REGULARITY OF CANONICAL AND DEFICIENCY MODULES
FOR MONOMIAL IDEALS

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Abstract. We show that the Castelnuovo–Mumford regularity of the canonical or a deficiency module of the quotient of a polynomial ring by a monomial ideal is bounded by its dimension.

1. Introduction

Let $R = k[x_1, \ldots, x_n]$ be a standard graded polynomial ring over a field $k$ and $m = (x_1, \ldots, x_n)$ the homogeneous maximal ideal of $R$. In this paper, we study the Castelnuovo–Mumford regularity of the modules $\text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R)$ when $I \subset R$ is a monomial ideal; here $\omega_R = R(-n)$ denotes the canonical module of $R$. The $\text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R), i > n - \dim R/I$ are called deficiency modules of $R/I$ while $\text{Ext}^{n-\dim R/I}_R(R/I, \omega_R)$ is called the canonical module of $R/I$.

For any homogeneous ideal $I \subseteq R$, local cohomology modules $H^i_m(R/I)$ are important in commutative algebra and algebraic geometry. One is often interested in the vanishing of homogeneous components of $H^i_m(R/I)$. While one cannot expect the vanishing of $H^i_m(R/I)$ in negative degrees, unless it has finite length, one can, using the local duality theorem of Grothendieck, obtain some information from $\text{Ext}^{n-i}_R(R/I, \omega_R)$. For a finitely generated graded $R$-module $M$, its (Castelnuovo–Mumford) regularity, $\text{reg}(M)$, is an invariant that contains information about the stability of homogeneous components in sufficiently large degrees. In light of these, it is desirable to get bounds on $\text{reg}(\text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R))$. Such bounds were studied by L. T. Hoa and E. Hyry [HH06] and M. Chardin, D. T. Ha and Hoa [CHH09]; see also the references in those papers.

Unfortunately, canonical and deficiency modules can have large regularity. For a finitely generated graded $R$-module $M$, known bounds for $\text{reg}(\text{Ext}^i_M(M, \omega_R))$ are large (see, e.g., [HH06, Theorems 9 and 14]). On the other hand, more optimal bounds for $\text{reg}(\text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R))$ are known to exist for certain classes of graded ideals $I$ (see [HH06, Section 4]). It is an interesting problem to find a class of graded ideals $I \subseteq R$ with optimal bounds for $\text{reg}(\text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R))$. In this paper, we focus on monomial ideals. It follows from the theory of square-free modules, introduced by K. Yanagawa [Yan00], that if $I$ is a square-free monomial ideal then $\text{reg}(\text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R)) \leq \dim \text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R)$. This bound is small, since $\dim \text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R) \leq n - i$ (see [BH93, Corollary 3.5.11]).

While one cannot apply the theory of square-free modules to all monomial ideals, there are results that show that, when $I$ is a monomial ideal, $\text{reg}(\text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R))$ is not large. For example, we see from [Tak05, Proposition 1, p 333] that if $\text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R)$ has finite length then its regularity is negative or equal to zero.

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Again, Hoa and Hyry [HH06, Proposition 21] showed that if \( H^i_{\mathfrak{m}}(R/I) \) has finite length for \( i = 0, 1, \ldots, d - 1 \), where \( d = \dim R/I \), then \( \text{reg} \left( \text{Ext}^n_{R}(R/I, \omega_R) \right) \leq d \). We generalize these results in the following theorem:

**Theorem 1.1.** Let \( I \subseteq R \) be a monomial ideal. Then, for all \( 0 \leq i \leq n \),

\[
\text{reg} \left( \text{Ext}^i_{R}(R/I, \omega_R) \right) \leq \dim \text{Ext}^1_{R}(R/I, \omega_R).
\]

Since \( \dim \text{Ext}^i_{R}(R/I, \omega_R) \leq n - i \) we immediately get:

**Corollary 1.2.** Let \( I \subseteq R \) be a monomial ideal. Then, for all \( 0 \leq i \leq n \),

\[
\text{reg} \left( \text{Ext}^i_{R}(R/I, \omega_R) \right) \leq n - i.
\]

The above conclusion need not hold, in general, without the assumption that \( I \) is a monomial ideal; see [CD03, Example 3.5].

Our approach to bounding the regularity of canonical and deficiency modules differs from that of Hoa and Hyry. We show that if \( I \) is a monomial ideal, then \( \text{Ext}^i_{R}(R/I, \omega_R) \) has a multigraded filtration, called Stanley filtration, introduced by D. Maclagan and G. G. Smith [MS05]; the bound on regularity follows from this filtration.

