ON THE $b$-ARY EXPANSIONS OF $\log(1 + \frac{1}{a})$ AND $e$

YANN BUGEAUD AND DONG HAN KIM

Abstract. Let $b \geq 2$ be an integer and $\xi$ an irrational real number. We prove that, if the irrationality exponent of $\xi$ is equal to 2 or slightly greater than 2, then the $b$-ary expansion of $\xi$ cannot be ‘too simple’, in a suitable sense. Our result applies, among other classical numbers, to badly approximable numbers, non-zero rational powers of $e$, and $\log(1 + \frac{1}{a})$, provided that the integer $a$ is sufficiently large. It establishes an unexpected connection between the irrationality exponent of a real number and its $b$-ary expansion.

1. Introduction and Main Result

Throughout the present paper, $b$ always denotes an integer greater than or equal to 2 and $\xi$ a real number. There exists a unique infinite sequence $(a_j)_{j \geq 1}$ of integers from $\{0, 1, \ldots, b-1\}$, called the $b$-ary expansion of $\xi$, such that

$$\xi = \lfloor \xi \rfloor + \sum_{j \geq 1} \frac{a_j}{b^j}$$

(1.1)

and $a_j \neq b-1$ for infinitely many indices $j$. Here, $\lfloor \cdot \rfloor$ denotes the integer part function. Clearly, the sequence $(a_j)_{j \geq 1}$ is ultimately periodic if, and only if, $\xi$ is rational.

The real number $\xi$ is called normal to base $b$ if, for any positive integer $k$, each one of the $b^k$ blocks of $k$ digits from $\{0, 1, \ldots, b-1\}$ occurs in the $b$-ary expansion $a_1a_2\ldots$ of $\xi$ with the same frequency $1/b^k$. The first explicit example of a number normal to base 10, namely the number

$$0.1234567891011121314\ldots,$$

whose sequence of digits is the concatenation of all positive integers ranged in increasing order, was given in 1933 by Champernowne [15]; see the monograph [13].
for further results. Almost all real numbers (here and below, ‘almost all’ always
refers to the Lebesgue measure) are normal to every base \(b\), but proving that a
specific number, like \(e\), \(\pi\), \(\sqrt{2}\) or \(\log 2\) is normal to some base remains a challenging
open problem, which seems to be completely out of reach.

In the present paper, we focus our attention to apparently simpler questions.
We take a point of view from combinatorics on words. Let \(\mathcal{A}\) be a finite set called
an alphabet and denote by \(|\mathcal{A}|\) its cardinality. A word over \(\mathcal{A}\) is a finite or infinite
sequence of elements of \(\mathcal{A}\). For a (finite or infinite) word \(x = x_1x_2\ldots\) written
over \(\mathcal{A}\), let \(n \mapsto p(n,x)\) denote its subword complexity function which counts the
number of different subwords of length \(n\) occurring in \(x\), that is,
\[
p(n,x) = \#\{x_{j+1}x_{j+2}\ldots x_{j+n} : j \geq 0\}, \quad n \geq 1.
\]
Clearly, we have
\[
1 \leq p(n,x) \leq |\mathcal{A}|^n, \quad n \geq 1.
\]
If \(x\) is ultimately periodic, then there exists an integer \(C\) such that \(p(n,x) \leq C\) for
\(n \geq 1\). Otherwise, we have
\[
p(n+1,x) \geq p(n,x) + 1, \quad n \geq 1,
\]
thus \(p(n,x) \geq n + 1\) for \(n \geq 1\). There exist uncountably many infinite words \(s\) over
\(\{0,1\}\) such that \(p(n,s) = n + 1\) for \(n \geq 1\). These words are called Sturmian words.
Classical references on combinatorics on words and on Sturmian sequences include
[18, 22, 9].

A natural way to measure the complexity of the real number \(\xi\) written in base \(b\)
as in (1.1) is to count the number of distinct blocks of given length in the infinite
word \(a = a_1a_2\ldots\). Thus, for \(n \geq 1\), we set \(p(n,\xi,b) = p(n,a)\). Obviously, we have
\[
p(n,\xi,b) = \#\{a_{j+1}a_{j+2}\ldots a_{j+n} : j \geq 0\}, \quad n \geq 1,
\]
and
\[
1 \leq p(n,\xi,b) \leq b^n, \quad n \geq 1,
\]
where both inequalities are sharp.

If \(\xi\) is normal to base \(b\), then \(p(n,\xi,b) = b^n\) for every positive integer \(n\). Clearly,
the converse does not always hold. To establish a good lower bound for \(p(n,\xi,b)\)
is a first step towards the confirmation that the real number \(\xi\) is normal to base \(b\).
This point of view has been taken by Ferenczi and Mauduit \cite{17} in 1997. It follows from their approach (see also \cite{8}) that we have
\[
\lim_{n \to +\infty} \left( p(n, \xi, b) - n \right) = +\infty,
\]
for every algebraic irrational number $\xi$ and every integer $b \geq 2$. Subsequently, by means of a new transcendence criterion established in \cite{6}, their result was improved in \cite{4} as follows.

