n^2$  elements  $h_i \in G$  which span  $R^{n \times n}$ .

Take maximal ideal  $\mathfrak{M} \triangleleft R$  such that  $\bar{h}_i \in (R/\mathfrak{M})^{n \times n}$  remain independent, get irreducible  $\bar{G} = \langle \bar{h}_i \rangle \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(R/\mathfrak{M})$ .

## Reductions, continued

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(R)$  abs. irred.,  $R$  finitely generated

Step 4: wlog  $G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(q)$  finite

Clear for  $|R| < \infty$ .

Else take  $n^2$  elements  $h_i \in G$  which span  $R^{n \times n}$ .

Take maximal ideal  $\mathfrak{M} \triangleleft R$  such that  $\bar{h}_i \in (R/\mathfrak{M})^{n \times n}$  remain independent, get irreducible  $\bar{G} = \langle \bar{h}_i \rangle \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(R/\mathfrak{M})$ .

Here  $R/\mathfrak{M}$  is a finite field.

# Reductions, concluded

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(q)$  irreducible

# Reductions, concluded

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(q)$  irreducible

Step 5: wlog  $G$  non-abelian simple

## Reductions, concluded

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(q)$  irreducible

Step 5: wlog  $G$  non-abelian simple

*Let  $N \triangleleft G$  minimal normal subgroup.*

# Reductions, concluded

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(q)$  irreducible

Step 5: wlog  $G$  non-abelian simple

Let  $N \triangleleft G$  minimal normal subgroup.

- $N$  elementary abelian  $p$ -group,  $p > 2$ : done by Isaacs et al.

# Reductions, concluded

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(q)$  irreducible

## Step 5: wlog $G$ non-abelian simple

Let  $N \triangleleft G$  minimal normal subgroup.

- $N$  elementary abelian  $p$ -group,  $p > 2$ : done by Isaacs et al.
- $N$  elementary abelian 2-group: use an argument on average size of fixed point space.

# Reductions, concluded

Have  $1 \neq G \leq \mathrm{GL}_n(q)$  irreducible

## Step 5: wlog $G$ non-abelian simple

Let  $N \triangleleft G$  minimal normal subgroup.

- $N$  elementary abelian  $p$ -group,  $p > 2$ : done by Isaacs et al.
- $N$  elementary abelian 2-group: use an argument on average size of fixed point space.
- $N$  non-abelian: Reduces to simple case (for  $L_2(2^f)$  use an argument of Guralnick–Maróti)



# Sizes of fixed point spaces

## Sizes of fixed point spaces

Lemma (Scott (1977))

Let  $G = \langle g_1, \dots, g_r \rangle$  with  $g_1 \cdots g_r = 1$ ,  $V$  finite dim'l  $kG$ -module. Then

# Sizes of fixed point spaces

## Lemma (Scott (1977))

Let  $G = \langle g_1, \dots, g_r \rangle$  with  $g_1 \cdots g_r = 1$ ,  $V$  finite dim'l  $kG$ -module. Then

$$\sum_{i=1}^r \dim[g_i, V] \geq \dim V - \dim V^G + \dim[G, V].$$

## Sizes of fixed point spaces

### Lemma (Scott (1977))

Let  $G = \langle g_1, \dots, g_r \rangle$  with  $g_1 \cdots g_r = 1$ ,  $V$  finite dim'l  $kG$ -module. Then

$$\sum_{i=1}^r \dim[g_i, V] \geq \dim V - \dim V^G + \dim[G, V].$$

When  $r = 3$  and  $G$  has no fixed points on  $V$  or  $V^*$  this gives

$$\sum_{i=1}^3 \dim C_V(g_i) \leq \dim V$$

## Sizes of fixed point spaces

### Lemma (Scott (1977))

Let  $G = \langle g_1, \dots, g_r \rangle$  with  $g_1 \cdots g_r = 1$ ,  $V$  finite dim'l  $kG$ -module. Then

$$\sum_{i=1}^r \dim[g_i, V] \geq \dim V - \dim V^G + \dim[G, V].$$

When  $r = 3$  and  $G$  has no fixed points on  $V$  or  $V^*$  this gives

$$\sum_{i=1}^3 \dim C_V(g_i) \leq \dim V$$

(since  $\dim C_V(g_i) = \dim V - \dim[g_i, V]$ )



## Lemma

Let  $x, y \in \mathrm{GL}_n(k) = \mathrm{GL}(V)$ ,  $n \geq 2$ , be conjugate with product  $xy \sim x^2$ .

