

# HIGHER REPRESENTATION THEORY

---

## 1. PROLOGUE

---

Throughout these notes, we will often talk about both weak and strict 2-categories. We will use “bicategory” to mean a weak 2-category, which roughly consists of a class of objects, a class of 1-morphisms between objects and a class of 2-morphisms between 1-morphisms, together with unitors, associators and a notion of horizontal composition. Meanwhile, a “2-category” will be taken to mean a strict 2-category, which is roughly a bicategory whose unitors and associators are equalities rather than mere natural transformations. Note that there is a bijection between one-object bicategories (respectively, 2-categories) and monoidal (respectively, strict monoidal) categories.

## 2. FINITARY BIREPRESENTATION THEORY

---

**Definition 2.1.** (Idempotent Complete). *Let  $\mathcal{C}$  be a category. An idempotent is an endomorphism  $p : A \rightarrow A$  in  $\mathcal{C}$  such that  $p \circ p = p$ . An idempotent is said to split if there is an object  $B$  and morphisms  $\pi : A \rightarrow B$ ,  $\iota : B \rightarrow A$  in  $\mathcal{C}$  such that  $p = \iota \circ \pi$  and  $\text{id}_B = \pi \circ \iota$ . A category is said to be idempotent complete (or idempotent split) if every idempotent splits.*

Note that the condition  $\text{id}_B = \pi \circ \iota$  implies that  $\pi$  is an epimorphism and  $\iota$  is a monomorphism. To see why, suppose we have morphisms  $h, k : B \rightarrow C$  with  $h \circ \pi = k \circ \pi$ . Then  $h = h \circ \pi \circ \iota = k \circ \pi \circ \iota = k$ , whence  $\pi$  is an epimorphism. Similarly, given morphisms  $h, k : C \rightarrow B$  with  $\iota \circ h = \iota \circ k$ , we have that  $h = \pi \circ \iota \circ h = \pi \circ \iota \circ k = k$ , whence  $\iota$  is a monomorphism. Thus, because  $\iota$  is a monomorphism,  $B$  is by definition a subobject of  $A$ . In other words, a category being idempotent complete means that every idempotent  $p : A \rightarrow A$  can be seen as a projection onto some subobject  $B$  followed by an inclusion back into  $A$ . Moreover, in the additive setting we have the following results.

**Proposition 2.2.** *An idempotent  $p : A \rightarrow A$  belonging to a preadditive category splits if and only if  $A = \text{Im}(p) \oplus \text{Ker}(p)$ .*

**Proof.** Suppose  $p : A \rightarrow A$  is an idempotent that splits. Then by definition we have a subobject  $I$  of  $A$  together with an epimorphism  $\pi_I : A \rightarrow I$  and a monomorphism  $\iota_I : I \rightarrow A$  satisfying  $p = \iota_I \circ \pi_I$  and  $\text{id}_I = \pi_I \circ \iota_I$ . Moreover, because  $\text{id}_A - p$  is also idempotent, there similarly exists a subobject  $K$  of  $A$  together with an epimorphism  $\pi_K : A \rightarrow K$  and a monomorphism  $\iota_K : K \rightarrow A$  satisfying  $\text{id}_A - p = \iota_K \circ \pi_K$  and  $\text{id}_K = \pi_K \circ \iota_K$ . Because  $\text{id}_A = \iota_I \circ \pi_I + \iota_K \circ \pi_K$ , we have the biproduct diagram

$$I \begin{array}{c} \xleftarrow{\pi_I} \\ \xrightarrow{\iota_I} \end{array} A \begin{array}{c} \xleftarrow{\pi_K} \\ \xrightarrow{\iota_K} \end{array} K.$$

By [Mac13, theorem VIII.2.2], it follows that  $A = I \oplus K$ . We claim now that  $\text{Im}(p) = I$ ; we shall prove this by showing that  $p$  admits the canonical decomposition

$$K \xrightarrow{\iota_K} A \xrightarrow{\pi_I} I \xrightarrow{\iota_I} A \xrightarrow{\pi_K} K.$$

In particular, we claim that  $\text{Ker}(p) = (K, \iota_K)$ , that  $\text{Coker}(p) = (K, \pi_K)$ , that  $\text{Coker}(\iota_K) = (I, \pi_I)$  and that  $\text{Ker}(\pi_K) = (I, \iota_I)$ . We show that the first two hold and remark that showing the remaining two is essentially the same. First, observe that

$$p \circ \iota_K = \iota_I \circ \pi_I \circ \iota_K = (\text{id}_A - \iota_K \circ \pi_K) \circ \iota_K = \iota_K - \iota_K \circ \pi_K \circ \iota_K = \iota_K - \iota_K = 0.$$

Moreover, given an object  $K'$  together with a morphism  $k' : K' \rightarrow A$  for which  $p \circ k' = 0$ , we see that by taking  $\ell := \pi_K \circ k'$ , we have that

$$\iota_K \circ \ell = \iota_K \circ \pi_K \circ k' = (\text{id}_A - p) \circ k' = k'.$$

Thus  $\text{Ker}(p) = (K, \iota_K)$ . As for  $\text{Coker}(p)$ , we observe that

$$\pi_K \circ p = \pi_K \circ \iota_I \circ \pi_I = \pi_K \circ (\text{id}_A - \iota_K \circ \pi_K) = \pi_K - \pi_K \circ \iota_K \circ \pi_K = \pi_K - \pi_K = 0,$$

and that for any object  $C'$  together with a morphism  $c' : A \rightarrow C'$  for which  $c' \circ p = 0$ , taking  $\ell := c' \circ \iota_K$  gives us

$$\ell \circ \pi_K = c' \circ \iota_K \circ \pi_K = c' \circ (\text{id}_A - p) = c'.$$

That  $\text{Coker}(\iota_K) = (I, \pi_I)$  and  $\text{Ker}(\pi_K) = (I, \iota_I)$  follow similarly, whence  $A = \text{Im}(p) \oplus \text{Ker}(p)$ .

