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Numerical analysis / Analyse numérique

Numerical analysis of the neutron multigroup $SP_N$ equations

Analyse numérique des équations de la neutronique $SP_N$ multigroupe

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Abstract. The multigroup neutron $SP_N$ equations, which are an approximation of the neutron transport equation, are used to model nuclear reactor cores. In their steady state, these equations can be written as a source problem or an eigenvalue problem. We study the resolution of those two problems with an $H^1$-conforming finite element method and a Discontinuous Galerkin method, namely the Symmetric Interior Penalty Galerkin method.

Résumé. Les équations de la neutronique $SP_N$ multigroupe, qui sont une approximation de l’équation de transport des neutrons, sont utilisées pour la modélisation des cœurs de réacteurs nucléaires. Dans le cas stationnaire, ces équations sont soit un problème à source, soit un problème aux valeurs propres. Nous étudions l’approximation de ces deux problèmes avec une méthode d’éléments finis conformes dans $H^1$ et une méthode d’éléments finis discontinu appelée Symmetric Interior Penalty Galerkin.

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La physique d’un cœur de réacteur nucléaire est décrite par l’équation de transport des neutrons, qui dépend du temps et de 6 variables liées aux neutrons : 3 pour leur position, 2 pour la direction de leur vitesse et 1 pour leur énergie. Nous nous intéressons à la formulation stationnaire de cette équation (5) où l’énergie est discrétisée par la méthode multigroupe, et la direction est discrétisée par la méthode des harmoniques sphériques simplifiées $SP_N$. Cette formulation de l’équation de transport des neutrons revient à un système d’équations de la diffusion couplées. Nous proposons l’analyse numérique de ces équations discrétisées par une méthode d’éléments finis conformes dans $H^1$ (resp. de Galerkin discontinu).
Nous commençons par l'étude des équations $SP_N$ multigroupe pour le problème à source. À l'aide du lemme d'Aubin–Nitsche, nous obtenons une estimation d'erreur a priori dans $L^2$ pour le problème à source discrétisé (12) (resp. (15)), énoncée dans le Théorème 5 (resp. 11). Puis nous nous intéressons au problème aux valeurs propres généralisé. Nous utilisons la théorie développée par Babuška et Osborn [2] pour obtenir une estimation d'erreur a priori sur la valeur propre, énoncée dans le Théorème 12 (resp. 13). Le Théorème 13 est obtenu à partir d'une généralisation de ces travaux présentée dans [1].

1. Introduction

The neutron transport equation describes the neutron flux density in a reactor core. It depends on 7 variables: 3 for the space, 2 for the motion direction, 1 for the energy (or the speed), and 1 for the time.

The energy variable is discretized using the multigroup theory [10, 16]. In this method, the entire range of neutron energies is divided into $G$ intervals, called energy groups. In each energy group, the neutron flux density is lumped and all parameters are averaged. Let us set $\mathcal{S}_G := \{1, \ldots, G\}$, the set of energy group indices.

Concerning the motion direction, the $P_N$ transport equations are obtained by developing the neutron flux on the spherical harmonics from order 0 to order $N$. This approach is very time-consuming. The simplified $P_N (SP_N)$ transport theory [12] was developed to address this issue. The two fundamental hypotheses to obtain the $SP_N$ equations are that locally, the angular flux has a planar symmetry; and that the axis system evolves slowly. The neutron flux and the scattering cross sections are then developed on the Legendre polynomials. From a mathematical point of view, $SP_N$ equations correspond to tensorized 1D $P_N$ transport equations, so that some couplings are missing. Consequently, the $SP_N$ equations do not converge to transport equations. Nevertheless, they are commonly used by physicists since their resolution is cheap in terms of computational cost. The order $N$ is odd, and the number of $SP_N$ odd (resp. even) moments is $\tilde{N} := \frac{N+1}{2}$. We will denote by $\mathcal{S}_e$ (resp. $\mathcal{S}_o$) the subset of even (resp. odd) integers of the integer set \{0, \ldots, N\}.

Finally, the (motion direction and energy) discretization of the neutron flux is such that there are $\tilde{N} \times G$ even and odd moments of the neutron flux.

We will denote by $\psi = (\psi_{m,g}^x)_{m \in \mathcal{S}_e, g \in \mathcal{S}_G} \in \mathbb{R}^{\tilde{N} \times G}$ the set of functions containing, for all energy group $g$, the even moments of the neutron flux.

Likewise, we will denote by $\phi = (\phi_{m,g}^x)_{m \in \mathcal{S}_e, g \in \mathcal{S}_G} \in \mathbb{R}^{\tilde{N} \times G}$ the set of functions containing the odd moments of the neutron flux.

Note that while modelling the core of a pressurized water reactor, the number of groups if such that $2 \leq G \lesssim 30$, physicists usually choose $N = 1$ or 3, more rarely $N = 5$.

2. Setting of the model

The reactor core is modelled by a bounded, connected and open subset $\mathcal{R}$ of $\mathbb{R}^d$, $d = 1, 2, 3$, having a Lipschitz boundary which is piecewise regular. The coefficients are piecewise regular, so that we split $\mathcal{R}$ into $\tilde{N}$ open disjoint parts $\mathcal{R}_i \in \mathbb{R}^d$, $i = 1, \ldots, \tilde{N}$. For this reason, we will use the following space of piecewise regular functions:

$$\mathcal{D} W^{1,\infty}(\mathcal{R}) = \left\{ D \in L^{\infty}(\mathcal{R}) \, | \, \nabla D|_{\mathcal{R}_i} \in (L^{\infty}(\mathcal{R}_i))^d, i = 1, \ldots, \tilde{N} \right\}.$$

For a set of functions $\psi = (\psi_{m,g}^x)_{m \in \mathcal{S}_e, g \in \mathcal{S}_G} \in \mathbb{R}^{\tilde{N} \times G}$, we make the following abuse of notation: $\nabla \psi = (\partial_x \psi_{m,g}^x)_{m \in \mathcal{S}_e, g \in \mathcal{S}_G} \in \left(\mathbb{R}^{\tilde{N} \times G}\right)^d$. 

