EQUILATERAL TRIANGLE SKEW CONDITION
FOR QUASICONFORMALITY
Colleen Ackermann, Peter Haïssinsky, Aimo Hinkkanen

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Abstract. We characterize quasiconformal mappings in terms of the distortion of the vertices of equilateral triangles.

1. Introduction

Since quasiconformal mappings were first studied nearly a century ago, many diverse characterizations have been discovered. These have led to a wide variety of applications in many fields including Teichmüller theory, elliptic PDE’s, hyperbolic geometry and complex dynamics. For an overview of these applications and the theory of quasiconformal mappings see [2], [4], and [6]. In this paper we will use the metric definition of quasiconformality to obtain a new formulation for the definition of planar quasiconformal mappings.

Definition 1. Let $f : U \to V$ be a homeomorphism between planar domains. When $D(z, r) = \{w \in \mathbb{C} : |z - w| \leq r\} \subset U$, define

$$M(z, r) = \sup\{|f(z) - f(w)| : |z - w| = r\}, \quad m(z, r) = \inf\{|f(z) - f(w)| : |z - w| = r\}.$$ 

Suppose that $K \geq 1$. The mapping $f$ is said to be $K$-quasiconformal if

$$H(z) = \limsup_{r \to 0} \frac{M(z, r)}{m(z, r)} \leq K$$

for a.e. $z \in U$, and if $H(z)$ is bounded in $U$.

In his book [6] John Hubbard obtained a new characterization of quasiconformal mappings. Let $T$ be a closed topological triangle with specified vertices, $L(T) = \max\{|a - b| : a, b \text{ are vertices of } T\}$ and $l(T) = \min\{|a - b| : a, b \text{ are vertices of } T\}$. We define

$$\text{skew}(T) = \frac{L(T)}{l(T)}.$$ 

Note that $f(T)$ is also a topological triangle so the expression $\text{skew}(f(T))$ is defined. Then $f : U \to V$ is quasiconformal provided that there exists an increasing homeomorphism $h : [0, \infty) \to [0, \infty)$ such that

$$\text{skew}(f(T)) \leq h(\text{skew}(T))$$

for all closed Euclidean triangles $T \subset U$. In fact, Hubbard showed that it is sufficient to only consider triangles with skew bounded above by $\sqrt{7}/3$. He then asked the question of whether it suffices to only consider equilateral triangles. Progress was made on this problem in a previous paper by Javier Aramayona and Peter Haïssinsky [3] in which they showed that there exists a constant $\epsilon_0 > 0$ such that if $\epsilon \in [0, \epsilon_0)$ and

$$\text{skew}(f(T)) \leq 1 + \epsilon.$$
for all equilateral triangles $T \subset U$, then $f$ is quasiconformal.

Theorem 1 of this paper answers Hubbard’s question in the affirmative.

**Theorem 1.** Let $U$ and $V$ be two domains in the complex plane $\mathbb{C}$, and let $f : U \to V$ be an orientation-preserving homeomorphism. For each $\sigma \geq 1$ there exists $H(\sigma) \geq 1$ with the following property. If $\text{skew}(f(T)) \leq \sigma$ for all equilateral triangles $T \subset U$, then, for every $z \in U$ and every $r < \text{dist}(z, \mathbb{C} \setminus U)$, the inequality $M(z, r) \leq Hm(z, r)$ holds where $H = H(\sigma)$. In particular, the map $f$ is quasiconformal.

Our next result, Theorem 2, serves two purposes. On the one hand, the value $H$ from Theorem 1 gives an upper bound for the dilatation of $f$. However, this estimate is far from optimal. We may use the fact that quasiconformal mappings are differentiable almost everywhere to obtain a sharp bound on the dilatation in terms of $\sigma$. On the other hand, quasiconformality is a local property and demanding, as in Theorem 1, a uniform bound on every equilateral triangle is unnecessarily strong.

To show that $f$ is quasiconformal in $U$, it suffices to show that $f$ satisfies two conditions. First we must show that each $z \in U$ has a neighborhood $W$ such that $\text{skew}(f(T))$ is bounded for all equilateral triangles $T \subset W$. If the resulting upper bounds vary, this is not enough to get the result that $f$ is quasiconformal in $U$. However, by formulating a new concept of skew that needs to be satisfied only almost everywhere and must be bounded uniformly in $U$, and combining it with the assumption that the skew as defined previously is bounded, not necessarily uniformly, in some neighborhood of each point of $U$, we obtain both quasiconformality and a better upper bound for the maximal dilatation of $f$. The details of how to define this new notion of skew are given below.

First note that quasiconformal maps are differentiable almost everywhere by Mori’s theorem [9]. Let $\text{Skew}(f)$ denote the supremum of $\text{skew}(f(T))$ over all equilateral triangles $T$ contained in $U$. Next, for $z \in U$ and $r > 0$, let $\text{skew}(f, z, r)$ denote the least upper bound of $\text{skew}(f(T))$ over all equilateral triangles $T \subset \{w \in U : |z - w| < r\}$. Set $\text{skew}(f, z) = \lim \inf_{r \to 0} \text{skew}(f, z, r)$ and $\text{skew}(f) = \|\text{skew}(f, z)\|_{\infty}$. Below, the assumption that $\text{Skew}(f|W)$ is finite means that there is some upper bound for $\text{skew}(f(T))$ over all equilateral triangles $T$ contained in the appropriate domain $W$.

**Theorem 2.** Let $U$ be a domain in the complex plane $\mathbb{C}$, and let $f : U \to f(U)$ be an orientation-preserving homeomorphism. Suppose that each $z \in U$ has a neighborhood $W$ such that $\text{Skew}(f|W)$ is finite.

Suppose that $\sigma \geq 1$. If $\text{skew}(f) \leq \sigma$ then $f$ is $K(\sigma)$-quasiconformal where

$$K(\sigma) = \frac{\sigma^2 - 1 + \sqrt{\sigma^4 + \sigma^2 + 1}}{\sqrt{3}\sigma}.$$  

In particular, if $\text{skew}(f) = 1$ then $f$ is a conformal mapping. The upper bound $K(\sigma)$ for the maximal dilatation of $f$ is the best possible and is attained at least for certain affine mappings.