Conversely, suppose that  $p : A \rightarrow A$  is an idempotent for which  $A = \text{Im}(p) \oplus \text{Ker}(p)$ . Then we have the canonical decomposition

$$\text{Ker}(p) \xrightarrow{k} A \xrightarrow{\pi} \text{Im}(p) \xrightarrow{\iota} A \xrightarrow{c} \text{Coker}(p).$$

By definition this means that  $p = \iota \circ \pi$ , so we need only show that  $\text{id}_{\text{Im}(p)} = \pi \circ \iota$ .  $\text{id}_{\text{Im}(p)} = \pi \circ \iota$ . But note that  $\pi$  is a cokernel and  $\iota$  is a kernel, hence they are an epimorphism and a monomorphism, respectively. Thus by the definition of epimorphisms and monomorphisms, we may cancel  $p \circ p = p$  on the right by  $\iota$  and on the left by  $\pi$ , whence we obtain nothing but

$$p \circ p = p \implies \iota \circ \pi \circ \iota \circ \pi = \iota \circ \pi \implies \pi \circ \iota = \text{id}_{\text{Im}(p)}$$

as desired. Thus  $p$  splits. This completes the proof. ■

This result is helpful from a philosophical perspective: it essentially tells us in some heuristic sense that split idempotents categorify the notion of projections from linear algebra, which always split. Moreover, recall that a preadditive category is said to be *Karoubian* (or *pseudo-Abelian*) if every idempotent admits a kernel (or equivalently if every idempotent admits an image, as we may obtain this from  $\text{Ker}(\text{id}_A - p)$ ). We therefore have the following corollary.

**Corollary 2.3.** *A preadditive category is Karoubian if and only if it is idempotent complete.*

**Example 2.4.** The category of projective modules over a ring is the Karoubi envelope of its full subcategory of free modules, as a module is projective if and only if it is a direct summand of a free module. In other words, categories of projective modules are idempotent complete in a universal way.

**Definition 2.5.** (Finitary Category). *An additive,  $\mathbb{k}$ -linear category  $\mathcal{C}$  is called multifinitary if it is idempotent complete, it has finitely many isomorphism classes of indecomposable objects and it has finite-dimensional  $\mathbb{k}$ -vector spaces of morphisms. If  $\mathcal{C}$  is not monoidal, this is equivalent to being finitary; otherwise, it is said to be finitary if its unit object is indecomposable.*

Some authors write instead that a category is finitary if it is equivalent to the category of finitely generated, projective modules over some finite-dimensional, associative  $\mathbb{k}$ -algebra. Such a category is certainly Karoubi by our previous remarks, and it also has both finitely many isomorphism classes of indecomposable objects and finite-dimensional  $\mathbb{k}$ -vector spaces of morphisms. The converse direction follows from a finitary modification of the Freyd-Mitchell embedding theorem. It may also be worth noting that we can replace “projective” with “injective” in the previous definition, as these two notions are dual in the sense that being projective is the same as being injective in the opposite category.

**Definition 2.6.** Let  $\mathfrak{A}_{\mathbb{k}}^f$  denote the 2-category whose objects are multifinitary categories, whose 1-morphisms are  $\mathbb{k}$ -linear functors and whose 2-morphisms are natural transformations.

Note that any  $\mathbb{k}$ -linear functor between additive,  $\mathbb{k}$ -linear categories is automatically additive.

**Definition 2.7.** (Hom-Category). Let  $\mathcal{C}$  be a bicategory with objects  $\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$ . We define the Hom-category  $\mathcal{C}(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j})$  to be the category whose objects are the 1-morphisms of  $\mathcal{C}$  from  $\mathbf{i}$  to  $\mathbf{j}$  and whose 1-morphisms are the 2-morphisms of  $\mathcal{C}$  that are horizontally between  $\mathbf{i}$  and  $\mathbf{j}$ , where composition is given by vertical composition. We interpret the End-categories  $\mathcal{C}(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{i})$  as being monoidal categories with respect to the composition of 1-morphisms.

**Definition 2.8.** (Finitary Bicategory). A bicategory  $\mathcal{C}$  is said to be (multi)finitary if

- it has finitely many objects;
- for any pair  $\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$ , the Hom-category  $\mathcal{C}(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j})$  is (multi)finitary;
- horizontal composition of 2-morphisms is both biadditive and  $\mathbb{k}$ -bilinear.

Observe that  $\mathcal{C}(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{i})$  has a canonical monoidal structure given by composition, which is strict if  $\mathcal{C}$  is a 2-category. Thus for finitary bicategories, we are subtly asking that the corresponding identity 1-morphism  $\text{id}_{\mathbf{i}}$  be indecomposable as an object of  $\mathcal{C}(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{i})$  for every  $\mathbf{i} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$ .