**Theorem 1.1.** For every integer $b \geq 2$, every algebraic irrational number $\xi$ satisfies
\[
\lim_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n, \xi, b)}{n} = +\infty.
\]

Much less is known for specific transcendental numbers. The only result available so far was obtained in \cite{3} (see also Section 8.5 of \cite{13}), as the consequence of two combinatorial statements established in \cite{11} and \cite{5} on the structure of Sturmian words. Before stating this result, we recall a basic notion from Diophantine approximation.

**Definition 1.2.** The irrationality exponent $\mu(\xi)$ of an irrational real number $\xi$ is the supremum of the real numbers $\mu$ such that the inequality
\[
\left| \xi - \frac{p}{q} \right| < \frac{1}{q^\mu}
\]
has infinitely many solutions in rational numbers $\frac{p}{q}$.

The theory of continued fraction implies that every irrational real number $\xi$ satisfies $\mu(\xi) \geq 2$. Combined with an easy covering argument, we get that the irrationality exponent of almost every real number is equal to 2. Theorem 1 of \cite{3}, reproduced below, extends the result of Ferenczi and Mauduit mentioned above to real numbers whose irrationality exponent is equal to 2 (recall that, by Roth’s theorem \cite{23}, the irrationality exponent of every real algebraic irrational number is equal to 2).

**Theorem 1.3.** For every integer $b \geq 2$, every irrational real number $\xi$ whose irrationality exponent is equal to 2 satisfies
\[
\lim_{n \to +\infty} \left( p(n, \xi, b) - n \right) = +\infty.
\]
Theorem 1.3 applies to a wide class of classical numbers, including non-zero rational powers of $e$, badly approximable numbers, $\tan \frac{1}{a}$, where $a$ is a positive integer, etc. Further examples of real numbers whose irrationality exponent is known to be equal to 2 are listed in [3].

Theorem 1.3 covers all what is known at present on the $b$-ary expansion of transcendental numbers. The main result of the present paper is the following considerable improvement of Theorem 1.3.

**Theorem 1.4.** Let $b \geq 2$ be an integer and $\xi$ an irrational real number. If $\mu$ denotes the irrationality exponent of $\xi$, then

$$\liminf_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n,\xi,b)}{n} \geq 1 + \frac{1-2\mu(\mu-1)(\mu-2)}{\mu^3(\mu-1)}. \tag{1.3}$$

and

$$\limsup_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n,\xi,b)}{n} \geq 1 + \frac{1-2\mu(\mu-1)(\mu-2)}{3\mu^3 - 6\mu^2 + 4\mu - 1}. \tag{1.4}$$

In particular, every irrational real number $\xi$ whose irrationality exponent is equal to 2 satisfies

$$\liminf_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n,\xi,b)}{n} \geq \frac{9}{8} \quad \text{and} \quad \limsup_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n,\xi,b)}{n} \geq \frac{8}{7}. \tag{1.5}$$

We display an immediate consequence of Theorem 1.4.

**Theorem 1.5.** For any integer $b \geq 2$ we have

$$\liminf_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n,e,b)}{n} \geq \frac{9}{8} \quad \text{and} \quad \limsup_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n,e,b)}{n} \geq \frac{8}{7}. \tag{1.6}$$

Theorem 1.4 establishes an unexpected connection between the irrationality exponent of a real number and its $b$-ary expansion. It gives a non-trivial result on the $b$-ary expansion of a real number $\xi$ when $2 \leq \mu(\xi) < 2.1914\ldots$ It applies to a much wider class of classical numbers than Theorem 1.3, which includes in particular the transcendental number $\log(1 + \frac{1}{a})$, where $a$ is a large positive integer. More examples are given in Section 2. Theorem 1.4 is sharp up to the values of the numerical constants occurring in (1.3) to (1.5).

The present paper illustrates the fruitful interplay between combinatorics on words and Diophantine approximation, which has already led recently to several recent progress. The proof of Theorem 1.4 given in Section 3, is mostly combinatorial and essentially self-contained.
2. A further result, comments, and examples

A key ingredient for the proof of Theorem 1.4 is the study of a complexity function which takes into account the smallest return time of a factor of an infinite word. For an infinite word \( x = x_1x_2 \ldots \) and an integer \( n \geq 1 \), set
\[
r(n, x) = \min \{ m \geq 1 : x_i \ldots x_{i+n-1} = x_{m-n} \ldots x_m \text{ for some } i \text{ with } 1 \leq i \leq m-n \}.
\]
Said differently, \( r(n, x) \) denotes the length of the smallest prefix of \( x \) containing two (possibly overlapping) occurrences of some word of length \( n \). The function \( n \mapsto r(n, x) \) has been introduced and studied in [14], where the following two assertions are established. For every infinite word \( x \) which is not ultimately periodic, there exist arbitrarily large integers \( n \) such that \( r(n, x) \geq 2n + 1 \). The only infinite words \( x \) such that \( r(n, x) \leq 2n + 1 \) for \( n \geq 1 \) and which are not ultimately periodic are the Sturmian words.

