

On Valency Problems of Saxl Graphs

Hong Yi Huang

Southern University of Science and Technology

Kunming, 2 January 2021

Joint work with Jiyong Chen

Outline

1 Backgrounds

2 Our Results

3 Problems

Bases

Let $G \leq \text{Sym}(\Omega)$ with $|\Omega| < \infty$.

- **Base**: $\Delta \subset \Omega$ such that the point-wise stabiliser $G_{(\Delta)} = 1$.
- **Base size**: minimal cardinality of bases, denoted by $b(G)$.
- **Base size set**: a base Δ such that $|\Delta| = b(G)$.

Bases

Let $G \leq \text{Sym}(\Omega)$ with $|\Omega| < \infty$.

- **Base**: $\Delta \subset \Omega$ such that the point-wise stabiliser $G_{(\Delta)} = 1$.
- **Base size**: minimal cardinality of bases, denoted by $b(G)$.
- **Base size set**: a base Δ such that $|\Delta| = b(G)$.

With the natural actions,

- $b(S_n) = n - 1$;
- $b(A_n) = n - 2$;
- $b(\text{GL}_n(q)) = n$, and a base size set is exactly a basis of \mathbb{F}_q^n over \mathbb{F}_q .

Bases

Let $G \leq \text{Sym}(\Omega)$ with $|\Omega| < \infty$.

- **Base**: $\Delta \subset \Omega$ such that the point-wise stabiliser $G_{(\Delta)} = 1$.
- **Base size**: minimal cardinality of bases, denoted by $b(G)$.
- **Base size set**: a base Δ such that $|\Delta| = b(G)$.

With the natural actions,

- $b(S_n) = n - 1$;
- $b(A_n) = n - 2$;
- $b(\text{GL}_n(q)) = n$, and a base size set is exactly a basis of \mathbb{F}_q^n over \mathbb{F}_q .

Suppose G is transitive.

- G is regular $\iff b(G) = 1$.
- If G is Frobenius then $b(G) = 2$.
- If G is sharply k -transitive then $b(G) = k$.

Almost simple primitive groups

Recall that $G \leq \text{Sym}(\Omega)$ is called **primitive** if

- G is transitive, and
- G_α is maximal in G .

Almost simple primitive groups

Recall that $G \leq \text{Sym}(\Omega)$ is called **primitive** if

- G is transitive, and
- G_α is maximal in G .

Theorem (O'Nan-Scott).

Let G be a primitive group. Then G is of one of the following types: HA, AS, HS, HC, PA, TW, SD, CD.

Almost simple primitive groups

Recall that $G \leq \text{Sym}(\Omega)$ is called **primitive** if

- G is transitive, and
- G_α is maximal in G .

Theorem (O'Nan-Scott).

Let G be a primitive group. Then G is of one of the following types: HA, AS, HS, HC, PA, TW, SD, CD.

A group G is called **almost simple** if

$$\text{soc}(G) = T \cong \text{Inn}(T) \lesssim G \lesssim \text{Aut}(T)$$

for some non-abelian simple group T .

Almost simple primitive groups

Recall that $G \leq \text{Sym}(\Omega)$ is called **primitive** if

- G is transitive, and
- G_α is maximal in G .

Theorem (O'Nan-Scott).

Let G be a primitive group. Then G is of one of the following types: HA, AS, HS, HC, PA, TW, SD, CD.

A group G is called **almost simple** if

$$\text{soc}(G) = T \cong \text{Inn}(T) \lesssim G \lesssim \text{Aut}(T)$$

for some non-abelian simple group T .

- Li-Zhang 2011 [8]: completely classified almost simple primitive groups with soluble stabilisers.

Base sizes

Definition.

Let $G \leq \text{Sym}(\Omega)$ be an almost simple primitive group with socle G_0 and stabiliser H . Then we say G is **standard** if one of the following holds:

- ① $G_0 = A_n$ and Ω is an orbit of subsets or partitions of $\{1, \dots, n\}$; or
- ② G_0 is a classical group with natural module V and either Ω is an orbit of subspaces (or pairs of subspaces) of V ; or
- ③ $G_0 = \text{Sp}_n(2^f)$ and $H \cap G_0 = O_n^\pm(2^f)$.

Base sizes

Definition.