In a finitary 2-category, vertical composition will automatically be both biadditive and  $\mathbb{k}$ -bilinear as a consequence of the Hom-categories  $\mathcal{C}(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j})$  being additive and  $\mathbb{k}$ -linear. However, we genuinely must ask that horizontal composition be biadditive and  $\mathbb{k}$ -bilinear.

**Example 2.9.** Consider the algebra of dual numbers  $D := \mathbb{C}[x]/\langle x^2 \rangle$ , and let  ${}_D\mathbf{Mod}_D$  be the category of  $(D, D)$ -bimodules. The endofunctor  $F := D \otimes_{\mathbb{C}} -$  on  ${}_D\mathbf{Mod}_D$  happens to satisfy  $F \circ F \cong F \oplus F$  (why? this sounds like nonsense); thus we have a  $\mathbb{C}$ -finitary 2-category  $\mathcal{C}_D$  with a single object  $\mathbf{i} := {}_D\mathbf{Mod}_D$ , whose 1-morphisms are all endofunctors of  $\mathbf{i}$  that are isomorphic to a direct sum of copies of  $F$  and the identity functor, and whose 2-morphisms are all natural transformations.

**Proposition 2.10.** A monoidal category  $\mathcal{C}$  is (multi)finitary if and only if its monoidal delooping  $BC$  is (multi)finitary.

**Proof.** If  $\mathcal{BC}$  is (multi)finite, it is obvious that  $\mathcal{C}$  is (multi)finite, since  $\mathcal{C} = \mathcal{BC}(\bullet, \bullet)$ , where  $\text{Ob}(\mathcal{BC}) = \{\bullet\}$ . Conversely, suppose  $\mathcal{C}$  is (multi)finite. Clearly  $\mathcal{BC}$  has finitely many objects (in particular, it has only one), and  $\mathcal{BC}(\bullet, \bullet) = \mathcal{C}$  is (multi)finite. Finally, horizontal composition is given by the monoidal product and is hence biadditive and  $\mathbb{k}$ -bilinear. This completes the proof. ■

**Definition 2.11.** (2-Representation). *A birepresentation of a bicategory  $\mathcal{C}$  is a pseudofunctor from  $\mathcal{C}$  to  $\mathbf{Cat}$ , the 2-category of small categories. A 2-representation of a 2-category  $\mathcal{C}$  is a 2-functor from  $\mathcal{C}$  to  $\mathbf{Cat}$ .*

**Definition 2.12.** (Finitary 2-Representation). *A finitary birepresentation of a bicategory  $\mathcal{C}$  is a  $\mathbb{k}$ -linear pseudofunctor from  $\mathcal{C}$  to  $\mathfrak{A}_{\mathbb{k}}^f$ . A finitary 2-representation of a 2-category  $\mathcal{C}$  is a  $\mathbb{k}$ -linear 2-functor from  $\mathcal{C}$  to  $\mathfrak{A}_{\mathbb{k}}^f$ .*

Just like every 2-category is a bicategory, every 2-representation is a birepresentation. If  $\mathcal{C}$  is a finitary 2-category, then any finitary 2-representation of  $\mathcal{C}$  is a finitary birepresentation.

**Intuition 2.13.** Recall that a representation of a group  $G$  is morally nothing but a functor  $F : \mathbf{BG} \rightarrow \mathbf{Vect}$ , where the action of  $G$  on  $V := F(\bullet)$  is given by  $g \cdot v := [F(g)](v)$  for all  $v \in V$  and  $g \in \text{Mor}(\mathbf{BG})$ . Analogously, given a 2-representation  $M : \mathcal{C} \rightarrow \mathbf{Cat}$ , we have a 2-action of  $\mathcal{C}$  given by  $F \cdot X := [M(F)](X)$  for all  $X \in M(\mathbf{i})$  and  $F \in \text{Mor}_{\mathcal{C}}^1(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j})$ , where  $\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$ . The upshot here is that we should think of the 1-morphisms in our 2-category as our “group elements”, with composition becoming “group multiplication”. This perspective motivates the following definitions.

**Proposition 2.14.** *Let  $\mathcal{C}$  be a monoidal (respectively, strict monoidal) category. There exists a bijection between  $\mathcal{C}$ -module categories and birepresentations (respectively, 2-representations) of the delooping category  $\mathcal{BC}$ .*

**Proof.** Let  $\mathcal{C}$  be a monoidal category and  $\mathcal{BC}$  its delooping category. Recall that there is a bijection between  $\mathcal{C}$ -module structures on a category  $\mathcal{M}$  and monoidal functors of the form  $F : \mathcal{C} \rightarrow \text{End}(\mathcal{M})$ . Such a functor  $F$  induces a canonical birepresentation  $M : \mathcal{BC} \rightarrow \mathbf{Cat}$  that takes the single object  $\bullet \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{BC})$  to  $\mathcal{M}$  and otherwise acts on the 1-morphisms and 2-morphisms by  $F$ . Conversely, let  $M : \mathcal{BC} \rightarrow \mathbf{Cat}$  be a birepresentation and write  $\mathcal{M} := M(\bullet)$ . This naturally induces a functor  $F : \mathcal{C} \rightarrow \mathbf{Cat}(\mathcal{M}, \mathcal{M}) = \text{End}(\mathcal{M})$  that acts on objects and morphisms of  $\mathcal{C}$  by  $M$ . Clearly these two constructions are inverse to each other. It is easy to see that if  $\mathcal{C}$  is strict, the result for 2-representations follows similarly. This completes the proof. ■

