A class of completely monotonic functions involving the polygamma functions

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Abstract
Let \( \Gamma(x) \) denote the classical Euler gamma function. We set \( \psi_n(x) = (-1)^{n-1} \psi^{(n)}(x) \) (\( n \in \mathbb{N} \)), where \( \psi^{(n)}(x) \) denotes the \( n \)th derivative of the psi function \( \psi(x) = \Gamma'(x)/\Gamma(x) \). For \( \lambda, \alpha, \beta \in \mathbb{R} \) and \( m, n \in \mathbb{N} \), we establish necessary and sufficient conditions for the functions

\[
L(x; \lambda, \alpha, \beta) = \psi_{m+n}(x) - \lambda \psi_m(x + \alpha) \psi_n(x + \beta)
\]

and \(-L(x; \lambda, \alpha, \beta)\) to be completely monotonic on \((-\min(\alpha, \beta, 0), \infty)\).

As a result, we generalize and refine some inequalities involving the polygamma functions and also give some inequalities in terms of the ratio of gamma functions.

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1 Introduction
We know that Euler’s gamma function is defined by \( \Gamma(x) = \int_0^\infty t^{x-1} e^{-t} \, dt \) for \( x > 0 \). The psi or digamma function is its logarithmic derivative

\[
\psi(x) = \frac{d}{dx} \ln \Gamma(x) = \frac{\Gamma'(x)}{\Gamma(x)},
\]
whose derivatives \( \psi'(x) \) and \( \psi''(x) \) are called the trigamma and tetragamma functions, respectively. The polygamma functions are higher-order derivatives

\[
\psi^{(n)}(x) = (-1)^{n-1} \int_0^\infty e^{-xt} \frac{t^n}{1 - e^{-t}} \, dt = (-1)^{n-1} n! \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{(x + k)^{n+1}},
\]
where \( n \in \mathbb{N} \). The Gamma function’s history and its development are given in [1].

After Euler discovered the gamma function, some scholars studied the fundamental properties of gamma, digamma, and polygamma functions, see [2–5]. These functions are important in the fields of engineering, physics, inequality theory, or statistics, and many inequalities involving these functions have been obtained through monotonicity or convexity properties, see [6–16].
A function \( f \) is said to be completely monotonic on an interval \( I \) if \( f \) has derivatives of all orders on \( I \) and \((-1)^n f^{(n)}(x) \geq 0, x \in I, n \geq 0 \) (see [17]). A function \( f \) is said to be strictly completely monotonic if \((-1)^n f^{(n)}(x) > 0 \). The Bernstein–Widder Theorem [17, Theorem 12b, p. 161] states that \( f \) is completely monotonic on \((0, \infty)\) if and only if
\[
f(x) = \int_0^\infty e^{-xt} \, d\alpha(t),
\]
where \( \alpha(t) \) is nondecreasing such that the integral converges for \( x > 0 \). Completely monotonic functions have attracted the attention of many researchers in various fields (see [8, 18–24]).

The following asymptotic formulas are often encountered in many papers (see [5]).

\[
\psi^{(n)}(x + 1) = \psi^{(n)}(x) + (-1)^n \frac{n!}{x^{n+1}}, \quad (x > 0; n = 0, 1, \ldots),
\]
(1.3)

\[
\ln \Gamma(x) = \left( x - \frac{1}{2} \right) \ln x - x + \frac{1}{2} \ln(2\pi) + \frac{1}{12x} + \cdots, \quad (x \to \infty),
\]
(1.4)

\[
\psi(x) \sim \ln x - \frac{1}{2x} - \frac{1}{12x^2} + \frac{1}{120x^4} - \cdots, \quad (x \to \infty),
\]
(1.5)

\[
(-1)^{n-1} \psi^{(n)}(x) \sim \left( \frac{(n-1)!}{x^n} + \frac{n!}{2x^{n+1}} + \frac{(n+1)!}{12x^{n+2}} - \cdots \right), \quad (x \to \infty, n = 1, 2, \ldots).
\]
(1.6)

For the sake of convenience, we set \( \psi_n(x) = (-1)^{n-1} \psi^{(n)}(x) \) for \( n \in \mathbb{N} \).

From (1.2) and the Bernstein–Widder Theorem, we know that \( \psi_n(x) \) is strictly completely monotonic on \((0, \infty)\). From (1.3) and (1.6), we have

\[
\lim_{x \to 0^+} x^{n+1} \psi_n(x) = n!,
\]
(1.7)

\[
\lim_{x \to \infty} x^n \psi_n(x) = (n-1)!,
\]
(1.8)

which easily yields that \( \lim_{x \to 0^+} \psi_n(x) = \infty \) and \( \lim_{x \to \infty} \psi_n(x) = 0 \).

In order to prove [25, Theorem 4.8], Alzer provided

\[
\psi_1^2(x) - \psi_2(x) > 0, \quad x > 0,
\]
(1.9)

which was verified in a distinct way in [26, Lemma 1.1]. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to notice that [27, Lemma 1.2] is a generalization of the inequality (1.9) and is used to establish many interesting results (see [26, 27]). From [27, Theorem 2.2], it follows that

\[
\psi_1^2 \left( x + \frac{1}{2} \right) - \psi_2(x) < 0, \quad x > 0.
\]
(1.10)

In light of (1.9) and (1.10), a novel question was raised in [27], which asks whether it is possible that there exist constants \( \alpha \) and \( \beta \) such that

\[
\psi_1^2(x + \alpha) - \psi_2(x) > 0,
\]
(1.11)

and

\[
\psi_1^2(x + \beta) - \psi_2(x) < 0, \quad x > 0.
\]
(1.12)
Recently, Qi and Guo showed in [28, Theorem 1] that for $\alpha \in \mathbb{R}$, the function

$$f(x; \alpha) = \psi_1^2(x + \alpha) - \psi_2(x)$$

(1.13)

is completely monotonic on $(- \min(0, \alpha), \infty)$ if and only if $\alpha \leq 0$, and so is the function $-f(x; \alpha)$ if

$$\alpha \geq \sup_{x \in (0, \infty)} \frac{x}{\rho^{-1}(e^{2x(2(x + 1)^2 - 1)})},$$

where $\rho(x) = x \coth x$ for $x > 0$ and $\rho^{-1}(x)$ is the inverse function of $\rho(x)$.

