On the p-rank of Ext(A, B) for countable abelian groups A and B

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ABSTRACT. In this note we show that the p-rank of Ext(A, B) for countable torsion-free abelian groups A and B is either countable or the size of the continuum.

1. Introduction

The structure of Ext(A, B) for torsion-free abelian groups A has received much attention in the literature. In particular in the case of $B = \mathbb{Z}$ complete characterizations are available in various models of ZFC (see [EkMe], Sections on the structure of Ext], [ShSt1], and [ShSt2] for references). It is easy to see that Ext(A, B) is always a divisible group for any torsion-free group A. Hence it is of the form

$$\text{Ext}(A, B) = \bigoplus_{p \in \Pi} \mathbb{Z}(p^\infty)^{(\nu_p)} \oplus \mathbb{Q}^{(\nu_0)}$$

for some cardinals $\nu_p, \nu_0$ ($p \in \Pi$) which are uniquely determined. Here $\mathbb{Z}(p^\infty)$ is the $p$-Prüfer group and $\mathbb{Q}$ is the group of rational numbers. Thus, the obvious question that arises is which sequences $(\nu_0, \nu_p : p \in \Pi)$ can appear as the cardinal invariants of Ext(A, B) for some (which) torsion-free abelian group A and arbitrary abelian group B? As mentioned above for $B = \mathbb{Z}$ the answer is pretty much known but for general $B$ there is little known so far. Some results were obtained in [Fr] and [FrSt] for countable abelian groups A and B. However, one essential question was left open, namely if the situation is similar to the case $B = \mathbb{Z}$ when it comes to $p$-ranks. It was conjectured that the $p$-rank of Ext(A, B) can only be either countable or the size of the continuum whenever A and B are countable. Here we prove

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that the conjecture is true.

Our notation is standard and we write maps from the left. If \( H \) is a pure subgroup of the abelian group \( G \), then we will write \( H \subseteq^* G \). The set of natural primes is denoted by \( \Pi \). For further details on abelian groups and set-theoretic methods we refer to [Fu] and [EkMe].

2. Proof of the conjecture on the p-rank of Ext

It is well-known that for torsion-free abelian groups \( A \) the group of extensions \( \text{Ext}(A,B) \) is divisible for any abelian group \( B \). Hence it is of the form

\[
\text{Ext}(A,B) = \bigoplus_{p \in \Pi} \mathbb{Z}(p^\infty)^{(\nu_p)} \oplus \mathbb{Q}^{(\nu_0)}
\]

for some cardinals \( \nu_p, \nu_0 \) which are uniquely determined.

The invariant \( r_p(\text{Ext}(A,B)) := \nu_p \) is called the \( p \)-rank of \( \text{Ext}(A,B) \) while \( r_0(\text{Ext}(A,B)) := \nu_0 \) is called the torsion-free rank of \( \text{Ext}(A,B) \). The following was shown in [FrSt] and gives an almost complete description of the structure of \( \text{Ext}(A,B) \) for countable torsion-free \( A \) and \( B \). Recall that the nucleus \( G_0 \) of a torsion-free abelian group \( G \) is the largest subring \( R \) of \( \mathbb{Q} \) such that \( G \) is a module over \( R \).

Proposition 2.1. Let \( A \) and \( B \) be torsion-free groups with \( A \) countable and \( |B| < 2^{\aleph_0} \). Then either

i) \( r_0(\text{Ext}(A,B)) = 0 \) and \( A \otimes B_0 \) is a free \( B_0 \)-module or

ii) \( r_0(\text{Ext}(A,B)) = 2^{\aleph_0} \).

Recall that for a torsion-free abelian group \( G \) the \( p \)-rank \( r_p(G) \) is defined to be the \( \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z} \)-dimension of the vector space \( G/pG \).

Proposition 2.2. The following holds true:

i) If \( A \) and \( B \) are countable torsion-free abelian groups and \( A \) has finite rank then \( r_p(\text{Ext}(A,B)) \leq \aleph_0 \). Moreover, all cardinals \( \leq \aleph_0 \) can appear as the \( p \)-rank of some \( \text{Ext}(A,B) \).

ii) If \( A \) and \( B \) are countable torsion-free abelian groups with \( \text{Hom}(A,B) = 0 \) then

\[
r_p(\text{Ext}(A,B)) = \begin{cases} 
0 & \text{if } r_p(A) = 0 \text{ or } r_p(B) = 0 \\
\mathbb{R}_0 & \text{if } 0 < r_p(A) < \aleph_0 \text{ and } r_p(B) = \aleph_0 \\
2^{\aleph_0} & \text{if } r_p(A) = \aleph_0 \text{ and } 0 < r_p(B) \leq \aleph_0 
\end{cases}
\]

Recall the following way of calculating the \( p \)-rank of \( \text{Ext}(A,B) \) for torsion-free groups \( A \) and \( B \) (see [EkMe] page 389).