C. R. Mathématique — 2021, 359, no. 5, 533-545
For a set of vector valued functions \( \mathbf{q} = \left( (q_{x,m}^g)_{m=1}^d \right)_{x=1}^N \in \left( \mathbb{R}^{\mathbb{N} \times G} \right)^d \), we make the following abuse of notation:

\[
\text{div} \mathbf{q} = \left\{ \text{div}((q_{x,m}^g)_{m=1}^d) \right\}_{m,g}, \quad \mathbf{q} \cdot \mathbf{p} = \left( \sum_{x=1}^d q_{x,m}^g p_{x,m}^g \right)_{m,g} \in \mathbb{R}^{\mathbb{N} \times G}.
\]

Let us use these notations: for \( E \subset \mathbb{R}^d \), \( L(E) = L^2(E) \); \( L := L^2(\mathcal{R}) \); \( V := H^1_0(\mathcal{R}) \); \( V' := H^{-1}(\mathcal{R}) \) its dual and \( Q := H(\text{div},\mathcal{R}) \). For \( W = L(E) \), \( L \), \( V \) or \( Q \) we define the product space \( W := W^{\mathbb{N} \times G} \) endowed with the following scalar product and associated norm:

\[
(u,v)_W = \sum_{g \in \mathcal{G}, m \in \mathcal{R}} \sum_{e \in \mathcal{E}_0} (u_m^g,v_m^g)_W, \quad \| u_m^g \|_W^2 = \sum_{g \in \mathcal{G}, m \in \mathcal{R}} \| u_m^g \|_W^2.
\]

We also set \( V' := (V')^{\mathbb{N} \times G} \), \( L(E) = (L(E))^d \) and \( L^p(\cdot) = (L^p(\cdot))^{\mathbb{N} \times G} \).

Let \( \mathbf{q} \in \left( \mathbb{R}^{\mathbb{N} \times G} \right)^d \) and \( \mathfrak{M} \in \left( \mathbb{R}^{\mathbb{N} \times \mathbb{N}} \right)^{G \times G} \). We set \( \mathbf{q}_x = (q_{x,m}^g)_{m,g} \) and we use the notation \( \mathfrak{M} \mathbf{q} = \{ \mathfrak{M} q_x \}_{x=1}^d \).

Given a source term \( S_f \in L \), the multigroup \( SP_N \) equations with zero-flux boundary conditions\(^1\) read as coupled diffusion-like equations set in a mixed formulation:

\[
\text{Solve in } (\phi, \mathbf{p}) \in V \times Q \quad \begin{cases}
\mathcal{T}_o \mathbf{p} + \bar{\mathbf{V}}(\mathbb{H} \phi) = 0, \\
\mathfrak{T}_e \text{div} \mathbf{p} + \mathfrak{T}_e \phi = S_f.
\end{cases}
\]

When \( S_f \) depends on \( \phi \), the steady state multigroup \( SP_N \) equations read as the following generalized eigenproblem:

\[
\text{Solve in } (\lambda, \phi, \mathbf{p}) \in \mathbb{R}^* \times V \times Q \quad \begin{cases}
\mathcal{T}_o \mathbf{p} + \bar{\mathbf{V}}(\mathbb{H} \phi) = 0, \\
\mathfrak{T}_e \text{div} \mathbf{p} + \mathfrak{T}_e \phi = \lambda^{-1} \mathfrak{M} f \phi.
\end{cases}
\]

The physical solution to Problem (3) corresponds to the eigenfunction associated with the smallest eigenvalue, which in addition is simple [8]. In neutronics, the \textit{multiplication factor} \( k_{\text{eff}} = \max \lambda \) characterizes the physical state of the core reactor: if \( k_{\text{eff}} = 1 \) the nuclear chain reaction is self-sustaining; if \( k_{\text{eff}} > 1 \) the chain reaction is diverging; if \( k_{\text{eff}} < 1 \) the chain reaction vanishes.

The matrices \( \mathbb{H}, \mathfrak{T}_e, \mathfrak{T}_o, \mathfrak{M} \in \left( \mathbb{R}^{\mathbb{N} \times \mathbb{N}} \right)^{G \times G} \) are such that \( \forall (g,g') \in \mathcal{G} \times \mathcal{G} \) (\( \delta_{\cdot,\cdot} \) is the Kronecker symbol):

- \((\mathbb{H})_{g,g'} = \delta_{g,g'} \mathbb{H} \in \mathbb{R}^{\mathbb{N} \times \mathbb{N}} \), with \( (i,j) \in \{1, \ldots, \mathbb{N}\} \), \( \mathbb{H}_{i,j} = \delta_{i,j} + \delta_{i,j-1} \).
- \((\mathfrak{T}_e)_{g,g'} := \mathfrak{T}_e^g \in \mathbb{R}^{\mathbb{N} \times \mathbb{N}} \) denotes the even removal matrix, such that:
  \[
  \mathfrak{T}_e^g = \text{diag} \left( t_0 \sigma_r^g, t_2 \sigma_r^{g,2}, \ldots \right),
  \]
- \((\mathfrak{T}_o)_{g,g'} := \mathfrak{T}_o^g \in \mathbb{R}^{\mathbb{N} \times \mathbb{N}} \) denotes the odd removal matrix, such that:
  \[
  \mathfrak{T}_o^g = \text{diag} \left( t_1 \sigma_r^{g,1}, t_3 \sigma_r^{g,3}, \ldots \right),
  \]
where \( \forall m \in \mathcal{E}_0, \sigma_m^g := \sigma_m^g - \sigma_{s,m}^{g,-g} \), \( \forall m > 0, t_m > 0 \).

