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A New Maximal Subgroup of $E_8$ in Characteristic 3

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Abstract

We prove the existence and uniqueness up to conjugacy of a new maximal subgroup of the algebraic group of type $E_8$ in characteristic 3. This has type $F_4$, and was missing from previous lists of maximal subgroups produced by Seitz and Liebeck–Seitz. We also prove a result about the finite group $H = 3D_4(2)$, namely that if $H$ embeds in $E_8$ (in any characteristic $p$) and has two composition factors on the adjoint module then $p = 3$ and $H$ lies in a conjugate of this new maximal $F_4$ subgroup.

1 Introduction

The classification of the maximal subgroups of positive dimension of exceptional algebraic groups [14] is a cornerstone of group theory. In the course of understanding subgroups of the finite groups $E_8(q)$ in [3], the first author ran into a configuration that should not occur according to the tables in [14].

We elicit a previously undiscovered maximal subgroup of type $F_4$ of the algebraic group $E_8$ over an algebraically closed field of characteristic 3. This discovery corrects the tables in [14], and the original source [19] on which it depends.

Theorem 1.1. Let $G$ be a simple algebraic group of type $E_8$ over an algebraically closed field $k$ of characteristic 3. Then $G$ contains a unique conjugacy class of simple maximal subgroups of type $F_4$.

If $X$ is in this class, then the restriction of the adjoint module $L(G)$ to $X$ is isomorphic to $L_X(0010) \oplus L_X(1000)$, where the first factor is the adjoint module for $X$ of dimension 52 and the second is a simple module of dimension 196 for $X$.

(Here we use the notation $L_X(\lambda)$ to refer to the highest-weight module with highest weight $\lambda$ for the algebraic group $X$.)

The classification from [14] states that the maximal subgroups of positive dimension are maximal-rank or parabolic subgroups, or one of a short list of reductive subgroups that exist for all but a few small primes, together with $G_2$ inside $F_4$ for $p = 7$. This last case arises from a generic embedding of $G_2$ in $E_6$, which falls into $F_4$ on reduction modulo the prime $p = 7$ only. This new $F_4$ subgroup of $E_8$ is therefore the only example of a maximal subgroup that exists for a single prime, whose embedding cannot be explained using generic phenomena.

The error in [19] leading to this new maximal subgroup does not propagate into any other arguments or proofs. The mistake is in calculating the multiplicities of the non-negative $T$-weights of the highest-weight modules $L_X(0010)$ and $L_X(1000)$ in the proof of (15.4), where $T$ is a 1-dimensional torus of a hypothesized maximal subgroup $X = F_4$ of $G = E_8$. The $T$-weights on $L(G)$ are determined by a labelling of the Dynkin diagram of $G$ with 0s and 2s (a labelled diagram). The argument rules out the existence of such a maximal subgroup $X$ with $L(G) \downarrow X = L_X(0010) \oplus L_X(1000)$ by showing that the $T$-weights on $L(G)$ do not come from such a labelled diagram. See [19] pp.13–16 for more details about $T$, its weights and labelled diagrams. The correct multiplicities for non-negative $T$-weights on $L_X(0010) + L_X(1000)$ are as follows:

$$30, 28, 26^2, 24^2, 22^3, 20^5, 18^7, 16^7, 14^9, 12^{10}, 10^{12}, 8^{12}, 6^{14}, 4^{14}, 2^{15}, 0^{16}.$$
There is a labelled diagram which yields these T-weights, so no contradiction is obtained.

We note that we have not traced all applications of the theorems in [19] and [14], for which there are currently 52 and 46 citations, respectively according to MathSciNet. Many will be unaffected, or require an extra case to be considered and/or included in final results.

The structure of this note is as follows. Throughout, we let $G$ be a simple algebraic group of type $E_8$ over an algebraically closed field $k$ of characteristic $p$ and let its Lie algebra be denoted by $L(E_8) = \mathfrak{e}_8$. In Section 2 we provide a proof of Theorem 1.1 showing the existence and uniqueness up to conjugacy of a maximal subgroup $X$ of type $F_4$ in $G$ when $p = 3$. To do this we first prove that there is an $f_4$ Lie subalgebra of $\mathfrak{e}_8$ that is normalized by the finite group $H = 3D_4(2)$ and go on to show that there must be a positive-dimensional subgroup $X < G$ containing $H$, and moreover that $X$ must be a maximal subgroup of type $F_4$. In Section 3 a direct construction of $X < G$ is given by providing expressions for the root groups of $X$ in terms of the root groups of $G$. This can be used to provide an alternative proof of the existence part of Theorem 1.1. More precisely, we provide a Chevalley basis of the Lie subalgebra $f_4$ from above, and exponentiating this provides another alternative proof of the existence part of Theorem 1.1.

In the final section we determine various results providing extra details on this new class of maximal subgroups. For each unipotent class in $X$ we determine the corresponding unipotent class in $G$ that contains it, and we do the same for nilpotent orbits of the corresponding Lie algebras. We also consider the maximal connected subgroups of $X$. The maximal parabolic subgroups of $X$ will be contained in parabolic subgroups of $G$ by the Borel–Tits Theorem. There are four classes of reductive maximal connected subgroups of $X$ when $p = 3$ with types $B_4, A_1C_3, A_1G_2, A_2A_2$. We show that all of these classes are contained in other maximal connected subgroups of $G$ and we specify such an overgroup. Moreover, we determine that the first three classes are $G$-irreducible but the last class is not. (A subgroup is $H$-irreducible for some connected reductive algebraic group $H$ if it is not contained in any proper parabolic subgroup of $H$.)

In establishing the existence of $X$, we prove the following extra result, of use in the project to classify maximal subgroups of the finite exceptional groups of Lie type.

**Proposition 1.2.** Let $H$ be the group $3D_4(2)$, let $p$ be a prime, and suppose that $H$ embeds in the algebraic group $E_8$ in characteristic $p$. If the composition factors of the action of $H$ on the adjoint module $L(E_8)$ have dimensions 52 and 196, then $p = 3$ and $H$ is contained in a maximal subgroup $X$ of type $F_4$; furthermore, $H$ and $X$ stabilize the same subspaces of $L(E_8)$.

