

Characters as tempered distributions: p -adic fields

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A character χ of the multiplicative group of a local field k defines a distribution $\varphi = \varphi_\chi$ on that group:

$$\langle \varphi, f \rangle = \int_{k^\times} \chi(x) f(x) d^\times x.$$

It satisfies the functional equation

$$\mu_a \varphi = \chi(a) \varphi,$$

which means that φ is χ -**equivariant**. Up to scalar multiplication, it is unique with respect to that property.

The multiplicative group k^\times is an open set in k , and the Schwartz space of k^\times is embedded into that of k . Under what circumstances does φ on k^\times extend to a χ -equivariant tempered distribution on k ? What does the space of all χ -equivariant distributions on k look like? What is the Fourier transform of the distribution φ_χ ?

This material originated in [Tate:1951/1967], but the approach here amounts to working out details suggested in [Weil:1967]. What is slightly new is that the computation of the Fourier transform of χ is not quite the usual one.

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Let

- k = a non-Archimedean local field
- \mathfrak{o} = integers in k
- \mathfrak{p} = prime ideal of \mathfrak{o}
- \mathfrak{d} = different of the extension k/\mathbb{Q}_p
 = inverse of $\{x \in k \mid \text{trace}_{k/\mathbb{Q}_p}(x\mathfrak{o}) \subseteq \mathbb{Z}_p\}$
 = (say) \mathfrak{p}^δ
- ϖ = generator of \mathfrak{p}
- ν = the multiplicative character $x \mapsto |x|$
- $\mathbb{F}_q = \mathfrak{o}/\mathfrak{p}$.

For an ideal $\mathfrak{a} \subseteq \mathfrak{o}$ let $N\mathfrak{a} = |\mathfrak{o}/\mathfrak{a}|$. For example, $N\mathfrak{p} = q$.

There is a canonical embedding of $\mathbb{Q}_p/\mathbb{Z}_p$ into the quotient \mathbb{Q}/\mathbb{Z} , identifying it with the p -torsion. For every x in \mathbb{Q}_p there exists a unique fraction m/p^k such that $x - m/p^k$ is in \mathbb{Z}_p . The integer m is uniquely

determined modulo p^k , and $x \mapsto \psi_p(x) = e^{2\pi im/p^k}$ is well defined, and determines a character of \mathbb{Q}_p whose kernel is \mathbb{Z}_p . The map

$$x \mapsto \psi(x) = \psi_p(\text{trace}_{k/\mathbb{Q}_p}(x))$$

is a character of k such that

$$\mathfrak{d}^{-1} = \{x \in k \mid \psi(x\mathfrak{o}) = 1\}.$$

The character $\psi(x/\varpi^{\delta+m})$ is a primitive character of $\mathfrak{o}/\mathfrak{p}^m$.

Choose the measure on k such that

$$\text{meas}(\mathfrak{o}) = |\mathfrak{o}/\mathfrak{d}|^{-1/2} = q^{-\delta/2}.$$

The measure $d^\times x = dx/|x|$ is a multiplicatively invariant measure on k^\times .

1. Characters as distributions on the multiplicative group

The Schwartz space $\mathcal{S}(k^\times)$ is the vector space of all locally constant complex-valued functions of compact support on k^\times . The multiplicative group acts on it by right multiplication:

$$\rho_a f(x) = f(xa).$$

A distribution on k^\times is any linear functional on its Schwartz space. The group k^\times acts by the usual duality formula on the linear dual of $\mathcal{S}(k^\times)$, the space of distributions:

$$\langle \rho_a \varphi, f \rangle = \langle \varphi, \rho_{a^{-1}} f \rangle.$$

The integral

$$\langle \varphi \chi, f \rangle = \int_{k^\times} f(x) \chi(x) d^\times x = \int_{k^\times} f(x) \chi(x) |x|^{-1} dx.$$

defines a χ -equivariant distribution on k^\times . It is essentially unique:

1.1. Theorem. *Every distribution φ on k^\times satisfying the functional equation $\rho_a \varphi = \chi(a)\varphi$ is a multiple of φ_χ .*