## Lemma

Let  $x, y \in \mathrm{GL}_n(k) = \mathrm{GL}(V)$ ,  $n \geq 2$ , be conjugate with product  $xy \sim x^2$ .  
If  $V$  is irreducible for  $G = \langle x, y \rangle \implies$   
all eigenspaces of  $x$  have dimension at most  $n/3$ .



## Lemma

Let  $x, y \in \mathrm{GL}_n(k) = \mathrm{GL}(V)$ ,  $n \geq 2$ , be conjugate with product  $xy \sim x^2$ .  
If  $V$  is irreducible for  $G = \langle x, y \rangle \implies$   
all eigenspaces of  $x$  have dimension at most  $n/3$ .

## Proof.

Let  $\theta$  an eigenvalue of  $x$  with  $\theta$ -eigenspace of maximal dimension,

## Lemma

Let  $x, y \in \mathrm{GL}_n(k) = \mathrm{GL}(V)$ ,  $n \geq 2$ , be conjugate with product  $xy \sim x^2$ .  
If  $V$  is irreducible for  $G = \langle x, y \rangle \implies$   
all eigenspaces of  $x$  have dimension at most  $n/3$ .

## Proof.

Let  $\theta$  an eigenvalue of  $x$  with  $\theta$ -eigenspace of maximal dimension,

$$x' = \theta^{-1}x, \quad y' = \theta^{-1}y, \quad z' = \theta^2(xy)^{-1}.$$

## Lemma

Let  $x, y \in \mathrm{GL}_n(k) = \mathrm{GL}(V)$ ,  $n \geq 2$ , be conjugate with product  $xy \sim x^2$ .  
If  $V$  is irreducible for  $G = \langle x, y \rangle \implies$   
all eigenspaces of  $x$  have dimension at most  $n/3$ .

## Proof.

Let  $\theta$  an eigenvalue of  $x$  with  $\theta$ -eigenspace of maximal dimension,

$$x' = \theta^{-1}x, \quad y' = \theta^{-1}y, \quad z' = \theta^2(xy)^{-1}.$$

$$\implies x'y'z' = 1.$$

## Lemma

Let  $x, y \in \mathrm{GL}_n(k) = \mathrm{GL}(V)$ ,  $n \geq 2$ , be conjugate with product  $xy \sim x^2$ .  
If  $V$  is irreducible for  $G = \langle x, y \rangle \implies$   
all eigenspaces of  $x$  have dimension at most  $n/3$ .

## Proof.

Let  $\theta$  an eigenvalue of  $x$  with  $\theta$ -eigenspace of maximal dimension,

$$x' = \theta^{-1}x, \quad y' = \theta^{-1}y, \quad z' = \theta^2(xy)^{-1}.$$

$$\implies x'y'z' = 1.$$

Fixed space of each of these has dimension at least that of the  $\theta$ -eigenspace of  $x$ .

## Lemma

Let  $x, y \in \mathrm{GL}_n(k) = \mathrm{GL}(V)$ ,  $n \geq 2$ , be conjugate with product  $xy \sim x^2$ .  
If  $V$  is irreducible for  $G = \langle x, y \rangle \implies$   
all eigenspaces of  $x$  have dimension at most  $n/3$ .

## Proof.

Let  $\theta$  an eigenvalue of  $x$  with  $\theta$ -eigenspace of maximal dimension,

$$x' = \theta^{-1}x, \quad y' = \theta^{-1}y, \quad z' = \theta^2(xy)^{-1}.$$

$$\implies x'y'z' = 1.$$

Fixed space of each of these has dimension at least that of the  $\theta$ -eigenspace of  $x$ .

