

The goal of this lecture is to present a motivation and overview of the étale and pro-étale topologies and cohomologies.

1 Counting points with Zeta functions

We begin with the following question:

Question 1. Let X is a smooth projective variety over \mathbb{F}_q , how many elements does the set $X(\mathbb{F}_{q^n}) = \text{hom}_{\text{Spec}(\mathbb{F}_q)}(\text{Spec}(\mathbb{F}_{q^n}), X)$ of \mathbb{F}_{q^n} -points of X have for each n ?

Or equivalently:

Question 2. If $f_1, \dots, f_c \in \mathbb{F}_q[t_0, \dots, t_d]$ are the homogeneous polynomials defining X , how many solutions do f_1, \dots, f_c have in \mathbb{F}_{q^n} for each n ?

In order to work with all the sets $X(\mathbb{F}_{q^n})$ at once, we introduce the zeta function

$$Z(X, t) = \exp \left(\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} |X(\mathbb{F}_{q^n})| \frac{t^n}{n} \right) \stackrel{(*)}{=} \prod_{x \in |X|} (1 - t^{\deg(x)})^{-1}.$$

Exercise 1. Applying log and using the identity $\log(1 - T)^{-1} = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} T^n/n$, prove the equality (*).

Remark 3. Note $Z(X, t)$ is defined for any \mathbb{F}_q -variety, possibly not projective, not smooth.

Remark 4. For any sequence of closed subsets $Y_0 \subset Y_1 \subset \dots \subset Y_n = X$, it follows from the sum description that we have

$$Z(X, t) = \prod_i Z(Y_i \setminus Y_{i-1}, t).$$

Remark 5. There is a reason that the product form of $Z(X, p^{-s})$ looks similar to the Riemann zeta function $\zeta(X, s) = \prod_{p \text{ prime}} (1 - p^{-s})^{-1}$ but we will not say much about this.

Now our question has become:

Question 6. Calculate $Z(X, t)$.

Example 7. First consider $Z(\mathbb{A}^d, t)$. We have $|\mathbb{A}^d(\mathbb{F}_{q^n})| = q^{nd}$ so

$$Z(\mathbb{A}^d, t) = \exp \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} (q^d t)^n / n = \exp(-\log(1 - q^d t)) = \frac{1}{(1 - q^d t)}.$$

Example 8. Consider $X = \mathbb{P}^d$. Choosing coordinates gives a sequence $\mathbb{P}^0 \subset \mathbb{P}^1 \subset \dots \subset \mathbb{P}^d$. Since $\mathbb{A}^i \cong \mathbb{P}^i \setminus \mathbb{P}^{i-1}$, we see that

$$Z(\mathbb{P}^d, t) = \frac{1}{(1 - t)(1 - qt) \dots (1 - q^d t)}$$

Example 9. Let X be an elliptic curve. Using the action $\phi_\ell : T_\ell E \rightarrow T_\ell E$ of the Frobenius ϕ on the Tate module $T_\ell E = \varprojlim_n \ker(E \xrightarrow{\ell^n} E)$ one can calculate

$$|E(\mathbb{F}_{q^n})| = \deg(1 - \phi^n) = \det(1 - \phi_\ell^n) = 1 - \alpha^n - \beta^n + q^n$$

where $\alpha, \beta \in \mathbb{C}$ are complex conjugates with absolute value \sqrt{q} . Then using the log argument as in the case of \mathbb{A}^d , we find that

$$Z(E, t) = \frac{(1 - \alpha t)(1 - \beta t)}{(1 - t)(1 - qt)}.$$

For more details see Silverman, “The Arithmetic of Elliptic Curves”, Chapter 5. This method generalises to higher dimension abelian varieties.

Example 10. If X is a curve, then the Zeta function can be rewritten in terms of divisors, and from there, in terms of linear systems of divisors of line bundles. Then using the Riemann-Roch theorem for curves, one can calculate

$$Z(X, t) = \frac{f(t)}{(1 - t)(1 - qt)}$$

where $f(t) \in \mathbb{Z}[t]$ has degree $2g$. For more details see, for example, Raskin, “The Weil conjectures for curves”.