Proof. Suppose φ to be such a distribution. If $\chi = 1$ on $1 + \mathfrak{p}^f$, then

$$\langle \varphi, f \rangle = \langle \varphi, f_* \rangle$$

where

$$f_*(x) = \frac{1}{\text{meas}(1 + \mathfrak{p}^f)} \cdot \int_{1+\mathfrak{p}^f} f(xu) du.$$

Therefore φ amounts to integration against

$$F(x) = \frac{\langle \varphi, \text{char}_{x(1+\mathfrak{p}^f)} \rangle}{\text{meas}(1 + \mathfrak{p}^f)}.$$

We have a short exact sequence

$$1 \longrightarrow \mathfrak{o}^\times \longrightarrow k^\times \longrightarrow k^\times/\mathfrak{o}^\times \longrightarrow 1$$

The map from $\langle \varpi \rangle$ to the quotient is an isomorphism, so the quotient is isomorphic to the group of powers of ϖ , isomorphic to \mathbb{Z} . This isomorphism does not depend on the choice of ϖ , and I'll call the image of ϖ in the quotient a **canonical generator** of it. I'll write it as \mathfrak{p}^\times .

A character of k^\times trivial on \mathfrak{o}^\times , or equivalently a character of $k^\times/\mathfrak{o}^\times$, is said to be **unramified**. It is determined by the image of ϖ , which can be any non-zero complex number z . It is often convenient to write it as $|x|^s$ with s in \mathbb{C} , but since $|x| = q^{-n}$ if $x = \varpi^n$ we have

$$|x|^s = q^{-ns} = e^{-ns \log q}$$

so s is only determined up to a term $2\pi in/\log q$. Nonetheless, because of global considerations it is convenient to use s as a parameter.

A splitting of the exact sequence above is determined by a single element of k^\times whose image in $k^\times/\mathfrak{o}^\times$ is \mathfrak{p}^\times or, equivalently, a generator of \mathfrak{p} . There is no best choice, in spite of personal prejudices. Given a generator ϖ of \mathfrak{p} , one can factor any x in k^\times as $u \cdot \varpi^n$, thus factoring $k^\times = \mathfrak{o}^\times \times \langle \varpi \rangle$. In these circumstances one can write any character of k^\times uniquely as $\sigma(x) \cdot z^{\text{ord}(x)}$, where $\sigma(\varpi) = 1$ and z lies in \mathbb{C}^\times .

Remark. Suppose f to lie in $\mathcal{S}(k^\times)$, $\chi(x) = \omega(x) \cdot z^{\text{ord}(x)}$. Then $\langle \chi, f \rangle$ is a polynomial in $z^{\pm 1}$ (i.e. a Laurent polynomial in z).

2. As distributions on the additive group

The Schwartz space of k is that of all locally constant, complex-valued functions of compact support on k . We have an exact sequence of vector spaces

$$(2.1) \quad 0 \longrightarrow \mathcal{S}(k^\times) \longrightarrow \mathcal{S}(k) \xrightarrow{f \mapsto f(0)} \mathbb{C} \longrightarrow 0.$$

The group k^\times acts on all of these compatibly—on the first two by ρ and on the last trivially. The triviality means that the image of each $\rho_a f - f$ in \mathbb{C} is 0. Given χ , integration gives us a χ -equivariant distribution φ_χ on k^\times . Does it extend to a distribution on k ? Is the extension unique?

If f lies in $\mathcal{S}(k)$, then $f - f(0)\text{char}_{\mathfrak{o}}$ lies in $\mathcal{S}(k^\times)$. Evaluating $\langle \varphi_\chi, f \rangle$ therefor reduces to evaluating $\langle \varphi_\chi, \text{char}_{\mathfrak{o}} \rangle$. But if $z = \chi(\varpi)$ and $|z| < 1$ we can write

$$\begin{aligned} \langle \varphi_\chi, \text{char}_{\mathfrak{o}} \rangle &= \int_{\mathfrak{o}} \chi(x) |x|^{-1} dx \\ &= \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \int_{\mathfrak{p}^k - \mathfrak{p}^{k+1}} \chi(x) |x|^{-1} dx \\ &= \left(\int_{\mathfrak{o}^\times} \chi(x) dx \right) \left(\sum_{k=0}^{\infty} z^k \right), \end{aligned}$$

which certainly converges, and defines an equivariant extension.