**Definition 2.15.** (Equivalence of 2-Representations). *We say that two birepresentations  $M$  and  $N$  of  $\mathcal{C}$  are equivalent if there exists a strong transformation  $\Phi : M \rightarrow N$  such that the component  $\Phi_{\mathbf{i}}$  is an equivalence of categories for each  $\mathbf{i} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$  (see [Lei98] for the definition of a strong transformation).*

**Definition 2.16.** (Ideal). A left (respectively right) ideal  $\mathcal{I}$  of a category  $\mathcal{C}$  consists of a subclass  $\text{Ob}(\mathcal{I})$  of  $\text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$  together with, for every pair  $X, Y \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{I})$ , a subclass  $\text{Mor}_{\mathcal{I}}(X, Y)$  of  $\text{Mor}_{\mathcal{C}}(X, Y)$  that is stable under post-composition (respectively pre-composition) with morphisms from  $\mathcal{C}$ . In other words, it is a left (respectively right)  $\mathcal{C}$ -stable sub-semicategory. If  $\mathcal{C}$  is finitary, we additionally ask that  $\text{Mor}_{\mathcal{I}}(X, Y)$  be both an Abelian subgroup and a  $\mathbb{k}$ -subspace of  $\text{Mor}_{\mathcal{C}}(X, Y)$ , for all pairs  $X, Y \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$ . We say that  $\mathcal{I}$  is a two-sided ideal if it is both a left ideal and a right ideal, and that it is a subideal of  $\mathcal{J}$  if its classes of objects and morphisms are subclasses.

**Example 2.17.** Consider a subcategory  $\mathcal{T}$  of  $\text{Vec}_{\mathbb{k}}$  whose endomorphisms of  $\mathbb{k}^n$  are the  $n \times n$  upper triangular Toeplitz matrices. Then  $\text{End}(\mathbb{k}^2) \cong \mathbb{k}[x]/\langle x^2 \rangle$ . If we consider the sub-semicategory of  $\mathcal{T}$  containing only the object  $\mathbb{k}^2$  and the endomorphisms  $\mathbb{k}\{x\}$  (that is, linear scalings of the matrix with 1 in the off-diagonal), we obtain an ideal of  $\mathcal{T}$ .

**Definition 2.18.** ( $\mathcal{C}$ -Stable Ideal). Let  $M$  be a birepresentation of  $\mathcal{C}$ . A  $\mathcal{C}$ -stable ideal  $I$  of  $M$  is a collection  $I := \{I(\mathbf{i}) : \mathbf{i} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})\}$ , where each  $I(\mathbf{i})$  is a (two-sided) ideal of  $M(\mathbf{i})$  such that  $[M(F)](I(\mathbf{i}))$  is a subideal of  $I(\mathbf{j})$  for all 1-morphism  $F \in \text{Mor}_{\mathcal{C}}^1(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j})$ . We say that  $I$  is proper if there exists some  $\mathbf{i} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$  for which  $\{0\} \subset I(\mathbf{i}) \subset M(\mathbf{i})$ .

Let  $M$  be a birepresentation of a multifinitary bicategory  $\mathcal{C}$  for which each  $M(\mathbf{j})$  is additive and idempotent complete, and let  $X \in \text{Ob}(M(\mathbf{i}))$  for some  $\mathbf{i} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$ . Consider the *additive closure* (closure under isomorphisms, direct sums and direct summands) of the orbit of  $X$  under the action of  $\mathcal{C}$ ; that is, the collection

$$\mathcal{C}(\{X\}) := \{[M(F)](X) : \mathbf{j} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C}), F \in \text{Mor}_{\mathcal{C}}^1(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j})\}_{\oplus}$$

where the subscript  $\oplus$  denotes the aforementioned additive closure. Due to the additivity of the 1-morphisms of  $\mathfrak{A}_{\mathbb{k}}^f$ , it follows that  $\mathcal{C}(\{X\})$  is itself stable under the action of  $\mathcal{C}$ . This therefore induces a sub-birepresentation  $G_M(\{X\})$  of  $\mathcal{C}$  by restriction, with each  $\mathbf{j} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$  sent to

$$\mathcal{C}_j(\{X\}) := \{[M(F)](X) : F \in \text{Mor}_{\mathcal{C}}^1(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j})\}_{\oplus},$$

the *additive subcategory* (full subcategory that is closed under isomorphisms, direct sums and direct summands) of  $M(\mathbf{j})$  generated by the objects of  $\mathcal{C}(\{X\})$  that lie in  $M(\mathbf{j})$ . In principle this process works for any collection of objects  $\{X_i : i \in I\}$  with  $X_i \in \text{Ob}(M(\mathbf{i}_i))$ , whence

$$\mathcal{C}(\{X_i : i \in I\}) := \{[M(F)](X_i) : i \in I, \mathbf{j} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C}), F \in \text{Mor}_{\mathcal{C}}^1(\mathbf{i}_i, \mathbf{j})\}_{\oplus}$$

similarly induces a sub-birepresentation  $G_M(\{X_i : i \in I\})$  of  $\mathcal{C}$ . In any case, we will only need to consider the single-object situation, as it allows us to make the following evocative definition.

