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The average order of the Möbius function for Beurling primes

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Abstract

In this paper, we study the counting functions $\psi_{\mathcal{P}}(x)$, $N_{\mathcal{P}}(x)$ and $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x)$ of a generalized prime system \mathcal{N} . Here $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x)$ is the partial sum of the Möbius function over \mathcal{N} not exceeding x . In particular, we study these when they are asymptotically well-behaved, in the sense that $\psi_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = x + O(x^{\alpha+\varepsilon})$, $N_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = \rho x + O(x^{\beta+\varepsilon})$ and $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = O(x^{\gamma+\varepsilon})$, for some $\rho > 0$ and $\alpha, \beta, \gamma < 1$. We show that the two largest of α, β, γ must be equal and at least $\frac{1}{2}$.

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1. Introduction

A *Beurling generalized prime system* \mathcal{P} is an unbounded sequence of real numbers p_1, p_2, p_3, \dots satisfying

$$1 < p_1 \leq p_2 \leq \dots \leq p_n \leq \dots$$

We call these numbers *generalized primes* (or *g-primes*), and from them we form the system \mathcal{N} of *generalized integers* (or *g-integers*) associated to \mathcal{P} . These are the numbers of the form

$$p_1^{\alpha_1} p_2^{\alpha_2} \dots p_k^{\alpha_k}$$

where $\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k \in \mathbb{N}_0$. In other words, \mathcal{N} (viewed as a multi-set) is the semi-group generated by the (multi-set) \mathcal{P} under multiplication. Such systems were first defined and investigated by Beurling [1] in 1937 and have been studied by many researchers since then (see for instance [2], [5] and the numerous references therein). Attached to these systems are the counting functions

$$\pi_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = \sum_{\substack{p \leq x \\ p \in \mathcal{P}}} 1, \quad N_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = \sum_{\substack{n \leq x \\ n \in \mathcal{N}}} 1, \quad \psi_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = \sum_{\substack{p^k \leq x \\ p \in \mathcal{P} \\ k \in \mathbb{N}}} \log p,$$

which generalize the usual counting functions. In each case, the sum is over all possible elements from the multi-set \mathcal{P} or \mathcal{N} with the given constraint. We are also interested in the generalized *Möbius* function defined to be $\mu_{\mathcal{P}}(1) = 1$, $\mu_{\mathcal{P}}(p_{i_1} \dots p_{i_k}) = (-1)^k$ for distinct *g-primes* (i.e. i_1, \dots, i_k are distinct) and zero otherwise. Strictly speaking this need not be a function if two such products are numerically the same. In any case, we define the sum function

$$M_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = \sum_{\substack{n \leq x \\ n \in \mathcal{N}}} \mu_{\mathcal{P}}(n).$$

This generalizes the usual $M(x) = \sum_{n \leq x} \mu(n)$. The associated *Beurling zeta function* is defined as usual by

$$\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}(s) = \prod_{p \in \mathcal{P}} \frac{1}{1 - \frac{1}{p^s}} = \sum_{n \in \mathcal{N}} \frac{1}{n^s}.$$

We are interested in systems for which one or more of $\psi_{\mathcal{P}}(x) - x$, $N_{\mathcal{P}}(x) - \rho x$, or $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x)$ is $O(x^\theta)$ for some $\theta < 1$ (and $\rho > 0$). More precisely, we define three numbers α, β, γ by the following:

$$\psi_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = x + O(x^{\alpha+\varepsilon}) \quad (1)$$

$$N_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = \rho x + O(x^{\beta+\varepsilon}) \quad (2)$$

$$M_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = O(x^{\gamma+\varepsilon}) \quad (3)$$

hold for all $\varepsilon > 0$ but no $\varepsilon < 0$. For example, for $\mathcal{N} = \mathbb{N}$, $\beta = 0$ while $\alpha = \gamma \geq \frac{1}{2}$ due to the Riemann zeros. At the outset we are only interested in those systems for which the abscissa of convergence of the Dirichlet series for $\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}$ is 1. Thus $\alpha, \beta, \gamma \in [0, 1]$ in any case.

For (1) and (2) to hold simultaneously for some $\alpha, \beta < 1$ is akin to having a kind of Riemann Hypothesis being true for such a system. In [11], it was shown that such a system does exist with $\alpha, \beta \leq \frac{1}{2}$. On the other hand, in [6], it was shown that it is impossible to have both α and β less than $\frac{1}{2}$.