2.2. Theorem. *If $\chi \neq 1$ there is a unique extension. If $\chi = 1$ there is none, and the Dirac distribution*

$$\delta_0: f \longmapsto f(0)$$

spans the space of distributions φ such that $\rho_a \varphi = \varphi$ for all a .

Proof. Since k^\times acts trivially on $\mathcal{S}(k)/\mathcal{S}(k^\times)$, any extension is certainly unique.

Suppose at first that φ did satisfy $\rho_a\varphi = \chi(a)\varphi$. Then

$$\langle \rho_a\varphi, f \rangle = \langle \varphi, \rho_{a^{-1}}f \rangle = \chi(a)\langle \varphi, f \rangle$$

so $\langle \varphi, \rho_{a^{-1}}f - f \rangle = (\chi(a) - 1)\langle \varphi, f \rangle$ and

(2.3)
$$\langle \varphi, f \rangle = \frac{\langle \varphi, \rho_{a^{-1}}f - f \rangle}{\chi(a) - 1}.$$

as long as $\chi(a) \neq 1$. But this can be used to **specify** φ , as long as $\chi \neq 1$. For any a $\rho_{a^{-1}}f - f$ lies in the Schwartz space of k^\times , so the numerator is always defined, and if we choose a with $\chi(a) \neq 1$ this formula will define a suitable distribution.

If $\chi = 1$, the argument fails, and in fact there is no extension to k . For suppose φ were one. Let f be the characteristic function of some small neighbourhood of 0. Then on the one hand

$$\langle \varphi, \rho_{\varpi^{-1}}f \rangle = \langle \varphi, f \rangle, \quad \langle \varphi, \rho_{\varpi^{-1}}f - f \rangle = 0,$$

but on the other

$$\langle \varphi, \rho_{\varpi^{-1}}f - f \rangle = \int_{k^\times} (f(x) - f(\varpi^{-1}x)) d^\times x \neq 0. \quad \color{orange}{\blacksquare}$$

Remark. There is another way to look at the same problem. Choose a fixed φ_* in $\mathcal{S}(k)$ with $\varphi_*(0) = 1$. Then for every φ in $\mathcal{S}(k)$ the function $\varphi - \varphi(0) \cdot \varphi_*$ will lie in $\mathcal{S}(k^\times)$. The integral

$$\int_{k^\times} \chi(x)(\varphi(x) - \varphi(0) \cdot \varphi_*(x)) d^\times x$$

defines a distribution that extends χ on $\mathcal{S}(k^\times)$. It is not the only such extension, since we can always add a multiple of δ_0 to it without modifying its effect on $\mathcal{S}(k^\times)$. So in looking for a χ -equivariant extension of χ we are looking for a distribution

$$\langle \varphi, \varphi \rangle = \int_{k^\times} \chi(x)(\varphi(x) - \varphi(0) \cdot \varphi_\#) d^\times x + c_\chi \varphi(0)$$

such that $\rho_a\varphi = \chi(a)\varphi$ for all a .

I leave as exercise to find the constant c_χ making φ a χ -equivariant distribution.

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Example. Suppose $\chi(x) = |x|^s = z^{\text{ord}(x)}$ and f is the characteristic function of \mathfrak{o} . What is $\langle \chi, f \rangle$? For $\text{RE}(s) > 0$

$$\begin{aligned} \langle \chi, f \rangle &= \int_{\mathfrak{o}} |x|^{-s-1} dx \\ &= \sum_{k \geq 0} \int_{\mathfrak{p}^k - \mathfrak{p}^{-(k+1)}} |x|^s dx / |x| \\ &= \sum_{k \geq 0} q^{-ks} = \frac{1}{1 - q^{-s}}. \end{aligned}$$

The residue of the distribution $|x|^s$ at $s = 0$ is a multiple of the Dirac δ_0 .