2. **Proof of the Main Theorem**

Throughout the rest of the paper we will use the following notation and conventions:

1. We define $D(z, r) = \{w \in \mathbb{C} : |z - w| \leq r\}$ and let $C(z, r)$ be the boundary of $D(z, r)$.
2. By a curve we mean the image of a not necessarily one-to-one continuous function from a closed interval into \(\mathbb{C}\).
3. All triangles (without the qualifier “topological”) will be closed Euclidean triangles.
4. Let $\mathcal{F}_\sigma$ denote the set of orientation-preserving homeomorphisms of any domain $U \subset \mathbb{C}$ into any domain $V \subset \mathbb{C}$ such that $\text{skew}(f(T)) \leq \sigma$ for all closed equilateral triangles $T \subset U$.  

Our strategy for the proof of Theorem 1 is to show first that the image of every equilateral triangle, $T$, contains a disk with radius proportional to $L(f(T))$. To do this, we naturally need the assumption of Theorem 1 for all equilateral triangles (at least in a suitable set containing this $T$) and not only for this particular $T$. Once it is known that the images of equilateral triangles are “thick” in this sense, it is easier to obtain the quantitative estimates that are required to prove that $f$ is quasiconformal, whether using the metric (Definition 1) or the analytic (Definition 2 in Section 6 below) definition of quasiconformality.

The most difficult part of the proof that the image $f(T)$ is thick is to construct another equilateral triangle with suitable additional properties, to which the assumption of Theorem 1 can then be applied. This will be done in the proof of Proposition 2 below. That proof requires delicate geometric considerations. After these strategic comments, let us now move to the proof.

The proof of Theorem 1 relies on the following proposition.

**Proposition 1.** Let $U$ be a domain containing $D(0, 1)$, let $f : U \to \mathbb{C}$ belong to $\mathcal{F}_\sigma$, and let $T$ be the triangle with vertices $0$, $1$, and $\omega = 1/2 + (\sqrt{3}/2)i$. Then there exists a disk $D$ contained in $f(T)$ such that

1. $D$ is centered at $f(p)$ where $p = 1/2 + (85\sqrt{3} \cdot 2^{-9})i = 0.5 + 0.29i$, and
2. there exists a constant $\alpha = \alpha(\sigma)$ such that the radius of $D$ is at least $\alpha L(f(T))$.

We note that if $f$ is to be quasiconformal, then, certainly, the image $f(T)$ has to contain a disk of a definite size centered at the image of the centroid of the triangle, i.e., the point $\xi = 1/2 + (\sqrt{3}/6)i$. Unfortunately, its arithmetic properties make it difficult to relate this point $\xi$ to the vertices of $T$ using equilateral triangles. The point $p$ was chosen, because it is both close to the centroid ($|\xi - p| = \sqrt{3}/(2^9 \cdot 3)$), and it is a vertex of a tiling of the plane by equilateral triangles whose vertices include the vertices of $T$. Indeed, we have $p = 1/2 - 85 \cdot 2^{-9} + 85 \cdot 2^{-8}\omega$, cf. Lemma 1. We finally observe that $p$ is closer to the horizontal side of $T$ than $\xi$.

We first derive the proof of Theorem 1 from Proposition 1. We will then focus on the proof of the latter.

**Proof of Theorem 1.** Fix $z \in U$ and $r > 0$. If $D(z, r) \subseteq U$, let $M(z, r) = \max\{|f(z) - f(w)| : w \in C(z, r)\}$ and $m(z, r) = \min\{|f(z) - f(w)| : w \in C(z, r)\}$. Denote by $z_M$ a point in $C(z, r)$ such that $|f(z_M) - f(z)| = M(z, r)$.

Since $\mathcal{F}_\sigma$ is invariant under pre- and post-composition by affine maps of the form $z \mapsto az + b$ where $a, b \in \mathbb{C}$ and $a \neq 0$, we assume that $z = 0$, $r = 1$, and $z_M = 1$. Thus $|f(0) - f(1)| = M(0, 1)$. Let $T_1$ be the equilateral triangle with vertices $0$, $1$, and $\omega$. Since $0$ and $1$ are vertices of $T_1$, we have $|f(0) - f(1)| \leq L(f(T_1))$. Hence $M(0, 1) \leq L(f(T_1))$.

By Proposition 1, the image of $T_1$ contains a disk $D$ centered at $f(p)$ and of radius at least $\alpha L(f(T_1))$.

Let us consider the isometry $A(z) = \overline{z - p}$. Let $T_2 = A(T_1)$ (see Figure 1). The triangle $T_2$ is contained in the unit disk, and $A$ maps $p$ to $0$ and $1$ to $p$. Since the vertices of $T_2$ other than $p$ lie outside of $T_1$, their images lie outside of $D$, and so we have $L(f(T_2)) \geq \alpha L(f(T_1))$.

Moreover, another application of Proposition 1 implies that $f(T_2)$ contains the disk $D(f(0), \alpha L(f(T_2)))$. Since all the points of $f(C(0, 1))$ are outside the interior of $f(T_2)$ and thus also outside the interior of $D(f(0), \alpha L(f(T_2)))$, it follows that $m(0, 1) \geq \alpha L(f(T_2))$.

Summing up these estimates, we obtain

$$m(0, 1) \geq \alpha L(f(T_2)) \geq \alpha^2 L(f(T_1)) \geq \alpha^2 M(0, 1).$$

Figure 1. Configuration of $C(0, 1)$, $T_1$ and $T_2$

3. CONSTRUCTION OF CERTAIN TRIANGLES

Proposition 1 is a consequence of the following proposition.

Proposition 2. Let $U$ be a neighborhood of $D(0, 1)$, and let $f : U \to \mathbb{C}$ be a homeomorphism onto its image such that $f \in \mathcal{F}_\sigma$. Let $T$ be the closed triangle with vertices 0, 1, and $\omega = 1/2 + (\sqrt{3}/2)i$. Let $q = p + 2^{-9}$.

Then there exist points $t_1, t_2 \in T$ such that the points $q, t_1, t_2$ form the vertices of an equilateral triangle and the inequalities $|f(t_1) - f(p)| \leq C\mu$, and $|f(p) - f(q)| \geq cL(f(T))$ hold for some constants $c = c(\sigma)$ and $C = C(\sigma)$ where $\mu = \text{dist}(f(p), \mathbb{C} \setminus f(T))$. We permit the trivial triangle where we have $t_1 = t_2 = q$.