Let $G \leq \text{Sym}(\Omega)$ be an almost simple primitive group with socle G_0 and stabiliser H . Then we say G is **standard** if one of the following holds:

- ① $G_0 = A_n$ and Ω is an orbit of subsets or partitions of $\{1, \dots, n\}$; or
- ② G_0 is a classical group with natural module V and either Ω is an orbit of subspaces (or pairs of subspaces) of V ; or
- ③ $G_0 = \text{Sp}_n(2^f)$ and $H \cap G_0 = O_n^\pm(2^f)$.

Let G be almost simple and primitive.

- Cameron-Kantor 1993 [6]: conjectured $b(G) \leq c$ if G is non-standard.
- Liebeck-Shalev 1999 [9]: c exists.
- Burness-Liebeck-Shalev 2009 [4]: $c = 7$ is optimal (M_{24}).
- Burness 2018 [1]: determined non-standard groups with $b(G) = 6$.

Soluble groups

Let G be primitive.

- Seress 1996 [10]: $b(G) \leq 4$ if G is soluble.
- Burness 2020+ [2]: $b(G) \leq 5$ if G_α is soluble.
- Burness-Shalev 2020+ [5]: if G is not of types HA or TW, and every $G_{\alpha\beta}$ is soluble, then $b(G) \leq 6$.

Saxl graphs

Saxl first proposed determining all primitive groups G with $b(G) = 2$.

Definition (Saxl graphs [3]).

Let G be a permutation group acting on Ω . Then the **Saxl graph** $\Sigma(G)$ is the graph such that

- the vertex set is Ω ;
- $\alpha \sim \beta$ if $\{\alpha, \beta\}$ is a base.

Saxl graphs

Saxl first proposed determining all primitive groups G with $b(G) = 2$.

Definition (Saxl graphs [3]).

Let G be a permutation group acting on Ω . Then the **Saxl graph** $\Sigma(G)$ is the graph such that

- the vertex set is Ω ;
- $\alpha \sim \beta$ if $\{\alpha, \beta\}$ is a base.

We have

- $b(G) \geq 3 \implies \Sigma(G)$ empty;
- $b(G) = 1$ and G transitive $\implies \Sigma(G)$ complete.

Example.

Suppose $G = A_5$ and $G_\alpha = S_3$. Then $\overline{\Sigma(G)}$ is Petersen.

First observations

Proposition.

Suppose G is transitive with $b(G) = 2$ and $\Sigma(G)$ is the Saxl graph of G .

- ① $\Sigma(G)$ is G -vertex-transitive.
- ② $\Sigma(G)$ is connected if G is primitive.
- ③ $\Sigma(G)$ is complete if and only if G is Frobenius.
- ④ $\Sigma(G)$ is G -arc-semiregular.

First observations

Proposition.

Suppose G is transitive with $b(G) = 2$ and $\Sigma(G)$ is the Saxl graph of G .

- 1 $\Sigma(G)$ is G -vertex-transitive.
- 2 $\Sigma(G)$ is connected if G is primitive.
- 3 $\Sigma(G)$ is complete if and only if G is Frobenius.
- 4 $\Sigma(G)$ is G -arc-semiregular.

Indeed, $\Sigma(G)$ is the union of all regular orbital graphs of G .

Burness-Giudici Conjecture

Conjecture (Burness-Giudici 2020 [3]).

Let G be primitive and $b(G) = 2$. Then any two vertices in $\Sigma(G)$ has a common neighbour.

Note that if $\text{val}(\Sigma(G)) > \frac{1}{2}|\Omega|$ then the conjecture is verified. This gives a motivation to study the valency problems.

$$\text{val}(\Sigma(G)) = r|H|$$

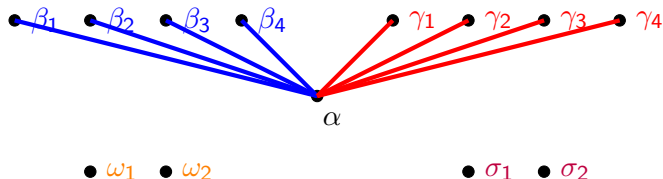
Proposition.

Suppose G is transitive with $b(G) = 2$ and $\Sigma(G)$ is the Saxl graph of G . Then $\Sigma(G)$ has valency $r|H|$, where H is the point stabiliser and r is the number of regular suborbits of G .

$$\text{val}(\Sigma(G)) = r|H|$$

Proposition.

