

Zeitschrift: L'Enseignement Mathématique
Herausgeber: Commission Internationale de l'Enseignement Mathématique
Band: 36 (1990)
Heft: 1-2: L'ENSEIGNEMENT MATHÉMATIQUE

Artikel: LINK SIGNATURE, GOERITZ MATRICES AND POLYNOMIAL INVARIANTS
Autor: Lipson, A. S.
Kapitel: 1. P-SKEINS AND SIGNATURE
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-57904>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 09.03.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

LINK SIGNATURE, GOERITZ MATRICES AND POLYNOMIAL INVARIANTS

by A. S. LIPSON

ABSTRACT

Lickorish and Millett introduced the notion of skein equivalence of oriented links in [15]. In the first part of this paper I show that the link signature function $\sigma_L: S^1 \rightarrow Z$ of [22], [12], etc. is a skein invariant for links with non-zero Alexander polynomial. In the second part I show that a renormalised form of Kauffman's polynomial invariant $F_L(a, z)$, well-defined on non-oriented links is calculable from the Goeritz matrix.

1. *P*-SKEINS AND SIGNATURE

In this section I present two notions of “skein equivalence” for links; “broad” skein equivalence and “narrow” skein equivalence. Narrow skein equivalence is a stronger relation (i.e. has smaller equivalence classes), but it is not clear whether it is strictly stronger. I show that the link signature function $\sigma_L: S^1 \rightarrow Z$ is a broad skein invariant for all links with non-zero Alexander polynomial. It is not known whether this result extends to links with zero Alexander polynomial, but it seems unlikely that it should.

1.1. PRELIMINARIES

I briefly recap on some standard material. See [19], [2] or [5] for further details. Let L be an oriented link. Then it is always possible to find an oriented surface F embedded in S^3 in such a way that $\partial F = L$, with the appropriate orientation. Such a surface is called a *Seifert surface* for the link L . Now let c_1, \dots, c_n be closed curves lying in S whose homology classes generate $H_1(S)$, and let c_1^+, \dots, c_n^+ be the results of pushing these curves slightly away from S in the positive direction in a collar neighbourhood of the surface. The matrix $V = (v_{ij})$, where $v_{ij} = lk(a_i, a_j^+)$, is

called a *Seifert matrix* for the link L . Of course such a matrix is not well-defined, but it is true that any two Seifert matrices for a link L are *S-equivalent*; that is, can be transformed into each other by a finite sequence of the moves

$$(1) \quad V \rightarrow PVP',$$

where P is an integral unimodular matrix, and

$$(2) \quad V \rightarrow \begin{pmatrix} V & & \\ & 0 & 1 \\ & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}.$$

Up to sign and multiplication by a power of t , the Alexander polynomial can be obtained by

$$(3) \quad \Delta_L(t) \doteq \det(tV - V').$$

Finally, the *determinant* of L is given by

$$(4) \quad \det(L) = i^n \det(V + V')$$

where V is an $n \times n$ square matrix, and the classical *signature* of the link L is defined by

$$(5) \quad \sigma_L = \sigma(V + V')$$

and this turns out to be a well-defined link invariant.

Tristram [22], Levine [12] and others have developed the following generalisation of the classical signature of a link: Let V be a Seifert matrix for a link L , and ω a complex number of modulus 1. Instead of considering the symmetric matrix $V + V'$, we can deal with the Hermitian matrix $H(\omega) = (1 - \bar{\omega})V + (1 - \omega)V'$. The fact that $|\omega| = 1$ enables us easily to show that the signature $\sigma(H(\omega))$ is unchanged by the moves (1) and (2) and so takes the same values for *S-equivalent* matrices. It hence provides a function $\sigma_L: S^1 \rightarrow \mathbb{Z}$ which may be regarded as a link invariant. Further, $H(\omega) = (\omega - 1)(\bar{\omega}V - V')$ so $\sigma_L(\omega)$ is continuous away from roots of the Alexander polynomial. Clearly $\sigma_L(-1)$ is twice the classical signature of a link.

