Asymptotic Methods

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January 16, 2016

What we'll learn in this course

Examples:

(1) $I(\lambda) = \int_{\infty}^{\infty} \exp[-\lambda \cosh u] du$
We expect that $I(\lambda) \to 0$ as $\lambda \to \infty$. But how fast?

(2) $i\hbar \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial t} = -\frac{\hbar^2}{2m} \frac{\partial^2 \psi}{\partial x^2} + V(x)$ with $\psi(x,t) \in \mathbb{C}$, $V = V(x)$.
Look for a solution $\psi(x,t) = \exp\left[\frac{-iEt}{\hbar}\right] f(x) \implies \hbar^2 f'' = 2m(V(x) - E)f$
$\hbar$ is very small. So a natural problem is to try and understand $\epsilon^2 \frac{d^2 y}{dx^2} = Q(x) y$ when $\epsilon \ll 1$.
The "semi-classical limit" or "geometric optics".

(3) Put $\hbar = 1$, $m = \frac{1}{2}$, $V = 0$; specify $\psi(x, 0) = \psi_0(x)$
Fourier transform $\to \psi(x,t) = \frac{1}{(4\pi i t)^{1/2}} \int_{\mathbb{R}} \exp\left[\frac{i|x-y|^2}{4t}\right] \psi_0(y) dy$.
Question: Does $\psi(x,t)$ really approach $\psi_0(x)$ as $t \to 0$?

1 Asymptotic expansions of functions

$$\sinh x = \frac{e^x - e^{-x}}{2} = x + \frac{x^3}{3!} + \frac{x^5}{5!} + \ldots$$

say $\sinh x \sim x$ as $x \to 0$.
Definition: $f \sim g$ as $x \to x_0$ is $|f(x) - g(x)| = o(g(x))$ as $x \to x_0$.

Example: $|\sinh x - x| = |\frac{x^3}{3!} + \frac{x^5}{5!} + \ldots| = O(x^3) = o(x)$
($F = O(G)$ as $x \to x_0$ means $\exists C > 0$ such that $|F(x)| \le C|G(x)|$ in some open interval I, with $x_0 \in I$)
In fact, by remainder estimate for Taylor expansion

$$\left| \sinh x - \sum_0^N \frac{x^{2n+1}}{(2n+1)!} \right| = O(x^{2n+3}) = o(x^{2n+1}) \text{ as } x \to 0$$

We write $\sinh x \sim \sum_0^\infty \frac{x^{2n+1}}{(2n+1)!}$

Definition: Asymptotic sequence and asymptotic expansion.

(i) $\{\phi_n\}_{n=0}^\infty$ is an asymptotic sequence (of functions) as $x \to x_0$ if $\phi_{n+1}(x) = o(\phi_n(x))$ as $x \to x_0$. $(\forall n)$

(ii) A function f has asymptotic expansion w.r.t. $\{\phi_n\}$ as $x \to x_0$ written $f \sim \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} a_n \phi_n$ if $\left| f(x) - \sum_0^N a_n \phi_n(x) \right| = o(\phi_N(x))$ as $x \to x_0$ $\forall N$
Notice the difference with Taylor expansion - an asymptotic expansion need not converge as $N \to \infty$ for any x!

Examples:

- $\{\phi_n(x) = x^n\}$ as $x \to 0$, the most common sequence.
- $\{\phi_n(x) = x^{2n+1}\}$ as $x \to 0$
- $\{\phi_n(x) = e^{-n/x}\}$ as $x \to 0^+$ (i.e. $x > 0$ and $x \to 0$ on right)

Warning: $\sin x \sim x - x - \frac{x^3}{3!} + \frac{x^5}{5!} + \dots$ as $x \to 0$.
$\sin x + e^{-1/x} \sim x - x - \frac{x^3}{3!} + \frac{x^5}{5!} + \dots$ as $x \to 0^+$.

Why?

$$\left| \sin x + e^{-1/x} - \sum_0^N \frac{(-1)^n x^{2n+1}}{(2n+1)!} \right| = \left| \sum_{n=2N+1}^{\infty} \frac{(-1)^n x^{2n+1}}{(2n+1)!} + e^{-1/x} \right| = O(x^{2N+3}) = o(x^{2N+1})$$

Moral: information is lost in asymptotic expansions!

However, given f and asymptotic sequence, the a_j's are unique, i.e.

$$\begin{aligned} a_0 &= \lim_{x \to x_0} \frac{f(x)}{\phi_0(x)} \\ a_1 &= \lim_{x \to x_0} \frac{f(x) - a_0\phi_0(x)}{\phi_1(x)} \\ &\vdots \end{aligned}$$

Question: Is it possible that $f(x) \sim 0$ as $x \to 0$?
If $|f(x) - 0| = o(0) = 0$ in some interval I, containing 0, then $f \equiv 0$ on I.

Example: Consider $Ei(x) = \int_x^{\infty} \frac{e^{-t}}{t} dt$ as $x \to +\infty$.
Consider the asymptotic sequence $\phi_n(x) = \frac{1}{n}$ as $x \to +\infty$

$$Ei(x) = \int_x^{\infty} \frac{-d(e^{-t})}{t} = \left[-\frac{e^{-t}}{t} \right]_x^{\infty} - \int_x^{\infty} \frac{e^{-t}}{t^2} dt = \frac{e^{-x}}{x} - \int_x^{\infty} \frac{e^{-t}}{t^2} dt$$

Claim: $Ei(x) \sim \frac{e^{-x}}{x}$ as $x \to +\infty$.

$$\left| Ei(x) - \frac{e^{-x}}{x} \right| = \left| \int_x^{\infty} \frac{e^{-t}}{t^2} dt \right| \le \frac{1}{x^2} \int_x^{\infty} e^{-t} dt = \frac{e^{-t}}{x^2} = o\left(\frac{e^{-x}}{x} \right)$$

Work out full expansion of Ei w.r.t. $\phi_n = \frac{e^{-x}}{x^n}$.