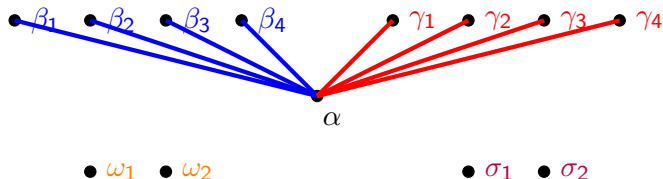
Suppose G is transitive with $b(G) = 2$ and $\Sigma(G)$ is the Saxl graph of G . Then $\Sigma(G)$ has valency $r|H|$, where H is the point stabiliser and r is the number of regular suborbits of G .



$$\text{val}(\Sigma(G)) = r|H|$$

Proposition.

Suppose G is transitive with $b(G) = 2$ and $\Sigma(G)$ is the Saxl graph of G . Then $\Sigma(G)$ has valency $r|H|$, where H is the point stabiliser and r is the number of regular suborbits of G .



By $\text{val}(G, H)$ we mean the valency of the Saxl graph of G with stabiliser H . In particular, $|H|$ divides $\text{val}(G, H)$.

Outline

1 Backgrounds

2 Our Results

3 Problems

Frobenius groups

Recall that a group H is called **Frobenius** if there exists a non-trivial proper subgroup $L < H$ such that $L \cap L^h = 1$ for any $h \in H \setminus L$.

- **Frobenius complement**: L .
- **Frobenius kernel**: the subgroup K comprising the identity element and those elements that are not in any conjugate of L .

Frobenius groups

Recall that a group H is called **Frobenius** if there exists a non-trivial proper subgroup $L < H$ such that $L \cap L^h = 1$ for any $h \in H \setminus L$.

- **Frobenius complement**: L .
- **Frobenius kernel**: the subgroup K comprising the identity element and those elements that are not in any conjugate of L .
- $H = K:L$.
- If K is cyclic, then so does L .

Frobenius groups with cyclic kernel

Theorem (Chen-H. 2020+).

Suppose G is a finite primitive permutation group with stabiliser H , where $H = K:L$ is Frobenius with cyclic kernel K . Write $L = \langle y \rangle$. Then

$$\text{val}(G, H) = |G : H| + |K| - 1 + \frac{|K|}{|L|} \sum_{1 \neq d \mid |L|} \mu(d) |N_G(\langle y^{\frac{|L|}{d}} \rangle)|,$$

where μ is the Möbius function.

Alternating and symmetric groups

This can be applied to various problems. For example

Corollary.

Let $G = S_p$ and $H = \text{AGL}_1(p) \cong \mathbb{Z}_p : \mathbb{Z}_{p-1}$ with $p \geq 5$ a prime. Then

$$\text{val}(G, H) = (p-2)! + p - 1 + p \sum_{1 \neq d | (p-1)} \mu(d) \phi(d) d^{\frac{p-1}{d}-1} \left(\frac{p-1}{d} - 1 \right) !.$$

Corollary.

Let $G = A_p$ and $H = \text{AGL}_1(p) \cap A_p \cong \mathbb{Z}_p : \mathbb{Z}_{(p-1)/2}$ with $p \geq 5$ a prime and $p \neq 7, 11, 17, 23$. Then

$$\text{val}(G, H) = (p-2)! + p - 1 + p \sum_{1 \neq d | \frac{p-1}{2}} \mu(d) \phi(d) d^{\frac{p-1}{d}-1} \left(\frac{p-1}{d} - 1 \right) !.$$

Alternating and symmetric groups

Theorem (Chen-H. 2020+).

Let G be an almost simple primitive group with socle A_n and soluble stabiliser H . If $b(G) = 2$, then $(G, H, \text{val}(G, H))$ is listed in the following.

G	H	$\text{val}(G, H)$
A_5	S_3	6
M_{10}	$\text{AGL}_1(5)$	20
M_{10}	$8:2$	32
$\text{PGL}_2(9)$	D_{16}	16
A_9	$\text{ASL}_2(3)$	432
A_p	$\mathbb{Z}_p:\mathbb{Z}_{(p-1)/2}$	see above
S_p	$\text{AGL}_1(p)$	see above

Prime valency

Proposition (Burness-Giudici 2020 [3]).