In addition, it was shown in [28, Theorem 3] that the function

$$f_\lambda(x) = \psi_1^2(x) - \lambda \psi_2(x)$$

(1.14)

is completely monotonic on $(0, \infty)$ if and only if $\lambda \leq 1$.

Besides the preceding conclusions invoked, we can refer to more references on results extending (1.9) or (1.14) (see [19, 20, 24, 29–35]).

In view of (1.13), we define the function $L(x; \lambda, \alpha, \beta)$ for $\lambda, \alpha, \beta \in \mathbb{R}$, $\eta = \min(\alpha, \beta, 0)$ and $m, n \in \mathbb{N}$ as follows:

$$L(x; \lambda, \alpha, \beta) = \psi_{m+\alpha}(x) - \lambda \psi_m(x + \alpha) \psi_{n}(x + \beta)$$

(1.15)

with respect to $x \in (-\eta, \infty)$.

Then it is a question to put forward: Do sufficient and necessary conditions exist such that $L(x; \lambda, \alpha, \beta)$ is completely monotonic?

The aim of this paper is to solve this question and then apply it to obtain more inequalities involving ratios, differences of digamma and polygamma functions.

A detailed plan of this paper is as follows: In Sect. 2, we give detailed proof of our main results. In Sect. 3, some more inequalities for ratios of gamma functions are obtained with the aid of Theorem 3.1.

2 A lemma

In order to prove our main results, we need the following:

Lemma 1 For $\alpha, \beta \in \mathbb{R}$ and $t > 0$, let the function $\phi(x)$ be defined on $(0, 1)$ by

$$\phi(x) = \frac{t(1 - e^{-t})}{1 - e^{-t}} \frac{x(1-x)}{1 - e^{-(1-x)t}} e^{-\alpha tx} e^{-\beta t(1-x)}.$$  

(2.1)

Then the following statements are true:

(1) For $-\alpha \geq \frac{1}{2}$, the function $\phi(x)$ is increasing from $(0, 1)$ onto $(e^{-\beta t}, e^{-\alpha t})$;

(2) For $-\alpha \leq -\frac{1}{2}$, the function $\phi(x)$ is decreasing from $(0, 1)$ onto $(e^{-\alpha t}, e^{-\beta t})$;

(3) For $-1/2 < \alpha - \beta < 0$, there exists $t_0 \geq 0$ such that when $0 < t < t_0$, the function $\phi(x)$ is increasing from $(0, 1)$ onto $(e^{-\beta t}, e^{-\alpha t})$;

(4) For $0 < \alpha - \beta < 1/2$, there exists $t_0 \geq 0$ such that when $0 < t < t_0$, the function $\phi(x)$ is decreasing from $(0, 1)$ onto $(e^{-\beta t}, e^{-\alpha t})$;
(5) For $|\alpha - \beta| < \frac{1}{2}$, there exists $t_0 \geq 0$ such that when $t > t_0$, the function $\phi(x)$ has a unique maximum point $x_0(t)$ on $(0, 1)$, that is, $\phi(x)$ is increasing on $(0, x_0(t))$ and decreasing on $(x_0(t), 1)$. In particular, if $\alpha = \beta$, then $x_0(t) = 1/2$.

**Proof**

Differentiating $\upsilon(x) = \ln \phi(x)$ yields

$$\upsilon'(x) = t\left(\omega(tx) - \omega(t(1-x)) + \beta - \alpha\right),$$

(2.2)

where

$$\omega(x) = \frac{1}{x} - \frac{1}{e^x - 1}, \quad x > 0.$$  

It is not difficult to show that $\omega(x)$ is decreasing from $(0, \infty)$ onto $(0, \frac{1}{2})$ by noting that

$$\omega'(x) = \frac{\left[(\frac{x}{2})^2 - (\sinh(\frac{x}{2}))^2\right]}{(x \sinh(\frac{x}{2}))^2} < 0.$$  

(2.3)

Apparently, we have

$$\upsilon''(x) = t^2 \left(\omega'(tx) + \omega'(t(1-x))\right) < 0,$$

so that

$$\upsilon'(1) = t\left(-\omega(0) - \omega(t) + \beta - \alpha\right) < \upsilon'(x) < t\left(\omega(0) - \omega(t) + \beta - \alpha\right) = \upsilon'(0).$$  

(2.4)

For $\beta - \alpha \geq \frac{1}{2}$, from $\omega'(x) < 0$ and $0 < \omega(x) < 1/2$, we see that $\upsilon'(1) > 0$, that is, $\upsilon(x)$ is increasing on $(0, 1)$, which immediately yields

$$e^{-\beta t} < \phi(x) < e^{-\alpha t}.$$  

(2.5)

For $\beta - \alpha \leq -\frac{1}{2}$, a similar argument yields $\upsilon'(0) < 0$, and therefore $\upsilon(x)$ is decreasing on $(0, 1)$, which leads to the inversed inequality of (2.5).

If $0 < |\alpha - \beta| < \frac{1}{2}$, then there exists $t_0 > 0$ satisfying $\omega(0) - \omega(t_0) = |\beta - \alpha|$.  

