

Why dummy indices cannot be appear more that two times

In class I mentioned that if a dummy index appears more than twice it will lead to inconsistency/erroneous expressions. This can be demonstrated simply, even in the case of Cartesian tensors in 2D. Let's say we have an expression, $(\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{b})^2$, which is the square of $(\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{b})$, the scalar product and is a real (or more generally complex) number. Now we can expand,

$$(\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{b})^2 = (a_1b_1 + a_2b_2)^2 = a_1^2b_1^2 + a_2^2b_2^2 + 2a_1a_2b_1b_2. \quad (1)$$

Lets try to reproduce this result from Einstein summation convention. According to this convention any repeated index must be summed over values 1,2. E.g. $\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{b} = a_ib_i = a_1b_1 + a_2b_2$. Then we can have for our example, two possible choices,

$$(\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{b})^2 = (\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{b}) (\mathbf{a} \cdot \mathbf{b}) = \begin{cases} (a_ib_i) (a_ib_i) = a_ia_ib_ib_i, \\ (a_ib_i) (a_jb_j) = a_ia_jb_ib_j. \end{cases}$$

In the first choice we have repeated i , four times while in the second case we have not repeated any index more than twice. Now let's see which one reproduces the correct result (1).

$$\begin{aligned} a_ia_ib_ib_i &= a_1a_1b_1b_1 + a_2a_2b_2b_2 \\ &= a_1^2b_1^2 + a_2^2b_2^2. \end{aligned}$$

Thus the expression with dummy index, i repeated more than twice misses the cross term, $2a_1a_2b_1b_2$ in (1). So this must be incorrect. On the other hand, the second choice,

$$\begin{aligned} a_ia_jb_ib_j &= a_1a_jb_1b_j + a_2a_jb_2b_j \\ &= a_1a_1b_1b_1 + a_1a_2b_1b_2 + a_2a_1b_2b_1 + a_2a_2b_2b_2 \\ &= a_1^2b_1^2 + a_2^2b_2^2 + 2a_1a_2b_1b_2. \end{aligned}$$

This is indeed the correct expression. Thus as a general rule, a repeated/dummy index cannot be appear more than two times.