By a *skein triplet* (or *oriented skein triplet*) of links I shall mean a triplet (L_+, L_-, L_0) of oriented links which are identical outside some ball $B \subset S^3$ and inside it are as shown in Figure 1.

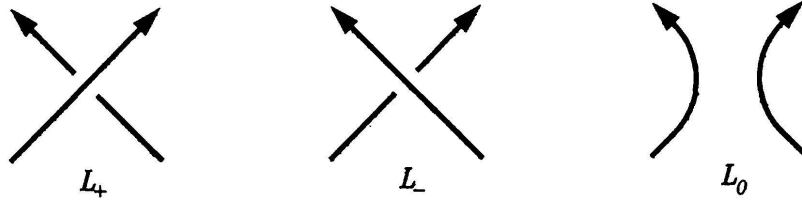


FIGURE 1

There are two equivalence relations with which we may be interested: Let R_b be the equivalence relation on the set of links generated by:

$$(6) \quad \text{if } (L_+, L_-, L_0) \text{ and } (L'_+, L'_-, L'_0) \text{ are skein triples then} \quad \begin{cases} L_+ R_b L'_+, L_- R_b L'_- \Rightarrow L_0 R_b L'_0 \\ L_+ R_b L'_+, L_0 R_b L'_0 \Rightarrow L_- R_b L'_- \\ L_- R_b L'_-, L_0 R_b L'_0 \Rightarrow L_+ R_b L'_+ \end{cases}$$

I shall call this equivalence relation *broad oriented skein equivalence*. The other relation on the set of oriented links, *narrow oriented skein equivalence*, is the equivalence relation R_n generated by:

$$(7) \quad \text{if } (L_+, L_-, L_0) \text{ and } (L'_+, L'_-, L'_0) \text{ are skein triples then} \quad \begin{cases} L_+ R_n L'_+, L_0 R_n L'_0 \Rightarrow L_- R_n L'_- \\ L_- R_n L'_-, L_0 R_n L'_0 \Rightarrow L_+ R_n L'_+ \end{cases}$$

It is obvious that R_b is a weaker equivalence relation than R_n (i.e. the equivalence classes are larger), but it is not clear (and I do not know) whether it is strictly weaker. By the *broad* or *narrow oriented skein of links* I refer to the set of equivalence classes of oriented links under the relation R_b or R_n (Note that in most of the literature, R_n is referred to as “skein equivalence”; R_b is not referred to at all). The polynomial invariant $P_L(l, m)$ of [15], [3] etc. may be regarded as the most general linear broad skein invariant (see [15], [16]). The fact that the value of $P_L(l, m)$ specified on the unknot U is sufficient to define its value on any link may be taken as saying that the broad oriented skein is *generated* by U . The corresponding statement for the narrow oriented skein is that specifying the values of $P_L(l, m)$ on all unlinks is sufficient to define its values on all links — the set of unlinks generates the narrow oriented skein.

1.2. SIGNATURE AND ORIENTED SKEINS

I now show that the signature function $\sigma_L(\xi)$ of any link with non-zero Alexander polynomial is a broad oriented skein invariant (It is already known that the signature $\sigma = \frac{1}{2} \sigma_L(-1)$ is a narrow skein oriented invariant

for knots — which are, of course a proper subset of the set of links with non-zero Alexander polynomial — see e.g. [15]). Before proceeding with this, however, I introduce some convenient notation. Given links L and L' , set

$$(8) \quad \rho_0(L, L') = \begin{cases} \infty & \text{if } L \neq L' \\ 0 & \text{if } L = L' \end{cases}.$$

