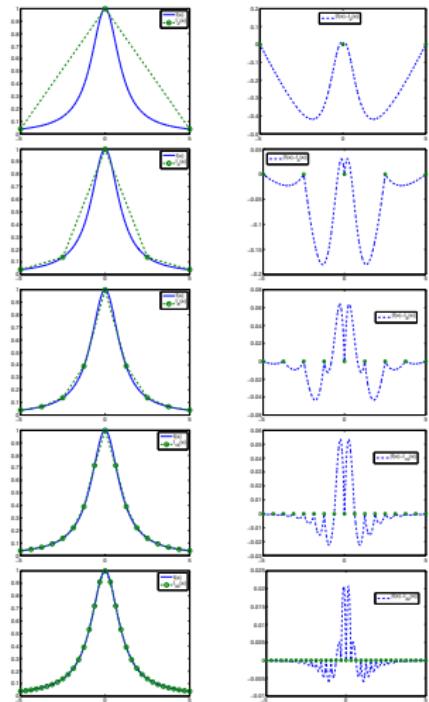


MA378 Chapter 2: Splines

§2.1 Linear Interpolating Splines

Dr Niall Madden

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1.1 Introduction

In Section 1.5 (Convergence and Runge's Example), we learned that it is not always a good idea to interpolate functions by a high-order polynomials at equally spaced points. However, it is possible to obtain very good approximations using a very simple method. The trick is to use a **spline**: a *piecewise polynomial interpolating function*.

We'll consider three important example of splines:

1. *linear splines*
2. *(natural) cubic splines.*
3. **Hermite** piecewise cubics.

For more details about splines, have a look at Chap. 11 of Süli and Mayers, and Lectures 10 and 11 Stewart's "Afternotes goes to Grad School".

1.1 Introduction

In this section, we always have N equally spaced intervals (and so $N + 1$ equally spaced points). Let $h = (b - a)/N$, then

$$a = x_0, \quad b = x_N \quad \text{and} \quad x_i = x_0 + ih \quad \text{for } i = 0, 1, \dots, N.$$

Often these are referred to as *knots points* (or simply as *knots*), and denote the set of knot points by $\omega^N := \{x_i\}_{i=0}^N$.

1.2 Linear Interpolating Splines

We first study the *piecewise linear interpolant*, also called a *linear spline*. We will see that they have important properties, including

- (a) they are easy to construct and analyse;
- (b) the bound on the error decreases as the number of interpolation points increases;
- (c) the error we get using a linear spline is no more than twice the error using the best possible (piecewise linear) approximation;
- (d) of all the interpolants to f at a given set of points, the linear spline is the one with the **smallest first derivative**.

1.3 Construction on linear splines

Definition 1.1

Let f be a function that is continuous on $[a, b]$. The *linear spline interpolant* to f is the continuous function, l , such that

- (i) $l(x_i) = f(x_i)$ for each $i = 0, 1, \dots, N$,
- (ii) l is a linear function l_i on each interval $[x_{i-1}, x_i]$. That is,

$$l(x) = \begin{cases} l_1(x) & x_0 \leq x \leq x_1 \\ l_2(x) & x_1 \leq x \leq x_2 \\ \dots \\ l_N(x) & x_{N-1} \leq x \leq x_N \end{cases}$$

where each $l_i \in \mathcal{P}_1$.

1.3 Construction on linear splines

It is easy to write down a formula for the l_i , based on Lagrange polynomials:

- ▶ Set $h = (b - a)/N$.
- ▶ For each $i = 1, 2, \dots, N$, define

$$l_i(x) = f(x_{i-1}) \frac{x_i - x}{h} + f(x_i) \frac{x - x_{i-1}}{h}, \quad x \in [x_{i-1}, x_i]. \quad (1)$$

1.3 Construction on linear splines

Example 1.2

Write down the linear spline interpolant to $f(x) = e^x$ at the knot points $\{-1, 0, 1\}$.

1.4 Analysis

We know that if p_N is the polynomial of degree N that interpolates f at N equally spaced points, it does **not** follow that $p_N \rightarrow f$ as $N \rightarrow \infty$. But as we will see, the piecewise linear interpolant to f converges to f , albeit slowly.

This is verified in the following theorem, which is a direct consequence of Cauchy's theorem.

1.4 Analysis

Theorem 1.3

Suppose that f , f' and f'' are all continuous and defined on the interval $[a, b]$. Let l be the linear spline interpolant to f on the $N + 1$ equally spaced points $a = x_0 < x_1 \cdots < x_N = b$ with $h = x_i - x_{i-1} = (b - a)/N$. Then

$$\|f - l\|_\infty \leq \frac{h^2}{8} \|f''\|_\infty,$$

(Here $\|g\|_\infty := \max_{a \leq x \leq b} |g(x)|$.)