Proof of Proposition 1 assuming Proposition 2. If $t_1 = t_2 = q$, then we have

$$cL(f(T)) \leq |f(p) - f(q)| \leq C\mu.$$ 

Otherwise, by the triangle inequality we have

$$(1) \quad |f(p) - f(q)| \leq |f(t_1) - f(p)| + |f(t_1) - f(q)|.$$ 

Since $f \in \mathcal{F}_\sigma$ and $t_1, t_2, q$ are the vertices of an equilateral triangle, we obtain

$$(2) \quad |f(t_1) - f(q)| \leq \sigma|f(t_1) - f(t_2)|.$$ 

By Proposition 2, we have $|f(t_1) - f(p)| \leq C\mu$ and $|f(t_2) - f(p)| \leq C\mu$, so that by this and the triangle inequality we get

$$|f(t_1) - f(t_2)| \leq |f(t_1) - f(p)| + |f(t_2) - f(p)| \leq 2C\mu.$$ 

By Proposition 2, we have $|f(p) - f(q)| \geq cL(f(T))$. Using this and appealing to $|f(t_1) - f(p)| \leq C\mu$ again, we obtain from (1) and (2) that

$$cL(f(T)) \leq |f(p) - f(q)| \leq C\mu + \sigma(2C\mu),$$
where

\[ \mu \geq \frac{c}{(2\sigma + 1)C} L(f(T)). \]

\[ \square \]

4. Proof of Proposition 2

Let the assumptions of Proposition 2 be satisfied. Recall that we write \( \mu = \text{dist}(f(p), C \setminus f(T)) \). The idea of our proof of Proposition 2 is to define a curve \( \gamma' \) in \( T \) going through \( p \) such that

1. for all \( t \in \gamma' \) we have \( |f(t) - f(p)| \leq \sigma \mu (1 + 2\sigma^3) \);
2. there are two points \( t_1, t_2 \in \gamma' \), such that \( q, t_1, t_2 \) form the vertices of an equilateral triangle.

The proof of Proposition 2 results from Lemma 1 and Lemma 3.

We first prove the following result. Recall that \( \omega = 1/2 + (\sqrt{3}/2)i \).

**Lemma 1.** Let \( T \) be the closed triangle with vertices 0, 1, and \( \omega \). Let \( p = 1/2 + (85\sqrt{3}/2)^{-9})i \) and \( q = p + 2^{-9} \). Then \( |f(q) - f(p)| \geq cL(f(T)) \) for some positive constant \( c = c(\sigma) \).

**Proof.** Let us first consider the tiling of the plane by equilateral triangles with vertices in \( \Lambda = \mathbb{Z} \oplus \omega \mathbb{Z} \). Define a chain of triangles \( (T_j)_{0 \leq j \leq J} \) as a sequence of triangles with vertices in \( \Lambda \) such that \( T_j \cap T_{j+1} \) is an edge for all \( j \) with \( 0 \leq j < J \). Given two edges \( (v, w) \) and \( (v', w') \), we may connect them by a chain of minimal length \( n \geq 0 \). A simple induction argument implies

\[ |f(v) - f(w)| \leq \sigma^n |f(v') - f(w')| \]

if \( f \in \mathcal{F}_{\sigma} \) is defined in a neighborhood of the chain.

Let \( T \) be as defined in our hypotheses: it is tiled by \( N = 2^{18} \) triangles of \( 2^{-9} \Lambda \), and \( [p, q] \) is an edge of this tiling. Therefore, for every other edge \( [v, w] \), it follows that

\[ |f(v) - f(w)| \leq \sigma^N |f(p) - f(q)|. \]

But each side of \( T \) is the union of less than \( N \) edges of our tiling, therefore, the triangle inequality implies

\[ L(f(T)) \leq N \sigma^N |f(p) - f(q)|. \]

\[ \square \]

We now prove a geometric lemma which will be used in the proof of Lemma 3.

**Lemma 2.** Let \( |z| \leq 1/8 \) and suppose that \( |\theta_{\pm} - (\pm \pi/3)| \leq 1/8 \). Then the angle \( \varphi \) between \( e^{i\theta_{\pm} - z} \) and \( e^{i\theta_{-} - z} \) which crosses the positive real axis belongs to \( (\pi/3, \pi) \).

**Proof.** We note that \( \cos \theta_{\pm} \geq 1/2 - 1/4 > 1/8 \geq |z| \) so that \( \varphi \) is less than \( \pi \).

For the other inequality, we will estimate \( \tan |\arg(e^{i\theta_{\pm} - z})| \) to obtain a lower bound of both angles with the horizontal line:

\[ \tan |\arg(e^{i\theta_{\pm} - z})| \geq \frac{\sqrt{3}/2 - (|z| + 1/8)}{1/2 + (|z| + 1/8)} \geq \frac{\sqrt{3}/2 - 1/4}{1/2 + 1/4} \geq \frac{2\sqrt{3} - 1}{3} \geq \frac{2}{3} > \tan(\pi/6). \]

Therefore \( \varphi \) is at least \( \pi/3 \).

\[ \square \]

Now we demonstrate how to find the curve \( \gamma' \) mentioned above.
Lemma 3. Under the assumptions of Proposition 2, there exists a curve $\gamma'$ in $T$ going through $p$ such that for all $t \in \gamma'$ we have
\[
|f(t) - f(p)| \leq \sigma \mu (1 + 2\sigma^3)
\]
and there are two points $t_1, t_2 \in \gamma'$, such that $q, t_1, t_2$ form the vertices of an equilateral triangle. We permit the trivial triangle where we have $t_1 = t_2 = q$.

Proof. We will do this in several steps. We first define a curve that will join two points of the boundary of a disk contained in $T$ (Step 1). To make sure that we will be able to find two points that form an equilateral triangle with $q$, we will extend this curve so that it has end points in a slightly larger disk, and is only close to the boundary of the larger disk when it is also close to its end points (Step 2). Then we will use Lemma 2 to find our triangle (Step 3).