The coefficient \( \sigma_m^g \) is the macroscopic total cross section of energy group \( g \), and the coefficients \( \sigma_{s,m}^{g,-g} \) denote the \( P_N \) moments of the macroscopic self scattering cross sections from energy group \( g \) to itself.

- For \( g' \neq g \):
  \((\mathfrak{T}_e)_{g,g'} := -\mathfrak{S}_{e}^{g,-g} \in \mathbb{R}^{\mathbb{N} \times \mathbb{N}} \) denotes the even scattering matrix, such that:
  \[
  \mathfrak{S}_{e}^{g,-g} = \text{diag} \left( t_0 \sigma_{s,0}^{g,-g}, t_2 \sigma_{s,2}^{g,-g}, \ldots \right),
  \]

\(^1\)ie: for \( 1 \leq g \leq G, m \in \mathcal{N}, (\phi_m^g)_{|_{\partial \mathcal{R}}} = 0.\)
The coe\(\mathcal{C}. \mathbf{R.} \) Mathématique

\begin{align*}
\text{Theorem 1.} & \quad \text{Suppose that} \\
\text{where:} & \quad \exists \chi \in \mathbb{C}^\mathcal{O}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{The variational formulation of (5) writes:} & \quad \forall \phi \in \mathcal{O} \\
\text{Theorem 2.} & \quad \text{Suppose that} \\
\text{cross-sections are weaker than the removal cross-sections of an order } 0
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{The variational formulation of (7) writes:} & \quad \forall \psi \in \mathcal{O} \\
\text{It happens that the coe-} & \quad \exists \lambda \in \mathbb{C}^\mathcal{O}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{Problem 2 can be written as a set of coupled primal diffusion-like equations with single} & \quad \text{unknown } \phi \in \mathcal{O}: \\
| \text{The variational formulation of (5) writes:} & \quad \text{Solve in } \phi \in \mathcal{O} \\
| \text{The bilinear form } c \text{ and the linear form } \ell \text{ are continuous and under the hypothesis on } \mathbb{D}, & \quad \text{the bilinear form } c \text{ is coercive: we can apply Lax–Milgram theorem to conclude.} \quad \square
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{In the same way, Problem 3 can be written as:} & \quad \exists \chi \in \mathbb{C}^\mathcal{O}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{The variational formulation of (7) writes:} & \quad \forall \psi \in \mathcal{O} \\
\text{Theorem 2.} & \quad \text{Suppose that } \mathbb{D} \text{ is positive definite. There exists a unique compact operator } T_f : \mathcal{O} \to \mathcal{O}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{Theorem 1.} & \quad \text{Suppose that } \mathbb{D} \text{ is positive definite. For a given source term } S_f \in \mathcal{O}, \text{ it exists a unique} \\
\text{unknown } \phi \in \mathcal{O} \text{ that solves Problem 6. In addition, it holds: } \| \phi \|_\mathcal{O} \leq \| S_f \|_\mathcal{O}. \\
\text{Proof.} & \quad \text{The bilinear form } c \text{ and the linear form } \ell \text{ are continuous and under the hypothesis on } \mathbb{D}, \\
\text{the bilinear form } c \text{ is coercive: we can apply Lax–Milgram theorem to conclude.} \quad \square
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{In the same way, Problem 3 can be written as:} & \quad \exists \chi \in \mathbb{C}^\mathcal{O}
\end{align*}
Proof. The bilinear form $c$ is a continuous and under the hypothesis on $D$, it is coercive onto $V \times V$. The bilinear form $\ell_f$ is a continuous onto $L \times V$. Finally, $V$ is a subset of $L$ with a compact embedding. We can then apply the work of Babuška and Osborn in [2]. □

Thus, the couple $(\phi, \lambda^{-1})$ is a solution to Problem 8 iff the couple $(\phi, \lambda)$ is an eigenpair of operator $T_f$. Moreover, Problem 8 admits a countable number of eigenvalues.

We propose first to derive conditions on the macroscopic cross sections so that Problems 5 and 7 are well-posed. Then we obtain a priori error estimates for a discretization performed with some $H^1$-conforming FEM and a Discontinuous Galerkin method, namely the Symmetric Interior Penalty Galerkin method (SIPG) [9, Chapter 4]. The outline is as follows: in Section 3, we exhibit some conditions so that the matrix $T^{-1}_{\sigma}$ and $T_e$ are positive definite. Then we study the discretization of the source problem (5) in Section 5, and the discretization of the eigenproblem in Section 6. Finally, we perform in Section 7 a numerical study of convergence on a benchmark representative of a nuclear core.

3. Properties of $T_e$ and $T^{-1}_{\sigma}$

Consider the diagonal matrix containing the even (resp. odd) removal macroscopic cross sections: $T_{r(e,o)} = \text{diag}(1, \ldots, 1)$. We split $T_{e,o}$ so that: $T_{e,o} = T_{r(e,o)}(I - \varepsilon U_{e,o})$, where $I \in \mathbb{R}^{\hat{N}} \times \hat{N}$ is the identity matrix, and:

$$\forall \, g, g' \in \mathcal{F}_G; \, g' \neq g, \quad (U_{e,o})_{g,g'} = \text{diag}(\alpha_{s,m}^{\hat{N}})_{m \in \mathcal{F}_e,o} \in \mathbb{R}^{\hat{N} \times \hat{N}};$$

$$\forall \, g \in \mathcal{F}_G, \quad (U_{e,o})_{g,g} = 0 \in \mathbb{R}^{\hat{N} \times \hat{N}}.$$  

We have then: $\|U_{e,o}\|_2 \leq \frac{\alpha_{s,e,o}}{\tau_{e,o}}$ where: $\alpha_{s,(e,o)} := (G - 1) \max_{m \in \mathcal{F}_e,o} \max_{g \neq g' \in \mathcal{F}_G} \sup_{x \in \mathbb{R}} |\hat{\sigma}_m^{\hat{N}_e}(x)| \frac{\sigma_m^{\hat{N}_e}(x)}{\hat{\sigma}_m^{\hat{N}_e}(x)}$.

