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Skew left braces and the Yang-Baxter equation

Lindsay N. Childs

ABSTRACT. We give a self-contained, notation-friendly proof that a skew left brace yields a solution of the Yang-Baxter equation.

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1. Introduction

A skew left brace is a set $B = (B, \circ, \cdot)$ with two group operations that satisfy the single compatibility condition: for all x, y, z in B,

$$(\#) \quad x \circ (y \cdot z) = (x \circ y) \cdot x^{-1} \cdot (x \circ z).$$

The inverse of x in $(B, \circ)$ is denoted $\overline{x}$ and in $(B, \cdot)$ by x^{-1}. One easily checks from (#) that the two groups $(B, \circ)$ and $(B, \cdot)$ share a common identity element, 1. (Let $x = z = 1_\circ$ and $y = 1_\cdot$ in (#).)

Skew left braces were first defined by Guarneri and Vendramin in [GV17], generalizing the concept of left brace, a concept defined by W. Rump [Ru07] as a generalization of a radical ring.

The primary motivation behind the concept of a brace, and subsequently a skew brace, was to construct algebraic structures that yield set-theoretic solutions of the Yang-Baxter equation. Such a solution is a function $R : B \times B \to B \times B$ on a set B that satisfies the equation

$$(*) : \quad (R \times id)(id \times R)(R \times id)(a, b, c) = (id \times R)(R \times id)(id \times R)(a, b, c).$$

for all a, b, c in B. This equation has been a question of considerable interest among algebraists since 1990 (motivated by [Dr92]. Solutions of the YBE have been constructed in various settings during the past 25 years (e. g. [LYZ00], [Ru07], [CJO14], [BCJ16]), but the only general descriptions of how a skew left brace yields a solution to the YBE appear in [GV17] and [Ba18].

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Beyond their connection to the YBE, skew braces have also been shown in [SV18] to be very closely related to Hopf-Galois structures on Galois extensions of fields–see, for example, [CGK...21] and [ST23].

Skew braces and their role in giving solutions to the YBE were recently introduced to a broad American audience by Vendramin in [Ve24], adapted from a longer survey article [Ve23]. The latter refers only to [GV17] for the proof that a skew brace yields a solution of the YBE. But the proof in [GV17] is not self-contained–it refers to braiding operators, from [LYZ00], and does not explicitly mention Proposition 2.4, below, which is central to the proof.

The referee pointed out that [Ba16], hence [Ba18], gives a self-contained proof of the skew brace-YBE connection that includes Proposition 2.4. But the proofs in [GV17] and [Ba18] involve notation for functions of functions that require multiple layers of subscripts whose complexity obscures what is going on.

This note presents a straightforward, entirely self-contained and notation-friendly proof that a skew left brace yields a solution $R : B \times B \to B \times B$ of the form $R(x,y) = (\sigma_x(y), \tau_y(x))$ for all x, y in B, where $\sigma_x(y) = x^{-1} \cdot (x \circ y)$ is the well-known λ-function (or γ-function, depending on author) associated to a skew brace, and $\tau_y(x)$ is defined by the equation that $\sigma_x(y) \circ \tau_y(x) = x \circ y$. Beyond this equation, the only facts needed for the proof are that $\sigma_x(\sigma_y(z)) = \sigma_{x \circ y}(z)$ and $\tau_y(\tau_x(z)) = \tau_{x \circ y}(z)$ (Proposition 2.4), both of which we prove.

The proof of the σ-result is from [GV17]. The τ-result appears as Lemma 2.4 of [Ba18], but not explicitly in [GV17] and, as will be seen below, is a fundamental contributor to the proof of the main result. There is a proof of the τ result in [Ba18], but the proof below was obtained independently of [Ba18]. My thanks to the referee for the reference to [Ba16].