## 2 From the Thompson group to $F_4$

Let $p$ be an odd prime and let $k$ be an algebraically closed field of characteristic $p$. From the end of Lemma 2.1 onwards we will assume that $p = 3$.

One path to a construction of the $F_4$ subgroup of $E_8$ starts with the Thompson group (acting irreducibly on $L(E_8)$ [20]), which contains a copy of $H \cong 3D_4(2)$, acting on $L(E_8)$ with composition factors of dimensions 52 and 196 (using the trace information in [2] p.176 and [6] p.251). In fact, we will show that every $H$-invariant alternating bilinear form on the 248-dimensional module is invariant under a suitable copy of $F_4 \leq \text{GL}_{248}(k)$, where $k$ is algebraically closed and of characteristic 3.

We cannot quite show this without a computer. Splitting $L(E_8)$ up as the sum of 52 and 196 fragments the space of alternating forms into six components. For five of these six we can show that the $H$-invariant maps are $F_4$-invariant, but for the sixth we cannot do so without a computer. With a computer we can check that this sixth component is at least $F_4(9)$-invariant, and thus every subgroup $H$ of $G$ is contained in a copy of $F_4(9)$. But $F_4(9)$ contains elements of order 6562, and thus there is an $F_4$ subgroup of $G$ containing it, via [12] Proposition 2 and Lemma 2.4 below.

We then show that this $F_4$ subgroup is unique up to $G$-conjugacy, obtaining as a by-product that $H$ is unique up to $G$-conjugacy.
We start with a copy of Table 2.1: List of traces of semisimple elements modulo all primes. From [2, p.176], we see that there are elements of order 2. Thus these elements cannot be semisimple, and in particular, claimed composition factors then the structure of a Lie algebra of type $\lambda$. The only integers that are the traces of semisimple elements of order $\lambda$ are the only primes greater than 13. We are the unique conjugacy class of subgroups $M$ in Table 1.1. Thus these elements cannot be semisimple, and in particular, $\chi_p$ is an irreducible (see [6, pp.252–253]), hence the reduction modulo $p$ is irreducible modulo $p$ for all $p > 3$ (as $p = 7, 13$ are the only primes greater than 3 dividing $|H|$). Thus for $p > 3$, if $H$ embeds in $G$ with the claimed composition factors then the 52-dimensional summand is a Lie subalgebra of $L(G)$.

| Trace of $x^3$ | Trace of $x$ | Trace of $x^3$ | Trace of $x$ |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| 77            | 56$\lambda_1 + \lambda_2 + 134$ | $-4$          | 56$\lambda_1 + 28\lambda_2 + 56$ |
|               | 26$\lambda_1 + 25\lambda_2 + 53$ |               | 35$\lambda_1 + 28\lambda_2 + 38$ |
|               | 20$\lambda_1 + \lambda_2 + 35$ |               | 26$\lambda_1 + 16\lambda_2 + 20$ |
|               | 8$\lambda_1 + 7\lambda_2 + 8$ |               | 11$\lambda_1 + 10\lambda_2 + 20$ |
|               | 2$\lambda_1 + \lambda_2 + 8$ |               | 8$\lambda_1 + 2\lambda_2 + 11$ |
|               | 2$\lambda_1 + \lambda_2 - 1$ |               | 2$\lambda_1 + \lambda_2 + 2$ |
| 5             | 54$\lambda_1 + 27\lambda_2 + 80$ | 24            | 64$\lambda_1 + 14\lambda_2 + 92$ |
|               | 45$\lambda_1 + 27\lambda_2 + 38$ |               | 43$\lambda_1 + 32\lambda_2 + 56$ |
|               | 24$\lambda_1 + 21\lambda_2 + 32$ |               | 34$\lambda_1 + 20\lambda_2 + 29$ |
|               | 18$\lambda_1 + 9\lambda_2 + 17$ |               | 16$\lambda_1 + 8\lambda_2 + 29$ |
|               | 9$\lambda_1 + 9\lambda_2 + 11$ |               | 13$\lambda_1 + 20\lambda_2 + 29$ |
|               | 6$\lambda_1 + 3\lambda_2 + 5$ |               | 13$\lambda_1 + 8\lambda_2 + 11$ |
|               | 29            |               | 4$\lambda_1 + 5\lambda_2 + 11$ |
|               | 8             |               | 4$\lambda_1 + 2\lambda_2 + 2$ |
|               | 2             |               | $\lambda_1 + 2\lambda_2 + 2$ |
|               | $-1$          |               |               |

Table 2.1: List of traces of semisimple elements $x$ of order 9 in $E_8$ on $L(E_8)$. Here, $\omega_9$ is a primitive 9th root of unity, $\lambda_1 = \omega_9 + \omega_9^{-1}$ and $\lambda_2 = \omega_9^2 + \omega_9^{-2}$. Traces are given up to algebraic conjugacy.

We start with a copy $J$ of the Thompson sporadic simple group. This has a 248-dimensional self-dual simple module $M$ over $\mathbb{C}$ (it is a minimal faithful representation), and it remains simple upon reduction modulo all primes. From [2, p.176], we see that there are elements of order 9 with Brauer character value 5 on $M$. The only integers that are the traces of semisimple elements of order 9 in $G$ (on the adjoint module) are $-1$, 2, 8 and 29. (These were computed using the algorithm in [15, Appendix], see Table 2.1.) Thus these elements cannot be semisimple, and in particular, $p = 9$. Thus we see that if $J$ embeds in the algebraic group $G$ in any characteristic $p$, then $p = 3$. It is a famous result [20] that $J$ does indeed embed in $E_8(3)$, and is unique up to conjugacy.

It is well known that $J$ contains a subgroup $H$ isomorphic to $\tilde{3}D_4(2)$. From [2, p.90] and [6, pp.251–253], we see that in characteristic not 2, the restriction of $M$ to $H$ is the direct sum of a 52-dimensional simple module $M_1$ and a 196-dimensional simple module $M_2$ (the sum is direct since $M$ is self-dual). However, all elements of order 9 in $H$ act on $M_1 \oplus M_2$ with trace 2, so we cannot use the previous method to show that $H$ cannot embed in $G$ in characteristic $p \neq 2, 3$ acting on $L(G)$ as $M_1 \oplus M_2$.