Let us set $\alpha_{r,e,o} = \frac{(\sigma_{r,e,o})^*}{(\sigma_{r,e,o})^*} > 1$. We have the following properties.

**Property 3.** Suppose that $\alpha_{s,e} < \frac{1}{\sigma_{r,e}}$. The matrix $T_e$ is such that:

$$\forall \, X \in \mathbb{R}^{\hat{N} \times G}, \quad (T_e X|X) \geq \tau_e \|X\|_2^2 \quad \text{where} \quad \tau_e = (\sigma_{r,e})^* \left(1 - \alpha_{r,e,0} \alpha_{s,e}\right).$$  

**Proof.** We have: $\forall \, X \in \mathbb{R}^{\hat{N} \times G}, \quad (T_e X|X) = (T_{r,e} X|X) - \varepsilon (U_{e,o} X|T_{r,e} X)$, so that:

$$(T_{r,e} X|X) \geq (\sigma_{r,e}^*) \|U_{e,o}\|_2 \|T_{r,e}\|_2 \|X\|_2^2, \quad \text{where} \quad \|T_{r,e}\|_2 \leq (\sigma_{r,e})^*.$$  

**Property 4.** Suppose that $\alpha_{s,o} < \frac{1}{\sigma_{r,o} + 1}$, the matrix $T^{-1}_{\sigma}$ is such that:

$$\forall \, X \in \mathbb{R}^{\hat{N} \times G}, \quad (T^{-1}_{\sigma} X|X) \geq \tau_o \|X\|_2^2 \quad \text{where} \quad \tau_o = \frac{1}{(\sigma_{r,o})^*} \left(1 - \alpha_{r,o} \alpha_{s,o} \frac{1}{1 - \alpha_{s,o}}\right).$$  

**Proof.** The Taylor expansion of $T^{-1}_{\sigma}$ writes: $T^{-1}_{\sigma} = (I + \sum_{l>0} \epsilon^l T_{r,o}^{-1}) T_{r,o}^{-1}$.

We get that $\forall \, X \in \mathbb{R}^{\hat{N} \times G}$:

$$T^{-1}_{\sigma} X|X = (T_{r,o}^{-1} X|X) + \sum_{l>0} \epsilon^l \left(U_{o} T_{r,o}^{-1} X|X\right)$$

$$\geq \frac{1}{(\sigma_{r,o})^*} \left(1 - \alpha_{r,o} \sum_{l>0} \epsilon^l \|U_{o}\|_2^2 \right) \|X\|_2^2,$$

$$\geq \frac{1}{(\sigma_{r,o})^*} \left(1 - \alpha_{r,o} \epsilon \|U_{o}\|_2 \right) \|X\|_2^2,$$

$$\geq \frac{1}{(\sigma_{r,o})^*} \left(1 - \alpha_{r,o} \alpha_{s,o} \frac{1}{1 - \alpha_{s,o}}\right) \|X\|_2^2.$$  

C. R. Mathématique — 2021, 359, n°5, 533-545
Under assumptions of Properties 3 and 4 the matrices $\mathbb{T}_e$ and $\mathbb{T}_o^{-1}$ are positive definite. Moreover, one can show that $\|H \hat{\nabla} \phi\|_L^2 \geq \| \nabla \phi\|_L^2$ [13]. We infer that the matrix $\mathbb{D}$ is positive definite and that there exists a constant $C_{\mathbb{D}} > 0$ such that for all $\xi \in \mathbb{R}^{\hat{N} \times G}$,

$$
(\mathbb{D} \xi, \mathbb{D} \xi) \leq C_{\mathbb{D}} \|\xi\|_2^2.
$$

From now on, we suppose that this property holds.

4. Discretizations

Let $\mathcal{T}_h$ be a shape-regular mesh of $\mathcal{R}$, with mesh size $h$. We denote by $K$ its elements and $F$ its facets. To simplify the presentation, we assume that the meshes are such that in every element, the cross-sections are regular. We define by $\mathcal{F}_i$ the set of interior faces of $\mathcal{T}_h$, $\mathcal{F}_b$ the set of boundary facets and $\mathcal{F}_h = \mathcal{F}_i \cup \mathcal{F}_b$. We denote by $N_\partial$ the maximum number of mesh faces composing the boundary of mesh elements

$$
N_\partial := \max_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} \text{Card}(F \in \mathcal{F}_h, F \subset \partial K).
$$

We will first consider an $H^1$-conforming finite element method (FEM). For $k \in \mathbb{N}^*$, $V^k_h \subset V$ and $\bar{V}^k_h \subset \bar{V}$ are the finite dimension spaces defined by:

$$
V^k_h = \{ v_h \in V, \forall K \in \mathcal{T}_h, \nu_h|_K \in \mathbb{P}_k \}, \quad \bar{V}^k_h := (V^k_h)^{\hat{N} \times G}.
$$

The discrete variational formulation associated with Problem (6) writes:

$$
\text{Solve in } \phi_h \in \bar{V}^k_h \text{ such that } \forall \psi_h \in V^k_h : c(\phi_h, \psi_h) = \ell(\psi_h), \quad (12)
$$

Similarly, the discrete variational formulation associated with Problem (7) writes:

$$
\text{Solve in } (\lambda_h, \phi_h) \in \mathbb{R}^* \times \bar{V}^k_h \text{ such that } \forall \psi_h \in V^k_h : c(\phi_h, \psi_h) = \lambda_h^{-1} \ell(\psi_h), \quad (13)
$$