Now for $n > 0$ set

$$(9) \quad \rho_{n+1}(L, L') = \min \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \min_{\substack{\text{skein triples} \\ (L, L_1, L_2) \\ (L', L'_1, L'_2)}} (1 + \max\{\rho_n(L_1, L'_1), \rho_n(L_2, L'_2)\}), \\ \min_{\substack{\text{skein triples} \\ (L_1, L, L_2) \\ (L'_1, L', L'_2)}} (1 + \max\{\rho_n(L_1, L'_1), \rho_n(L_2, L'_2)\}), \\ \min_{\substack{\text{skein triples} \\ (L_1, L_2, L) \\ (L'_1, L'_2, L)}} (1 + \max\{\rho_n(L_1, L'_1), \rho_n(L_2, L'_2)\}), \\ \min_{\text{Links } L''} (\rho_n(L, L'') + \rho_n(L', L'')). \end{array} \right.$$

Finally, define

$$(10) \quad \rho(L, L') = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \rho_n(L, L')$$

to be the *broad skein distance* from L to L' . It is easy to see that ρ is a metric on the set of links, and that $\rho(L, L') < \infty$ if and only if L and L' are broadly skein equivalent. Intuitively, ρ measures the number of skein triples in a minimal chain of simple skein equivalences needed to establish skein equivalence. It is useful because it provides a grip on broad skein equivalence for use in inductive proofs.

By modifying equation (9) (i.e. by removing the third line inside the outer minimum) a similar metric can easily be defined for narrow skein equivalence, but I shall not need it here.

Note that since skein-equivalent links have the same $P_L(l, m)$ and hence $\Delta_L(t)$ and determinant, it makes sense to speak of the determinant of a skein equivalence class.

THEOREM 1. *The signature is well-defined on broad oriented skein equivalence classes with non-zero determinant.*

Proof. The proof proceeds by induction on the broad oriented skein distance ρ between two links. If $\rho(L, L') = 0$ then $L = L'$ and trivially $\sigma(L) = \sigma(L')$. For the inductive hypothesis suppose that $\rho(L, L') < n$ implies that $\sigma(L) = \sigma(L')$ whenever $\det(L) = \det(L') \neq 0$. I will prove that this is enough to show that the same is true whenever $\rho(L, L') = n$ and $\det(L) = \det(L') \neq 0$. This will suffice to prove the theorem.

Now if $\rho(L, L') = n$ then from the construction of ρ we can see that $\rho_n(L, L') = n$ and $\rho_{n-1}(L, L') = \infty$. One of the following cases must occur, corresponding to the four lines in the outer minimum of equation 9:

- 1) There exist skein triplets (L, L_1, L_2) and (L', L'_1, L'_2) such that $\rho(L_1, L'_1) \leq n - 1$ and $\rho(L_2, L'_2) \leq n - 1$. Then $\sigma(L_1) = \sigma(L'_1)$ and $\sigma(L_2) = \sigma(L'_2)$, provided $\det(L_1) \neq 0$ and $\det(L_2) \neq 0$ respectively. Let L, L_1, L_2 be given Seifert surfaces M_+, M_-, M_0 which are identical away from the crossing at which the links differ and near it are as shown in Figure 2.

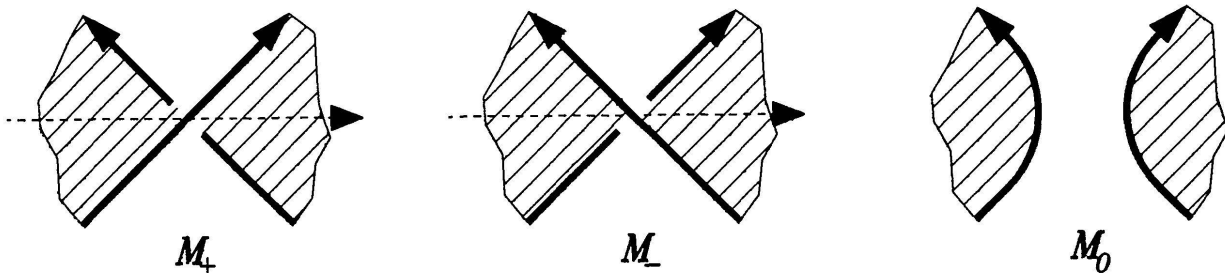


FIGURE 2

Choose a set of generators for $H_1(M_0; \mathbb{Z})$ and extend to sets of generators for the first homologies of M_+ and M_- by including loops which intersect the additional crossing once in the link projection as shown, and which are identical away from this crossing. Then using these to obtain Seifert matrices V_+, V_-, V_0 for the three links, we find that $V_+ + V'_+, V_- + V'_-, V_0 + V'_0$ are of the form

