

Classification of q -difference equations using holomorphic vector bundles

Jacques Sauloy¹

Cantoperdic²

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¹email: jacquessauly@gmail.com

²url: <http://www.cantoperdic.fr>

Abstract

Let q a complex number such that $0 < |q| < 1$. With every analytic q -difference module is associated a holomorphic vector bundle over the corresponding elliptic curve $\mathbf{E}_q := \mathbf{C}^*/q^{\mathbb{Z}}$.

For fuchsian q -difference modules, this allows for analytic classification, including the calculation of the Galois group (Baranovsky-Ginzburg-Kontsevich).

For arbitrary analytic q -difference modules, one can also obtain in this way a formal classification closely related to Atiyah's classification of holomorphic vector bundles over \mathbf{E}_q (van der Put-Reversat).

In order to get the analytic classification of arbitrary modules (irregular equations), it is necessary (and sufficient) to take in account the canonical slope filtration on the side of the modules; and something called anti-HN filtration (HN stands for Harder-Narasimhan) on the side of the bundles. This is a variant of a statement attributed by Kontsevich and Soibelman to Ramis-Sauloy-Zhang.

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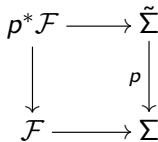
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Let Σ a compact Riemann surface and let $p : \tilde{\Sigma} \rightarrow \Sigma$ its universal covering.

Then every vector bundle $\mathcal{F} \rightarrow \Sigma$ can be pulled back to a vector bundle $p^*\mathcal{F} \rightarrow \tilde{\Sigma}$



Except if Σ is the Riemann sphere, $\tilde{\Sigma}$ is contractile and therefore $p^*\mathcal{F}$ is trivial:

$$p^*\mathcal{F} = \tilde{\Sigma} \times \mathbf{C}^n.$$

Moreover, $p^*\mathcal{F}$ is *equivariant* under $\text{Aut}(p) = \pi_1(\Sigma)$, i.e. every $g \in \text{Aut}(p)$ gives rise to an automorphism of $p^*\mathcal{F}$:

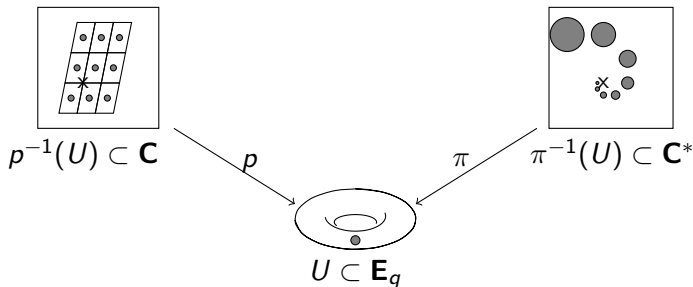
$$(x, X) \mapsto (gx, A(g, x)X), \text{ where } A(g, -) \in \mathrm{GL}_n(\mathcal{O}(\tilde{\Sigma})).$$

The equivariant action of the cyclic group $\text{Aut}(\pi) = q^{\mathbb{Z}}$ on the trivial bundle $\pi^* \mathcal{F} = \mathbf{C}^* \times \mathbf{C}^n$ is completely determined by the action of its generator q , which has the form:

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The sheaf on \mathbf{E}_q of sections of the bundle \mathcal{F} can then be described as a sheaf of functions on \mathbf{C}^* :

$$\mathcal{F}_A(U) := \{X \in \mathcal{O}(\pi^{-1}(U))^n \mid X(qx) = A(x)X(x)\}$$



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Figure: Preimage in \mathbf{C} , resp. in \mathbf{C}^* , of a trivializing open set

The equivariant action of the cyclic group $\text{Aut}(\pi) = q^{\mathbb{Z}}$ on the trivial bundle $\pi^*\mathcal{F} = \mathbf{C}^* \times \mathbf{C}^n$ is completely determined by the action of its generator q , which has the form:

$$(x, X) \mapsto (qx, A(x)X), \text{ where } A(x) \in \text{GL}_n(\mathcal{O}(\mathbf{C}^*)).$$