Remark. It is potentially useful to consider these results in light of the long exact sequence of cohomology derived from (2.1) :

$$0 \longrightarrow \text{Hom}_{k^\times}(\mathbb{C}, \mathbb{C}) \longrightarrow \text{Hom}_{k^\times}(\mathcal{S}(k), \mathbb{C}) \longrightarrow \text{Hom}_{k^\times}(\mathcal{S}(k^\times), \mathbb{C}) \longrightarrow \text{Ext}_{k^\times}(\mathbb{C}, \mathbb{C}) \longrightarrow \dots$$

3. Analysis on finite rings

Let $\mathfrak{r} = \mathfrak{o}/\mathfrak{p}^n$ for some $n > 0$. For the moment, suppose ω to be any primitive additive character of \mathfrak{r} , for example

$$x \mapsto \psi(x/\varpi^{\delta+n}).$$

The **Fourier transform** on $\mathbb{C}[\mathfrak{r}]$ is

$$\widehat{f}(y) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{N\mathfrak{r}}} \cdot \sum \omega(-xy)f(x).$$

It is an isometry of $L^2(\mathfrak{r})$ with itself.

If χ is a multiplicative character of \mathfrak{o}^\times , it is said to have **conductor** \mathfrak{p}^r if χ is trivial on $1 + \mathfrak{p}^r$ but not on $1 + \mathfrak{p}^{r-1}$. If χ has conductor \mathfrak{p}^r , extend it to be a function on all of \mathfrak{r} by setting $\chi(x) = 0$ for x not a unit. This extension is, up to scalar factor, the unique χ -equivariant function on \mathfrak{r} .

In this situation, define

$$\mathfrak{g}(\chi) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{N\mathfrak{r}}} \cdot \sum_{\mathfrak{r}} \omega(-x)\chi(x).$$

The following is easy to verify:

3.1. Proposition. *The Fourier transform of χ is $\mathfrak{g}(\chi)\chi^{-1}$.*

3.2. Corollary. *We have $|\mathfrak{g}(\chi)| = 1$.*

Proof. Because the L^2 norm of the Fourier transform of χ is equal to that of χ . ▣

4. The Fourier transform

The formula

$$\widehat{f}(y) = \int_k \psi(-xy)f(x) dx$$

defines a Fourier transform on $\mathcal{S}(k)$, which is an isomorphism of $\mathcal{S}(k)$ with itself. With the given choice of measure, the Fourier transform of $\text{char}_{\mathfrak{o}}$ is $N\mathfrak{d}^{-1/2}\text{char}_{\mathfrak{d}^{-1}}$, and vice-versa.

For two functions f, φ in $\mathcal{S}(k)$

$$\langle \widehat{\varphi}, f \rangle = \langle \varphi, \widehat{f} \rangle.$$

When φ is a distribution, this **defines** the Fourier transform of φ .

How does the Fourier transform interact with the action of k^\times ?

4.1. Lemma. *For any distribution φ*

$$\langle \rho_c \widehat{\varphi}, f \rangle = |c| \langle \widehat{\rho_{1/c} \varphi}, f \rangle.$$

Proof. For any f in $\mathcal{S}(k)$

$$\begin{aligned} \widehat{\rho_{1/c}f}(y) &= \int_k \psi(-xy)f(x/c) dx \\ &= \int_k \psi(-zcy)f(z) dz \\ &= |c|\widehat{f}(cy), \end{aligned}$$

and $\widehat{\rho_{1/c}f} = |c|\widehat{\rho_c f}$. Hence for a distribution φ

$$\begin{aligned} \langle \rho_c \widehat{\varphi}, f \rangle &= \langle \widehat{\varphi}, \rho(1/c)f \rangle \\ &= \langle \varphi, \widehat{\rho(1/c)f} \rangle \\ &= \langle \varphi, |c|\widehat{\rho_c f} \rangle \\ &= |c|\langle \varphi, \widehat{\rho_c f} \rangle \\ &= |c|\langle \rho_{1/c}\varphi, \widehat{f} \rangle \\ &= |c|\langle \widehat{\rho_{1/c}\varphi}, f \rangle. \end{aligned}$$

If φ is χ -equivariant, this gives us

$$\rho_c \widehat{\varphi} = |c|\chi^{-1}(c)\widehat{\varphi},$$

so that $\widehat{\varphi}$ is equivariant for $\nu\chi^{-1}$. Since the space of χ -equivariant distributions has dimension one, this implies that the Fourier transform of χ is a scalar multiple of $\nu\chi^{-1}$. What is that scalar? The usual calculation uses suitably chosen test functions to answer this, but with the prospect of similar if more difficult calculations in mind, I'll do something a bit different.

