ON THE ZEROS OF POLYNOMIALS OVER DIVISION RINGS

BY

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1. **Introduction.** Let $f(x)$ be a polynomial of degree n with coefficients in the center K of a division ring D. Herstein [1] has shown that the number of zeros of $f(x)$ in D is either $\leqq n$ or infinite. In this paper we investigate the situation for polynomials whose coefficients are in D, but not necessarily in K. Here one must distinguish between two types of polynomials, which we call *left* and *general.*

A left polynomial is an expression of the form $f(x) = a_0x^n + a_1x^{n-1} + \cdots + a_n$, where $a_k \in D$ $(k = 0, \cdots, n)$. Equality of two such polynomials is defined in the usual way. If $a_0 \neq 0$, n is called the *degree* of $f(x)$. If $c \in D$, we define $f(c) = a_0c^n + a_1c^{n-1} + \cdots + a_n$; if $f(c) = 0$, c is called a *zero* or *root* of $f(x)$. In §2 we prove that the number of distinct zeros of a left polynomial of degree n is either $\leqq n$ or infinite. This includes in particular a new proof of Herstein's result, avoiding the use of the Cartan-Brauer-Hua theorem.

Left polynomials can be added in the obvious way, and multiplied according to the rule $(a_0x^m + \cdots + a_m)(b_0x^n + \cdots + b_n) = c_0x^{m+n} + \cdots + c_{m+n}$, where $c_k = \sum_{i+j=k} a_ib_j$; they then form a ring $D_L[x]$. However, the specialization maps $f(x) \to f(c)$ of $D_L[x]$ onto D are not homomorphisms if $c \notin K$. To overcome this difficulty we are led to introduce *general polynomials.* Roughly speaking, a general polynomial is a sum of terms of the form $a_0xa_1x \cdots a_{k-1}xa_k$, where $a_0, \cdots, a_k \in D$. But there are certain identifications which must be made in order to obtain the various distributive laws, and to guarantee that $cx = xc$ for $c \in K$; therefore we now give a more careful description. Consider first the set S of all finite sequences $(a_0, a_1, \cdots, a_k)$, where $a_i \in D$. It is easily seen that S forms a semigroup under the product

$$(a_0, a_1, \cdots, a_k)(b_0, b_1, \cdots, b_l) = (a_0, a_1, \cdots, a_{k-1}, a_kb_0, b_1, \cdots, b_l).$$

Let R be the semigroup ring of S, and let A_{ik} (where $0 \leqq i \leqq k$) be the set of all elements in R of the form $(a_0, \cdots, a_i + b_i, \cdots, a_k) - (a_0, \cdots, a_i, \cdots, a_k) - (a_0, \cdots, b_i, \cdots, a_k)$. Let B_k be the set of all elements of R of the form

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$(a_0, a_1, \cdots, a_k) - (c_0a_0, c_1a_1, \cdots, c_ka_k)$, where $c_0, \cdots, c_k \in K$, and $c_0c_1 \cdots c_k = 1$. We consider the quotient ring $R/\mathfrak{a}$, where $\mathfrak{a}$ is the ideal generated by

$$\bigcup_{k=0}^{\infty}\left(\bigcup_{i=0}^{k} A_{ik} \cup B_k\right).$$

Each element (a_0) constitutes a residue class mod $\mathfrak{a}$, and these classes form a subring D' of $R/\mathfrak{a}$ which is isomorphic to D. We now identify D' with D, and write a_0 instead of (a_0). Let x denote the residue class of $(1,1)$ mod $\mathfrak{a}$; then it is easily verified that

$$(a_0, a_1, \cdots, a_k) \equiv a_0xa_1x \cdots a_{k-1}xa_k \qquad (\text{mod}\ \mathfrak{a}).$$