Example 11. Using characters $\chi : \mathbb{F}_q^* \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$, one can calculate explicitly the case X is a smooth hypersurface defined by an equation of the form $a_0 x_0^{n_0} + a_1 x_1^{n_1} + \dots + a_r x_r^{n_r}$.

$$Z(X, t) = \frac{1}{(1 - t)(1 - qt) \dots (1 - q^{r-1}t)} \prod_{\alpha} (1 - C(\alpha)t^{\mu(\alpha)})^{\frac{(-1)^r}{\mu(\alpha)}}$$

where $\alpha \in (\mathbb{F}_q^*)^{r+1}$, $\mu(\alpha) \in \mathbb{N}$, $C(\alpha) \in \mathbb{C}$, $|C(\alpha)| = q^{\frac{(r-1)\mu(\alpha)}{2}}$, and we do not say what the product is over. For details see Weil, “Numbers of solutions of equations in finite fields”.

After calculating many examples Weil made the following conjectures:

Theorem 12 (Weil conjectures). *Suppose X is a smooth projective variety of dimension n over \mathbb{F}_q . Then the Zeta function of X satisfies the following properties:*

1. (Rationality) *The Zeta function $Z(X, t)$ is a rational function of t .*
2. (Functional equation) *There is an integer e such that*

$$Z(X, q^{-n}t^{-1}) = \pm q^{en/2} t^e Z(X, t).$$

3. (Riemann Hypothesis) *The Zeta function can be written as an alternating product*

$$Z(X, t) = \frac{P_1(t)P_3(t) \dots P_{2n-1}(t)}{P_0(t)P_2(t) \dots P_{2n}(t)}$$

where each $P_i(t)$ is an integral polynomial all of whose roots have absolute value $q^{-i/2}$. Moreover, $P_0(t) = 1 - t$ and $P_{2n}(t) = 1 - q^n t$.

4. (Betti numbers) Suppose there is a number field K/\mathbb{Q} , and homogeneous polynomials $f_1, \dots, f_c \in \mathcal{O}_K[t_0, \dots, t_d]$ where \mathcal{O}_K is the ring of integers of K , such that X is defined by the $f_i \bmod \mathfrak{p}$, and the complex projective variety $X(\mathbb{C})$ defined by the f_i is smooth. Then

$$\deg P_i(t) = \dim_{\mathbb{Q}} H^i(X(\mathbb{C}), \mathbb{Q})$$

where $X_{\mathbb{C}} \subseteq \mathbb{P}_{\mathbb{C}}^d$ is given the topology induced from $\mathbb{P}_{\mathbb{C}}^d$ considered as a complex analytic space.

Remark 13. The Riemann Hypothesis is so called because it places the zeroes and poles of $Z(X, q^{-s})$ on vertical lines in the complex plane.

Exercise 2. Show that if s is a zero or pole of $Z(X, q^{-s})$ then $\Re s = j/2$ for some $j \in \mathbb{Z}$.

2 Counting points with cohomology

Now we show why one might expect cohomology to be useful. Suppose M is an n -dimensional compact real manifold. The sheaf cohomology $H^i(M, \mathbb{Q})$ of the constant sheaf \mathbb{Q} has the following properties.

1. (Finiteness) $\dim_{\mathbb{Q}} H^i(M, \mathbb{Q}) < \infty$ for all i . Moreover, if $M = X(\mathbb{C})$ comes from a complex algebraic variety X , then $H^i(M, \mathbb{Q}) = 0$ for $i > 2 \dim_{\mathbb{C}} X(\mathbb{C})$.
2. (Functoriality) For any continuous map $\phi : M \rightarrow N$, there are induced maps $\phi_i : H^i(M, \mathbb{Q}) \rightarrow H^i(N, \mathbb{Q})$ compatible with composition.
3. (Poincaré Duality) There is a canonical isomorphism $H^n(M, \mathbb{Q}) \cong \mathbb{Q}$, and a natural perfect pairing

$$H^i(M, \mathbb{Q}) \times H^{n-i}(M, \mathbb{Q}) \rightarrow H^n(M, \mathbb{Q}).$$

4. (Lefschetz Trace Formula) Suppose $\phi : M \rightarrow M$ is a continuous map with only simple isolated fixed points (e.g., the graph is transverse to the diagonal). Then

$$\#\{\text{fixed points}\} = \sum_{i=0}^n (-1)^i \text{tr}(\phi_i).$$

Now suppose we had a cohomology theory defined for algebraic varieties over finite fields, satisfying versions of the above properties. Since

$$X(\mathbb{F}_{q^m}) = \text{fixed points of } \text{Frob}^m : X(\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q) \rightarrow X(\overline{\mathbb{F}}_q)$$

we could hope that a version of (Lefschetz Trace Formula) would give

$$|X(\mathbb{F}_{q^m})| = \sum_{i=0}^{2 \dim X} (-1)^i \text{tr} \phi_i^m$$

with $\phi = Frob$. Inserting this to the sum description of $Z(X, t)$ we get

$$\begin{aligned} Z(X, t) &= \exp \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \left(\sum_{i=0}^{2 \dim X} (-1)^i \text{tr} \phi_i^n \right) \frac{t^n}{n} \\ &= \prod_{i=1}^{2 \dim X} \left(\exp \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \text{tr} \phi_i^n \frac{t^n}{n} \right)^{(-1)^i} \end{aligned}$$

