



Lie algebras

## A remark on boundary level admissible representations

*Une remarque sur les représentations admissibles de niveau limite*

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## ABSTRACT

We point out that it is immediate by our character formula that in the case of a *boundary level* the characters of admissible representations of affine Kac–Moody algebras and the corresponding  $W$ -algebras decompose in products in terms of the Jacobi form  $\vartheta_{11}(\tau, z)$ .

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## R É S U M É

Nous remarquons la conséquence suivante de notre formule de caractères. Pour un niveau limite, les caractères d'une représentation admissible d'une algèbre de Kac–Moody affine ainsi que de la  $W$ -algèbre correspondante s'expriment comme des produits de formes de Jacobi  $\vartheta_{11}(\tau, z)$ .

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Recently a remarkable map between 4-dimensional superconformal field theories and vertex algebras has been constructed [1]. This has led to new insights in the theory of characters of vertex algebras. In particular it was observed that in some cases these characters decompose in nice products [10,8].

The purpose of this note is to explain the latter phenomena. Namely, we point out that it is immediate by our character formula [5,6] that in the case of a *boundary level* the characters of admissible representations of affine Kac–Moody algebras and the corresponding  $W$ -algebras decompose in products in terms of the Jacobi form  $\vartheta_{11}(\tau, z)$ .

We would like to thank Wenbin Yan for drawing our attention to this question.

Let  $\mathfrak{g}$  be a simple finite-dimensional Lie algebra over  $\mathbb{C}$ , let  $\mathfrak{h}$  be a Cartan subalgebra of  $\mathfrak{g}$ , and let  $\Delta \subset \mathfrak{h}^*$  be the set of roots. Let  $Q = \mathbb{Z}\Delta$  be the root lattice and let  $Q^* = \{h \in \mathfrak{h} \mid \alpha(h) \in \mathbb{Z} \text{ for all } \alpha \in \Delta\}$  be the dual lattice. Let  $\Delta_+ \subset \Delta$  be a subset of positive roots, let  $\{\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_\ell\}$  be the set of simple roots and let  $\rho$  be half of the sum of positive roots. Let  $W$  be the Weyl group. Let  $(\cdot | \cdot)$  be the invariant symmetric bilinear form on  $\mathfrak{g}$ , normalized by the condition  $(\alpha | \alpha) = 2$  for a long root  $\alpha$ , and let  $h^\vee$  be the dual Coxeter number ( $= \frac{1}{2}$  eigenvalue of the Casimir operator on  $\mathfrak{g}$ ). We shall identify  $\mathfrak{h}$  with  $\mathfrak{h}^*$  using the form  $(\cdot | \cdot)$ .

Let  $\widehat{\mathfrak{g}} = \mathfrak{g}[t, t^{-1}] + \mathbb{C}K + \mathbb{C}d$  be the associated with  $\mathfrak{g}$  affine Kac–Moody algebra (see [3] for details), let  $\widehat{\mathfrak{h}} = \mathfrak{h} + \mathbb{C}K + \mathbb{C}d$  be its Cartan subalgebra. We extend the symmetric bilinear form  $(\cdot | \cdot)$  from  $\mathfrak{h}$  to  $\widehat{\mathfrak{h}}$  by letting  $(\mathfrak{h} | \mathbb{C}K + \mathbb{C}d) = 0$ ,  $(K | K) = 0$ ,

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$(d|d) = 0$ ,  $(d|K) = 1$ , and we identify  $\widehat{\mathfrak{h}}^*$  with  $\widehat{\mathfrak{h}}$  using this form. Then  $d$  is identified with the 0th fundamental weight  $\Lambda_0 \in \widehat{\mathfrak{h}}^*$ , such that  $\Lambda_0|_{\mathfrak{g}[t,t^{-1}] + \mathbb{C}d} = 0$ ,  $\Lambda_0(K) = 1$ , and  $K$  is identified with the imaginary root  $\delta \in \widehat{\mathfrak{h}}^*$ . Then the set of real roots of  $\widehat{\mathfrak{g}}$  is  $\widehat{\Delta}^{\text{re}} = \{\alpha + n\delta \mid \alpha \in \Delta, n \in \mathbb{Z}\}$  and the subset of positive real roots is  $\widehat{\Delta}_+^{\text{re}} = \Delta_+ \cup \{\alpha + n\delta \mid \alpha \in \Delta, n \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 1}\}$ . Let  $\widehat{\rho} = h^\vee \Lambda_0 + \rho$ . Let