**Lemma 2.1.** Let $p$ be an odd prime, let $H$ denote the group $\tilde{3}D_4(2)$, and suppose that $H$ embeds in the algebraic group $G$ over an algebraically closed field $k$ of characteristic $p$, acting on the adjoint module with composition factors of dimensions 52 and 196. Then the 52-dimensional submodule carries the structure of a Lie algebra of type $F_4$, and in addition $p = 3$. Furthermore, such an $f_4$-subalgebra of $c_8$ does exist for $p = 3$.

**Proof.** Let $M_1$ denote the 52-dimensional $kH$-submodule of the adjoint module for $G$ and $M_2$ the 196-dimensional submodule. Note that $|H| = 2^{12} \cdot 3^4 \cdot 7^2 \cdot 13$, so either $p \nmid |H|$ and we are essentially in characteristic 0, or $p = 7, 13$, or $p = 3$.

From [4, Table 1.1], there is a unique conjugacy class of subgroups $H$ in $F_4$ for any odd characteristic $p$, acting irreducibly on the minimal and adjoint modules. In particular, we see from [4, Section 4.3.4] that $\text{Hom}_{kH}(\Lambda^2(M_1), M_1)$ is 1-dimensional for all odd primes $p$. From an ordinary character calculation, we see that

$$\Lambda^2(\chi_{52}) = \chi_{52} + \chi_{1274},$$

where $\chi_i$ is the irreducible character of $H$ of degree $i$. For $p = 7, 13$, the reduction modulo $p$ of $\chi_{1274}$ is irreducible (see [6, pp.252–253]), hence the reduction modulo $p$ is irreducible modulo $p$ for all $p > 3$ (as $p = 7, 13$ are the only primes greater than 3 dividing $|H|$). Thus for $p > 3$, if $H$ embeds in $G$ with the claimed composition factors then the 52-dimensional summand is a Lie subalgebra of $L(G)$. 

3
On the other hand, if \( p = 3 \) then \( \chi_{1274} \) has Brauer character constituents of degrees 52 and 1222 from \([6]\) p.251. Since \( \text{Hom}_k(H)(\Lambda^2(M_1), M_1) = k \), we see that the exterior square is uniserial, with layers of dimensions 52, 1222 and 52. Moreover,

\[
\text{Hom}_k(H)(\Lambda^2(M_1), M_2) = 0.
\]

Thus again \( M_1 \) forms an \( H \)-invariant subalgebra. Thus for all odd primes \( p \), \( M_1 \) is an \( H \)-invariant Lie subalgebra of \( L(G) \) of dimension 52.

Moreover, \( M_1 \) must be non-abelian for all \( p \), since \( e_8 \) contains no abelian subspace of dimension 52 by \([5]\) Proposition 2.3. Furthermore, as \( M_1 \) is irreducible for \( H \), the restriction of the Lie bracket to \( M_1 \) furnishes it with the structure of a semisimple Lie algebra. Since \( \text{Hom}_k(H)(\Lambda^2(M_1), M_1) = k \), there is at most one isomorphism class of such, but as the algebraic \( k \)-group \( F_4 \) does contain a subgroup isomorphic to \( H \), acting as \( \chi_{52} \) on its adjoint module, it follows that \( M_1 \cong f_4 \). In particular, this means that the \( f_4 \) Lie algebra must have a simple module of dimension 196, as it acts \( H \)-equivariantly on \( L(G) \).

Such a simple module must be restricted: if not the \( p \)-closure \( L_p \) of the image \( L \) of \( f_4 \) in \( e_8 \) will contain a non-trivial centre \([22]\) 2.5.8(2)]; but \( L \) has no 1-dimensional submodules on \( e_8 \). By Curtis’s theorem, \( M_2 \) arises by differentiation of a restricted representation for the algebraic group \( F_4 \), whence \( p = 3 \), from the tables in \([16]\).

The embeddings of \( 3D_4(2) \) and the \( f_4 \)-subalgebra do exist for \( p = 3 \) via the Thompson group, as seen above.

For the rest of this paper we therefore assume that \( p = 3 \).

We will prove that the \( f_4 \)-subalgebra is the Lie algebra of an \( F_4 \) algebraic subgroup of \( G \). To do so, we will actually prove that every \( H \)-invariant alternating product on the \( kH \)-module \( M = M_1 \oplus M_2 \) for \( p = 3 \) is also \( F_4 \)-invariant, for the unique \( F_4 \leq GL_{52}(k) \) containing \( H \). To do so, we need to understand the space

\[
\text{Hom}_k(H)(\Lambda^2(M), M)
\]

of alternating products on \( M \). Using \( M = M_1 \oplus M_2 \), and the formula

\[
\Lambda^2(A \oplus B) \cong \Lambda^2(A) \oplus \Lambda^2(B) \oplus A \otimes B,
\]

we split the space of products up into six components. The next result gives the dimensions of these components.

**Proposition 2.2.** We have

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Hom}_k(H)(\Lambda^2(M_1), M_1) &= k, & \text{Hom}_k(H)(\Lambda^2(M_1), M_2) &= 0, \\
\text{Hom}_k(H)(\Lambda^2(M_2), M_1) &= k, & \text{Hom}_k(H)(\Lambda^2(M_2), M_2) &= k, \\
\text{Hom}_k(H)(M_1 \otimes M_2, M_1) &= 0, & \text{Hom}_k(H)(M_1 \otimes M_2, M_2) &= k.
\end{align*}
\]

**Proof.** One may use a computer to check these with ease. Some may be checked easily by hand as well, using the ordinary character table and the 3-decomposition matrix for \( H \). For example, using those two tables, \( M_1 \otimes M_2 \) does not possess a composition factor \( M_1 \), and thus

\[
\text{Hom}_k(H)(M_1 \otimes M_2, M_1) = \text{Hom}_k(H)(\Lambda^2(M_1), M_2) = 0.
\]

The statement that \( \text{Hom}_k(H)(\Lambda^2(M_1), M_1) = k \) appears in \([3]\) Section 4.3.4| (where it is proved by computer).