Let \( \xi \) be an irrational real number and \( b \geq 2 \) be an integer. Write \( \xi \) in base \( b \) as in (1.1) and set \( a = a_1a_2 \ldots \). For \( n \geq 1 \), set \( r(n, \xi, b) = r(n, a) \). The following result asserts that, if the irrationality exponent of \( \xi \) is not too large, then the function \( n \mapsto r(n, \xi, b) \) cannot increase too slowly.

**Theorem 2.1.** Let \( b \geq 2 \) be an integer and \( \xi \) an irrational real number. If \( \mu \) denotes the irrationality exponent of \( \xi \), then
\[
\limsup_{n \to +\infty} \frac{r(n, \xi, b)}{n} \geq 2 + \frac{1 - 2\mu(\mu - 1)(\mu - 2)}{3\mu^3 - 6\mu^2 + 4\mu - 1}.
\]  
(2.1)
In particular, every irrational real number \( \xi \) whose irrationality exponent is equal to 2 satisfies
\[
\limsup_{n \to +\infty} \frac{r(n, \xi, b)}{n} \geq \frac{15}{7}.
\]  
(2.2)

By Lemma 3.1 below, \( p(n, \xi, b) \geq r(n, \xi, b) - n \) holds for all integers \( n \geq 1 \), \( b \geq 2 \) and every irrational real number \( \xi \). Thus, (1.4) and the second assertion of (1.5) are immediate consequences of (2.1) and (2.2), respectively.

We will establish Theorems 1.4 and 2.1 simultaneously in Section 3. Our key ingredient is a purely combinatorial auxiliary result, stated as Theorem 3.3 below.

We stress that, even for real numbers whose irrationality exponent is equal to 2, Theorem 1.4 improves Theorem 1.3. Indeed, Aberkane [2] proved the existence of
infinite words $x$ with the property that
\[
\lim_{n \to +\infty} p(n, x) - n = +\infty \quad \text{and} \quad \lim_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n, x)}{n} = 1.
\]
Furthermore, he established in [1] that, for any real number $\delta$ with $\delta > 1$, there are infinite words $x$ satisfying
\[
1 < \liminf_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n, x)}{n} < \limsup_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n, x)}{n} \leq \delta.
\]
See also Heinis [19, 20] for further results on words with small subword complexity.

Independently, Kmôsek [21] and Shallit [24] (see also Section 7.6 of [13]) established that the real number $\xi_{KS} := \sum_{k \geq 1} 2^{-2^k}$ has a bounded continued fraction expansion. In particular, it satisfies $\mu(\xi_{KS}) = 2$. Since
\[
\limsup_{n \to +\infty} \frac{r(n, \xi_{KS}, 2)}{n} = \frac{5}{2} \quad \text{and} \quad \liminf_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n, \xi_{KS}, 2)}{n} = \frac{3}{2},
\]
this shows that the value $\frac{15}{7}$ in (2.2) cannot be replaced by a real number greater than $\frac{5}{2}$. Also, the value $\frac{9}{8}$ in (1.5) cannot be replaced by a real number greater than $\frac{3}{2}$. Actually, with some additional effort and a case-by-case analysis, it is possible to replace the value $\frac{15}{7}$ in (2.2) and $\frac{9}{8}$ in (1.5) by slightly larger numbers; see the additional comments at the end of Section 3. We have, however, chosen to present an elegant, short proof of Theorem 2.1 rather than a more complicated proof of a slightly sharper version of it.

It has been proved in [12] (see also Section 7.6 of [13]) that, for every real number $\mu \geq 2$, the irrationality exponent of $\xi_{\mu} := \sum_{k \geq 1} 2^{-\lfloor \mu^k \rfloor}$ is equal to $\mu$. Since $p(n, \xi_{\mu}, 2) = O(n)$, this shows that Theorems [14] and [21] are best possible up to the values of the numerical constants.

Any real number whose sequence of partial quotients is bounded has its irrationality exponent equal to 2, thus it satisfies (1.5) and (2.2), and its expansion in an integer base $b$ cannot be ‘too simple’.

Theorems [14] and [21] give non-trivial results on the $b$-ary expansion of a real number $\xi$ when $2 \leq \mu(\xi) < 2.1914\ldots$. By means of a specific analysis of repetitions in Sturmian words, we were able in [14] to extend Theorem [13] to real numbers whose irrationality exponent is less than or equal to $\frac{5}{2}$. Note that if $f = f_1 f_2 \ldots$
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denotes the Fibonacci word \( f = 01001010 \ldots \) (that is, the fixed point of the substitution \( 0 \mapsto 01, 1 \mapsto 0 \); this is a Sturmian word), then the real number \( \xi_f := \sum_{k \geq 1} 2^{-f_k} \) satisfies \( \mu(\xi_f) = \frac{3+\sqrt{5}}{2} = 2.618 \ldots \) and \( p(n, \xi_f, 2) = n + 1 \) for \( n \geq 1 \).