$$\widehat{\Pi}_u = \{u\delta - \theta, \alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_\ell\},$$

where  $\theta \in \Delta_+$  is the highest root, so that  $\widehat{\Pi}_1$  is the set of simple roots of  $\widehat{\mathfrak{g}}$ . For  $\alpha \in \widehat{\Delta}^{\text{re}}$  one lets  $\alpha^\vee = 2\alpha/(\alpha|\alpha)$ . Finally, for  $\beta \in Q^*$  define the translation  $t_\beta \in \text{End } \widehat{\mathfrak{h}}^*$  by

$$t_\beta(\lambda) = \lambda + \lambda(K)\beta - ((\lambda|\beta) + \frac{1}{2}\lambda(K)|\beta|^2)\delta.$$

Given  $\Lambda \in \widehat{\mathfrak{h}}^*$  let  $\widehat{\Delta}^\Lambda = \{\alpha \in \widehat{\Delta}^{\text{re}} \mid (\Lambda|\alpha^\vee) \in \mathbb{Z}\}$ . Then  $\Lambda$  is called an *admissible weight* if the following two properties hold:

- (i)  $(\Lambda + \widehat{\rho}|\alpha^\vee) \notin \mathbb{Z}_{\leq 0}$  for all  $\alpha \in \widehat{\Delta}_+$ ,
- (ii)  $\mathbb{Q}\widehat{\Delta}^\Lambda = \mathbb{Q}\widehat{\Delta}^{\text{re}}$ .

If instead of (ii) a stronger condition holds:

$$(ii)' \varphi(\widehat{\Delta}^\Lambda) = \widehat{\Delta}^{\text{re}} \text{ for a linear isomorphism } \varphi : \widehat{\mathfrak{h}}^* \rightarrow \widehat{\mathfrak{h}}^*,$$

then  $\Lambda$  is called a *principal admissible weight*. In [6] the classification and character formulas for admissible weights are reduced to that for principal admissible weights. The latter are described by the following proposition.

**Proposition 1.** [6] *Let  $\Lambda$  be a principal admissible weight and let  $k = \Lambda(K)$  be its level. Then*

- (a)  *$k$  is a rational number with denominator  $u \in \mathbb{Z}_{\geq 1}$ , such that*

$$k + h^\vee \geq \frac{h^\vee}{u} \text{ and } \gcd(u, h^\vee) = \gcd(u, r^\vee) = 1, \tag{1}$$

where  $r^\vee = 1$  for  $\mathfrak{g}$  of type A-D-E,  $= 2$  for  $\mathfrak{g}$  of type B, C, F, and  $= 3$  for  $\mathfrak{g} = G_2$ .

- (b) *All principal admissible weights are of the form*

$$\Lambda = (t_\beta y) \cdot (\Lambda^0 - (u - 1)(k + h^\vee)\Lambda_0), \tag{2}$$

where  $\beta \in Q^*$ ,  $y \in W$  are such that  $(t_\beta y)\widehat{\Pi}_u \subset \widehat{\Delta}_+$ ,  $\Lambda^0$  is an integrable weight of level  $u(k + h^\vee) - h^\vee$ , and dot denotes the shifted action:  $w \cdot \Lambda = w(\Lambda + \widehat{\rho}) - \widehat{\rho}$ .