At least the existence, if not the uniqueness, of two of the three remaining non-zero maps is clear from the fact that \( H \) embeds in \( E_6(3) \) with representation \( M_1 \oplus M_2 \). If \( \text{Hom}_k(H)(M_1 \otimes M_2, M_2) = 0 \) then \( M_1 \) would be an ideal of the Lie algebra (as \( \text{Hom}_k(H)(\Lambda^2(M_1), M_2) = 0 \), which is not possible. A character calculation shows that \( S^2(M_2) \) does not have a composition factor \( M_1 \), so

\[
\text{Hom}_k(H)(\Lambda^2(M_2), M_1) = \text{Hom}_k(H)(M_1 \otimes M_2, M_2).
\]
It is only \( \text{Hom}_{kH}(\Lambda^2(M_2), M_2) \) that cannot easily be seen. Indeed, this space will cause us a problem later on.

We now prove that five of the six \( \text{Hom} \)-spaces extend to the algebraic group \( X = F_4 \), with only \( \text{Hom}_{kH}(\Lambda^2(M_2), M_2) \) missing. If one is happy to use a computer for all of this, one simply checks that all \( H \)-invariant maps are \( F_4(3) \)- and even \( F_4(9) \)-invariant, and thus one does not need to prove the next proposition.

**Proposition 2.3.** Let \( X \) be an algebraic \( k \)-group of type \( F_4 \). We have

\[
\text{Hom}_X(\Lambda^2(L(1000)), L(1000)) = k, \\
\text{Hom}_X(\Lambda^2(L(1000)), L(0010)) = \text{Hom}_X(L(1000) \otimes L(0010), L(1000)) = 0, \text{ and} \\
\text{Hom}_X(\Lambda^2(L(0010)), L(1000)) = \text{Hom}_X(L(1000) \otimes L(0010), L(0010)) = k.
\]

**Proof.** Note that each of these spaces must have dimension at most the dimension of the corresponding space for \( H \). This yields the two 0-dimensional spaces, and that the other spaces have dimension at most 1. The first statement holds because \( X \) is an algebraic group and its adjoint module is \( L(1000) \), thus the space is non-zero.

For the last statement, since \( S^2(M_2) \) has no composition factor isomorphic to \( M_1 \), certainly \( S^2(L(0010)) \) has no composition factor isomorphic to \( L(1000) \). Thus the two \( \text{Hom} \)-spaces are isomorphic, so it remains to find a non-zero map in the latter space.

Using the Brauer character table of \( H \) [p.251] (or preferably, a computer), the composition factors of the \( kH \)-module \( M_1 \otimes M_2 \) are of dimensions

\[25, 196, 196, 441, 1963, 2457, 2457, 2457.\]

The highest-weight module \( L(1010) \), which must appear as a composition factor in \( L(1000) \otimes L(0010) \), has dimension 7371 (see Appendix A.50), and must restrict to \( kH \) to be the sum of the three (non-isomorphic) modules of dimension 2457, as no other combination of dimensions works. The rest of the composition factors, in total, have dimension 2821, so there must be an \( X \)-composition factor of dimension between 1963 and 2821. Consulting Appendix A.50, we find exactly one such module: \( L(0011) \) of dimension 2404 = 1963 + 441. The remaining \( kH \)-modules, 25, 196 and 196, must be the other composition factors for \( X \), because \( X \) has no simple modules of dimension 25 + 196, 196 + 196, or 25 + 196 + 196.

Thus the composition factors of \( L(1000) \otimes L(0010) \) have dimensions 25, 196, 196, 2404 and 7371. Since \( L(0010) \) is the unique module to appear more than once, and the tensor product is self-dual, \( L(0010) \) must be a submodule, and the maps in \( \text{Hom}_{kH}(M_1 \otimes M_2, M_2) \) extend to \( X \).

The last remaining \( \text{Hom} \)-space to check is \( \text{Hom}_X(\Lambda^2(L(0010)), L(0010)) \). This seems difficult to do by hand, and we resort to a computer. There are two ways to proceed. The first is to prove that there is an \( F_4(3) \)-invariant map in the space (this takes a couple of minutes), and thus the group \( H \) is contained in a copy of \( F_4(3) \) in \( G \). We then apply Proposition 6.8, which states that \( F_4(3) \) is contained in a positive-dimensional subgroup stabilizing the same subspaces of \( L(G) \), which are \( M_1 \) and \( M_2 \). This must be a copy of \( F_4 \) (as it stabilizes an \( f_4 \)-Lie subalgebra), and we are done. Alternatively, we prove the same statement for \( F_4(9) \) (which contains elements of order \( 9^4 + 1 = 6562 \), this takes about half an hour on one of the first author’s computers) and then apply Proposition 2, which yields the same positive-dimensional subgroup.

We must also show that the subgroup \( X \) is actually \( F_4 \). This is easy, and we can do it quite generally.

**Lemma 2.4.** Let \( G \) be of type \( E_8 \) over \( k \), and let \( X \) be a closed, positive-dimensional subgroup of \( G \). If \( X \) acts on \( L(G) \) with composition factors of dimensions 52 and 196 then \( X \) is simple of type \( F_4 \). Furthermore, \( X \) is maximal in \( G \).
Proof. Since $X$ has no trivial composition factor on $L(G)$ it cannot lie in a parabolic subgroup, hence must be reductive. It also cannot centralize any semisimple element, hence must be semisimple. Since $L(X)$ is a submodule of $L(G)$, it has dimension either 52 or 196 and is simple. There is no simple algebraic group of rank at most 8 and dimension 196, so $X$ has dimension 52, and must therefore be $F_4$. Since $F_4$ has no outer automorphisms, $N_G(X) = X$ (as $X$ has trivial centralizer). Since any closed, positive-dimensional proper subgroup of $G$ cannot act irreducibly on $L(G)$, any overgroup of $X$ also acts with composition factors 52 and 196, hence is $F_4$ by the above proof. Thus $X$ is maximal, as claimed. \[\square\]

Thus we obtain the following.