**Definition 2.19.** (Transitive 2-Representation). Let  $M$  be a finitary birepresentation of a multifinitary bicategory  $\mathcal{C}$ . We say that  $M$  is transitive if, for every  $\mathbf{i} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$  and non-zero  $X \in \text{Ob}(M(\mathbf{i}))$ , the embedding  $\mathcal{C}_j(\{X\}) \hookrightarrow M(\mathbf{j})$  is an equivalence for all  $\mathbf{j} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$ .

**Intuition 2.20.** Recall that a module  $M$  is simple if and only if every cyclic submodule generated by a non-zero element of  $M$  is equal to  $M$ . This is exactly what we're trying to capture with transitivity! In the 2-representation world, however, things are slightly more involved, as this does not imply that there are no non-trivial ideals (a natural property we would like to ask of simple 2-representations).

**Definition 2.21.** (Simple 2-Representation). *A finitary birepresentation of a multifinitary bicategory  $\mathcal{C}$  is said to be simple (or simple transitive) if it admits no proper  $\mathcal{C}$ -stable ideals.*

**Proposition 2.22.** *Every simple birepresentation is transitive.*

**Proof.** Let  $M$  be a simple birepresentation of a multifinitary category  $\mathcal{C}$  and take  $X \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$  non-zero. Certainly  $G_M(\{X\})$  is a  $\mathcal{C}$ -stable ideal of  $M$ , so it must be non-proper by simplicity. In other words, for all  $j \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$ , we know that  $\mathcal{C}_j(\{X\})$  must either be zero or equivalent to  $M(j)$ .

**Why is this non-zero when  $X$  is non-zero?** We need the proof for lemma 3 of <https://www2.math.uu.se/~vomaz>. This completes the proof. ■

**Example 2.23.** *Transitive does not imply simple?*

**Proposition 2.24.** *Let  $M$  be a transitive birepresentation of a multifinitary category  $\mathcal{C}$ . Then  $M$  admits a unique maximal,  $\mathcal{C}$ -stable ideal  $I$ . Moreover, no  $I(i)$  contains any identity morphisms apart from the one corresponding to the zero object.*

**Proof.** ... ■

**Proposition-Definition 2.25.** (Simple Quotient). *A finitary birepresentation  $M$  of a multifinitary category  $\mathcal{C}$  is simple if and only if the unique maximal,  $\mathcal{C}$ -stable ideal  $I$  from proposition 2.24 is the zero ideal. The simple birepresentation  $\underline{M}$  given by the quotient  $M/I$  is known as the simple quotient of  $M$ .*

**Proof.** ... ■

Let  $M$  be a finitary birepresentation of  $\mathcal{C}$ . We denote by  $\text{Ind}(M)$  the set of isomorphism classes of indecomposable objects in every  $M(i)$ , for  $i \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$ ; that is,

$$\text{Ind}(M) = \bigsqcup_{i \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})} \{[X] \in M(i) : X \text{ is indecomposable}\}.$$

Note that  $\text{Ind}(M)$  is clearly finite, as  $\mathcal{C}$  has finitely many objects and each category  $M(i) \in \text{Ob}(\mathfrak{A}_k^f)$  has finitely many isomorphism classes of indecomposable objects.

For  $X, Y \in \text{Ind}(M)$ , where for instance  $X \in M(i_X)$  and  $Y \in M(i_Y)$ , we write  $X \geq Y$  if there is a 1-morphism  $F : M(i_Y) \rightarrow M(i_X)$  in  $\mathcal{C}$  such that  $X$  is isomorphic to a direct summand of  $[M(F)](Y)$ .

**Lemma 2.26.** *Let  $M$  be a finitary birepresentation. The binary relation  $\geq$  defined above defines a preorder on  $\text{Ind}(M)$  known as the action preorder.*

**Proof.** Clearly  $\geq$  is reflexive, as we can just take  $F := 1_X$ . Moreover, suppose that  $X$  is isomorphic to a direct summand of  $[M(F)](Y)$  and  $Y$  is isomorphic to a direct summand of  $[M(G)](Z)$ ; that is,

$$\begin{aligned} [M(F)](Y) &\cong X \oplus X_1 \oplus X_2 \oplus \cdots, \\ [M(G)](Z) &\cong Y \oplus Y_1 \oplus Y_2 \oplus \cdots. \end{aligned}$$

In order to show transitivity, we would like to show that  $X$  is isomorphic to a direct summand of  $[M(FG)](Z)$ . Well, because the morphisms of  $\mathfrak{A}_{\mathbb{k}}^f$  are additive, we simply observe that

$$\begin{aligned} [M(FG)](Z) &\cong [M(F)](Y) \oplus [M(F)](Y_1) \oplus [M(F)](Y_2) \oplus \cdots \\ &\cong X \oplus X_1 \oplus X_2 \oplus \cdots \oplus [M(F)](Y_1) \oplus [M(F)](Y_2) \oplus \cdots . \end{aligned}$$

This completes the proof. ■

Suppose we define an equivalence relation  $\sim$  given by  $X \sim Y$  if and only if  $X \geq Y$  and  $Y \geq X$ . Obviously  $\geq$  extends to a partial order on  $\text{Ind}(\mathcal{M})/\sim$ . In particular, we have the following result.