**Case 1.** $0 < \alpha - \beta < 1/2$. Since $\omega(x)$ is decreasing on $(0, \infty)$, we obtain

$$\upsilon'(0) < 0, \quad \text{for } 0 < t < t_0,$$

(2.6)

and

$$\upsilon'(0) > 0, \quad \text{for } t > t_0.$$  

(2.7)

Hence (2.4) and (2.6) imply that $\upsilon'(x) < 0$ for $0 < t < t_0$ on $(0, 1)$, namely, $\phi(x)$ is decreasing from $(0, 1)$ onto $(e^{-\alpha t}, e^{-\beta t})$.

**Case 2.** $-1/2 < \alpha - \beta < 0$. By the same argument, assertion (4) can be proved.

Simultaneously, we observe that $\upsilon'(1) < 0$ for $t > t_0$. This in combination with (2.7) and $\upsilon''(x) < 0$ suggests that $\upsilon'(x)$ is strictly decreasing and therefore has a unique zero point $x_0(t)$, that is, $\upsilon(x)$ is increasing on $(0, x_0(t))$ and decreasing on $(x_0(t), 1)$. Moreover, for $\alpha = \beta$, it follows from (2.2) that $\upsilon'(x)$ has a unique zero point at $x = \frac{1}{2}$. This completes the proof.  

□
3 Main results

For \(x, y \in \mathbb{R}\), let

\[
D_1 = \{(x, y) | x \leq 0, y \leq 0\} \quad \text{and} \quad D_2 = \{(x, y) | x > 0, y > 0\},
\]

\[
D_3 = \{(x, y) | x \geq M, y \geq M\} \cup \{(x, y) | |x - y| \geq \frac{1}{2}, x \geq 0, y \geq 0\},
\]

where

\[
M = \max_{x>0} \left\{ G(x) = \frac{\ln x(1-e^{-x}) - 2\ln(1-e^{-x/2}) - \ln 4}{x} \right\} < \frac{1}{2}. \tag{3.1}
\]

We point here that \(M\) in (3.1) is well defined since \(\lim_{x \to 0} G(x) = 0\) and \(\lim_{x \to \infty} G(x) = 0\). In fact, \(G(x)\) reaches the maximum at \(x_0 = 10.042944\ldots\), that is, \(M = \max_{x>0} G(x) = 0.09297\ldots\). 

Theorem 3.1 For \(\lambda, \alpha, \beta \in \mathbb{R}, \eta = \min(\alpha, \beta, 0)\) and \(m, n \in \mathbb{N}\), let the function \(L(x; \lambda, \alpha, \beta)\) be defined by (1.15). Then we have

(1) For \((\alpha, \beta) \in D_1\), \(-L(x; \lambda, \alpha, \beta)\) is completely monotonic on \((-\eta, \infty)\) if and only if \(\lambda \geq \frac{(m+1)!}{(m-n-1)!}\), and so is the function \(L(x; \lambda, \alpha, \beta)\) if and only if \(\lambda \leq 0\);

(2) For \((\alpha, \beta) \in D_2\), \(L(x; \lambda, \alpha, \beta)\) is completely monotonic on \((0, \infty)\) if and only if \(\lambda \leq \inf_{t>0} 1/W(t)\). In particular, if \((\alpha, \beta) \in D_3\), then \(\inf_{t>0} 1/W(t) = \frac{(m+1)!}{(m-n-1)!}\) where

\[
W(t) = \int_0^1 t(1-e^{-t}) x^m(1-x)^n e^{-\alpha tx} e^{-\beta t(1-x)} dx, \quad t > 0. \tag{3.2}
\]

Proof Using the well-known formula (1.2) and applying the convolution theorem for the Laplace transform, we have

\[
L(x; \lambda, \alpha, \beta) = \int_0^\infty e^{-sx} P(t) dt,
\]

where

\[
P(t) = \int_0^t \left( \frac{(t-s)^m}{1-e^{-t}} - \frac{\lambda s^m}{1-e^{-x}} \frac{(t-s)^n}{1-e^{-x}} e^{-\alpha tx} e^{-\beta t(1-x)} \right) ds.
\]

Changing of variable \(s = tx\) yields

\[
P(t) = \frac{t^{m+n} \lambda}{1-e^{-t}} \left( \frac{1}{\lambda} - W(t) \right). \tag{3.3}
\]

Using the integral representation

\[
\int_0^1 x^m(1-x)^n dx = \frac{n!m!}{(n+m+1)!}, \tag{3.4}
\]

for \(\lambda = \frac{(m+1)!}{(m-n-1)!}\), the expression (3.3) can be written as

\[
P(t) = \frac{\lambda t^{m+n}}{1-e^{-t}} \int_0^1 x^{m-1}(1-x)^{n-1} U(x) dx,
\]

where
where
\[
U(x) = 1 - \frac{t(1 - e^{-t})}{1 - e^{-tx}} \frac{x(1-x)}{1 - e^{-r(1-x)}} e^{-\alpha tx} e^{-\beta(1-x)}.
\] (3.5)

Case 1. \((\alpha, \beta) \in D_1\). First of all, we shall show that
\[
1 < \frac{t(1 - e^{-t})}{1 - e^{-tx}} \frac{x(1-x)}{1 - e^{-r(1-x)}} e^{-\alpha tx} e^{-\beta(1-x)},
\]
for \(t > 0\) and \(0 < x < 1\),

which is equivalent to
\[
V(t) = (1 - e^{-tx})(1 - e^{-\beta(1-x)}) - x(1-x)t(1 - e^{-t}) < 0.
\]
A simple computation gives \(e^t V'(t) = V_1(t)\) and
\[
V_1(t) = x(1-x) \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} t^k \frac{k!}{k!} (x^k + (1-x)^k - 1) < 0,
\]

which together with \(V_1(0) = 0\) yields that \(V_1(t) < 0\) for \(t > 0\) and \(0 < x < 1\). Furthermore, combining this with \(V(0) = 0\) and \(e^t V'(t) = V_1(t)\), we have \(V(t) < 0\). Hence for \((\alpha, \beta) \in D_1\), we see that
\[
1 < \frac{t(1 - e^{-t})}{1 - e^{-tx}} \frac{x(1-x)}{1 - e^{-r(1-x)}} e^{-\alpha tx} e^{-\beta(1-x)},
\]
for \(t > 0\) and \(0 < x < 1\),

that is \(U(x) > 0\) for \(t > 0\) and \(0 < x < 1\).

