

CHEM2024 - Week 19 Lecture 2 - Eigensystems

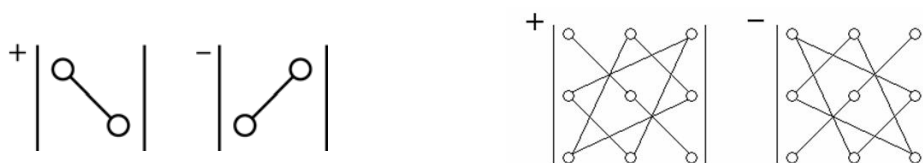
Chapters 17 and 19 of Steiner, "The Chemistry Maths Book", 2nd edition.

1. Determinants

Matrix *determinant* is an auxiliary function that often occurs in matrix algebra. It is defined in terms of products of matrix elements. For 2x2 and 3x3 matrices the expressions are:

$$\det \begin{pmatrix} a & b \\ c & d \end{pmatrix} = ad - bc, \quad \det \begin{pmatrix} a & b & c \\ d & e & f \\ g & h & i \end{pmatrix} = aei + bfg + cdh - ceg - bdi - afh \quad (1)$$

The following diagrams are useful for memorising the element multiplication order:



Determinants of larger matrices can be expressed *via* the determinants of their submatrices – see Section 17.3 in Steiner. Determinants are useful as indicators of various matrix properties, which in this course will be given without formal proof:

1. The inverse matrix exists only for matrices with a non-zero determinant.
2. The equation $\mathbf{A}\vec{x} = 0$ can only have non-zero solutions if $\det \mathbf{A} = 0$.
3. An orthogonal 3x3 matrix with a determinant of +1 is a rotation. If the determinant is -1, it is a rotation preceded or followed by a reflection.

In physics, wavefunctions of fermionic systems are formulated in terms of determinants because the determinant changes sign when any pair of matrix rows or columns is swapped. This property happens to coincide with the particle permutation property imposed on fermions by Schrödinger's equation.

2. Eigenvalues, eigenvectors, and eigenfunctions

Strings of musical instruments oscillate at specific frequencies, atoms and molecules have specific energy levels, bridges have specific resonances that must be avoided, and physical systems in general have patterns of behaviour and properties that are in some sense intrinsic to those systems. Such properties often correspond to what is called an *eigensystem*.

In vector spaces, a non-zero vector \vec{v} is called an *eigenvector* of a square matrix \mathbf{A} and λ is called the corresponding *eigenvalue* if $\mathbf{A}\vec{v} = \lambda\vec{v}$.

In function spaces, a non-zero function $|f\rangle$ is called an *eigenfunction* of an operator \hat{O} and λ is called the corresponding eigenvalue if $\hat{O}|f\rangle = \lambda|f\rangle$. Examples:

1. Complex exponentials are eigenfunctions of the derivative operator:

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial x}(e^{ikx}) = ik(e^{ikx})$$

2. Sinusoidal oscillations are eigenfunctions of the acceleration operator:

$$\frac{\partial^2}{\partial t^2}[\sin(\omega t)] = -\omega^2[\sin(\omega t)]$$

3. Z axis direction is an eigenvector of the matrix that performs rotations around Z:

$$\begin{pmatrix} \cos \varphi & -\sin \varphi & 0 \\ \sin \varphi & \cos \varphi & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix}$$

4. Atomic orbitals (s, p, d, f, \dots) are eigenfunctions of the energy operator for the hydrogen atom – there will be a separate lecture on this later in this course.

3. Eigensystems of matrices

Given a matrix \mathbf{A} , we can write the following equation for its eigenvalues and eigenvectors:

$$\mathbf{A}\vec{x} = \lambda\vec{x} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \mathbf{A}\vec{x} = \lambda\mathbf{1}\vec{x} \quad \Rightarrow \quad (\mathbf{A} - \lambda\mathbf{1})\vec{x} = 0 \quad (2)$$

As noted above, this matrix equation only has non-zero solutions if

$$\det(\mathbf{A} - \lambda\mathbf{1}) = 0 \quad (3)$$

which is a polynomial equation for λ with the number of solutions that is equal to the dimension of the matrix. Solutions of Equation (3) are eigenvalues $\{\lambda_k\}$. For each eigenvalue, we can solve Equation (2) and obtain the corresponding eigenvectors. By convention, they are normalized.

Example 1: find eigenvalues and eigenvectors of σ_x Pauli matrix:

$$\sigma_x = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1/2 \\ 1/2 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

Solution:

$$\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1/2 \\ 1/2 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} x_1 \\ x_2 \end{pmatrix} = \lambda \begin{pmatrix} x_1 \\ x_2 \end{pmatrix} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \det \left[\begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1/2 \\ 1/2 & 0 \end{pmatrix} - \lambda \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \right] = 0$$

Opening up the determinant yields a quadratic equation:

$$\det \left[\begin{pmatrix} -\lambda & 1/2 \\ 1/2 & -\lambda \end{pmatrix} \right] = 0 \quad \Rightarrow \quad \lambda^2 - \frac{1}{4} = 0 \quad \Rightarrow \quad \begin{cases} \lambda_1 = +1/2 \\ \lambda_2 = -1/2 \end{cases}$$