**Proposition 2.27.** *Let  $\mathcal{M}$  be a finitary birepresentation. Then  $\mathcal{M}$  is transitive if and only if  $\text{Ind}(\mathcal{M})/\sim$  has only one element.*

**Proof.** Basic idea: if  $\text{Ind}(\mathcal{M})/\sim$  has only one element, then any indecomposable object in some  $\mathcal{M}(\mathbf{i})$  hits every other indecomposable object in every other  $\mathcal{M}(\mathbf{j})$  via some action from  $\mathcal{C}$ . ■

**Definition 2.28.** (Poset Ideal). *An ideal of a partially ordered set  $(P, \geq)$  is a non-empty subset  $I$  such that*

- *for all  $x \in I$  and  $y \in P$ ,  $x \geq y$  implies that  $y \in I$  (lower set);*
- *for all  $x, y \in I$ , there is some  $z \in I$  such that  $z \geq x$  and  $z \geq y$  (upward directed set).*

*A coideal of a partially ordered set  $(P, \geq)$  is a subset whose complement is an ideal.*

For what follows, we will be considering coideals rather than ideals; the reason is because we want to “go upwards” with respect to our equivalence relation. That is, if we have (the isomorphism class of) an indecomposable object  $X$ , we also want to have every object that, roughly speaking, is isomorphic to a direct summand of  $X$  (perhaps after  $X$  is acted on by  $\mathcal{C}$ ). This ensures that we are closed under taking direct summands, even after an action by  $\mathcal{C}$ .

Let  $\mathcal{M}$  be a finitary birepresentation of  $\mathcal{C}$  and  $Q$  a coideal of  $\text{Ind}(\mathcal{M})/\sim$ . For  $\mathbf{i} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$ , define  $\mathcal{M}_Q(\mathbf{i})$  to be the additive subcategory of  $\mathcal{M}(\mathbf{i})$  generated by the indecomposable objects  $X \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{M}(\mathbf{i}))$  whose equivalence class lies in  $Q$ . Then  $\mathcal{M}_Q : \mathbf{i} \mapsto \mathcal{M}_Q(\mathbf{i})$  induces a sub-birepresentation of  $\mathcal{M}$ , known as the sub-birepresentation of  $\mathcal{M}$  associated to  $Q$ .

Let  $Q \subset R$  be a pair of coideals in  $\text{Ind}(\mathcal{M})/\sim$  and let  $I(\mathbf{i})$  denote the ideal in  $\mathcal{M}_R(\mathbf{i})$  generated by the identity morphisms in  $\mathcal{M}_Q(\mathbf{i})$ . Then the birepresentation  $\mathcal{M}_R$  induces a birepresentation  $\mathcal{M}_{R/Q}$  sending  $\mathbf{i}$  to the quotient category  $\mathcal{M}_{R/Q}(\mathbf{i}) := \mathcal{M}_R(\mathbf{i})/I(\mathbf{i})$ . This is known as the quotient of  $\mathcal{M}$  associated to  $Q \subset R$ . Note that if  $|R \setminus Q| = 1$ , then  $|\text{Ind}(\mathcal{M}_{R/Q})/\sim| = 1$ , so  $\mathcal{M}_{R/Q}$  will be transitive by proposition 2.27. Check if this follows.

Choose  $r \in \text{Ind}(\mathcal{M})/\sim$  and let  $X_r$  be the maximal coideal in  $\text{Ind}(\mathcal{M})/\sim$  that does not contain  $r$ . In other words,  $X_r$  is the complement of the principal ideal with principal (maximal) element  $r$ . Why do they say  $r$  is *minimal* in the complement of  $X_r$ ? This makes no sense. Are my ideals defined the wrong way around? This induces a coideal  $Y_r := X_r \cup \{r\}$ , whence the associated quotient  $\mathcal{M}_{Y_r/X_r}$  is transitive by proposition 2.27. We henceforth let  $\underline{\mathcal{M}}_r$  denote the simple quotient  $\mathcal{M}_{Y_r/X_r}$ .

Before stating the main theorem of this section, we recall the classical Jordan-Hölder theorem for modules over rings. Let  $M$  be an  $R$ -module admitting the two composition series

$$\{0\} = M_0 \subset M_1 \subset \cdots \subset M_n = M$$

and

$$\{0\} = M'_0 \subset M'_1 \subset \cdots \subset M'_m = M,$$

where by *composition series* we mean that these are filtrations of submodules where the *composition factors*  $L_i := M_i/M_{i-1}$  and  $L'_i := M'_i/M'_{i-1}$  are simple for all  $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$  and  $j \in \{1, \dots, m\}$ . The *Jordan-Hölder theorem* tells us that the *composition lengths* are equal – that is,  $n = m$  – and moreover that there exists a permutation  $\sigma \in S_n$  such that  $L_i \cong L'_{\sigma(i)}$  for all  $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$ .