The elements of $R/\mathfrak{a}$ of the form $a_0xa_1x \cdots a_{k-1}xa_k$ are called *general monomials,* and denoted by symbols $M(x)$, $M_\nu(x)$, etc. If $a_0a_1 \cdots a_k \neq 0$, then $M(x) = a_0x \cdots xa_k$ is said to have degree k. Every element of $R/\mathfrak{a}$ can be represented as a sum $\sum_{\nu=1}^{m} M_\nu(x)$ of general monomials. Such elements are called general polynomials, and are denoted by symbols $f(x)$, $g(x)$, etc. It can be shown that every $f(x) \in R/\mathfrak{a}$ has a unique representation in the form $f(x) = \sum_{\nu=1}^{m} M_\nu(x)$ where m is minimal. Then if $f(x) \neq 0$, we define its degree to be $n = \max_\nu \deg M_\nu(x)$.

We are now justified in introducing the notation $D_G[x]$ for the ring $R/\mathfrak{a}$. There is a natural way of identifying $D_L[x]$ with a subset of $D_G[x]$, but this subset is not a subring of $D_G[x]$ unless $D = K$, in which case $D_L[x] = D_G[x] = K[x]$. It is, however, always possible to map $D_G[x]$ homomorphically onto $D_L[x]$ by extending the map $a_0xa_1x \cdots xa_k \to a_0a_1 \cdots a_kx^k$ to be additive.

In the construction of $D_L[x]$ and $D_G[x]$ we used only the fact that D was a ring with identity; hence we can define $D_L[x_1, \cdots, x_r]$ and $D_G[x_1, \cdots, x_r]$ by induction.

If $c \in D$ and $M(x) = a_0xa_1 \cdots xa_k$, put $M(c) = a_0ca_1 \cdots ca_k$; it is clear from the definition of $\mathfrak{a}$ that $M(c)$ depends only on the residue class mod $\mathfrak{a}$ in which $(a_0, \cdots, a_k)$ lies, and is therefore well-defined. If $f(x) = \sum M_\nu(x)$, put $f(c) = \sum M_\nu(c)$; this is also well-defined. The specializations $f(x) \to f(c)$ are now homomorphisms of $D_G[x]$ onto D.

An element $c \in D$ is a *zero* or *root* of $f(x) \in D_G[x]$ if $f(c) = 0$. Let $N(f)$ be the number of distinct zeros of $f(x)$. In §3 we study $N(f)$ in the case where K is infinite and $[D: K] = d < \infty$. We prove that if h is any integer in the range $1 \leq h \leq n^d$, then there is a polynomial $f(x) \in D_G[x]$ of degree n such that $N(f) = h$.

2. **Left polynomials.** Our first two theorems are essentially due to Richardson [3]; however his proofs are not quite correct, as pointed out by Rohrbach [4].

Theorem 1. *An element $c \in D$ is a zero of a polynomial $f(x) \in D_L[x]$ if and only if there exists a $g(x) \in D_L[x]$ such that $f(x) = g(x)(x-c)$.*

Proof. Let $f(x) = a_0x^n + a_1x^{n-1} + \cdots + a_n$. The theorem is trivial if $n = 0$ or 1, so we may suppose $n \geqq 2$. If c is a root of $f(x)$, let

$$g(x) = a_0x^{n-1} + (a_1 + a_0c)x^{n-2} + (a_2 + a_1c + a_0c^2)x^{n-3} + \cdots + (a_{n-1} + a_{n-2}c + \cdots + a_0c^{n-1}).$$

Then a simple calculation shows that $f(x) = g(x)(x-c)$.

Conversely, suppose that $f(x) = g(x)(x-c)$, where $g(x) = b_0x^{n-1} + b_1x^{n-2} + \cdots + b_{n-1}$. Equating coefficients, we obtain

$$\begin{aligned} a_0 &= b_0, \\ a_1 &= b_1 - b_0c, \\ a_2 &= b_2 - b_1c, \\ &\vdots \\ a_{n-1} &= b_{n-1} - b_{n-2}c, \\ a_n &= -\,b_{n-1}c. \end{aligned}$$

Multiplying the equation for a_i on the right by c^{n-i} and adding, we get $f(c) = 0$. This completes the proof.