**Proposition 2.5.** Let $p = 3$ and let $H$ be a subgroup $3D_4(2)$ of $G$, acting on $L(G)$ with composition factors of dimensions 52 and 196. Then $H$ is contained in a positive-dimensional subgroup of type $F_4$, stabilizing exactly the same subspaces of $L(G)$ that are stabilized by $H$.

It suffices to ascertain the uniqueness up to conjugacy of the subgroup of type $F_4$, and as a by-product we also obtain uniqueness of $H$ up to conjugacy.

Let $t$ be an involution in $X = F_4$ with centralizer $B$ of type $B_4$. The trace of $t$ on $L(G)$ is $-8$ (see [13, Table 4]), and so the centralizer of $t$ in $G$ is $D_8$, which acts with composition factors $L(\lambda_2)$ and $L(\lambda_4)$, of dimensions 120 and 128 respectively. The restriction of the $kX$-module $L_X(1000)$ to $B$ is $L_B(0001) \oplus L_B(0110)$, with dimensions 16 and 36 respectively. The restriction of $L_X(0010)$ to $B$ is $L_B(0010) \oplus L_B(1001)$, of dimensions 84 and 112 respectively. (This can be checked using weights or quickly on a computer for $F_4(3)$.) From [23 Table 60] we see that $B$ is subgroup $E_8(\#45)$ and is unique up to conjugacy. But clearly there is a unique way to assemble the numbers 16, 36, 84 and 112 to make 52 and 196. Thus given any subgroup of type $B_4$ there exists at most one $F_4$ containing it, which must stabilize the submodule $L_B(0001) \oplus L_B(0110)$. Thus we obtain the result that $X$ is unique up to conjugacy.

This completes the proof of uniqueness of $X$, and thus Theorem 1.1 is proved.

### 3 An explicit construction of the maximal subgroup $F_4$

Recall that $k$ is algebraically closed and of characteristic 3. For their application to future explicit computations, we give expressions for the root elements $x_{\pm, \alpha}(t)$ for $t \in k$ and $\alpha$ a root of the maximal subgroup $F_4$ as products of root elements of $G$; see [1] §4.4] for notation. We also provide the elements $h_{\gamma}(t)$ for $\gamma$ a simple root of $F_4$ and $t \in k^*$, written in terms of the $h_{\alpha}(t)$ elements of $G$. As the factors of $x_{\alpha}(t) = \prod_j x_{\alpha_j}(c_j t)$ commute we get easily that $x_{-\alpha}(t) = \prod_j x_{-\alpha_j}(c_j t)$. For this reason we only list the root group elements for positive roots. Note that since the coefficients $c_j$ that we exhibit are elements of GF(3), it follows that the subgroup $Y$ we produce is defined over GF(3).

**Proposition 3.1.** The elements $x_{\pm, \alpha}(t) = \prod_j x_{\alpha_j}(c_j t)$ for $t \in k$ generate a maximal subgroup $X$ of type $F_4$ in $G$. They are the root elements of $F_4$ with respect to the maximal torus generated by $h_{\alpha}(t) \prod_j x_{\alpha_j}(d_j t)$ for $t \in k^*$. Furthermore, the elements $e_{\beta_j}, h_{\gamma_j}$ form a Chevalley basis for $\mathfrak{h} = \text{Lie}(F_4)$ where $e_{\beta_i} = \sum c_j e_{\alpha_j}$, $h_{\gamma_i} = \sum d_j e_{\alpha_j}$.

\[
\begin{align*}
x_{100}(t) &= x_{00010000}(t)x_{00000010}(t) \\
x_{010}(t) &= x_{00100000}(t)x_{00000000}(t)x_{00001100}(t)x_{00011000}(t) \\
x_{001}(t) &= x_{11111000}(t)x_{01210000}(t)x_{01111100}(t)x_{01011110}(t) \\
x_{110}(t) &= x_{00111000}(t)x_{00100010}(t) \\
x_{011}(t) &= x_{10100010}(t)x_{00000011}(t)x_{00011000}(t)x_{00001110}(t) \\
x_{0011}(t) &= x_{11112000}(t)x_{11111100}(t)x_{01011111}(t)x_{00122100}(t) \\
x_{1110}(t) &= x_{10110000}(t)x_{00000111}(t)x_{00111100}(t)x_{00011110}(t) \\
x_{0120}(t) &= x_{10111000}(t)x_{00001111}(t)
\end{align*}
\]
Chevalley’s commutator relations for this subgroup presentation alluded to in Proposition 3.1 has the slightly unfortunate property that the constants in $x$ of type $\alpha$ (defined at the start of Section 2). We use the space $H^\alpha \Lambda^2(M, \mathfrak{g})$, as used in [12] (described there as the ‘Lie product method’), to construct an explicit $H$-invariant Lie product on $M$ that turns $M$ into a copy of $\mathfrak{g}_5$. This gives us explicit structure constants. The module $M$ splits as the sum of 52- and 196-dimensional $H$-stable submodules. As explained in Lemma 2.1, the first of these subspaces is forced to be a subalgebra $\mathfrak{h}$ of $\mathfrak{g}_5$ isomorphic to $\mathfrak{h}_4$ and so Magma could write down a basis for it in terms of a basis of $\mathfrak{h}_4$. However, this process left us with basis elements for $\mathfrak{h}$ with around 120 non-zero coefficients in terms of a basis of $\mathfrak{g}_5$.

Proof. It can be checked by hand that these elements satisfy Steinberg’s relations (see [11, Theorem 12.1.1]) for a suitable choice of constants for Chevalley’s commutator relations and that the corresponding elements of $\mathfrak{g}_5$ form a Chevalley basis for $\text{Lie}(\mathfrak{g}_5)$, a Lie algebra of type $F_4$. Another check, which theoretically could be done by hand, shows that $X$ acts on $\text{Lie}(\mathfrak{g}_5)$ as $L\mathfrak{x}(1000) \oplus L\mathfrak{x}(0010)$, and so by Lemma 2.4 we see that $\mathfrak{X}$ is a maximal subgroup of $\mathfrak{g}_5$.

Remark 3.2. The proof of Proposition 3.1 provides another proof for the existence of a maximal subgroup of type $F_4$ in $\mathfrak{g}_5$, which is at least in theory computer-free.