Solving Equation (2) (including the normalization condition) for the first eigenvalue:

$$\begin{cases} \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1/2 \\ 1/2 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} x_1 \\ x_2 \end{pmatrix} = \frac{1}{2} \begin{pmatrix} x_1 \\ x_2 \end{pmatrix} \\ |x_1|^2 + |x_2|^2 = 1 \end{cases} \Rightarrow \begin{cases} 1/2 x_2 = 1/2 x_1 \\ 1/2 x_1 = 1/2 x_2 \\ |x_1|^2 + |x_2|^2 = 1 \end{cases} \Rightarrow \begin{cases} x_1 = x_2 \\ |x_1|^2 + |x_2|^2 = 1 \end{cases} \Rightarrow \begin{cases} x_1 = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \\ x_2 = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \end{cases}$$

The system will always contain one redundant equation – this is a subtle consequence of forcing the determinant to be zero in Equation (3). Doing the same for the second eigenvalue yields:

$$\begin{cases} \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1/2 \\ 1/2 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} x_1 \\ x_2 \end{pmatrix} = -\frac{1}{2} \begin{pmatrix} x_1 \\ x_2 \end{pmatrix} \\ |x_1|^2 + |x_2|^2 = 1 \end{cases} \Rightarrow \begin{cases} 1/2 x_2 = -1/2 x_1 \\ 1/2 x_1 = -1/2 x_2 \\ |x_1|^2 + |x_2|^2 = 1 \end{cases} \Rightarrow \begin{cases} x_1 = -x_2 \\ |x_1|^2 + |x_2|^2 = 1 \end{cases} \Rightarrow \begin{cases} x_1 = +\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \\ x_2 = -\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \end{cases}$$

The final answer is:

$$\left\{ \lambda_1 = \frac{1}{2}, \vec{x}_1 = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \right\}, \quad \left\{ \lambda_2 = -\frac{1}{2}, \vec{x}_2 = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ -1 \end{pmatrix} \right\}$$

Note that eigenvectors are defined up to a constant multiplier: if \vec{v} is an eigenvector, then $\alpha\vec{v}$ is also an eigenvector with the same eigenvalue.

The flowchart for the eigenvalue and eigenvector determination is:

- (a) solve Equation (3) for λ ;
- (b) for each value of λ , solve Equation (2) for \vec{x} with the condition that $\|\vec{x}\| = 1$;
- (c) test your answer using the definition $\mathbf{A}\vec{x} = \lambda\vec{x}$.

With some experience, it is sometimes possible to guess eigenvectors by just looking at the matrix.

4. Eigensystems of quantum mechanical operators

Operators in quantum mechanics are often combinations of differentiation and multiplication. They will all be derived in due course – for now we will simply take the expressions out of the QM textbooks. The procedure for finding eigenvalues and eigenfunctions of differential operators

$$\hat{O}|\psi\rangle = \lambda|\psi\rangle \quad (4)$$

simply amounts to solving the corresponding differential equations. Example ("particle in a box"):

$$\hat{H}|\psi(x)\rangle = E|\psi(x)\rangle, \quad \hat{H} = -\frac{1}{2m} \frac{\partial^2}{\partial x^2}, \quad \begin{cases} \psi(0) = 0 \\ \psi(a) = 0 \end{cases}$$

where E is the energy of the particle (quantum mechanical energies are eigenvalues of certain operators called Hamiltonians), \hat{H} is the Hamiltonian operator and a is the size of the box. After writing down the differential equation explicitly, we obtain:

$$-\frac{1}{2m} \frac{\partial^2 \psi(x)}{\partial x^2} = E\psi(x) \quad \Rightarrow \quad \frac{\partial^2 \psi(x)}{\partial x^2} = -2mE\psi(x)$$

It is clear (we shall skip a lot of formal math here) that the solutions are sines and cosines. In general:

$$\psi(x) = \alpha \cos(\sqrt{2mEx}) + \beta \sin(\sqrt{2mEx})$$

where α and β are arbitrary numbers. The solution must be zero at $x = 0$, meaning that $\alpha = 0$. We are therefore left with:

$$\psi(x) = \beta \sin(\sqrt{2mEx})$$

which must also be zero at $x = a$, therefore:

$$\beta \sin(\sqrt{2mEa}) = 0 \quad \Rightarrow \quad \sqrt{2mEa} = \pi n \quad \Rightarrow \quad E_n = \frac{\pi^2 n^2}{2ma^2}, \quad n = 1, 2, 3, \dots$$

where the solution with $n = 0$ has been discarded because it corresponds to there being no particle at all. After substituting the energy expression into the eigenfunction, we get:

$$\psi_n(x) = \beta \sin\left(\frac{\pi nx}{a}\right)$$

The coefficient β should be adjusted so that the function has a unit norm:

$$\langle \psi_n | \psi_n \rangle = \int_0^a \beta^2 \sin^2 \left(\frac{\pi n x}{a} \right) dx = 1 \quad \Rightarrow \quad \beta = \sqrt{\frac{2}{a}}$$

And so the final answer is:

$$E_n = \frac{\pi^2 n^2}{2ma^2}, \quad \psi_n(x) = \sqrt{\frac{2}{a}} \sin \left(\frac{\pi n x}{a} \right), \quad n = 1, 2, 3, \dots$$

As expected for a differential operator, the number of eigenfunction-eigenvalue pairs is infinite.