Apply Scott's Lemma □

## Lemma

Let  $x, y \in \mathrm{GL}_n(k) = \mathrm{GL}(V)$ ,  $n \geq 2$ , be conjugate with product  $xy \sim x^2$ .  
If  $V$  is irreducible for  $G = \langle x, y \rangle \implies$   
all eigenspaces of  $x$  have dimension at most  $n/3$ .

## Proof.

Let  $\theta$  an eigenvalue of  $x$  with  $\theta$ -eigenspace of maximal dimension,

$$x' = \theta^{-1}x, \quad y' = \theta^{-1}y, \quad z' = \theta^2(xy)^{-1}.$$

$$\implies x'y'z' = 1.$$

Fixed space of each of these has dimension at least that of the  $\theta$ -eigenspace of  $x$ .

Apply Scott's Lemma □

Thus, Thm. A follows from certain generation property of simple groups.

# Generation of simple groups

## Theorem C

$G$  finite non-abelian simple,  $G \neq L_2(2^f), L_2(7)$

# Generation of simple groups

## Theorem C

$G$  finite non-abelian simple,  $G \neq L_2(2^f), L_2(7) \implies$   
there exists a class  $C$  of  $G$  and  $(x, y, z) \in C \times C \times C^{-2}$  with:

$$xyz = 1 \quad \text{and} \quad G = \langle x, y \rangle.$$



# Generation of simple groups

## Theorem C

*$G$  finite non-abelian simple,  $G \neq L_2(2^f), L_2(7) \implies$   
there exists a class  $C$  of  $G$  and  $(x, y, z) \in C \times C \times C^{-2}$  with:*

$$xyz = 1 \quad \text{and} \quad G = \langle x, y \rangle.$$

## Corollary

*$G$  finite non-abelian simple other than  $L_2(2^f)$ .*

# Generation of simple groups

## Theorem C

*$G$  finite non-abelian simple,  $G \neq L_2(2^f), L_2(7) \implies$   
there exists a class  $C$  of  $G$  and  $(x, y, z) \in C \times C \times C^{-2}$  with:*

$$xyz = 1 \quad \text{and} \quad G = \langle x, y \rangle.$$

## Corollary

*$G$  finite non-abelian simple other than  $L_2(2^f)$ . There exists  $g \in G$  with:  
for any non-trivial irreducible  $kG$ -module  $V$ , every eigenspace of  $g$  on  $V$   
has dimension  $\leq (1/3) \dim V$ .*

# Generation of simple groups

## Theorem C

*$G$  finite non-abelian simple,  $G \neq L_2(2^f), L_2(7) \implies$   
there exists a class  $C$  of  $G$  and  $(x, y, z) \in C \times C \times C^{-2}$  with:*

$$xyz = 1 \quad \text{and} \quad G = \langle x, y \rangle.$$

## Corollary

*$G$  finite non-abelian simple other than  $L_2(2^f)$ . There exists  $g \in G$  with:  
for any non-trivial irreducible  $kG$ -module  $V$ , every eigenspace of  $g$  on  $V$   
has dimension  $\leq (1/3) \dim V$ .*

For  $L_2(2^f)$  the 2-dim'l modules in char. 2 provide counterexamples.

# Generation of simple groups

## Theorem C

*$G$  finite non-abelian simple,  $G \neq L_2(2^f), L_2(7) \implies$   
there exists a class  $C$  of  $G$  and  $(x, y, z) \in C \times C \times C^{-2}$  with:*

$$xyz = 1 \quad \text{and} \quad G = \langle x, y \rangle.$$

## Corollary

*$G$  finite non-abelian simple other than  $L_2(2^f)$ . There exists  $g \in G$  with:  
for any non-trivial irreducible  $kG$ -module  $V$ , every eigenspace of  $g$  on  $V$   
has dimension  $\leq (1/3) \dim V$ .*

For  $L_2(2^f)$  the 2-dim'l modules in char. 2 provide counterexamples.