1.4 Analysis

1.4 Analysis

It follows directly from this theorem that

$$\lim_{N \rightarrow \infty} \|f - l\|_\infty = 0.$$

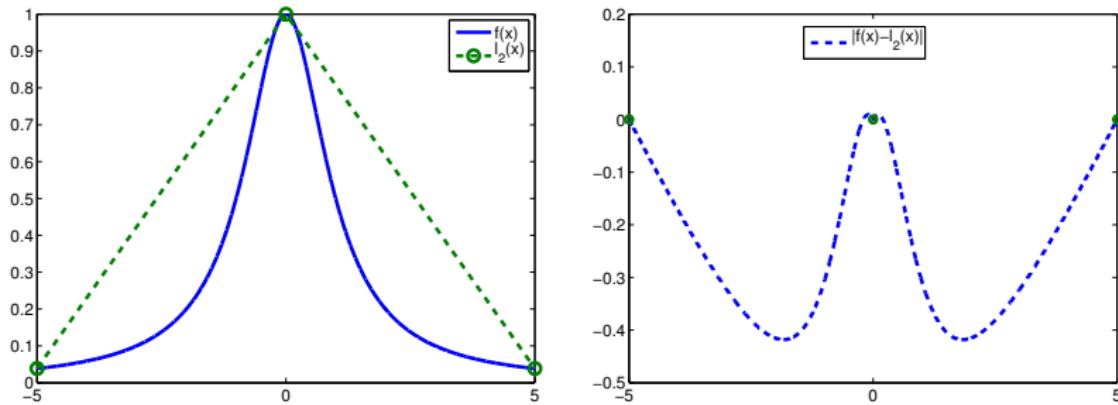
1.4 Analysis

Example 1.4

The figure below shows linear spline interpolations of Runge's example:

$$f(x) = \frac{1}{1+x^2} \text{ on } [-5, 5].$$

These diagrams appear to support our assertion that the error tends to zero as $N \rightarrow \infty$.



