

Multiple ergodic averages along polynomials for systems of commuting transformations

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Joint work with Nikos Frantzikinakis

Multiple ergodic averages with polynomial iterates

We will study L^2 limits of averages

$$\frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T_1^{p_1(n)} f_1 \cdots T_k^{p_k(n)} f_k$$

where

- 1 (X, \mathcal{X}, μ) is a standard probability space;
- 2 T_1, \dots, T_k are **commuting** invertible measure-preserving transformations acting on X
(I will refer to $(X, \mathcal{X}, \mu, T_1, \dots, T_k)$ simply as **system**);
- 3 $p_1, \dots, p_k \in \mathbb{Z}[n]$ are polynomials with $p_i(0) = 0$ (we call such polynomials **integral**);
- 4 $f_1, \dots, f_k \in L^\infty(\mu)$.

Polynomial Szemerédi theorem (a special case)

Theorem (Bergelson & Leibman 1996)

Let p_1, \dots, p_k be integral polynomials and $(X, \mathcal{X}, \mu, T_1, \dots, T_k)$ be a system. Suppose that $\mu(A) > 0$. Then

$$\liminf_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N \mu(A \cap T_1^{-p_1(n)} A \cap \dots \cap T_k^{-p_k(n)} A) > 0.$$

Corollary

Let p_1, \dots, p_k be integral polynomials and $v_1, \dots, v_k \in \mathbb{Z}^d$. Then each dense subset of \mathbb{Z}^d contains a polynomial progression of the form

$$x, x + v_1 p_1(n), \dots, x + v_k p_k(n)$$

with $n \neq 0$.

For instance, each dense subset on \mathbb{Z}^2 contains

$$(x_1, x_2), (x_1 + n, x_2), (x_1, x_2 + n^2)$$

for some $n \neq 0$.

Theorem (Walsh 2012)

Let $(X, \mathcal{X}, \mu, T_1, \dots, T_k)$ be a system, p_1, \dots, p_k be integral polynomials and $f_1, \dots, f_k \in L^\infty(\mu)$. Then

$$\frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T_1^{p_1(n)} f_1 \dots T_k^{p_k(n)} f_k$$

converges in L^2 .

What can we say about the limit?

A representative question: joint ergodicity

For instance, when are the polynomials *jointly ergodic* for the system, i.e.

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T_1^{p_1(n)} f_1 \cdots T_k^{p_k(n)} f_k = \int f_1 \cdots \int f_k$$

for all functions f_1, \dots, f_k ?

Two ways to describe the limit

We want to find

- 1 a **factor** (T -invariant σ -algebra) \mathcal{Y}_j ;
- 2 or a **seminorm** $\|\cdot\|_j$ such that

$$\frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T_1^{p_1(n)} f_1 \cdots T_k^{p_k(n)} f_k \rightarrow 0$$

if $\mathbb{E}(f_j|\mathcal{Y}_j) = 0$ or $\|f_j\|_j = 0$.

If this happens, we say that \mathcal{Y}_j or $\|\cdot\|_j$ **controls/is characteristic for** the average (at the index j).

The factor approach dates back to Furstenberg's multiple recurrence result.

Host-Kra seminorms

There exist a family of seminorms $\| \cdot \|_{s,T}$ on $L^\infty(\mu)$ satisfying

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \left\| \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^n f_1 \cdots T^{\ell n} f_\ell \right\|_{L^2(\mu)} \leq C_\ell \min_{j=1, \dots, \ell} \|f_j\|_{\ell, T}$$

for all 1-bounded functions f_1, \dots, f_ℓ .

Similarly, for pairwise distinct integral polynomials p_1, \dots, p_ℓ , there exists s such that

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \left\| \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{p_1(n)} f_1 \cdots T^{p_\ell(n)} f_\ell \right\|_{L^2(\mu)} = 0$$

whenever $\|f_j\|_{s,T} = 0$ for some $s \in \mathbb{N}$.