$$(11) \quad \begin{pmatrix} 2r & \rho \\ \rho' & S_0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} 2r + 2 & \rho \\ \rho' & S_0 \end{pmatrix}, (S_0).$$

Now if $\det(L_2) \neq 0$, transformations of the form $Q \rightarrow PQP'$ (P nonsingular and with rational entries) suffice to put these matrices in the form

$$(12) \quad \begin{pmatrix} m & 0 \\ 0 & S_0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} m - 1 & 0 \\ 0 & S_0 \end{pmatrix}, (S_0),$$

where $\det(S_0) \neq 0$. Then

$$\begin{aligned}
 \sigma(L) &= \sigma(V_+ + V'_+) \\
 &= \sigma(S_0) + \operatorname{sgn}(m) \\
 &= \sigma(L_2) + \operatorname{sgn}\left(\frac{\det(L)}{i \det(L_2)}\right) \\
 &= \sigma(L'_2) + \operatorname{sgn}\left(\frac{\det(L')}{i \det(L'_2)}\right) \\
 &= \sigma(L')
 \end{aligned}$$

using the inductive hypothesis for the equality of the third and fourth lines. If, however, $\det(L_2) = 0$, then $\det(L) \neq 0 \Rightarrow \det(L_1) \neq 0$ and the three matrices can be put in the form

$$(14) \quad \begin{pmatrix} m & 0 & \varepsilon \\ 0 & A & 0 \\ \varepsilon & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} m-1 & 0 & \varepsilon \\ 0 & A & 0 \\ \varepsilon & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} A & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix},$$

with $\det(A) \neq 0$ and $\varepsilon = \pm 1$, whence it is easy to check that

$$(15) \quad \sigma(L) = \sigma(A) = \sigma(L_1) = \sigma(L'_1) = \sigma(L').$$

2) There exist skein triplets (L_1, L, L_2) and (L'_1, L', L'_2) such that $\rho(L_1, L'_1) \leq n - 1$ and $\rho(L_2, L'_2) \leq n - 1$. Then $\sigma(L_1) = \sigma(L'_1)$ and $\sigma(L_2) = \sigma(L'_2)$. We may prove by precisely the same arguments as in Case 1) that $\sigma(L) = \sigma(L')$.

3) There exist skein triplets (L_1, L_2, L) and (L'_1, L'_2, L') such that $\rho(L_1, L'_1) \leq n - 1$ and $\rho(L_2, L'_2) \leq n - 1$. Then $\sigma(L_1) = \sigma(L'_1)$ and $\sigma(L_2) = \sigma(L'_2)$, provided $\det(L_1) \neq 0$ and $\det(L_2) \neq 0$ respectively. In this case $L = L_0$ in the skein triplet under construction. As above, we may choose Seifert matrices V_+, V_-, V_0 for L_1, L_2, L such that (after transformations of the form $Q \rightarrow PQP'$, P non-singular and with rational entries) $V_+ + V'_+, V_- + V'_-, V_0 + V'_0$ take the forms

$$(16) \quad \begin{pmatrix} m & 0 \\ 0 & S_0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} m-1 & 0 \\ 0 & S_0 \end{pmatrix}, (S_0),$$

where $\det(S_0) \neq 0$. Then at least one of L_1, L_2 has non-zero determinant. Without loss of generality, suppose $\det(L_1) \neq 0$. Then

$$\begin{aligned}
(17) \quad \sigma(L) &= \sigma(S_0) \\
&= \sigma(L_1) - \operatorname{sgn}(m) \\
&= \sigma(L_1) - \operatorname{sgn}\left(\frac{\det(L_1)}{i \det(L)}\right) \\
&= \sigma(L'_1) - \operatorname{sgn}\left(\frac{\det(L'_1)}{i \det(L')}\right) \\
&= \sigma(L')
\end{aligned}$$

using the inductive hypothesis to establish the equality of the third and fourth lines.