Since $\sqrt{3} \geq 8/5$, it follows that $\text{dist}(p, \partial T) = 8\sqrt{3} \cdot 2^{-9} > 1/4 + 2^{-6}$, so that $D(p, 1/4 + 2^{-6})$ is contained in the interior of $T$.

Throughout the proof, for $x \in \mathbb{C}$, $R_x$ will denote the rotation centered at $x$ by $\pi/3$ radians, defined by $R_x(z) = x + (z - x)\omega$ and $\bar{R}_x$ the rotation centered at $x$ by $-\pi/3$ radians, defined by $\bar{R}_x(z) = x + (z - x)\bar{\omega}$.

Recall that we set $\omega = 1/2 + (\sqrt{3}/2)i$.

**Step 1:** There exists a curve $\gamma_2$ that satisfies the following:

1. $\gamma_2 \subset D(p, 1/4)$,
2. $\gamma_2$ has end points on $C(p, 1/4)$ which are exactly $2\pi/3$ radians apart, and
3. for all points $t \in \gamma_2$ we have $|f(t) - f(p)| \leq \sigma \mu$.

Let $p' \in \partial T$ be such that $d(f(p), f(p')) = \mu$ and let $\gamma = f^{-1}([f(p), f(p')])$. Since $D(p, 1/4)$ is contained in the interior of $T$, we may consider the component $\gamma_1$ of $\gamma \cap D(p, 1/4)$ that contains $p$, and we denote by $w \in C(p, 1/4)$ the other end point of $\gamma_1$. We take $w$ to be the first point of $C(p, 1/4)$ encountered when moving along $\gamma$ starting from $p$.

Now define
\[
\gamma_2 = R_p(\gamma_1) \cup \bar{R}_p(\gamma_1).
\]

Note that, for every $s \in \gamma_1$, $R_p(s)$ and $\bar{R}_p(s)$ are two points in $\gamma_2$ which make an angle of $2\pi/3$ seen from $p$. Since $f \in \mathcal{F}_\tau$, for all $t \in \gamma_2$, we have
\[
|f(t) - f(p)| \leq \sigma |f(s) - f(p)| \leq \sigma \mu
\]
where $s \in \gamma_1$ denotes a point such that either $t = R_p(s)$ or $t = \bar{R}_p(s)$.

**Step 2:** Let $a, b$ be the end points of $\gamma_2$. There exists a curve $\gamma_3$ such that

1. $\gamma_3 \subset D(p, 1/4) \cup D(a, 2^{-6}) \cup D(b, 2^{-6})$;
2. $\gamma_3$ has both end points on $C(p, 1/4 + \sqrt{3} \cdot 2^{-7})$;
3. for all points $t \in \gamma_3$, $|f(t) - f(p)| \leq \sigma \mu (1 + 2\sigma^3)$.

Let $D_a = D(a, 2^{-6})$ and $D_b = D(b, 2^{-6})$. Let $\gamma_{2a}$ and $\gamma_{2b}$ be the components of $\gamma_2 \cap D_a$ and $\gamma_2 \cap D_b$ that have end points at $a$ and $b$ respectively.
Clearly \( \gamma_{2a} \) also has an end point on the boundary of \( D_a \). Let \( a' \) denote an end point of \( \gamma_{2a} \) on the boundary of \( D_a \). Use the tangent line to \( D(p, 1/4) \) at \( a \) to divide \( D_a \) in half, and then divide each half into thirds. So we have divided \( D_a \) into closed sectors of \( \pi/3 \) radians with three such sectors lying entirely outside of \( D(p, 1/4) \). Let \( S_n \) denote the middle sector lying completely outside of \( D(p, 1/4) \). Then there exists \( n \in \{2, 3\} \) such that when \( \gamma_{2a} \) is rotated \( n\pi/3 \) radians in an appropriate direction about \( a \), the image of \( a' \) under the rotation will lie in \( S_n \). Let the image of \( \gamma_{2a} \) under this rotation be denoted by \( \gamma_{3a} \).

Now we will bound the quantity \(|f(t) - f(p)|\) where \( t \in \gamma_{3a} \). Fix \( t \in \gamma_{3a} \). Let \( t_0 \) be the point on \( \gamma_{2a} \) whose image under the rotation is \( t \). Without loss of generality we will assume this rotation was clockwise. Let \( t_i \) denote the image of \( t_0 \) under a clockwise rotation of \( i\pi/3 \) radians where \( i = 1, \ldots, n \). Then since \( a, t_i, q \) \((1 \leq i \leq n)\) form an equilateral triangle, we have

\[
|f(t_i) - f(a)| \leq \sigma|f(t_{i-1}) - f(a)|.
\]

Since \( a, t_0 \in \gamma_2 \) we have

\[
|f(a) - f(t_0)| \leq |f(a) - f(p)| + |f(p) - f(t_0)| \leq 2\sigma \mu
\]

and

\[
|f(a) - f(p)| \leq \sigma \mu.
\]

Thus since \( n \) is at most \( 3 \) we may apply (3) with \( n \leq 3 \), which together with the triangle inequality yields

\[
|f(t) - f(p)| \leq |f(a) - f(p)| + |f(a) - f(t)| \leq \sigma \mu + \sigma^2 |f(a) - f(t_0)| \leq \sigma \mu (1 + 2\sigma^3) \leq \sigma \mu (1 + 2\sigma^3).
\]

Furthermore \( \gamma_{3a} \) must intersect the circle \( C(p, 1/4 + \sqrt{3} \cdot 2^{-7}) \). This is because \( \gamma_{3a} \) has an end point in \( S_n \) and therefore the distance of the end point of \( \gamma_{3a} \) from \( D(p, 1/4) \) must be at least \( \cos(\pi/6) \cdot 2^{-6} = \sqrt{3} \cdot 2^{-7} \).

This is depicted in Figure 2.

We proceed similarly near \( b \) and define a curve \( \gamma_{3b} \) contained in \( D_b \) with end points at \( b \) and at some point on the intersection of the boundary of \( D_b \) and \( S_b \) (defined analogously to \( S_n \)) such that for all \( t \in \gamma_{3b} \) we have \(|f(t) - f(p)| \leq \sigma \mu (1 + 2\sigma^3)\); as above, \( \gamma_{3b} \) intersects the circle \( C(p, 1/4 + \sqrt{3} \cdot 2^{-7}) \).