- (c) *For  $\mathfrak{g} = \mathfrak{sl}_N$  all admissible weights are principal admissible.*

Recall that the normalized character of an irreducible highest weight  $\widehat{\mathfrak{g}}$ -module  $L(\Lambda)$  of level  $k \neq -h^\vee$  is defined by

$$\text{ch}_\Lambda(\tau, z, t) = q^{m_\Lambda} \text{tr}_{L(\Lambda)} e^{2\pi i h}$$

where

$$h = -\tau d + z + tK, \quad z \in \mathfrak{h}, \quad \tau, t \in \mathbb{C}, \quad \text{Im } \tau > 0, \quad q = e^{2\pi i \tau}, \tag{3}$$

and  $m_\Lambda = \frac{|\Lambda + \widehat{\rho}|^2}{2(k + h^\vee)} - \frac{\dim \mathfrak{g}}{24}$  (the normalization factor  $q^{m_\Lambda}$  “improves” the modular invariance of the character).

In [6], the characters of the  $\widehat{\mathfrak{g}}$ -modules  $L(\Lambda)$  for arbitrary admissible  $\Lambda$  were computed, see Theorem 3.1, or formula (3.3) there for another version in case of a principal admissible  $\Lambda$ . In order to write down the latter formula, recall the normalized affine denominator for  $\widehat{\mathfrak{g}}$ :

$$\widehat{R}(h) = q^{\frac{\dim \mathfrak{g}}{24}} e^{\widehat{\rho}(h)} \prod_{n=1}^{\infty} (1 - q^n)^\ell \prod_{\alpha \in \Delta_+} (1 - e^{\alpha(z)} q^n)(1 - e^{-\alpha(z)} q^{n-1}).$$

In coordinates (3) this becomes:

$$\widehat{R}(\tau, z, t) = (-i)^{|\Delta_+|} e^{2\pi i h^\vee t} \eta(\tau)^{\frac{1}{2}(3\ell - \dim \mathfrak{g})} \prod_{\alpha \in \Delta_+} \vartheta_{11}(\tau, \alpha(z)), \tag{4}$$

where

$$\vartheta_{11}(\tau, z) = -iq^{\frac{1}{12}} e^{-\pi iz} \eta(\tau) \prod_{n=1}^{\infty} (1 - e^{-2\pi iz} q^n)(1 - e^{2\pi iz} q^{n-1})$$

is one of the standard Jacobi forms  $\vartheta_{ab}$ ,  $a, b = 0$  or  $1$  (see, e.g., Appendix to [7]), and  $\eta(\tau)$  is the Dedekind eta function. For a principal admissible  $\Lambda$ , given by (2), formula (3.3) from [6] becomes in coordinates (3):

$$(\widehat{Rch}_{\Lambda})(\tau, z, t) = (\widehat{Rch}_{\Lambda_0})\left(u\tau, y^{-1}(z + \tau\beta), \frac{1}{u}(t + (z|\beta) + \frac{\tau|\beta|^2}{2})\right). \tag{5}$$

It follows from (5) that if  $\Lambda^0 = 0$  in (2) (so that  $ch_{\Lambda^0} = 1$ ), which is equivalent to

$$k + h^{\vee} = \frac{h^{\vee}}{u} \text{ and } \gcd(u, h^{\vee}) = \gcd(u, r^{\vee}) = 1, \tag{6}$$

the (normalized) character  $ch_{\Lambda}$  turns into a product. The level  $k$ , defined by (6), is naturally called the *boundary principal admissible level* in [4], see formula (3.5) there. We obtain from Proposition 1, (4) and (5)

**Proposition 2.**

(a) All boundary principal admissible weights are of level  $k$ , given by (6), and are of the form

$$\Lambda = (t_{\beta}y) \cdot (k\Lambda_0), \tag{7}$$

where  $\beta \in Q^*$ ,  $y \in W$  are such that  $(t_{\beta}y)\widehat{\Pi}_u \subset \widehat{\Delta}_+$ . In particular,  $k\Lambda_0$  is a principal admissible weight of level (6).