These **Host-Kra seminorms** satisfy the monotonicity property

$$\|f\|_{1,T} \leq \|f\|_{2,T} \leq \|f\|_{3,T} \leq \dots$$

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These **Host-Kra seminorms** satisfy the monotonicity property

$$\|f\|_{1,T} \leq \|f\|_{2,T} \leq \|f\|_{3,T} \leq \dots$$

There exist factors $\mathcal{Z}_s(T)$ such that

$$\|f\|_{s,T} = 0 \iff \mathbb{E}(f|\mathcal{Z}_{s-1}(T)) = 0.$$

Properties of the factors:

- The factor $\mathcal{Z}_0(T)$ is the **invariant factor** $\mathcal{I}(T)$;
- In particular, if T ergodic, then $\mathbb{E}(f|\mathcal{Z}_0(T)) = \int f$;
- If T is ergodic, then $\mathcal{Z}_1(T)$ is the **Kronecker factor**;
- For $s \in \mathbb{N}$ and T ergodic, $\mathcal{Z}_s(T)$ is an inverse limit of s -step nilsystems (**Host-Kra structure theorem**).

Rational Kronecker factor

We also need the **rational Kronecker factor**:

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{K}_{\text{rat}}(T) &= \langle A \in \mathcal{X} : T^{-r}A = A \text{ for some } r > 0 \rangle \\ &= \mathcal{I}(T) \vee \mathcal{I}(T^2) \vee \mathcal{I}(T^3) \vee \dots\end{aligned}$$

For instance,

- ① For $Tx = x + \sqrt{2}$ on \mathbb{T} , we have

$$\mathbb{E}(f|\mathcal{K}_{\text{rat}}(T)) = \mathbb{E}(f|\mathcal{I}(T)) = \int f;$$

- ② For $Tx = x + 1$ on $\mathbb{Z}/N\mathbb{Z}$, we have

$$\mathbb{E}(f|\mathcal{K}_{\text{rat}}(T)) = f \quad \text{whereas} \quad \mathbb{E}(f|\mathcal{I}(T)) = \int f.$$

Hence $\mathcal{I}(T) = \mathcal{Z}_0(T) \subset \mathcal{K}_{\text{rat}}(T) \subset \mathcal{Z}_1(T) \subset \mathcal{Z}_2(T) \subset \dots$

Single averages

If T is **totally ergodic** (i.e. T, T^2, \dots are ergodic), then

$$\frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{p(n)} f \rightarrow \int f;$$

For general T , we have

$$\frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{p(n)} f \rightarrow 0 \quad \text{if} \quad \mathbb{E}(f | \mathcal{K}_{\text{rat}}(T)) = 0.$$

On the combinatorial side, this corresponds to the fact that if $f_0, f_1 : \mathbb{Z} \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$ are 1-bounded and compactly supported and

$$\sum_{x \in \mathbb{Z}} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N f_0(x) f_1(x + p(n))$$

is “large”, then f_1 has a large average on **arithmetic progressions** of small common difference and length $\sim N^{\deg p}$.

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Multiple ergodic averages of a single transformation

For distinct p_1, \dots, p_k , we know a lot about the L^2 limits of

$$\frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{p_1(n)} f_1 \dots T^{p_k(n)} f_k :$$

- 1 They are always controlled by some Host-Kra seminorm (Host & Kra 2005);
- 2 If p_1, \dots, p_k are **linearly independent**, then $\mathcal{K}_{\text{rat}}(T)$ is characteristic (Frantzikinakis & Kra 2006);
- 3 If p_1, \dots, p_k are **“quadratically independent”**, then $\mathcal{Z}_1(T)$ is characteristic (K. 2022);
- 4 When T is **weakly mixing**, we have

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{p_1(n)} f_1 \dots T^{p_k(n)} f_k = \int f_1 \dots \int f_k$$

for all distinct polynomials (Bergelson 1987).

Summary of our results

For commuting T_1, \dots, T_k and integral p_1, \dots, p_k , we examine the L^2 limits of

$$\frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T_1^{p_1(n)} f_1 \cdots T_k^{p_k(n)} f_k,$$

proving:

- 1 Limiting formulas when p_1, \dots, p_k are linearly independent or T is weak mixing;
- 2 Optimal multiple recurrence results;
- 3 Control by Host-Kra seminorms in most cases of interest;
- 4 Nil + null decomposition for multicorrelation sequence.

