14.5 The Chain Rule

The Chain Rule: Case 1

Suppose that $z = f(x, y)$ is a differentiable function of x and y, where $x = g(t)$ and $y = h(t)$ are both differentiable functions of t. Then z is a differentiable function of t and

$$\frac{dz}{dt} = \frac{\partial z}{\partial x}\frac{dx}{dt} + \frac{\partial z}{\partial y}\frac{dy}{dt}$$

Proof

Since $z = f(x, y)$ is differentiable, we have

$$\Delta z = f_x(x_0, y_0)\Delta x + f_y(x_0, y_0)\Delta y + \varepsilon_1 \Delta x + \varepsilon_2 \Delta y$$

where $\varepsilon_1 \to 0$ and $\varepsilon_2 \to 0$ as $(\Delta x, \Delta y) \to (0, 0)$. Dividing both sides by Δt, we have

$$\frac{\Delta z}{\Delta t} = \frac{\partial z}{\partial x}\frac{\Delta x}{\Delta t} + \frac{\partial z}{\partial y}\frac{\Delta y}{\Delta t} + \frac{\varepsilon_1}{\Delta t}\Delta x + \frac{\varepsilon_2}{\Delta t}\Delta y$$

If we let $\Delta t \to 0$, then $\Delta x = g(t + \Delta t) - g(t) \to 0$ because g is differentiable and therefore continuous. Similarly, $\Delta y \to 0$. This, in turn, means that $\varepsilon_1 \to 0$ and $\varepsilon_2 \to 0$. Thus, we have

$$\begin{aligned}
\frac{dz}{dt} &= \lim_{\Delta t \to 0} \frac{\Delta z}{\Delta t} \\
&= \frac{\partial f}{\partial x} \lim_{\Delta t \to 0} \frac{\Delta x}{\Delta t} + \frac{\partial f}{\partial y} \lim_{\Delta t \to 0} \frac{\Delta y}{\Delta t} + \left(\lim_{\Delta t \to 0} \varepsilon_1\right) \lim_{\Delta t \to 0} \frac{\Delta x}{\Delta t} + \left(\lim_{\Delta t \to 0} \varepsilon_2\right) \lim_{\Delta t \to 0} \frac{\Delta y}{\Delta t} \\
&= \frac{\partial f}{\partial x}\frac{dx}{dt} + \frac{\partial f}{\partial y}\frac{dy}{dt} + 0 \cdot \frac{dx}{dt} + 0 \cdot \frac{dy}{dt} \\
&= \frac{\partial f}{\partial x}\frac{dx}{dt} + \frac{\partial f}{\partial y}\frac{dy}{dt}
\end{aligned}$$

The Chain Rule: Case 2

Suppose that $z = f(x, y)$ is a differentiable function of x and y, where $x = g(s, t)$ and $y = h(s, t)$ are differentiable functions of s and t. Then

$$\frac{\partial z}{\partial s} = \frac{\partial z}{\partial x}\frac{\partial x}{\partial s} + \frac{\partial z}{\partial y}\frac{\partial y}{\partial s}$$

$$\frac{\partial z}{\partial t} = \frac{\partial z}{\partial x}\frac{\partial x}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial z}{\partial y}\frac{\partial y}{\partial t}$$

The Chain Rule: General Version

Suppose that u is a differentiable function of the n variables $x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_n$, and each x_j is a differentiable function of the m variables $t_1, t_2, \ldots, t_m$. Then u is a function of the m variables $t_1, t_2, \ldots, t_m$, and

$$\frac{\partial u}{\partial t_i} = \frac{\partial u}{\partial x_1}\frac{\partial x_1}{\partial t_i} + \frac{\partial u}{\partial x_2}\frac{\partial x_2}{\partial t_i} + \cdots + \frac{\partial u}{\partial x_n}\frac{\partial x_n}{\partial t_i}$$

for each $i = 1, 2, \ldots, m$.

Implicit Differentiation

Suppose that an equation of the form $F(x, y) = 0$ defines y implicitly as a differentiable function of x, that is, $y = f(x)$, where $F(x, f(x)) = 0$ for all x in the domain of f. If F is differentiable, we can apply Case I of the Chain Rule to differentiate both sides of the equation $F(x, f(x)) = 0$ with respect to x. Since both x and y are functions of x, we obtain

$$\frac{\partial F}{\partial x}\frac{dx}{dx} + \frac{\partial F}{\partial y}\frac{dy}{dx} = 0$$

But $\frac{dx}{dx} = 1$, so if $\frac{\partial F}{\partial y} \neq 0$, we can solve for $\frac{dy}{dx}$ to obtain

$$\frac{dy}{dx} = -\frac{\frac{\partial F}{\partial x}}{\frac{\partial F}{\partial y}} = -\frac{F_x(x, y)}{F_y(x, y)}$$

For $F(x, y, z) = 0$, we can apply the Chain Rule to differentiate both sides of the equation $F(x, y, z) = 0$ with respect to x. We obtain

$$\frac{\partial F}{\partial x}\frac{\partial x}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial F}{\partial y}\frac{\partial y}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial F}{\partial z}\frac{\partial z}{\partial x} = 0$$

Since we're differentiating with respect to x, $\frac{\partial y}{\partial x} = 0$
Hence

$$\frac{\partial F}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial F}{\partial z}\frac{\partial z}{\partial x} = 0$$

We can get

$$\frac{\partial z}{\partial x} = -\frac{\frac{\partial F}{\partial x}}{\frac{\partial F}{\partial z}} = -\frac{F_x}{F_z}$$

$$\frac{\partial z}{\partial y} = -\frac{\frac{\partial F}{\partial y}}{\frac{\partial F}{\partial z}} = -\frac{F_y}{F_z}$$