- 4) There exists a link L'' such that $\rho(L, L'') < n$ and $\rho(L'', L') < n$. Then $\sigma_{L'} = \sigma_{L''} = \sigma_L$.

This concludes the proof of Theorem (1). Note the use made of the fact that it is not possible for exactly one member of a skein triplet to have non-zero determinant. Note also that although the transformations $Q \rightarrow PQP'$ (P nonsingular with rational entries) may alter the determinant, they do not change its sign, which is all that the proof requires. \square

Unfortunately it is not clear how to deal with the cases in which $\det(L) = 0$, because it is conceivable that one or more of the skein triplets in the chain establishing skein equivalence of two links could have all three determinants equal to zero, in which case the methods of the above proof would not be applicable. It becomes clearer what is going on and that these exceptions are not just artifacts of a poor proof when the more general situation of the signature function $\sigma_L: S^1 \rightarrow Z$ is considered.

Now since the Alexander polynomial $\Delta_L(t)$ can be obtained from $P_L(l, m)$ it is clearly a broad oriented skein invariant and it makes sense to state

THEOREM 2. *Broadly skein-equivalent oriented links have the same signature function $\sigma_L(\omega)$ for all ω other than roots of the Alexander polynomial.*

Proof. The proof of Theorem 4 goes through virtually unmodified ($\Delta_L(\omega)$ takes the place of the determinant, and the obvious changes are made to accommodate the fact that we are dealing with Hermitian matrices instead of symmetric ones). \square

Now if we adopt the usual convention (see [5]) that the value of $\sigma_L(\omega)$ at a root of the Alexander polynomial is defined to be the mean of its two "adjacent" values

$$(18) \quad \lim_{\varepsilon \rightarrow 0^+} \sigma_L(\omega e^{i\varepsilon}) \quad \text{and} \quad \lim_{\varepsilon \rightarrow 0^-} \sigma_L(\omega e^{i\varepsilon}),$$

the fact that both of these values are well-defined broad oriented skein invariants completes the proof that

COROLLARY 3. *The signature function $\sigma_L: S^1 \rightarrow \mathbb{Z}$ is a broad oriented skein invariant for all links with non-zero Alexander polynomials. \square*

This is an intriguing result, especially in view of the fact that $\sigma_L(\omega)$ is known to be a concordance invariant. It is natural to ask what relations there may be between skein theory and concordance theory. Another obvious question is that of what happens when the Alexander polynomial Δ_L is identically zero. In these circumstances the first Alexander ideal of the link collapses and the signature function can be thought of as extracting information about higher Alexander ideals. Kanenobu ([8] and [9]) has shown that there exist infinitely many links with identical P -polynomials but distinct second Alexander ideals, so there is no obvious reason to suppose that this information should be skein invariant. However, I know of no counterexamples to the conjecture that $\sigma_L(\omega)$ is a broad oriented skein invariant for all links.

2. GOERITZ MATRICES AND THE F -POLYNOMIAL

In this section I explore the relationships between the graph of a link, its Goeritz matrix and Kauffman's polynomial invariant $F_L(a, z)$. In particular I show that the $F(a, z)$, is essentially calculable from the Goeritz matrix of a knot. This result makes use of facts about planar graphs discovered by Whitney over 50 years ago.

2.1. THE GOERITZ MATRIX AND GRAPH OF A LINK

Kauffman [10] has defined a polynomial invariant $F_L(a, z)$ of oriented links as follows:

Recall the definition of the three *Reidemeister moves*, see Figure 3.