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Coverings of Singular Curves over Finite Fields

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We prove that if $f : Y \longrightarrow X$ is a finite flat morphism between two reduced absolutely irreducible algebraic projective curves defined over the finite field $\mathbb{F}_q$, then

$$|\#Y(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#X(\mathbb{F}_q)| \leq 2(\pi_Y - \pi_X)\sqrt{q},$$

where π_C is the arithmetic genus of a curve C . As application, we give some character sum estimation on singular curves.

In this paper, the word *curve* stands for a reduced absolutely irreducible algebraic projective curve defined over the finite field $\mathbb{F}_q$ with q elements. If X is a smooth curve, it has been shown by Weil in [6] that the number of $\mathbb{F}_q$ -rational points of X , denoted by $\#X(\mathbb{F}_q)$, is related to the geometric genus g_X by :

$$|\#X(\mathbb{F}_q) - (q + 1)| \leq 2g_X\sqrt{q} \quad (1)$$

(with an improvement of Serre using the integral part, see [5]). In fact, Weil's statement, involving the zeta function of X , is more precise. It implies that if there is a finite morphism $f : Y \rightarrow X$ between two smooth curves X and Y having (geometric) genus g_X and g_Y respectively, then (see for instance [2], proposition 6)

$$|\#Y(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#X(\mathbb{F}_q)| \leq 2(g_Y - g_X)\sqrt{q}. \quad (2)$$

When X is the projective line, this is exactly Weil's bound for Y .

On the other hand, the authors proved in [1] that if X is a singular curve, then Weil's inequality (1) holds if one replaces the geometric genus g_X of X by its arithmetic genus π_X . The aim of this paper is to give a generalization of both (2) and (1) for singular curves. Namely, if $f : Y \rightarrow X$ is a finite flat morphism between two singular curves, then

$$|\#Y(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#X(\mathbb{F}_q)| \leq 2(\pi_Y - \pi_X)\sqrt{q} \quad (3)$$

holds.

We will prove (3) in the third section. The proof goes as follows. Inequality (2) can be applied to the finite morphism $\tilde{f} : \tilde{Y} \rightarrow \tilde{X}$ induced by f on the smooth models of X and Y respectively. Furthermore the number of $\mathbb{F}_q$ -rational points of a curve is related to the number of $\mathbb{F}_q$ -rational points of its smooth model (first section). Unfortunately, this is not sufficient to prove (3). One has to introduce (in the second section) the auxiliary curve $Z = \tilde{X} \times_X Y$, birational to Y .

Finally, we apply this result in a fifth section to obtain some character sum estimations.

1. A lemma

The following lemma relates the number of $\mathbb{F}_q$ -rational points of a curve and that of its smooth model. It is given in [1], but in order to be self contained, we give here its short proof. If P is a $\mathbb{F}_q$ -rational point of a curve X , we denote by α_P (respectively $\alpha_P(\infty)$) the number of $\mathbb{F}_q$ -rational points (respectively of $\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q$ -rational points, where $\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q$ stands for an algebraic closure of $\mathbb{F}_q$) of $\tilde{X}$, lying over P in the normalization map $\nu_X : \tilde{X} \rightarrow X$. Let $\mathcal{O}_P$ be the local ring of X at P , and $\overline{\mathcal{O}_P}$ its integral closure in the function field $\mathbb{F}_q(X)$ of X . The quotient $\overline{\mathcal{O}_P}/\mathcal{O}_P$ is a $\mathbb{F}_q$ -vector space of finite length : let δ_P be its dimension.

Lemma 1. *Let X be a reduced absolutely irreducible projective algebraic curve defined over $\mathbb{F}_q$. Then*

$$|\#\tilde{X}(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#X(\mathbb{F}_q)| \leq \sum_{P \in X(\mathbb{F}_q)} |\alpha_P - 1| \leq \pi_X - g_X.$$

Proof. Let us first prove that if P is a $\mathbb{F}_q$ -rational singular point of X , then $\alpha_P - 1 \leq \delta_P$. Let $Q_1, \dots, Q_{\alpha_P(\infty)}$ be the $\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q$ -rational points of $\tilde{X}$ lying over P (the α_P first being the $\mathbb{F}_q$ -rational ones), and ϕ the $\mathbb{F}_q$ -linear map

$$\begin{aligned} \phi : \overline{\mathcal{O}_P} &\longrightarrow \mathbb{F}_q^{\alpha_P} \\ f &\longmapsto (f(Q_i))_{1 \leq i \leq \alpha_P} \end{aligned}$$