Remark 3.3. We note that the 24-dimensional unipotent subgroup generated by the positive root elements of $F_4$ is contained in the 120-dimensional unipotent subgroup generated by the positive roots of $G$. The presentation alluded to in Proposition 3.1 has the slightly unfortunate property that the constants in Chevalley’s commutator relations for this subgroup $F_4$ are not the same as those used in Magma, which are a somewhat standard choice. However, one can if one wishes rectify this by choosing a different basis: let $\tilde{x}_{\alpha_1}(t) = x_{-0100}(t)$, $\tilde{x}_{\alpha_2}(t) = x_{-1242}(t)$, $\tilde{x}_{\alpha_3}(t) = x_{1232}(t)$, $\tilde{x}_{\alpha_4}(t) = x_{-0001}(t)$. Then we generate the same maximal subgroup $F_4$ but this time the constants in the commutator relations do agree with those in Magma.

We provide a brief explanation on how we found the generators and Chevalley basis in Proposition 3.1. We start with the 248-dimensional module $M$ with summands of dimensions 52 and 196 for $H \cong ^3D_4(2)$ (defined at the start of Section 2). We use the space $\text{Hom}_{\mathfrak{h}}(\Lambda^2(M, \mathfrak{g})$, as used in [11] (described there as the ‘Lie product method’), to construct an explicit $H$-invariant Lie product on $M$ that turns $M$ into a copy of $\mathfrak{g}_5$. This gives us explicit structure constants. The module $M$ splits as the sum of 52- and 196-dimensional $H$-stable submodules. As explained in Lemma 2.1, the first of these subspaces is forced to be a subalgebra $\mathfrak{h}$ of $\mathfrak{g}_5$ isomorphic to $\mathfrak{h}_4$ and so Magma could write down a basis for it in terms of a basis of $\mathfrak{h}_4$. However, this process left us with basis elements for $\mathfrak{h}$ with around 120 non-zero coefficients in terms of a basis of $\mathfrak{g}_5$. 

\[x_{0111}(t) = x_{11221000}(t)x_{11111110}(t)x_{01111111}(t)x_{01122210}(-t)\]
\[x_{1120}(t) = x_{01111100}(-t)x_{00011111}(t)\]
\[x_{1111}(t) = x_{11221100}(t)x_{11121110}(-t)x_{01122210}(t)\]
\[x_{0121}(t) = x_{11111111}(-t)x_{11222100}(-t)x_{11122210}(t)\]
\[x_{1120}(t) = x_{01111110}x_{00011111}(-t)\]
\[x_{1121}(t) = x_{11122111}(t)x_{11222100}(-t)x_{01122211}(-t)\]
\[x_{0122}(t) = x_{12232111}(-t)x_{12232310}(t)\]
\[x_{1221}(t) = x_{11221111}(-t)x_{11232110}(-t)x_{11222210}(t)\]
\[x_{1122}(t) = x_{11232111}(t)x_{1223221}(t)x_{12243210}(t)\]
\[x_{1222}(t) = x_{12233210}(t)x_{12343211}(t)x_{12243211}(t)\]
\[x_{1242}(t) = x_{22343211}(t)x_{12244321}(t)\]
\[x_{1342}(t) = x_{22343221}(-t)x_{12344321}(t)\]
\[x_{2342}(t) = x_{22343321}(t)x_{12354321}(-t)\]
\[h_{1000}(t) = h_{00010000}(t)h_{00000100}(t)\]
\[h_{0010}(t) = h_{01000000}(t)h_{00001000}(t)h_{00000100}(t)h_{00000010}(t)\]
\[h_{0011}(t) = h_{10000000}(t)h_{01000000}(t^2)h_{00010000}(t^2)h_{00001000}(t^2)h_{00000100}(t^2)h_{00000010}(t^2)\]
We found that four of the basis vectors for \( \mathfrak{h} \) were toral (meaning \( x^{[p]} = x \) \( \mathbb{Z} \), which implies \( x \) is semisimple) and commuted with each other, thus spanning a maximal toral subalgebra \( \mathfrak{t} \). We then searched for a \( G \)-conjugate of \( \mathfrak{h} \) such that the corresponding conjugate of \( \mathfrak{t} \) was contained in the standard toral subalgebra of \( \mathfrak{e}_8 \). To do this we used the inbuilt \textit{InnerAutomorphism} function in Magma to construct the automorphisms of \( \mathfrak{e}_8 \) corresponding to \( x_\gamma(\pm1) \) for all roots \( \gamma \) in the root system of \( G \), yielding 480 possible conjugations.

Our strategy was to implement a naive hill climb for the first basis element \( t_1 \) of \( \mathfrak{t} \). Indeed, we searched through all 480 possible conjugating elements and selected the one that yielded the largest number of zero coefficients when expressing \( t_1^q \) in terms of the basis of \( \mathfrak{e}_8 \). We remembered the elements we used at each step. This meant that when we could no longer increase the number of zero coefficients we could trace our steps back and take the next best conjugating element and continue the process. This led to a significant increase in the number of zero coefficients but nowhere near the 240 we needed.

We then slightly upgraded our hill climb algorithm to include using a random conjugating element at fixed intervals. Every 100 steps we chose a random conjugating element and used this, regardless of what it did to the number of zero coefficients. This method was not optimized; it could be that a better choice would have been every five steps, or 500 steps. But this hill climb was enough for us: it quickly led us to a conjugating element \( g_0 \) which took \( t_1 \) into the standard toral subalgebra of \( \mathfrak{e}_8 \). At this point, the remaining three basis elements \( t_2, t_3 \) and \( t_4 \) were not sent by \( g_0 \) to something in the standard toral subalgebra of \( \mathfrak{e}_8 \), but they had significantly fewer non-zero coefficients. We then repeated the algorithm looking to increase the total number of zero coefficients in \( t_1^q, t_2^q, t_3^q \) and this quickly converged, yielding a conjugating element \( g_1 \) which sent \( t_1, \ldots, t_4 \) to the four toral elements corresponding to the generators of the maximal torus given in Proposition 3.1. From the toral subalgebra of \( \mathfrak{h} \) it was then routine to take a Cartan decomposition and find the corresponding root elements.