An important feature of Theorems 1.4 and 2.1 is that they apply not only to real numbers whose irrationality exponent is equal to 2, but also to real numbers whose irrationality exponent is slightly larger than 2. To prove that the irrationality exponent of a given real number is equal to 2 is often a very difficult problem, while it is sometimes possible to bound its value from above. For example, Alladi and Robinson [7] (who improved earlier results of A. Baker [10]) and Danilov [16] established that, for any positive integer \( s \), the irrationality exponents of \( \log(1 + \frac{s}{t}) \) and \( \sqrt{t^2 - s^2} \arcsin \frac{s}{t} \) are bounded from above by a function of \( t \) which tends to 2 as the integer \( t \) tends to infinity. The next statement then follows at once from Theorem 1.4.

**Theorem 2.2.** Let \( \varepsilon \) be a positive real number. For any positive integer \( s \), there exists an integer \( t_0 \) such that, for any integer \( t > t_0 \), we have

\[
\liminf_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n, \log(1 + \frac{s}{t}), b)}{n} \geq \frac{9}{8} - \varepsilon
\]

and

\[
\liminf_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n, \sqrt{t^2 - s^2} \arcsin \frac{s}{t}, b)}{n} \geq \frac{9}{8} - \varepsilon.
\]

Using the results from [16, 7], it is easy to give a suitable explicit value for \( t_0 \) in terms of \( s \) and \( \varepsilon \). In particular, there exists an absolute positive constant \( c \) such that, if \( s, t \) are integers with \( s \geq 2 \) and \( t \geq s^c \), then

\[
\liminf_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n, \log(1 + \frac{s}{t}), b)}{n} \geq \frac{9}{8} - 4 \frac{\log s}{\log t}.
\]

Up to now, not a single result was known on the \( b \)-ary expansion of the transcendental real number \( \log(1 + \frac{1}{a}) \).

3. Proofs

We start with establishing a relationship between the subword complexity function of an infinite word \( x \) and the function \( n \mapsto r(n, x) \).

Here and below, for integers \( i, j \) with \( 1 \leq i \leq j \), we write \( x_{i:j} \) for the factor \( x_i x_{i+1} \ldots x_j \) of the word \( x = x_1 x_2 \ldots \).
Lemma 3.1. For any infinite word $x$ and any positive integer $n$, we have
\[ p(n, x) \geq r(n, x) - n. \]

Proof. It follows from the definition of $r(n, x)$ that the $r(n, x) - 1 - (n - 1)$ factors of length $n$ of $x^{r(n, x)}$ are all distinct. Since $x^{r(n, x)}$ is a factor of $x^{r(n, x) - 1}$, we have
\[ p(n, x) \geq p(n, x^{r(n, x) - 1}) = p(n, x^{r(n, x)}) = r(n, x) - n. \] □

We stress that there is no analogue lower bound for the subword complexity function of $x$ in terms of $n \mapsto r(n, x)$.

For our combinatorial analysis, it is convenient to introduce two combinatorial exponents which measure the repetitions in an infinite word.

Definition 3.2. Let $x$ be an infinite word. The exponent of repetition of $x$, denoted by $\text{rep}(x)$, is the quantity
\[ \text{rep}(x) = \liminf_{n \to +\infty} \frac{r(n, x)}{n}. \]
The uniform exponent of repetition of $x$, denoted by $\text{Rep}(x)$, is the quantity
\[ \text{Rep}(x) = \limsup_{n \to +\infty} \frac{r(n, x)}{n}. \]

The key ingredient for the proof of Theorem 2.1 is the following combinatorial theorem.

Theorem 3.3. Any infinite word $x$ which is not ultimately periodic satisfies $\text{Rep}(x) \geq 2$,
\[ \text{Rep}(x) \geq \text{rep}(x) + \frac{1}{1 + \text{rep}(x) + (\text{rep}(x))^2}, \] (3.1)
and
\[ \liminf_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n, x)}{n} \geq \text{rep}(x) - 1 + \frac{1}{(\text{rep}(x))^3}. \] (3.2)

Proof. The first assertion of Theorem 3.3 has been established in [14]. It only remains for us to prove (3.1) and (3.2).

Let $x = x_1x_2\ldots$ be an infinite word which is not ultimately periodic. Without any loss of generality, we may assume that $\text{rep}(x)$ is finite. Set $\rho = \text{rep}(x)$. Since (3.1) and (3.2) trivially hold for $\rho \leq \frac{8}{5}$, we also assume that $\rho > \frac{8}{5}$. 
Let $\varepsilon$ be a positive real number with $\varepsilon < \frac{1}{10}$ and $n_0 \geq 3 \varepsilon^2$ be such that

$$(\rho - \varepsilon)n \leq r(n, x), \quad \text{for } n \geq \frac{n_0}{8\rho}.$$ 

By Theorem 2.3 of [14], there are arbitrarily large integers $n$ such that $r(n + 1, x) \geq r(n, x) + 2$. Let $n > n_0$ be an integer such that $r(n + 1, x) > r(n, x) + 1$ and define $\alpha$ by setting $r(n, x) = \alpha n$. This implies that the word $x_{(\alpha - 1)n + 1}^\alpha$ of length $n$ has two occurrences in $x_1^\alpha$ and that these two occurrences are not followed by the same letter. Let $m_1$ be the index at which the first occurrence of $x_{(\alpha - 1)n + 1}^\alpha$ starts. We have $m_1 + n - 1 < \alpha n$ and the letters $x_{m_1 + n}$ and $x_{\alpha n + 1}$ are different.

