

MATH 611 HOMEWORK 2 (DUE 9/11)

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Exercise. (Problem 1, Section 1.2) Show that the free product $G * H$ of nontrivial groups G and H has trivial center, and that the only elements of $G * H$ of finite order are the conjugates of finite-order elements of G and H .

Proof. Let $w \in G * H$ be given. Suppose w is not the empty word.

- Suppose the leftmost element of w is in G . Let $h \in H$ be given such that h is not the identity element of H .
 - Case 1: The rightmost element of w is an element of G . Then wh is just a concatenation, so $wh \neq hw$ because the leftmost element of wh is in G and the leftmost element of hw is in H .
 - Case 2: The rightmost element of w is an element of H , but not h^{-1} . Let h' denote the rightmost element of w and w' denote the remaining. Then $w = w'h'$, so $wh = w'(h'h)$. By the definition of a reduced word, the rightmost element of w' is an element of G , so the concatenation of w' and $h'h$ is exactly wh . The leftmost element of wh is in G and the leftmost element of hw is in H , so $wh \neq hw$.
 - Case 3: The rightmost element of w is h^{-1} . Then the rightmost element of w disappears in wh . In this case, the leftmost element of w stays the same. Therefore, the leftmost element of wh is in G and the leftmost element of hw is in H , so $wh \neq hw$.

In each case, $wh \neq hw$.

- Suppose that the leftmost element of w is in H . Let $g \in G$ be given such that g is not the identity element of G . Using the exact same logic as above, we can conclude that $wg \neq gw$.

Therefore, w is not in the center of $G * H$, so $Z(G * H) = \{e\}$ where e denotes the empty word.

Let x be a finite-order element in G or H . Let n denote the order. Let $w \in G * H$. Then $(wxw^{-1})^n = wx^n w^{-1} = ww^{-1} = e$, so the conjugate of a finite order element in G or H has finite order.

We will show that every element of finite order in $G * H$ is a conjugate of a finite order element in G or H . We will consider the length of a finite-order element.

- Let $w \in G * H$ be a nonempty word of even length. Since adjacent elements must be elements of different groups, the leftmost element of w and rightmost element of w are in different groups. In other words, w^k has the length k times the length of w . This implies that the order of w is not finite.
- We will show that every reduced word of length $2k - 1$ is a conjugate of a finite order element in G or H for every $k \in \mathbb{N}$. Let $k = 1$. Then it is either just g or h where $g \in G$ or $h \in H$. In each case, it is clear that the order g or h itself is finite. Therefore, it is a conjugate of a finite order element by the empty word.

Suppose that the claim is true for some $k \in \mathbb{N}$. We will consider a finite-order element of length $2k + 1$. Let w denote a reduced word of length $2k + 1$. Suppose $w^n = e$ for some $n \in \mathbb{N}$.

- Case 1: The leftmost element of w is in G . Then $w = gw'g'$ where g, g' are in G and w' is a reduced word of length $2k - 1$. g' must equal g^{-1} . Otherwise, the length of w^m would equal $m \cdot (2k + 1) - m$, and it would never equal 0. Consider $g^{-1}wg = w'$. Since $(g^{-1}wg)^n = g^{-1}w^n g = g^{-1}g = e$, the order of w' is finite. By the inductive hypothesis, w' is a conjugate of a finite order element in G or H . Since the length of w' is odd and the end elements are in H , w' must be a conjugate of a finite order element in G . In other words, $w' = axa^{-1}$ for some $a \in G * H$ and $x \in G$. Then $w = g(axa^{-1})g^{-1} = (ga)x(a^{-1}g^{-1}) = (ga)x(ga)^{-1}$. ga is a reduced word because the leftmost element of a is the same as the leftmost element of w' , which is in H .

By induction, every reduced word of finite length whose leftmost element is in G is a conjugate of a finite order element in G .

- Case 2: The leftmost element of w is in H . By symmetry, every reduced word of finite length whose leftmost element in H is a conjugate of a finite order element in H .

Therefore, the only elements of $G * H$ of finite order are the conjugates of finite-order elements of G and H .

□

Exercise. (Problem 4, Chapter 1.2) Let $X \subset \mathbb{R}^3$ be the union of n lines through the origin. Compute $\pi_1(\mathbb{R}^3 - X)$.

Proof.

□

