

# Sums, Differences and Dilates

Amites Sarkar

Western Washington University

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Joint work with Jon Cutler (Montclair State University)  
and Luke Pebody

# Jon and Luke



# Sums and differences

For a set  $A \subset \mathbb{Z}$ , the **sumset**  $A + A$  of  $A$  is defined as

$$A + A = \{a + b : a, b \in A\}$$

and the **difference set**  $A - A$  is defined as

$$A - A = \{a - b : a, b \in A\}.$$

**Example:** If  $A = \{1, 2, 3\}$ , then  $A + A = \{2, 3, 4, 5, 6\}$ , and  $A - A = \{-2, -1, 0, 1, 2\}$ .

**Example:** If  $A = \{1, 2, 4\}$ , then  $A + A = \{2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8\}$ , and  $A - A = \{-3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3\}$ .

$A = \{1, 2, 4\}$  is an example of a **Sidon set**, i.e., a set with no nontrivial equality of the form  $a + b = c + d$ .

# Number-theoretic connections

## Goldbach's Conjecture

If  $P$  is the set of primes, and  $E = \{4, 6, 8, 10, \dots\}$ , then  $E \subset P + P$ .

## Fundamental Theorem of Arithmetic

For every  $n \geq 2$ , there is a unique representation

$$\log n = n_1 \log p_1 + \dots + n_r \log p_r.$$

- What does this, by itself, imply about the  $p_i$ ?
- Erdős (1938): It implies that  $\sum_{p \in P} 1/p$  diverges.

# Freiman's theorem

## Observation

If  $A$  is an arithmetic progression, then  $|A + A| = 2|A| - 1$ .

## Definition

A generalized arithmetic progression (GAP) of dimension  $d$  is a set of the form

$$A = \{a_0 + n_1 a_1 + \cdots + n_d a_d\}$$

where  $a_i, n_i \in \mathbb{Z}$  and  $0 \leq n_i < N_i$ . The size of  $A$  is  $N_1 N_2 \cdots N_d$ .

## Freiman's Theorem (1966)

If  $A \subset \mathbb{Z}$  and  $|A + A| \leq K|A|$ , then  $A$  is a subset of a GAP of dimension at most  $d(K)$  and size at most  $s(K)|A|$ .

Here,  $d(K)$  and  $s(K)$  depend only on  $K$ .

- In words, if  $A$  has **small doubling**, then  $A$  must be a dense subset of the projection of a low-dimensional discrete box.

## From a book review

Freiman's original proof was very complicated and published as a book.

From Gordon's review of the English translation of Freiman's book:

A rather grandiose statement is made to the effect that additive number theory is the study of properties invariant under isomorphism, and comparisons with Klein's *Erlanger Programm* are drawn. The reviewer finds this quite ludicrous, but it does enliven some otherwise dull moments in reading the book.

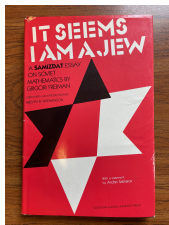
(On Freiman's proof) The proof of this theorem is a *tour de force*, combining the method of trigonometric sums with ideas from the geometry of numbers and probability theory.

At the risk of reopening the cold war, the reviewer feels compelled to lodge a feeble protest against the sloppiness which mars so many otherwise superb Russian texts. G. H. Hardy once remarked that no one ever wrote five pages of mathematics without a mistake; it seems that in the area of trigonometric sums this bound can be reduced to five lines.

# Gregory Abelevich Freiman (1926-2024)



Freiman (bottom left)



Freiman's other book

- Freiman's book *It Seems I Am a Jew* describes the discrimination against Jewish mathematicians at the Steklov Institute in Moscow, and other institutions, during the postwar period.
- In the 1970s, only 2 to 4 Jewish students were admitted out of a class of 400 to 500 mathematics students at Moscow University.
- Jewish candidates had to sit a special entrance examination, with problems selected from Olympiad competitions.
- Freiman eventually left the USSR and settled in Israel.