The sheaf on \mathbf{E}_q of sections of the bundle \mathcal{F} can then be described as a sheaf of functions on \mathbf{C}^* :

$$\mathcal{F}_A(U) := \{X \in \mathcal{O}(\pi^{-1}(U))^n \mid X(qx) = A(x)X(x)\}$$

So we can see it as *the sheaf of holomorphic solutions of the q -difference equation $\sigma_q X = AX$, i.e. $X(qx) = A(x)X(x)$.*

However this $A(x) \in \text{GL}_n(\mathcal{O}(\mathbf{C}^*))$ is “wild” at 0, while in the theory of functional equations the coefficients are usually taken either

- ▶ in $\mathbf{C}(x)$ (global study)
- ▶ or $\mathbf{C}(\{x\})$ (local analytic study: most of this talk)
- ▶ or $\mathbf{C}((x))$ (formal study).

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Recall notations: $\Im \tau > 0$, $q := e^{2i\pi\tau}$, and $\mathbf{E}_q := \mathbf{C}^*/q^{\mathbf{Z}}$.

Also we denote $K := \mathbf{C}(\{x\}) \subset \hat{K} := \mathbf{C}((x))$ equipped with their q -dilatation automorphism $\sigma_q : f(x) \mapsto f(qx)$.

The Ore-Laurent ring of q -difference operators over K is:

$$\mathcal{D}_{K,q} := K\langle \sigma_q, \sigma_q^{-1} \rangle, \text{ where } \sigma_q \cdot f = \sigma_q(f) \cdot \sigma_q$$

A q -difference module (abbreviated **qdm**) over K is defined as a finite length left $\mathcal{D}_{K,q}$ -module.

Equivalently, we shall rather see it as a pair (V, Φ) of

- ▶ a finite dimensional K -vector space V , equipped with
- ▶ a σ_q -linear automorphism Φ of V (i.e. a group automorphism such that $\Phi(av) = \sigma_q(a)\Phi(v)$).

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Recall that $K = \mathbf{C}(\{x\})$. We set $R := \mathcal{O}(\mathbf{C}^*, 0) \supset K$.

Let $A \in \mathrm{GL}_n(K)$, $B \in \mathrm{GL}_p(K)$ and let:

$$F : M_A = (K^n, \Phi_A) \rightarrow M_B = (K^p, \Phi_B)$$

a morphism of qdms, i.e. $F \in \mathrm{Mat}_{p,n}(K)$ and $(\sigma_q F)A = BF$.

Now, $A \in \mathrm{GL}_n(R)$, $B \in \mathrm{GL}_p(R)$ and $F \in \mathrm{Mat}_{p,n}(R)$, so that the mapping $X \mapsto FX$ induces a morphism of bundles:

$$\mathcal{F}_A = \frac{(\mathbf{C}^*, 0) \times \mathbf{C}^n}{(x, X) \sim (x, A(x)X)} \rightarrow \mathcal{F}_B = \frac{(\mathbf{C}^*, 0) \times \mathbf{C}^p}{(x, X) \sim (x, B(x)X)}.$$

This can be made intrinsic: every $F : M \rightarrow N$ in the category \mathcal{E}_q of qdms over K defines a morphism $\mathcal{F}_M \rightarrow \mathcal{F}_N$ in the category \mathcal{V}_q of bundles over \mathbf{E}_q .

We thereby get a functor $M \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{F}_M$ from \mathcal{E}_q to \mathcal{V}_q .

Example 1

Let $n = p = 1$, $A := (x)$ and $B := (1)$.

Morphisms $M_A \rightarrow M_B$, resp. $\mathcal{F}_A \rightarrow \mathcal{F}_B$, are (scalar) functions $f \in K = \mathbf{C}(\{x\})$, resp. $f \in R = \mathcal{O}(\mathbf{C}^*, 0)$, such that $x\sigma_q f = f$.

There are no such $f \in K \setminus \{0\}$, so $\mathrm{Hom}_{\mathcal{E}_q}(M_A, M_B) = 0$.