We note that the existence of a factorization $f(x) = (x-c)h(x)$ neither implies nor is implied by $f(c) = 0$.

Now let D^* be the multiplicative group of nonzero elements of D. Two elements $a, b \in D$ are called conjugates if $a = tbt^{-1}$ for some $t \in D^*$. As usual this equivalence relation partitions D into disjoint sets called conjugacy classes.

Theorem 2. *If $f(x) \in D_L[x]$ has degree n, then at most n conjugacy classes of D contain roots of $f(x)$.*

Proof. The proof is by induction on n. It is clear that a polynomial of degree zero has no roots, and a polynomial of degree one has exactly one root. Hence the theorem is true for $n < 2$. Now suppose $n \geqq 2$, and assume that the theorem has already been proved for polynomials of degree $< n$. Suppose $f(x) = a_0x^n + a_1x^{n-1} + \cdots + a_n$ has $n+1$ distinct zeros $c_0, c_1, \cdots, c_n$. By Theorem 1 we have factorizations $f(x) = g_i(x)(x - c_i)$ $(i = 0, \cdots, n)$. Now assume $i > 0$, and set $t_i = c_i - c_0$. Then $x - c_0 = x - c_i + t_i$; hence

$$\begin{aligned} g_i(x)(x-c_i) &= g_0(x)(x-c_0) \\ &= g_0(x)(x-c_i) + g_0(x)t_i. \end{aligned}$$

Thus

$$\begin{aligned} g_0(x) &= [g_i(x) - g_0(x)](x-c_i)t_i^{-1} \\ &= [g_i(x) - g_0(x)]t_i^{-1}(x - t_ic_it_i^{-1}), \end{aligned}$$

remembering that $xt_i^{-1} = t_i^{-1}x$ in the ring $D_L[x]$. Another application of Theorem 1 now shows that $t_ic_it_i^{-1}$ is a root of $g_0(x)$ $(i = 1, \cdots, n)$. Since $\deg g_0(x) < n$, the induction hypothesis implies that two of the elements $t_ic_it_i^{-1}$ are conjugate (they may be equal). But if, say, $t_1c_1t_1^{-1}$ is conjugate to $t_2c_2t_2^{-1}$, then c_1 is conjugate to c_2, completing the induction.

THEOREM 3. *If D is a noncommutative division ring, then the centralizer $Z(c)$ of any element $c \in D$ is infinite.*

Proof. We suppose $Z(c)$ is finite, and obtain a contradiction as follows. The center K of D is contained in $Z(c)$, so K is a finite field; say $K = \mathrm{GF}(q)$. If $c \in K$, then $Z(c) = D$, which is infinite by Wedderburn's theorem. Hence $c \notin K$. Another application of Wedderburn's theorem shows that $Z(c)$ is a field, and hence $Z(c) = \mathrm{GF}(q^f)$, where $f > 1$. The mapping μ: $a \to a^q$ is an automorphism of $Z(c)$ with fixed field K. By a well-known theorem [2, p. 162], μ can be extended to an inner automorphism of D. Thus there is an element $t \in D$ such that $tat^{-1} = a^q$ for all $a \in Z(c)$. In particular $tct^{-1} = c^q$, and by iteration, $t^fct^{-f} = c^{q^f} = c$. Hence $t^f \in Z(c)$, which implies that t is of finite order. From these facts it follows easily that there are only a finite number of distinct elements of the form $\sum \lambda_{i,j}c^it^j$ $(\lambda_{i,j} \in K)$ and that they form a subring $E \subset D$. The nonzero elements of E form a finite semigroup $E^* \subset D^*$; hence E^* is a group, and E is a division ring. This contradicts Wedderburn's theorem, since $tc = c^qt \neq ct$.