## Part of Freiman's legacy

- Freiman's theorem was reproved by Ruzsa in 1994, with a much more streamlined proof.
- The theorem, and Ruzsa's proof of it, were key ingredients in Gowers's 2001 famous proof of Szemerédi's theorem.
- Very recently, a major generalization of Freiman's theorem, the *Polynomial Freiman-Ruzsa conjecture*, also known as *Marton's conjecture*, was settled affirmatively by Gowers, Green, Manners and Tao. The proof was formalized in Lean 4.
- Two books: *Additive Combinatorics* by Terence Tao and Van Vu, and *Graph Theory and Additive Combinatorics* by Yufei Zhao.

# Back in the USSR

Theorem (Freiman and Pigarev 1973)

$$|A + A|^{3/4} \leq |A - A| \leq |A + A|^{4/3}$$

Theorem (Ruzsa 1976, 1989)

$$\left( \frac{|A + A|}{|A|} \right)^{\frac{1}{2}} \leq \frac{|A - A|}{|A|} \leq \left( \frac{|A + A|}{|A|} \right)^2$$

The upper bound comes from taking  $B = C = -A$  in Ruzsa's triangle inequality:

$$|A||B - C| \leq |A - B||A - C|,$$

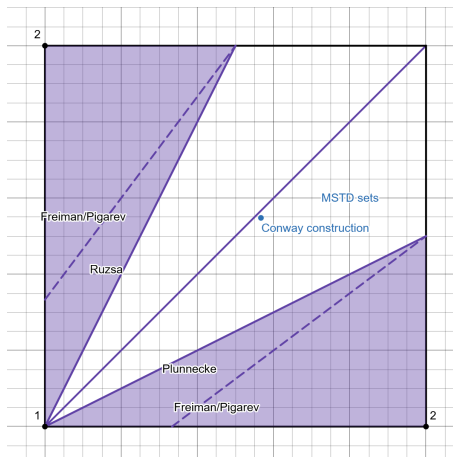
and the lower bound comes from taking  $B = C = -A$  in this inequality:

$$|A||B + C| \leq |A + B||A + C|.$$

Theorem (Conway 1967)

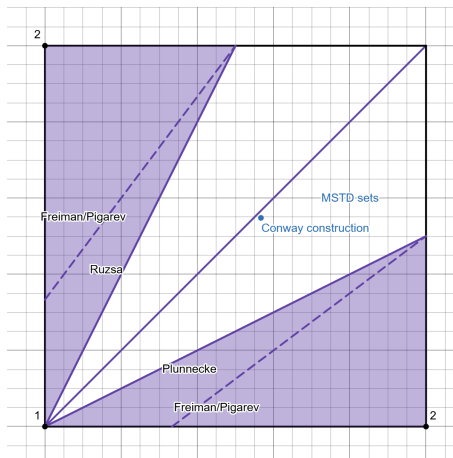
If  $A = \{0, 2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 12, 14\}$ , then  $|A + A| = 26 > 25 = |A - A|$ .

# The feasible region $F_{1,-1}$



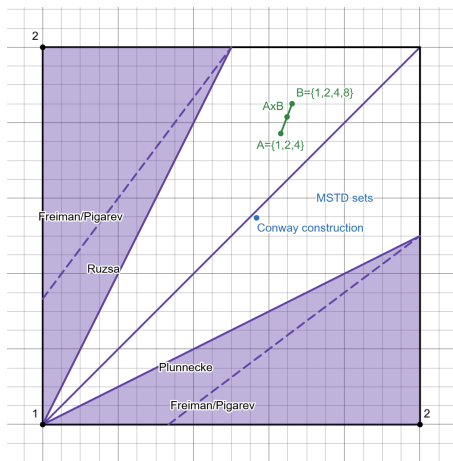
$$E_{1,-1} = \{(x, y) : |A + A| = |A|^x, |A - A| = |A|^y \text{ for some } A \subset \mathbb{Z}\}$$

# The feasible region $F_{1,-1}$



$$E_{1,-1} = \left\{ \left( \frac{\log |A+A|}{\log |A|}, \frac{\log |A-A|}{\log |A|} \right) \right\}, F_{1,-1} = \overline{E_{1,-1}}$$

# The feasible region $F_{1,-1}$ is convex



$$E_{1,-1} = \left\{ \left( \frac{\log |A+A|}{\log |A|}, \frac{\log |A-A|}{\log |A|} \right) \right\}, F_{1,-1} = \overline{E_{1,-1}}$$

# The top right corner of $F_{1,-1}$

## Observation

If  $A \subset \mathbb{Z}$  with  $|A| = n$ , then

$$|A + A| \leq \frac{n(n+1)}{2} \quad \text{and} \quad |A - A| \leq n^2 - n + 1,$$

with equality in both cases precisely when  $A$  is a Sidon set.