Still, a slight variation holds in this case as well.

# Alternating groups

For  $\mathfrak{A}_n$ , Thm. C is proved by explicit construction.

# Alternating groups

For  $\mathfrak{A}_n$ , Thm. C is proved by explicit construction.

## Lemma

*Let  $n \geq 11$  be odd. There exist three  $n - 2$ -cycles in  $\mathfrak{A}_n$  with product 1 that generate  $\mathfrak{A}_n$ .*

# Alternating groups

For  $\mathfrak{A}_n$ , Thm. C is proved by explicit construction.

## Lemma

*Let  $n \geq 11$  be odd. There exist three  $n - 2$ -cycles in  $\mathfrak{A}_n$  with product 1 that generate  $\mathfrak{A}_n$ .*

Uses results of Wielandt on triply transitive groups.

# Alternating groups

For  $\mathfrak{A}_n$ , Thm. C is proved by explicit construction.

## Lemma

*Let  $n \geq 11$  be odd. There exist three  $n - 2$ -cycles in  $\mathfrak{A}_n$  with product 1 that generate  $\mathfrak{A}_n$ .*

Uses results of Wielandt on triply transitive groups.

Similarly for  $n \geq 12$  even with  $n - 3$ -cycles.



# Alternating groups

For  $\mathfrak{A}_n$ , Thm. C is proved by explicit construction.

## Lemma

*Let  $n \geq 11$  be odd. There exist three  $n - 2$ -cycles in  $\mathfrak{A}_n$  with product 1 that generate  $\mathfrak{A}_n$ .*

Uses results of Wielandt on triply transitive groups.

Similarly for  $n \geq 12$  even with  $n - 3$ -cycles.

Small  $n$ : computer check

# Structure constants

# Structure constants

$G$  a finite group,  $C \subset G$  a conjugacy class,  $x \in C$ .

## Structure constants

$G$  a finite group,  $C \subset G$  a conjugacy class,  $x \in C$ . Then

$$n(C) := |\{(y, z) \in C \times C^{-2} \mid xyz = 1\}|$$

## Structure constants

$G$  a finite group,  $C \subset G$  a conjugacy class,  $x \in C$ . Then

$$n(C) := |\{(y, z) \in C \times C^{-2} \mid xyz = 1\}|$$

is given by

$$n(C) = \frac{|C|^2}{|G|} \sum_{\chi \in \text{Irr}(G)} \frac{\chi(C)^2 \chi(C^{-2})}{\chi(1)}.$$

## Structure constants

$G$  a finite group,  $C \subset G$  a conjugacy class,  $x \in C$ . Then

$$n(C) := |\{(y, z) \in C \times C^{-2} \mid xyz = 1\}|$$

is given by

$$n(C) = \frac{|C|^2}{|G|} \sum_{\chi \in \text{Irr}(G)} \frac{\chi(C)^2 \chi(C^{-2})}{\chi(1)}.$$

Set

$$\epsilon(C) := \sum_{\chi \neq 1_G} \frac{\chi(C)^2 \chi(C^{-2})}{\chi(1)},$$

## Structure constants

$G$  a finite group,  $C \subset G$  a conjugacy class,  $x \in C$ . Then

$$n(C) := |\{(y, z) \in C \times C^{-2} \mid xyz = 1\}|$$

is given by

$$n(C) = \frac{|C|^2}{|G|} \sum_{\chi \in \text{Irr}(G)} \frac{\chi(C)^2 \chi(C^{-2})}{\chi(1)}.$$

Set

$$\epsilon(C) := \sum_{\chi \neq 1_G} \frac{\chi(C)^2 \chi(C^{-2})}{\chi(1)},$$

so that

$$n(C) = \frac{|C|^2}{|G|} (1 + \epsilon(C)).$$

## Structure constants

$G$  a finite group,  $C \subset G$  a conjugacy class,  $x \in C$ . Then

$$n(C) := |\{(y, z) \in C \times C^{-2} \mid xyz = 1\}|$$

is given by

$$n(C) = \frac{|C|^2}{|G|} \sum_{\chi \in \text{Irr}(G)} \frac{\chi(C)^2 \chi(C^{-2})}{\chi(1)}.$$