Let \( \gamma_3 \) be the connected component of \( (\gamma_2 \cup \gamma_{3a} \cup \gamma_{3b}) \cap D(p, 1/4 + \sqrt{3} \cdot 2^{-7}) \) which includes points in both \( \gamma_{3a} \) and \( \gamma_{3b} \). Then for all points \( t \in \gamma_3 \),

\[
|f(t) - f(p)| \leq \sigma \mu (1 + 2\sigma^3).
\]

The curve \( \gamma' \) in Lemma 3 can be chosen as \( \gamma' = \gamma_3 \).

**Step 3:** Let \( q = p + 2^{-9} \). There exist \( t_1, t_2 \in \gamma_3 \) such that \( \{q, t_1, t_2\} \) form an equilateral triangle.

Let \( D_q \) be the smallest disk centered at \( q \) which contains \( D(p, 1/4) \). Then \( D_q \subseteq D(p, 1/4 + \sqrt{3} \cdot 2^{-7}) \) since \(|p - q| = 2^{-9} \leq \sqrt{3} \cdot 2^{-8} \). Let \( \gamma_4 \) be the connected component of \( \gamma_3 \cap D_q \) which has end points \( A \in D_a \cap D_q \) and \( B \in D_b \cap D_q \).

Note that, if we write \( a = p + |a - p|e^{i\theta_a} \) and \( A = p + |A - p|e^{i\theta_A} \), where \(|\theta_A - \theta_a|\) is chosen to be as small as possible modulo \( 2\pi \), then

\[
|\theta_A - \theta_a| \leq 2|a - A|/(1/4) \leq 2 \cdot 2^{-6}/(1/4) \leq 1/8
\]

and similarly for \( b \) and \( B \). Note that \(|\arg(a - p)| + |\arg(b - p)| = 2\pi/3 \) and \(|p - q|/(1/4) = 2^{-7} \leq 1/8 \). Therefore, by Lemma 2 applied in \( D(p, 1/4) \), the angle between \( A - q \) and \( B - q \) lies in \((\pi/3, \pi)\). Hence,
the images $A_r$ and $B_r$ of $A$ and $B$ respectively under $\tilde{R}_q$ will separate $A$ and $B$ on $\partial D_q$. Thus the image $\tilde{R}_q(\gamma_4)$ must intersect $\gamma_4$ at a point $q$, say. This gives us our desired equilateral triangle since $q$, $q'$, and the pre-image $q''$ of $q'$ form an equilateral triangle.

This completes the proof of Lemma 3.

To complete the proof of Proposition 2, we note that the points $t_1$ and $t_2$ required will be the points $q'$ and $q''$. It remains to be shown that $|f(q') - f(p)| \leq C\mu$ and $|f(q'') - f(p)| \leq C\mu$ for some constant $C$. Since $q'' \in \gamma_4 \subset \gamma_3$, we have $|f(q'') - f(p)| \leq \sigma(1 + 2\sigma^3)\mu$ by part (3) in Step 2. But also $q' \in \gamma_4$, so that for the same reason $|f(q') - f(p)| \leq \sigma(1 + 2\sigma^3)\mu$. This completes the proof of Proposition 2.

5. Proof of Theorem 2

We prove Theorem 2 by approximating $f$ by linear mappings at points where $f$ is differentiable.
Proof. Let the assumptions of Theorem 2 be satisfied. Theorem 1 implies that $f$ is locally quasiconformal and hence differentiable with $f_z \neq 0$ at almost every point of $U$. Let $z_0$ be a point of differentiability such that skew$(f, z_0) \leq \sigma$. We compute the maximum possible value for $H(z_0)$, which yields the same upper bound for the dilatation of $f$ at $z_0$. Since $H(z_0)$ is invariant under Möbius transformations we may compose with translations, a dilation and a rotation to assume that $z_0 = f(z_0) = 0$, $f_z(z_0) = 1$ and $f_z(z_0) = |f_z(z_0)| < 1$. Then $f(z) = z + f_z(z_0)\bar{z} + \epsilon(z)$ where $\epsilon(z)/|z|$ tends to 0 as $z$ tends to $z_0$, and thus skew$(f, z_0) = \text{skew}(\hat{f}, z_0)$ where $\hat{f}(z) = z + f_z(z_0)\bar{z}$. It now suffices to prove that for all affine mappings $\hat{f}$ that can arise in this way, under the assumptions of Theorem 2, the maximal dilatation of $\hat{f}$ is at most $K(\sigma)$. This then shows that also the maximal dilatation of our original mapping $f$ is at most $K(\sigma)$, as required. Thus from now on we only consider $\hat{f}$.

We will first compute the skew of $\hat{f}$, and then express $K(\hat{f})$ in terms of skew$(\hat{f})$.

Note that $|\hat{f}(a) - \hat{f}(b)| = |\hat{f}(a + v) - \hat{f}(b + v)|$, $|\hat{f}(a) - \hat{f}(b)| = |\hat{f}(\bar{a}) - \hat{f}(\bar{b})|$ and $|\hat{f}(a) - \hat{f}(b)|/|\hat{f}(a) - \hat{f}(c)| = |\hat{f}(ra) - \hat{f}(rb)|/|\hat{f}(ra) - \hat{f}(rc)|$ for all $a, b, c, v \in \mathbb{C}$ with $a \neq c$ and all $r > 0$. This implies skew$(\hat{f}(T))$ where $T$ is an equilateral triangle is invariant under translations, complex conjugation and dilations of $T$. Thus for all equilateral triangles $T$,

$$\text{skew}(\hat{f}(T)) \in \left\{ \frac{|\hat{f}(z) - \hat{f}(0)|}{|f(ze^{i\pi/3}) - \hat{f}(0)|} : |z| = 1 \right\}.$$ 

Indeed, suppose $T$ has vertices $A$, $B$ and $C$, and skew$(T) = |\hat{f}(A) - \hat{f}(B)|/|\hat{f}(A) - \hat{f}(C)|$. First we translate $A$ to the origin, and then we dilate $T$ so its side lengths are equal to 1. If $\overline{AB}$ is $\pi/3$ radians clockwise from $\overline{AC}$, it is clear that our statement is true; otherwise we take the complex conjugate of $T$ to change the orientation of $T$ and then, since skew$(\hat{f}(T))$ is invariant under complex conjugation of $T$, our claim is true.