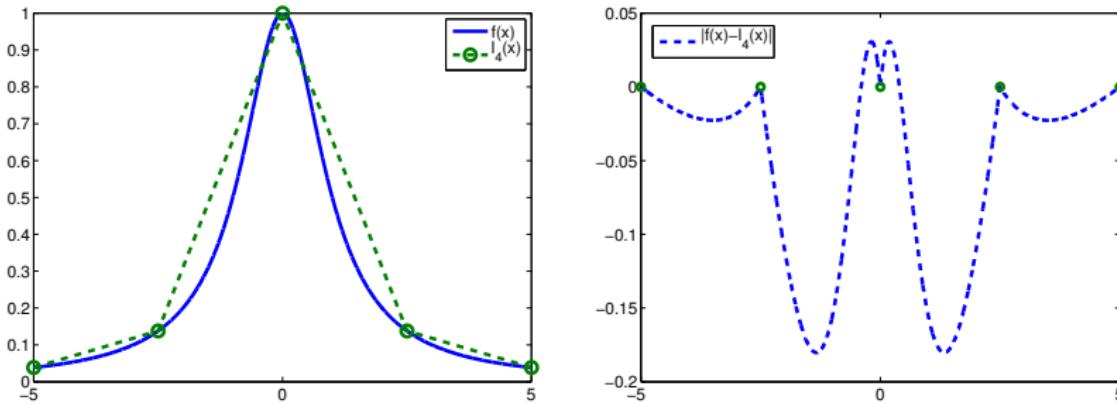
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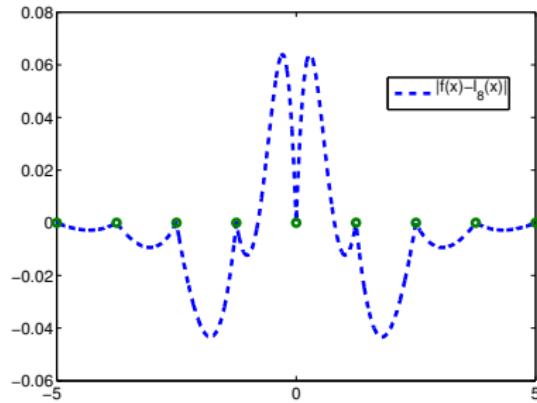
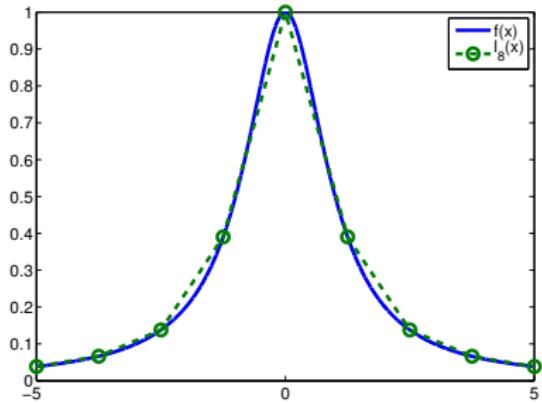
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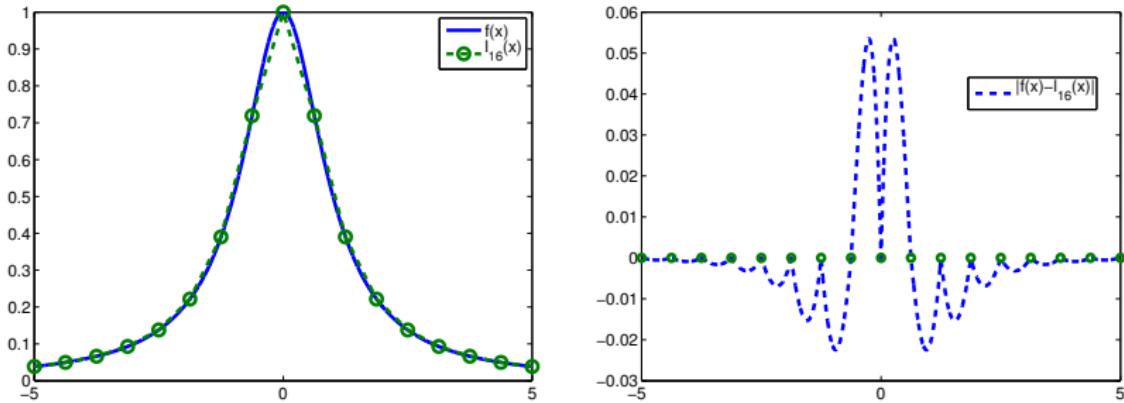
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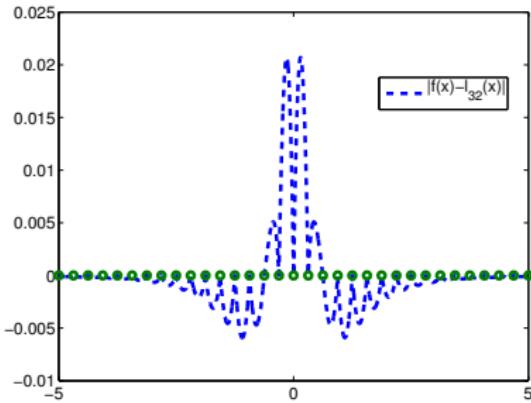
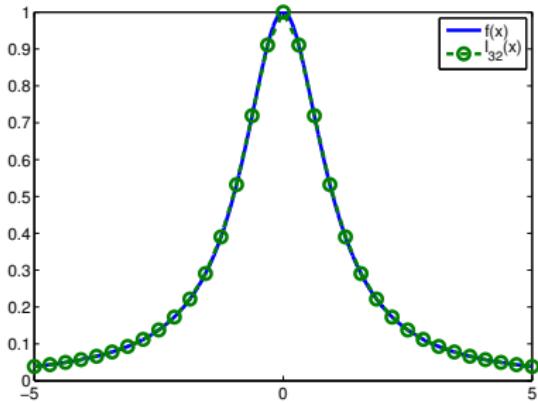
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1.4 Analysis

Example 1.5

Suppose we interpolate $f(x) = e^x$ with linear splines on $N + 1$ equally spaced points between $x_0 = -1$ and $x_N = 1$. What value of N would you have to take to ensure that the maximum error is less than 10^{-2} ?

1.5 Best approximation

For the next part of the analysis it will help to think of piecewise linear interpolation as an *operator*. Then we can compare the linear spline to all the other piecewise linear approximations.

First, observe that one can define an infinite number of piecewise linear functions on a given set of $N + 1$ knot points, denoted ω^N . We'll call the set of these functions \mathcal{L} .

1.5 Best approximation

Definition 1.6

For a fixed set of knot points ω^N , let L be the operator that maps the continuous function f to its linear spline interpolant $l \in \mathcal{L}$.

Now suppose that $g \in \mathcal{L}$. Then $L(g) = g$. That is L is a *projection*: $L(L(f)) = L(f)$.