But the Jacobi Theta function:

$$\theta_q(x) := \sum_{n \in \mathbf{Z}} q^{n(n-1)/2} x^n \in \mathcal{O}(\mathbf{C}^*) \subset R$$

satisfies $\sigma_q \theta_q = x^{-1} \theta_q$, i.e. $\theta_q \in \mathrm{Hom}_{S_q}(\mathcal{F}_A, \mathcal{F}_B)$.

Therefore $\mathrm{Hom}_{\mathcal{E}_q}(M_A, M_B) = 0$ while $\mathrm{Hom}_{S_q}(\mathcal{F}_A, \mathcal{F}_B) \neq 0$.

Let $n = p = 2$, $A := \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix}$ and $B := \begin{pmatrix} x^{-1} & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$.

Then one can prove that $\text{Hom}_{\mathcal{E}_q}(M_A, M_B) = 0$.

However, setting:

$$c(x) := \sum_{n \geq 0} \frac{q^{n(n+3)/2}}{(1-q^2) \cdots (1-q^{2n})} x^{-n} \text{ and } d(x) := c(-x),$$

we get an isomorphism $\begin{pmatrix} \sigma_q c & -\sigma_q d \\ c & d \end{pmatrix} : \mathcal{F}_A \rightarrow \mathcal{F}_B$ in \mathcal{S}_q .

Therefore $\text{Hom}_{\mathcal{E}_q}(M_A, M_B) = 0$ while $\mathcal{F}_A \simeq \mathcal{F}_B$

Functions similar to a, b, c, d appear in Ismail-Zhang (2006), as q -analogues of the Airy function.

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To every $L := \sigma_q^n + a_1(x)\sigma_q^{n-1} + \cdots + a_n(x) \in \mathcal{D}_{K,q}$ we associate a *Newton polygon*, the convex hull of the set $\{(i, j) \in \mathbf{Z}^2 \mid j \geq v_x(a_i)\} \subset \mathbf{R}^2$.

The finite part of its boundary is made of k vectors $(r_i, d_i) \in \mathbf{N}^* \times \mathbf{Z}$ with **slopes** $\mu_i := d_i/r_i \in \mathbf{Q}$ decreasing from right to left: $\mu_1 > \cdots > \mu_k$. Slope μ_i has multiplicity r_i .

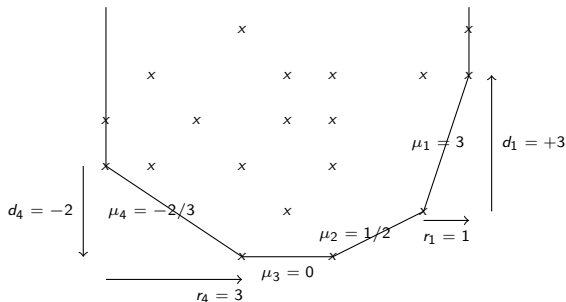


Figure: The Newton polygon

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1. Baranovsky-Ginzburg 1996: to a *formal* fuchsian qdm is associated a *flat* vector bundle (i.e. one that can be written \mathcal{F}_A with $A \in \mathrm{GL}_n(\mathbf{C})$); this is an equivalence of categories.

(The equivalence is \otimes -compatible from which Kontsevich deduces the formal Galois group of fuchsian qdms in an appendix.)

2. van der Put-Reversat 2007: to any formal qdm is associated a bundle and the formal classification of qdms boils down to Atiyah's classification of bundles over an elliptic curve. **This is however not an equivalence of categories, only a bijective correspondence between isomorphism classes.**

(They deduce a complete description of the formal Galois group.)

In both cases, one obtains an *analytic* object (a bundle) from a *formal* one (a qdm over \hat{K}) and the construction is rather involved, or at least indirect.

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Every qdm M over K admits a unique tower of submodules:

$$M_0 = 0 \subset \cdots \subset M_k = M$$

such that the successive quotients $P_i := M_i/M_{i-1}$ are pure isoclinic of slope μ_i and $\mu_1 < \cdots < \mu_k$. One then has

$S(M) = \{\mu_1, \dots, \mu_k\}$ and the ranks are $r_i = \text{rk } P_i$.

