

Origins of Matrix/Vector and Matrix/Matrix Multiplication

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Dec 6, 2024

1 Algebraic properties of Matrices

Why is matrix/vector and matrix/matrix multiplication defined the way it is? One motivation is to try to extend the (albeit trivial) solution of linear equations in 1-dimension to n dimensions. To do this, we go through the solution of the 1-dimensional case in careful detail.

The scalar problem is:

$$a x = b \tag{1}$$

Here is a very explicit solution keeping an eye towards generalization.

$$a x = b \tag{2}$$

$$a^{-1}(a x) = a^{-1}b \quad (\text{Multiply by Inverse}) \tag{3}$$

$$(a^{-1}a)x = a^{-1}b \quad (\text{Use associativity of multiplication}) \tag{4}$$

$$1 x = a^{-1}b \quad (\text{What Inverse multiplication does}) \tag{5}$$

$$x = a^{-1}b \quad (\text{What identity multiplication does}) \tag{6}$$

The multi-dimensional problem has a lot more variables and coefficients. To start, we need to be more systematic about the naming of these coefficients. With this in mind, the multi-dimensional linear problem can be written:

$$\begin{aligned} a_{11}x_1 + a_{12}x_2 + \cdots + a_{1n}x_n &= b_1 \\ a_{21}x_1 + a_{22}x_2 + \cdots + a_{2n}x_n &= b_2 \\ &\vdots \\ a_{n1}x_1 + a_{n2}x_2 + \cdots + a_{nn}x_n &= b_n \end{aligned}$$

Here, a_{ij} is the coefficient in the i^{th} row and j^{th} column.

To make this look like the 1-dimensional case, we need to think of the b 's as a single unit. Our single unit will be the *vector* of the b 's.

The multi-dimensional case can be rewritten in vector terms as:

$$\begin{bmatrix} a_{11}x_1 + a_{12}x_2 + \cdots + a_{1n}x_n \\ a_{21}x_1 + a_{22}x_2 + \cdots + a_{2n}x_n \\ \vdots \\ a_{n1}x_1 + a_{n2}x_2 + \cdots + a_{nn}x_n \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} b_1 \\ b_2 \\ \vdots \\ b_n \end{bmatrix} \quad (7)$$

We can replace the tedious list of sums on the left hand side of the above with standard mathematical summing notation:

$$\begin{bmatrix} \sum_{j=1}^n a_{1,j}x_j \\ \sum_{j=1}^n a_{2,j}x_j \\ \vdots \\ \sum_{j=1}^n a_{n,j}x_j \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} b_1 \\ b_2 \\ \vdots \\ b_n \end{bmatrix} \quad (8)$$

Two things need to be done: treat the x 's as a unit – as we did with the b 's – and separate the a coefficients from the x 's. This must be done formally and yet have the same meaning as the original problem formulation. This is done in the most natural of ways:

$$\begin{bmatrix} a_{11} & a_{12} & \cdots & a_{1n} \\ a_{21} & a_{22} & \cdots & a_{2n} \\ \vdots & & & \\ a_{n1} & a_{n2} & \cdots & a_{nn} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} x_1 \\ x_2 \\ \vdots \\ x_n \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} b_1 \\ b_2 \\ \vdots \\ b_n \end{bmatrix} \quad (9)$$

Taking the rectangular collection (matrix) of a 's to be represented by A ; the (vector) collection of x 's to be \mathbf{x} ; and the collection of the b 's to be \mathbf{b} ; we may write (9) as:¹

$$A\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{b} \quad (10)$$

This now looks like the scalar problem, (1). Just as one writes $ax = b$, interpreting the proximity of a and x to mean multiplication, we want the proximity of A and \mathbf{x} to mean matrix/vector multiplication – something we need to work out.