It turned out that the root elements of \( \mathfrak{h} \) were expressed as a sum of commuting root elements of \( \mathfrak{e}_8 \); in fact long root elements of \( \mathfrak{h} \) were of type \( 2A_1 \) in \( \mathfrak{e}_8 \), whereas short root elements were of type \( 4A_1 \). For pairwise commuting root elements \( e_{\alpha_1}, \ldots, e_{\alpha_n} \) of \( \mathfrak{e}_8 \), the operators \( ad(e_{\alpha_i}) \) pairwise commute and so one has

\[
\exp(t_1 \text{ad}
\begin{array}{c}
\begin{bmatrix}
1 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 1 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 1
\end{bmatrix}
\end{array}
+ \cdots + t_m \text{ad}
\begin{array}{c}
\begin{bmatrix}
0 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 1 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 1
\end{bmatrix}
\end{array}
) = \exp(t_1 e_{\alpha_1}) \cdots \exp(t_m e_{\alpha_m}).
\]

Thus if \( e_{\beta_i} = \sum t_j e_{\alpha_j} \in \mathfrak{h} \) is of this form, then evidently the left-hand side of the displayed equation normalizes \( \mathfrak{h} \) in the group \( \text{GL}_{248}(k) \), and the right-hand side belongs to \( E_8(k) \), hence for \( t \in k \), the elements \( x_{\beta_i}(t) \) generate a connected smooth subgroup \( Y \) of \( E_8 \) for which \( \mathfrak{h} \subseteq \text{Lie}(Y) \). As the restriction to \( \mathfrak{h} \) of the adjoint module \( \mathfrak{e}_8 \) is the direct sum of \( \mathfrak{h} \) and a simple module, it is maximal, which forces \( \text{Lie}(Y) = \mathfrak{h} \). The only connected smooth affine k-group whose Lie algebra is a simple Lie algebra of type \( F_4 \) is a group of type \( F_4 \) itself and using the maximality of \( f_4 \) we conclude that \( Y \) must be a maximal connected subgroup. This yields yet another proof of the existence a maximal subgroup of type \( F_4 \) in \( G \).

4 Consequences

As before, \( k \) is algebraically closed and of characteristic 3. We extend the results of \( [10] \) to this new maximal subgroup, determining which unipotent classes of \( G \) meet the new maximal subgroup \( X \) of type \( F_4 \) non-trivially.

**Proposition 4.1.** If \( u \) is a unipotent element of \( X < G \), then the class of \( u \) in \( X \) and \( G \) is given in Table 7.4.

**Proof.** The proof is a fast computer check. Randomly generate elements \( u \) of orders 3, 9 and 27 in \( F_4(3) \) (given by the presentation alluded to in Lemma 3.1) until we hit each class. (The class to which \( u \) belongs can be deduced from \([3 \text{ Tables 3 and 4}]\).) The Jordan blocks of the action of \( u \) on the sum of \( L_X(1000) \) and \( L_X(0010) \) are trivial to compute then. From \([3]\) we obtain the class in \( G \) to which \( u \) belongs.

However, note that there is an error in \([3]\), due to an error in \([15]\), which leads to a single class having the wrong Jordan blocks in characteristic 3. This is corrected in \([9]\), and it concerns exactly the class \( E_8(b_9) \) in the table. It has Jordan blocks \( 9^{26}, 7, 3^2 \) on \( L(E_8) \), not \( 9^{25}, 8^2, 2^2, 1^3 \) as stated in \([3]\). With this
Table 4.1: Fusion of unipotent classes of the maximal subgroup $X = F_4$ into $G = E_8$. (Horizontal lines separate elements of different orders.)

| Class in $F_4$ | Class in $E_8$ |
|----------------|----------------|
| $A_1$          | $2A_1$         |
| $\tilde{A}_1$  | $4A_1$         |
| $A_1 + \tilde{A}_1$ | $A_2 + 2A_1$ |
| $A_2$          | $2A_2$         |
| $\tilde{A}_2$  | $2A_2$         |
| $A_2 + \tilde{A}_1$ | $2A_2 + A_1$ |
| $\tilde{A}_2 + A_1$ | $2A_2 + 2A_1$ |
| $B_2$          | $2A_3$         |
| $C_3(a_1)$     | $A_4 + 2A_1$  |
| $F_4(a_3)$     | $A_4 + A_2$   |
| $B_3$          | $A_6$          |
| $C_3$          | $D_6(a_1)$     |
| $F_4(a_2)$     | $D_5 + A_2$   |
| $F_4(a_1)$     | $E_6(b_6)$     |
| $F_4$          | $E_8(b_4)$     |

Table 4.2: Fusion of nilpotent classes of maximal $f_4$ into $e_8$.

| Class in $f_4$ | Class in $e_8$ |
|----------------|----------------|
| $A_1$          | $2A_1$         |
| $\tilde{A}_1$  | $4A_1$         |
| $A_1 + \tilde{A}_1$ | $A_2 + 2A_1$ |
| $A_2$          | $2A_2$         |
| $\tilde{A}_2$  | $2A_2$         |
| $A_2 + \tilde{A}_1$ | $2A_2 + A_1$ |
| $\tilde{A}_2 + A_1$ | $2A_2 + 2A_1$ |
| $B_2$          | $2A_3$         |
| $C_3(a_1)$     | $A_4 + 2A_1$  |
| $F_4(a_3)$     | $A_4 + A_2$   |
| $B_3$          | $A_6$          |
| $C_3$          | $D_6(a_1)$     |
| $F_4(a_2)$     | $D_5 + A_2$   |
| $F_4(a_1)$     | $E_7(a_4)$     |
| $F_4$          | $E_6(a_1)$     |
| $F_4$          | $E_6(b_4)$     |

For completeness we do the same thing for nilpotent orbits of $f_4$.

**Proposition 4.2.** If $x$ is a nilpotent element of the maximal $f_4$-subalgebra of $e_8$, then the class of $x$ in $f_4$ and $e_8$ is given in Table 4.2.