From (3.2), (3.4) and (3.6), we conclude that \(W(t) > \frac{(m-1)(n-1)!}{(m+n-1)!}\) for \(t > 0\). For \((\alpha, \beta) \in D_1\), we also observe that \(\lim_{t \to 0} W(t) = \frac{(m-1)(n-1)!}{(m+n-1)!}\), and \(\lim_{t \to \infty} W(t) = +\infty\). Hence we have the sharp inequality
\[
0 < \frac{1}{W(t)} < \frac{(m+n-1)!}{(m-1)(n-1)!}\) for all \(t > 0\).
\] (3.7)

Finally, according to (3.3), (3.7) and the Bernstein–Widder Theorem, we complete the proof of assertion (1).

Case 2. \((\alpha, \beta) \in D_2\). Since \(\lim_{t \to 0} W(t) = \frac{(m-1)(n-1)!}{(m+n-1)!}\) and \(\lim_{t \to \infty} W(t) = 0\), then \(\lambda < \inf_{t>0} 1/W(t)\) is well defined. Once more using the Bernstein–Widder Theorem and (3.3), we know that \(L(x; \lambda, \alpha, \beta)\) is completely monotonic on \((0, \infty)\) if and only if \(\lambda \leq \inf_{t>0} 1/W(t)\).

In particular, we consider the case \((\alpha, \beta) \in D_3\). If we prove
\[
1 \geq \frac{t(1 - e^{-t})}{1 - e^{-tx}} \frac{x(1-x)}{1 - e^{-r(1-x)}} e^{-\alpha tx} e^{-\beta(1-x)},
\]
for \(t > 0, 0 < x < 1\),

we get \(\inf_{t>0} 1/W(t) = \frac{(m+n-1)!}{(m-1)(n-1)!}\) according to (3.2), (3.4) and \(\lim_{t \to 0} W(t) = \frac{(m-1)(n-1)!}{(m+n-1)!}\).

For \(\alpha = \beta \geq M\), \(U(x)\) is reduced to
\[
U_1(x) = 1 - \frac{t(1 - e^{-t})}{1 - e^{-tx}} \frac{x(1-x)}{1 - e^{-r(1-x)}} e^{-\alpha t}.
\] (3.9)
In virtue of Lemma 1, we know that $U_1(x)$ is decreasing on $(0,1/2)$ and increasing on $(1/2,1)$, that is, $U_1(x) \geq U_1(1/2)$. Since $\alpha \geq M$ is equivalent to $U_1(1/2) \geq 0$, we have $U_1(x) \geq 0$ for $t > 0$ and $0 < x < 1$.

If $\beta \geq M$ and $\alpha \geq \beta$, then we write

$$U(x) = 1 - \frac{t(1 - e^{-\alpha})}{1 - e^{-tx}} \frac{x(1 - x)}{1 - e^{-\alpha x}} e^{\beta t} e^{(\beta - \alpha)tx}.$$ 

Together with $U_1(x) \geq 0$, it leads to (3.8). Similarly, we can prove that (3.8) is still valid for the case $\alpha \geq M$ and $\beta \geq \alpha$.

If $\beta - \alpha \geq 1/2$ and $\alpha \geq 0$ or $\beta - \alpha \leq -1/2$ and $\beta \geq 0$, in view of Lemma 1, we can prove (3.8).

The proof is completed.

□

Remark 1 Obviously, Theorem 3.1 is a generalization of [28, Theorem 3] for higher derivatives of $\psi(x)$.

Corollary 1 For $\alpha \in \mathbb{R}$, $m, n \in \mathbb{N}$ and $\lambda = \frac{(m+n-1)!}{(m-1)!(n-1)!}$, the functions

$$f_1(x) = \lambda \psi_m(x + \alpha)\psi_n(x + \alpha) - \psi_{m+n}(x),$$
$$f_2(x) = \lambda \psi_m(x)\psi_n(x + \alpha) - \psi_{m+n}(x)$$

are completely monotonic on $(-\alpha, \infty)$ if and only if $\alpha \leq 0$.

Proof The sufficient conditions of the assertion is proved in the proof of Theorem 3.1.

Next we shall prove the necessary conditions.

Suppose that $\alpha > 0$. Since $f_1(x)$ and $f_2(x)$ are completely monotonic on $(0, \infty)$, we have $f_1(x), f_2(x) \geq 0$. On the other hand, it is easy to check that

$$\lim_{x \to 0^+} f_1(x) = \lambda \psi_m(\alpha)\psi_n(\alpha) - \lim_{x \to 0^+} \psi_{m+n}(x) = -\infty,$$
$$\lim_{x \to 0^+} \frac{f_2(x)}{\psi_m(x)} = \lambda \psi_n(\alpha) - \lim_{x \to 0^+} \frac{\psi_{m+n}(x)}{\psi_m(x)} = -\infty,$$

which yields contradictions.