We note that (3) is related to an interesting problem in its own right: *how small can $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x)$ be made for a system with abscissa¹ equal to 1?* In other words, how much cancellation can occur in the sum for $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x)$? Of course, for $\mathcal{N} = \mathbb{N}$, $M(x) = \Omega(\sqrt{x})$ on account of the Riemann zeros, but without this knowledge it is not clear how to even prove $M(x) = \Omega(x^a)$ for some $a > 0$. This is similar to a question of Kahane and Saias [9] who ask how small $\sum_{n \leq x} f(n)$ can be for f completely multiplicative.

It is also related to the more general question of the size of $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x)$ and how it relates to the other functions. For example, much work has been done to determine under what conditions one has $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = o(x)$ (see for example Chapter 14 of [5]). Zhang [10] was the first to note that PNT is not equivalent to $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = o(x)$. For the most general results giving $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = o(x)$, see the very recent papers [3] and [4].

Our main result is the following:

Theorem 1

Of the numbers α, β, γ , the two largest must be the same and at least $\frac{1}{2}$.

This result implies that for $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = O(x^\gamma)$ with $\gamma < \frac{1}{2}$ to hold, we need the system to have somewhat chaotic g -primes and g -integers; i.e. the errors in (1) and (2) have to be $\Omega(x^{\frac{1}{2}-\varepsilon})$ for every $\varepsilon > 0$. It may be conjectured that having $\gamma < \frac{1}{2}$ is actually impossible.

2. Some Relevant Results

In order to prove the main result we shall need some relevant notions as well as existing results about g -prime systems.

Let $f(s) = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{a_n}{b_n^s}$ be a generalized Dirichlet series where $b_n > 0$ is strictly increasing with finite abscissae of absolute convergence σ_a . Suppose f has a meromorphic continuation to $H_\alpha := \{s \in \mathbb{C} : \Re s > \alpha\}$. We say f has *finite order* in H_α if

$$f(\sigma + it) \ll |t|^\lambda \quad (|t| \geq 1)$$

¹The abscissa of convergence of $\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}(s)$. With abscissa σ_c , we trivially have $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x) \ll x^{\sigma_c+\varepsilon}$. Without the condition on the abscissa, $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x)$ can even be bounded: take $\mathcal{P} = \{2^{2^n} : n \in \mathbb{N}_0\}$. Then $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = 0, 1$ or -1 .

for $\sigma > \alpha$. As such, we can define the *Lindelöf function* $\mu_f(\sigma)$ to be the infimum of such λ . It is well-known that μ_f is non-negative, decreasing and convex and for $\sigma > \sigma_a$, $\mu_f(\sigma) = 0$.

The following result about such Dirichlet series and “counting function”

$$A(x) := \sum_{b_n \leq x} a_n$$

was essentially proved in [6], Proposition 3 (see also [8], Theorem 2.1). It was proven for the case where $a_n \geq 0$ such that $a_n \ll n^\varepsilon$ for all $\varepsilon > 0$. This latter condition however is not necessary. Also we shall require a particular case when a_n is also sometimes negative.

Theorem A

Let $f(s) = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{a_n}{b_n^s}$ have abscissa of convergence $\sigma_c \leq 1$. Suppose that for some $\alpha \in [0, 1)$ and $c \in \mathbb{C}$, we have

$$A(x) = cx + O(x^{\alpha+\varepsilon}) \quad \text{for all } \varepsilon > 0. \quad (4)$$

Then $f(s)$ has an analytic continuation to $H_\alpha \setminus \{1\}$ with a simple pole at $s = 1$ with residue² c and f has finite order; indeed $\mu_f(\sigma) \leq 1$ for $\sigma > \alpha$.

Conversely, suppose that for some $\alpha \in [0, 1)$, $f(s)$ has an analytic continuation to H_α except for a simple pole at $s = 1$ with residue c . Further assume that $\mu_f(\sigma) = 0$ for $\sigma > \alpha$ and either

(i) $a_n \geq 0$ or
(ii)
$$\sum_{x-1 < b_n \leq x} |a_n| = O(x^{\alpha+\varepsilon}) \quad \text{for all } \varepsilon > 0. \quad (5)$$

Then (4) holds.

Proof. The proof of the first part is standard and follows on writing

$$f(s) = s \int_1^\infty \frac{A(x)}{x^{s+1}} dx = \frac{cs}{s-1} + s \int_1^\infty \frac{A(x) - cx}{x^{s+1}} dx,$$

and noting that the integral on the right converges absolutely to a holomorphic function on H_α .

For the converse, we follow the proof of Proposition 3 in [6] as much as possible. This leads to

$$A(x) - cx \ll \frac{x}{T^{1-\varepsilon}} + x^{\alpha+\varepsilon} T^\varepsilon + \frac{x}{T} + \frac{x}{T} \sum_{\frac{x}{2} < b_n < 2x} \frac{|a_n|}{|b_n - x|} \quad (6)$$

for every $T > 1$ and $\varepsilon > 0$ — see equation (3.7) of [6].