The functor $M \rightsquigarrow \text{gr } M := P_1 \oplus \cdots \oplus P_k$ is exact, \mathbf{C} -linear, faithful (and \otimes -compatible).

Over \hat{K} , the filtration splits canonically (i.e. the functor gr becomes isomorphic to the identity functor).

Applying the functor $M \rightsquigarrow \mathcal{F}_M$ yields a tower of sub bundles:

$$0 = \mathcal{F}_0 \subset \cdots \subset \mathcal{F}_k = \mathcal{F}_M$$

such that each $\mathcal{F}_i = \mathcal{F}_{M_i}$ and the successive subquotients $\mathcal{G}_i := \mathcal{F}_i/\mathcal{F}_{i-1}$ are the associated bundles $\mathcal{G}_i = \mathcal{F}_{P_i}$.

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We are led to characterize those bundles over an elliptic curve E which become “pure” after pullback by an isogeny $E' \rightarrow E$ making their slope integral.

Those are exactly the semi-stable bundles.
(Recall that the bundle \mathcal{G} is *semi-stable* if for every subbundle \mathcal{G}' the slopes satisfy $\lambda(\mathcal{G}') \leq \lambda(\mathcal{G}).$)

The statement follows from two lemmas:

For an bundle with integral slope, “pure” is equivalent to semi-stable.

(Direct implication is easy; the converse uses Weil’s characterization of flat bundles.)

If $\rho : E' \rightarrow E$ is an isogeny of elliptic curves and if \mathcal{G} is an bundle on E , then \mathcal{G} is semi-stable iff $\rho^*\mathcal{G}$ is.

(Direct implication is by Galois descent and actually much more general; the converse is easy.)

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We write $\underline{\mathcal{F}}_M$ the bundle \mathcal{F}_M equipped with that filtration.

This is the opposite behaviour with respect to the so-called *Harder-Narasimhan filtration*, so, following Kontsevich and Soibelman, we call it *anti-HN*.

The definition can be extended to coherent sheaves.

We call $\underline{\mathcal{S}}_q$, resp. $\underline{\mathcal{V}}_q$, the category of coherent sheaves, resp. of bundles, endowed with anti-HN filtrations.

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Main result (so far): *local* classification at 0

The functor $M \rightsquigarrow \underline{\mathcal{F}}_M$ from \mathcal{E}_q to $\underline{\mathcal{S}}_q$ is exact, \mathbf{C} -linear, *fully faithful* (and \otimes -compatible).

Its essential image is $\underline{\mathcal{V}}_q$.

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The above is part of a paper in preparation with Julien Roques. Meanwhile, one can look at a draft with the same title on my webpage <http://www.cantoperdic.fr>

The Baranovsky-Ginzburg 1996 article is:

“Conjugacy classes in loop groups and G -bundles on elliptic curves”, Internat. Math. Res. Notices 15 (1996), 733–751

The van der Put-Reversat 2007 article is: “Galois theory of q -difference equations”, Ann. Fac. Sci. Toulouse Math. (6) 16 (2007), no. 3, 665–718.

The Zhang-Ismaïl 2006 article is:

“Zeros of entire functions and a problem of Ramanujan” Adv. Math. 209, No. 1, 363–380 (2007).

The Roques-Sauloy 2019 article is:

“Euler characteristics and q -difference equations” Ann. Sc. Norm. Super. Pisa, Cl. Sci. (5) 19, No. 1, 129–154 (2019).

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Work by Kontsevich and Soibelman about the Riemann-Hilbert correspondence can be found in:

https://indico.math.cnrs.fr/category/603/attachments/3705/9402/2025_02_28_Y_Soibelman.pdf

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eesE2SIpZ8>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4J_KLTLPwQk

<https://www.carmin.tv/fr/collections/maxim-kontsevich/video/riemann-hilbert-correspondence-for-q-difference-modules>

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Example 2 (non isomorphic qdms giving rise to isomorphic bundles) was obtained on the basis of the following suggestion of Julien Roques:

