MATH 304

Linear Algebra

Lecture 31:
Eigenvalues and eigenvectors.
Characteristic equation.

Eigenvalues and eigenvectors

Definition. Let A be an $n \times n$ matrix. A number $\lambda \in \mathbb{R}$ is called an **eigenvalue** of the matrix A if $\boxed{A\mathbf{v} = \lambda\mathbf{v}}$ for a nonzero column vector $\mathbf{v} \in \mathbb{R}^n$.
The vector $\mathbf{v}$ is called an **eigenvector** of A belonging to (or associated with) the eigenvalue λ.

Remarks. • Alternative notation:
eigenvalue = **characteristic value**,
eigenvector = **characteristic vector**.

• The zero vector is never considered an eigenvector.

Example. $A = \begin{pmatrix} 2 & 0 \\ 0 & 3 \end{pmatrix}$.

$$\begin{pmatrix} 2 & 0 \\ 0 & 3 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 2 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} = 2 \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix},$$

$$\begin{pmatrix} 2 & 0 \\ 0 & 3 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ -2 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ -6 \end{pmatrix} = 3 \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ -2 \end{pmatrix}.$$

Hence $(1, 0)$ is an eigenvector of A belonging to the eigenvalue 2, while $(0, -2)$ is an eigenvector of A belonging to the eigenvalue 3.

Example. $A = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$.

$$\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix}, \quad \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ -1 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} -1 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix}.$$

Hence $(1, 1)$ is an eigenvector of A belonging to the eigenvalue 1, while $(1, -1)$ is an eigenvector of A belonging to the eigenvalue -1.

Vectors $\mathbf{v}_1 = (1, 1)$ and $\mathbf{v}_2 = (1, -1)$ form a basis for $\mathbb{R}^2$. Consider a linear operator $L : \mathbb{R}^2 \to \mathbb{R}^2$ given by $L(\mathbf{x}) = A\mathbf{x}$. The matrix of L with respect to the basis $\mathbf{v}_1, \mathbf{v}_2$ is $B = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix}$.

Let A be an $n \times n$ matrix. Consider a linear operator $L : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}^n$ given by $L(\mathbf{x}) = A\mathbf{x}$.

Let $\mathbf{v}_1, \mathbf{v}_2, \ldots, \mathbf{v}_n$ be a nonstandard basis for $\mathbb{R}^n$ and B be the matrix of the operator L with respect to this basis.

Theorem The matrix B is diagonal if and only if vectors $\mathbf{v}_1, \mathbf{v}_2, \ldots, \mathbf{v}_n$ are eigenvectors of A.

If this is the case, then the diagonal entries of the matrix B are the corresponding eigenvalues of A.

$$A\mathbf{v}_i = \lambda_i \mathbf{v}_i \iff B = \begin{pmatrix} \lambda_1 & & & O \\ & \lambda_2 & & \\ & & \ddots & \\ O & & & \lambda_n \end{pmatrix}$$

Eigenspaces

Let A be an $n \times n$ matrix. Let $\mathbf{v}$ be an eigenvector of A belonging to an eigenvalue λ.

Then $A\mathbf{v} = \lambda\mathbf{v} \implies A\mathbf{v} = (\lambda I)\mathbf{v} \implies (A - \lambda I)\mathbf{v} = \mathbf{0}$.

Hence $\mathbf{v} \in N(A - \lambda I)$, the nullspace of the matrix $A - \lambda I$.

Conversely, if $\mathbf{x} \in N(A - \lambda I)$ then $A\mathbf{x} = \lambda\mathbf{x}$.
Thus the eigenvectors of A belonging to the eigenvalue λ are nonzero vectors from $N(A - \lambda I)$.

Definition. If $N(A - \lambda I) \neq \{\mathbf{0}\}$ then it is called the **eigenspace** of the matrix A corresponding to the eigenvalue λ.

How to find eigenvalues and eigenvectors?

Theorem Given a square matrix A and a scalar λ, the following statements are equivalent:

- λ is an eigenvalue of A,
- $N(A - \lambda I) \neq \{\mathbf{0}\}$,
- the matrix $A - \lambda I$ is singular,
- $\det(A - \lambda I) = 0$.

Definition. $\det(A - \lambda I) = 0$ is called the **characteristic equation** of the matrix A.

Eigenvalues λ of A are roots of the characteristic equation. Associated eigenvectors of A are nonzero solutions of the equation $(A - \lambda I)\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{0}$.

