### An introduction to modular plethysms

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#### Outline

- §1 Motivation: the Wronskian isomorphism
- §2 Schur functors, Schur functions and a definition of plethysm
- §3 Modular plethysms for  $SL_2(F)$
- §4 Modular plethysms for the symmetric group

## §1 Motivation: A modular Wronskian isomorphism

Let V be a vector space.

$$\operatorname{Sym}^{2}V = V^{\otimes 2}/\langle v \otimes w - w \otimes v : v, w \in V \rangle$$

$$= \langle vw : v \in V, w \in V \rangle$$

$$\bigwedge^{2}V = V^{\otimes 2}/\langle v \otimes v : v \in V \rangle$$

$$= \langle v \wedge w : v \in V, w \in V \rangle$$

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Observation. Sym<sup>2</sup> $\mathbb{C}^d$  and  $\bigwedge^2 \mathbb{C}^{d+1}$  both have dimension  $\binom{d+1}{2}$ .

For instance, if  $v_1, \ldots, v_d$  is a basis for  $\mathbb{C}^d$  then  $\operatorname{Sym}^2 \mathbb{C}^d$  has basis  $v_1^2, \ldots, v_d^2, v_1 v_2, \ldots, v_{d-1} v_d$  of size  $d + \binom{d}{2}$ .

Question. Asked by **8387333 x00cm303** on MathOverflow: Is there a natural isomorphism between these vector spaces?

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Question. Asked by **838m33 x00m30** on MathOverflow: Is there a natural isomorphism between these vector spaces?

Answer, Yes!

### §1 Motivation: the Wronskian isomorphism

### Are there nice isomorphisms $S^2(k^n) \cong \Lambda^2(k^{n+1})$ ?

Asked 1 year, 1 month ago Active 1 year, 1 month ago Viewed 349 times



This might be forced to migrate to math.SE but let me still risk it.

12 The spaces  $S^2(k^n)$  and  $\Lambda^2(k^{n+1})$  from the title have equal dimensions. Is there a *natural* isomorphism between them?

:

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edited Jan 15 '19 at 10:52





Let E be a 2-dimensional k-vector space. The Wronksian isomorphism is an isomorphism of SL(E)-modules  $\int^m S^{m+r-1}(E) \cong S^m S^r(E)$ . It is easiest to deduce it from the corresponding identity in symmetric functions (specialized to 1 and q), but it can also be defined explicitly: see for example Section 2.5 of this paper of Abdesselam and Chipalkatti.



In particular, identifying  $S^n(E)$  with the homogeneous polynomial functions on E of degree n, their definition becomes the map  $\wedge^2 S^n(E) \to S^2 S^{n-1}(E)$  defined by



$$f \wedge g \mapsto \frac{\partial f}{\partial X} \frac{\partial g}{\partial Y} - \frac{\partial f}{\partial Y} \frac{\partial g}{\partial X}.$$

Now  $S^n(E) \cong k^{n+1}$  and  $S^{n-1}(E) \cong k^n$ , so we have the required isomorphism  $S^2 k^n \cong \wedge^2 k^{n+1}$ .

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edited Jan 15 '19 at 11:49



# Action of $SL_2(F)$ on $\bigwedge^2 Sym^2 E$ where $E = \langle X, Y \rangle$

 $\begin{array}{cccc}
X & Y & X^2 \wedge XY & Y^2 \wedge XY & X^2 \wedge Y^2 \\
\begin{pmatrix} \alpha & \beta \\ \gamma & \delta \end{pmatrix} & \longmapsto \begin{pmatrix} \alpha^3 \delta - \alpha^2 \beta \gamma & \alpha \beta^2 \delta - \alpha \beta^2 \gamma & 2\alpha^2 \beta \delta - 2\alpha \beta^2 \gamma \\ -\alpha \gamma^2 \delta + \beta \gamma^3 & \alpha \delta^3 - \beta \gamma \delta^2 & 2\beta \gamma^2 \delta - 2\alpha \gamma \delta^2 \\ \alpha^2 \gamma \delta - \alpha \gamma^2 \beta & \beta^2 \gamma \delta - \alpha \beta \delta^2 & \alpha^2 \delta^2 - \beta^2 \gamma^2 \end{pmatrix}$ 