Consider a filtration of coideals

$$\emptyset = Q_0 \subset Q_1 \subset \cdots \subset Q_n = \text{Ind}(M)/\sim$$

such that  $|Q_i \setminus Q_{i-1}| = 1$  for all  $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$ . We call this a *complete filtration*. As shown previously, from such a filtration we have a corresponding *weak Jordan-Hölder series*

$$\{0\} = M_{Q_0} \subset M_{Q_1} \subset \cdots \subset M_{Q_n} = M$$

consisting of sub-birepresentations whose *weak composition quotients*  $L_i := \underline{M}_{Q_i/Q_{i-1}}$  are simple birepresentations for all  $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$ . With this, we have the following result.

**Theorem 2.29.** (Weak Jordan-Hölder Theorem). *Let  $M$  be a finitary birepresentation of a multifinitary bicategory  $\mathcal{C}$  admitting the two complete filtrations*

$$\emptyset = Q_0 \subset Q_1 \subset \cdots \subset Q_n = \text{Ind}(M)/\sim$$

and

$$\emptyset = Q'_0 \subset Q'_1 \subset \cdots \subset Q'_m = \text{Ind}(M)/\sim,$$

with weak composition quotients  $\{L_i\}_{i=1}^n$  and  $\{L'_j\}_{j=1}^m$  respectively. Then  $m = n$ , and moreover there exists a permutation  $\sigma \in S_n$  such that  $L_i$  and  $L_{\sigma(i)}$  are equivalent for all  $i \in \{1, \dots, n\}$ .

**Proof.** . ■

In what sense is this weak Jordan-Hölder theorem “weak”? The decategorifications of these simple quotients are “transitive  $\mathbb{N}$ -modules” and usually not simple.

**Definition 2.30.** (2-Ideal). A left (respectively right) biideal  $\mathcal{I}$  of a bicategory  $\mathcal{C}$  consists of a subclass  $\text{Ob}(\mathcal{I})$  of  $\text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$  together with, for every pair  $\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{I})$ , a left (respectively right) ideal  $\mathcal{I}(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j})$  of  $\mathcal{C}(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j})$  such that the 2-morphisms are stable under horizontal post-composition (respectively horizontal pre-composition) with 2-morphisms from  $\mathcal{C}$ . We say that  $\mathcal{I}$  is a two-sided biideal if it is both a left biideal and a right biideal.

Let  $\mathcal{C}$  be a bicategory and  $\mathbf{i} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$ , and consider the pseudofunctor  $\mathcal{C}(\mathbf{i}, -) : \mathcal{C} \rightarrow \text{Cat}$  such that

- objects  $\mathbf{j} \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C})$  are sent to the Hom-category  $\mathcal{C}(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j})$ ;



- 1-morphisms of the form  $F \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C}(\mathbf{j}, \mathbf{k})) = \text{Mor}_{\mathcal{C}}^1(\mathbf{j}, \mathbf{k})$  are sent to the “post-composition by  $F$ ” functor  $F_* : \mathcal{C}(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j}) \rightarrow \mathcal{C}(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{k})$  given by  $G \mapsto F \circ G$ ;
- 2-morphisms of the form  $\alpha : F \Rightarrow G$ , for  $F, G \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C}(\mathbf{j}, \mathbf{k})) = \text{Mor}_{\mathcal{C}}^1(\mathbf{j}, \mathbf{k})$ , are sent to the “horizontal post-composition by  $\alpha$ ” natural transformation given by  $\alpha_* : \beta \mapsto \alpha \circ_h \beta$ , where  $\beta : F' \Rightarrow G'$  for  $F', G' \in \text{Ob}(\mathcal{C}(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j})) = \text{Mor}_{\mathcal{C}}^1(\mathbf{i}, \mathbf{j})$ .

We call this the *ith Yoneda* (or *principal*) *birepresentation* and denote it by  $\mathbb{P}_{\mathbf{i}}$ . In particular, if  $\mathcal{C}$  is a finitary, then its corresponding Yoneda birepresentations are also all finitary. If  $\mathcal{C}$  is a finitary 2-category, its Yoneda birepresentations are finitary 2-representations. Moreover, the image of each  $\mathbb{P}_{\mathbf{i}}$  induces a left biideal of  $\mathcal{C}$ .

## REFERENCES

---

- [EGNO16] Etingof, P., Gelaki, S., Nikshych, D., and Ostrik, V., *Tensor Categories*, Mathematical Surveys and Monographs 205, American Mathematical Society, 2016.
- [Lei98] Leinster, T., *Basic bicategories*, 1998, DOI: 10.48550/arXiv.math/9810017.
- [Mac13] Mac Lane, S., *Categories for the Working Mathematician*, Graduate Texts in Mathematics, Springer New York, 2013.
- [MM14] Mazorchuk, V. and Miemietz, V., *Additive versus abelian 2-representations of fiat 2-categories*, Trans. Amer. Math. Soc. 14.3 (2014), pp. 595–615.
- [MM16] Mazorchuk, V. and Miemietz, V., *Transitive 2-representations of finitary 2-categories*, Trans. Amer. Math. Soc. 368.11 (2016), pp. 7623–7644.
- [MMM+21] Mackaay, M. et al., *Finitary birepresentations of finitary bicategories*, Forum Math. 33.5 (2021), pp. 1261–1320.
- [MMM+23] Mackaay, M. et al., *Simple transitive 2-representations of Soergel bimodules for finite Coxeter types*, Proc. Lond. Math. Soc. 126.5 (2023), pp. 1585–1655.
- [Rou08] Rouquier, R., *2-Kac-Moody Algebras*, preprint, 2008, DOI: 10.48550/arXiv.0812.5023.