## Theorem (Ruzsa 1992)

For every large enough  $n$ , there is a set  $A$  with  $|A| = n$ ,

$$|A + A| \leq n^{2-c} \quad \text{and} \quad |A - A| \geq n^2 - n^{2-c},$$

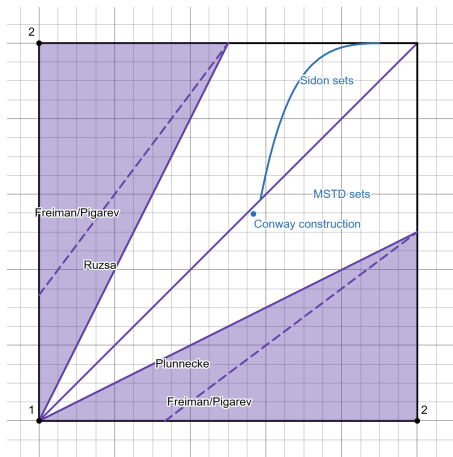
where  $c$  is a positive absolute constant, and a set  $B$  with  $|B| = n$ ,

$$|B - B| \leq n^{2-c'} \quad \text{and} \quad |B + B| \geq \frac{1}{2}n^2 - n^{2-c'},$$

where  $c'$  is a positive absolute constant.

So  $(2 - c, 2) \in F_{1,-1}$  and  $(2, 2 - c') \in F_{1,-1}$ , for some  $c, c' > 0$ .

# The feasible region $F_{1,-1}$ and Sidon sets



$$E_{1,-1} = \left\{ \left( \frac{\log |A+A|}{\log |A|}, \frac{\log |A-A|}{\log |A|} \right) \right\}, F_{1,-1} = \overline{E_{1,-1}}$$

- Take  $S = \{0, 1, 3\}$ , so that  $|S + S| < |S - S|$ .
- Fix a probability  $0 < q < 1$ .
- Choose each  $\mathbf{x} \in S^d \subset \mathbb{Z}^d$  independently with probability  $q^d$ .
- Project this set into  $\mathbb{Z}$  using a suitable map  $\phi$  of the form

$$\phi(x_1, \dots, x_d) = \lambda_1 x_1 + \dots + \lambda_d x_d.$$

# Why does this work?

$$a = (3, 1, 1, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 0, 1, 1, 3, 3, 1)$$

$$b = (0, 0, 3, 0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 3, 3, 1, 1, 0, 1, 0)$$

$$a + b = (3, 1, 4, 3, 4, 3, 3, 3, 6, 3, 2, 2, 3, 4, 1)$$

$$a - b = (3, 1, \bar{2}, 3, 2, 3, 3, 3, 0, \bar{3}, 0, 0, 3, 2, 1)$$

In  $a + b$ :

- 1, 3, 4 can be made in two ways;
- 0, 2, 6 can be made in one way.

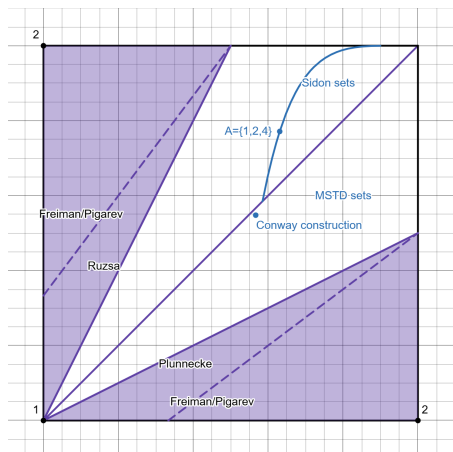
In  $a - b$ :

- 0 can be made in three ways,
- but everything else can only be made in one way.

So, for the right choice of  $q$ , a lot of the sums will coincide, but the differences will spread out.