Let $\beta$ be such that $r(n + 1, x) = \beta (n + 1)$. Since $r(n + 1, x) \geq r(n, x) + 2$, we have $\beta (n + 1) \geq \alpha n + 2$, that is $1 + (\beta - 1)(n + 1) \geq (\alpha - 1)n + 2$. Then, the word $x_{(\beta - 1)(n + 1) + 1}^\beta$ of length $n + 1$ has two occurrences in $x_1^\beta$. Let $m_2$ be the index at which its first occurrence starts. We have $m_2 < (\beta - 1)(n + 1) + 1$.

If $\alpha \geq \rho + 2$, then $\beta (n + 1) \geq (\rho + 2)n + 2$ and we deduce that $\beta \geq \rho + 1$ since $n > n_0 > \rho + 1$.

We assume that $\alpha < \rho + 2$ and

$$\frac{1 - \beta + \alpha - \varepsilon}{\beta - 1} > \frac{1 + \rho}{(\rho - \varepsilon)^2} \quad \text{(3.3)}$$

and we will get a contradiction.

Consider the word $V_n := x_{(\beta - 1)(n + 1) + 1}^\alpha$ of length

$$v_n = (1 - \beta + \alpha)n - \beta + 1.$$ 

Observe that $\rho - \varepsilon > \frac{8}{5} - \frac{1}{10} \geq \frac{3}{2}$ implies that $\beta \geq \frac{3}{2}$ and check that, by (3.3),

$$v_n \geq (\beta - 1) \left(1 + \frac{\rho}{\rho^2} n - (\beta - 1) \geq \frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{n}{\rho} - 1\right) \geq \frac{n}{4\rho},$$

since $n \geq 2\rho$.

The word $V_n$ is a proper suffix of $x_{(\alpha - 1)n + 1}^\alpha$ and we have

$$V_n = x_{(\beta - 1)(n + 1) + 1}^\alpha = x_{m_2 + v_n - 1}^{m_2 + v_n} = x_{m_1 + n - v_n}^{m_1 + n - v_n}.$$ 

If $m_2 = m_1 + n - v_n$, then $x_{m_2 + v_n} = x_{m_1 + n}$ and we deduce from $x_{m_2 + v_n} = x_{\alpha n + 1}$ that $x_{m_1 + n} = x_{\alpha n + 1}$, a contradiction with our choice of $n$. Consequently, the word $V_n$ has (at least) three occurrences in $x_1^\alpha$. Set

$$j_3 = (\beta - 1)(n + 1) + 1.$$
Let \( j_1, j_2 \) with \( j_1 < j_2 < j_3 \) be the indices at which the two other occurrences of \( x_{j_3}^{\alpha n} \) start. In particular, the letters \( x_{j_1 + v_n} \) and \( x_{j_2 + v_n} \) must be different.

The proof decomposes into five steps. We show that \( j_2 \) and \( j_1 \) cannot be too small and that the three occurrences of \( V_n \) in \( x_1^{\alpha n} \) overlap. We conclude in Step 5 that the letters \( x_{j_1 + v_n} \) and \( x_{j_2 + v_n} \) must be the same. This contradiction shows that (3.3) cannot hold.

For a finite word \( W \) and a real number \( t > 1 \), we denote by \((W)^t\) the word equal to the concatenation of \( \lfloor t \rfloor \) copies of the word \( W \) followed by the prefix of \( W \) of length \( \lceil t - \lfloor t \rfloor \rceil \times \) the length of \( W \), where \( \lceil x \rceil \) denotes the smallest integer greater than or equal to \( x \). We say that \((W)^t\) is the \( t \)-th power of \( W \).

Step 1. Since \( v_n \geq \frac{4}{5} \rho \), our choice of \( n_0 \) implies that
\[
(\rho - \varepsilon)v_n \leq r(v_n, x) \leq j_2 + v_n - 1,
\]
thus we get
\[
j_2 \geq (\rho - 1 - \varepsilon)v_n + 1. \tag{3.4}
\]
We have established that \( j_2 \) cannot be too small.