Suppose G is transitive with $b(G) = 2$ and $\Sigma(G)$ is the Saxl graph of G . Then $\Sigma(G)$ has prime valency p if and only if G is one of the following:

- ① $G = \mathbb{Z}_p \wr \mathbb{Z}_2$ and $\Sigma(G) \cong K_{p,p}$.
- ② $G = S_3$, $p = 2$ and $\Sigma(G) \cong K_3$.
- ③ $G = \text{AGL}_1(2^f)$, where $p = 2^f - 1$ is a Mersenne prime and $\Sigma(G) \cong K_{p+1}$.

Prime-power valency

Proposition.

Let G be an almost simple primitive group with stabiliser H . If $|H|$ is a prime power, then H is a 2-group and (G, H) is listed in the following.

G	H	Conditions
$L_2(p)$	D_{p-1}	$p \geq 17$ is a Fermat prime
	D_{p+1}	$p \geq 31$ is a Mersenne prime
$PGL_2(p)$	$D_{2(p-1)}$	$p \geq 17$ is a Fermat prime
	$D_{2(p+1)}$	$p \geq 7$ is a Mersenne prime
$PGL_2(9)$	D_{16}	
M_{10}	$8:2$	
$P\Gamma L_2(9)$	8.2^2	
$Aut(L_3(2))$	D_{16}	

Table: Almost simple groups G with a maximal subgroup H of prime-power order

Prime-power valency

Theorem (Chen-H. 2020+).

Suppose G is almost simple primitive with $b(G) = 2$ stabiliser H . Then the Saxl graph $\Sigma(G)$ has prime-power valency if and only if (G, H) is one of the following:

- 1 $(G, H) = (M_{10}, 8:2)$ and $\text{val}(G, H) = 32$.
- 2 $(G, H) = (\text{PGL}_2(q), D_{2(q-1)})$, where $q \geq 17$ is a Fermat prime or $q = 9$, $\Sigma(G)$ is isomorphic to the Johnson graph $J(q+1, 2)$ and $\text{val}(G, H) = 2(q-1)$.

Prime-power valency

Theorem (Chen-H. 2020+).

Suppose G is almost simple primitive with $b(G) = 2$ stabiliser H . Then the Saxl graph $\Sigma(G)$ has prime-power valency if and only if (G, H) is one of the following:

- 1 $(G, H) = (M_{10}, 8:2)$ and $\text{val}(G, H) = 32$.
- 2 $(G, H) = (\text{PGL}_2(q), D_{2(q-1)})$, where $q \geq 17$ is a Fermat prime or $q = 9$, $\Sigma(G)$ is isomorphic to the Johnson graph $J(q+1, 2)$ and $\text{val}(G, H) = 2(q-1)$.

General primitive groups with prime-power valency?

Example.

- $\text{val}(\text{PSU}_3(2), Q_8) = 8$.
- $\text{val}(M_{10} \wr C_2, (8:2) \wr C_2) = 2^9$, while $\text{val}(M_{10} \wr C_4, (8:2) \wr C_4) = 2^{18} \cdot 3$.

Odd valency

Proposition (Burness-Giudici 2020 [3]).

Let G be an almost simple primitive group with stabiliser H and $b(G) = 2$. If $\text{val}(G, H)$ is odd then one of the following holds:

- 1 $(G, H) = (M_{23}, 23:11)$.
- 2 $(G, H) = (A_p, \mathbb{Z}_p : \mathbb{Z}_{(p-1)/2})$, where $p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$ is a prime and $(p-1)/2$ is composite.
- 3 $L_r^\epsilon(q) \leq G \leq \text{P}\Gamma\text{L}_r^\epsilon(q)$ with r an odd prime and $G \neq L_r^\epsilon(q)$. The stabiliser H is the \mathcal{C}_3 -subgroup of G .

Odd valency

Case (2) can be easily shown impossible by above. Moreover, we analysis the case when $G = \text{PGL}_r^{\epsilon}(q)$. These lead the following.

Theorem (Chen-H. 2020+).

Let G be an almost simple primitive group with stabiliser H and $b(G) = 2$. Then $\text{val}(G, H)$ is odd only if one of the following holds:

- 1 $G = M_{23}$ and $H = 23:11$.
- 2 $L_r^{\epsilon}(q) \leq G \leq \text{P}\Gamma\text{L}_r^{\epsilon}(q)$ with r an odd prime and $G \not\leq \text{PGL}_r^{\epsilon}(q)$. The stabiliser H is the \mathcal{C}_3 -subgroup of G .