Formally, we have

$$\begin{aligned} \int_k \chi(x)|x|^{-1}\widehat{f}(x) dx &= \int_k \chi(x)|x|^{-1} \left(\int_k \psi(-yx)f(y) dy \right) dx \\ &= \int_k f(y) \left(\int_k \psi(-xy)\chi(x)|x|^{-1} dx \right) dy. \end{aligned}$$

Making sense of this poses two problems. First of all, to calculate the factor $\gamma_\psi(\chi)$ such that the integral

$$\int_k \psi(-xy)\chi(x)|x|^{-1} dx$$

make sense and is equal to

$$\gamma_\psi(\chi)\chi^{-1}(y).$$

Second, to justify the manipulation of integrals. The crucial step is this:

4.2. Lemma. *If $|y| = q^{-m}$ and $\mathfrak{f} = \mathfrak{p}^f$ is the conductor of χ , then*

$$\int_{\mathfrak{p}^n} \psi(-xy)\chi(x) d^\times x = \int_{\mathfrak{p}^{-\delta-m-f}} \psi(-xy)\chi(x) d^\times x$$

for $n \leq -\delta - m - f$.

I'll prove this at the same time I calculate the integral explicitly.

4.3. Lemma. *If $y \sim \varpi^m$ then*

$$\int_{\mathfrak{p}^k} \psi(-xy) dx = \begin{cases} q^{-k-\delta/2} & \text{if } m \geq -\delta - k \\ 0 & \text{if } m \leq -\delta - k - 1. \end{cases}$$

Now I begin the proof of Lemma 4.2. Say $y = \varpi^m u$ with u in \mathfrak{o}^\times .

Unramified. Assume $n \gg 0$, $\chi = |x|^s$.

$$\begin{aligned} & \int_{\mathfrak{p}^n} \psi(-xy) \chi(x) |x|^{-1} dx \\ &= \sum_{k \geq n} \left(\int_{\mathfrak{p}^k - \mathfrak{p}^{k+1}} \psi(-xy) \chi(x) |x|^{-1} dx \right) \\ &= \sum_{k \geq n} q^{-ks} q^k \left(\int_{\mathfrak{p}^k - \mathfrak{p}^{k+1}} \psi(-xy) dx \right) \\ &= \sum_{k \geq n} q^{-ks} q^k \left(\int_{\mathfrak{p}^k} \psi(-xy) dx \right) - \sum_{k \geq n} q^{-ks} q^k \left(\int_{\mathfrak{p}^{k+1}} \psi(-xy) dx \right) \\ &= \sum_{k \geq n} q^{-ks} q^k \left(\int_{\mathfrak{p}^k} \psi(-xy) dx \right) - \sum_{\ell \geq n+1} q^{-(\ell-1)s} q^{\ell-1} \left(\int_{\mathfrak{p}^\ell} \psi(-xy) dx \right) \\ &= \sum_{k \geq n} q^{-ks} q^k \left(\int_{\mathfrak{p}^k} \psi(-xy) dx \right) - \sum_{\ell \geq n+1} q^{-\ell s} q^{s-1} q^\ell \left(\int_{\mathfrak{p}^\ell} \psi(-xy) dx \right) \\ &= \sum_{k \geq -\delta-m} q^{-ks-\delta/2} - \sum_{\ell \geq -\delta-m} q^{-\ell s-\delta/2} q^{s-1} \\ &= (1 - q^{-(1-s)}) \cdot \frac{q^{(\delta+m)s-\delta/2}}{1 - q^{-s}} \\ &= \chi^{-1}(y) \cdot q^{\delta(s-1/2)} \cdot \frac{1 - q^{-(1-s)}}{1 - q^{-s}} \\ &= \gamma_\psi(\chi) \cdot \frac{|y| \chi^{-1}(y)}{|y|}. \end{aligned}$$