Step 2. Since \( j_2 \) is not too small, the subwords \( x_{j_3}^{\alpha n} = x_{j_3}^{j_3 + v_n - 1} \) and \( x_{j_2}^{j_2 + v_n - 1} \) (which are both equal to \( V_n \)) have a quite big overlap. Consequently, by Theorem 1.5.2 of \[9\], the word \( V_n \) is the \( t \)-th power with
\[
t := \frac{v_n}{j_3 - j_2}
\]
of some word \( U_n \) of length \( u_n := j_3 - j_2 \). We have \( x_{j_2}^{j_2 + v_n - 1} = (U_n)^{1+t} \). Observe that \( n + 1 > n_0 \geq \frac{3\rho^2}{\varepsilon} > \frac{\alpha + \varepsilon}{\beta} > \frac{\alpha}{\beta} \), thus \( v_n \geq (1 - \beta + \alpha - \varepsilon)(n + 1) \) and, by (3.4),
\[
t \geq \frac{v_n}{(\beta - 1)(n + 1) - (\rho - 1 - \varepsilon)v_n} \geq \frac{1 - \beta + \alpha - \varepsilon}{\beta - 1 - (1 - \beta + \alpha - \varepsilon)(\rho - 1 - \varepsilon)} \geq \frac{1 + \rho}{(\rho - \varepsilon)^2 - (\rho - 1 - \varepsilon)(1 + \rho)} \geq \frac{1 + \rho}{1 + \varepsilon + \varepsilon^2}.
\]
Recalling that \( \rho \geq \frac{8}{9} \) and \( \varepsilon \leq \frac{1}{10} \), we have established that \( t \geq \frac{\alpha}{\beta} \).

Step 3. Let \( W_n \) be the word such that \( V_n = U_n W_n \) and let \( w_n \) denote its length. Observe that
\[
w_n = \frac{t - 1}{t} v_n = v_n - j_3 + j_2 \tag{3.5}
\]
and, recalling that $v_n \geq \frac{t}{4\rho}$ and $t \geq \frac{n}{2}$,

$$w_n = \frac{t-1}{t} v_n \geq \frac{5}{9} \cdot \frac{n}{4\rho} \geq \frac{n}{8\rho}.$$  

Since $V_n = (U_n)^t$ and $t > 2$, the word $W_n$ is a prefix of $V_n$ and it has two occurrences in the prefix of $x$ of length $j_1 + v_n - 1$. It then follows from our choice of $n_0$ that

$$(\rho - \varepsilon)w_n \leq r(w_n, x) \leq j_1 + v_n - 1.$$  

Combined with (3.5), this gives

$$j_1 \geq (\rho - 1 - \varepsilon)v_n - (\rho - \varepsilon)(j_3 - j_2) + 1. \quad (3.6)$$

We have established that $j_1$ cannot be too small.

**Step 4.** Observe first that (3.3) is equivalent to the inequality

$$(\rho - \varepsilon)^2(1 - \beta + \alpha - \varepsilon) > (\beta - 1)(\rho + 1).$$

This gives

$$(\rho - \varepsilon)^2(1 - \beta + \alpha)n - (\rho + 1 - \varepsilon)(\beta - 1)n > n\varepsilon(\beta - 1)$$

$$> (\beta - 1)((\rho - \varepsilon)^2 + \rho + 1 - \varepsilon),$$

since $n\varepsilon > n_0\varepsilon \geq 3\rho^2$. Consequently, we get

$$(\rho - \varepsilon)^2v_n > (\rho + 1 - \varepsilon)(\beta - 1)(n + 1) = (\rho + 1 - \varepsilon)(j_3 - 1). \quad (3.7)$$

We deduce from (3.4) that

$$(\rho - \varepsilon)^2v_n \leq (\rho - \varepsilon)v_n + (\rho - \varepsilon)(j_2 - 1),$$

which, combined with (3.7), gives

$$(\rho - \varepsilon)v_n \geq (\rho + 1 - \varepsilon)(j_3 - 1) - (\rho - \varepsilon)(j_2 - 1)$$

$$= (\rho - \varepsilon)(j_3 - j_2) + j_3 - 1.$$  

We conclude by (3.6) that

$$v_n > j_3 - j_1. \quad (3.8)$$

Thus, the subwords $x^{j_1 + v_n - 1}_{j_1}$ and $x^{j_3 + v_n - 1}_{j_3}$, which are both equal to $V_n$, overlap.

**Step 5.** It follows from (3.8) that

$$v_n - (j_2 - j_1) > j_3 - j_2 = u_n,$$
which means that the length of the overlap between the subwords $x_{j_1}^{j_2}v_n^{-1}$ and $x_{j_2}^{j_2}v_n^{-1}$ exceeds the length $u_n$ of $U_n$. We show that this implies that $x_{j_1}^{(2-\alpha)n} = x_{j_1}^{j_2}v_n^{-1}$ is equal to a (large) power of some word. To do this, we distinguish two cases.

If there exists an integer $h$ such that $j_2 = j_1 + hu_n$, then we have

$$x_{j_1}^{j_2}v_n^{-1} = x_{j_1}^{j_2-1}x_{j_1}^{j_2}v_n^{-1} = (U_n)^{h+1+t}$$

and the letters $x_{j_1+v_n}$ and $x_{j_2+v_n}$ are the same, since $j_1 + v_n$ and $j_2 + v_n$ are congruent modulo the length $u_n$ of $U_n$. This is a contradiction.