 $X^2 \wedge XY \quad Y^2 \wedge XY \qquad X^2 \wedge Y^2$ 

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 $= \begin{pmatrix} \alpha^2 & -\beta^2 & 2\alpha\beta \\ -\gamma^2 & \delta^2 & -2\gamma\delta \\ \alpha\gamma & -\beta\delta & \alpha\delta + \beta\gamma \end{pmatrix}$ 

 $= \begin{pmatrix} \alpha^2 \Delta & -\beta^2 \Delta & 2\alpha\beta\Delta \\ -\gamma^2 \Delta & \delta^2 \Delta & -2\gamma\delta\Delta \\ \alpha\gamma\Delta & -\beta\delta\Delta & (\alpha\delta + \beta\gamma)\Delta \end{pmatrix}$ 

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Action of 
$$\operatorname{SL}_2(F)$$
 on  $\bigwedge^2\operatorname{Sym}^2E$  where  $E=\langle X,Y\rangle$ 

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$$\frac{X^{2} \wedge XY}{\alpha^{2}} \frac{XY}{\alpha^{2}} \frac{XY}{\alpha^{2}} \frac{Y^{2}}{\alpha^{2}} \frac{2\alpha\beta}{\alpha\gamma}$$
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▶ Even after the sign flip, this is not the matrix for  $\mathrm{Sym}^2 E$ . The matrices are not even conjugate if  $\mathrm{char}\ F=2$ 

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$$\operatorname{Sym}_2 E = \langle X \otimes X, Y \otimes Y, X \otimes Y + Y \otimes X \rangle \cong (\operatorname{Sym}^2 E)^{\star}.$$

▶ So  $(\operatorname{Sym}^2 E)^* \cong_{\operatorname{SL}_2(F)} \bigwedge^2 \operatorname{Sym}^2 E$  and the duality is essential.

### Duality and the modular Wronskian isomorphism

Theorem (McDowell-W 2020)

Let F be any field. Let  $E \cong F^2$  be the natural representation of  $\mathrm{SL}_2(F)$ . There is an explicit isomorphism

$$\mathrm{Sym}_r\mathrm{Sym}^\ell E\cong_{\mathrm{SL}_2(F)}\bigwedge^r\mathrm{Sym}^{r+\ell-1}E.$$

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As a corollary we obtain a modular version of Hermite reciprocity.

Corollary (Hermite 1854 over C, McDowell-W 2020)

Let F be any field. Let m,  $\ell \in \mathbb{N}$  and let E be the natural 2-dimensional representation of  $\mathrm{GL}_2(F)$ . Then

$$\operatorname{Sym}_m \operatorname{Sym}^{\ell} E \cong \operatorname{Sym}^{\ell} \operatorname{Sym}_m E$$

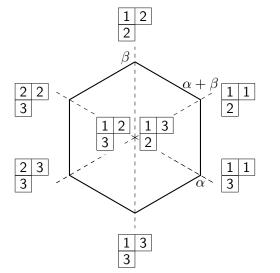
by an explicit map.

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  - $E \otimes E \cong \operatorname{Sym}^2 E \oplus \bigwedge^2 E$
  - $E \otimes E \otimes E \cong \operatorname{Sym}^3 E \oplus \bigwedge^3 E \oplus ?$

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Now take  $E = \langle e_1, e_2 \rangle \cong \mathbb{C}^2$ 

- ► Tensor product:  $Sym^2 E \otimes Sym^2 E$
- Symmetric power of symmetric power:  $Sym^2(Sym^2E)$
- **Composition of Schur functors**:  $\nabla^{\nu} (\nabla^{\mu}(E))$

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  - **Composition of Schur functors**:  $\nabla^{\nu}(\nabla^{\mu}(E))$
- Symmetric functions
  - $s_{(2)}(y_1, y_2, y_3) = y_1^2 + y_2^2 + y_3^3 + y_1y_2 + y_1y_3 + y_2y_3$
  - $s_{(2,1)}(x_1, x_2, x_3) = x^{\frac{1}{2}} + x^{\frac{1}{3}} + x^{\frac{1}{2}} + x^{\frac{1}{3}} + x^{\frac{1}{2}} + x^{\frac{1}{3}} + x^{\frac{1}{3}} + x^{\frac{2}{3}} +$