Then, we will consider a non-conforming FEM. We define the broken spaces:

$$
V_\mathcal{NC} = \{ v \in L^2(\mathcal{R}) | \forall K \in \mathcal{T}_h, v \in H^1(K) \}, \quad \bar{V}_\mathcal{NC} = (V_\mathcal{NC})^{\hat{N} \times G}.
$$

For $(\phi, \psi) \in V_\mathcal{NC} \times \bar{V}_\mathcal{NC}$, and $\mathbb{T} \in \mathbb{R}^{\hat{N} \times G}$, we set:

$$
(\mathbb{D} \hat{\nabla}_h \phi, \hat{\nabla}_h \psi)_{\mathcal{T}_h} = \sum_{K \in \mathcal{T}_h} (\mathbb{D} \hat{\nabla}_h \phi, \hat{\nabla}_h \psi)_{\mathcal{L}(K)}, \quad \text{and} \quad \| \hat{\nabla}_h \psi \|_{\mathcal{T}_h} = \| \hat{\nabla}_h \psi, \hat{\nabla}_h \psi \|_{\mathcal{T}_h}^{1/2}.
$$

For $F \in \mathcal{F}_h$ such that $F = \partial K_1 \cap \partial K_2$, we define the average $(\mathbb{D} \hat{\nabla}_h \psi)$ and the jump $[\psi]$ as:

$$
[\mathbb{D} \hat{\nabla}_h \psi]_F = \frac{1}{2} \left( (\mathbb{D}_1 \hat{\nabla}_1 \psi)_F + (\mathbb{D}_2 \hat{\nabla}_2 \psi)_F \right) \in \left( \mathbb{R}^{\hat{N} \times G} \right)^d,
$$

$$
[\psi]_F = \psi_1|_F \mathbf{n}_1 + \psi_2|_F \mathbf{n}_2 \in \left( \mathbb{R}^{\hat{N} \times G} \right)^d.
$$

where $\mathbf{n}_1$ is the unit outward normal to $K_1$ at face $F$ and $\mathbb{D}_i = \mathbb{D}|_{K_i}$, $\psi_1 = \psi|_{K_1}$.

For $F \in \mathcal{F}_b$ such that $F \in K$, we set $(\mathbb{D} \hat{\nabla}_h \psi)|_F = \mathbb{D}|_K \hat{\nabla}_h \psi|_K$ and $[\psi]|_F = (\psi_K)|_F$, where $\psi_K = \psi|_K$ and $\mathbf{n}$ is the unit outward normal to $K$ at face $F$.

For $k \in \mathbb{N}^*$, $V^k_{h,\mathcal{NC}} \subset H^1(\mathcal{T}_h)$ and $\bar{V}^k_{h,\mathcal{NC}}$ are the finite dimension spaces defined by:

$$
V^k_{h,\mathcal{NC}} = \{ v_h \in L^2(\mathcal{R}) | \forall K \in \mathcal{T}_h, \nu_h|_K \in \mathbb{P}_k \}, \quad \bar{V}^k_{h,\mathcal{NC}} := (V^k_{h,\mathcal{NC}})^{\hat{N} \times G}.
$$

For $\phi_h, \psi_h \in \bar{V}^k_{h,\mathcal{NC}}$, we set: $(\mathbb{D} \hat{\nabla}_h \phi_h, [\psi_h])_{\mathcal{F}_h} = \sum_{F \in \mathcal{F}_h} (\mathbb{D} \hat{\nabla}_h \phi_h, [\psi_h])_{\mathcal{L}(F)}$.

Let us set

$$
c_h(\phi_h, \psi_h) = c_{\partial h}(\phi_h, \psi_h) + c_{\mathcal{F}_h}(\phi_h, \psi_h),
$$

$$
(\mathbb{D} \xi, \mathbb{D} \xi) \leq C_{\mathbb{D}} \|\xi\|_2^2.
$$


with
\[ c_{T_h}(\phi_h, \psi_h) = \left( [\tilde{\nabla} h \phi_h, \tilde{\nabla} h \psi_h]_{T_h} + \langle \mathcal{T}_e \phi_h, \psi_h \rangle_L \right), \]
\[ c_{\mathcal{F}_h}(\phi_h, \psi_h) = \sum_{F \in \mathcal{T}_h} \frac{\alpha}{h_F} \left( [\phi_h], [\psi_h] \right)_{L(F)} - \left( [\tilde{\nabla} h \phi_h], [\psi_h] \right)_{\mathcal{F}_h} - \left( [\tilde{\nabla} h \psi_h], [\phi_h] \right)_{\mathcal{F}_h}, \]
where \( \alpha \) is a stabilization parameter.

The Symmetric Interior Penalty Galerkin method (SIPG) associated with Problem \((6)\) writes:
\[ \text{Solve in } \phi_h \in V_{h,NC}^k \mid \forall \, \psi_h \in V_{h,NC}^k : c_h(\phi_h, \psi_h) = \ell(\psi_h). \]  

Similarly, the SIPG method associated with Problem \((8)\) writes:
\[ \text{Solve in } (\lambda_h, \phi_h) \in \mathbb{R}^* \times V_{h,NC}^k \mid \forall \, \psi_h \in V_{h,NC}^k : c_h(\phi_h, \psi_h) = \lambda_h^{-1} \ell_f(\phi_h, \psi_h). \]

5. The source problem

5.1. Conforming discretization

**Theorem 5.** Suppose that there exists \( r_{\text{max}} \) in \([0,1]\) such that \( \forall \, r \in [0, r_{\text{max}}]\), \( \phi \in \left( H^{1+r}(\mathcal{R}) \right)^{N \times G} \) (cf. [6, Proposition 1]). Let us set \( \mu = \min(r_{\text{max}}, k) \). The solution of \((12)\), \( \phi_h \) is such that: \( \| \phi - \phi_h \|_{V} \lesssim h^{2 \mu} \| f \|_{L^2} \) and \( \| \phi - \phi_h \|_{L^2} \lesssim h^{2 \mu} \| f \|_{L^2} \).