Set

$$\epsilon(C) := \sum_{\chi \neq 1_G} \frac{\chi(C)^2 \chi(C^{-2})}{\chi(1)},$$

so that

$$n(C) = \frac{|C|^2}{|G|} (1 + \epsilon(C)).$$

So:  $\epsilon(C) < 1 \implies n(C) > 0$



## Structure constants

$G$  a finite group,  $C \subset G$  a conjugacy class,  $x \in C$ . Then

$$n(C) := |\{(y, z) \in C \times C^{-2} \mid xyz = 1\}|$$

is given by

$$n(C) = \frac{|C|^2}{|G|} \sum_{\chi \in \text{Irr}(G)} \frac{\chi(C)^2 \chi(C^{-2})}{\chi(1)}.$$

Set

$$\epsilon(C) := \sum_{\chi \neq 1_G} \frac{\chi(C)^2 \chi(C^{-2})}{\chi(1)},$$

so that

$$n(C) = \frac{|C|^2}{|G|} (1 + \epsilon(C)).$$

So:  $\epsilon(C) < 1 \implies n(C) > 0 \implies$  there exist triples

# Groups of type $E_8$

Let  $G = E_8(q)$ ,  $q = p^f$ ,

## Groups of type $E_8$

Let  $G = E_8(q)$ ,  $q = p^f$ ,

$C$  class of  $x \in G$  of order  $q^8 + q^7 - q^5 - q^4 - q^3 + q + 1$ ,

## Groups of type $E_8$

Let  $G = E_8(q)$ ,  $q = p^f$ ,

$C$  class of  $x \in G$  of order  $q^8 + q^7 - q^5 - q^4 - q^3 + q + 1$ ,

$T := \langle x \rangle$

## Groups of type $E_8$

Let  $G = E_8(q)$ ,  $q = p^f$ ,

$C$  class of  $x \in G$  of order  $q^8 + q^7 - q^5 - q^4 - q^3 + q + 1$ ,

$T := \langle x \rangle$

Weigel (1992): if  $x \in M < G$  then  $M \leq N_G(T) = T : Z_{30}$

## Groups of type $E_8$

Let  $G = E_8(q)$ ,  $q = p^f$ ,

$C$  class of  $x \in G$  of order  $q^8 + q^7 - q^5 - q^4 - q^3 + q + 1$ ,

$T := \langle x \rangle$

Weigel (1992): if  $x \in M < G$  then  $M \leq N_G(T) = T : Z_{30}$

$\implies$  at most one pair  $(y, z) \in C \times C^{-2}$  with  $xyz = 1$  does not generate  $G$ .

## Groups of type $E_8$

Let  $G = E_8(q)$ ,  $q = p^f$ ,

$C$  class of  $x \in G$  of order  $q^8 + q^7 - q^5 - q^4 - q^3 + q + 1$ ,

$T := \langle x \rangle$

Weigel (1992): if  $x \in M < G$  then  $M \leq N_G(T) = T : Z_{30}$

$\implies$  at most one pair  $(y, z) \in C \times C^{-2}$  with  $xyz = 1$  does not generate  $G$ .

Deligne-Lusztig theory: characters with  $\chi(x) \neq 0$  can be described, values estimated

## Groups of type $E_8$

Let  $G = E_8(q)$ ,  $q = p^f$ ,

$C$  class of  $x \in G$  of order  $q^8 + q^7 - q^5 - q^4 - q^3 + q + 1$ ,

$T := \langle x \rangle$

Weigel (1992): if  $x \in M < G$  then  $M \leq N_G(T) = T : Z_{30}$

$\implies$  at most one pair  $(y, z) \in C \times C^{-2}$  with  $xyz = 1$  does not generate  $G$ .