2. The proof

Given a skew brace $B = (B, \circ, \cdot)$, define $\sigma_x : B \to B$ by

$$\sigma_x(y) = x^{-1} \cdot (x \circ y)$$

for all x, y in B. Define

$$\tau_y(x) = \overline{\sigma_x(y)} \circ x \circ y = \overline{x^{-1} \cdot (x \circ y)} \circ x \circ y.$$

Then for all x, y in B, σ_x and τ_y are one-to-one maps from B to B, and by definition of $\tau_y(x)$, $\sigma_x(y) \circ \tau_y(x) = \sigma_x(y) \circ (\overline{\sigma_x(y)} \circ x \circ y) = x \circ y$. Define

$$R : B \times B \to B \times B$$

by

$$R(a,b) = (\sigma_a(b), \tau_b(a)) = (\sigma_a(b), \overline{\sigma_a(b)} \circ a \circ b).$$

for all a, b in B. Note that if $R(a,b) = (s,t)$, then $s \circ t = \sigma_a(b) \circ \tau_b(a) = a \circ b$.

We will prove:

Theorem 2.1. *If B is a skew left brace and $R : B \times B \to B \times B$ is defined by $R(a,b) = (\sigma_a(b), \tau_b(a))$ for a, b in B, then R is a solution of the Yang-Baxter equation: for all a, b, c in B,*

$$(*):\quad (R \times id)(id \times R)(R \times id)(a,b,c) = (id \times R)(R \times id)(id \times R)(a,b,c).$$

Since σ_a and τ_b are one-to-one maps from B to B for all a, b in B, the solution R of the Yang-Baxter equation is nondegenerate.

Proof. Given a skew brace $B(\circ, \cdot)$, for x, y in B the maps $\sigma_x(y) = x^{-1} \cdot (x \circ y)$ and $\tau_y(x) = \overline{\sigma_x(y)} \circ x \circ y$ satisfy the following two properties for all x, y, z in B, as we show below:

(i): σ is a homomorphism from $(B, \circ)$ to Perm(B): ,

$$\sigma_{x \circ y}(z) = \sigma_x(\sigma_y(z));$$

(ii): τ is an anti-homomorphism from $(B, \circ)$ to Perm(B):

$$\tau_{z \circ y}(x) = \tau_y(\tau_z(x)).$$

Beside these two properties, the only other property we need is the property noted above:

(iii) if $R(u,v) = (\sigma_u(v), \tau_v(u)) = (y, z)$, then $u \circ v = y \circ z$.

These three properties suffice to show that R satisfies

$$(R \times 1)(1 \times R)(R \times 1)(a,b,c) = (1 \times R)(R \times 1)(1 \times R)(a,b,c) \ (*),$$

for all a, b, c in B, as follows.

The left side of (*) is:

$$(R \times 1)(1 \times R)(R \times 1)(a,b,c) = (R \times 1)(1 \times R)(d,e,c) = (R \times 1)(d,f,g) = (h,k,g)$$

where

$$d = \sigma_a(b),\ e = \tau_b(a),\ \text{so } a \circ b = d \circ e,$$

$$f = \sigma_e(c),\ g = \tau_c(e),\ \text{so } e \circ c = f \circ g,$$

and

$$h = \sigma_d(f),\ k = \tau_f(d),\ \text{so } d \circ f = h \circ k.$$

The right side of (*) is:

$$(1 \times R)(R \times 1)(1 \times R)(a,b,c) = (1 \times R)(R \times 1)(a,q,r) = (1 \times R)(s,t,r) = (s,v,w),$$

where

$$q = \sigma_b(c),\ r = \tau_c(b),\ \text{so } b \circ c = q \circ r,$$
$$s = \sigma_a(q),\ t = \tau_q(a),\ \text{so } a \circ q = s \circ t,$$

and

$$v = \sigma_t(r),\ w = \tau_r(t),\ \text{so } t \circ r = v \circ w.$$

We want to show that $(h,k,g) = (s,v,w)$.