**Proof.** From Céa’s lemma and Aubin–Nitsche lemma as detailed in [11, Section 2.3]. \( \square \)

5.2. SIPG discretization

**Assumption 6 (Regularity of exact solution and space \( V^* \)).** Let us denote by \( W^{2,p}(\mathcal{T}_h) \) the broken Sobolev space spanned by those functions \( v \) such that for all \( K \in \mathcal{T}_h \), \( v|_K \in W^{2,p}(K) \). We set \( \bar{W}^{2,p}(\mathcal{T}_h) = \left( W^{2,p}(\mathcal{T}_h) \right)^{N \times G} \). We assume that \( d \geq 2 \) and that there is \( 2d / (d + 2) < p \leq 2 \) such that, for the exact solution \( \phi \in V^* := V \cap \bar{W}^{2,p}(\mathcal{T}_h) \). This holds for our assumptions on the coefficients, which are piecewise constant with respect to the triangulation [17].

This assumption requires \( p > 1 \) for \( d = 2 \) and \( p > 6/5 \) for \( d = 3 \). In particular, we observe that, in two space dimensions, \( \phi \in \bar{W}^{2,p}(\mathcal{T}_h) \) in polygonal domains. Moreover, using Sobolev embeddings [4, Section IX.3] [7], this implies
\[ \phi \in \left( H^{1+\alpha_p} (\mathcal{R}) \right)^{N \times G}, \quad \alpha_p = \frac{d+2}{2} - \frac{d}{p} > 0. \]

We state the following lemma [9, Lemma 1.46, p. 27].

**Lemma 7.** Suppose that \( (\mathcal{T}_h)_h \) is a shape- and contact-regular mesh sequence. Then, we have for all \( h > 0 \):
\[ \forall \, \psi_h \in V_{h,NC}^k, \forall \, K \in \mathcal{T}_h, \forall \, F \in \partial K, \quad h_K^{1/2} \| \psi_h \|_{L^2(F)} \leq C_{tr} \| \psi_h \|_{L^2(K)}, \]
where \( h_K \) is the diameter of element \( K \).

We aim at asserting the discrete coercivity using the following norm:
\[ \| \psi_h \|_{j} = \sum_{F \in \mathcal{T}_h} \frac{1}{h_F} \| \psi_h \|_{L(F)}^2, \]
with the jump semi-norm
\[ \| \psi_h \|_{j} = \sum_{F \in \mathcal{T}_h} \frac{1}{h_F} \| \psi_h \|_{L(F)}^2. \]

Under assumption (4), there exists \( \beta > 0 \) we have for all \( \psi_h \in V_{h,NC}^k \)
\[ c_{\mathcal{T}_h}(\psi_h, \psi_h) \geq \beta \left( \| \tilde{\nabla} h \psi_h \|_{\mathcal{T}_h}^2 + \| \psi_h \|_{j}^2 \right), \]
so that
\[ \| \psi_h \|_{\text{sip}}^2 \geq \beta \left( \| \nabla_h \psi_h \|_{\mathcal{F}_h}^2 + \| \psi_h \|_{L^2(K)}^2 + \| \psi_h \|_{L^2(K)}^2 \right). \]

**Lemma 8 (Discrete coercivity).** Let \( \alpha := C_{tr}^2 N_0 \frac{C_0}{p} \) where
- \( C_{tr} \) results from the discrete trace inequality (17),
- \( N_0 \) is defined in Section 4,
- \( C_0 \) is defined in (11).

For all \( \alpha \geq \alpha \), the SIP bilinear form defined by (14) is coercive on \( V_{h,NC}^k \) with respect to the \( \| \cdot \|_{\text{sip}} \) norm, i.e.,
\[ c_h(\psi_h, \psi_h) \geq C_\alpha \| \psi_h \|_{\text{sip}}^2, \]
with \( C_\alpha := \left( \alpha - C_{tr}^2 N_0 \frac{C_0}{p} \right) \min \left\{ \frac{1}{2}, \beta \left( \alpha + C_{tr}^2 N_0 \frac{C_0}{p} \right)^{-1} \right\}. \]

**Proof.** We follow the proof of [9, Lemma 4.12]. For all \( \psi_h \in V_{h,NC}^k \),
\[ c_h(\psi_h, \psi_h) = c_{\mathcal{F}_h}(\psi_h, \psi_h) + c_{\mathcal{F}^+, \mathcal{F}^-}(\psi_h, \psi_h) \]
\[ = c_{\mathcal{F}_h}(\psi_h, \psi_h) + \sum_{F \in \mathcal{F}_h} \alpha \| \psi_h \|_{L^2(F)}^2 - 2 \left( D \nabla_h \psi_h, [\psi_h] \right)_{\mathcal{F}^+} \]
\[ \geq c_{\mathcal{F}_h}(\psi_h, \psi_h) + \alpha \| \psi_h \|_J^2 - 2 C_{tr} (N_0)^{1/2} \| D \nabla_h \psi_h \|_{\mathcal{F}_h} \| \psi_h \|_J \]
where we used Cauchy–Schwarz and Lemma 7 in the last line. Using the inequality \( 2ab \leq \varepsilon a + \varepsilon^{-1} b \) for any \( \varepsilon > 0 \), we obtain
\[ 2 C_{tr} (N_0)^{1/2} \| D \nabla_h \psi_h \|_{\mathcal{F}_h} \| \psi_h \|_J \leq \varepsilon C_{tr}^2 N_0 \| D \nabla_h \psi_h \|_{\mathcal{F}_h}^2 + \varepsilon^{-1} \| \psi_h \|_J^2 \]
\[ \leq \varepsilon C_{tr}^2 N_0 C_D \| \nabla_h \psi_h \|_{\mathcal{F}_h}^2 + \varepsilon^{-1} \| \psi_h \|_J^2. \]
Using (18), we obtain that there exists a constant \( \beta > 0 \) such that
\[ c_h(\psi_h, \psi_h) \geq \beta (1 - \varepsilon \alpha) \| \nabla_h \psi_h \|_{\mathcal{F}_h}^2 + \beta \| \psi_h \|_J^2 + (\alpha - \varepsilon^{-1}) \| \psi_h \|_J^2. \]
Choosing \( \varepsilon = 2(\alpha + \alpha)^{-1} \) yields the assertion. \( \square \)