Linearly independent polynomials

Theorem (Frantzikinakis & K. 2022)

Let p_1, \dots, p_k be **linearly independent** integral polynomials.

① If T_1, \dots, T_k are **totally ergodic**, then

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T_1^{p_1(n)} f_1 \cdots T_k^{p_k(n)} f_k = \int f_1 \cdots \int f_k.$$

② For general commuting T_1, \dots, T_k , the factors $\mathcal{K}_{\text{rat}}(T_j)$ are characteristic.

Part (1) only known before for **distinct degree** polynomials (due to Chu, Frantzikinakis & Host 2011).

Not even previously known for

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T_1^{n^2} f_1 \cdot T_2^{n^2+n} f_2.$$

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Corollary (Frantzikinakis & K. 2022)

- ① If p_1, \dots, p_k are **linearly independent integral polynomials**, then for every $A \subset X$ and $\varepsilon > 0$, we have

$$\mu(A \cap T_1^{-p_1(n)} A \cap \dots \cap T_k^{-p_k(n)} A) \geq \mu(A)^{k+1} - \varepsilon$$

for a syndetic set of n .

- ② Likewise, for every $B \subset \mathbb{Z}^d$, directions $v_1, \dots, v_k \in \mathbb{Z}^d$ and $\varepsilon > 0$, we have

$$\bar{d}(B \cap (B - v_1 p_1(n)) \cap \dots \cap (B - v_k p_k(n))) \geq \bar{d}(B)^{k+1} - \varepsilon$$

for a syndetic set of n .

Our proof uses two main properties of linearly independent polynomials:

- 1 **Equidistribution property:** for every $\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k \in \mathbb{R}$ not all rational and any linearly independent integral polynomials p_1, \dots, p_k ,

$$\alpha_1 p_1(n) + \dots + \alpha_k p_k(n)$$

is equidistributed in \mathbb{T} ; in particular, we have

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N e(\alpha_1 p_1(n) + \dots + \alpha_k p_k(n)) = 0.$$

- 2 **Seminorm estimates** for the limits

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T_1^{p_1(n)} f_1 \dots T_k^{p_k(n)} f_k.$$

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Seminorm estimates for commuting transformations

Theorem (Frantzikinakis & K. 2022)

Let p_1, \dots, p_k be **pairwise linearly independent**. There exists $s \in \mathbb{N}$ such that for every system, we have

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \left\| \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T_1^{p_1(n)} f_1 \cdots T_k^{p_k(n)} f_k \right\|_{L^2(\mu)} = 0$$

whenever $\|f_i\|_{s, T_i} = 0$ for some i .

Previously, this was only known for distinct degree polynomials.

It was not even known for

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T_1^{n^2} f_1 \cdot T_2^{n^2+n} f_2.$$

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Corollary for weakly mixing transformations

Corollary (Frantzikinakis & K. 2022)

Let p_1, \dots, p_k be **pairwise linearly independent**. For every system of **weakly mixing transformations**, we have

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T_1^{p_1(n)} f_1 \cdots T_k^{p_k(n)} f_k = \int f_1 \cdots \int f_k,$$

This is because for a weakly mixing transformation T , we have

$$\|f\|_{s,T} = \left| \int f \right|$$

for any $s \in \mathbb{N}$ and bounded f .

What about an average like

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T_1^{n^2} f_1 \cdot T_2^{n^2} f_2 \cdot T_3^{n^2+n} f_3?$$

We get seminorm control whenever

$$\mathcal{I}(T_1^{-1} T_2) = \mathcal{I}(T_1) \cap \mathcal{I}(T_2)$$

(so in particular when $T_1^{-1} T_2$ is ergodic).

We show that

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot S^{n^2+n} g = \int f \cdot \int g$$

whenever T, S are totally ergodic and commute.

- 1 Box seminorm control;
- 2 Host-Kra seminorm control;
- 3 Degree lowering.