The trick is to choose the right value of  $q$ , depending on the *multiplicity spectra* of  $S + S$  and  $S - S$ .

# The feasible region $F_{1,-1}$ and Ruzsa's method



$$E_{1,-1} = \left\{ \left( \frac{\log |A+A|}{\log |A|}, \frac{\log |A-A|}{\log |A|} \right) \right\}, F_{1,-1} = \overline{E_{1,-1}}$$

# Sums of dilates

Recall that the **sumset**  $A + B$  of sets  $A, B \subset \mathbb{Z}^d$  is defined as

$$A + B = \{a + b : a \in A, b \in B\}.$$

For a given integer  $k$ , the **dilate**  $A + k \cdot B$  is defined as

$$A + k \cdot B = \{a + kb : a \in A, b \in B\}.$$

**Note:**  $A + 2 \cdot A$  (for example) is generally a strict subset of  $3A = A + A + A$ , where each of the three summands can be distinct.

**Example:** If  $A = \{1, 2, 4\}$ , then  $A + 2 \cdot A = \{3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12\}$ , but  $A + A + A = \{3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12\}$ .

# A complicated formula

Suppose

$$|S| = M \quad |S + k \cdot S| = N \quad S + k \cdot S = \{x_1, \dots, x_N\}.$$

For  $1 \leq i \leq N$ , write  $\lambda_i$  for the number of ordered pairs  $(s_1, s_2) \in S^2$  such that  $x_i = s_1 + ks_2$ .  $\lambda_1, \lambda_2, \dots, \lambda_N$  is the *multiplicity spectrum* of  $S + k \cdot S$ . Note that  $\sum_{i=1}^N \lambda_i = M^2$ .

## Theorem (CPS)

Fix a finite set  $S \subseteq \mathbb{Z}$ , and let  $k$  be a nonzero integer. Let  $M, N, \lambda_i$  be defined as above. Then, if  $S_n$  is the random set produced by Ruzsa's method, starting with the set  $S$ , and using the probability  $q$ , we have

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} (\mathbb{E}|S_n + k \cdot S_n|)^{1/n} = \begin{cases} (qM)^2 & \text{if } q^2 \leq \prod_i \lambda_i^{-\lambda_i/M^2} \\ N & \text{if } q^2 \geq \prod_i \lambda_i^{-1/N} \\ q^{2p} \sum_i \lambda_i^p & \text{if } q^2 = \prod_i \lambda_i^{-\Lambda(p)} \end{cases}$$

where

$$\Lambda(p) = \frac{\lambda_i^p}{\sum_1^N \lambda_j^p}.$$

# The size of a fractional dilate

## Definition (CPS)

A *fractional dilate*  $\alpha$  is a map  $\alpha : \mathbb{Z} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^+ \cup \{0\}$  with finite support  $\text{supp}(\alpha)$ . The *size of a fractional dilate* is

$$\|\alpha\| = \inf_{0 \leq p \leq 1} \sum_{n \in \text{supp}(\alpha)} \alpha(n)^p.$$

- If  $\alpha$  is a *fractional set* ( $\alpha(n) \leq 1$  for all  $n$ ), then  $\|\alpha\| = \sum_{n \in \mathbb{Z}} \alpha(n)$ . (Take  $p = 1$ .)
- If  $\alpha(n) \geq 1$  for all  $n$ , then  $\|\alpha\| = |\text{supp}(\alpha)|$ . (Take  $p = 0$ .)
- In general, it is not obvious which value of  $p$  to take. If the infimum above is attained at  $p = 1$ , we say that  $\alpha$  is *spartan*. If the infimum is attained at  $p = 0$ , we say that  $\alpha$  is *opulent*. Otherwise  $\alpha$  is *p-comfortable*.

# Fractional dilates as generalizations of dilates

## Definition (CPS)

For fractional sets  $\alpha, \beta$  and an integer  $k$ ,  $\alpha + k \cdot \beta$  is the fractional dilate

$$(\alpha + k \cdot \beta)(n) = \sum_{\substack{(i,j) \\ i+kj=n}} \alpha(i)\beta(j).$$

- If  $\alpha = \mathbb{1}_A$  and  $\beta = \mathbb{1}_B$ , then  $\text{supp}(\alpha + k \cdot \beta) = A + k \cdot B$ , and the values  $(\alpha + k \cdot \beta)(n)$  record multiplicities.
- If  $\alpha = q\mathbb{1}_A$  and  $\beta = q\mathbb{1}_B$ , then  $\text{supp}(\alpha + k \cdot \beta) = A + k \cdot B$ , and the values  $(\alpha + k \cdot \beta)(n)$  record multiplicities, multiplied by  $q^2$ .