Thus, it only remains to prove boundedness. To this purpose, we need to define \( V_{h,NC}^k = V^* + V_{h,NC}^k \) and the following norm
\[ \| \psi \|_{\text{sip}, \alpha} := \left( \| \psi \|_{\text{sip}}^p + \sum_{K \in \mathcal{K}_h} h_K^{1+\gamma_p} \| \nabla \psi \|_{L^p(K)} \right)^{1/p}, \]
where \( \gamma_p = \frac{d(p-2)}{2} \) and \( n_K \) is the unit outward normal to \( K \). Following [9, Section 4.2], we obtain the following results.

**Lemma 9 (Boundedness).** There is \( C_{\text{bnd}} \), independent of \( h \), such that for all \( (\phi, \psi_h) \in V_{h,NC}^{*,h} \times V_{h,NC}^k \)
\[ c_h(\phi, \psi_h) \leq C_{\text{bnd}} \| \phi \|_{\text{sip}, \alpha} \| \psi_h \|_{\text{sip}}. \]

**Theorem 10 (Convergence).** Suppose that there exists \( r_{\text{max}} \) in \( (0,1) \) such that \( \forall r \in [0, r_{\text{max}}] \), \( \phi \in \{ H^{1+r}(\mathcal{S}) \}^N \) (cf. [6, Proposition 1]). Then the solution of (15), \( \phi_h \) is such that:
\[ \| \phi - \phi_h \|_{\text{sip}} \leq C \inf_{\psi_h \in V_{h,NC}} \| \phi - \psi_h \|_{\text{sip}, \alpha}, \]
where \( C \) is a constant independent of \( h \). Moreover, under Assumption 6, there holds
\[ \| \phi - \phi_h \|_{\text{sip}} \leq C(\phi) \| \omega^{2,p}(\mathcal{F}_h) \| h^\mu, \]
where \( \mu = r_{\text{max}}, C \) is a constant independent of \( h \) and \( p \) is such that \( \mu = \frac{d+2}{2} - \frac{d}{p} \).
Theorem 11 *(\(L^2\)-norm estimate).* Suppose that there exists \(r_{\text{max}}\) in \((0,1]\) such that \(\forall \, r \in [0,r_{\text{max}}], \phi_h \in H^{1+r}(\mathbb{R})\) (cf. [6, Proposition 1]). Under Assumption 6, the solution of (15), \(\phi_h\) is such that: \(\|\phi - \phi_h\|_L \lesssim h^{2\mu} \|S_f\|_L\), where \(\mu = r_{\text{max}}\).

**Proof.** We apply the Aubin–Nitsche similarly as in [9, Theorem 4.25]. \(\square\)

6. The eigenproblem

6.1. **Conforming discretization**

**Theorem 12.** Let \(\mu\) be the regularity of the eigenfunction \(\phi\) associated with \(\lambda\), and \(\omega = \min(\mu, k)\). Let \(\lambda_h\) be the discrete eigenvalue associated with Problem (13). The following a priori error estimate holds: \(|\lambda - \lambda_h| \lesssim h^{2\omega}\).

**Proof.** As in the continuous case (Theorem 2), since the discretization is conforming, there exists a unique compact operator \(T_h : V_h^k \rightarrow V_h^k\) such that \(\forall \, (\phi_h, \psi_h) \in V_h^k \times V_h^k\): \(c(T_h\phi_h, \psi_h) = \ell_f(\phi_h, \psi_h)\). According to Theorem 5, the sequence of the operators \((T_h)_h\) is pointwise converging towards \(T\). As \(T_h\) and \(T\) are compact operators, the sequence of operators \((T_h)_h\) is then converging in \(L(V)\) towards \(T\): \(\|T_h - T\|_{L(V)} \rightarrow 0\). The norm convergence guarantees that there is no spectral pollution (see [18]). Moreover, we can apply Theorem 8.3 in [2] to state the error estimate on the eigenvalue. We remark that \((\mathbb{M}_f\phi, \phi)_L\) is a norm over \(V_\lambda := \{\phi \in V \mid \forall \, \psi \in V, c(\phi, \psi) = \lambda\ell_f(\phi, \psi)\}\) [13, Section 5.2.2 p. 78]. \(\square\)

6.2. **SIPG discretization**

We recall that, in this section, we work under the assumption 6.

**Theorem 13.** Let \(\mu\) be the regularity of the eigenfunction \(\phi\) associated with \(\lambda\), and \(\omega = \min(\mu, k)\). Let \(\lambda_h\) be the discrete eigenvalue associated with Problem (16). The following a priori error estimate holds: \(|\lambda - \lambda_h| \lesssim h^{2\omega}\).

**Proof.** We apply the theory developed in [1]. The proof is decomposed as follows. We first show that there is no spectral pollution. Then, we derive the error estimate.