In the next section, we discuss some preliminaries on Stanley filtrations and local cohomology. In Section 3 we prove our main result.

## 2. Preliminaries

Hereafter we take \( R \)-modules to be graded by \( \mathbb{Z}^n \), giving \( \text{deg} x_i = e_i \), the \( i \)th unit vector of \( \mathbb{Z}^n \). We call this the multigrading of \( R \) and \( R \)-modules.

**Notation 2.1.** Let \( \mathbf{a} = (a_1, \ldots, a_n) \in \mathbb{Z}^n \). Write \( x^\mathbf{a} = \prod_{i=1}^{n} x_i^{a_i} \in k[x_1^{\pm 1}, \ldots, x_n^{\pm 1}] \). We say that \( \mathbf{a} \) is the degree of \( x^\mathbf{a} \), and write \( \text{deg} x^\mathbf{a} = \mathbf{a} \). Define \( \text{Supp}(\mathbf{a}) = \{i : a_i \neq 0\} \). Define \( \mathbf{a}^+, \mathbf{a}^- \in \mathbb{N}^n \) by the conditions \( \mathbf{a} = \mathbf{a}^+ - \mathbf{a}^- \) and \( \text{Supp}(\mathbf{a}^+) \cap \text{Supp}(\mathbf{a}^-) = \emptyset \). We write \( \|a\| \) for \( \sum_{i=1}^{n} a_i \), the total degree of \( \mathbf{a} \) (and of the monomial \( x^\mathbf{a} \)). We will say that \( \mathbf{a} \) (equivalently \( x^\mathbf{a} \)) is square-free if \( a_i \in \{0, 1\} \) for all \( i \). Let \( [n] = \{1, \ldots, n\} \). For \( \Lambda \subseteq [n] \), we set \( e_\Lambda = \sum_{i \in \Lambda} e_i \) and abbreviate the (square-free) monomial \( x^{\mathbf{a}_\Lambda} \) as \( x^\Lambda \). The canonical module of \( R \) is \( \omega_R = R(-e_{[n]}) \).

Let \( M \) be a finitely generated multigraded \( R \)-module. Let \( m \in M \) be a homogeneous element and let \( G \subset \{x_1, \ldots, x_n\} \) be a subset such that \( um \neq 0 \) for all monomials \( u \in k[G] \). The \( k \)-subspace \( k[G]m \) of \( M \) generated by all the \( um \), where \( u \) is a monomial in \( k[G] \), is called a Stanley space. A Stanley decomposition of \( M \) is a finite set \( S \) of pairs \( (m, G) \) of homogeneous elements \( m \in M \) and \( G \subseteq \{x_1, \ldots, x_n\} \) such that \( k[G]m \) is a Stanley space for all \( (m, G) \in S \) and

\[
M = k \bigoplus_{(m, G) \in S} k[G]m
\]

(We use \( =_k \) to emphasize that the decomposition is only as vector spaces.) Properties of such decompositions have been widely studied; we follow the approach of [MS05, Section 3] where Stanley decompositions were used to get bounds for multigraded regularity. Following [MS05, Definition 3.7], we define a Stanley filtration to be a Stanley decomposition with an ordering of pairs \( \{(m_i, G_i) : 1 \leq i \leq p\} \)
such that, for \( j = 1, 2, \ldots, p, \)
\[
\left( \sum_{i=1}^{j} Rm_i \right) / \left( \sum_{i=1}^{j-1} Rm_i \right) = \mathbb{k}[G_j](\deg m_j).
\]
as \( R \)-modules. Note, in this case, that
\[
0 \subseteq Rm_1 \subseteq \cdots \subseteq \sum_{i=1}^{j} Rm_i \subseteq \cdots \subseteq \sum_{i=1}^{p} Rm_i = M
\]
is a prime filtration of \( M \), as in \([\text{Eis}95, \text{p. 93}, \text{Proposition 3.7}]\).

**Proposition 2.2.** Let \( M \) be a multigraded \( R \)-module with a Stanley decomposition \( S \) such that for all \((m, G) \in S,(\deg m)^+\) is square-free and \( G = \text{Supp}((\deg m)^+)\).
Then \( S \) gives a Stanley filtration. Moreover \( \text{reg} M \leq \max\{\|\deg m\| : (m, G) \in S\} \).