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#### Symmetric functions

• 
$$s_{(2)}(y_1, y_2, y_3) = y_1^2 + y_2^2 + y_3^3 + y_1y_2 + y_1y_3 + y_2y_3$$
  
•  $s_{(2,1)}(x_1, x_2, x_3) = x^{11} + x^{11} + x^{12} + x^{13} + x^{12} + x^{13} + x$ 

 $= x_1^2 x_2 + x_1^2 x_3 + x_1 x_2^2 + 2x_1 x_2 x_3 + \cdots + x_2 x_2^2$ 

• Multiplication: 
$$s_{(2)}(x_1, x_2)^2 = (x_1^2 + x_2^2 + x_1 x_2)^2$$

Evaluate  $s_{(2)}(y_1, y_2, y_3)$  at monomials in  $s_{(2)}(x_1, x_2)$  to get

$$s_{(2)}(x_1^2, x_2^2, x_1x_2) = (x_1^2)^2 + (x_1^2)(x_2^2) + (x_1^2)(x_1x_2) + \dots + (x_1x_2)^2.$$

▶ **Plethysm**:  $(s_{\nu} \circ s_{\mu})(x_1, x_2, \dots, x_d) = s_{\nu}$  evaluated at monomials in  $s_{\mu}(x_1, \dots, x_d)$ . Equivalently: formal character of  $\nabla^{\nu}(\nabla^{\mu}(E))$ 

### Combinatorial definitions

Given a tableau t let  $x^t = x_1^{a_1} x_2^{a_2} \dots$  where  $a_i$  is the number of entries of t equal to i.

#### Definition (Schur function)

Let  $\mu$  be a partition. The *Schur function*  $s_{\mu}$  is the generating function enumerating semistandard  $\mu$ -tableaux by weight:  $\sum_{t \in \mathrm{SSYT}(\mu)} x^t$ .

For example 
$$x^{\frac{112}{35}} = x_1^2 x_2 x_3 x_5$$
 and

$$s_{(2)}(x_1, x_2,...) = x^{\boxed{11}} + x^{\boxed{12}} + x^{\boxed{22}} + x^{\boxed{13}} + \cdots$$
  
=  $x_1^2 + x_1x_2 + x_2^2 + x_1x_3 + \cdots$ 

#### Definition

Let  $\mu$  and  $\nu$  be partitions. Let  $\mathrm{SSYT}(\mu) = \{t(1), t(2), \ldots\}$ . The plethystic product of  $s_{\nu}$  and  $s_{\mu}$  is  $s_{\nu} \circ s_{\mu} = s_{\nu}(x^{t(1)}, x^{t(2)}, \ldots)$ .

**Warning.** I haven't defined a general plethysm. Note  $\circ$  is not linear in its second component:  $f \circ (g + h) \neq f \circ g + f \circ h$ .

### §3 Plethysms and Stanley's Hook Content Formula

#### **Theorem**

Let  $E = \langle X, Y \rangle$  be natural representation of  $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbb{C})$ . Let  $\lambda$  and  $\mu$  be partitions and let  $\ell, m \in \mathbb{N}$ . The following are equivalent:

- (i)  $\nabla^{\lambda} \operatorname{Sym}^{\ell} E \cong_{\operatorname{SL}_2(\mathbb{C})} \nabla^{\mu} \operatorname{Sym}^m E$ ;
- (ii)  $(s_{\lambda} \circ s_{(\ell)})(q, q^{-1}) = (s_{\mu} \circ s_{(m)})(q, q^{-1});$
- (iii)  $s_\lambda(q^\ell,q^{\ell-2},\ldots,q^{-\ell})=s_\mu(q^m,q^{m-2},\ldots,q^{-m});$
- (iv)  $s_{\lambda}(1,q,\ldots,q^{\ell}) = s_{\mu}(1,q,\ldots,q^m)$  up to a power of q;
- $(i) \ \textit{representations} \\ \textit{of} \ \mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbb{C}) \\ \longleftrightarrow \\ \hline (ii) \ \textit{plethysms of} \\ \textit{symmetric functions} \\ \longleftrightarrow \\ \hline (iv) \ \textit{combinatorial} \\ \textit{enumeration}$

Example of (iv)  $\iff$  (i): Hermite reciprocity over  $\mathbb{C}$ .