For T, S , we define

$$\|f\|_{T,S}^4 = \lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N \lim_{M \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{M} \sum_{m=1}^M \int f \cdot T^n \bar{f} \cdot S^m \bar{f} \cdot T^n S^m f.$$

We can similarly define $\|f\|_{T_1, \dots, T_s}$.

Donoso, Ferré-Moragues, Koutsogiannis and Sun showed that

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot S^{n^2+n} g = 0 \quad (1)$$

whenever $\|g\|_{S, \dots, S, T^{-1}S, \dots, T^{-1}S} = 0$.

Our input: (1) holds whenever $\|g\|_{s, S} = 0$ for some $s \in \mathbb{N}$ via a new **seminorm smoothing** technique.

This stronger seminorm control is necessary for the degree lowering argument.

A **ping-pong** strategy: we pass information from g to f and then back to g .

Suppose for simplicity that we have $\|g\|_{T^{-1}S}$ control, i.e.

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot S^{n^2+n} g = 0 \quad \text{whenever} \quad \|g\|_{T^{-1}S} = 0.$$

- 1 (Ping) Control by $\|f\|_{T, \dots, T}$;
- 2 (Pong) Control by $\|g\|_{S, \dots, S}$.

Suppose that

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \left\| \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot S^{n^2+n} g \right\|_2 > 0.$$

Let $h = \lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot S^{n^2+n} g$ and

$$G = \lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N S^{-(n^2+n)} \bar{h} \cdot S^{-(n^2+n)} T^{n^2} \bar{f},$$

so that

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \left\| \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot S^{n^2+n} g \right\|_2^2 = \int g \cdot G.$$

By the Cauchy-Schwarz and definition of G , we have

$$\|G\|_2^2 = \lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \int h \cdot \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot S^{n^2+n} G > 0.$$

and so

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \left\| \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot S^{n^2+n} G \right\|_2 > 0.$$

Recall the assumption that

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot S^{n^2+n} g = 0 \quad \text{whenever} \quad \|g\|_{T^{-1}S} = 0$$

for all g . In particular,

$$\begin{aligned} \lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \left\| \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot S^{n^2+n} g \right\|_2 &> 0 \\ \Rightarrow \lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \left\| \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot S^{n^2+n} G \right\|_2 &> 0 \Rightarrow \|G\|_{T^{-1}S} > 0. \end{aligned}$$

Importantly, we have

$$\|G\|_{T^{-1}S}^2 = \int G \cdot u > 0$$

for a $T^{-1}S$ -invariant function u (i.e. $Su = Tu$); hence

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \left\| \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot S^{n^2+n} u \right\|_2 = \lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \left\| \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot T^{n^2+n} u \right\|_2 > 0.$$

This we know how to handle. We get $\|f\|_{s,T} > 0$ for some $s \in \mathbb{N}$.

So in the **ping** step, we started with averages of the form

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot S^{n^2+n} g$$

and ended up with averages

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot T^{n^2+n} u$$

that are simpler to handle.

In the **pong** step, we similarly reduce to averages

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} (\mathcal{D}_{s,T} f) \cdot S^{n^2+n} g$$

that we know how to handle ($\mathcal{D}_{s,T} f$ is the **dual function** associated with $\|f\|_{s,T}$).

For longer averages such as

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N T^{n^2} f \cdot S^{n^2+n} g \cdot R^{n^2+2n} h,$$

we induct on complexity.

In the **ping** step, we reduce to T, S, S , then S, S, S (same transformation = base case).

In the **pong** step, we replace functions by dual functions (these can be removed by van der Corput).

Theorem (K. 2023)

Let p_1, \dots, p_k be **linearly independent** integral polynomials and $v_1, \dots, v_k \in \mathbb{Z}^d$. Then each subset of $(\mathbb{Z}/N\mathbb{Z})^d$ (N prime) lacking a polynomial progression of the form

$$m, m + v_1 p_1(n), \dots, m + v_k p_k(n)$$

with $n \neq 0$ has at most $O(N^{d-c})$ elements.

This jointly generalises results of Peluse (for $d = 1$) and myself (for distinct degree polynomials).

This extension uses a **quantitative concatenation** result for box norms of independent interest.