Hence we have

$$\text{skew}(\hat{f}) = \max \left\{ \frac{|\hat{f}(z) - \hat{f}(0)|}{|f(ze^{i\pi/3}) - \hat{f}(0)|} : |z| = 1 \right\} = \max \left\{ \frac{|\hat{f}(z)|}{|f(ze^{i\pi/3})|} : |z| = 1 \right\}.$$ 

Let $\mu = f_z(z_0)$. If $\mu = 0$, then skew$(\hat{f}) = 1$, so we assume that $0 < \mu < 1$. Write $\nu = \mu + \mu^{-1} > 2$ and $\beta = e^{i\pi/6}$. Let $w \in \mathbb{C}$ with $|w| = 1$. We have

$$|\hat{f}(w)|^2 = |w + \mu\bar{w}|^2 = (w + \mu\bar{w})(\bar{w} + \mu w) = 1 + \mu^2 + \mu(w^2 + \bar{w}^2) = \mu[\nu + (w^2 + \bar{w}^2)].$$

Now we are able to maximize $|\hat{f}(\beta w)|/|\hat{f}(\beta \bar{w})|$ with respect to $w$. Set $z = w^2$ and $\alpha = e^{i\pi/3}$. Since we have assumed $|w| = 1$, we can instead maximize

$$\kappa = \left| \frac{\hat{f}(\beta w)}{\hat{f}(\beta \bar{w})} \right| = \frac{\nu + \alpha z + \bar{\alpha} \bar{z}}{\nu + \bar{\alpha} z + \alpha \bar{z}}.$$ 

We write $z = e^{iz}$, $x \in \mathbb{R}$, so that $z' = d/dx = i\bar{z}$, $z' = -i\bar{z}$. We may differentiate $\kappa$ as a function of $x$. It follows that $\kappa' = 0$ if, and only if,

$$(\alpha z - \bar{\alpha} \bar{z})(\nu + \alpha z + \alpha \bar{z}) - (\nu + \alpha z + \bar{\alpha} \bar{z})(\bar{\alpha} z - \alpha \bar{z}) = 0.$$ 

Thus

$$\nu(\alpha z - \bar{\alpha} \bar{z} - \bar{\alpha} z + \alpha \bar{z}) = z^2 - \alpha^2 + \bar{\alpha}^2 - \bar{z}^2 - z^2 - \alpha^2 + \bar{\alpha}^2 + \bar{z}^2$$

which is equivalent to

$$\nu(z + \bar{z})(\alpha - \bar{\alpha}) = 2(\bar{\alpha} - \alpha)(\bar{\alpha} + \alpha).$$
\[
\cos x = -\frac{2}{\nu} \cos \frac{\pi}{3} = -\frac{1}{\nu}.
\]

It follows that \( \sin^2 x = 1 - 1/\nu^2 \) so \( \kappa' = 0 \) for

\[
z = \frac{1}{\nu} \left(-1 + i \varepsilon \sqrt{\nu^2 - 1}\right)
\]

with \( \varepsilon \in \{\pm 1\} \). For these values of \( z \), one gets

\[
\kappa = \frac{\nu + 2 \text{Re}(\alpha z)}{\nu + 2 \text{Re}(\bar{\alpha} z)} = \frac{\nu^2 - 1 - \varepsilon \sqrt{3(\nu^2 - 1)}}{\nu^2 - 1 + \varepsilon \sqrt{3(\nu^2 - 1)}}
\]

which is maximal for \( \varepsilon = -1 \). So we obtain

\[
\text{skew}(\hat{f})^2 = \frac{\nu^2 - 1 + \sqrt{3(\nu^2 - 1)}}{\nu^2 - 1 - \sqrt{3(\nu^2 - 1)}} = \frac{(\nu^2 - 1)/3 + 1}{(\nu^2 - 1)/3 - 1} > 1.
\]

Note that \( \nu^2 - 1 > 3 \) since \( \nu > 2 \). Let us write \( \tau = \text{skew}(\hat{f}) > 1 \) so that

\[
\sqrt{(\nu^2 - 1)/3} = \frac{\tau^2 + 1}{\tau^2 - 1}, \quad \nu^2 = 3 \left(\frac{\tau^2 + 1}{\tau^2 - 1}\right)^2 + 1 = \frac{4(\tau^4 + \tau^2 + 1)}{(\tau^2 - 1)^2}
\]

and thus

\[
\mu + \mu^{-1} = \nu = \frac{2\sqrt{\tau^4 + \tau^2 + 1}}{\tau^2 - 1}.
\]

Hence

\[
\mu^2 - 2\mu \frac{\sqrt{\tau^4 + \tau^2 + 1}}{\tau^2 - 1} + 1 = 0.
\]

We compute the reduced discriminant

\[
\Delta' = \frac{\tau^4 + \tau^2 + 1}{(\tau^2 - 1)^2} - 1 = \frac{3\tau^2}{(\tau^2 - 1)^2}
\]

and we deduce from \( 0 < \mu < 1 \) that

\[
\mu = \frac{\sqrt{\tau^4 + \tau^2 + 1} - \sqrt{3}\tau}{\tau^2 - 1}.
\]

Thus

\[
K(\hat{f}) = \frac{1 + \mu}{1 - \mu} = \frac{\tau^2 - 1 + \sqrt{\tau^4 + \tau^2 + 1} - \sqrt{3}\tau}{\tau^2 - 1 - \sqrt{\tau^4 + \tau^2 + 1} + \sqrt{3}\tau} = \varphi(\tau),
\]

say. Write \( t = \sqrt{\tau^4 + \tau^2 + 1} \) and note that \( t^2 = (\tau^2 - 1)^2 + 3\tau^2 \) so that

\[
\varphi(\tau) = \frac{[(\tau^2 - 1 + t) - \sqrt{3}\tau][((\tau^2 - 1 + t) + \sqrt{3}\tau)]}{[(\tau^2 - 1) + \sqrt{3}\tau]^2 - t^2}
\]

\[
= \frac{[(\tau^2 - 1) + t]^2 - 3\tau^2}{2\sqrt{3}\tau(\tau^2 - 1)} = \frac{2[(\tau^2 - 1)^2 + t(t^2 - 1)]}{2\sqrt{3}\tau(\tau^2 - 1)}
\]

\[
= \frac{\tau^2 - 1 + \sqrt{\tau^4 + \tau^2 + 1}}{\sqrt{3}\tau}.
\]