THEOREM 4. *If a polynomial $f(x) \in D_L[x]$ has two distinct zeros in a conjugacy class of D, then it has infinitely many zeros in that class.*

Proof. Suppose c and $tct^{-1} \neq c$ are zeros of $f(x) = a_0x^n + \cdots + a_n$. Consider the equation

$$f(ycy^{-1}) = a_0yc^ny^{-1} + a_1yc^{n-1}y^{-1} + \cdots + a_n = 0, \tag{1}$$

where y is the unknown. Except for the extraneous root 0, this is equivalent to the equation

$$a_0yc^n + a_1yc^{n-1} + \cdots + a_ny = 0. \tag{2}$$

By hypothesis $y = 1$ and $y = t$ are solutions of (2). Now (2) clearly has the following properties:

(i) If y_1 and y_2 are solutions, so is $y_1 + y_2$.

(ii) If y is a solution and $z \in Z(c)$, then yz is a solution.

Combining these properties we see that $t + z$ is a solution of (2) for any $z \in Z(c)$. Moreover $t + z \neq 0$ since $t \notin Z(c)$. Hence $t + z$ is a solution of (1), and so $(t+z)c(t+z)^{-1}$ is a zero of $f(x)$. To complete the proof we show that the elements $(t+z)c(t+z)^{-1}$ are all distinct and apply Theorem 3. Suppose that $(t+z_1)c(t+z_1)^{-1} = (t+z_2)c(t+z_2)^{-1}$, where $z_1, z_2 \in Z(c)$. Then $(t+z_2)^{-1}(t+z_1)$ commutes with c, so that $(t+z_2)^{-1}(t+z_1) = z_3$ where $z_3 \in Z(c)$. Thus $t + z_1 = (t+z_2)z_3 = tz_3 + z_2z_3$. If $z_3 \neq 1$, this implies that $t=(z_2z_3-z_1)(1-z_3)^{-1}$, which is in $Z(c)$ since $Z(c)$ is a division ring. This contradicts the fact that $tct^{-1}\neq c$. Hence $z_3=1$, which means that $t+z_1=t+z_2$, or finally $z_1=z_2$.

THEOREM 5. *If $f(x)\in D_L[x]$ has degree n, then the number of zeros of $f(x)$ is either $\leqq n$ or infinite.*

Proof. If $f(x)$ has more than n zeros, then two of them lie in the same conjugacy class by Theorem 2. By Theorem 4, this class contains infinitely many zeros of $f(x)$.

3. **General polynomials.** We suppose throughout this section that $[D:K]=d<\infty$. Elements of K are denoted by greek letters. Let $1=e_1,\cdots,e_d$ be a basis of D over K, and let $x=\xi_1e_1+\cdots+\xi_de_d$ be the generic element of D. If $f(x)$ is a general polynomial of degree n, we can express all its coefficients in terms of the basis $e_1,\cdots,e_d$. Then after multiplying the factors of each monomial $a_0xa_1\cdots xa_k$ and collecting terms, we obtain

$$f(x)=f_1(\xi_1,\cdots,\xi_d)e_1+\cdots+f_d(\xi_1,\cdots,\xi_d)e_d,$$

where the $f_i(\xi_1,\cdots,\xi_d)$ are polynomials in $K[\xi_1,\cdots,\xi_d]$. Thus the equation $f(x)=0$ is equivalent to the system $f_i(\xi_1,\cdots,\xi_d)=0$ $(i=1,\cdots,d)$. We note that each f_i is either identically zero or of degree $\leqq n$.

To avoid endless separation of cases in what follows, we make the convention that 0 is a homogeneous polynomial of degree n for any $n\geqq 0$.