We prove that ϕ is onto : let $(x_1, \dots, x_{\alpha_P}) \in \mathbb{F}_q^{\alpha_P}$ and $f_i = x_i \in \mathbb{F}_q \subset \mathbb{F}_q(X)$ if $i \leq \alpha_P$. For $i \geq \alpha_P + 1$, let $f_i = 0$. Then by the weak approximation theorem, there exists $g \in \mathbb{F}_q(X)$ such that $v_{Q_i}(g - f_i) \geq 1$ for $1 \leq i \leq \alpha_P(\infty)$. Hence, $\phi(g) = (x_1, \dots, x_{\alpha_P})$ and

$$g \in \bigcap_{1 \leq i \leq \alpha_P(\infty)} \mathcal{O}_{Q_i} = \overline{\mathcal{O}_P}.$$

Since $f(Q_1) = \cdots = f(Q_{\alpha_P})$ for $f \in \mathcal{O}_P$, it follows that $\phi(\mathcal{O}_P)$ is contained in the vector-line $L \subset \mathbb{F}_q^{\alpha_P}$ spanned by $(1, \dots, 1)$. One obtains a surjective linear map

$$\tilde{\phi}: \overline{\mathcal{O}_P}/\mathcal{O}_P \longrightarrow \mathbb{F}_q^{\alpha_P}/L.$$

Taking dimensions, we obtain that $\alpha_P - 1 \leq \delta_P$.

Now, Lemma 1 follows from the formulas

$$\pi_X - g_X = \sum_{P \in \text{Sing } X(\overline{\mathbb{F}_q})} \delta_P$$

and

$$\sharp \tilde{X}(\mathbb{F}_q) - \sharp X(\mathbb{F}_q) = \sum_{P \in X(\mathbb{F}_q)} (\alpha_P - 1).$$

□

2. An auxiliary curve

Let X and Y be two curves, and $f: Y \longrightarrow X$ be a finite flat morphism. In order to give an estimate for the difference between the numbers of $\mathbb{F}_q$ -rational points of X and Y , it is convenient to consider the fibre product $Z = \tilde{X} \times_X Y$.

Lemma 2. *Z is a reduced absolutely irreducible projective curve.*

Proof. The map f being finite, the map $Z \longrightarrow \tilde{X}$ is finite and onto, which implies that $\dim Z = \dim \tilde{X} = 1$, and Z is a curve.

In order to prove that Z is absolutely integral, one has to prove that given an affine open set $\text{Spec } A(X_i)$ of X , the ring $A = \overline{A(X_i)} \otimes_{A(X_i)} A(Y_i)$ is an integral domain, where $\bar{A}$ stands for the integral closure of a ring A , and $A(Y_i)$ is defined by $\text{Spec } A(Y_i) = f^{-1}(\text{Spec } A(X_i))$. Denote by $\text{Frac}(A)$ the quotient field of a domain A . By the flatness hypothesis,

$$0 \longrightarrow \overline{A(X_i)} \longrightarrow \text{Frac}(A(X_i))$$

induce

$$0 \longrightarrow A \longrightarrow \operatorname{Frac}(A(X_i)) \otimes_{A(X_i)} A(Y_i).$$

Then, the injective map

$$\operatorname{Frac}(A(X_i)) \otimes_{A(X_i)} A(Y_i) \hookrightarrow \operatorname{Frac}(A(Y_i))$$

proves that A is an integral domain, as a subring of a field.

Finally, Z is projective. Indeed, f is proper since it is finite, and $Z \longrightarrow \tilde{X}$ is also proper, so that the composite morphism $Z \longrightarrow \tilde{X} \longrightarrow \operatorname{Spec} \mathbb{F}_q$ is proper since $\tilde{X}$ is complete. Hence, Z is projective as a complete curve. $\square$

By the universal properties of the fibre product and of normalization maps, one can write the following diagram, where all triangles and squares are commutative, and all morphisms are finite :

$$\begin{array}{ccccc}
 & & \tilde{Y} & & \\
 & & \swarrow & \searrow & \\
 & & Z & \xrightarrow{\quad} & \tilde{X} \\
 & \searrow & \downarrow & & \downarrow \\
 & & Y & \xrightarrow{\quad f \quad} & X \\
 & \swarrow & & & \\
 & & \nu_Y & & \nu_X
 \end{array}$$