# Ruzsa's method generalized, and quantified

## Definition (CPS)

Given a fractional set  $\alpha$ , a random set  $S_n \subseteq \mathbb{Z}^n$  is *drawn from*  $\alpha^n$  if each element  $(i_1, i_2, \dots, i_n) \in \mathbb{Z}^n$  is chosen independently with probability

$$\alpha(i_1)\alpha(i_2)\cdots\alpha(i_n).$$

Ruzsa:  $\alpha = q\mathbb{1}_{\{0,1,3\}}$

## Definition (CPS)

Let  $\alpha$  be a fractional set with  $\|\alpha\| > 1$ , and suppose  $S_n \subseteq \mathbb{Z}^n$  is drawn from  $\alpha^n$ . Then

$$\mathbb{E}|S_n| = \|\alpha\|^n \quad \text{Var}|S_n| \leq \|\alpha\|^n$$

and

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} (\mathbb{E}|S_n + k \cdot S_n|)^{1/n} = \|\alpha + k \cdot \alpha\|.$$

## Difference Body Inequality

If  $A \subset \mathbb{R}^d$  is convex,  $V$  denotes volume, and

$$A - A = \{a - b : a, b \in A\},$$

then

$$2^d V(A) \leq V(A - A) \leq \binom{2d}{d} V(A).$$

- Brunn-Minkowski inequality; equality iff  $A$  is centrally symmetric.
- *Rogers-Shephard inequality* (1957); equality iff  $A$  is a simplex.

# The Convex Connection II

Hennecart, Robert, Yudin Construction 1999

If

$$A_{k,d} = \{(x_1, \dots, x_{d+1}) : x_1, \dots, x_{d+1} \geq 0, x_1 + \dots + x_{d+1} = k\},$$

then

$$|A| = \binom{k+d}{d} \quad |A+A| = \binom{2k+d}{d} \quad |A-A| = \sum_{t=0}^{\min(d,k)} \binom{d}{t}^2 \binom{k+d-t}{d}.$$

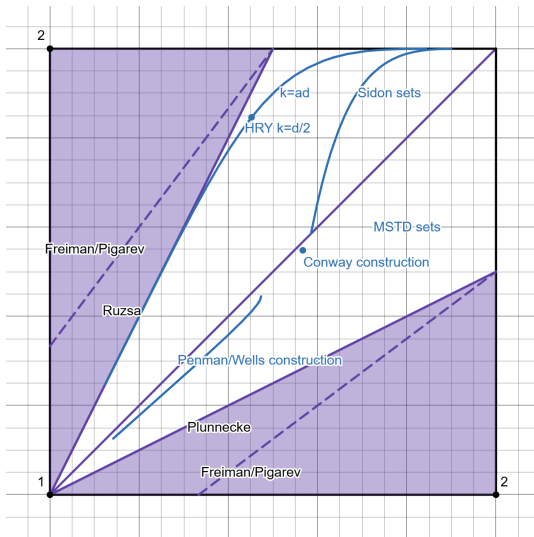
If  $k = d/2$ , then

$$\frac{\log |A+A|}{\log |A|} \rightarrow \frac{4 \log 2}{3 \log 3 - 2 \log 2} \approx 1.4520$$

and

$$\frac{\log |A-A|}{\log |A|} \rightarrow \frac{4 \log(1 + \sqrt{2})}{3 \log 3 - 2 \log 2} \approx 1.8463,$$

so that  $(1.4520, 1.8463)$  is feasible when  $k = 1$  and  $l = -1$ .



$$E_{1,-1} = \left\{ \left( \frac{\log |A+A|}{\log |A|}, \frac{\log |A-A|}{\log |A|} \right) \right\}$$

