

On the decomposition of a strong epimorphism into regular epimorphisms

Yuto Kawase (joint with Hayato Nasu)

RIMS, Kyoto University

February 8, 2026.

Categories in Tokyo 2nd



← slides

- 1 Regular epimorphisms
- 2 Generalized regular epimorphisms
- 3 Locally orthogonal factorizations

Recall

Every homomorphism $f: A \rightarrow B$ between groups can be decomposed into a surjective hom. followed by an injective hom.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} A & \xrightarrow{f} & B \\ & \searrow & \nearrow \\ & \text{Im } f & \end{array} \quad \text{in } \mathbf{Grp}$$

Regular epimorphisms = morphisms being the coequalizer of some parallel pair of morphisms.

$$\cdot \begin{array}{c} \xrightarrow{\quad} \\ \xleftarrow{\quad} \end{array} \cdot \xrightarrow{\text{regular epi}} \cdot$$

(eg. regular epi = surjective hom. in **Grp**)

Monomorphisms = morphisms s.t. $f \circ -$ is injective.

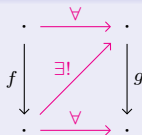
$$\cdot \begin{array}{c} \xrightarrow{g} \\ \xleftarrow{h} \end{array} \cdot \xrightarrow[f]{\text{mono}} \cdot \quad (\text{cofork}) \quad \implies \quad g = h$$

(eg. mono = injective hom. in **Grp**)

Definition

$f \perp g$
(f and g are **orthogonal**)

$\stackrel{\text{def}}{\Leftrightarrow}$



Example

In every category, $\{\text{regular epi}\} \perp \{\text{mono}\}$.

$\mathbf{E} \subseteq \text{Mor } \mathcal{C}$: a class of morphisms in a category \mathcal{C} .

Definition

$$\mathbf{E}: \text{iso-closed} \stackrel{\text{def}}{\iff} \begin{array}{l} \bullet \{ \text{iso} \} \subseteq \mathbf{E}. \\ \bullet \mathbf{E} \ni f \downarrow \begin{array}{c} \cdot \cong \cdot \\ \cdot \cong \cdot \end{array} \downarrow g \implies g \in \mathbf{E}. \end{array}$$

Definition

\mathbf{E} : iso-closed.

\mathcal{C} admits orthogonal \mathbf{E} -factorizations $\stackrel{\text{def}}{\iff}$ Every morphism f can be decomposed as

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \cdot & \xrightarrow{f} & \cdot \\ \mathbf{E} \ni e \searrow & & \nearrow m \in \mathbf{r}(\mathbf{E}) \\ & \cdot & \end{array} \quad \text{where } \mathbf{r}(\mathbf{E}) := \{ m \mid \mathbf{E} \perp m \}.$$

Example

Grp admits orthogonal $\{\text{regular epi}\}$ -factorizations.

The fundamental homomorphism theorem

$$A / \text{Ker } f \cong \text{Im } f \quad (f: A \rightarrow B)$$

The **kernel pair** of f :

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{Kp } f & \xrightarrow{\pi_2} & A \\ \pi_1 \downarrow & \lrcorner & \downarrow f \\ A & \xrightarrow{f} & B \end{array} \quad (\text{pullback})$$

The **coimage** of f :

$$\text{Kp } f \xrightleftharpoons[\pi_1]{\pi_2} A \twoheadrightarrow \text{Coim } f \quad (\text{coequalizer})$$

The fundamental homomorphism theorem (categorically)

$$\begin{array}{ccc} A & \xrightarrow{f} & B \\ & \searrow & \nearrow \text{mono} \\ & \text{Coim } f & \end{array}$$

This holds in any categories of equational algebras.

Fact

TFAE for a category \mathcal{C} with finite limits and colimits:

- ① \mathcal{C} admits orthogonal {regular epi}-factorizations.
- ② “The fundamental homomorphism theorem holds in \mathcal{C} .” That is, for every $f: A \rightarrow B$ in \mathcal{C} , the canonical morphism $\text{Coim } f \rightarrow B$ is monic.