Combining this with

$$\det(1 - A)^{-1} = \exp \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \text{tr} A^n / n$$

valid for any matrix A , we get

$$Z(X, t) = \prod_{i=0}^{2 \dim X} \det(1 - \phi_i \cdot t)^{(-1)^{i+1}}$$

and we would get (Rationality). Moreover, an appropriate version of (Poincaré Duality) would give (Functional equation), and if our new cohomology theory is compatible with usual cohomology in an appropriate way, then we would get (Betti numbers). Finally, this description suggests that the polynomials in (Riemann Hypothesis) are $P_i(t) = \det(1 - \phi_i \cdot t)$, and if so, then the second part is reformulated as: the eigenvalues of ϕ_i have absolute value $q^{-i/2}$.

3 Fundamental group

Notice that in the Zariski topology, every non-empty open subsets of a smooth connected variety is dense. Consequently, $H^n(X, \mathbb{Q}) = 0$ for all $n > 0$. So we need a more sophisticated cohomology.

Leaving cohomology alone for a moment, lets consider the fundamental group. Note that for smooth manifolds M , there is a canonical morphism

$$\pi_k(M) \rightarrow H_k(M)$$

and if M is path connected then the Hurewicz Theorem says

$$\frac{\pi_1(M)}{[\pi_1(M), \pi_1(M)]} \xrightarrow{\sim} H_1(M),$$

which is dual to $H^1(M)$ when M is compact and oriented. So if we can find a good algebraic version of the fundamental group, this might give some indication how to build a cohomology theory.

Recall:

Definition 14. *The fundamental group of a smooth manifold M is*

$$\pi_1(M, m) = \text{hom}_{cont.}([0, 1], (M, m)) / \text{hom}_{cont.}([0, 1]^2, (M, m)).$$

That is, loops from m to m , modulo homotopy.

— — — picture of a loop and a contraction — — —

The first problem with this definition in the world of varieties is that $[0, 1]$ is not algebraic. We could observe that extending $[0, 1] \subseteq \mathbb{A}^1(\mathbb{C})$ gives the same groups, and try and use \mathbb{A}^1 . But this is still no good. Topologically, for a complete elliptic curve E , we have $E(\mathbb{C}) \cong S^1 \times S^1$, but every algebraic map $\mathbb{A}^1 \rightarrow E$ is constant.

Lets use a different description of the fundamental group.

Theorem 15. *Let M be a smooth (connected) manifold, and $\widetilde{M} \rightarrow M$ a smooth morphism of relative dimension zero such that \widetilde{M} is contractible. Then*

$$\pi_1(M) \cong \text{Aut}(\widetilde{M}/M).$$

— — — picture of S^1 , universal cover, and a loop going to an automorphism — — —

Smooth morphisms can be defined algebraically, but contractibility cannot (yet). However, if we don't mind passing to the completion, we are ok.

Theorem 16. *Let M be a smooth (connected) manifold, and consider the category of all finite, smooth, relative dimension zero morphisms $N \rightarrow M$.*

$$\pi_1(M)^\vee \cong \varprojlim_{N \rightarrow M} \text{Aut}(N/M).$$

— — — picture of S^1 , universal cover, and a loop going to an automorphism — — —

This leads to a useful notion of fundamental group.

Definition 17. *Let X be a smooth variety and consider the category of finite, smooth, relative dimension zero morphisms $Y \rightarrow X$. Define*

$$\pi_1^{\text{ét}}(X) = \varprojlim_{Y \rightarrow X} \text{Aut}(Y/X).$$

A consequence of the Riemann Existence Theorem is the following.

Theorem 18. *Let X be a smooth \mathbb{C} -variety. Then*

$$\pi_1^{\text{ét}}(X) \cong \pi_1(X(\mathbb{C}))^\vee$$

Moreover, this étale fundamental group contains arithmetic information.