### §3 Plethysms and Stanley's Hook Content Formula

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- (iv)  $s_{\lambda}(1,q,\ldots,q^{\ell})=s_{\mu}(1,q,\ldots,q^{m})$  up to a power of q;
- (v)  $C(\lambda) + \ell + 1/H(\lambda) = C(\mu) + m + 1/H(\mu)$

where  $\ /\$  is difference of multisets (negative multiplicities okay) and

- ▶  $C(\lambda) = \{j i : (i, j) \in [\lambda]\}$  is the multiset of contents of  $\lambda$ ;
- ▶  $H(\lambda) = \{h_{(i,j)} : (i,j) \in [\lambda]\}$  is the multiset of hook lengths of  $\lambda$ .

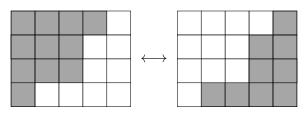
Part (v) is a corollary of Stanley's Hook Content Formula.

Example of  $(v) \iff (i)$ : Wronksian isomorphism over  $\mathbb{C}$ .

### Plethystic complement isomorphism for $SL_2(\mathbb{C})$

Let  $\lambda$  be a partition contained in a box with d rows and s columns. Let  $\lambda^{\bullet d}$  be its complement. For example if s=5, d=4 then

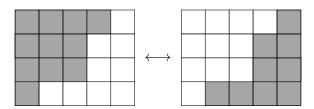
$$(4,3,3,1)^{\bullet 4}=(4,2,2,1).$$



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$$(4,3,3,1)^{\bullet 4} = (4,2,2,1).$$



### Theorem (King 1985 [if], Paget-W 2019 [only if])

Let E be the natural representation of  $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbb{C})$ . Let  $\lambda$  have at most d parts. Then

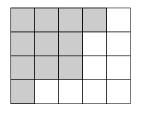
$$\nabla^{\lambda} \operatorname{Sym}^{\ell} E \cong \nabla^{\lambda^{\bullet d}} \operatorname{Sym}^{\ell} E$$

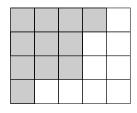
if and only if  $\lambda = \lambda^{\bullet d}$  or  $\ell = d - 1$ .

$$\nabla^{(4,3,3,1)} \operatorname{Sym}^3 E \cong \nabla^{(4,2,2,1)} \operatorname{Sym}^3 E.$$

By (i) 
$$\Longrightarrow$$
 (v) taking  $\lambda = (4,3,3,1)$ ,  $\lambda^{\bullet 4} = (4,2,2,1)$ 

$$C(\lambda) + 4/H(\lambda) = C(\lambda^{\bullet 4}) + 4/H(\lambda^{\bullet 4}).$$





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By (i) 
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 (v) taking  $\lambda = (4, 3, 3, 1), \lambda^{\bullet 4} = (4, 2, 2, 1)$ 

$$C(\lambda) + 4 \cup H(\lambda^{\bullet 4}) = C(\lambda^{\bullet 4}) + 4 \cup H(\lambda).$$

$$C(\lambda) + 4$$

4	5	6	7	
3	4	5		
2	3	4		
1				

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$$C(\lambda) + 4$$

4	ļ	5	6	7	1
3	3	4	5	1	3
2		3	4	2	4
1	•	1	2	5	7
$H(\lambda^{\bullet 4})$					

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$$C(\lambda) + 4$$

4 5 6 7 1

3 4 5 1 3

2 3 4 2 4

1 1 2 5 7

 $H(\lambda^{\bullet 4})$ 

$H(\lambda$
-------------

• •					
	7	5	4	1	
	5	3	2		
	4	2	1		
	1				

For example, using a rectangle with 4 rows and 5 columns,

$$\nabla^{(4,3,3,1)}\mathrm{Sym}^3E\cong\nabla^{(4,2,2,1)}\mathrm{Sym}^3E.$$

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 $C(\lambda) + 4 \cup H(\lambda^{\bullet 4}) = C(\lambda^{\bullet 4}) + 4 \cup H(\lambda)$ .

