COMPOSITIO MATHEMATICA

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Compositio Mathematica, tome 74, nº 2 (1990), p. 165-168
<http://www.numdam.org/item?id=CM_1990__74_2_165_0>

Compositio Mathematica **74**: 165–168, 1990.

Projective modules and approximation couples

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1. Introduction

In 1976, Quillen and Suslin independently and almost simultaneously showed that every finitely generated projective module over a polynomial ring in n variables with coefficients from a field, is free. Thus they settled the conjecture of Serre affirmatively. In the following year Lindel and Lutkebohmert [3] showed that the above result is valid if the field of coefficients is replaced by a ring of formal power series in a finite number of variables over a field.

The object of this note is to show that if $R \subset \bar{R}$ is an approximation couple (see Definition 1 below) and if a finitely generated, projective $R[X] = R[X_1, \ldots, X_n] = S$ module M becomes free on extension of scalars to $\bar{R}[X]$, then M itself is free as an S-module. In particular, Serre's conjecture is true if the field of coefficients is replaced by an equicharacteristic Henselian ring.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the helpful discussions we had with Professor Amit Roy while working on this note.

2. Approximation couples

Let $R \subset \bar{R}$ be two commutative rings with the same identity, provided with a topology τ such that R is dense in $\bar{R}$ under the induced topology.

DEFINITION 1. Let $R \subset \bar{R}$ be as above. The pair $R \subset \bar{R}$ is called an approximation couple (or a couple of rings having the approximation property) if the following holds:

For any finite family $\{f_i\}_{i \in I}$ of polynomials in $R[Y_1, \ldots, Y_n]$ and for each common zero $\xi = (\xi_1, \ldots, \xi_n)$ of $\{f_i\}$ in $\bar{R}^n$, we can find a common zero $y = (y_1, \ldots, y_n)$ in R^n which is arbitrarily close to ξ in the product topology in $\bar{R}^n$.

We give below a few examples of approximation couples.

1. Let $(\hat{K}, v)$ be a complete valued field of characteristic 0 and K any algebraically closed field in $\hat{K}$. Then $K \subset \hat{K}$ forms an approximation couple (Lang [2]).

2. Let R be a local ring and $\bar{A} = R[[X]]$. Let A be the Henselization of

$R[X]_{(X)}$ at its maximal ideal. Then $A \subset \bar{A}$ is an approximation couple. (Artin [1]).

3. Let A be the valuation ring of a complete non-archimedean valued field (K, v) of characteristic 0 and $Y = (Y_1, Y_2, \ldots, Y_n)$ be a set of indeterminates over K. In the formal power series ring $A[[Y]]$ introduce a topology with the help of v as follows. For any $f = \Sigma_\nu a_\nu Y^\nu$ where $\nu = \nu_1, \nu_2, \ldots, \nu_n)$, $\nu_i \geqslant 0$, set $v(f) = \mathrm{Sup}_\nu v(a_\nu)$. If A_n denotes the subring of $A[[Y]]$ consisting of elements (which are algebraic over $A[Y]$ and $\bar{A}_n$ is the closure of A_n in $A[[Y]]$ in the above topology, then $A_n \subset \bar{A}_n$ is an approximation couple. (Robba [4]).

In the above examples the rings involved are Noetherian. Schoutens [5] gives an example of a couple of non-Noetherian local rings having the approximation property.

3. Projective modules

In this section we prove the main result of this note.

THEOREM: *Let $R \subset \bar{R}$ be an approximation couple and M be a finitely generated projective S-module where $S = R[X] = R[X_1, \ldots, X_n]$ the X_i being indeterminates over R. If $\bar{M} = \bar{S} \otimes_R M (\bar{S} = \bar{R}[X])$ is free S-module, then M is free as an S-module.*

In particular, the validity of Serre's conjecture for $\bar{R}[X_1, \ldots, X_n]$ modules implies the validity for $R[X_1, \ldots, X_n]$-modules.

Proof. M being a projective module, is a direct summand of a free module over S and as M is also finitely generated we have an N such that $M \oplus N \cong S^m$ for a suitable m. Note that N is also finitely generated and projective. By the hypothesis, the modules $\bar{M} = M \otimes_S \bar{S}$ and $N = N \otimes_S \bar{S}$ are free $\bar{S}$-modules.

Now, consider the exact sequence

$$S^m \xrightarrow{\varepsilon} S^m \xrightarrow{\varphi} M \longrightarrow 0$$

of S-modules, where ε is the projection of S^m on N and φ is the projection on M. Tensoring the above sequence with $\bar{S}$ over S, we get the following exact sequence

$$\bar{S}^m \xrightarrow{\bar{\varepsilon}} \bar{S}^m \xrightarrow{\bar{\varphi}} \bar{M} \longrightarrow 0.$$

Since both $\bar{M}$ and $\bar{N}$ are free over $\bar{S}$ and $\bar{S}^m = \bar{M} \oplus \bar{N}$, for the standard basis $\{e_1, e_2, \ldots, e_m\}$ of $\bar{S}^m$ over $\bar{S}$ where e_i is the m-tuple with 1 at the ith entry and 0 elsewhere, we can find an $\bar{S}$-automorphism $\bar{\sigma}$ of $\bar{S}^m$ namely, $\bar{\sigma}(f_i) = e_i$ (where $f_1, \ldots, f_s$ and $f_{s+1}, \ldots, f_m$ are generators of $\bar{N}$ and $\bar{M}$ respectively, as free

$\bar{S}$-modules) such that the matrix of

$$\bar{\tau} = \bar{\sigma} \cdot \bar{\varepsilon} \cdot \bar{\sigma}^{-1} \tag{1}$$

with respect to the above basis has the form $\begin{pmatrix} I_s & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$. In other words we have the following commutative diagram. Here $m = r + s$.