We proceed to try solving (10) using the solution procedure used above for the scalar case. In the process, we need to:

- Vectorize the input variable x and the outputs b . – **Done.**
- Define an, “ a ”, matrix. – **Done.**
- Define matrix-vector multiplication.
- Define matrix-matrix multiplication.
- Define the identity matrix.

¹In general, we use uppercase italic letters for matrices; lowercase bold italic letters for vectors; and lowercase italic letters for scalars.

- Define the inverse matrix.

How do we make sense of this matrix/vector syntax on the left hand side of (10)? It should have the proper meaning; that is, (9) should have the same meaning as (8).

Examining (9) and the left hand side of (8), gives us our definition of matrix/vector multiplication:

$$[A\mathbf{x}]_i \equiv \sum_{j=1}^n A_{ij}x_j \quad (11)$$

That is, A acts on a vector, \mathbf{x} , to create a new vector, $A\mathbf{x}$, whose i^{th} entry is the i^{th} entry of the left hand side of (7).

Another way to write this is:

$$A\mathbf{x} = \sum_{j=1}^n x_j \mathbf{A}^j \quad (12)$$

Here, \mathbf{A}^j is the j^{th} column vector of A . Applying A to the special vectors, \mathbf{e}_j – which are 0 everywhere except at j where they are 1 – we see that $A\mathbf{e}_j = \mathbf{A}^j$. Consequently, this matrix/vector multiplication determines A uniquely – if there is another matrix, its columns would have to match A .

We note the following for future reference.

$$[\mathbf{A}^j]_i = A_{i,j} \quad (13)$$

That is, the i^{th} entry of the column vector, \mathbf{A}^j , is the i^{th} row, j^{th} column of the matrix A .

Before moving on with our outline, we note one very important property of matrix/vector multiplication: It is *linear*. By that we mean the following:²

$$A(a\mathbf{x} + b\mathbf{y}) = aA\mathbf{x} + bA\mathbf{y} \quad (14)$$

One can show this from our definition of matrix/vector multiplication which we leave to the reader. What this means in practice is that for a given vector, $\mathbf{z} = a\mathbf{x} + b\mathbf{y}$, we can compute $A\mathbf{z}$ by computing A on the “components” of \mathbf{z} and then multiplying by scalars and adding the resulting vectors. This can be an easier way to compute the action of a matrix on a vector in some cases. The linearity result above can be extended to arbitrary sums as:

$$A\left(\sum_{j=1}^n c_j \mathbf{x}_j\right) = \sum_{j=1}^n c_j A\mathbf{x}_j \quad (15)$$

Continuing with our solution outline, matrix/matrix multiplication is needed to go from equation (3) to (4). How must this be defined? Well, we need to make sense of:

$$(A^{-1}A)\mathbf{x} = A^{-1}(A\mathbf{x}) \quad (16)$$

²Here, we assume the reader has a passing knowledge of how vectors are added and multiplied by scalars. Another way to say this is that matrix/vector multiplication *distributes* over scalar multiplication and vector addition.

This involves the inverse of the matrix A , which we also need to define. What we are imposing on matrix multiplication is that it be associative in the specific case of a matrix and its inverse. But this is not what happens in the scalar case; associativity works not just for a special case of multiplication, but for *all* numbers. We will forgo what the inverse of a matrix might mean and focus now on imposing the condition that matrix/matrix multiplication be associative; meaning for *all* input vectors. Specifically, the condition we impose is:

$$(BA)\mathbf{x} = B(A\mathbf{x}) \quad \forall \mathbf{x} \in R^n \quad (17)$$

Notice that we are imposing what matrix/matrix multiplication is by saying how the new matrix formed, BA , acts on an *arbitrary* vector, \mathbf{x} . And we specify that action by the right hand side of (17), which involves only matrix/vector multiplication – something we have defined.