Lemma 2.3. For a torsion-free abelian group \( A \) and an arbitrary abelian group \( B \) let \( \varphi^p \) be the map that sends \( \psi \in \text{Hom}(A,B) \) to \( \pi \circ \psi \) with \( \pi :
B \rightarrow B/pB is the canonical epimorphism. Then
\[
\varphi_p(\text{Ext}(A, B)) = \dim_{\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}}(\text{Hom}(A, B/pB)/\varphi^p(\text{Hom}(A, B))).
\]
We now need some preparation from descriptive set-theory in order to prove our main result. Recall that a subset of a topological space is called perfect if it is closed and contains no isolated points. Moreover, a subset \( T \) of a Polish space \( V \) is analytic if there is a Polish space \( Y \) and a Borel (or closed) set \( B \subseteq V \times Y \) such that \( T \) is the projection of \( B \); that is,
\[
X = \{ v \in V | (\exists y \in Y)(v, y) \in B \}.
\]

**Proposition 2.4.** If \( E \) is an analytic equivalence relation on \( \Gamma = \{ X : X \subseteq \omega \} \) that satisfies
\[(\dagger) \text{ if } X, Y \subseteq \omega, n \notin Y, X = Y \cup \{ n \} \text{ then } X \text{ and } Y \text{ are not } E\text{-equivalent then there is a perfect subset } T \text{ of } \Gamma \text{ of pairwise nonequivalent } X \subseteq \omega.\]

**Proof.** See [Sh] Lemma 13. \( \square \)

We are now in the position to prove our main result.

**Theorem 2.5.** Let \( A \) be a countable torsion-free abelian group and \( B \) an arbitrary countable abelian group. Then either
\[
\begin{align*}
& \bullet \ \varphi_p(\text{Ext}(A, B)) \leq \aleph_0 \text{ or } \\
& \bullet \ \varphi_p(\text{Ext}(A, B)) = 2^{\aleph_0}.
\end{align*}
\]

**Proof.** The proof uses descriptive set theory, relies on [Sh] Lemma 13 and is inspired by [HaSh] Lemma 2.2. By the above Lemma 2.3 the \( p \)-rank of \( \text{Ext}(A, B) \) is the dimension \( \kappa \) of the \( \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z} \) vector space \( L := \text{Hom}(A, B/pB)/\varphi^p(\text{Hom}(A, B)) \) where \( \varphi^p \) is the natural map. We choose a basis \( \{ [\varphi\alpha] \mid \alpha < \kappa \} \) of \( L \) with \( \varphi\alpha \in \text{Hom}(A, B/pB) \) and assume that \( \aleph_0 < \kappa \). Note that \( [\varphi\alpha] \neq 0 \) means, that \( \varphi\alpha : A \rightarrow B/pB \) has no lifting to an element \( \psi \in \text{Hom}(A, B) \) such that \( \varphi\alpha = \pi \circ \psi \).

Now let \( A = \bigcup_{i \in \omega} A_i \) with \( rk(A_i) \) finite. By a pigeonhole-principle there are \( \alpha_1 \neq \beta_1 \) such that \( \varphi\alpha_1 \upharpoonright A_1 = \varphi\beta_1 \upharpoonright A_1 \). We define \( \psi_1 := \varphi\alpha_1 - \varphi\beta_1 \) and obtain \( A_1 \subseteq \text{Ker}(\psi_1) \). Obviously, \( \psi_1 \) has no lifting because \( \{ [\varphi\alpha] \mid \alpha < \kappa \} \) is a basis of \( L \), hence \( [\psi_1] \neq 0 \). Since \( \alpha_1 \neq \beta_1 \) there exists \( x_1 \in A \) satisfying \( \varphi\alpha_1(x_1) \neq \varphi\beta_1(x_1) \). Let \( n \) be minimal with \( x_1 \in A_n \setminus A_{n-1} \). Because \( A_n \) has finite rank we similarly get \( \alpha_2 \neq \beta_2 \) such that \( \varphi\alpha_2 \upharpoonright A_n = \varphi\beta_2 \upharpoonright A_n \) and define \( \psi_2 := \varphi\alpha_2 - \varphi\beta_2 \) with \( A_n \subseteq \text{Ker}(\psi_2) \). Clearly we have \( \psi_1 \neq \psi_2 \) since \( \psi_1(x_1) \neq 0 = \psi_2(x_1) \) and \( [\psi_2] \neq 0 \). Continuing this construction we get \( \aleph_0 \) pairwise different \( \psi_n \in \text{Hom}(A, B/pB) \) with \( [\psi_n] \neq 0 \).