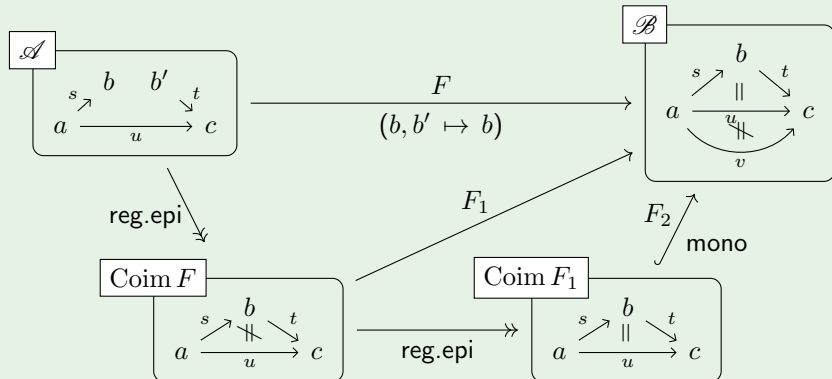
Question

Does the fundamental hom. thm. hold in any category?

\rightsquigarrow No.

Counter example

In \mathbf{Cat} ,



Definition

A **(regular) decomposition** of $A \xrightarrow{f} B$ in \mathcal{C} consists of:

- A functor $\mathbf{Ord} \xrightarrow{A_\bullet} \mathcal{C}$ with $A_0 = A$;
- A cocone $f_\bullet = (A_\alpha \xrightarrow{f_\alpha} B)$ over A_\bullet with $f_0 = f$

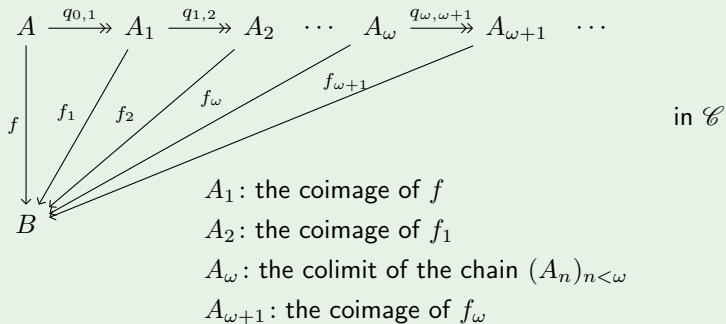
satisfying $(\forall \alpha, A_{\alpha, \alpha+1}: \text{regular epi})$ and $(\forall \gamma: \text{limit type}, A_\gamma \cong \text{Colim}_{\alpha < \gamma} A_\alpha)$.

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
 A = A_0 & \xrightarrow{A_{0,1}} & A_1 & \longrightarrow & \cdots & \longrightarrow & A_\alpha \xrightarrow{A_{\alpha, \alpha+1}} A_{\alpha+1} \longrightarrow \cdots \\
 \downarrow f=f_0 & & \swarrow f_1 & & & \nearrow f_\alpha & \\
 & & B & & & \nwarrow f_{\alpha+1} &
 \end{array}
 \quad \text{in } \mathcal{C}$$

Definition

- 1 A decomp. (A_\bullet, f_\bullet) **stabilizes at α** $\stackrel{\text{def}}{\Leftrightarrow} f_\beta: \text{mono} (\alpha \leq \forall \beta) (\Leftrightarrow f_\alpha: \text{mono})$
- 2 The smallest α above is called the **length** of (A_\bullet, f_\bullet) . (if exists)

\mathcal{C} : a category with kernel pairs and colimits.