Outline

1 Backgrounds

2 Our Results

3 Problems

A conjecture on arc stabilisers

To calculate the valency we need to determine all possible arc stabilisers $G_{(\alpha, \alpha^g)}$ for $g \in G$. This leads to the following conjecture, which may be of independent interest.

Conjecture.

Let G be a finite primitive permutation group with stabiliser G_α . Then for any $g \notin G_\alpha$, either $G_{(\alpha, \alpha^g)} = 1$ or $G_{(\alpha, \alpha^g)}$ is not normal in G_α .

The conjecture is verified when:

- $G_{(\alpha, \alpha^g)} < G_{\{\alpha, \alpha^g\}}$;
- $|\Omega| \leq 4095$;
- $G_{(\alpha, \alpha^g)}$ has odd order.

Burness-Giudici Conjecture

Conjecture (Burness-Giudici 2020 [3]).

Let G be primitive and $b(G) = 2$. Then any two vertices in $\Sigma(G)$ has a common neighbour.

The conjecture is verified when:

- $\text{soc}(G) = A_n$ and $H \cap \text{soc}(G)$ acts primitively on $\{1, \dots, n\}$.
- $\text{soc}(G)$ is in a collection of sporadic simple groups.
- Chen-Du 2020+ [7]: $\text{soc}(G) = \text{PSL}_2(q)$.

Connectivity

- How to characterise the connectivity of Saxl graphs of transitive permutation groups? We know that

$$G \text{ primitive} \implies \Sigma(G) \text{ connected.}$$

The converse? Simple quasi-primitive groups?

Connectivity

- How to characterise the connectivity of Saxl graphs of transitive permutation groups? We know that

$$G \text{ primitive} \implies \Sigma(G) \text{ connected.}$$

The converse? Simple quasi-primitive groups?

- When does $\text{val}(G, H) = |H|$? That is, there is exactly one regular suborbit, especially when G is primitive.

Example.

When $(G, H) = (\text{PGL}_2(q), D_{2(q-1)})$ for $q \geq 5$ we have $\text{val}(G, H) = |H|$.

Automorphisms

- We have $G \leq \text{Aut}(\Sigma(G))$. When does $G = \text{Aut}(\Sigma(G))$?

Example.

- ▶ When $(G, H) = (\text{Sp}_{2m}(2), S_{2m+2})$ with $m \geq 6$ even, $G = \text{Aut}(\Sigma(G))$.
- ▶ When $(G, H) = (\text{PGL}_2(q), D_{2(q-1)})$ with $q \geq 7$, we have $\Sigma(G) \cong J(q+1, 2)$ and so $G < \text{Aut}(\Sigma(G)) \cong S_{q+1}$.

Automorphisms

- We have $G \leq \text{Aut}(\Sigma(G))$. When does $G = \text{Aut}(\Sigma(G))$?

Example.

- ▶ When $(G, H) = (\text{Sp}_{2m}(2), S_{2m+2})$ with $m \geq 6$ even, $G = \text{Aut}(\Sigma(G))$.
 - ▶ When $(G, H) = (\text{PGL}_2(q), D_{2(q-1)})$ with $q \geq 7$, we have $\Sigma(G) \cong J(q+1, 2)$ and so $G < \text{Aut}(\Sigma(G)) \cong S_{q+1}$.
- To what extent does $\Sigma(G)$ determine G up to permutation isomorphism?

Automorphisms

- We have $G \leq \text{Aut}(\Sigma(G))$. When does $G = \text{Aut}(\Sigma(G))$?

Example.

- ▶ When $(G, H) = (\text{Sp}_{2m}(2), S_{2m+2})$ with $m \geq 6$ even, $G = \text{Aut}(\Sigma(G))$.
- ▶ When $(G, H) = (\text{PGL}_2(q), D_{2(q-1)})$ with $q \geq 7$, we have $\Sigma(G) \cong J(q+1, 2)$ and so $G < \text{Aut}(\Sigma(G)) \cong S_{q+1}$.
- To what extent does $\Sigma(G)$ determine G up to permutation isomorphism?
- When is $\Sigma(G)$ Cayley? That is, when $\text{Aut}(\Sigma(G))$ has a regular subgroup?