$$C(\lambda) + 4$$

4 5 6 7 1

3 4 5 1 3

2 3 4 2 4

1 1 2 5 7

 $H(\lambda^{\bullet 4})$ 

 $H(\lambda)$ 

$$\begin{array}{c|c|c|c|c} \hline & 7 & 6 & 5 & 4 \\ \hline & C(\lambda^{\bullet 4}) + 4 & \\ \hline \end{array}$$

5 4

Either way have same multiset:  $\{1^4, 2^3, 3^3, 4^4, 5^3, 6, 7^2\}$ 

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$$\Longrightarrow$$
 (v) taking  $\lambda = (4,3,3,1)$ ,  $\lambda^{\bullet 4} = (4,2,2,1)$   
 $C(\lambda) + 4 \cup H(\lambda^{\bullet 4}) = C(\lambda^{\bullet 4}) + 4 \cup H(\lambda)$ .

Either way have same multiset:  $\{1^4, 2^3, 3^3, 4^4, 5^3, 6, 7^2\}$ 

Problem. A 2001 theorem of Christine Bessenrodt implies a stronger version with arm-lengths. Interpret this as a plethysm of Jack symmetric functions.

### Modular complements

#### Theorem (McDowell-W 2020)

- Let G be a group;
- ► Let V be a d-dimensional representation of G over an arbitrary field;
- Let  $s \in \mathbb{N}$ , and let  $\lambda$  be a partition with  $\ell(\lambda) \leq d$  and first part at most s.
- ▶ Recall that  $\lambda^{\bullet d}$  denotes the complement of  $\lambda$  in the  $d \times s$  rectangle.

There is an explicit isomorphism

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This generalizes the complementary partition isomorphism from  $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbb{C})$  to arbitrary fields and groups. In fact, over any ring.

### A 'no-go' result in positive characteristic

### Theorem (King 1985)

Let E be the natural representation of  $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbb{C})$  and let  $m \in \mathbb{N}$ . For a large class of partitions  $\lambda$ , there is an explicit isomorphism

$$\nabla^{\lambda} \operatorname{Sym}^{m+\ell(\lambda)} E \cong_{\operatorname{SL}(E)} \nabla^{\lambda'} \operatorname{Sym}^{m+\ell(\lambda')} E.$$

- ▶ In particular, King's result holds when  $\lambda$  is a hook; that is  $\lambda = (a+1,1^b)$  for some  $a,b \in \mathbb{N}_0$ .
- ▶ Just for this talk: say that a partition in the class for King's theorem is 'royal'.

#### Theorem (Paget-W 2019)

Let E be the natural representation of  $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbb{C})$ . There is a plethystic isomorphism

$$\nabla^{\lambda} \operatorname{Sym}^{m} E \cong_{\operatorname{SL}(E)} \nabla^{\lambda'} \operatorname{Sym}^{m'} E$$

if and only if  $\lambda$  is royal and  $m - m' = \ell(\lambda) - \ell(\lambda')$ .

### A 'no-go' result in positive characteristic

Let F be an infinite field of prime characteristic p and let E be the natural representation of  $SL_2(F)$ .

#### Theorem (McDowell-W 2020)

There exist infinitely many pairs (a,b) such that, provided e is sufficiently large, the eight representations of  $\mathrm{SL}_2(F)$  obtained from  $\nabla^{(a+1,1^b)}\mathrm{Sym}^{p^e+b}E$  by

- ightharpoonup Replacing  $\nabla$  with  $\Delta$  (duality)
- ▶ Replacing  $(a + 1, 1^b)$  with  $(b + 1, 1^a)$  and  $p^e + b$  with  $p^e + a$  (King conjugation);
- ▶ Replacing  $\operatorname{Sym}^{\ell} E$  with  $\operatorname{Sym}_{\ell} E$  (another duality); are all non-isomorphic.

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#### **Problem**

What plethystic isomorphisms of representations of  $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbb{C})$  have modular analogues?

### §4 Modular plethysms for the symmetric group

#### Problem (Decomposition numbers)

Determine the composition factors of Specht modules over fields of prime characteristic.

```
(6)
(5,1)
(4,2)
(3,3)
(4,1,1)
(3,2,1)
(2,2,1,1)
     (6) 1
   (5,1) 1 1 (4,2) · · 1
```

For instance the Specht module  $S^{(3,3)}$  has composition factors labelled by (5,1) and (3,3).