The sheaf of $\mathcal{O}_X$ -modules $f_*\mathcal{O}_Y$ is coherent because f is finite. It is then locally free since f is flat. After localization, the stalks $(f_*\mathcal{O}_Y)_P$ are $\mathcal{O}_{X,P}$ -module of finite type, whose rank doesn't depend on P since X is connected. Let

$$\begin{aligned}
r &= \dim_{\mathbb{F}_q(P)} (f_* \mathcal{O}_Y)_P \otimes_{\mathcal{O}_{X,P}} \mathbb{F}_q(P) \\
&= \sum_{Q \in f^{-1}(P)} \dim_{\mathbb{F}_q(P)} (\mathcal{O}_{Y,Q} \otimes_{\mathcal{O}_{X,P}} \mathbb{F}_q(P))
\end{aligned}$$

be this rank, where $\mathbb{F}_q(P)$ denotes the residue field of the point P . Note that if $r = 1$, then $f^{-1}(P) = \{Q\}$ contains only one element for any $P \in X$, and f induces a morphism of local rings $\mathcal{O}_{Y,Q} \rightarrow \mathcal{O}_{X,P}$, so that f is an isomorphism. Hence, one can suppose $r \geq 2$.

Proposition 3. (i) Z is birational to Y . In particular, $g_Z = g_Y$.

(ii) The arithmetic genus of Z is given by

$$\pi_Z = \pi_Y - r(\pi_X - g_X).$$

Proof. (i) This is trivial since there are dominant morphisms $\tilde{Y} \rightarrow Z$ and $Z \rightarrow Y$.

(ii) Since both arithmetic and geometric genus of a curve C and of $C \times_{\mathbb{F}_q} \overline{\mathbb{F}_q} = \overline{C}$ are the same, it is sufficient to compute $\pi_{\overline{Z}}$. To simplify notations, we continue to denote by X, Y and Z the curves $\overline{X}, \overline{Y}$ and $\overline{Z}$ respectively. The exact sequence of $\mathcal{O}_X$ -module sheaves

$$0 \rightarrow \mathcal{O}_X \rightarrow \nu_{X,*} \mathcal{O}_{\tilde{X}} \rightarrow (\nu_{X,*} \mathcal{O}_{\tilde{X}}) / \mathcal{O}_X \rightarrow 0$$

tensorized by the flat $\mathcal{O}_X$ -module $f_* \mathcal{O}_Y$, gives the exact sequence

$$\begin{aligned}
0 \rightarrow f_* \mathcal{O}_Y \rightarrow (\nu_{X,*} \mathcal{O}_{\tilde{X}}) \otimes_{\mathcal{O}_X} f_* \mathcal{O}_Y \rightarrow \\
\rightarrow ((\nu_{X,*} \mathcal{O}_{\tilde{X}}) / \mathcal{O}_X) \otimes_{\mathcal{O}_X} f_* \mathcal{O}_Y \rightarrow 0
\end{aligned} \tag{4}$$

from which we deduce a long exact sequence of cohomology. Let us scrutinize its different terms.

Since $H^i(X, f_*\mathcal{O}_Y) \cong H^i(Y, \mathcal{O}_Y)$ and Y is projective, then we have $\dim_{\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q} H^0(X, f_*\mathcal{O}_Y) = 1$ and $\dim_{\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q} H^1(X, f_*\mathcal{O}_Y) = \pi_Y$. In the same way,

$$\dim_{\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q} H^0(X, (\nu_{X,*}\mathcal{O}_{\tilde{X}}) \otimes_{\mathcal{O}_X} f_*\mathcal{O}_Y) = 1$$

and

$$\dim_{\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q} H^1(X, (\nu_{X,*}\mathcal{O}_{\tilde{X}}) \otimes_{\mathcal{O}_X} f_*\mathcal{O}_Y) = \pi_Z.$$

Furthermore, the sheaf $(\nu_{X,*}\mathcal{O}_{\tilde{X}})/\mathcal{O}_X$ is a sum of skyscraper sheaves on the singular points of X . Hence, this is also the case for $((\nu_{X,*}\mathcal{O}_{\tilde{X}})/\mathcal{O}_X) \otimes_{\mathcal{O}_X} f_*\mathcal{O}_Y$, and this prove the vanishing of its H^1 . Finally,

$$\begin{aligned} & \dim_{\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q} H^0(X, ((\nu_{X,*}\mathcal{O}_{\tilde{X}})/\mathcal{O}_X) \otimes_{\mathcal{O}_X} f_*\mathcal{O}_Y) \\ &= \sum_{P \in \text{Sing } X(\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q)} \dim_{\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q} ((\overline{\mathcal{O}_{X,P}}/\mathcal{O}_{X,P}) \otimes_{\mathcal{O}_{X,P}} (f_*\mathcal{O}_Y)_P) = \\ & \sum_{P \in \text{Sing } X(\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q)} \dim_{\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q} ((\overline{\mathcal{O}_{X,P}}/\mathcal{O}_{X,P}) \otimes_{\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q} (\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q \otimes_{\mathcal{O}_{X,P}} (f_*\mathcal{O}_Y)_P)) \\ &= \sum_{P \in \text{Sing } X(\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q)} \dim_{\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q} ((\overline{\mathcal{O}_{X,P}}/\mathcal{O}_{X,P}) \otimes_{\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q} (\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q)^r) \\ &= \sum_{P \in \text{Sing } X(\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q)} \dim_{\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q} (\overline{\mathcal{O}_{X,P}}/\mathcal{O}_{X,P})^r \\ &= r(\pi_X - g_X). \end{aligned}$$