To show that $h = s$ uses property (i): $\sigma_{y \circ z}(x) = \sigma_y(\sigma_z(x))$, as follows:

$$s = \sigma_a(q) = \sigma_a(\sigma_b(c)) = \sigma_{a \circ b}(c);$$
$$h = \sigma_d(f) = \sigma_d(\sigma_e(c)) = \sigma_{d \circ e}(c);$$

and

$$d{\circ}e = \sigma_a(b){\circ}\tau_b(a) = a{\circ}b.$$

So

$$h = \sigma_{d\circ e}(c) = \sigma_{a\circ b}(c) = s.$$

To show that $w = g$ uses property (ii): $\tau_{z\circ y}(x) = \tau_y(\tau_z(x))$, as follows:

$$g = \tau_c(e) = \tau_c(\tau_b(a)) = \tau_{b\circ c}(a);$$
$$w = \tau_r(t) = \tau_r(\tau_q(a)) = \tau_{q\circ r}(a)$$

and

$$q{\circ}r = \sigma_b(c){\circ}\tau_c(b) = b{\circ}c.$$

So

$$w = \tau_{q\circ r}(a) = \tau_{b\circ c}(a) = g.$$

Finally, to show that $k = v$ we just use property (iii) many times, that for any u, v, if $R(u, v) = (m, n)$, then $m{\circ}n = u{\circ}v$:

The left side of equation (*) is (h, k, g); the right side is (s, v, w), and using all of the equalities above, we have that

$$s{\circ}v{\circ}w = a{\circ}b{\circ}c = h{\circ}k{\circ}g\ :$$

For

$$\begin{aligned} s{\circ}(v{\circ}w) &= s{\circ}(\sigma_t(r){\circ}\tau_r(t)) = s{\circ}(t{\circ}r) \\ &= (s{\circ}t){\circ}r = (\sigma_a(q){\circ}\tau_q(a)){\circ}r = (a{\circ}q){\circ}r \\ &= a{\circ}(q{\circ}r) = a{\circ}(\sigma_b(c){\circ}\tau_c(b)) = a{\circ}(b{\circ}c); \end{aligned}$$

while

$$\begin{aligned} (a{\circ}b){\circ}c &= (\sigma_a(b){\circ}\tau_b(a)){\circ}c = (d{\circ}e){\circ}c \\ &= d{\circ}(e{\circ}c) = d{\circ}(\sigma_e(c){\circ}\tau_c(e)) = d{\circ}(f{\circ}g) \\ &= (d{\circ}f){\circ}g = (\sigma_d(f){\circ}\tau_f(d)){\circ}g = (h{\circ}k){\circ}g. \end{aligned}$$

So $s{\circ}v{\circ}w = h{\circ}k{\circ}g$. Since $w = g$, and $h = s$ in the group $(B, \circ)$, it follows that $k = v$. Given properties (i) and (ii), that completes the proof. □

To prove properties (i) and (ii) we need the following consequence of the compatibility condition (#) for a skew brace (c.f. [GV17], Lemma 1.7 (2)):

Lemma 2.2. *For all a, b in B,* $a^{-1} \cdot (a{\circ}b^{-1}) \cdot a^{-1} = (a{\circ}b)^{-1}$.

Proof. The compatibility condition (#) for a skew brace is that for all x, y, z in B,

$$x{\circ}(y \cdot z) = (x{\circ}y) \cdot x^{-1} \cdot (x{\circ}z),$$

hence

$$x \cdot (x{\circ}y)^{-1} \cdot (x{\circ}(y \cdot z)) = x{\circ}z$$

or

$$x{\circ}z = x \cdot (x{\circ}y)^{-1} \cdot (x{\circ}(y \cdot z)).$$

Set $x = a, y = b, z = b^{-1}$ to get

$$a{\circ}b^{-1} = a \cdot (a{\circ}b)^{-1} \cdot a,$$

or

$$a^{-1} \cdot (a \circ b^{-1}) \cdot a^{-1} = (a \circ b)^{-1}.$$

□

Here is property (i): it is Proposition 1.9 (2) of [GV17].