Deligne-Lusztig theory: characters with  $\chi(x) \neq 0$  can be described, values estimated

$$\implies \epsilon(C) < 1/2$$



## Groups of type $E_8$

Let  $G = E_8(q)$ ,  $q = p^f$ ,

$C$  class of  $x \in G$  of order  $q^8 + q^7 - q^5 - q^4 - q^3 + q + 1$ ,

$T := \langle x \rangle$

Weigel (1992): if  $x \in M < G$  then  $M \leq N_G(T) = T : Z_{30}$

$\implies$  at most one pair  $(y, z) \in C \times C^{-2}$  with  $xyz = 1$  does not generate  $G$ .

Deligne-Lusztig theory: characters with  $\chi(x) \neq 0$  can be described, values estimated

$$\implies \epsilon(C) < 1/2 \quad \implies n(C) \geq \frac{1}{2} \frac{|C|^2}{|G|} > 2$$

## Groups of type $E_8$

Let  $G = E_8(q)$ ,  $q = p^f$ ,

$C$  class of  $x \in G$  of order  $q^8 + q^7 - q^5 - q^4 - q^3 + q + 1$ ,

$T := \langle x \rangle$

Weigel (1992): if  $x \in M < G$  then  $M \leq N_G(T) = T : Z_{30}$

$\implies$  at most one pair  $(y, z) \in C \times C^{-2}$  with  $xyz = 1$  does not generate  $G$ .

Deligne-Lusztig theory: characters with  $\chi(x) \neq 0$  can be described, values estimated

$$\implies \epsilon(C) < 1/2 \quad \implies n(C) \geq \frac{1}{2} \frac{|C|^2}{|G|} > 2$$

$\implies$  there exist generating pairs  $(y, z)$

# Groups of Lie type

# Groups of Lie type

$G$  of Lie type,

# Groups of Lie type

$G$  of Lie type,  $C$  class of generators of suitable maximal torus  $T$

# Groups of Lie type

$G$  of Lie type,  $C$  class of generators of suitable maximal torus  $T$

Weigel, Kleidman–Liebeck, M.–Saxl–Weigel, G.–Penttila–Praeger–Saxl,  
G.–M.: Maximal overgroups of  $T$  known

# Groups of Lie type

$G$  of Lie type,  $C$  class of generators of suitable maximal torus  $T$

Weigel, Kleidman–Liebeck, M.–Saxl–Weigel, G.–Penttila–Praeger–Saxl,  
G.–M.: Maximal overgroups of  $T$  known

## Example

Let  $G = \Omega_{2n}^-(q)$ ,  $x$  an element of order  $r > 4n + 1$  dividing  $\Phi_{2n}(q)$ ,  
 $x \in M < G$ . Then one of:

# Groups of Lie type

$G$  of Lie type,  $C$  class of generators of suitable maximal torus  $T$

Weigel, Kleidman–Liebeck, M.–Saxl–Weigel, G.–Penttila–Praeger–Saxl,  
G.–M.: Maximal overgroups of  $T$  known

## Example

Let  $G = \Omega_{2n}^-(q)$ ,  $x$  an element of order  $r > 4n + 1$  dividing  $\Phi_{2n}(q)$ ,  
 $x \in M < G$ . Then one of:

- (1)  $M$  is the normalizer of  $\Omega_{2n/f}^-(q^f)$ ,  $f|n$  prime;
- (2)  $n$  is odd and  $M$  is the normalizer of  $SU_n(q)$ ;



# Groups of Lie type

$G$  of Lie type,  $C$  class of generators of suitable maximal torus  $T$

Weigel, Kleidman–Liebeck, M.–Saxl–Weigel, G.–Penttila–Praeger–Saxl, G.–M.: Maximal overgroups of  $T$  known

## Example

Let  $G = \Omega_{2n}^-(q)$ ,  $x$  an element of order  $r > 4n + 1$  dividing  $\Phi_{2n}(q)$ ,  $x \in M < G$ . Then one of:

- (1)  $M$  is the normalizer of  $\Omega_{2n/f}^-(q^f)$ ,  $f|n$  prime;
- (2)  $n$  is odd and  $M$  is the normalizer of  $SU_n(q)$ ;
- (3)  $(n, q) = (10, 2)$ ,  $M = \mathfrak{A}_{12}$ ;
- (4)  $(n, q) = (12, 2)$ ,  $M = \mathfrak{A}_{13}, L_2(13), L_3(3)$ ; or
- (5)  $(n, q) = (18, 2)$ ,  $M = \mathfrak{A}_{20}$ .