THEOREM 6. *If $f_i(\xi_1,\cdots,\xi_d)\in K[\xi_1,\cdots,\xi_d]$ $(i=1,\cdots,d)$ are d given polynomials of degree $\leqq n$, then there exists a polynomial $f(x)\in D_G[x]$ of degree $\leqq n$ such that $f(x)=\sum_{i=1}^d f_ie_i$.*

Proof. The theorem is clearly true if $d=1$, i.e., $D=K$. Assume from now on that $d>1$, so that D is noncommutative. It suffices to show that if the f_i are all homogeneous polynomials of degree n, then there is a homogeneous polynomial $f(x)\in D_G[x]$ of degree n with $f(x)=\sum_{i=1}^d f_ie_i$. (The general case then follows by forming sums.) If $n=0$ the result is obvious. If $n=1$, we have $f_i(\xi_1,\cdots,\xi_d)=\sum_{j=1}^d\alpha_{ij}\xi_j$ with $\alpha_{ij}\in K$. Thus the f_i define a linear transformation of D, considered as a vector space over K, into itself. It is our object to show that this transformation is of the form $x\rightarrow f(x)$ for some homogeneous polynomial $f(x)\in D_G[x]$ of degree one. Such polynomials have the form $f(x)=\sum a_\nu xb_\nu$, where $a_\nu,b_\nu\in D$. From this it is trivial to verify that the corresponding transformations $x\rightarrow f(x)$ form a ring R. We now show that R is doubly transitive. Let a and b be two elements of D which are linearly independent over K, and let c,d be any two elements of D. Then $ab\neq 0$, and $ab^{-1}\notin K$. Hence there is an element $r\in D$ such that $s=rab^{-1}-ab^{-1}r\neq 0$. Then $t=ba^{-1}r^{-1}-r^{-1}ba^{-1}\neq 0$. The polynomial

$$g(x)=(rxb^{-1}-xb^{-1}r)s^{-1}c+(xa^{-1}r^{-1}-r^{-1}xa^{-1})t^{-1}d$$

satisfies $g(a) = c$ and $g(b) = d$, proving that R is doubly transitive. By a theorem of Jacobson [2, p. 32], R is the ring of all linear transformations of D; thus there is an $f(x) \in D_G[x]$ such that $f(x) = \sum_{i=1}^{d} f_i e_i$.

To deal with the case $n > 1$ we consider the ring $D_G[x_1, \cdots, x_n]$ of general polynomials in n indeterminates. A polynomial $p(x_1, \cdots, x_n) \in D_G[x_1, \cdots, x_n]$ is called a *multilinear form* if it is homogeneous and linear in each indeterminate x_k. Putting $x_k = \sum_{i=1}^{d} \xi_i^{(k)} e_i$, and expressing the coefficients of f in terms of the basis $e_1, \cdots, e_d$, we find that

$$p(x_1, \cdots, x_n) = \sum_{i=1}^{d} p_i(\xi_1^{(1)}, \cdots, \xi_d^{(n)}) e_i,$$

where the p_i are polynomials in $K[\xi_1^{(1)}, \cdots, \xi_d^{(n)}]$. Moreover p is multilinear if and only if all the p_i are multilinear (i.e., linear in each set of indeterminates $\xi_1^{(k)}, \cdots, \xi_d^{(k)}$). We assert that given any d multilinear forms $p_i \in K[\xi_1^{(1)}, \cdots, \xi_d^{(n)}]$, there exists a multilinear form $p \in D_G[x_1, \cdots, x_n]$ such that $p = \sum f_i e_i$. For let

$$g_k(\xi_1^{(k)}, \cdots, \xi_d^{(k)}) \in K[\xi_1^{(k)}, \cdots, \xi_d^{(k)}] \qquad (k = 1, \cdots, n)$$