The nullity of the alternating sum of the $\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q$ -dimensions of the different terms of the long exact sequence of cohomology given by (4) gives :

$$1 - 1 + r(\pi_X - g_X) - \pi_Y + \pi_Z - 0 = 0,$$

which was to be proved. $\square$

3. The main theorem

Theorem 4. *Let X and Y be two reduced absolutely irreducible projective algebraic curves defined over $\mathbb{F}_q$, with respective arithmetic genus π_X and π_Y , and let $f : Y \longrightarrow X$ be a finite flat morphism defined over $\mathbb{F}_q$. Then*

$$|\#Y(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#X(\mathbb{F}_q)| \leq 2(\pi_Y - \pi_X)\sqrt{q}.$$

The proof depends on the following lemma.

Lemma 5.

$$|(\#Z(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#\tilde{X}(\mathbb{F}_q)) - (\#Y(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#X(\mathbb{F}_q))| \leq (r-1)(\pi_X - g_X)$$

(recall that $r = \dim_{\mathbb{F}_q(P)}(f_*\mathcal{O}_Y)_P \otimes_{\mathcal{O}_{X,P}} \mathbb{F}_q(P)$).

Proof. If $P \in X(\mathbb{F}_q)$, let

$$\alpha_P = \#\{\tilde{P} \in \tilde{X}(\mathbb{F}_q) \mid \nu_X(\tilde{P}) = P\}$$

and

$$\beta_P = \#\{Q \in Y(\mathbb{F}_q) \mid f(Q) = P\}.$$

Then

$$\beta_P \leq \sum_{Q \in f^{-1}(P)} 1 \leq \sum_{Q \in f^{-1}(P)} \dim_{\mathbb{F}_q(P)}(\mathcal{O}_{Y,Q} \otimes_{\mathcal{O}_{X,P}} \mathbb{F}_q(P)) = r$$

Moreover,

$$Z(\mathbb{F}_q) = \{(\tilde{P}, Q) \in \tilde{X}(\mathbb{F}_q) \times Y(\mathbb{F}_q) \mid \nu_X(\tilde{P}) = f(Q)\}$$

hence

$$\begin{aligned} \#Z(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#\tilde{X}(\mathbb{F}_q) &= \sum_{P \in X(\mathbb{F}_q)} \alpha_P \beta_P - \sum_{P \in X(\mathbb{F}_q)} \alpha_P \\ &= \sum_{P \in X(\mathbb{F}_q)} \alpha_P (\beta_P - 1), \end{aligned}$$

and

$$\begin{aligned} \#Y(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#X(\mathbb{F}_q) &= \sum_{P \in X(\mathbb{F}_q)} \beta_P - \sum_{P \in X(\mathbb{F}_q)} 1 \\ &= \sum_{P \in X(\mathbb{F}_q)} (\beta_P - 1). \end{aligned}$$

By lemma 1, and since $r \geq 2$, we obtain

$$\begin{aligned} |(\#Z(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#\tilde{X}(\mathbb{F}_q)) - (\#Y(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#X(\mathbb{F}_q))| &\leq \\ &\leq (r-1) \sum_{P \in X(\mathbb{F}_q)} |\alpha_P - 1| \\ &\leq (r-1)(\pi_X - g_X). \end{aligned}$$

□

The theorem follows easily from the preceding and the triangular inequality

$$\begin{aligned} |\#Y(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#X(\mathbb{F}_q)| &\leq |\#\tilde{Y}(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#Z(\mathbb{F}_q)| \\ &\quad + |(\#Z(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#\tilde{X}(\mathbb{F}_q)) - (\#Y(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#X(\mathbb{F}_q))| \\ &\quad + |\#\tilde{X}(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#\tilde{Y}(\mathbb{F}_q)| \end{aligned}$$

4. Remarks

4.1. The proof of theorem 4 gives a better upper bound, namely

$$|\#Y(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#X(\mathbb{F}_q)| \leq (\pi_Y - g_Y) - (\pi_X - g_X) + (g_Y - g_X)[2\sqrt{q}].$$

See lemma 4.1 of [3] for the reason of the integer part $[2\sqrt{q}]$ of $2\sqrt{q}$.