\rightsquigarrow This gives a decomposition of f . (**canonical decomposition**)

Definition

- ① The **canonical decomposition number** $\sigma(f) :=$ the length of the canonical decomposition of f . If it doesn't stabilize, $\sigma(f)$ is left to be undefined.
- ② If $\sigma(f)$ is defined for every f in \mathcal{C} , the **global canonical decomposition number** $\sigma(\mathcal{C}) := \min\{\alpha \mid \sigma(f) < \alpha \text{ for every } f \text{ in } \mathcal{C}\}$

Remark

- ① $\sigma(\mathcal{C}) = 0 \iff \mathcal{C} = \emptyset.$
- ② $\sigma(\mathcal{C}) \leq 1 \iff \sigma(f) = 0 \ (\forall f) \iff f: \text{monic} \ (\forall f).$
- ③ $\sigma(\mathcal{C}) \leq 2 \iff \sigma(f) \leq 1 \ (\forall f) \iff \text{“The fund. hom. thm. holds in } \mathcal{C}.”$

Example

- ① $\sigma(\mathbf{Set}) = \sigma(\mathbf{Grp}) = 2.$
- ② $\sigma(\mathbf{Cat}) = 3.$
- ③ $\sigma(n\text{-}\mathbf{Cat}) = n + 2.$

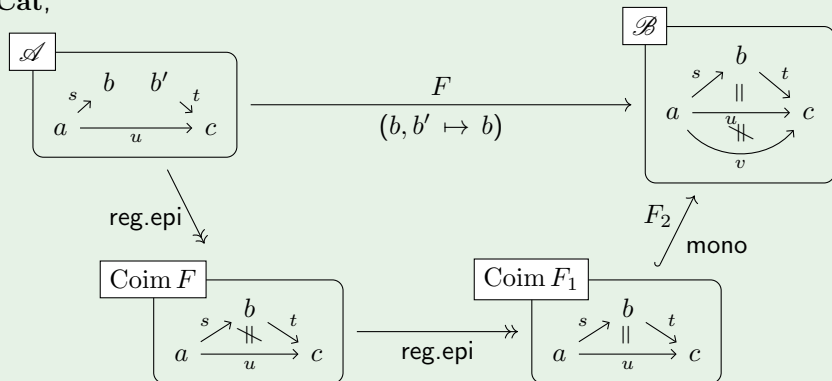
Theorem [GU71]

\mathcal{C} : locally κ -presentable $\implies \sigma(f)$ is defined and $\sigma(f) \leq \kappa$ holds. ($\forall f$ in \mathcal{C})
(Equivalently, $\sigma(\mathcal{C}) \leq \kappa + 1$)

Minimum decomposition problem

Recall (a canonical decomposition in \mathbf{Cat})

In \mathbf{Cat} ,



Question

Is there a shorter decomposition of F than the canonical one in \mathbf{Cat} ? That is, can F be decomposed as $\cdot \xrightarrow{\text{reg.epi}} \cdot \xrightarrow{\text{mono}} \cdot$?

Minimum decomposition problem

Definition

The **minimum decomposition number** $\delta(f)$:= the shortest possible length of decompositions of f . (if at least one decomposition exists)

Question (restated)

Does $\sigma(f) = \delta(f)$ hold?

Theorem (Canonical vs minimum [KN])

In a category with kernel pairs and colimits,

- 1 $\sigma(f)$ is defined $\iff \delta(f)$ is defined.
- 2 Whenever they are defined, $\sigma(f) = \delta(f)$ holds.

That is, the canonical (regular) decomposition is minimum.

- 1 Regular epimorphisms
- 2 Generalized regular epimorphisms
- 3 Locally orthogonal factorizations

Observation

In a category with kernel pairs,

q : regular epi. $\iff q$: the coequalizer of the kernel pair of q .

- “coequalize the kernel pair of q ” \iff coequalize any pair of morphisms that coequalized by q . \dots (\star) (*the kernel condition associated with q*)

$\therefore q$: regular epi. $\iff q$: the most universal among morphisms satisfying (\star) .