(b) If  $\Lambda$  is of the form (7), then

$$ch_{\Lambda}(\tau, z, t) = e^{2\pi i(k t + \frac{h^{\vee}}{u}(z|\beta))} q^{\frac{h^{\vee}}{2u}| \beta|^2} \left(\frac{\eta(u\tau)}{\eta(\tau)}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}(3\ell - \dim \mathfrak{g})} \prod_{\alpha \in \Delta_+} \frac{\vartheta_{11}(u\tau, y(\alpha)(z + \tau\beta))}{\vartheta_{11}(\tau, \alpha(z))}.$$

**Remark 1.** For the vacuum module  $L(k\Lambda_0)$  of the boundary principal admissible level  $k$  the character formula from Proposition 2(b) becomes

$$ch_{k\Lambda_0}(\tau, z, t) = e^{2\pi i k t} \left(\frac{\eta(u\tau)}{\eta(\tau)}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}(3\ell - \dim \mathfrak{g})} \prod_{\alpha \in \Delta_+} \frac{\vartheta_{11}(u\tau, \alpha(z))}{\vartheta_{11}(\tau, \alpha(z))}.$$

**Example 1.** Let  $\mathfrak{g} = s\ell_2$ , so that  $h^{\vee} = 2$ . Then the boundary levels are  $k = \frac{2}{u} - 2$ , where  $u$  is a positive odd integer, and all admissible weights are

$$\Lambda_{k,j} := t_{-\frac{j}{2}\alpha_1} \cdot (k\Lambda_0) = (k + \frac{2j}{u})\Lambda_0 - \frac{2j}{u}\Lambda_1, \quad j = 0, 1, \dots, u - 1,$$

and the character formula from Proposition 2(b) becomes:

$$ch_{\Lambda_{u,j}} = e^{2\pi i(k t - \frac{j}{u}z)} q^{\frac{j^2}{2u}} \frac{\vartheta_{11}(u\tau, z - j\tau)}{\vartheta_{11}(\tau, z)}. \tag{8}$$

For  $u = 3$  and  $5$  some of these formulas is conjectured in [8].

**Example 2.** Let  $\mathfrak{g} = s\ell_N$ , so that  $h^{\vee} = N$ , let  $N > 1$  be odd, and let  $u = 2$ . Then the boundary admissible level is  $k = -\frac{N}{2}$ , and the boundary admissible weights of the form  $t_{\beta} \cdot (k\Lambda_0)$  are:

$$\Lambda_{N,p} = -\frac{N}{2}\Lambda_p, \quad p = 0, 1, \dots, N - 1,$$

where  $\Lambda_p$  are the fundamental weights of  $\widehat{\mathfrak{g}}$ . Letting  $z = \sum_{i=1}^{N-1} z_i \bar{\Lambda}_i$ , where  $\bar{\Lambda}_i$  are the fundamental weights of  $\mathfrak{g}$ , the character formula from Proposition 2 (b) becomes:

$$ch_{\Lambda_{N,p}}(\tau, z, t) = i^{p(N-p)} e^{-\pi i N t} \left(\frac{\eta(2\tau)}{\eta(\tau)}\right)^{-\frac{(N-1)(N-2)}{2}} \frac{\prod_{\substack{1 \leq i \leq j < p \\ \text{or } p < i \leq j < N}} \vartheta_{11}(2\tau, z_i + \dots + z_j) \prod_{1 \leq i \leq p \leq j < N} \vartheta_{01}(2\tau, z_i + \dots + z_j)}{\prod_{1 \leq i \leq j < N} \vartheta_{11}(\tau, z_i + \dots + z_j)},$$

where

$$\vartheta_{01}(\tau, z) = \prod_{n=1}^{\infty} (1 - q^n)(1 - e^{2\pi iz} q^{n-\frac{1}{2}})(1 - e^{-2\pi iz} q^{n-\frac{1}{2}}).$$

This follows from Proposition 2(b) by applying to  $\vartheta_{11}$  an elliptic transformation (see, e.g., [7], Appendix). In particular,

$$\text{ch}_{-\frac{N}{2}\Lambda_0} = e^{-\pi i N t} \left( \frac{\eta(2\tau)}{\eta(\tau)} \right)^{-\frac{(N-1)(N-2)}{2}} \prod_{1 \leq i \leq j < N} \frac{\vartheta_{11}(2\tau, z_i + \dots + z_j)}{\vartheta_{11}(\tau, z_i + \dots + z_j)}.$$

The latter formula was conjectured in [10].