JR pour JS, le 27/09/2025, en réponse à “je n’arrive pas à trouver le contre-exemple suivant, dont je pense qu’il existe : deux modules (ou systèmes ou équations) aux q -différences analytiques non isomorphes mais tels que les fibrés associés le soient. Sauf erreur, sous forme concrète, ça veut dire ceci (convention $|q| < 1$). On a $A(x)$ et $B(x)$ dans $\mathrm{GL}_n(\mathbb{C}(x))$ tels qu’il existe F dans $\mathrm{GL}_n(\mathcal{O}(\mathbb{C}^\times, 0))$ (germes sur \mathbb{C}^\times holomorphes au voisinage épointé de 0) avec $F(qx)A(x) = B(x)F(x)$ mais qu’il n’existe pas de tel F dans $\mathrm{GL}_n(\mathbb{C}(x))$. Une méthode serait de partir d’un fibré sur Eq avec deux filtrations anti-HN distinctes, mais je n’arrive pas à en fabriquer.”

Considérons $A(z) \in \mathrm{GL}_n(\mathbb{C}[z, z^{-1}])$ telle que $\sigma_q Y = AY$ soit singulier régulier en 0. Soit $F^{(0)} \in \mathrm{GL}_n(\mathbb{C}(\{z\}))$ une transformation de jauge ramenant $\sigma_q Y = AY$ à un système à coefficients constants $\sigma_q Y = A^{(0)}Y$, $A^{(0)} \in \mathrm{GL}_n(\mathbb{C})$. L’hypothèse $A(z) \in \mathrm{GL}_n(\mathbb{C}[z, z^{-1}])$ implique que $F^{(0)} \in M_n(\mathcal{O}(\mathbb{C}^\times)) \cap \mathrm{GL}_n(\mathcal{M}(\mathbb{C}))$. Puisque la matrice du système dual $\sigma_q Y = A^{-\top}Y$ appartient elle aussi à $\mathrm{GL}_n(\mathbb{C}[z, z^{-1}])$, on a aussi $(F^{(0)})^{-\top} \in M_n(\mathcal{O}(\mathbb{C}^\times)) \cap \mathrm{GL}_n(\mathcal{M}(\mathbb{C}))$. On a donc $F^{(0)} \in \mathrm{GL}_n(\mathcal{O}(\mathbb{C}^\times))$ (et méromorphe en 0, mais ça ne servira pas). Ainsi, le système $\sigma_q Y = AY$ est $\mathrm{GL}_n(\mathcal{O}(\mathbb{C}^\times))$ -équivalent à $\sigma_q Y = A^{(0)}Y$. Pour trouver le contre-exemple que tu cherches (en l’infini plutôt qu’en zéro), il suffit donc de trouver un système $\sigma_q Y = AY$ avec $A(z) \in \mathrm{GL}_n(\mathbb{C}[z, z^{-1}])$ qui, en l’infini, n’est pas méromorphiquement équivalent à un système constant ; il suffit pour cela qu’il soit irrégulier en l’infini. Un exemple concret est donné par les systèmes associés aux équations q -hypergéométriques du type $\sigma_q \prod_{i=1}^{n-1} (\sigma_q - a_i) - z$ avec $a_1, \dots, a_{n-1} \in \mathbb{C}$.

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First question asked at the end of the talk: “Is there a conjectural description of the global Galois group ?”

Answer: There is a complete description (Sauloy) in the fuchsian case in:

“Galois theory of Fuchsian q -difference equations” Ann. Sci. Éc. Norm. Supér. (4) 36, No. 6, 925-968 (2003).

There is a complete description (Ramis-Sauloy) in the irregular case assuming integral slopes in: “The q -analogue of the wild fundamental group and the inverse problem of the Galois theory of q -difference equations” Ann. Sci. Éc. Norm. Supér. (4) 48, No. 1, 171-226 (2015).

There is a partial description (which will probably be completed into a complete description in the final publication) in the irregular case allowing arbitrary slopes in: arXiv:2006.03237

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Second question asked at the end of the talk: “Does the functor preserve the Ext ?”

Answer: I think it does. See 4.4.3 in the text “qRHB+HVB” on my webpage for a very particular instance. The matter will be settled in the final version of the paper.

For any additional question, please write me:
jacquessauly@gmail.com

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