In a category with binary coproducts,

$$X \begin{smallmatrix} \xrightarrow{u} \\ \xrightarrow{v} \end{smallmatrix} A \text{ is coequalized by } \begin{array}{c} A \\ \downarrow q \\ B \end{array} \iff \begin{array}{ccc} X + X & \xrightarrow{(u,v)} & A \\ \nabla \downarrow & & \downarrow q \\ X & \xrightarrow{\exists} & B \end{array}$$

$$A \xrightarrow{f} C \text{ satisfies } (\star) \iff \forall X, \begin{array}{ccc} X + X & \xrightarrow{\nabla} & A \\ \nabla \downarrow & & \downarrow q \\ X & \xrightarrow{\nabla} & B \end{array} \begin{array}{c} \searrow f \\ \xrightarrow{\exists} C \end{array}$$

Idea

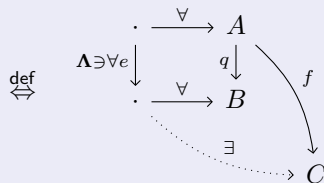
Replace $\{X + X \xrightarrow{\nabla} X\}_{X: \text{obj}}$ with another class of epimorphisms.

Λ -regular epimorphisms

Λ : a class of epimorphisms. Fix $A \xrightarrow{q} B$.

Definition [KN]

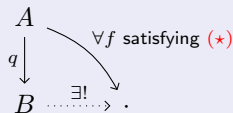
$A \xrightarrow{f} C$ satisfies (\star)
(the Λ -kernel condition assoc. with q)



Definition [KN]

q : Λ -regular epi

$\stackrel{\text{def}}{\Leftrightarrow}$



Example I

Example

Pos: the category of posets and order-preserving maps.

$$\Lambda := \left\{ \boxed{\bullet \quad \star} \xrightarrow{\iota} \boxed{\bullet < \star} \quad \text{in } \mathbf{Pos} \right\}$$

\rightsquigarrow Λ -regular epis = *surjective* order-preserving maps (= epis)

Example

Cat: the category of small categories and functors.

$$\Lambda := \left\{ \boxed{\bullet \rightarrow \star} \xrightarrow{L} \boxed{\bullet \cong \star} \quad \text{in } \mathbf{Cat} \right\}$$

\rightsquigarrow Λ -regular epis = *strict localizations*

Example II

Example

Met: the category of metric spaces and non-expansive maps.

$$\Lambda := \left\{ \boxed{\bullet \xrightarrow{r+1} \star} \xrightarrow{e_r} \boxed{\bullet \xrightarrow{r} \star} \text{ in } \mathbf{Met} \right\}_{r \in \mathbb{Q}_{>0}}$$

$\rightsquigarrow q$: Λ -regular epi $\iff d(x, y) - d(q(x), q(y)) \leq 1 \ (\forall x, y)$.
(a shrinking at most 1)

Example

Top: the category of topological spaces and continuous maps.

$$\Lambda := \left\{ K \xrightarrow{!K} 1 \text{ in } \mathbf{Top} \right\}_{K: \text{connected space}}$$

$\rightsquigarrow q$: Λ -regular epi $\iff q^{-1}(x)$: connected $(\forall x)$. (= monotone map)

Orthogonal $\{\Lambda\text{-regular epi}\}$ -factorizations

Recall

\mathcal{C} admits orthogonal **E**-factorizations $\stackrel{\text{def}}{\iff}$ Every morphism f can be decomposed as

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \cdot & \xrightarrow{f} & \cdot \\ \mathbf{E} \ni e \searrow & & \nearrow m \in \mathbf{r}(\mathbf{E}) \\ & \cdot & \end{array}$$

category	Λ	$\mathbf{E} = \{\Lambda\text{-regular epis}\}$	$\mathbf{r}(\mathbf{E})$
any category with bin.coprod.	$\{\text{codiagonals}\}$	$\{\text{regular epis}\}$	$\{\text{monos}\}$
Pos	$\{\iota\}$	$\{\text{surjections}\}$	$\{\text{embeddings}\}$
Cat	$\{L\}$	$\{\text{strict localizations}\}$	$\{\text{conservatives}\}$
Met	$\{e_r\}_r$	$\{\text{shrinkings at most 1}\}$	$\{\text{isometries}\}$
Top	$\{!_K\}_K$	$\{\text{monotone maps}\}$	$\{\text{light maps}\}$

Pos admits orthogonal $\{\text{surj}\}$ -factorizations.