# Deligne–Lusztig theory

# Deligne–Lusztig theory

Lusztig's Jordan decomposition of characters:

# Deligne–Lusztig theory

Lusztig's Jordan decomposition of characters:

characters not vanishing on  $x \in T$  lie in few Lusztig families,

# Deligne–Lusztig theory

Lusztig's Jordan decomposition of characters:

characters not vanishing on  $x \in T$  lie in few Lusztig families,  
values on  $x, x^2$  known 'in principle' (since  $x$  is semisimple).

# Deligne–Lusztig theory

Lusztig's Jordan decomposition of characters:

characters not vanishing on  $x \in T$  lie in few Lusztig families,  
values on  $x, x^2$  known 'in principle' (since  $x$  is semisimple).

Estimate yields  $\epsilon(C) < 1/2$

# Deligne–Lusztig theory

Lusztig's Jordan decomposition of characters:

characters not vanishing on  $x \in T$  lie in few Lusztig families,  
values on  $x, x^2$  known 'in principle' (since  $x$  is semisimple).

Estimate yields  $\epsilon(C) < 1/2$

$\implies n(C)$  'large'; not all triples can lie in maximal subgroups

# Deligne–Lusztig theory

Lusztig's Jordan decomposition of characters:

characters not vanishing on  $x \in T$  lie in few Lusztig families,  
values on  $x, x^2$  known 'in principle' (since  $x$  is semisimple).

Estimate yields  $\epsilon(C) < 1/2$

$\implies n(C)$  'large'; not all triples can lie in maximal subgroups

$\implies$  Thm. C holds for these groups



# A related result

## A related result

### Theorem D

*$G$  finite non-abelian simple,  $G \neq O_8^+(2) \implies$   
there exists an element  $x$  of order prime to 6 such that:*

$$\{1\} \neq C \text{ class of } G \implies G = \langle g, x \rangle \text{ for some } g \in C.$$

## A related result

### Theorem D

*$G$  finite non-abelian simple,  $G \neq O_8^+(2) \implies$   
there exists an element  $x$  of order prime to 6 such that:*

$$\{1\} \neq C \text{ class of } G \implies G = \langle g, x \rangle \text{ for some } g \in C.$$

### Idea of proof of Theorem D.

Take  $x$  as in Thm. C.

If contained in at most two maximal subgroups done by: □

## A related result

### Theorem D

$G$  finite non-abelian simple,  $G \neq O_8^+(2) \implies$   
there exists an element  $x$  of order prime to 6 such that:

$$\{1\} \neq C \text{ class of } G \implies G = \langle g, x \rangle \text{ for some } g \in C.$$

### Idea of proof of Theorem D.

Take  $x$  as in Thm. C.

If contained in at most two maximal subgroups done by: □

### Lemma

$C$  a non-trivial conjugacy class in a finite simple group  $G$   
 $\implies C$  not contained in the union of any two proper subgroups.

Remaining cases:

Remaining cases:

Find two conjugacy classes  $C_1, C_2$  of  $G$  such that

Remaining cases:

Find two conjugacy classes  $C_1, C_2$  of  $G$  such that

- $G = C_1 C_2$  (structure constants)
- no maximal subgroup contains elements from both classes

Remaining cases:

Find two conjugacy classes  $C_1, C_2$  of  $G$  such that

- $G = C_1 C_2$  (structure constants)
- no maximal subgroup contains elements from both classes

or: use fixed point ratios