### Theorem (CPS)

There exists a fractional set  $\alpha$  for which

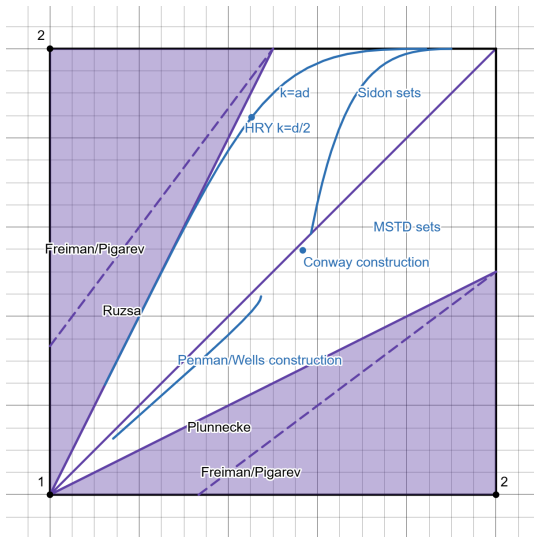
$$\|\alpha\| > 1, \quad \|\alpha - \alpha\| = \|\alpha\|^2, \quad \|\alpha + \alpha\| \leq \|\alpha\|^{1.7354}.$$

### Theorem (CPS)

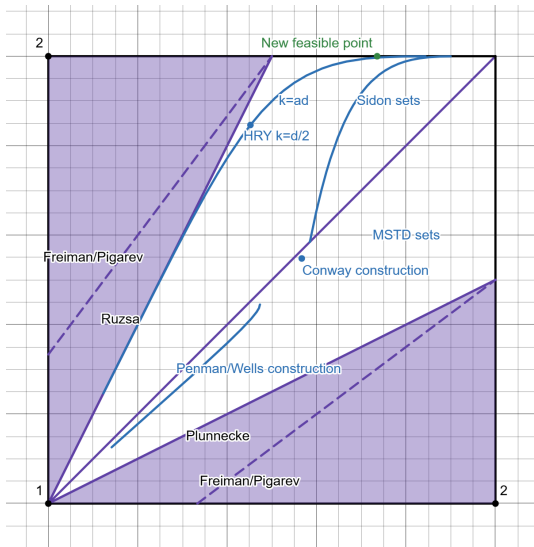
For all  $\epsilon > 0$ , there exists a finite  $A \subset \mathbb{Z}$  such that

$$|A - A| \geq |A|^{2-\epsilon} > 1 \quad \text{and} \quad |A + A| \leq |A|^{1.7354+\epsilon}.$$

So  $(1.7354, 2)$  is feasible for  $F_{1,-1}$ .



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# A question of Bukh

Suppose  $A \subset \mathbb{Z}$  has **small doubling**, so that  $|A + A| \leq K|A|$ , where  $K$  is small. Then, from **Plünnecke's inequality**,

$$|A + 2 \cdot A| \leq |A + A + A| \leq K^3|A|.$$

Bukh (2008): can the exponent 3 be improved?

**Theorem (Hanson and Petridis 2021)**

If  $A \subset \mathbb{Z}$  and  $|A + A| \leq K|A|$ , then

$$|A + 2 \cdot A| \leq K^{2.95}|A|.$$

**Theorem (Hanson and Petridis 2021)**

If  $A \subset \mathbb{Z}$  and  $|A + A| \leq K|A|$ , then

$$|A + 2 \cdot A| \leq (K|A|)^{4/3}.$$

How do we make  $A + 2 \cdot A$  large, while keeping  $A + A$  small?

# Consider the hypercube

How do we make  $A + 2 \cdot A$  large, while keeping  $A + A$  small?

Consider the hypercube:

$$H_n = \left\{ \sum_{i=0}^{n-1} a_i 4^i : a_i \in \{0, 1\} \right\},$$

that is, all integers from 0 to  $\frac{1}{3}(4^n - 1)$  with only 0s and 1s in their base-4 expansions. We have

$$|H_n| = 2^n \quad |H_n + H_n| = 3^n \quad |H_n + 2 \cdot H_n| = 4^n.$$

How good is this? For all  $n$ ,

$$\left( \frac{\log |H_n + H_n|}{\log |H_n|}, \frac{\log |H_n + 2 \cdot H_n|}{\log |H_n|} \right) = \left( \frac{\log 3}{\log 2}, 2 \right) \approx (1.585, 2).$$

# A modified hypercube

How do we make  $A + 2 \cdot A$  large, while keeping  $A + A$  small?