### Even partitions and plethysms

For  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ ,

$$s_n \circ s_2 = \sum_{\lambda \in \operatorname{Par}(n)} s_{2\lambda}$$

where  $2\lambda$  is the *even* partition obtained by doubling each part of  $\lambda$ . Equivalently, for the symmetric group,

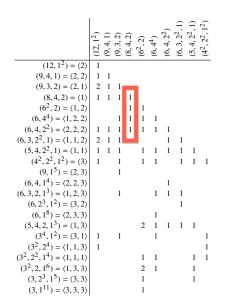
$$\mathbb{C}\! \uparrow_{S_2 \wr S_n}^{S_{2n}} = \bigoplus_{\lambda \in \operatorname{Par}(n)} S^{2\lambda}.$$

Given a p-core  $\gamma$ , let  $\mathcal{E}(\gamma)$  be the set of even partitions obtained from  $\gamma$  by adding the least possible number of disjoint p-hooks.

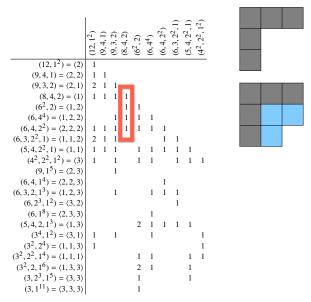
For example if 
$$p = 3$$
 then  $\mathcal{E}\left( - \right) = \left\{ (6,2), (4,4), (4,2,2) \right\}$ 

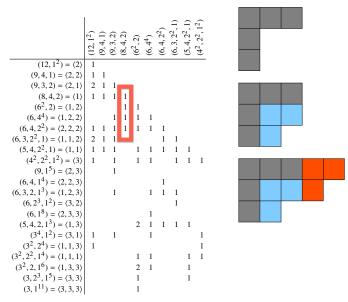
#### Theorem (Giannelli-W 2014)

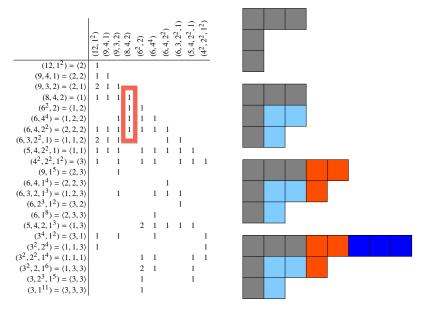
Let p be an odd prime and let  $\gamma$  be a p-core. Let  $\lambda \in \mathcal{E}(\gamma)$  be maximal. The column of the decomposition matrix labelled by  $\lambda$  has entries 0 and 1. Moreover its non-zero entries are in rows labelled by  $E(\gamma)$ 

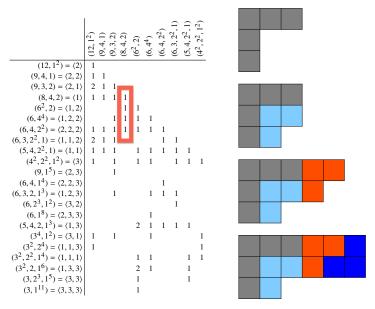










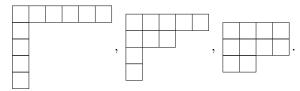


# The plethysm $s_{(1^n)} \circ s_{(2)}$

#### Proposition (Paget-W 2022)

Let  $\nu \in \operatorname{Par}(n)$  and let  $\mu \in \operatorname{Par}(m)$  with  $m, n \geq 2$ . The only plethysms  $s_{\nu} \circ s_{\mu}$  in which every constituent is both maximal and minimal in the dominance order are  $s_{(1^n)} \circ s_{(2)}$  and  $s_{(1^n)} \circ s_{(1^2)}$ .

For example,  $s_{(1^5)} \circ s_{(2)}$  has constituents



This is a special case of a much more general theorem extending joint work from 2019 and 2021 that gives an explicit combinatorial description of all maximal and minimal constituents in plethysms.

#### **Problem**

Get results on decomposition numbers from the monomial modules for the symmetric group corresponding to  $s_{(k)}(s_{(1^n)} \circ s_{(1^2)})$ .



#### Thank you!

Some more suggestions for problems on modular plethysms are in my MFO 'Research summary'.