Proposition 19. *Let k be a field with algebraic closure \bar{k} . Then*

$$\pi_1^{\text{ét}}(k) \cong \text{Gal}(\bar{k}/k)$$

4 Cohomology via local homeomorphisms

Remark 20 (This remark may not appear in the lecture). What does the Hurewicz Theorem look like now? A finite smooth morphism $N \rightarrow M$ is called *Galois* if $|Aut(N/M)| = \deg N$. In this case there is a canonical¹ isomorphism $N \times_M N \cong \coprod_{Aut} N$. Let Λ be any abelian group. When N is connected, set morphisms $N \times_M N \rightarrow \Lambda$ are in bijection with global sections of the constant sheaf $\Gamma(N \times_M N, \Lambda)$. One can check that a function $N \times_M N \rightarrow \Lambda$ corresponds to a group homomorphism $\phi : Aut(N) \rightarrow \Lambda$ if and only if the corresponding section $\sigma_\phi \in \Gamma(N \times_M N, \Lambda)$ is a cocycle. Moreover, the morphism ϕ is trivial if and only if the section σ_ϕ comes from $\Gamma(N, \Lambda)$. So we see that $\text{hom}(Aut(N), \mathbb{Z}/n) \cong \check{H}^1(N/M, \Lambda)$, where $\check{H}^\bullet(N/M, \Lambda)$ is the cohomology of the complex associated to

$$\check{\Xi} N \times_M N \times_M N \rightrightarrows N \times_M N \rightrightarrows N.$$

Note how similar this looks to Čech cohomology, which for a covering $\{U_i \rightarrow M\}_{i \in I}$ is the complex associated to $\check{\Xi} U \times_M U \times_M U \rightrightarrows U \times_M U \rightrightarrows U$ where $U = \coprod U_i$.

All of this suggests that we should be working with smooth relative dimension zero morphisms.

Definition 21. A smooth relative dimension zero morphism $f : Y \rightarrow X$ is called *étale*.

To give more support for this idea, notice that the inverse function theorem now holds:

Proposition 22. Let $f : Y \rightarrow X$ be a smooth morphism of varieties. Then for every $y \in Y$, there exists an étale morphism $j : U \rightarrow X$, a point $u \in U$ with $j(u) = f(y)$, and a factorisation

$$\begin{array}{ccc} & & Y \\ & \nearrow & \downarrow \\ U & \longrightarrow & X \end{array}$$

Exercise 3. Prove the above proposition when $Y \rightarrow X$ is of relative dimension zero.

Moreover, just as locally every manifold looks like \mathbb{R}^n , étale locally every smooth variety looks like \mathbb{A}^n :

Proposition 23. If X is a smooth variety of dimension n , then for every $x \in X$, there exists an open subset $U \ni x$, and an étale morphism $U \rightarrow \mathbb{A}^n$.

Exercise 4 (Advanced). Prove the above proposition when X is of dimension one. Hint: use the fact that each $\mathcal{O}_{X,x}$ is a discrete valuation ring.

¹The diagonal $N \rightarrow N \times_M N$ is a canonical choice of connected component, and then Aut acting on the right of $N \times_M N$ permutes the components.

The above suggest that we should consider étale morphisms as “unwrapped” open subsets.

Now notice that the definition of a sheaf only the structure of the poset of open sets, and nothing to do with the fact that they are subsets:

Definition 24. *A functor $F : \text{Open}(M)^{op} \rightarrow \text{Ab}$ is a sheaf, if for every open subset $V \subseteq M$ and every open cover $\{U_i \rightarrow V\}_{i \in I}$ the sequence*

$$0 \rightarrow F(V) \rightarrow \prod_{i \in I} F(U_i) \rightarrow \prod_{i, j \in I} F(U_i \times_V U_j)$$

is exact.

Finally, we arrive at the definition of an étale sheaf.

Definition 25. *Let X be a scheme, and $\text{Et}(X)$ the category of étale morphisms $V \rightarrow X$. A functor $F : \text{Et}(X)^{op} \rightarrow \text{Ab}$ is an étale sheaf, if for every $V \in \text{Et}(X)$, and every jointly surjective family $\{U_i \rightarrow V\}_{i \in I}$ in $\text{Et}(X)$, the sequence*

$$0 \rightarrow F(V) \rightarrow \prod_{i \in I} F(U_i) \rightarrow \prod_{i, j \in I} F(U_i \times_V U_j)$$

is exact.