The proof is completed. □

Remark 2 The function $f_1(x)$ can be written equivalently as $h_1(t) = f_1(t - \alpha)$ $(t > 0)$. By hypothesis, we get

$$\alpha \leq t - \psi_n^{-1}\left[\lambda \psi_n(t)\psi_m(t)\right]$$

which yields $\alpha \leq 0$ as $t \to 0$. Furthermore, Corollary 1 clearly strengthens [28, Theorem 1].

Remark 3 In [27, Theorem 2.2], Batir proved the inequality

$$\left( \frac{\psi_n(x + 1/2)}{(n-1)!} \right)^{m/n} \leq \frac{\psi_m(x)}{(m-1)!} \leq \left( \frac{\psi_n(x)}{(n-1)!} \right)^{m/n}$$

(3.11)
for \( m \in \mathbb{N}, n = 1, 2, \ldots, m - 1 \) and \( x > 0 \). By Theorem 3.1, inequality (3.11) can be refined partially. Taking the logarithm in (3.11) yields

\[
\frac{1}{n} \ln \left( \frac{\psi_n(x + 1/2)}{(n - 1)!} \right) < \frac{1}{m} \ln \left( \frac{\psi_m(x)}{(m - 1)!} \right) < \frac{1}{n} \ln \left( \frac{\psi_n(x)}{(n - 1)!} \right).
\] (3.12)

**Corollary 2** For \( m \) and \( n \in \mathbb{N} \), we have the following inequalities

\[
\left( \frac{\psi_n(x + 1/2)}{(n - 1)!} \right)^{\frac{m+n}{m}} < \frac{\psi_m(x)}{(m - 1)!} \frac{\psi_n(x + 1/2)}{(n - 1)!} < \frac{\psi_n(x)}{(n - 1)!}^{\frac{m+n}{n}}, \quad (m > n),
\] (3.13)

\[
\left( \frac{\psi_n(x + M)}{(n - 1)!} \right)^{\frac{m+n}{m}} < \frac{\psi_m(x + M)}{(m - 1)!} \frac{\psi_n(x + M)}{(n - 1)!} < \frac{\psi_n(x + M)}{(n - 1)!}^{\frac{m+n}{n}}, \quad (m < n)
\] (3.14)

for \( x > 0 \), where \( M \) is defined by (3.1).

**Proof** On the one hand, if \( m > n \), a simple calculation shows that the right-hand side of (3.12) is equivalent to

\[
\frac{\psi_m(x)}{(m - 1)!} \frac{\psi_n(x)}{(n - 1)!} < \left( \frac{\psi_n(x)}{(n - 1)!} \right)^{\frac{m+n}{n}}.
\] (3.15)

Similarly, the left-hand side of (3.12) is equivalent to

\[
\left( \frac{\psi_n(x + 1/2)}{(n - 1)!} \right)^{\frac{m+n}{m}} < \frac{\psi_m(x + 1/2)}{(m - 1)!} \frac{\psi_n(x + 1/2)}{(n - 1)!}.
\] (3.16)

By (3.15), (3.16) and Theorem 3.1, we see that (3.13) is proved.

On the other hand, if \( m < n \), inequality (3.15) is reversed by a similar calculation. From the reversed inequality of (3.15), it follows that

\[
\left( \frac{\psi_n(x + M)}{(n - 1)!} \right)^{\frac{m+n}{m}} < \frac{\psi_m(x + M)}{(m - 1)!} \frac{\psi_n(x + M)}{(n - 1)!}.
\] (3.17)

By taking into account the right-hand side of (3.12), the reversed inequality of (3.15), (3.17), and Theorem 3.1, we prove (3.14).

Consequently, the proof of the two inequalities is complete.

\[\square\]

4 Application

In [36], Elezović et al. derived that

\[
\psi_1(x) < e^{-\psi(x)}
\] (4.1)

by the fact that the function \( e^{\psi(x+t)} - x \) is decreasing on \((0, \infty)\) for all \( t > 0 \). In addition, [26, Lemma 1.2] provides a different proof of (4.1). Some extensions of (4.1) for higher-order
derivatives of $\psi(x)$ can be found in [25, 27]. For example, it is given in [27, Theorem 2.1] that the inequality (4.1) was generalized to

$$e^{-n\psi(x+\beta)} < \frac{\psi_n(x)}{(n-1)!} < e^{-n\psi(x+\alpha)}$$

(4.2)

for $x > 0$ and $n \in \mathbb{N}$, where $\beta = 1/2$ and $\alpha = 0$. In particular, inequality (4.2) was proved again by using monotonicity of functions involving the polygamma functions (see [37, Corollary 1]).

We introduce the divided differences of psi and polygamma functions (see [38]). For $n \in \mathbb{N}$, set

$$\psi_n(x) = \begin{cases} \frac{\psi_{n-1}(x+t) - \psi_{n-1}(s+t)}{t-s}, & t \neq s; \\ \psi_n(x+t), & t = s. \end{cases}$$

(4.3)

For the sake of consistency, we set $\psi_0(x) = -\psi(x)$.

Using Theorem 3.1 and inequality (4.2), we establish the following result.

**Corollary 3** For $\beta \in \mathbb{R}$ and $n \in \mathbb{N}$, let the function $f_2(x) = (n-1)!e^{-n\psi(x+\beta)} - \psi_n(x)$ be defined on $(\max(-\beta,0), \infty)$. Then the function $f_2(x)$ is decreasing on $(-\beta, \infty)$ if $\beta \leq 0$; and is increasing on $[0, \infty)$ if $\beta \geq \frac{1}{2}$.

**Proof** A simple computation gives

$$f_2''(x) = \psi_{n+1}(x) - n(n-1)!\psi_1(x+\beta)e^{-n\psi(x+\beta)}.$$  

For $\beta \leq 0$, from the right-hand side of (4.2), we get

$$f_2'(x) < \psi_{n+1}(x) - n\psi_1(x+\beta)\psi_n(x+\beta),$$

and therefore, in the view of Theorem 3.1, we have $f_2'(x) < 0$. By the same spirit, the left-hand side of (4.2) and Theorem 3.1 imply the case $\beta \geq \frac{1}{2}$.