**Remark 2.** For principal admissible weights  $\Lambda = (t_{\beta} y).(k\Lambda_0)$  and  $\Lambda' = (t_{\beta'} y').(k\Lambda_0)$  of boundary level  $k = \frac{h^{\vee}}{u} - h^{\vee}$  the S-transformation matrix  $(a(\Lambda, \Lambda'))$ , given by [6], Theorem 3.6, simplifies to

$$a(\Lambda, \Lambda') = |Q/uh^{\vee}Q^*|^{-\frac{1}{2}} \varepsilon(yy') \prod_{\alpha \in \Delta_+} 2 \sin \frac{\pi i u(\rho|\alpha)}{h^{\vee}} e^{-2\pi i \left( (\rho|\beta + \beta') + \frac{h^{\vee}(\beta|\beta')}{u} \right)}.$$

**Remark 3.** If  $\mathfrak{g} = \mathfrak{sl}_2$  and  $k$  is as in Example 1, then

$$a(\Lambda_{k,j}, \Lambda_{k,j'}) = (-1)^{j+j'} e^{-\frac{2\pi i j j'}{u}} \frac{1}{\sqrt{u}} \sin \frac{u\pi}{2}.$$

One can compute fusion coefficients [9] by Verlinde’s formula:

$$N_{\Lambda_{k,j_1}, \Lambda_{k,j_2}, \Lambda_{k,j_3}} = (-1)^{j_1+j_2+j_3} \text{ if } j_1 + j_2 + j_3 \in u\mathbb{Z}, \text{ and } = 0 \text{ otherwise.}$$

**Example 3.** Let  $\mathfrak{g} = \mathfrak{sl}_3$ , so that  $h^{\vee} = 3$ , and let  $u$  be a positive integer, coprime to 3. Then all (principal) admissible weights have level  $k = \frac{3}{u} - 3$  and are of the form (7), where

$$\beta = -(-1)^p (k_1 \bar{\Lambda}_1 + k_2 \bar{\Lambda}_2), \quad y = r_{\theta}^p, \quad p = 0 \text{ or } 1, \quad k_i \in \mathbb{Z}, \quad k_i \geq \delta_{p,1}, \quad k_1 + k_2 \leq u - \delta_{p,0}.$$

Denote this weight by  $\Lambda_{u;k_1, k_2}^{(p)} = (t_{\beta} y).(k\Lambda_0)$ . Using Remark 2, one computes the fusion coefficients by Verlinde’s formula:

$$N_{\Lambda_{u;k_1, k_2}^{(p)}, \Lambda_{u;k'_1, k'_2}^{(p')}, \Lambda_{u;k''_1, k''_2}^{(p'')}} = (-1)^{p+p'+p''} \text{ if } (-1)^p k_i + (-1)^{p'} k'_i + (-1)^{p''} k''_i \in u\mathbb{Z} \text{ for } i = 1, 2,$$

and = 0 otherwise.

**Remark 4.** If  $\Lambda$  is an arbitrary admissible weight, then  $\hat{\Delta}^{\Lambda}$  decomposes in a disjoint union of several affine root systems. Then  $\Lambda$  has boundary level if restrictions of it to each of them has boundary level, and formula (3.4) from [6] shows that  $\text{ch}_{\Lambda}$  decomposes in a product of the corresponding boundary level characters. Note also that all the above holds also for twisted affine Kac–Moody algebras [6].

**Remark 5.** The product character formula for boundary level affine Kac–Moody superalgebras holds as well, see [2], formula (2).