Fix  $\alpha \in (\frac{1}{2}, 1)$ , and set  $k = \lfloor \alpha n \rfloor$ .

Consider the hypercube + interval  $A_{n,k} = H_n \cup I_k$ , where

$$H_n = \left\{ \sum_{i=0}^{n-1} a_i 4^i : a_i \in \{0, 1\} \right\} \quad I_k = \left\{ 0, 1, \dots, \frac{4(4^{k-1} - 1)}{3} \right\}.$$

As  $n \rightarrow \infty$ ,

$$\left( \frac{\log |A_{n,k} + A_{n,k}|}{\log |A_{n,k}|}, \frac{\log |A_{n,k} + 2 \cdot A_{n,k}|}{\log |A_{n,k}|} \right) \rightarrow \left( \max \left\{ \frac{\log 3}{\alpha \log 4}, \frac{1 + \alpha}{2\alpha} \right\}, \frac{1}{\alpha} \right).$$

How does this compare with the upper bounds of Hanson and Petridis?

# Feasible regions in general

How does this compare with the upper bounds of Hanson and Petridis?

## Definition

For fixed integers  $k$  and  $l$ , we define the *feasible region*  $F_{k,l}$  to be the closure of the set  $E_{k,l}$  of attainable points

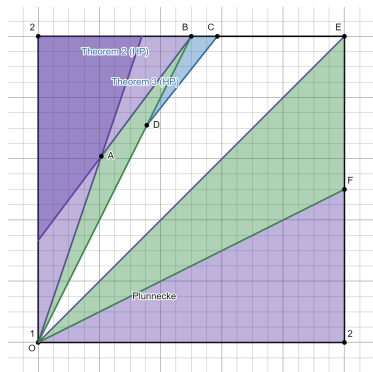
$$E_{k,l} = \{(x, y) : |A + k \cdot A| = |A|^x, |A + l \cdot A| = |A|^y \text{ for some } A \in \mathbb{Z}\}$$

as  $A$  ranges over finite sets of integers.  $F_{k,l} \subset [1, 2]^2$ .

## Proposition

For all nonzero  $k, l$ , the feasible region  $F_{k,l}$  is convex, and contains the diagonal  $D = \{(x, x) : 1 \leq x \leq 2\}$ .

# The feasible region $F_{1,2}$



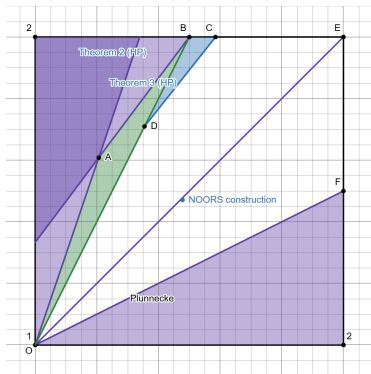
$$E_{1,2} = \left\{ \left( \frac{\log |A+A|}{\log |A|}, \frac{\log |A+2 \cdot A|}{\log |A|} \right) \right\}, F_{1,2} = \overline{E_{1,2}}$$

Purple = forbidden (by Plünnecke, Hanson and Petridis)

White = known to be feasible (ODC = hypercube + interval)

Green + blue = unknown

# Surprise



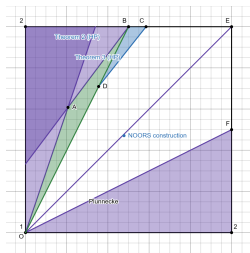
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# Various constructions



$$E_{1,2} = \left\{ \left( \frac{\log |A+A|}{\log |A|}, \frac{\log |A+2 \cdot A|}{\log |A|} \right) \right\}, F_{1,2} = \overline{E_{1,2}}$$

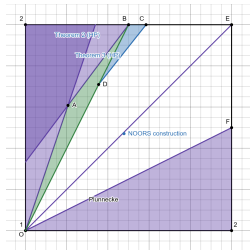
Nathanson, O'Bryant, Orosz, Ruzsa and Silva (2007)

... constructed a  $A$  set of size 2646 with  $|A + 2 \cdot A| < |A + A|$ .

