MATH 415

Modern Algebra I

Lecture 36:
Factorization in integral domains.

Unity and units

Let R be an **integral domain**, i.e., a commutative ring with the multiplicative identity element and no divisors of zero. The multiplicative identity, denoted 1, is called the **unity** of R. Any element of R that has a multiplicative inverse is called a **unit**. All units of R form a multiplicative group.

Examples. • Integers $\mathbb{Z}$.

Units are 1 and -1.

- Gaussian integers $\mathbb{Z}[\sqrt{-1}] = \{m + ni \in \mathbb{C} \mid m, n \in \mathbb{Z}\}$.

Units are 1, -1, i, and $-i$.

- $\mathbb{F}$: a field.

Units are all nonzero elements.

- $\mathbb{F}[x]$: polynomials in a variable x over a field $\mathbb{F}$.

Units are all nonzero polynomials of degree 0.

Irreducible elements and factorization

Let R be an integral domain. A non-zero, non-unit element of R is called **irreducible** if it cannot be represented as a product of two non-units.

The ring R is called a **factorization ring** if every non-zero, non-unit element x can be expanded into a product $x = q_1 q_2 \dots q_k$ of irreducible elements. Equivalently, $x = u q_1 q_2 \dots q_k$, where u is a unit and each q_i is irreducible.

Two non-zero elements $x, y \in R$ are called **associates** of each other if x divides y and y divides x. An equivalent condition is that $y = ux$ for some unit u. Any associate of a unit (resp. non-unit, irreducible) element is also a unit (resp. non-unit, irreducible).

Suppose $x = u q_1 q_2 \dots q_k$, where u is a unit and each q_i is irreducible. If $q_1', q_2', \dots, q_k'$ are associates of $q_1, q_2, \dots, q_k$, resp., then $x = u' q_1' q_2' \dots q_k'$ for some unit u'.

Examples of factorization rings

- Integers $\mathbb{Z}$.

Units are 1 and -1. Irreducible elements are primes and negative primes. Factorization into irreducible factors is, up to a sign, the usual prime factorization. It is unique up to rearranging the factors and changing their signs. For example, $-6 = (-1) \cdot 2 \cdot 3 = (-2) \cdot 3 = 2 \cdot (-3) = (-3) \cdot 2$.

- Polynomials $\mathbb{F}[x]$ over a field.

Units are all nonzero constants. Irreducible elements are exactly irreducible polynomials. Factorization into irreducible factors is unique up to rearranging the factors and multiplying them by constants.

Example of a non-factorization ring

- $\mathbb{Z} + x\mathbb{Q}[x]$: polynomials over $\mathbb{Q}$ with integer constant terms.

This is a subring of $\mathbb{Q}[x]$. Units are 1 and -1. Irreducible elements are of the form $\pm p$, where p is a prime number, or $\pm q(x)$, where $q(x)$ is an irreducible polynomial over $\mathbb{Q}$ with the constant term 1. No element with zero constant term is irreducible; for example, $x = 2 \cdot \frac{1}{2}x$.

Integral norm

Let R be an integral domain. A function $N : R \setminus \{0\} \to \mathbb{Z}$ is called an **integral norm** on R if

- $N(xy) = N(x)N(y)$ for all $x, y \in R \setminus \{0\}$,
- $N(x) > 0$ for all $x \in R \setminus \{0\}$,
- $N(x) = 1$ if and only if x is a unit.

Theorem If R admits an integral norm N then it is a factorization ring.

Proof: The proof is by strong induction on $n = N(x)$, where x is a non-unit. Assume that factorization is possible for all non-units y with $N(y) < n$. If x is irreducible, we are done. Otherwise $x = yz$, where y and z are non-units. Then $N(y), N(z) > 1$ and $N(y)N(z) = n$, hence $N(y), N(z) < n$. By the inductive assumption, $y = uq_1q_2 \dots q_k$ and $z = u'q'_1q'_2 \dots q'_s$, where all q_i and q'_j are irreducible and u, u' are units. Then $x = (uu')q_1q_2 \dots q_kq'_1q'_2 \dots q'_s$, which completes the induction step.

Examples of integral norms

- Integers $\mathbb{Z}$.

$N(n) = |n|$.

- $\mathbb{F}[x]$: polynomials in a variable x over a field $\mathbb{F}$.

$N(p) = 2^{\deg(p)}$.

- Gaussian integers $\mathbb{Z}[\sqrt{-1}] = \{m + ni \in \mathbb{C} \mid m, n \in \mathbb{Z}\}$.

$N(m+ni) = (m+ni)(\overline{m+ni}) = m^2 + n^2$. If $N(m+ni) = 1$ then $(m+ni)^{-1} = m - ni \in \mathbb{Z}[\sqrt{-1}]$ so that $m+ni$ is a unit. Not every prime integer is irreducible in this ring. For example, $2 = (1+i)(1-i)$, $5 = (2+i)(2-i)$.

- $\mathbb{Z}[\sqrt{3}] = \{m + n\sqrt{3} \mid m, n \in \mathbb{Z}\}$.

$N(m + n\sqrt{3}) = |(m+n\sqrt{3})(m-n\sqrt{3})| = |m^2 - 3n^2|$. It turns out that the map $\phi : \mathbb{Z}[\sqrt{3}] \to \mathbb{Z}[\sqrt{3}]$ defined by $\phi(m + n\sqrt{3}) = m - n\sqrt{3}$ for all $m, n \in \mathbb{Z}$ is an automorphism of the ring $\mathbb{Z}[\sqrt{3}]$.

Unique factorization

Let R be a factorization ring. We say that R is a **unique factorization domain** if factorization of any non-unit element of R into a product of irreducible elements is unique up to rearranging the factors and multiplying them by units.

A non-zero, non-unit element $x \in R$ is called **prime** if, whenever x divides a product yz of two non-zero elements, it actually divides one of the factors y and z.

Proposition Every prime element is irreducible.

Theorem A factorization ring is a unique factorization domain if and only if every irreducible element is prime.

Example of non-unique factorization:

- $\mathbb{Z}[\sqrt{-5}] = \{m + ni\sqrt{5} \in \mathbb{C} \mid m, n \in \mathbb{Z}\}$.

Integral norm: $N(z) = z\overline{z}$, $N(m + ni\sqrt{5}) = m^2 + 5n^2$. This norm can never equal 2 or 3. Hence any element of norm 4, 6 or 9 is irreducible. Now $6 = 2 \cdot 3 = (1 + i\sqrt{5})(1 - i\sqrt{5})$.