**Proof.** We order \( S = \{(m_1, G_1), \ldots, (m_p, G_p)\} \) so that \( \|\deg m_1\| \geq \cdots \geq \|\deg m_p\| \).
It follows from our hypothesis that
\[
(2) \quad \text{span}_k \{m_1, \ldots, m_p\} = \text{span}_k \{m \in M : \text{Supp}((\deg m)^+) \text{ is square-free}\},
\]
where \( \text{span}_k(V) \) denotes the \( k \)-vector space spanned by elements in \( V \). Write \( M^{(j)} \) for \( \sum_{i=1}^{j} Rm_i \). We will now show, inductively on \( j \), that
\begin{enumerate}[(A)]
\item \( M^{(j-1)} :_R m_j = (x_k : x_k \notin G_j) \).
\item The set \( \cup_{i=1}^{j-1} \{um_i : u \text{ is a monomial in } k[G_i]\} \) is a \( k \)-basis for \( M^{(j)} \).
\end{enumerate}
They imply that \( S \) is a Stanley filtration of \( M \).

Let \( j = 1 \). We will show \((0 :_R m_1) = (x_k : x_k \notin G_1) \). For all monomials \( u \in k[G_1], \)
\( um_1 \neq 0 \), from the definition of the decomposition. Therefore we must show that \( x_i m_1 = 0 \) for any \( x_i \notin G_1 \). Let \( x_i \notin G_1 \). Then \((\deg x_i m_1)^+\) is square-free, and by \((2)\), \( x_i m_1 \in \text{span}_k \{m_1, \ldots, m_p\} \). However, from the choice of \( m_1 \), we see that \( x_i m_1 = 0 \). Therefore \((0 :_R m_1) = (x_k : k \notin G_1) \) proving \((A)\). Note that \((B)\) follows immediately.

Now assume that \( j > 1 \) and that the assertion is known for all \( i < j \). We first show \((A)\). Let \( u \) be a monomial in \( k[G_j] \). By the statement \((B)\) for \( j-1 \), the set \( \cup_{i=1}^{j-1} \{um_i : v \text{ is a monomial in } k[G_i]\} \) is a \( k \)-basis for \( M^{(j-1)} \). Since \( um_j \) is an element of the basis of \( M \) coming from the Stanley decomposition, \( um_j \) is not in the \( k \)-linear span of \( \cup_{i=1}^{j-1} \{um_i : v \text{ is a monomial in } k[G_i]\} \), i.e., \( um_j \notin M^{(j-1)} \). It remains to prove that \( x_i m_j \in M^{(j-1)} \) for any \( x_i \notin G_j \). Let \( x_i \notin G_j \). Since \((\deg x_i m_j)^+\) is square-free, it follows, from \((2)\) and the ordering of the \((m_i, G_i)\), that
\[
x_i m_j \in \text{span}_k \{m_i : 1 \leq i \leq p, \deg m_i \geq \deg m_j\} \subseteq \text{span}_k \{m_1, \ldots, m_{j-1}\}.
\]
Therefore \( x_i m_j \in M^{(j-1)} \), proving the statement \((A)\) for \( j \).

From \((A)\), we see that the following sequence is exact:
\[
(3) \quad 0 \rightarrow M^{(j-1)} \rightarrow M^{(j)} \rightarrow k[G_j]m_j \rightarrow 0.
\]
Now statement \((B)\) for \( j \) follows from the induction hypothesis.

The assertion about regularity is essentially \([\text{MS}05, \text{Theorem 4.1}]\), but we give a quick proof here. We will show that \( \text{reg} M^{(j)} \leq \max\{\|\deg m_i\| : 1 \leq i \leq j\} \) for all \( 1 \leq j \leq p \). It holds for \( j = 1 \). For \( j > 1 \), it follows from \([\text{Eis}95, \text{Corollary 20.19}]\) and the exact sequence \((3)\) that \( \text{reg} M^{(j)} \leq \max\{\text{reg} M^{(j-1)}, \|\deg m_j\|\} \); induction completes the proof. \(\Box\)
Finally, we recall some basics of local cohomology, following [BH93, Sections 3.5–3.6]. Let $\check{C}^\bullet$ be the Čech complex on $x_1, \ldots, x_n$; the term at the $i$th cohomological degree is

$$\check{C}^i = \bigoplus_{\Lambda \subseteq [n]: |\Lambda| = i} R_{x_\Lambda}$$

where $R_{x_\Lambda}$ denotes inverting the monomial $x_\Lambda$. Note that $\check{C}^\bullet$ is a complex of $\mathbb{Z}^n$-graded $R$-modules, with differentials of degree 0. For a finitely generated $R$-module $M$, we set $\check{C}^\bullet(M) = \check{C}^\bullet \otimes_R (R/I)$. Then $H^i_m(M) = H^i(\check{C}^\bullet(M))$.