Example. $A = \begin{pmatrix} a & b \\ c & d \end{pmatrix}$.

$$\det(A - \lambda I) = \begin{vmatrix} a - \lambda & b \\ c & d - \lambda \end{vmatrix}$$

$$= (a - \lambda)(d - \lambda) - bc$$

$$= \lambda^2 - (a + d)\lambda + (ad - bc).$$

Example. $A = \begin{pmatrix} a_{11} & a_{12} & a_{13} \\ a_{21} & a_{22} & a_{23} \\ a_{31} & a_{32} & a_{33} \end{pmatrix}$.

$$\det(A - \lambda I) = \begin{vmatrix} a_{11} - \lambda & a_{12} & a_{13} \\ a_{21} & a_{22} - \lambda & a_{23} \\ a_{31} & a_{32} & a_{33} - \lambda \end{vmatrix}$$

$$= -\lambda^3 + c_1\lambda^2 - c_2\lambda + c_3,$$

where $c_1 = a_{11} + a_{22} + a_{33}$ (the *trace* of A),

$$c_2 = \begin{vmatrix} a_{11} & a_{12} \\ a_{21} & a_{22} \end{vmatrix} + \begin{vmatrix} a_{11} & a_{13} \\ a_{31} & a_{33} \end{vmatrix} + \begin{vmatrix} a_{22} & a_{23} \\ a_{32} & a_{33} \end{vmatrix},$$

$c_3 = \det A$.

Theorem. Let $A = (a_{ij})$ be an $n \times n$ matrix. Then $\det(A - \lambda I)$ is a polynomial of λ of degree n:

$$\det(A - \lambda I) = (-1)^n \lambda^n + c_1 \lambda^{n-1} + \cdots + c_{n-1}\lambda + c_n.$$

Furthermore, $(-1)^{n-1} c_1 = a_{11} + a_{22} + \cdots + a_{nn}$ and $c_n = \det A$.

Definition. The polynomial $p(\lambda) = \det(A - \lambda I)$ is called the **characteristic polynomial** of the matrix A.

Corollary Any $n \times n$ matrix has at most n eigenvalues.

Example. $A = \begin{pmatrix} 2 & 1 \\ 1 & 2 \end{pmatrix}$.

Characteristic equation: $\begin{vmatrix} 2-\lambda & 1 \\ 1 & 2-\lambda \end{vmatrix} = 0.$

$(2-\lambda)^2 - 1 = 0 \implies \lambda_1 = 1, \ \lambda_2 = 3.$

$$(A - I)\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{0} \iff \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} x \\ y \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

$$\iff \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} x \\ y \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} \iff x + y = 0.$$

The general solution is $(-t, t) = t(-1, 1), \ t \in \mathbb{R}$. Thus $\mathbf{v}_1 = (-1, 1)$ is an eigenvector associated with the eigenvalue 1. The corresponding eigenspace is the line spanned by $\mathbf{v}_1$.

$$(A-3I)\mathbf{x}=\mathbf{0} \iff \begin{pmatrix}-1 & 1\\ 1 & -1\end{pmatrix}\begin{pmatrix}x\\ y\end{pmatrix}=\begin{pmatrix}0\\ 0\end{pmatrix}$$

$$\iff \begin{pmatrix}1 & -1\\ 0 & 0\end{pmatrix}\begin{pmatrix}x\\ y\end{pmatrix}=\begin{pmatrix}0\\ 0\end{pmatrix} \iff x-y=0.$$

The general solution is $(t,t)=t(1,1),\ \ t\in\mathbb{R}$.
Thus $\mathbf{v}_2=(1,1)$ is an eigenvector associated with the eigenvalue 3. The corresponding eigenspace is the line spanned by $\mathbf{v}_2$.

Summary. $A = \begin{pmatrix} 2 & 1 \\ 1 & 2 \end{pmatrix}$.

- The matrix A has two eigenvalues: 1 and 3.
- The eigenspace of A associated with the eigenvalue 1 is the line $t(-1,1)$.
- The eigenspace of A associated with the eigenvalue 3 is the line $t(1,1)$.
- Eigenvectors $\mathbf{v}_1 = (-1,1)$ and $\mathbf{v}_2 = (1,1)$ of the matrix A form an orthogonal basis for $\mathbb{R}^2$.
- Geometrically, the mapping $\mathbf{x} \mapsto A\mathbf{x}$ is a stretch by a factor of 3 away from the line $x + y = 0$ in the orthogonal direction.