Differentiation shows that \( \varphi(\tau) \) is an increasing function of \( \tau \), so that since \( \tau = \text{skew}(\hat{f}) = \text{skew}(f, z_0) \leq \sigma \), we have

\[
K(\hat{f}) = \varphi(\tau) \leq \varphi(\sigma) = \frac{\sigma^2 - 1 + \sqrt{\sigma^4 + \sigma^2 + 1}}{\sqrt{3}\sigma}.
\]

Hence \( K(f) \leq \varphi(\sigma) = K(\sigma) \) as defined in Theorem 2.
If $\mu \in (0, 1)$ is given and if $f(z) = z + \mu z$, then we may take $\tilde{f} = f$ and $\sigma = \tau$ in the above argument, and we see that $K(f) = K(\sigma)$. Thus the upper bound in Theorem 2 is best possible. \hfill \square

6. An Alternative Proof of the Quasiconformality of Mappings Satisfying the Hypotheses of Theorem 1

From Proposition 1, there are several ways of establishing that a mapping $f$ satisfying the hypotheses of Theorem 1 satisfies the analytic definition of quasiconformality which is equivalent to Definition 1. For $|\xi| = 1$, we denote by $\partial_\xi f(z)$ the directional derivative $\lim_{t \downarrow 0}(f(z + t\xi) - f(z))/(t\xi)$.

**Definition 2.** We say that a homeomorphism $f : U \to V$ is absolutely continuous on lines if for every rectangle $R = \{(x, y) : a < x < b, c < y < d\}$ with $\overline{R} \subset U$, $f$ is absolutely continuous on a.e. interval $I_x = \{(x, y) : c < y < d\}$ and a.e. interval $I_y = \{(x, y) : a < x < b\}$. An orientation-preserving homeomorphism $f$ is called quasiconformal if $f$ is absolutely continuous on lines and there exists $K \geq 1$ such that

$$\max_{\xi} |\partial_\xi f(z)| \leq K \min_{\xi} |\partial_\xi f(z)| \text{ a.e.}$$

Proposition 1 tells us that the image of every equilateral triangle, $T$, contains a disk with radius proportional to $L(f(T))$. In [6, Section 4.5], Hubbard uses this to prove that the map belongs to the Sobolev space $W^{1,2}_{loc}$ by an approximation argument. We propose another approach which shows directly that the map satisfies the ACL property.

**Proof.** First we show that $f$ is absolutely continuous on lines. This part of the proof parallels Pfluger’s proof that a mapping satisfying the geometric definition of quasiconformality is absolutely continuous on lines. His proof can be found in [10] and is reproduced in English in [8], p. 162. We fix a rectangle $R$ and draw a rectangle of height proportional to $L(f(T))$. In [6, Section 4.5], Hubbard uses this to prove that the map belongs to the Sobolev space $W^{1,2}_{loc}$ by an approximation argument. We propose another approach which shows directly that the map satisfies the ACL property.

We consider the collection of rectangles $\{R_k\}_{k=1}^n$ where each $R_k$ has height $\delta$ and has its bottom side contained in the $k$th sub-interval. More precisely, fix $k$ and draw a rectangle of height $\delta$ above $(z_k^*, z_k)$. Set $N_k$ equal to the smallest integer greater than or equal to $\lceil\frac{x_k^* - x_k}{\delta}\rceil$. We draw $N_k$ equilateral triangles in $R_k$. The triangles all have one side on the interval $[z_k^*, z_k]$ and they overlap only at their vertices. The first $N_k - 1$ triangles have width $\delta$ and the last triangle has width $x_k^* - x_k - \delta(N_k - 1)$. Let $\Delta_{k,i}$ denote the side length of the $i$th triangle for $1 \leq i \leq N_k$ and set $\Delta_{k,0} = 0$. Set $N = \sum_{k=1}^n N_k$. Then $N \leq \sum_{k=1}^n \lceil\frac{x_k^* - x_k}{\delta}\rceil + n$.

Let $\alpha$ be as in Proposition 1. By Proposition 1, the image of each of our triangles must contain a disk of radius comparable to the greatest distance between the images of the vertices of the triangle. Thus the total area of all the images of our rectangles of height $\delta$ and width $x_k^* - x_k$ is greater than or equal to

$$\sum_{k=1}^n \sum_{j=1}^{N_k} \pi \alpha^2 \left( |f(x_k + \sum_{i=1}^j \Delta_{k,i}, y) - f(x_k + \sum_{i=1}^j \Delta_{k,i-1}, y)|^2 \right).$$
Then by the Cauchy–Schwarz inequality, (4) is greater than or equal to

\[
\frac{\pi \alpha^2}{N} \left( \sum_{k=1}^{n} \sum_{j=1}^{N_k} |f(x_k + \sum_{i=1}^{j} \Delta_{k,i}, y) - f(x_k + \sum_{i=1}^{j} \Delta_{k,i-1}, y)|^2 \right) 
\geq \frac{\pi \alpha^2}{N} \left( \sum_{k=1}^{n} |f(z_k^*) - f(z_k)|^2 \right) 
\geq \frac{\pi \alpha^2}{N} \left( \sum_{k=1}^{n} |f(z_k) - f(z_k)|^2 \right) 
= \frac{\pi \alpha^2}{N} \left( \sum_{k=1}^{n} |f(z_k^*) - f(z_k)| \right) 
\]

Recall that \( A(y) \) is defined to be the area in \( f(R) \) beneath the image of the line segment \( I_y \). Since the sum of the areas of the images of our rectangles of height \( \delta \) and width \( x_k^* - x_k \) is less than or equal to \( A(y + \delta) - A(y) \), we have

\[
\pi \alpha^2 \left( \sum_{k=1}^{n} |f(z_k^*) - f(z_k)| \right) \leq \left( \frac{A(y + \delta) - A(y)}{\delta} \right) \left( \sum_{k=1}^{n} |x_k^* - x_k| + \delta n \right) .
\]

Since we chose \( y \) at which \( A \) is differentiable, letting \( \delta \to 0 \) gives

\[
\pi \alpha^2 \left( \sum_{k=1}^{n} |f(z_k^*) - f(z_k)| \right) \leq A'(y) \left( \sum_{k=1}^{n} |x_k^* - x_k| \right) .
\]

Since \( A'(y) \) exists almost everywhere this gives absolute continuity on almost every horizontal line segment. The proof is analogous for vertical line segments.