Page intentionally left blank.

## Motivation

- What is finitary birepresentation theory? My take: a “categorification” of the representation theory of finite-dimensional algebras, arising from the study of knot invariants, tensor categories and operator algebras. In other words, Jones mathematics (lol).
- Stealing some slogans from one of Dani’s talks: representation theory is group theory in vector spaces, while birepresentation theory is group theory in linear categories.
- Why is it important? Basically for (somehow) studying the fields I just mentioned. Hopefully by the end of this little series we can figure out the answer to this together.

## Plan

- Today I’d like to introduce one of the main theorems of birepresentation theory: the “weak Jordan-Hölder theorem”. This theorem is a nice (abstract) motivation for the classification of simple birepresentations.
- In principle I’m not sure how helpful this talk will be. It will mostly be walking you through what I’ve been thinking about over the past couple of weeks. The main theorem is, I think, quite nice, but getting there will likely be dry. Next time I’d like to focus more on examples (especially Soergel bimodules and their classification) if I’m capable enough.
- Addressing a question: why am I talking about birepresentations? The people were promised 2-representations! In classifying 2-representations of Soergel bimodules, it was quickly found that the language of 2-representations was too restrictive. Later on in this series I will probably transition to 2-representations, but at least in this talk I’d like to state things as generally as possible to avoid issues later on.
- As a reminder to myself, I’d like to maintain a little definition bank so you guys can keep track of definitions.

## Multifinitary Categories

- What are multifinitary 1-categories? Add this to the definition bank.
- In linear algebra, all idempotents split. Idempotent complete categories live somewhere between additive categories and Abelian categories. In particular, *all pseudo-Abelian categories are idempotent complete!* These remarks are what “unlocked” idempotent completeness for me.
- Examples of finitary categories (that I can’t write down because I haven’t prepared any concrete examples): (semi)groups and their representations, quantum groups and their categorifications, tensor categories, fusion categories, modular (tensor) categories, 2-Kac-Moody categories, etc.
- $\mathbf{Vec}_k$  is a helpful example:  $\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$ .
- Maybe mention example 2.8? Mazorchuk and Miemietz would have you believe it’s a useful example but man is it impenetrable.
- Also,  $\mathbf{SBim}(W, S)$  lololol
- Define the category of multifinitary categories.
- Finitary bicategories. Add this to the definition bank. We can generate these from finitary monoidal categories: in particular, there is a bijection between monoidal categories and one-object bicategories, with delooping taking us upstairs and Hom-categories taking us downstairs. Mention strict case.

## Finitary Birepresentations

- What are finitary birepresentations? There is a bijection between module categories and birepresentations of one-object bicategories. Example: Yoneda birepresentations.
- Equivalence of birepresentations. I don't understand these very well yet.

## Simple Birepresentations

- Walk through next block: essentially, I want to define what it means for a birepresentation to be transitive. If you're like me and you keep forgetting what this adjective means, an action of  $G$  on a set  $X$  is said to be transitive if, for any  $x, y \in X$ , there is some  $g \in G$  for which  $g \cdot x = y$ .
- Define transitive birepresentations. Add this to the definition bank. What are we trying to capture with transitivity?
- There is a "better" notion of simplicity.
- What are ideals of finitary 1-categories? Mention that I've talked to Dani about this and they gave a somewhat confusing answer, but I think I've figured it out. I'm mentioning this in case I'm actually stupid.
- Give an example –  $\text{Vec}_k$  yippee!!
- What are  $\mathcal{C}$ -stable ideals of birepresentations?
- What are simple birepresentations? Add this to the definition bank. Why are they "better"? They somehow more completely characterize what it means for a representation to be simple. Unfortunately, I don't really have an example of a non-simple transitive birepresentation for you right now (supposedly they exist), but I'll hopefully have one next week. Many of the naïve examples of transitive birepresentations end up being simple.
- Result I'll need: transitive birepresentations admit a unique maximal ideal, and quotienting by this ideal gives you a simple birepresentation. We call this the simple quotient of  $M$ . I haven't finished working through the proof for this yet.

## Weak Jordan-Hölder

- Define  $\text{Ind}(M)$ , note that it is finite. Define preorder, outline the proof. Recall: preorder means  $X \geq X$  and  $X \geq Y, Y \geq Z \implies X \geq Z$ . Quotienting by  $X \sim Y \iff X \geq Y, Y \geq X$  gives us an honest partial order (pretty much by definition).
- Proposition:  $M$  is transitive if and only if  $|\text{Ind}(M)/\sim| = 1$ . This is yet another folklore result, but I can maybe offer some intuition as to why we might expect this to be true. I still need to prove it rigorously.
- Define poset ideal and coideal.
- Maybe now would be a good time to remind everyone of the classical Jordan-Hölder theorem. Given a representation  $M$ , we would like a sensible notion of composition series.
- How do coideals induce sub-birepresentations?
- How do pairs of coideals induce transitive birepresentations?
- How can we make these birepresentations simple?
- State the theorem.
- Maybe go through an example with  $\text{Rep}(\mathbb{Z}/2\mathbb{Z})$ ?