However, neither **Cat**, **Met**, nor **Top** admits orthogonal **E**-factorizations.

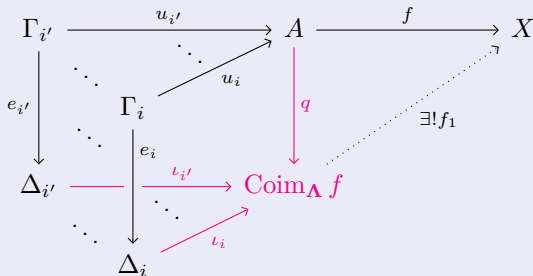
Coimages in terms of Λ -regular epis

Definition

Let $A \xrightarrow{f} X$.

$$\mathcal{S} := \left\{ (e_i, u_i) \left| \Lambda \ni \begin{array}{c} \Gamma_i \xrightarrow{u_i} A \xrightarrow{f} X \\ e_i \downarrow \quad \searrow \exists \\ \Delta_i \end{array} \right. \right\}$$

Then, $\text{Coim}_\Lambda f := \text{Colim } \mathcal{S}$. (multiple pushout)



Proposition [KN]

- ① $\Lambda \subseteq \mathbf{Reg}(\Lambda)$ ($:= \{\Lambda\text{-regular epis}\}$).
- ② Moreover, $\mathbf{Reg}(\Lambda)$ is the “multiple pushout closure” of Λ . That is,
 $q: \Lambda\text{-reg.epi} \iff q: \text{obtained by a mult.pushout of some family of spans}$
 $(e_i, u_i) \text{ s.t. } e_i \in \Lambda.$

In particular,

$$\begin{array}{ccc} A & \xrightarrow{f} & X \\ \Lambda\text{-regular epi } \rightsquigarrow q \downarrow & \nearrow f_1 & \\ \text{Coim}_\Lambda f & & \end{array}$$

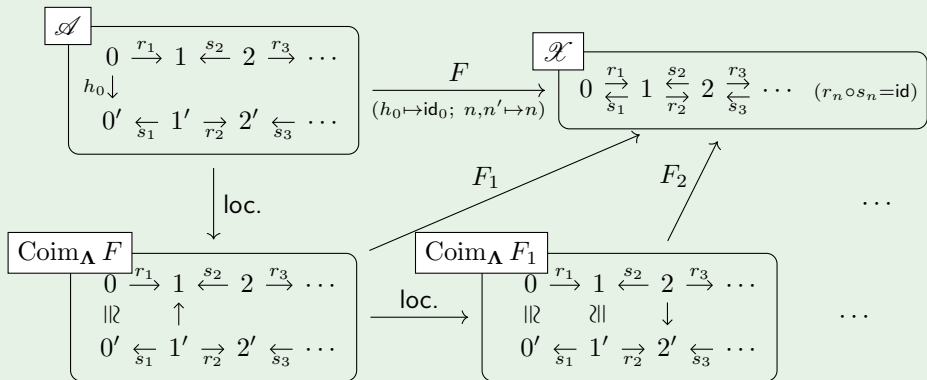
Replacing $\left(\begin{array}{cc} \{\text{regular epis}\} & \rightsquigarrow \\ \{\text{monos}\} & \rightsquigarrow \end{array} \begin{array}{c} \mathbf{E} = \mathbf{Reg}(\Lambda) \\ \mathbf{r}(\mathbf{E}) \end{array} \right),$

Definition

$\sigma_{\mathbf{E}}(f) := \min\{\alpha \mid f_\alpha \in \mathbf{r}(\mathbf{E})\}$. (the *canonical \mathbf{E} -decomposition number*)