1.5 Best approximation

It is not hard to see that one could find a different function $\hat{l} \in \mathcal{L}$ that is a better approximation of f in sense that

$$\max_{x_0 \leq x \leq x_n} |f(x) - \hat{l}(x)| < \max_{x_0 \leq x \leq x_n} |f(x) - l(x)|.$$

However, l is very easy to find, and the associated error is no worse than twice $\|f(x) - \hat{l}(x)\|_\infty$.

1.5 Best approximation

Theorem 1.7 (Stewart's “Afternotes goes to grad school”, Lecture 10)

Let $l = L(f)$. For any $\hat{l} \in \mathcal{L}$,

$$\|f - l\|_\infty \leq 2\|f - \hat{l}\|_\infty.$$

In the proof of this, we need several facts about L :

- ▶ L is a projection: $L(f) = L(L(f))$.
- ▶ L is a linear: $L(f + g) = L(f) + L(g)$.
- ▶ L is a $\|\cdot\|_\infty$ -stable: $\|L(f)\|_\infty \leq \|f\|_\infty$.

1.5 Best approximation

Proof:

1.6 Minimum Energy

The final interesting property of l that we will study is called the *minimum energy property*.

Definition 1.8

Let u be a function that is continuous and defined on the interval $[a, b]$ except, maybe, at the (countable set) ω^N of knot points^a Then the 2-norm of u is

$$\|u\|_{2,[a,b]} := \left(\int_a^b u^2(x) dx \right)^{1/2}.$$

Usually we just write this as $\|u\|_2$.

^aMore precisely, we should say “everywhere, except on a set of measure zero”. However, since not everyone is familiar with the terminology, we’ll skip the details.

1.6 Minimum Energy

Let H^1 be the set of all functions u that are continuous on $[a, b]$ and have $\|u'\|_2 < \infty$. Note that $l \in H^1$, even though we have not properly defined l' at the mesh points ω^N .

1.6 Minimum Energy

Theorem 1.9 (Süli and Mayers, Thm. 11.2)

Let w be any function in H^1 that interpolates the function f at the points in ω^N . Let l be the linear spline interpolant of f . Then

$$\|l'\|_2 \leq \|w'\|_2.$$

1.7 Looking ahead

Piecewise linear interpolation is one of the most standard tools in computational science, engineering and statistics.

It's major drawback is that it can't represent the *curvature* of the function it is interpolating. In the next section we'll investigate how to do that using *cubic* splines.

1.8 Exercises

Exercise 1.1

Page 28 of the Department of Education's old Mathematics Tables ("The *Log Tables*") reports that $\ln(1) = 0$, $\ln(1.5) = 0.4055$ and $\ln(2) = 0.6931$.

- (i) Write down the linear spline l that interpolates $f(x) = \ln(x)$ at the points $x_0 = 1$, $x_1 = 1.5$ and $x_2 = 2$.
- (ii) Use this to estimate $\ln(x)$ at $x = 1.2$. How does this compare to the value in the tables, which is 0.1823?
- (iii) Give an estimate for the maximum error:

$$\max_{1 \leq x \leq 2} |f(x) - l(x)|.$$

- (iv) What value of n would you choose to ensure that $|f(x) - l(x)| \leq 0.001$ for all $x \in [1, 2]$.

1.8 Exercises

Exercise 1.2

One can also define the linear spline interpolant to a function f as a linear combination of a set of piecewise linear basis functions $\{\psi_i\}_{i=0}^N$:

$$\psi_i(x_j) = \begin{cases} 1 & i = j \\ 0 & i \neq j \end{cases}$$

They are depicted in Figure 1.

- (i) Write down a formula for the $\psi_i(x)$;
- (ii) derive a formula for $l(x)$ in terms of the ψ_i .

This exercise is useful: we'll use these basis functions (called “hat” functions) in the final section of the course.

1.8 Exercises

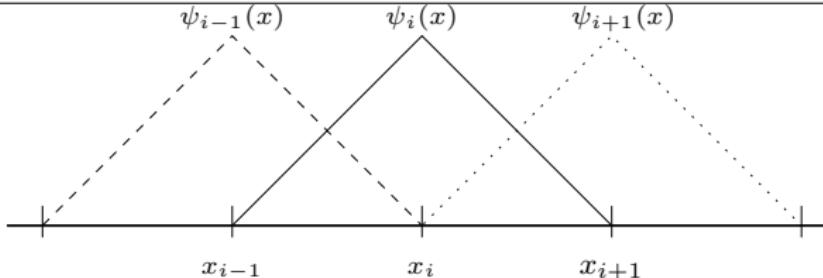


Figure: Some hat functions