If $j_2 - j_1$ is not an integer multiple of $u_n$, then let $h$ be the smallest integer such that $j_1 + hu_n > j_2$. The word $Z_n := x_{j_2}^{j_2+hu_n-1}$ is a suffix of $U_n$ and the word $Z'_n := x_{j_1}^{j_1+hu_n-1} = x_{j_1}^{j_1-1}x_{j_1}^{j_2}v_n^{-1}$ is a prefix of $U_n$. They satisfy

$$U_n = Z_nZ'_n = Z'_nZ_n.$$ 

By Theorem 1.5.3 of [9], the words $Z_n$ and $Z'_n$ are integer powers of a same word. Thus, there exist a word $T_n$ of length $t_n$ and positive integers $k, \ell$ such that

$$Z_n = (T_n)^k \quad \text{and} \quad Z'_n = (T_n)^\ell.$$ 

Consequently, there exists an integer $q$ such that $j_2 = j_1 + qt_n$ and we have

$$x_{j_1}^{j_2}v_n^{-1} = x_{j_1}^{j_2-1}x_{j_1}^{j_2}v_n^{-1} = (T_n)^{q+(1+t)(k+\ell)}.$$ 

As above, the letters $x_{j_1+v_n}$ and $x_{j_2+v_n}$ are the same, since $j_1 + v_n$ and $j_2 + v_n$ are congruent modulo the length $t_n$ of $T_n$. This is a contradiction.

We have shown that (3.3) does not hold and we are in position to complete the proof of the theorem.

Let $(n_k)_{k \geq 1}$ denote the increasing sequence comprising all the integers $n$ such that $r(n+1, x) \geq r(n, x) + 2$. For $k \geq 1$, define $\alpha_k$ and $\beta_k$ by setting

$$r(n_k, x) = \alpha_k n_k \quad \text{and} \quad r(n_k + 1, x) = \beta_k (n_k + 1).$$ 

Let $\varepsilon$ be a positive real number with $\varepsilon < \frac{1}{10}$. Let $k_0$ be an integer such that $r(n_k, x) \geq \rho - \varepsilon)n_\ell$ for $\ell \geq k_0$. For every integer $k$ greater than $k_0$ and large enough in terms of $\varepsilon$, we have established that $\beta_k \geq \rho + 1$ or

$$\frac{1 - \beta_k + \alpha_k - \varepsilon}{\beta_k - 1} \leq \frac{1 + \rho}{(\rho - \varepsilon)^2}.$$
thus
\[ \beta_k \geq \min \left\{ \rho + 1, \frac{(\rho - \varepsilon)^2(\rho + 1 - 2\varepsilon) + \rho + 1}{1 + \rho + (\rho - \varepsilon)^2} \right\}, \]
by using that \( \alpha_k \geq \rho - \varepsilon \). Since \( \varepsilon \) can be taken arbitrarily small, this gives
\[ \limsup_{n \to +\infty} \frac{r(n, x)}{n} \geq \min \left\{ \rho + 1, \frac{(\rho + 1)(\rho^2 + 1)}{1 + \rho + \rho^2} \right\}, \]
and we have established (3.1).

Observe that, by definition of the sequence \((n_k)_{k \geq 1}\),
\[ r(n_{k+1}, x) = r(n_k + 1, x) + n_{k+1} - n_k - 1 \geq (\rho - \varepsilon)n_{k+1}. \]
Consequently,
\[ n_{k+1} \leq \frac{r(n_k + 1, x) - n_k - 1}{\rho - 1 - \varepsilon}. \]
Let \( n \) be an integer with \( n_k + 1 \leq n \leq n_{k+1} \). By (1.2) and Lemma 3.1 we have
\[ p(n, x) \geq p(n_k + 1, x) + n - n_k - 1 \geq r(n_k + 1, x) + n - 2n_k - 2, \]
thus
\[ \frac{p(n, x)}{n} \geq 1 + \frac{r(n_k + 1, x) - 2n_k - 2}{n_{k+1}} \geq 1 + \frac{r(n_k + 1, x) - 2n_k - 2}{n_{k+1}}, \]
giving that
\[ \frac{p(n, x)}{n} \geq 1 + (\rho - 1 - \varepsilon) \frac{r(n_k + 1, x) - 2n_k - 2}{r(n_k + 1, x) - n_k - 1} \geq \rho - \varepsilon - (\rho - 1 - \varepsilon) \frac{1}{\beta_k - 1}. \]
Since \( \varepsilon \) can be taken arbitrarily small, we conclude that
\[ \liminf_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n, x)}{n} \geq \min \left\{ \rho - 1 + \frac{1}{\rho}, \rho - 1 + \frac{1}{\rho^3} \right\}. \]
This proves (3.2) and completes the proof of the theorem. \( \square \)

Let \( b \geq 2 \) be an integer. Our last auxiliary result establishes a close connection between the exponent of repetition of an infinite word \( x \) written over \( \{0, 1, \ldots, b-1\} \) and the irrationality exponent (see Definition 1.2) of the real number whose \( b \)-ary expansion is given by \( x \).
Lemma 3.4. Let $b \geq 2$ be an integer and $x = x_1x_2\ldots$ an infinite word over \{0, 1, \ldots, b-1\}, which is not eventually periodic. Then, the irrationality exponent of the irrational number $\sum_{k \geq 1} \frac{x_k}{b^k}$ satisfies

$$\mu\left(\sum_{k \geq 1} \frac{x_k}{b^k}\right) \geq \frac{\text{rep}(x)}{\text{rep}(x) - 1},$$

where the right hand side is infinite if $\text{rep}(x) = 1$.