Now let \( \eta \in \omega_2 \), which means that \( \eta \) is a countable \( \{0, 1\}\)-sequence and choose \( \psi_\eta := \sum_{n \in \text{supp}(\eta)} \psi_n \) where \( \text{supp}(\eta) := \{ n \in \omega | \eta(n) = 1 \} \). This is well-defined since for any \( a \in A \), the sum \( \psi_\eta(a) \) consists of only finitely many summands because there is \( n \in \mathbb{N} \) such that \( a \in A_n \) and \( A_n \) is in the kernel of \( \psi_m \) for sufficiently large \( m \). Note that also \( \psi_\eta \neq \psi_\eta' \) for all \( \eta \neq \eta' \).
It remains to prove that the size of \(\{\psi_\eta : \eta \in \omega^2\}\) is \(2^{\aleph_0}\) which then implies that \(\kappa = 2^{\aleph_0}\).

We now define an equivalence relation on \(\Gamma = \{X \subseteq \omega\}\) in the following way:

\[X \sim X'\] if and only if \([\psi_{\eta_X}] = [\psi_{\eta_{X'}}]\), where \(\eta_X \in \omega^2\) is the characteristic function of \(X\). We claim that

\[(\dagger)\] for \(X, X' \subseteq \omega\) and \(n \notin X\) such that \(X' = X \cup \{n\}\) we have \(X \neq X'\).

But this is obvious since in this case \(\psi_{\eta_X} - \psi_{\eta_{X'}} = -\psi_n\) and \([-\psi_n] \neq 0\), so \([\psi_{\eta_X}] \neq [\psi_{\eta_{X'}}]\). We claim that the above equivalence relation is analytic. It then follows from Proposition \[2.4\] that there is a perfect subset of \(\Gamma\) of pairwise nonequivalent \(X \subseteq \omega\) and hence there are \(2^{\aleph_0}\) distinct equivalence classes for \(\sim\). Thus the \(p\)-rank of \(\text{Ext}(A, B)\) must be the size of the continuum as claimed.

In order to see that \(\sim\) is analytic recall that both, the cantor space \(\omega^2\) (and hence \(\Gamma\)) and the Baire space \(\omega\) are Polish spaces with the natural topologies. For \(\sim\) to be analytic we therefore have to show that \(\Delta = \{(X, X') : X, X' \in \Gamma \text{ and } X \sim X'\}\) is an analytic subset of the product space \(\Gamma \times \Gamma\). We enumerate \(A = \{a_n : n \in \omega\}\) and \(B = \{b_n : n \in \omega\}\) and let \(C_1 \subseteq \omega^\omega\) be the set of all \(\rho \in \omega^\omega\) such that \(\rho\) induces a homomorphism \(f_\rho \in \text{Hom}(A, B/pB)\), i.e. the map \(f_\rho : A \rightarrow B/pB\) sending \(a_n\) onto \(b_{\rho(n)} + pB\) is a homomorphism. \(C_2\) is defined similarly replacing \(\text{Hom}(A, B/pB)\) by \(\text{Hom}(A, B)\), i.e. \(\nu \in C_2\) if the map \(g_\nu : A \rightarrow B\) with \(a_n \mapsto b_{\nu(n)}\) is a homomorphism. Clearly \(C_1\) and \(C_2\) are closed subsets of \(\omega^\omega\). Put \(P = \{(\rho_1, \rho_2, \nu) : \rho_1, \rho_2 \in C_1; \nu \in C_2\text{ and } f_{\rho_1} - f_{\rho_2} = \varphi^\rho(g_\nu)\}\). Then \(P\) is a closed subset of \(\omega^\omega \times \omega^\omega \times \omega^\omega\). Now the construction above gives a continuous function \(\Theta\) from \(\omega^2\) to \(\omega^\omega\) by sending \(\eta\) to \(\rho = \Theta(\eta)\) where \(\rho\) is induced by the homomorphism \(\psi_\eta\). Then \(X \sim X'\) if and only if there is \(\nu \in C_2\) such that \((\Theta(\eta_X), \Theta(\eta_{X'}), \nu) \in P\) and thus \(\sim\) is an analytic equivalence relation. \(\square\)

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