This completes the proof. \hfill \square

**Remark 4** For $\lambda \neq 0$, $s, t \in \mathbb{R}$ and $r = \min\{s, t\}$, define the function $\Psi$ for $x \in (-r, \infty)$

$$\Psi(x; \lambda; s, t) = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{\Gamma(x+s)} \frac{1}{\Gamma(x+t)} \frac{1}{\lambda}, & t \neq s; \\ e^{\frac{1}{\lambda}\psi(x+s)}, & t = s. \end{cases}$$

(4.4)

It was shown in [36] that the function $\Psi(x; 1, s, t)$ is convex on $(-r, \infty)$ for $|t-s| < 1$ and concave on the same interval for $|t-s| > 1$. Since

$$\Psi''(x; \lambda; s, t) = \frac{1}{\lambda^2} \psi^2(x; \lambda; s, t)(\phi_n^2(x) - \lambda \phi_2(x)),$$

we deduce from [39, Theorem 3.1]:

(1) For $0 < |t-s| < 1$, the function $\Psi(x; \lambda; s, t)$ is convex on $(-r, \infty)$ if and only if $\lambda \neq 0 \leq 1$ and concave on the same interval if and only if $\lambda \geq \frac{1}{|t-s|^2}$.
(2) For $|t - s| > 1$, the function $\Psi(x; \lambda, s, t)$ is convex on $(-r, \infty)$ if and only if $\lambda \neq 0 \leq \frac{1}{|t - s|}$ and concave on the same interval if and only if $\lambda \geq 1$;

(3) For $|t - s| = 1$, the function $\Psi(x; \lambda, s, t)$ is convex on $(-r, \infty)$ if and only if $\lambda \neq 0 \leq 1$ and concave on the same interval if and only if $\lambda \geq 1$;

(4) For $s = t$, the function $\Psi(x; \lambda, s, t)$ is convex on $(-r, \infty)$ if and only if $\lambda \neq 0 \leq 1$.

In addition, it was proved in [36] that

$$\Psi(x; 1, s, t)\phi_1(x) < 1$$

holds for $x > -r$ if $|t - s| < 1$ and its reversed inequality is valid on $(-r, \infty)$ if $|t - s| > 1$. Obviously, (4.5) is a generalization of (4.1).

In the following, we will prove the monotonicity of the function $z(x; \lambda, s, t) = \Psi(x; \lambda, s, t) \times \phi_n(x)$ and therefore extend (4.5) or the right-hand side of (4.2).

**Theorem 4.1** For $\lambda \neq 0$, $s, t \in \mathbb{R}$, $r = \min(s, t)$ and $n \in \mathbb{N}$, the function $z(x; \lambda, s, t)$ has the following monotonic properties:

1. For $0 < |t - s| < 1$, the function $z(x; \lambda, s, t)$ is increasing on $(-r, \infty)$ if and only if $1/\lambda \geq n$ and decreasing on the same interval if and only if $1/\lambda \leq n$;

2. For $|t - s| > 1$, the function $z(x; \lambda, s, t)$ is increasing on $(-r, \infty)$ if and only if $1/\lambda \geq n|t - s|$ and decreasing on the same interval if and only if $1/\lambda \leq n$;

3. For $|t - s| = 1$, the function $z(x; \lambda, s, t)$ is increasing on $(-r, \infty)$ if and only if $1/\lambda \geq n$ and decreasing on the same interval if and only if $1/\lambda \leq n$;

4. For $s = t$, the function $z(x; \lambda, s, t)$ is increasing on $(-r, \infty)$ if and only if $1/\lambda \geq n$ and decreasing on the same interval if and only if $1/\lambda \leq 0$.

**Proof** Differentiating $z(x; \lambda, s, t)$ yields

$$z'(x; \lambda, s, t) = \frac{1}{\lambda} \phi_1(x) \phi_n(x) - \phi_{n+1}(x).$$

This in combination with Theorem [39, Theorem 3.1] easily establishes the Theorem. □

Using Theorem 4.1, we have the following:

**Corollary 4** For $s, t \in \mathbb{R}$, $r = \min(s, t)$ and $n \in \mathbb{N}$, we have the inequality

$$\Psi\left(x; \frac{1}{n}, s, t\right)\phi_n(x) < (n - 1)!$$

for $x > -r$ if $|t - s| < 1$ and its reversed inequality is valid on $(-r, \infty)$ if $|t - s| > 1$.

**Proof** Obviously, we only assume $s \neq t$. In view of Theorem 4.1, we only need to check

$$\lim_{x \to -\infty} \Psi\left(x; \frac{1}{n}, s, t\right)\phi_n(x) = (n - 1)!.\quad (4.7)$$

Applying the asymptotic formula (1.5), we obtain

$$\lim_{x \to -\infty} \frac{e^{\Psi(x)}}{x^n} = 1.$$
Theorem 4.2

Therefore, this together with [24, Lemma 4] establishes

$$
\lim_{x \to -\infty} e^{\psi(x+c) \phi_\alpha(x)} = (n-1)^c \quad \text{for all } c \in \mathbb{R}. 
$$

(4.8)

According to [13, Corollary 1.4], the inequality

$$
e^{\psi(x+r)} \leq \left[ \frac{\Gamma(x+t)}{\Gamma(x+s)} \right]^{1/(t-s)} < e^{\psi(x+\frac{r}{2})}
$$

(4.9)

holds for $x > -r$, so that this combined with (4.8) yields (4.7).