4.2. It couldn't be expected theorem 4 to be true for any finite morphism $f : Y \longrightarrow X$. For instance, this is false for the normalization map of a singular curve. Here is another example : let X be the plane curve $Y^2Z = X^3$. This is a singular cubic curve, its arithmetic genus is $\pi_X = 1$, and for any integer n , we have $\#X(\mathbb{F}_{2^n}) = 2^n + 1$. Let us consider the morphism

$$\begin{aligned} \pi : \quad \mathbb{P}^1 &\longrightarrow X \\ (u : v) &\longmapsto (u^2v : u^3 : v^3) \end{aligned}$$

Suppose theorem 4 would be true for any finite morphism f , and let C be any smooth curve of genus g_C , defined over $\mathbb{F}_2$.

There is a finite morphism $\pi' : C \longrightarrow \mathbb{P}^1$, hence by composition a finite morphism $f = \pi \circ \pi' : C \longrightarrow X$, and theorem 4 would imply that for $q = 2^n$,

$$|\#C(\mathbb{F}_q) - (q + 1)| \leq 2(g_C - 1)\sqrt{q},$$

which is false : one can consider for instance the smooth curve C given by $X^3 + Y^3 + Z^3 = 0$, which has 9 rational points over $\mathbb{F}_4$ and genus $g_C = 1$.

4.3. If X is smooth (in particular if X is the projective line), then any finite morphism $Y \longrightarrow X$ is flat. Indeed, if $f(Q) = P$, then the local ring $\mathcal{O}_{Y,Q}$ is a finitely generated $\mathcal{O}_{X,P}$ -module without torsion element. But $\mathcal{O}_{X,P}$ is a principal ideal domain since X is supposed to be smooth, so that $\mathcal{O}_{Y,Q}$ is a flat $\mathcal{O}_{X,P}$ -module. This shows that theorem 4 contains all known results (1) and (2) of the introduction.

Note that there are many other situations where $Y \longrightarrow X$ is flat. This is the case for instance if $X = Y/G$, where G is a finite group of automorphisms of Y (see [4]), or (by stability of flatness by base change) if f is the reduction modulo a prime ideal of a flat morphism between two curves defined over a number field, or (also by base change, see section 5 below) if f is a Kummer, or an Artin-Schreier morphism.

5. Application to exponential sums

Let X be a curve over a finite field $\mathbb{F}_q$ of odd characteristic and $f \in \mathbb{F}_q(X)$ a function on X . When X is smooth, there is an extensive literature on estimations of the character sums $\sum_{P \in X(\mathbb{F}_q)} \left(\frac{f(P)}{q} \right)$, where $\left(\frac{\cdot}{q} \right)$ is the Legendre symbol on $\mathbb{F}_q$ (with the convention that $\left(\frac{f(P)}{q} \right) = 0$ if P is a zero or a pole of f). In fact, this character sum equals to $\#Y(\mathbb{F}_q) - \#X(\mathbb{F}_q)$, where Y is the Zariski closure of the curve $\{(P, y) \in X \times \mathbb{P}^1 \mid y^2 = f(P)\}$ in the surface $X \times \mathbb{P}^1$. Indeed, there are exactly $1 + \left(\frac{f(P)}{q} \right)$ points in $Y(\mathbb{F}_q)$ above a given point $P \in X(\mathbb{F}_q)$.

The geometric genus g_Y of Y is given from g_X by Hurwitz formula, and its arithmetic genus is given by the following lemma, whose proof is a standard and tedious calculation using Čech cohomology.

Lemma 6. *Let Y be the Zariski closure of $\{(P, y) \in X \times \mathbb{P}^1 \mid y^n = f(P)\}$. Then, $\pi_Y = n\pi_X + (n-1)(\deg(f)_0 - 1)$, where $(f)_0$ denotes the divisors of zeroes of f .*

Since the squaring map $\mathbb{P}^1 \longrightarrow \mathbb{P}^1$, $y \longmapsto y^2$ is flat, then by base change $Y = X \times_{\mathbb{P}^1} \mathbb{P}^1 \longrightarrow X$ is also flat. Hence, theorem 4 applies, so that the following holds :

Theorem 7.

$$\left| \sum_{P \in X(\mathbb{F}_q)} \left(\frac{f(P)}{q} \right) \right| \leq 2(n-1)(\pi_X + \deg(f)_0 - 1)\sqrt{q}.$$

Of course, one can give a better upper bound using remark 4.1., and one can study additive character sums via Artin-Schreier coverings.

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