Proposition 2.3. *For all x, y, z in B,*

$$\sigma_{x \circ y}(z) = \sigma_x(\sigma_y(z)).$$

Proof. (from [GV17]) The right side of

$$\sigma_{x \circ y}(z) = \sigma_x(\sigma_y(z))$$

is

$$\begin{aligned}\sigma_x(\sigma_y(z)) &= x^{-1} \cdot (x \circ \sigma_y(z)) \\ &= x^{-1} \cdot (x \circ (y^{-1} \cdot (y \circ z))) \\ &= x^{-1} \cdot (x \circ y^{-1}) \cdot x^{-1} \cdot (x \circ y \circ z) \quad \text{(by (\#))}.\end{aligned}$$

By Lemma 2.2, this is

$$\begin{aligned}&= (x \circ y)^{-1} \cdot (x \circ y \circ z) \\ &= \sigma_{x \circ y}(z).\end{aligned}$$

□

(We note that [GV17] proves that given a set B with two group operations, $\cdot$ and $\circ$, and $\sigma_x(y) = x^{-1} \cdot (x \circ y)$, then for all x, y, z in B,

$$\sigma_x(\sigma_y(z)) = \sigma_{x \circ y}(z)$$

if and only if the compatibility condition (#) holds, if and only if B is a skew left brace: see Proposition 1.9 of [GV17].)

Finally, we prove property (ii):

Proposition 2.4. *τ is an anti-homomorphism from $(B, \circ)$ to $\mathrm{Perm}(B)$: for all x, y, z in B,*

$$\tau_{y \circ z}(x) = \tau_z(\tau_y(x)).$$

Proof. We begin with the definition of $\sigma_x(q)$:

$$x^{-1} \cdot (x \circ y) = \sigma_x(y)$$

Rearrange the equation and use that $x \circ y = \sigma_x(y) \circ \tau_y(x)$, to get:

$$\sigma_x(y)^{-1} \cdot x^{-1} = (\sigma_x(y) \circ \tau_y(x))^{-1}$$

Apply the Lemma 2.2 formula, $(a \circ b)^{-1} = a^{-1} \cdot (a \circ b^{-1}) \cdot a^{-1})$ to the right side, to get:

$$\sigma_x(y)^{-1} \cdot x^{-1} = \sigma_x(y)^{-1} \cdot (\sigma_x(y) \circ \tau_y(x)^{-1}) \cdot \sigma_x(y)^{-1}$$

Cancel $\sigma_x(y)^{-1}$ on the left and multiply both sides by $\cdot(x \circ y \circ z)$ on the right:

$$x^{-1} \cdot (x \circ y \circ z) = (\sigma_x(y) \circ \tau_y(x)^{-1}) \cdot \sigma_x(y)^{-1} \cdot (x \circ y \circ z)$$

Apply the definition of σ to the left side and use that $x\circ y = \sigma_x(y)\circ\tau_y(x)$ on the right side:

$$\sigma_x(y\circ z) = (\sigma_x(y)\circ\tau_y(x)^{-1})\cdot\sigma_x(y)^{-1}\cdot(\sigma_x(y)\circ(\tau_y(x)\circ z))$$

Apply the skew brace formula (#) to the right side:

$$\sigma_x(y\circ z) = \sigma_x(y)\circ(\tau_y(x)^{-1}\cdot(\tau_y(x)\circ z))$$

Use the definition of σ on the far right side:

$$\sigma_x(y\circ z) = \sigma_x(y)\circ\sigma_{\tau_y(x)}(z)$$

Take the $\circ$-inverse of both sides, and multiply both sides by $\circ x\circ y\circ z$:

$$\overline{\sigma_x(y\circ z)}\circ x\circ y\circ z = \overline{\sigma_{\tau_y(x)}(z)}\circ(\overline{\sigma_x(y)}\circ x\circ y)\circ z$$

Use the definition of τ: $\tau_b(a) = \overline{\sigma_a(b)}\circ a\circ b$ on the right side:

$$\overline{\sigma_x(y\circ z)}\circ x\circ(y\circ z) = \overline{\sigma_{\tau_y(x)}(z)}\circ\tau_y(x)\circ z,$$

then on both sides:

$$\tau_{y\circ z}(x) = \tau_z(\tau_y(x))$$

So τ is an anti-homomorphism on $(B,\circ)$. □

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(Lindsay N. Childs) DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS AND STATISTICS, UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY, ALBANY, NY 12222, USA
lchilds@albany.edu

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