Hence we complete the proof of this Theorem.

**Theorem 4.2** For $s, t \in \mathbb{R}$, $r = \min|s, t|$ and $c \in (-r, \infty)$, we have the double inequality

$$
e^{G_{s,t}(x)} \leq e^{G_{s,t}(x)} \leq e^{H_{s,t}(x)} \leq e^{G_{s,t}(x)}
$$

(4.10)

for $x > X_{s,t}$ if $|t - s| < 1$ and its reversed inequality is valid on $(X_{s,t}, \infty)$ if $|t - s| > 1$, where $X_{s,t}$ is the only zero of $1 + \ln \Psi(x; 1, s, t)$ on $(-r, \infty)$,

$$
G_{s,t}(x) = \begin{cases}
\frac{1}{t-s} \int_{t}^{s} \ln \left[ \frac{\Gamma(u+t)}{\Gamma(u+s)} \right] du, & t \neq s,
\int_{c}^{s} \psi(u+s) du, & t = s;
\end{cases}
$$

(4.11)

and

$$
A_{s,t} = \begin{cases}
\int_{c}^{\infty} \frac{1}{t-s} \ln \left[ \frac{\Gamma(u+t)}{\Gamma(u+s)} \right] - \psi(u+s) du, & t \neq s,
0, & t = s;
\end{cases}
$$

$$
H_{s,t}(x) = \Psi(x; 1, s, t) \ln \Psi(x; 1, s, t) - x.
$$

**Proof** Let $g_{s,t}(x) = e^{G_{s,t}(x)}$, $h_{s,t}(x) = \ln \Psi(x; 1, s, t)$ and $f_{s,t}(x) = g_{s,t}(x) e^{x-h_{s,t}(x) e^{h_{s,t}(x)}}$. Since $g_{s,t}(x) = g_{s,t}(x) h_{s,t}(x)$ and $h_{s,t}(x) = \phi_1(x)$, we obtain

$$
f'_{s,t}(x) = g_{s,t}(x) e^{x-h_{s,t}(x) e^{h_{s,t}(x)}} \left( -\phi_1(x) e^{h_{s,t}(x)} \right) \left( 1 + h_{s,t}(x) \right).
$$

Using the asymptotic formula (see [4])

$$
\frac{\Gamma(x+t)}{\Gamma(x+s)} = x^{t-s} \left( 1 - \frac{(s-t)(s+t-1)}{2x} + O \left( \frac{1}{x^2} \right) \right), \quad x \to \infty,
$$

(4.12)

we get $\lim_{x \to -\infty} h_{s,t}(x) = \infty$, and therefore by $h'_{s,t}(x) > 0$ and $\lim_{x \to -\infty} h_{s,t}(x) = -\infty$, we conclude that $1 + h_{s,t}(x)$ has a unique zero on $(-r, \infty)$.

Hence thanks to $h'_{s,t}(x) > 0$, Corollary 4 and (4.11), we have the following statements:

(i) For $|t - s| < 1$, $f_{s,t}(x)$ is increasing on $(X_{s,t}, \infty)$ and decreasing on $(-r, X_{s,t})$.

(ii) For $|t - s| > 1$, $f_{s,t}(x)$ is decreasing on $(X_{s,t}, \infty)$ and increasing on $(-r, X_{s,t})$. 

On the one hand, we check that

\[
\lim_{x \to \infty} \int_c^x \psi \left( \frac{u + s + t}{2} \right) du + x - h_{s,t}(x)e^{h_{s,t}(x)} = \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} \ln(2\pi) - \frac{s + t}{2} - \ln \Gamma \left( c + \frac{s + t}{2} \right).
\]  

(4.13)

Case 1. \( s \neq t \). Now we derive the asymptotic formula of \( h_{s,t}(x)e^{h_{s,t}(x)} \). Taking the logarithm in (4.12), we get

\[
h_{s,t}(x) = \frac{\left[ \ln \Gamma(x + t) - \ln \Gamma(x + s) \right]}{t - s}.
\]

(4.14)

Together with

\[
\ln(1 + x) = x - \frac{x^2}{2} + O(x^3), \quad x \to 0,
\]

we can rewrite (4.14) as

\[
h_{s,t}(x) = \frac{\left[ \ln \Gamma(x + t) - \ln \Gamma(x + s) \right]}{t - s} = \ln x + \frac{t + s - 1}{2x} + O \left( \frac{1}{x^2} \right), \quad x \to \infty,
\]

(4.15)

which implies that

\[
h_{s,t}(x)e^{h_{s,t}(x)} = x \left( \ln x + \frac{t + s - 1}{2x} + O \left( \frac{1}{x^2} \right) \right) e^{\frac{t + s - 1}{2x} + O \left( \frac{1}{x^2} \right)}, \quad x \to \infty.
\]

(4.16)

Therefore, by the aid of

\[
e^x = 1 + x + O(x^2), \quad x \to 0,
\]

we obtain

\[
h_{s,t}(x)e^{h_{s,t}(x)} = x \ln x + \frac{t + s - 1}{2} \ln x + \frac{t + s - 1}{2} + \frac{(t + s - 1)^2}{4x}
\]

\[+ O \left( \frac{\ln x}{x} \right) + O \left( \frac{1}{x^2} \right), \quad x \to \infty.
\]

(4.17)

Combining (1.4) with (4.17), we deduce that

\[
\ln \Gamma \left( x + \frac{s + t}{2} \right) + x - h_{s,t}(x)e^{h_{s,t}(x)}
\]

\[= x \ln \left( 1 + \frac{s + t}{2x} \right) + \frac{t + s - 1}{2} \ln \left( 1 + \frac{s + t}{2x} \right)
\]

\[+ \frac{1}{2} - (t + s) + \frac{1}{2} \ln(2\pi) + \frac{1}{12} x + \frac{1}{12} \]

(4.18)
\[-(t + s - 1)^2 + O\left(\frac{\ln x}{x}\right) + O\left(\frac{1}{x^2}\right), \quad x \to \infty,
\]

which implies (4.13).