Example.

- ▶ When $(G, H) = (M_{10}, 8:2)$, $\Sigma(G)$ is not Cayley.
- ▶ When $(G, H) = (S_7, \text{AGL}_1(7))$, $\Sigma(G)$ is Cayley.

Cycles

- Euler cycle? The only known genuine example of almost simple primitive group with odd valency is M_{23} with stabiliser $23:11$.

Conjecture.

Let G be an almost simple primitive group with stabiliser H . Then $\text{val}(G, H)$ is odd if and only if $G = M_{23}$ and $H = 23:11$.

Cycles

- Euler cycle? The only known genuine example of almost simple primitive group with odd valency is M_{23} with stabiliser $23:11$.

Conjecture.

Let G be an almost simple primitive group with stabiliser H . Then $\text{val}(G, H)$ is odd if and only if $G = M_{23}$ and $H = 23:11$.

- Hamiltonian cycle? Note that $\Sigma(G)$ is G -vertex-transitive.

Lemma.

All the known examples of vertex-transitive non-Hamiltonian graphs of order at least 3 are cubic, and hence not Saxl graphs of transitive groups.

Other problems

- When is a vertex-transitive graph the Saxl graph of a transitive group?

Example.

- ▶ Most vertex-transitive graphs with prime valency are not.
- ▶ The Johnson graph $J(q+1, 2)$ for any prime-power $q \geq 5$ is isomorphic to the Saxl graph of $\text{PGL}_2(q)$ with stabiliser $D_{2(q-1)}$.

Other problems

- When is a vertex-transitive graph the Saxl graph of a transitive group?

Example.

- ▶ Most vertex-transitive graphs with prime valency are not.
 - ▶ The Johnson graph $J(q+1, 2)$ for any prime-power $q \geq 5$ is isomorphic to the Saxl graph of $\text{PGL}_2(q)$ with stabiliser $D_{2(q-1)}$.
- Properties of Saxl hypergraphs (vertex set Ω and edges are bases)?

Other problems

- When is a vertex-transitive graph the Saxl graph of a transitive group?

Example.

- ▶ Most vertex-transitive graphs with prime valency are not.
- ▶ The Johnson graph $J(q+1, 2)$ for any prime-power $q \geq 5$ is isomorphic to the Saxl graph of $\text{PGL}_2(q)$ with stabiliser $D_{2(q-1)}$.
- Properties of Saxl hypergraphs (vertex set Ω and edges are bases)?
- Other invariants of graphs:
 - ▶ chromatic number;
 - ▶ total domination number;
 - ▶ independence number;
 - ▶ spectrum.

References I

- [1] T. C. Burness.
On base sizes for almost simple primitive groups.
Journal of Algebra, 516:38–74, 2018.
- [2] T. C. Burness.
Base sizes for primitive groups with soluble stabilisers.
arXiv preprint arXiv:2006.10510, 2020.
- [3] T. C. Burness and M. Giudici.
On the Saxl graph of a permutation group.
Math. Proc. Cambridge Philos. Soc., 168(2):219–248, 2020.
- [4] T. C. Burness, M. W. Liebeck, and A. Shalev.
Base sizes for simple groups and a conjecture of Cameron.
Proc. Lond. Math. Soc. (3), 98(1):116–162, 2009.

References II

- [5] T. C. Burness and A. Shalev.
Permutation groups with restricted stabilizers.
arXiv preprint arXiv:2012.12818, 2020.
- [6] P. J. Cameron and W. M. Kantor.
Random permutations: some group-theoretic aspects.
Combin. Probab. Comput., 2(3):257–262, 1993.
- [7] H. Chen and S. Du.
On the burness-giudici conjecture.
arXiv preprint arXiv:2008.04233, 2020.
- [8] C. H. Li and H. Zhang.
The finite primitive groups with soluble stabilizers, and the
edge-primitive s -arc transitive graphs.
Proc. Lond. Math. Soc. (3), 103(3):441–472, 2011.

References III

- [9] M. W. Liebeck and A. Shalev.
Simple groups, permutation groups, and probability.
J. Amer. Math. Soc., 12(2):497–520, 1999.
- [10] Á. Seress.
The minimal base size of primitive solvable permutation groups.
Journal of the London Mathematical Society, 53(2):243–255, 1996.

Thank you for your attention!