Example

In \mathbf{Cat} with $\mathbf{E} := \{\text{strict localizations}\}$,



$$\rightsquigarrow \sigma_{\mathbf{E}}(F) = \omega.$$

Theorem (Small object argument)

\mathcal{C} : locally κ -presentable; Λ : small; $\text{dom } f, \text{cod } f$: κ -presentable ($\forall f \in \Lambda$)
 $\implies \sigma_{\mathbf{E}}(\mathcal{C}) \leq \kappa + 1$, where $\mathbf{E} := \mathbf{Reg}(\Lambda)$.

Corollary

$\sigma_{\mathbf{E}}(\mathbf{Cat}) = \omega + 1$, where $\mathbf{E} := \{\text{strict localizations}\}$.

Minimum decomposition problem

Let $\mathbf{E} := \mathbf{Reg}(\Lambda)$.

We can also generalize $\left(\begin{array}{ccc} \text{regular decomposition} & \rightsquigarrow & \mathbf{E}\text{-decomposition} \\ \text{minimum dec.num. } \delta(f) & \rightsquigarrow & \delta_{\mathbf{E}}(f) \end{array} \right).$

Then, $\sigma_{\mathbf{E}}$ and $\delta_{\mathbf{E}}$ still coincide:

Theorem (Canonical vs minimum [KN])

Let \mathcal{C} : locally small and cocomplete, $\mathbf{E} := \mathbf{Reg}(\Lambda)$ with Λ : small.

- ① $\sigma_{\mathbf{E}}(f)$ is defined $\iff \delta_{\mathbf{E}}(f)$ is defined.
- ② Whenever they are defined, $\sigma_{\mathbf{E}}(f) = \delta_{\mathbf{E}}(f)$ holds.

- 1 Regular epimorphisms
- 2 Generalized regular epimorphisms
- 3 Locally orthogonal factorizations

In the previous part, we did:

1. Define the class of morphisms $\mathbf{E} := \mathbf{Reg}(\Lambda)$;
2. Define the *coimage-factorizations* in terms of \mathbf{E} ;
3. Define $\sigma_{\mathbf{E}}(f)$ as the length of the iterated coimage-factorization of f ;
4. Compare $\sigma_{\mathbf{E}}(f)$ with the minimum decomposition number $\delta_{\mathbf{E}}(f)$.

Idea

Abstracting a class \mathbf{E} with coimage-factorizations, we can follow the same story from 2. to 4.

Definition [MT82]

$$\begin{array}{c} X \\ f \downarrow \\ Y \end{array} \text{ and } \begin{array}{c} A' \xrightarrow{a} A \\ \downarrow g \\ B \end{array} \text{ are locally orthogonal} \\
 \text{(written } f \perp^a g \text{)} \quad \stackrel{\text{def}}{\iff} \quad \begin{array}{ccccc} X & \xrightarrow{\forall} & A' & \xrightarrow{a} & A \\ f \downarrow & & \exists! \nearrow & & \downarrow g \\ Y & \xrightarrow{\forall} & & & B \end{array}$$

Recall Definition [MT82]

E: iso-closed.

C admits locally orthogonal **E**-factorizations $\stackrel{\text{def}}{\iff} \forall f$ can be decomposed as

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \cdot & \xrightarrow{f} & \cdot \\ \mathbf{E} \ni e \searrow & & \nearrow m \\ & \cdot & \end{array} \quad \text{with } \mathbf{E} \perp^e m.$$

Example

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \cdot & \xrightarrow{f} & \cdot \\ e \searrow & & \nearrow m \\ & \cdot & \end{array} \text{ is the coimage-factorization in terms of } \mathbf{E} = \mathbf{Reg}(\Lambda)$$

\iff it is a locally orthogonal **E**-factorization, i.e., $e \in \mathbf{E}$ and $\mathbf{E} \perp^e m$.