Case 2. \(s = t\). Using (1.4) and the asymptotic formula (see [4])

\[
\psi\left(x + \frac{s + t}{2}\right) = \ln x + \frac{s + t - 1}{2x} + O\left(\frac{1}{x^2}\right), \quad x \to \infty,
\]

we can easily prove (4.13).

On the other hand, we show that

\[
\lim_{x \to \infty} \left( G_{s,t}(x) - \int_{c}^{x} \psi\left(u + \frac{s + t}{2}\right) du \right) = \begin{cases} A_{c,s,t}, & t \neq s; \\ 0, & t = s; \end{cases}
\]

(4.20)

where

\[
\int_{c}^{\infty} \frac{1}{t - s} \ln \left[ \frac{\Gamma(u + t)}{\Gamma(u + s)} \right] - \psi\left(u + \frac{s + t}{2}\right) du = A_{c,s,t}.
\]

Note that the case \(t = s\) is obvious. Then using (4.15) and (4.19), we get

\[
\frac{1}{t - s} \ln \left[ \frac{\Gamma(x + t)}{\Gamma(x + s)} \right] - \psi\left(x + \frac{s + t}{2}\right) = O\left(\frac{1}{x^2}\right), \quad x \to \infty,
\]

which implies the exitance of constants \(C\) and \(X > 0\) such that

\[
\frac{1}{t - s} \ln \left[ \frac{\Gamma(x + t)}{\Gamma(x + s)} \right] - \psi\left(x + \frac{s + t}{2}\right) \leq C \left| \frac{1}{x^2} \right|
\]

for all \(x > X\). It follows that

\[
\lim_{x \to \infty} \int_{x}^{\infty} \frac{1}{t - s} \ln \left[ \frac{\Gamma(u + t)}{\Gamma(u + s)} \right] - \psi\left(u + \frac{s + t}{2}\right) du = 0,
\]

so that \(A_{c,s,t}\) is well defined. Hence, (4.20) is proved.

Finally, taking into consideration (4.13) and (4.20), we have

\[
\lim_{x \to \infty} \left( G_{s,t}(x) + x - h_{s,t}(x)e^{\psi(x)} \right)
\]

\[
= \begin{cases} \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} \ln(2\pi) - \frac{xt}{2} - \ln \Gamma(c + \frac{xt}{2}) + A_{c,s,t}, & t \neq s; \\ \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} \ln(2\pi) - \ln \Gamma(c + s), & t = s. \end{cases}
\]

(4.21)

Applying the monotonicity of \(f_{s,t}(x)\) and (4.21), we complete the proof of this Theorem.

\[\square\]

Remark 5 Let \(0.785003 \leq s < t\). Using the inequality (see [13, Corollary 1.4])

\[
\psi(x + s) < \frac{1}{t - s} \left[ \ln \Gamma(x + t) - \ln \Gamma(x + s) \right] < \psi\left(x + \frac{s + t}{2}\right), \quad x > -s,
\]
we have $1 + h_{st}(0) > 1 + \psi(s) > 0$, so that by $h'_{st}(x) > 0$, Corollary 4 and (4.11) again, we conclude that $f_{st}(x)$ is increasing on $(0, \infty)$ if $|t - s| < 1$ and decreasing on the same interval if $|t - s| > 1$. Similarly, we have the inequality

$$\left[ \frac{\Gamma(x + t)}{\Gamma(x + s)} \right]^{\frac{1}{t-s}} \ln \left[ \frac{\Gamma(x + t)}{\Gamma(x + s)} \right]^{\frac{1}{t-s}} < \left[ \frac{\Gamma(t)}{\Gamma(s)} \right]^{\frac{1}{t-s}} \ln \left[ \frac{\Gamma(t)}{\Gamma(s)} \right]^{\frac{1}{t-s}} + x$$

$$+ \frac{1}{t-s} \int_0^x \ln \left[ \frac{\Gamma(u + t)}{\Gamma(u + s)} \right] du$$

for $x > 0$ if $|t - s| < 1$ and its reversed inequality is valid on $(0, \infty)$ if $|t - s| > 1$.

5 Discussion
Observing that Corollary 4 generalizes the right-hand side of (4.2), we conjecture that the left-hand side of (4.2) might be generalized to

$$(n-1)! < \psi\left(x + \frac{1}{2}; \frac{1}{n}, s, t\right)$$

for $x > -r$ if $|t - s| < 1$ and that its reversed inequality might be valid on $(-r, \infty)$ if $|t - s| > 1$, where $s, t \in \mathbb{R}$ and $r = \min\{s, t\}$.

We turn to pay attention to the class of strongly completely monotonic functions, which are introduced in [40]. A function $f : (0, \infty) \to \mathbb{R}$ is called strongly completely monotonic if it satisfies the more restrictive condition that $(-1)^n x^n f^{(n)}(x)$ is nonnegative and decreasing on $(0, \infty)$ for all $n \in \mathbb{N}$. Note that [40, Theorem 1] gives a characterization of strongly completely monotonic functions.

It was shown in [20] that the function $\psi_1^1(x) - \psi_2(x)$ is strongly completely monotonic on $(0, \infty)$. Inspired by this, we will determine necessary and sufficient conditions for $\lambda$ such that the function $\Phi(x; \lambda, s, t)$ is strongly completely monotonic on $(-r, \infty)$ for all fixed $s, t \in \mathbb{R}$ and $r = \min\{s, t\}$ in the future work.

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