Recall that with any  $\mathfrak{sl}_2$ -triple  $\{f, x, e\}$  in  $\mathfrak{g}$ , where  $[x, f] = -f$ ,  $[x, e] = e$ , one associates a  $W$ -algebra  $W^k(\mathfrak{g}, f)$ , obtained from the vacuum  $\hat{\mathfrak{g}}$ -module of level  $k$  by quantum Hamiltonian reduction, so that any  $\hat{\mathfrak{g}}$ -module  $L(\Lambda)$  of level  $k$  produces either an irreducible  $W^k(\mathfrak{g}, f)$ -module  $H(\Lambda)$  or zero. The characters of  $L(\Lambda)$  and  $H(\Lambda)$  are related by the following simple formula ([4] or [7]):

$$\left( \overset{W}{R} \text{ch}_{H(\Lambda)} \right) (\tau, z) = \left( \hat{R} \text{ch}_{\Lambda} \right) \left( \tau, -\tau x + z, \frac{\tau}{2}(x|x) \right). \tag{9}$$

Here  $z \in \mathfrak{h}^f$ , the centralizer of  $f$  in  $\mathfrak{h}$ , and

$$\overset{W}{R} (\tau, z) = \eta(\tau)^{\frac{3}{2}l - \frac{1}{2} \dim(\mathfrak{g}_0 + \mathfrak{g}_{1/2})} \prod_{\alpha \in \Delta_+^0} \vartheta_{11}(\tau, \alpha(z)) \left( \prod_{\alpha \in \Delta_{1/2}} \vartheta_{01}(\tau, \alpha(z)) \right)^{1/2}, \tag{10}$$

where  $\mathfrak{g} = \bigoplus_j \mathfrak{g}_j$  is the eigenspace decomposition for  $\text{ad } x$ ,  $\Delta_j \subset \Delta$  is the set of roots of root spaces in  $\mathfrak{g}_j$  and  $\Delta_+^0 = \Delta_+ \cap \Delta_0$  (we assume that  $\Delta_j \subset \Delta_+$  for  $j > 0$ ). If  $k$  is a boundary level (6), we obtain from Proposition 2(b) and formulas (9), (10) the following character formula for  $H(\Lambda)$  if  $\Lambda$  is a principal admissible weight (7) ( $z \in \mathfrak{h}^f$ ):

$$\begin{aligned} \text{ch}_{H(\Lambda)}(\tau, z) &= (-i)^{|\Delta_+|} q^{\frac{h\nu}{2u}|\beta-x|^2} e^{\frac{2\pi i h\nu}{u}(\beta|z)} \\ &\times \frac{\eta(u\tau)^{\frac{3}{2}\ell - \frac{1}{2} \dim \mathfrak{g}}}{\eta(\tau)^{\frac{3}{2}\ell - \frac{1}{2} \dim(\mathfrak{g}_0 + \mathfrak{g}_{1/2})}} \frac{\prod_{\alpha \in \Delta_+} \vartheta_{11}(u\tau, y(\alpha)(z + \tau\beta - \tau x))}{\prod_{\alpha \in \Delta_+^0} \vartheta_{11}(\tau, \alpha(z)) \left( \prod_{\alpha \in \Delta_{1/2}} \vartheta_{01}(\tau, \alpha(z)) \right)^{1/2}}. \end{aligned} \quad (11)$$

**Remark 6.** A formula, similar to Proposition 2(b) and to formula (11), holds if  $\mathfrak{g}$  is a basic Lie superalgebra; one has to replace the character by the supercharacter,  $\dim$  by  $\text{sdim}$ , and the factor  $\vartheta_{ab}$ , corresponding to a root  $\alpha$ , by its inverse if this root is odd. Also, the character is obtained from the supercharacter by replacing  $\vartheta_{ab}$  by  $\vartheta_{a,b+1 \bmod 2}$  if the root  $\alpha$  is odd.

**Remark 7.** An example of (11) is the minimal series representations of the Virasoro algebra with central charge  $c = 1 - \frac{3(u-2)^2}{u}$ , obtained by the quantum Hamiltonian reduction from the boundary admissible  $\hat{\mathfrak{sl}}_2$ -modules from Example 1. For  $j = u - 1$  one gets 0, for  $u = 3$  and  $j = 0, 1$  one gets the trivial representation, but for all other  $j$  and  $u \geq 5$  the characters are the product sides of the Gordon generalizations of the Rogers–Ramanujan identities (the latter correspond to  $u = 5$ ). Another example is the minimal series representations of the  $N = 2$  superconformal algebras, see [4], Section 7.

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