To then conclude that \( f \) is quasiconformal we note that since \( f \) is open and absolutely continuous on lines, \( f \) is differentiable almost everywhere by a theorem of Gehring and Lehto [4]. Now the computations in the proof of Theorem 2 show that

\[
\max_{\xi} |\partial_\xi f(z)| \leq K(\sigma) \min_{\xi} |\partial_\xi f(z)|
\]

at points where \( f \) is differentiable and hence almost everywhere. According to the analytic definition of quasiconformality (Definition 2), the mapping \( f \) is quasiconformal.

\[\square\]

7. Appendix by Colleen Ackermann: An Analogue of the Main Theorem in Hilbert Spaces of Dimension at Least Three

In dimensions three and higher the proof of an analogue of Theorem 1 is surprisingly simpler than the proof of Theorem 1. Furthermore the proof itself gives an elegant bound on \( K(\sigma) \).

**Theorem 3.** Let \( \mathcal{H}_1 \) and \( \mathcal{H}_2 \) be Hilbert spaces with \( \dim(\mathcal{H}_1) = \dim(\mathcal{H}_2) \geq 3 \) and let \( U \subset \mathcal{H}_1, V \subset \mathcal{H}_2 \) be domains. Suppose that \( f : U \to V \) is a homeomorphism and that for all closed equilateral triangles \( T \subset U \), \( \text{skew}(f(T)) \leq \sigma \). Then \( f \) is \( \sigma^3 \)-quasiconformal when using the metric definition of quasiconformality.

Note that Definition 1 can be used to define quasiconformal mappings also between Hilbert spaces, whether finite-dimensional or infinite-dimensional. The same discussion on the locality of quasiconformality made in the introduction applies here as well and enables us to weaken the hypothesis that \( \text{skew}(f(T)) \leq \sigma \) holds for all equilateral triangles.

**Proof.** Fix a point \( p \in U \), a positive number \( r \) with \( r < \text{dist}(p, \partial U) \) and points \( a_1, a_2 \in \partial B(p, r) \). We will prove \( |f(a_1) - f(p)| \leq \sigma^3|f(p) - f(a_2)| \). Let \( P \subset \mathcal{H}_1 \) be the affine plane containing \( \{p, a_1, a_2\} \) and let us
fix a point $q \in \mathcal{H}_1$ so that $\vec{pq}$ is orthogonal to $P$ and let us restrict ourselves to the three-dimensional space containing $\{p, a_1, a_2, q\}$ that we may identify with $\mathbb{R}^3$. For the sake of convenience, we will consider spherical coordinates $(r, \theta, \varphi)$ with origin $p$ so that $(r, \theta, \pi/2)$ reduces to polar coordinates in $P$ and so that $a_1$ and $a_2$ have coordinates $(r, \pm\theta/2, \pi/2)$ where $\theta \in (0, \pi]$ denotes the non-oriented angle between $\vec{pa}_1$ and $\vec{pa}_2$.

**Case 1:** If $\theta \leq 2\pi/3$, then we may find $\varphi \in [0, \pi/2]$ such that $2\sin \varphi \cos(\theta/2) = 1$ and we set $b = (r, 0, \varphi)$. Both triangles $T_j$ with vertices $\{p, a_j, b\}$, $j = 1, 2$, are equilateral by construction and they share a common side with end points at $b$ and $p$.

Thus

$$|f(p) - f(a_1)| \leq \sigma |f(p) - f(b)| \leq \sigma^2 |f(p) - f(a_2)|.$$

**Case 2:** If $\theta > 2\pi/3$, consider the equilateral triangle $T_0$ with vertices $p, a_1$ and $b'$ where $b'$ is the image of $a_1$ under a rotation in $P$ of angle $\pi/3$ so that the smaller angle between $b'$ and $a_2$ is less than or equal to $2\pi/3$. Thus by Case 1

$$|f(p) - f(b')| \leq \sigma^3 |f(p) - f(a_2)|.$$

Then since the triangle $T_0$ has sides with endpoints at $p$ and $a_1$, and $p$ and $b'$ we have

$$|f(p) - f(a_1)| \leq \sigma |f(p) - f(b')| \leq \sigma^3 |f(p) - f(a_2)|.$$

\[\square\]

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The key point of both of our proofs of Theorem 1 given here is contained in Proposition 1, where it is proved that the image of a triangle contains a disk of a definite size, exhibiting a certain length-area estimate. This approach goes back to Pflüger and was pushed forward by P. Koskela and S. Rogovin who proved that the ACL property of a homeomorphism $f$ between open sets of $\mathbb{R}^n$, $n \geq 2$, could be established from an $L^1$-control of

$$k_f = \liminf_{r \to 0} \left( \frac{\text{diam}(f(D(x,r)))^n}{|f(D(x,r))|} \right)^{1/(n-1)}$$

where $|f(D(x,r))|$ denotes the Lebesgue measure of $f(D(x,r))$; see [7] for details. The authors would like to thank Pekka Koskela for mentioning this similarity.

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Colleen Ackermann, St. Mary’s College of Maryland, Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, 47645 College Drive, St. Mary’s City, Maryland 20686, United States
E-mail address: ctackermann@smcm.edu

Peter Haïssinsky, Université Paul Sabatier, Institut de Mathématiques de Toulouse, 118 route de Narbonne, 31062 Toulouse Cedex 9, France
Current address: Aix Marseille Univ, CNRS, Centrale Marseille, I2M, Marseille, France
E-mail address: phaissin@math.cnrs.fr

Aimo Hinkkanen, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Department of Mathematics, 1409 W. Green Street, Urbana, Illinois 61801, United States
E-mail address: aimo@math.uiuc.edu