**Proof.** Using the root elements constructed for $f_4$ as a subalgebra of $e_8$ (as explained in Section 3) we find a set of nilpotent orbit representatives for $f_4$ using [21 Appendix]. For each representative $x$ we use Magma to calculate the Jordan block structure for the adjoint action of $x$ on $e_8$ and the normalizer of each term of the derived series of $C_{e_8}(x)$. Using [7 Proposition 1.5], we then find the $e_8$-class of $x$. 

Before stating the next result we explain some notation. We use $\tilde{A}_2$ to denote an $A_2$ subgroup generated by long root elements.
In $G$ there are two conjugacy classes of $B_4$ subgroups contained in $D_8$ embedded via their spin module $L_{B_4}(0001)$. When $p$ is odd, these are distinguished by whether or not they are contained in a maximal subgroup of type $A_3$. We denote the class not contained in $A_3$ by $B_2(\overline{1})$.

**Proposition 4.3.** If $M$ is a maximally connected reductive subgroup of $X < G$, then $M$ is conjugate to one of the following four subgroups.

(i) $M_1 = B_4(\overline{1}) < D_8$ embedded via the spin module $L_{B_4}(0001)$. It is $G$-irreducible and denoted $E_8(#45)$ in [23].

(ii) $M_2 = A_1C_3 < D_8$ embedded via $L_{A_1}(2) \oplus L_{C_3}(010)$. This subgroup is $G$-irreducible and denoted by $E_8(#774)$ in [23].

(iii) $M_3 = A_1G_2 < A_1E_7$ embedded as follows: $E_7$ has a maximal subgroup of type $A_1G_2$ (when $p \neq 2$). Therefore $A_1E_7$ has a maximal subgroup $A_1A_1G_2$ and $M_3$ is embedded diagonally in this subgroup. One has to twist the embedding in the first $A_1$ factor by the Frobenius morphism. This subgroup is again $G$-irreducible and denoted by $E_8(#967^{(1,0)})$ in [23].

(iv) $M_4 = A_2A_2 < \overline{A}_2E_6$ embedded as follows: $E_6$ has a maximal subgroup $A_2G_2$, and $G_2$ has a maximal subgroup $\overline{A}_2$ generated by short root subgroups of the $G_2$ when $p = 3$. Thus $\overline{A}_2E_6$ has a subgroup $H = A_2A_2A_2$ (denoted $E_8(#1012)$ in [23]). The first $A_2$ factor of $M_4$ is the second $A_2$ factor of $H$ and the second $A_2$ factor of $M_4$ is diagonally embedded in the first and third factors of $H$ (with no twisting by field or graph automorphisms). Moreover, $M_4$ is not $G$-irreducible.

**Proof.** By [14, Corollary 2], $F_4$ has four conjugacy classes of reductive maximal connected subgroups in characteristic 3, which are indeed of types $B_4$, $A_1C_3$, $A_1G_2$ and $A_2A_2$. The first two maximal subgroups are centralizers of involutions. It follows from the action of $F_4$ on Lie$(G)$ that the centralizer in $G$ of both of these involutions is $D_8$. Thus $B_4$ and $A_1C_3$ are contained in a maximal subgroup of type $D_8$. By [14, Table 8.1], there are only three $G$-conjugacy classes of $B_4$ subgroups in $D_8$. Calculating the composition factors of the action of $B_4 < F_4$ on Lie$(G)$ yields that the $B_4$ subgroup of $F_4$ is indeed conjugate to $M_1$, which is $G$-irreducible by [23, Theorem 1]. Calculating the composition factors of $A_1C_3 < F_4$ on Lie$(G)$, we find that it has no trivial composition factors. Therefore it must be $G$-irreducible (by [23, Corollary 3.8]) and we may use the classification of irreducible subgroups determined in [23]. In particular, the composition factors on the Lie algebra of $G$ are enough to determine conjugacy and it follows that $A_1C_3$ is conjugate to $M_2$, as required.

Another calculation shows that $A_1G_2 < F_4$ has no trivial composition factors on the Lie algebra of $G$. We can therefore use the same method as in the previous case to deduce that it is conjugate to $M_4$. For $AB = A_2A_2 < F_4$ we start by considering the first $A_2$ factor $A$, which we define to be the $A_2$ subgroup generated by long root subgroups of $F_4$. This is the derived subgroup of a long root $A_2$-Levi subgroup, and is thus a subgroup of $B_4 < F_4$. Since $B_4$ is conjugate to $M_1$, we find that $A$ is contained in a maximal subgroup of type $A_3$ and acts as $L_{A_1}(10) \oplus L_{A_1}(01) \oplus L_{A_2}(00)\oplus 3$ on the natural 9-dimensional module of $A_3$. Given this action, it follows that $A$ is a diagonal subgroup (without field or graph twists) of the derived subgroup of an $A_2$-$A_2$-Levi subgroup of $A_3$ and hence of $G$. We now claim that the connected centralizer of $A$ in $G$ is $A_2G_2$. Indeed, we use [23, Theorem 1] to see that $C = A_2A_2G_2$ is $G$-irreducible (denoted by $E_8(#978)$) and the only reductive connected overgroups of $C$ are the maximal subgroups $\overline{A}_2E_6$ and $G_2F_4$. Therefore, we must have that $\overline{A}_2G_2 \leq C_G(A)^\circ$. Moreover, this must be an equality of subgroups since $AC_G(A)^\circ$ is a reductive connected overgroup of $C$, but clearly cannot be $\overline{A}_2E_6$ or $G_2F_4$ ($A$ is not conjugate to $\overline{A}_2$).

From the previous calculations, $AB < C$ is a subgroup of $\overline{A}_2E_6$ and $B < C_G(A)$ is contained in $\overline{A}_2G_2$. It is straightforward to list all $A_2$ subgroups of $\overline{A}_2G_2$, noting that $G_2$ has precisely two classes of $A_2$ subgroups when the characteristic is 3. Computing the composition factors of $B$ on the Lie algebra of $G$, by restricting first to $F_4$ and then $B$, shows that $B$ is conjugate to the subgroup claimed and hence $AB$ is conjugate to $M_4$. The fact that $M_4$ is $G$-irreducible follows from [23, Theorem 1].
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