Now, as in [6], consider x such that

$$\left(x - \frac{1}{x^2}, x + \frac{1}{x^2}\right) \cap \{b_k : k \in \mathbb{N}\} = \emptyset. \quad (7)$$

For such x , $|b_n - x| \geq \frac{1}{x^2}$ for all n and the sum on the right in (6) is at most

$$x^2 \sum_{\frac{x}{2} < b_n < 2x} |a_n|.$$

In case (i), this is $O(x^{3+\varepsilon})$, while in case (ii), it is $O(x^{3+\alpha+\varepsilon})$ by (5).

Taking $T = x^4$ in (6) shows that (4) holds whenever $x \rightarrow \infty$ satisfying (7). As shown in [8] (see (2.3)), for every x there exist $x_1 \in (x-1, x)$, $x_2 \in (x, x+1)$ such that x_1, x_2 satisfy (7). Thus (4) holds for x_1 and x_2 .

²Of course, if $c = 0$, the pole is removable.

For case (i), positivity of a_n implies $A(x_1) \leq A(x) \leq A(x_2)$. Hence (4) follows for x .
For case (ii), we use (5). We have

$$|A(x) - A(x_1)| \leq \sum_{x-1 < b_n \leq x} |a_n| \ll x^{\alpha+\varepsilon}$$

by (5). Hence (4) follows. □

We also require the following result from [8] (Theorem 2.3).

Theorem B

Suppose (1) and (2) hold for some $\alpha, \beta < 1$. Then for $\sigma > \Theta := \max\{\alpha, \beta\}$ and uniformly for $\sigma \geq \Theta + \delta$ (any $\delta > 0$),

$$\frac{\zeta'_{\mathcal{P}}(\sigma + it)}{\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}(\sigma + it)} = O\left((\log |t|)^{\frac{1-\sigma}{1-\Theta}+\varepsilon}\right) \quad \text{and} \quad \zeta_{\mathcal{P}}(\sigma + it), \frac{1}{\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}(\sigma + it)} = O\left(\exp\left\{(\log |t|)^{\frac{1-\sigma}{1-\Theta}+\varepsilon}\right\}\right)$$

for all $\varepsilon > 0$. In particular, for $\sigma > \Theta$, the Lindelöf functions for $\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}$ and $\frac{1}{\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}}$ are zero.

Actually, the statement of Theorem 2.3 in [8] does not mention $\frac{1}{\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}}$ but the proof, which argues from $\log \zeta_{\mathcal{P}}$ clearly applies also to $-\log \zeta_{\mathcal{P}} = \log \frac{1}{\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}}$.

Also, we have the following two consequences as described at the end of section 2 in [8]:

- (a) If $\alpha > \beta$, then $\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}$ has infinitely many zeros on, or arbitrarily close to, the line $\sigma = \alpha$.
- (b) If $\alpha < \beta$, then $\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}$ and $\frac{1}{\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}}$ have infinite order in the strip $\{s \in \mathbb{C} : \alpha < \Re s < \beta\}$.

Proof of Theorem 1

Let $\Theta := \max\{\alpha, \beta\}$. We use the converse part of Theorem A with $f(s) = \frac{1}{\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}(s)}$. This function has an analytic continuation to H_{Θ} and, by Theorem B, has zero order here. Further, $A(x) = M_{\mathcal{P}}(x)$ and

$$\sum_{\substack{x-1 \leq n \leq x \\ n \in \mathcal{N}}} |\mu_{\mathcal{P}}(n)| \leq N_{\mathcal{P}}(x) - N_{\mathcal{P}}(x-1) \ll x^{\beta+\varepsilon} \leq x^{\Theta+\varepsilon}.$$

Thus (5), and hence (4), holds (with $c = 0$). That is, $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = O(x^{\Theta+\varepsilon})$; i.e. $\gamma \leq \Theta$.

Now suppose $\alpha > \beta$. Then $\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}$ has infinitely many zeros on, or arbitrarily close to, the line $\sigma = \alpha$. Thus $\gamma \geq \alpha - \delta$ for any $\delta > 0$; i.e. $\gamma \geq \alpha$ and so $\gamma = \alpha$.

Now suppose $\alpha < \beta$. Then the Lindelöf functions for $\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}$ and $1/\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}$ are infinite for $\sigma < \beta$. Thus we cannot have $\gamma < \beta$ by the first part of Theorem A with $A(x) = M_{\mathcal{P}}(x)$; i.e. $\gamma = \beta$.