Ramified. Say χ has conductor \mathfrak{p}^f .

$$\begin{aligned} & \int_{\mathfrak{p}^n} \psi(-xy) \chi(x) |x|^{-1} dx \\ &= \sum_{k \geq n} \left(\int_{\mathfrak{p}^k - \mathfrak{p}^{k+1}} \psi(-xy) \chi(x) dx / |x| \right) \\ &= \sum_{k \geq n} q^{-ks} \left(\int_{\mathfrak{o}^\times} \psi(-\varpi^k u y) \chi(u) du \right) \\ &= \sum_{k \geq n} q^{-ks} \left(\int_{\mathfrak{o}^\times} \psi(-\varpi^{k+m} u \varepsilon) \chi(u) du \right) \\ &= \sum_{k \geq n} q^{-ks} \chi^{-1}(\varepsilon) \left(\int_{\mathfrak{o}^\times} \psi(-\varpi^{k+m} u) \chi(u) du \right) \end{aligned}$$

If $\ell = k + m$ the inner integral is

$$\int_{\mathfrak{o}^\times} \psi(\varpi^\ell u) \chi(u) du = 0$$

It is a kind of Gauss sum.

There are now four cases to consider.

- We have $\ell \geq -\delta$. Then $\psi(-\varpi^\ell u) = 1$ identically, and the integral vanishes since χ is a nontrivial character.
- We have $-\delta - f < \ell < \delta$. The integral again vanishes since χ is non-trivial on each subgroup $(1 + \mathfrak{p}^i)$.
- We have $\ell = -\delta - f$. The integral is the finite Gauss sum $\mathfrak{g}_\psi(\chi)$, and the corresponding term in the sum is

$$\chi^{-1}(y) (\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{D}\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{f})^{s-1/2} \mathfrak{g}_\psi(\chi).$$

- We have $\ell < -\delta - f$. The character $\psi(\varpi^\ell u)$ is non-trivial on each coset $u(1 + \mathfrak{p}^f)$, and χ is constant on one of these, so the integral vanishes.

This concludes the proof of Lemma 4.2. ▮

4.4. Theorem. *We have*

$$\widehat{\chi} = \gamma_\psi(\chi) \nu \chi^{-1}$$

for some scalar $\gamma_\psi(\chi)$. If $\chi(x) = |x|^s$ then

$$\gamma_\psi(\chi) = \mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{D}^{s-1/2} \cdot \frac{1 - q^{-(1-s)}}{1 - q^{-s}}.$$

If χ has conductor $\mathfrak{f} = \mathfrak{p}^f$ then

$$\gamma_\psi(\chi) = (\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{D}\mathfrak{N}\mathfrak{f})^{s-1/2} \mathfrak{g}_\psi(\chi).$$

Proof. Assume $\text{RE}(s) > 0$. Choose f in $\mathcal{S}(k^\times)$. Then

$$\begin{aligned} & \int_k \widehat{f}(x) \chi(x) |x|^{-1} dx \\ &= \int_{\mathfrak{p}^n} \widehat{f}(x) \chi(x) |x|^{-1} dx \\ &= \int_{\mathfrak{p}^n} \left(\int_{\mathfrak{p}^r} f(y) \psi(-xy) dy \right) \chi(x) |x|^{-1} dx \end{aligned}$$

for $n, r \ll 0$. All integrals are bounded, so there is no problem reversing the order of integration, and this is

$$\int_{\mathfrak{p}^r} f(y) \left(\int_{\mathfrak{p}^n} \psi(-xy) \chi(x) |x|^{-1} dx \right) dy.$$

Since $f(0) = 0$, we have an upper bound on m , and then Lemma 4.2 tells us that for $n \gg 0$ the inner integral is independent of n and equal to what it should be. ▮

Remarks. The usual proof uses special test functions, whereas this one gets by with a somewhat arbitrary choice. This is perhaps only a curiosity. For global applications, one cannot escape special choices, because evaluating adelic integrals requires it.

5. References

1. J. W. S. Cassels and A. Fröhlich (editors), **Algebraic number theory**, Thompson Book Company, 1967.
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