be given linear forms. By what we have already shown there exist polynomials $h_k(x_k) \in D_G[x_k]$ $(k = 1, \cdots, n)$ such that $h_1(x_1) = g_1 e_i$, and $h_k(x_k) = g_k e_1$ for $k > 1$. Then (recalling that $e_1 = 1$) we have $h_1(x_1) \cdots h_n(x_n) = g_1 \cdots g_n e_i$. The terms of the given polynomial p_i are of the form $g_1 \cdots g_n$, so p_i is a sum of such polynomials. Hence $p_i e_i$ is the sum of the corresponding polynomials $h_1(x_1) \cdots h_n(x_n) \in D_G[x_1, \cdots, x_n]$. Applying this fact for each $i = 1, \cdots, d$ and summing over i we obtain a multilinear form $p(x_1, \cdots, x_n) \in D_G[x_1, \cdots, x_n]$ such that $p = \sum p_i e_i$.

Now suppose that

$$f_i(\xi_1, \cdots, \xi_d) \in K[\xi_1, \cdots, \xi_d] \qquad (i = 1, \cdots, d)$$

are d given homogeneous polynomials of degree n. By "polarization" we construct multilinear polynomials $p_i(\xi_1^{(1)}, \cdots, \xi_d^{(n)}) \in K[\xi_1^{(1)}, \cdots, \xi_d^{(n)}]$ such that p_i reduces to f_i under the substitution $\xi_1^{(1)} = \cdots = \xi_1^{(n)} = \xi_1, \cdots, \xi_d^{(1)} = \cdots = \xi_d^{(n)} = \xi_d$. By what we have shown, there is a polynomial $p(x_1, \cdots, x_n) \in D_G[x_1, \cdots, x_n]$ such that $p = \sum p_i e_i$. Then $f(x) = p(x, \cdots, x) \in D_G[x]$ satisfies $f = \sum f_i e_i$, completing the proof.

THEOREM 7. *Let K be any infinite field, and let $\{n_1, n_2, \cdots, n_d\}$ be any set of positive integers. Suppose $1 \leqq h \leqq n_1 n_2 \cdots n_d$. Then there exist d polynomials $f_i(\xi_1, \cdots, \xi_d) \in K[\xi_1, \cdots, \xi_d]$ $(i = 1, \cdots, d)$ such that $\deg f_i = n_i$, and such that the system $f_i(\xi_1, \cdots, \xi_d) = 0$ $(i = 1, \cdots, d)$ has exactly h solutions. The same conclusion holds for $h = 0$, provided that $d > 1$.*

Proof. It is convenient to prove a stronger statement, namely that the f_i can be chosen so that f_i is a product of n_i linear polynomials, and such that if p_i is any linear factor of f_i $(i = 1, \cdots, d)$, then $p_1, \cdots, p_d$ are linearly independent over K. Consider first the case $d=1$, and write $n_1=n$, $\xi_1=\xi$. We have $0\leqq h\leqq n$. Since K is infinite, there exist h distinct elements $\alpha_1,\cdots,\alpha_h\in K$. The polynomial $f(\xi)=(\xi-\alpha_1)^{n-h+1}(\xi-\alpha_2)\cdots(\xi-\alpha_h)$ clearly does what is required.

Assume next that $d>1$, and that $n_1=n_2=\cdots=n_d=1$. Then $0\leqq h\leqq 1$. If $h=1$, set $f_i=\xi_i$, for all i. If $h=0$ put $f_1=\xi_1$, $f_2=\xi_1+1$, and $f_i=\xi_i$ for all $i>2$. (Note that these polynomials are linearly independent over K.) The proof now proceeds by induction on d, and for fixed d by induction on $s=\sum_{i=1}^{d}n_i$. Assume then that $s>d$, and that the theorem is true for all sets $\{m_1,\cdots,m_c\}$, where $c<d$, and also for all sets $\{m_1,\cdots,m_d\}$, where $\sum_{i=1}^{d}m_i<s$. Suppose without loss of generality that $n_1>1$. Then the induction hypothesis can be applied to the set $\{n_1-1,n_2,\cdots,n_d\}$. Thus for any h in the range $0\leqq h\leqq(n_1-1)n_2\cdots n_d$ we can find polynomials $g_i(\xi_1,\cdots,\xi_d)$ $(i=1,\cdots,d)$ of the special type described above, such that $\deg g_1=n_1-1$, $\deg g_i=n_i$ for $i>1$, and such that the system $g_i(\xi_1,\cdots,\xi_d)=0$ has exactly h solutions. Let $p(\xi_1,\cdots,\xi_d)$ be one of the linear factors of $g_1(\xi_1,\cdots,\xi_d)$. Then set $f_1=pg_1$ and $f_i=g_i$ for $i>1$. Clearly the polynomials f_i have the desired property.