We want to emphasize that this is a strong condition to impose; meaning, that the requirement that this is true for *all* \mathbf{x} gives us a lot to work with. For instance, if one had two $n \times n$ matrices, C and D , what could you conclude if someone told you that $C\mathbf{x} = D\mathbf{x}$ for *some* n vector, \mathbf{x} ? Well, the answer is: not much. However, if I told you that $C\mathbf{x} = D\mathbf{x}$ for *all* \mathbf{x} , what could you say? I claim that tells us that $C \equiv D$; meaning that every entry in C is the same as the corresponding entry in D . We can see this by applying C and D to each of the \mathbf{e}_j , ($j \in [1, n]$) vectors. For each j , $C\mathbf{e}_j$ and $D\mathbf{e}_j$ pick off the j^{th} column of C and D respectively. So we see that each column of C and D must match; consequently, $C \equiv D$.

We apply this idea to (17) to find a formula for matrix/matrix multiplication. Since (17) must be true for *all* \mathbf{x} ; in particular, it must be true for the vectors $\{\mathbf{e}_j\}_{j=1}^n$. This gives us the following equations:

$$(BA)\mathbf{e}_j = B(A\mathbf{e}_j) \quad j \in [1, n] \quad (18)$$

Or,

$$(\mathbf{B}\mathbf{A})^j = \mathbf{B}\mathbf{A}^j \quad j \in [1, n] \quad (19)$$

For any given, i , the i^{th} entry of the left and right hand side is (after using the definition of matrix/vector multiplication, (11), on the right hand side)

$$[(\mathbf{B}\mathbf{A})^j]_i = \sum_{k=1}^n B_{i,k} [\mathbf{A}^j]_k \quad \forall i, j \quad i \in [1, n] \wedge j \in [1, n] \quad (20)$$

Using (13) on the left and right hand sides of the previous equation we have

$$(BA)_{i,j} = \sum_{k=1}^n B_{i,k} A_{k,j} \quad \forall i, j \quad i \in [1, n] \wedge j \in [1, n] \quad (21)$$

And we are done, we have shown what the new matrix, BA is by showing what every entry, $(BA)_{i,j}$, of the new matrix is. So using the set of vectors, $\{\mathbf{e}_j\}_{j=1}^n$, we have completely determined what the matrix multiplication of BA is in order that matrix/matrix multiplication be associative when using these vectors. Does this mean that associativity works for *arbitrary* vectors? The answer is yes and this is because of the linearity of matrix/vector multiplication. Any given \mathbf{x} can be written as a *linear combination* of the vectors

$\{\mathbf{e}_j\}_{j=1}^n$: $\mathbf{x} = a_1\mathbf{e}_1 + a_2\mathbf{e}_2 + \cdots + a_n\mathbf{e}_n$. Matrix multiply the left and right hand sides by the matrix, BA . This gives

$$\begin{aligned}
(BA)\mathbf{x} &= (BA)\left(\sum_{j=1}^n a_j\mathbf{e}_j\right) && \text{Replace } \mathbf{x} \text{ with its components.} \\
&= \sum_{j=1}^n a_j(BA)\mathbf{e}_j && \text{Linearity of matrix/vector multiplication by } (BA). \\
&= \sum_{j=1}^n a_jB(A\mathbf{e}_j) && \text{Associativity of matrix/matrix multiplication on } \mathbf{e}_j. \\
&= B\left(\sum_{j=1}^n a_jA\mathbf{e}_j\right) && \text{Linearity of matrix/vector multiplication by } B. \\
&= B\left(A\left(\sum_{j=1}^n a_j\mathbf{e}_j\right)\right) && \text{Linearity of matrix/vector multiplication by } A. \\
&= B(A\mathbf{x}) && \text{Replace components with } \mathbf{x}.
\end{aligned} \tag{22}$$

In the above calculations, we applied our new matrix, (BA) to an arbitrary \mathbf{x} , and used the *linearity* of matrix/vector multiplication and the *associativity* of matrix/matrix multiplication on the components, $\{\mathbf{e}_j\}_{j=1}^n$, to show that matrix/matrix multiplication, as we have defined it, is associative – irrespective of the input vector.