Jeck Lim (2025)

Simpler construction

# A large set



$$E_{1,2} = \left\{ \left( \frac{\log |A+A|}{\log |A|}, \frac{\log |A+2 \cdot A|}{\log |A|} \right) \right\}, F_{1,2} = \overline{E_{1,2}}$$

Nathanson, O'Bryant, Orosz, Ruzsa, Silva construction

$$R_{13} = \{0, 1, 6, 7, 9, 11\}$$

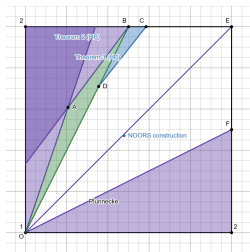
$$R_{15} = \{0, 1, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13\}$$

$$R_{16} = \{0, 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15\}$$

$$R_{19} = \{0, 1, 11, 12, 14, 16, 18\}$$

$$A = \{x \in [1, 13 \cdot 15 \cdot 16 \cdot 19] : x \equiv i_m \pmod{m} \text{ with } i_m \in R_m \text{ for } m = 13, 15, 16, 19\}$$

# Jeck Lim's construction



$$E_{1,2} = \left\{ \left( \frac{\log |A+A|}{\log |A|}, \frac{\log |A+2 \cdot A|}{\log |A|} \right) \right\}, F_{1,2} = \overline{E_{1,2}}$$

## Jeck Lim's construction

We first start with a certain construction mod  $p$  which is not hard to find: there is a prime  $p$  and a set  $B$  in  $\mathbb{Z}/p$  such that  $B+B=\mathbb{Z}/p$  but  $B+2 \cdot B$  does not contain  $0$  or  $1$ . Now let  $k$  be a large integer, and consider  $A$  to be the set of all  $k$ -digit numbers written in base  $p$ , whose digits are in  $B$ . Then  $A+A$  definitely contains all  $k$ -digit numbers (all in base  $p$ ), whereas  $A+2 \cdot A$  contains at most the  $(k+1)$ -digit numbers without the digit  $1$ , which is exponentially less.

$$S = \{1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 12, 13, 14\} \subseteq \mathbb{Z}_{22}$$

# Some new constructions

## Construction minimizing $|A|$

$$S = \{0, 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 20\} \subseteq \mathbb{Z}_{40}$$

When  $k = 3$ , we have

$$|A| = 1728 \quad |A + A| = 65641 \quad |A + 2 \cdot A| = 65017$$

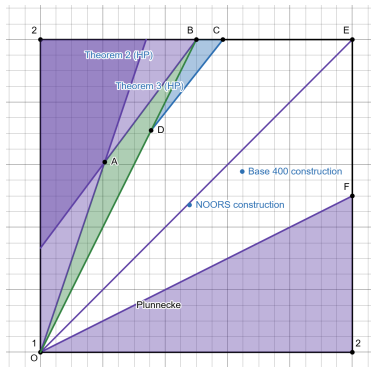
## Construction minimizing $\log |A + 2 \cdot A| / \log |A + A|$

$$S = \{0, 1, 2, \dots, 9, 19, 29, \dots, 199, 200, 201, 202, \dots, 208\} \subseteq \mathbb{Z}_{400}$$

Asymptotically,

$$|A| \sim 38^k \quad |A + A| \sim 400^k \quad |A + 2 \cdot A| \sim (160 + 6\sqrt{631})^k = (310.7\dots)^k$$

# The feasible region $F_{1,2}$



$$E_{1,2} = \left\{ \left( \frac{\log |A+A|}{\log |A|}, \frac{\log |A+2 \cdot A|}{\log |A|} \right) \right\}, F_{1,2} = \overline{E_{1,2}}$$

Purple = forbidden (by Plünnecke, Hanson and Petridis)

White = known to be feasible (ODC = hypercube + interval)

Green + blue = unknown

# Open problems

- Determine the feasible regions  $F_{1,-1}$  and  $F_{1,2}$ .
  
- Find another use for fractional dilates.

Thank you for your attention!