We may therefore suppose that $(n_1-1)n_2\cdots n_d<h\leqq n_1n_2\cdots n_d$. Write $h=(n_1-1)n_2\cdots n_d+k$, where $1\leqq k\leqq n_2\cdots n_d$. By induction there exist polynomials $g_i\in K[\xi_2,\cdots,\xi_d]$ $(i=2,\cdots,d)$ of our special type such that $\deg g_i=n_i$, and such that the system $g_i(\xi_2,\cdots,\xi_d)=0$ $(i=2,\cdots,d)$ has exactly k solutions. Let the decomposition of g_i into linear factors be $g_i=p_i^{(1)}\cdots p_i^{(n_i)}$ $(i=2,\cdots,d)$. Set $f_i=\prod_{j=1}^{n_i}(\alpha_{ij}\xi_1+p_i^{(j)})$ $(i=2,\cdots,d)$, where the α_{ij} are elements in K which will be specified later. Put

$$f_1=\xi_1\prod_{j=2}^{n_1}(\beta_j\xi_1+p_1^{(j)}),$$

where the β_j are elements of K to be specified later, and the $p_1^{(j)}$ are linear polynomials in $\xi_2,\cdots,\xi_d$, to be determined. There is no nontrivial relation of the form

$$\lambda_1\xi_1+\lambda_2(\alpha_{2r}\xi_1+p_2^{(r)})+\cdots+\lambda_d(\alpha_{dt}\xi_1+p_d^{(t)})=0.$$

For setting $\xi_1=0$ we see that $\lambda_2=\cdots=\lambda_d=0$ by the independence of $p_2^{(r)},\cdots,p_d^{(t)}$. Hence $\lambda_1=0$. Now choose the polynomials $p_1^{(j)}$ $(j>1)$ so that $p_1^{(j)},p_2^{(r)},\cdots,p_d^{(t)}$ are linearly independent for all choices of $j,r,\cdots,t$. This can be done since the set V of linear polynomials in $\xi_2,\cdots,\xi_d$ is a d-dimensional vector space over the infinite field K, and we need merely avoid a finite number of $(d-1)$-dimensional subspaces of V in choosing the $p_1^{(j)}$. Then it is clear that $\beta_j\xi_1+p_1^{(j)}$, $\alpha_{2r}\xi_1+p_2^{(r)},\ldots,\alpha_{dt}\xi_1+p_d^{(t)}$ are linearly independent. Furthermore the $d\times(d-1)$ matrix formed by the coefficients of $\xi_2,\ldots,\xi_d$ in the polynomials $p_1^{(j)},p_2^{(r)},\ldots,p_d^{(t)}$ has rank $d-1$. Hence by avoiding a finite number of proper subspaces in the space W of vectors whose coordinates are the β_j and α_{ij}, we can choose the α's and β's so that the matrix formed by the coefficients of $\xi_1, \dots, \xi_d$ in the polynomials $\beta_j\xi_1 + p_1^{(j)}, \alpha_{2r}\xi_1 + p_2^{(r)}, \dots, \alpha_{dt}\xi_1 + p_d^{(t)}$ is nonsingular for all choices of $j > 1$, $r, \dots, t$. Then the system $\beta_j\xi_1 + p_1^{(j)} = \alpha_{2r}\xi_1 + p_2^{(r)} = \dots = \alpha_{dt}\xi_1 + p_d^{(t)} = 0$ has a unique solution for each $j > 1$, $r, \dots, t$. By avoiding a further finite set of subspaces of W, we can insure that no $d + 1$ of these equations have a common solution, so that the solutions corresponding to different choices of $j, r, \dots, t$ are distinct.