Locally orthogonal factorizations subsume the coimage-factorization!

Theorem [Tho83; KN]

\mathcal{C} : co-well-powered, having small colimits and products.

TFAE for a class $\mathbf{E} \subseteq \{\text{epis}\}$:

- 1 \mathcal{C} admits locally orthogonal \mathbf{E} -factorizations.
- 2 \mathbf{E} is closed under multiple pushout.
- 3 $\mathbf{E} = \mathbf{Reg}(\Lambda)$ for some $\Lambda \subseteq \{\text{epis}\}$.

Question

Is there a non-epimorphic example?

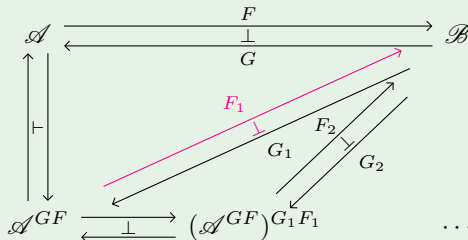
The Eilengerg–Moore decomposition (monadic towers)

Example

AdjCAT: the category of (large) categories and left adjoints.

$\mathbf{E} := \{\text{monadic adjunctions}\}$.

\rightsquigarrow **AdjCAT** admits locally orthogonal **E**-factorizations [MT82].



This **stabilizes** at $\alpha \stackrel{\text{def}}{\Leftrightarrow} \mathbf{E} \perp F_\alpha \Leftrightarrow F_\alpha : \text{fully faithful}$

$\rightsquigarrow \sigma_{\mathbf{E}}(F) = \text{the monadic length of } F \dashv G.$

Minimum decomposition problem

Theorem (Canonical vs minimum, the most general [KN])

\mathcal{C} : a category with locally orthogonal \mathbf{E} -factorizations and colimits of chains.
 f : a morphism in \mathcal{C} .

- ① $\sigma_{\mathbf{E}}(f)$ is defined $\iff \delta_{\mathbf{E}}(f)$ is defined.
- ② $\delta_{\mathbf{E}}(f)$: 0 or successor $\implies \sigma_{\mathbf{E}}(f) = \delta_{\mathbf{E}}(f)$.
- ③ $\delta_{\mathbf{E}}(f)$: limit $\implies \sigma_{\mathbf{E}}(f) = \delta_{\mathbf{E}}(f)$ or $\delta_{\mathbf{E}}(f) + 1$.

Corollary

The monadic length coincides with the shortest possible length of monadic decompositions if they are finite.

Thank you!

slides \rightsquigarrow



This talk is based on the first half of [KN].

References

- [BBP99] M. A. Bednarczyk, A. M. Borzyszkowski, and W. Pawłowski. “Generalized congruences—epimorphisms in *Cat*”. In: *Theory Appl. Categ.* 5 (1999), No. 11, 266–280.
- [Bör91] R. Börger. “Making factorizations compositive”. In: *Comment. Math. Univ. Carolin.* 32.4 (1991), pp. 749–759.
- [GU71] P. Gabriel and F. Ulmer. *Lokal präsentierbare Kategorien*. Vol. Vol. 221. Lecture Notes in Mathematics. Springer-Verlag, Berlin-New York, 1971.
- [KN] Y. Kawase and H. Nasu. *On the decomposition of a strong epimorphism into regular epimorphisms*. in preparation.
- [MT82] J. MacDonald and W. Tholen. “Decomposition of morphisms into infinitely many factors”. In: *Category Theory (Gummersbach, 1981)*. Vol. 962. Lecture Notes in Math. Springer, Berlin-New York, 1982, pp. 175–189.
- [MS82] J. L. MacDonald and A. Stone. “The tower and regular decomposition”. In: *Cahiers Topologie Géom. Différentielle* 23.2 (1982), pp. 197–213.
- [Tho83] W. Tholen. “Factorizations, localizations, and the orthogonal subcategory problem”. In: *Math. Nachr.* 114 (1983), pp. 63–85.