The next order of business is to identify an $n \times n$ matrix which serves as an identity (in terms of matrix/vector multiplication). Let us suppose that we have such a matrix and let's call it I . Then we must have $I\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{x} \quad \forall \mathbf{x} \in R^n$. Then, in particular, $I\mathbf{e}_j = \mathbf{e}_j \quad \forall j \in [1, n]$. However, we know that $I\mathbf{e}_j = I^j$. Therefore, I must have the property that $I^j = \mathbf{e}_j$. Consequently, I must have the form:

$$I = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & \cdots & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & \cdots & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & \ddots & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & \cdots & 1 \end{bmatrix} \tag{23}$$

We have shown that the only candidate for the identity matrix with respect to matrix/vector multiplication is the matrix I . That is, if there is an identity matrix, it must be the matrix of equation (23). Does it satisfy the property of being an identity matrix (again, in the matrix/vector multiplication world)? That is, do we have $I\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{x}$ for all $\mathbf{x} \in R^n$? As before, we can express \mathbf{x} as: $\mathbf{x} = \sum_{j=1}^n c_j\mathbf{e}_j$. By the *linearity* of

matrix/vector multiplication, we have

$$\begin{aligned}
I\mathbf{x} &= I \left(\sum_{j=1}^n c_j \mathbf{e}_j \right) && \text{Replace } \mathbf{x} \text{ with components.} \\
&= \sum_{j=1}^n c_j I\mathbf{e}_j && \text{Linearity of matrix/vector multiplication.} \\
&= \sum_{j=1}^n c_j \mathbf{e}_j && \text{Identity of } I \text{ on components.} \\
&= \mathbf{x} && \text{Replace components with } \mathbf{x}.
\end{aligned} \tag{24}$$

One can show that this identity matrix, I , is also the identity operator for matrix/matrix multiplication.

The only thing left is to know when a matrix inverse exists and how to compute it. We do not attempt to do this in this paper. In the next section we continue with a qualitative comparison of the solution to the scalar problem, $ax = b$, and its vectorized cousin.

2 Qualitative Features of Solutions

We can view the multiplication of two numbers, a and x , as just that. Or, we can think of a being fixed and letting x "run-through" all numbers. Here we see two cases: if $a \neq 0$, then letting x run through all of the numbers in R will produce all of the numbers in R . We could think of a as an "operator" and call the set of all possible outputs, the range of a and denote it: $\mathcal{R}(a)$. There is another case, a could be zero. In this case it's range is the set $\{0\}$. In the first case, with non-zero a it is clear that we can find an x to "hit" a given value b . That is, we can solve $ax = b$.

One can define the same concept for a matrix, A . Using this language of ranges, here is what we can say about the scalar problem: $ax = b$.

Unique Solution: If a^{-1} exists ($a \neq 0$), b is any number (that is: $b \in \mathcal{R}(a)$) then there is a **unique** solution.

No Solution: If a^{-1} does not exist (i.e., $a = 0$) **AND** b is **not** in the range of a (that is: $b \neq 0$), then there is **no** solution.

Infinite Solutions: If a^{-1} does not exist (i.e., $a = 0$) **BUT** b is in the range of a (that is: $b = 0$), then there are an **infinite** number of solutions.

Here is the analog of this solution categorization for the multi-dimensional case: $A\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{b}$.

Unique Solution: If A^{-1} exists, \mathbf{b} is in the range of A ($\mathbf{b} \in \mathcal{R}(A)$) then there is a **unique** solution.

No Solution: If A^{-1} does not exist **AND** \mathbf{b} is not in the range of A (that is $\mathbf{b} \notin \mathcal{R}(A)$), then there is **no** solution.

Infinite Solutions: If A^{-1} does not exist *BUT* \mathbf{b} is in the range of A (that is: $\mathbf{b} \in \mathcal{R}(A)$), then there are an **infinite** number of solutions.