Let \(E : V + V_{h,NC}^k \rightarrow V + V_{h,NC}^k\) be the continuous spectral projector relative to \(\lambda\) defined by

\[
E = \frac{1}{2\pi i} \int_{\Gamma} \left(z - T|_{V + V_{h,NC}^k}\right)^{-1}\,dz,
\]

where \(\Gamma\) is a circle in the complex plane centred at \(\lambda\) which lies in \(\rho(T|_{V + V_{h,NC}^k})\) and encloses no other points of \(\sigma(T|_{V + V_{h,NC}^k})\). The absence of spectral pollution relies on two properties. First, using interpolation results [9, Assumption 4.31] we have for all \(\phi \in E(V + V_{h,NC}^k)\),

\[
\inf_{\psi_h \in V_{h,NC}^k} \|\phi - \psi_h\|_{sip} \leq C h^\mu,
\]

where \(C\) is a constant independent of \(h\). Second, we have for all \(\phi_h \in V_{h,NC}^k\),

\[
\| (T - T_h)\phi_h \|_{sip} \leq C h^\mu |T\phi_h|_{W^{2,p}(\mathcal{F}_h)},
\]

\[
\leq C h^\mu \|T\phi_h\|_{(H^{1+p}(\mathbb{R}))^{N+G}},
\]

\[
\leq C h^\mu \|\phi_h\|_L,
\]

\[
\leq C h^\mu \|\phi_h\|_{sip},
\]

C. R. Mathématique — 2021, 359, n° 5, 533-545
where we used Theorem 10 in the second line and regularity results [17] in the third line. Applying [1, Theorem 3.7], we obtain that there is no spectral pollution.

Moreover, we apply [1, Theorem 3.14] to state the error estimate on the eigenvalue,

$$|\lambda - \lambda_h| \leq C \delta_h \delta_{*,h},$$

where

$$\delta_h = \gamma_h + \left\| (T - T_h)|_{E(V + V^k_{h,NC})} \right\|_{s^{ip}},$$

$$\delta_{*,h} = \gamma_{*,h} + \left\| (T_* - T_{*,h})|_{E(V + V^k_{h,NC})} \right\|_{s^{ip}},$$

with

$$\gamma_h = \delta(E(V + V^k_{h,NC}), V^k_{h,NC}),$$

$$\gamma_{*,h} = \delta(E_*(V + V^k_{h,NC}), V^k_{h,NC}),$$

where

$$\delta(Y, Z) = \sup_{y \in Y, \|y\|_{s^{ip}} = 1} \left( \inf_{z \in Z} \|y - z\|_{s^{ip}} \right),$$

and $E_* : V + V^k_{h,NC} \to V + V^k_{h,NC}$ is the continuous spectral projector of the adjoint operator $T_*|_{V + V^k_{h,NC}}$ relative to $\bar{\lambda}$.

Using again elliptic regularity results [17] and Theorem 10, we obtain

$$\left\| (T - T_h)|_{E(V + V^k_{h,NC})} \right\|_{s^{ip}} \leq Ch^\mu,$$

$$\left\| (T_* - T_{*,h})|_{E(V + V^k_{h,NC})} \right\|_{s^{ip}} \leq Ch^\mu.$$

Using elliptic regularity results, we get

$$\|\varphi\|_{H^{1+\sigma_p}(\mathbb{R})}^{N_c G} \leq C \|\varphi\|_{L^2} \leq C \|\varphi\|_{V}.$$

Applying Theorem 10, we infer that

$$\gamma_h \leq Ch^\mu,$$

$$\gamma_{*,h} \leq Ch^\mu.$$

This concludes the proof. □

7. Numerical Results

We consider the test case Model 2, case 1 from the benchmark of Takeda and Ikeda [20]. The geometry of the core is three-dimensional and the domain is $((x, y, z) \in \mathbb{R}^3, 0 \leq x \leq 140 \text{ cm}; 0 \leq y \leq 140 \text{ cm}; 0 \leq z \leq 150 \text{ cm})$. This test is defined with 4 energy groups, isotropic scattering and vacuum boundary conditions. Figure 1 represents the cross-sectional geometry on the plane $z = 75 \text{ cm}$.

Since the scattering is isotropic, the $SP_3$ formulation can easily be reformulated as a multi-group diffusion problem with 8 energy groups and an isotropic albedo boundary condition [3]. We then made the computations with the PRIAM solver from the code CRONOS2 [14] for the conforming case and with the MINARET solver [15] from the APOLLO3® code [19] for the SIPG discretization.
In Figure 2, we consider the convergence of the fundamental mode where we used the $SP_3$ formulation with $Q^1$ finite elements and a regular cartesian mesh of size $h$. The approximated order of convergence is 2.22.

In Figure 3, we consider the convergence of the fundamental mode for different the $SP_N$ formulations with discontinuous $P^1$ finite elements and a prismatic mesh of size $h$. The approximated orders of convergence are given in Table 1.

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**Figure 1.** Cross-sectional view of the core ($z = 75$ cm).

**Figure 2.** Error on the discrete eigenvalue for the $SP_3$ formulation with $Q^1$ finite elements

**Figure 3.**
Figure 3. Error on the discrete eigenvalue for the $SP_3$ formulation with discontinuous linear finite elements

Table 1. Approximated order of convergence associated with Figure 3

|       | $SP_3$ | $SP_5$ | $SP_7$ |
|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| Order | 1.88   | 1.96   | 1.92   |

8. Conclusion

We did the numerical analysis of the approximation with an $H^1$-conforming finite element method of the neutron multigroup $SP_N$ equations. We also studied the numerical analysis of the approximation with the Symmetric Interior Penalty Galerkin method of the neutron multigroup $SP_N$ equations. We then illustrated numerically the convergence results on a benchmark representative of a nuclear core. Those results can be extended to a mixed finite element method, see [5] for the diffusion case with an $H^1$-conforming finite element method.

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