Proof. Since the irrationality exponent of an irrational real number is at least equal to 2, we can assume that $\text{rep}(x) < 2$. Let $n$ and $C$ be positive integers such that $1 < C < 2$ and $r(n, x) \leq Cn$. By Theorem 1.5.2 of [9], this implies that there are finite words $W, U, V$ and a positive integer $t$ (we do not indicate the dependence on $n$) such that $|WU|^tU = n$ (here and below, $| \cdot |$ denotes the length of a finite word) and $W(UV)^tU$ is a prefix of $x$ of length at most $Cn$. Observe that

$$|W(UV)^tU| \leq Cn \leq C|W(UV)|,$$

thus $|WUV| \leq (C - 1)|UV|^t$. Setting $\xi = \sum_{k \geq 1} \frac{x_k}{b^k}$, there exists an integer $p$ such that

$$\left|\xi - \frac{p}{b^{|W(UV)| - 1}}\right| \leq \frac{1}{b|W(UV)|} \leq \frac{1}{b|WUV||WU|^t}(C - 1).$$

Consequently, if there are arbitrarily large integers $n$ with $r(n, x) \leq Cn$, then $\mu(\xi) \geq 1 + \frac{1}{C - 1}$. Since $C$ can be taken arbitrarily close to $\text{rep}(x)$, this implies the theorem. \hfill $\Box$

Lemma 3.4 shows that, when the exponent of repetition of an infinite word is less than 2, then the irrationality exponent of the associated real number exceeds 2. We are in position to complete the proof of Theorems 1.4 and 2.1.

Proof of Theorems 1.4 and 2.1

Let $b \geq 2$ be an integer and $\xi$ an irrational real number. Write $\xi$ in base $b$ as in (1.1) and put $a = a_1a_2\ldots$. Lemma 3.4 asserts that

$$\text{rep}(a) \geq \frac{\mu(\xi)}{\mu(\xi) - 1}.$$

Combined with Theorem 3.3 this gives

$$\text{Rep}(a) \geq 1 + \frac{(\text{rep}(a))^3}{1 + \text{rep}(a) + (\text{rep}(a))^2} \geq 1 + \frac{\mu^3}{3\mu^3 - 6\mu^2 + 4\mu - 1}. $$
where $\mu$ denotes the irrationality exponent of $\xi$. As well, we obtain
\[ \liminf_{n \to +\infty} \frac{p(n, a)}{n} \geq \text{rep}(a) - 1 + \frac{1}{\text{rep}(a)^3} \geq \frac{\mu^4 - 3\mu^3 + 6\mu^2 - 4\mu + 1}{\mu^3(\mu - 1)}. \]
We have established (1.3) and (2.1) and thereby completed the proofs of Theorems 1.4 and 2.1.

**Additional comments.**

We can slightly improve Theorem 3.3 (and, consequently, Theorems 1.4 and 2.1) by means of a refined case-by-case analysis. With the notation used in the proof of Theorem 3.3, the two cases to distinguish are:

(i) $j_1 = m_2$ and $j_2 = m_1 + n - v_n$ (that is, $m_2 < m_1 + n - v_n$);
(ii) $j_1 = m_1 + n - v_n$ and $j_2 = m_2$ (that is, $m_2 > m_1 + n - v_n$).

Then, (3.1) can be replaced by the stronger inequality which holds for Case (i)
\[ \text{Rep}(x) \geq \text{rep}(x) + \frac{1}{\text{rep}(x) + (\text{rep}(x))^2} \quad (3.9) \]
and (2.1) by
\[ \limsup_{n \to +\infty} \frac{r(n, \xi, b)}{n} \geq 2 + \frac{2\mu^2 + \mu - 1 - \mu^3}{\mu(\mu - 1)(2\mu - 1)}. \]
Furthermore, we may also see that, under a slightly weaker assumption than (3.9), Case (i) cannot occur for two consecutive integers $n$ such that $r(n+1, x) \geq r(n, x) + 2$. Hence, a further small improvement can be obtained.

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Department of Mathematics, Université de Strasbourg, 7 rue René Descartes, 67084 Strasbourg, France
E-mail address: bugeaud@math.unistra.fr

Department of Mathematics Education, Dongguk University – Seoul, Seoul 04620, Korea.
E-mail address: kim2010@dongguk.edu