**Definition 2.3.** Let $F \subseteq [n]$. We define $\check{C}^\bullet_F$ to be the subcomplex of $\check{C}^\bullet$ obtained by setting

$$\check{C}^i_F = \begin{cases} 0, & \text{if } i < |F|, \\ \bigoplus_{F \subseteq \Lambda \subseteq [n] \atop |\Lambda| = i} R_{x_\Lambda}, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

**Lemma 2.4.** Let $I$ be a monomial ideal. Let $F \subseteq [n]$ and $a \in \mathbb{Z}^n$ be such that $\text{Supp}(a^-) = F$. Then $H^i_m(R/I)_a = H^i(\check{C}^\bullet_F \otimes_R (R/I)_a)$.

**Proof.** This argument is used implicitly in the proof of [Tak05, Theorem 1]. Since $H^i_m(R/I)_a = H^i\left((\check{C}^\bullet(R/I)_a)\right)$, it suffices to show that $(\check{C}^\bullet(R/I)_a) = (\check{C}^\bullet_F \otimes_R (R/I)_a)$. This, in turn, stems from the fact that for all $1 \leq j \leq n$, $(\check{C}^\bullet_F \otimes_R (R/I)_a)$ consists precisely of the direct summands of $\check{C}^j(R/I)$ that are non-zero in the multidegree $a$.

3. **Proof of the main theorem**

**Lemma 3.1.** Let $I \subset R$ be a monomial ideal. Let $a \in \mathbb{Z}^n$ and $j \in \text{Supp}(a^+)$. Then the multiplication map

$$x_j : \text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R)_a \rightarrow \text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R)_{a + e_j}$$

is bijective.

**Proof.** We first claim that the multiplication map

$$x_j : H^m_{-x}(R/I)_{-a - e_j} \rightarrow H^m_{-x}(R/I)_{-a}$$

is bijective. By local duality [BH93, Theorem 3.6.19], this map is the Matlis dual of the multiplication by $x_j$ on $\text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R)_a$; hence, it suffices to prove the claim.

Set $F = \text{Supp}(a^+)$. Note that $\text{Supp}(a^+ + e_j) = F$. For all $i$, $x_j$ acts as a unit on $\check{C}_F$. Therefore the homomorphism of complexes $\check{C}^i_F \otimes_R (R/I) \rightarrow \check{C}^i_F \otimes_R (R/I)$ induced by the multiplication map $x_j : \check{C}^i_F \otimes_R (R/I) \rightarrow \check{C}^i_F \otimes_R (R/I)$ is an isomorphism. The claim now follows from Lemma 2.4, which implies that $H^m_i(R/I)_{-a - e_j} = H^i(\check{C}^\bullet_F \otimes_R (R/I)_{-a - e_j})$, and $H^m_i(R/I)_{-a} = H^i(\check{C}^\bullet_F \otimes_R (R/I)_{-a})$.

The above lemma says that if $I$ is a monomial ideal then $\text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R)$ is a $(1, 1, \ldots, 1)$-determined module, in the sense of [Mil00, Definition 2.1].

**Proof of Theorem 1.1.** For $F \subseteq [n]$, let $\mathcal{M}_F$ be a multigraded $\mathbb{k}$-basis for

$$\bigoplus_{a \in \mathbb{N}^n \atop \text{Supp}(a) \cap F = \emptyset} \text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R)_{e_F - a}.$$
Let $S_i = \{(m, F) : F \subseteq [n] \text{ and } m \in M_F^i\}$. Then it follows from Lemma 3.1 that $S_i$ is a Stanley decomposition of $\text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R)$. In particular,

$$\dim \text{Ext}^i(R/I, \omega_R) = \max \{|F| : M_F^i \neq \emptyset\}.$$

By the construction of $M_F^i$, this Stanley decomposition satisfies the assumption of Proposition 2.2. Therefore

$$\text{reg} \left( \text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R) \right) \leq \max_{F \subseteq [n]} \left\{ \max \{\|\deg m\| : m \in M_F^i\} \right\} \leq \max_{F \subseteq [n]} \{|F| : M_F^i \neq \emptyset\} = \dim \text{Ext}^i_R(R/I, \omega_R),$$

as desired. (The second inequality follows from the fact that, for any $u \in M_F^i$, one has $\|\deg u\| = |F| - \|\deg u\|\). □

We remark that, using [Tak05, Theorem 1] and local duality, one can determine whether $M_F^i \neq \emptyset$ from certain subcomplexes of the Stanley-Reisner complex of the radical $\sqrt{I}$ of $I$.

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