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
\bar{S}^m & \xrightarrow{\bar{\varepsilon}} & \bar{S}^m & \xrightarrow{\bar{\varphi}} & \bar{M} & \longrightarrow & 0 \\
\bar{\sigma} \big\downarrow & & \big\downarrow \bar{\sigma} & & \big\downarrow \cong & & \\
\bar{S}^m & \xrightarrow{\bar{\tau}} & \bar{S}^m & \longrightarrow & \bar{S}^r & \longrightarrow & 0
\end{array}$$

Let $A(\bar{\theta})$ (respectively $A(\theta)$) denote the matrix associated with $\bar{\theta} \in \mathrm{End}_{\bar{S}}(\bar{S}^m)$ (respectively $\theta \in \mathrm{End}_S(S^m)$) with respect to the standard basis $\{e_i\}$. In terms of the matrices, (1) can be written as $A(\bar{\tau}) \cdot A(\bar{\sigma}) = A(\bar{\sigma}) \cdot A(\bar{\varepsilon})$ and this yields

$$B(\bar{\sigma}) = A(\bar{\sigma}) \cdot A(\bar{\varepsilon}) - \begin{pmatrix} I_s & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix} A(\bar{\sigma}) = 0. \tag{2}$$

Note that $A(\varepsilon) = A(\bar{\varepsilon})$. Since $\bar{\sigma}$ is an automorphisms of $\bar{S}^m$ det $A(\bar{\sigma}) = u$ is a unit in $\bar{S}$ and therefore, on replacing f_1 by $u \cdot f_1$ we may assume that

$$\det A(\bar{\sigma}) = 1 \tag{3}$$

Setting $A(\bar{\sigma}) = (\bar{f}_{ij})$ and $B(\bar{\sigma}) = (\bar{g}_{ij})$ we have $\bar{f}_{ij} = \Sigma_\nu \, r_\nu^{(ij)} X^\nu$ where $\nu = (\nu_1, \ldots, \nu_n)$, $\nu_i \geq 0$ and $\bar{r}_\nu^{(ij)} \in \bar{R}$. On replacing $\bar{r}_\nu^{(ij)}$ by indeterminates $T_\nu^{(ij)}$, from equation (2) we get $\bar{g}_{kl} = (\Sigma_\mu \, P_\mu^{(kl)}(\ldots T_\nu^{(ij)} \ldots) X^\mu)$ is zero on specializing $T_\nu^{(ij)} = \bar{r}_\nu^{(ij)}$. Here $P_\mu^{(kl)}(\ldots \mathrm{T}_\nu^{(ij)} \ldots)$ are polynomials over R(since $A(\varepsilon)$ has entries from $R[X]$). Thus we get a finite set of polynomial equations

$$P_\mu^{(kl)}(\ldots T_\nu^{(ij)} \ldots) = 0 \quad \text{over } R \text{ satisfied by } (\ldots \bar{r}_\nu^{(ij)} \ldots),\ \bar{r}_\nu^{(ij)} \in \bar{R}.$$

Likewise, equation (3) gives another finite system of polynomial equations satisfied by $\{\bar{r}_\nu^{(ij)}\}$. As $R \subset \bar{R}$ is an approximation couple, we can find $r_\nu^{(ij)} \in R$ such that $\{r_\nu^{(ij)}\}$ is a common solution of the polynomial equations arising out of condition (2) and (3). Thus we have an automorphism σ of S^m with

$$A(\sigma) = (f_{ij}), \quad \text{where } f_{ij} = \sum_\nu r_\nu^{(ij)} X^\nu, \quad \nu = (\nu_i, \ldots, \nu_n)$$

such that the following diagram commutes.

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
S^m & \xrightarrow{\varepsilon} & S^m & \xrightarrow{\varphi} & M & \longrightarrow & 0 \\
\downarrow \sigma & & \downarrow \sigma & & \downarrow \cong & & \\
S^m & \xrightarrow[\tau]{} & S^m & \longrightarrow & S^r & \longrightarrow & 0.
\end{array}$$

This gives $M \cong S^r$. Thus M is a free S-module.

REMARK 1. In case $n = 0$, conditions (1) and (2) actually lead to m^2 linear equations and one homogeneous polynomial of total degree m in $T_v^{(ij)}$ equated to 1 and the proof gets considerably simplified.

REMARK 2. In view of example 2 and the result of Lindel and Lutkebohmert the theorem above implies that any finitely generated projective module over an equicharacteristic Henselian local domain is free.

References

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