Thus if $\alpha \neq \beta$, then $\gamma = \Theta$. Hence the two largest numbers are always equal. Finally, since $\max\{\alpha, \beta\} \geq \frac{1}{2}$, we see that in all three cases the largest pair is always at least $\frac{1}{2}$. □

2. Systems with different α, β, γ .

It is perhaps of interest to see if it really is possible that each of α, β or γ can be strictly less than the other two and whether it can be less than $\frac{1}{2}$.

- (a) $\beta < \alpha = \gamma$. For $\mathcal{N} = \mathbb{N}$, we have $\beta = 0$ and, under the Riemann Hypothesis, $\alpha = \gamma = \frac{1}{2}$. Unconditionally, we only have $\alpha = \gamma = \Theta$ where $\Theta = \sup\{\Re \rho : \zeta(\rho) = 0\}$.
- (b) $\alpha < \beta = \gamma$. In the final discussion of [6], a g -prime system was given with $\alpha = 0$. Namely, take $p_n = R^{-1}(n)$, where R is the strictly increasing function on $[1, \infty)$ defined by

$$R(x) = \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} \frac{(\log x)^k}{k!k\zeta(k+1)},$$

where $\zeta(\cdot)$ is the Riemann zeta-function. As such, one has $\psi_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = x + O(\log x \log \log x)$. By Theorem 1, $\beta = \gamma$, but what this common value is is not clear, except that it lies in $[\frac{1}{2}, 1]$.

- (c) $\gamma < \alpha = \beta$. For this we can use the example $\mathcal{P} = \mathbb{P} \sqcup \mathbb{P}^{1/\beta}$ with $\beta \in (0, 1)$. Using Dirichlet's hyperbola method, we have

$$N_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = \sum_{mn^{1/\beta} \leq x} 1 = \zeta\left(\frac{1}{\beta}\right)x + \zeta(\beta)x^{\beta} + O(x^{\frac{\beta}{1+\beta}})$$

(see [7] where this calculation was done). Furthermore, $\psi_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = \psi(x) + \psi(x^{\beta}) = x + x^{\beta} + O(x^{\frac{1}{2}+\varepsilon})$ on RH. Thus $\alpha = \beta$. But, with $M(x) = \sum_{n \leq x} \mu(n)$,

$$M_{\mathcal{P}}(x) = \sum_{mn^{1/\beta} \leq x} \mu(m)\mu(n) = \sum_{n \leq a^{\beta}} M\left(\frac{x}{n^{1/\beta}}\right) + \sum_{n \leq b} M\left(\left(\frac{x}{n}\right)^{\beta}\right) - M(a^{\beta})M(b)$$

for any $ab = x$. Putting $a = x^{\lambda}$ and using the bound $M(x) \ll x^{\frac{1}{2}+\varepsilon}$ gives

$$\begin{aligned} M_{\mathcal{P}}(x) &\ll \sum_{n \leq x^{\lambda\beta}} \left(\frac{x}{n^{1/\beta}}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}+\varepsilon} + \sum_{n \leq x^{1-\lambda}} \left(\left(\frac{x}{n}\right)^{\beta}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}+\varepsilon} + (x^{\lambda\beta})^{\frac{1}{2}+\varepsilon} x^{(1-\lambda)(\frac{1}{2}+\varepsilon)} \\ &\ll \left(x^{\frac{\beta}{2}+\lambda(1-\frac{\beta}{2})} + x^{\frac{1}{2}+(1-\lambda)(\beta-\frac{1}{2})} + x^{\frac{\lambda}{2}+(1-\lambda)\frac{\beta}{2}}\right) x^{\varepsilon}. \end{aligned}$$

Choosing $\lambda = \frac{\beta}{1+\beta}$ optimally shows that $M_{\mathcal{P}}(x) \ll x^{\frac{3\beta}{2(1+\beta)}+\varepsilon}$ for all $\varepsilon > 0$. Thus $\gamma \leq \frac{3\beta}{2(1+\beta)} < \beta$. Note that $\gamma \geq \frac{1}{2}$, since $\frac{1}{\zeta_{\mathcal{P}}(s)} = \frac{1}{\zeta(s)\zeta(s/\beta)}$ has poles on the $\frac{1}{2}$ -line.

Open problems

- 1) From (a) and (b) above we have systems with $(\alpha, \beta, \gamma) = (a, 0, a)$ and $(0, b, b)$ for some $a, b \in [\frac{1}{2}, 1]$. Can we find, unconditionally, such systems with $a < 1$ and $b < 1$?
- 2) In (c) above we have a system, conditional on RH, with $(\alpha, \beta, \gamma) = (c, c, d)$ with $\frac{1}{2} \leq d < c < 1$. Can we find one unconditionally, with $d < 1$. Furthermore, can we find one with $d < \frac{1}{2}$?

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