Now consider the system $f_i(\xi_1, \cdots, \xi_d) = 0$ $(i = 1, \cdots, d)$. For this to be satisfied, some linear factor of each f_i must vanish. If $\xi_1 = 0$, then the system reduces to $g_i(\xi_2, \dots, \xi_d) = 0$ $(i = 2, \dots, d)$. This has k solutions by the construction of the g_i. If $\xi_1 \neq 0$, we get exactly one solution for every choice of a linear factor from each of the polynomials $f_1, \dots, f_d$. There are $(n_1 - 1)n_2 \dots n_d$ such choices, and therefore the total number of solutions is $k + (n_1 - 1)n_2 \dots n_d = h$. This completes the proof.

Theorem 8. *Let D be a noncommutative division ring with $[D:K] = d < \infty$. Suppose $n \geqq 1$, and let h be an integer satisfying $0 \leqq h \leqq n^d$. Then there is a polynomial $f(x) \in D_G[x]$ of degree n with $N(f) = h$.*

Proof. By Theorem 7 with $n_1 = \dots = n_d = n$, we can find d polynomials $f_i(\xi_1, \cdots, \xi_d) \in K[\xi_1, \dots, \xi_d]$ of degree n such that the system $f_i(\xi_1, \dots, \xi_d) = 0$ $(i = 1, \dots, d)$ has exactly h solutions. By Theorem 6 there is a polynomial $f(x) \in D_G[x]$ of degree $\leqq n$ such that $f(x) = \sum_{i=1}^{d} f_i e_i$. Clearly $\deg f = n$, and $N(f) = h$.

The question of what values $> n^d$, if any, can be assumed by $N(f)$ for polynomials $f(x) \in D_G[x]$ of degree n, is extremely deep, and depends on the arithmetic nature of K. By Bézout's theorem we know that if $n^d < N(f) < \infty$, then the system $f_i(\xi_1, \dots, \xi_d) = 0$ has infinitely many solutions in the algebraic closure $\bar{K}$. But of course $K \neq \bar{K}$, since there are no division rings of finite dimension $d > 1$ over an algebraically closed field. Thus we gain little information about the zeros of the system $f_i = 0$ in K.

For example, let $K = \boldsymbol{Q}(\sqrt{-3})$, where $\boldsymbol{Q}$ is the rational field. Let D be a division ring with center K such that $[D:K] = 4$. Then the polynomial

$$f(x) = (\xi_3 - \xi_2^2)e_1 + (\xi_2\xi_3 - 3\xi_1^2 - 3\xi_1 - 1)e_2 + (\xi_4^2 - 1)e_3$$

has degree 2, but has exactly 18 zeros in D. To see this, we consider the system

$$\xi_3 = \xi_2^2,$$
$$\xi_2\xi_3 = 3\xi_1^2 + 3\xi_1 + 1,$$
$$\xi_4^2 = 1.$$

Eliminating ξ_3 from the first two equations we obtain

$$\xi_2^3 = 3\xi_1^2 + 3\xi_1 + 1 = (\xi_1 + 1)^3 - \xi_1^3.$$

By Fermat's last theorem for cubes, the only solutions in $\boldsymbol{Q}(\sqrt{-3})$ are such that $\xi_2 = 0$ or $\xi_1 + 1 = 0$ or $\xi_1 = 0$. There are nine such solutions. Once ξ_1, ξ_2 are known, ξ_3 is uniquely determined, and $\xi_4 = \pm 1$. Hence our system has precisely eighteen solutions in K, as asserted. On the other hand, $n^d = 2^4 = 16$.

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