MODULARLY IRREDUCIBLE CHARACTERS
AND NORMAL SUBGROUPS

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Abstract

Let $G$ be a finite $p$-solvable group, where $p$ is an odd prime. Suppose that $\chi \in \text{Irr}(G)$ lifts an irreducible $p$-Brauer character. If $G/N$ is a $p$-group, then we prove that the irreducible constituents of $\chi_N$ lift irreducible Brauer characters of $N$. This result was proven for $|G|$ odd by J.P. Cossey.

1. Introduction

Let $G$ be a finite group and let $p$ be a prime. Let $\text{Irr}(G)$ be the set of the irreducible complex characters of $G$, and let $\text{IBr}(G)$ be a set of irreducible Brauer characters of $G$. If $\chi \in \text{Irr}(G)$, then the restriction $\chi^0$ of $\chi$ to the $p$-regular elements of $G$,

$$\chi^0 = \sum_{\varphi \in \text{IBr}(G)} d_{\chi \varphi} \varphi,$$

decomposes as a sum of irreducible Brauer characters. Sometimes we have that $\chi^0 \in \text{IBr}(G)$. When this occurs, J.P. Cossey has investigated when the same happens for the normal irreducible constituents of $\chi$ ([1]). Aside of the case where $\chi$ has defect zero (i.e., $\chi(1)_p = |G|_p$), it seems difficult to control the behavior of the normal constituents of $\chi$. Somehow surprisingly, it is proven in [1] that normal irreducible constituents also lift modular characters, whenever $G/N$ is a $p$-group and $|G|$ is odd. The proof of that result relies on non-trivial facts from [10] (among others).

Our aim in this note is to give an essentially self-contained proof of a slightly more general result.

**Theorem A.** Let $p$ be an odd prime and let $G$ be a $p$-solvable group. Let $\chi \in \text{Irr}(G)$ with $\chi^0 = \varphi \in \text{IBr}(G)$. Suppose that $G/N$ is a $p$-group. If $\theta \in \text{Irr}(N)$ is under $\chi$, then $\theta^0 \in \text{IBr}(N)$.

Theorem A is not true for $p = 2$, even for solvable groups. A counterexample is provided by $G = GL(2, 3)$ and $N = SL(2, 3)$, where here $\chi \in \text{Irr}(G)$ is non-rational of

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degree 2. On the other hand, it has not been easy at all to find a counterexample of Theorem A for non-$p$-solvable groups. Finally, T. Okuyama (and independently P.H. Tiep) found that if $p = 3$, $N = PSU_5(8)$ and $G = PGU_5(8)$, then $G$ has irreducible characters $\chi \in \text{Irr}(G)$ of degree $\chi(1) = 399$, which are modularly irreducible, and such that $\chi_N = \theta \in \text{Irr}(N)$ does not lift an irreducible Brauer character of $N$.

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2. Proofs

Our notation for characters follows [6] and [9]. For instance, if $\chi$ is a character, then $o(\chi)$ is the order of the linear character $\text{det}(\chi)$, where $\chi$ is any representation affording $\chi$. We shall use Gajendragadkar $\pi$-special characters. These are the irreducible characters $\chi$ of $\pi$-separable groups such that for every subnormal irreducible constituent $\theta$ of $\chi$ we have that $o(\theta)\theta(1)$ are $\pi$-numbers ([3]). Every primitive character of a $\pi$-separable group factors as a product of a $\pi$-special and a $\pi'$-special characters (Corollary (4.7) of [4]). The reader is invited to read [3] and [4]. In the proof of the key lemma below we use a much deeper result: if $2 \notin \pi$, $\chi \in \text{Irr}(G)$ is $\pi$-special and $\chi_H \in \text{Irr}(H)$ for some subgroup $H$ of $G$, then $\chi_H$ is $\pi$-special. (This is Theorem A of [5].)

The key result to prove Theorem A is the following.

**Lemma 2.1.** Let $G$ be $p$-solvable with $p > 2$. Let $\chi \in \text{Irr}(G)$ be $p$-special. If $\chi(1) > 1$, then $\chi^0$ is not in $\text{IBr}(G)$.

Our first proof of this lemma contained a mistake that was pointed out by the careful reading of the referee, and for what we thank him/her. But also, we are also very grateful to I.M. Isaacs for providing us with a more general result whose corollary gave a correct proof of our lemma. After reading Isaacs proof, we found the following one.

**Proof of Lemma 2.1.** Let $M = \ker(\chi)$. Then $\chi$ considered as an irreducible character of $G/M$ is both $p$-special and $p$-Brauer irreducible. So arguing by induction on $|G|$, we may assume that $\chi$ is faithful. In particular, $\mathbf{O}_p'(G) = 1$ by Corollary (4.2) of [3]. Now, let $N = \mathbf{O}_p(G)$, $K/N = \mathbf{O}_p'(G/N)$, and let $L$ be a $p$-complement of $K$. By the Frattini argument, we have that $G = N\mathbf{N}_G(L)$. Write $H = \mathbf{N}_G(L)$.

We claim now that $\chi_H \in \text{Irr}(H)$. Write $\varphi = \chi^0 \in \text{IBr}(G)$. Since $N \subseteq \ker(\varphi)$ and $NH = G$, then we see that $\varphi_H$ is irreducible. (This follows from the fact that if $\chi$ is any representation affording $\varphi$, then $\chi(nh) = \chi(h)$ for $n \in N$ and $h \in H$. Hence $\chi(G) = \chi(H)$ and $\chi_H$ affords an irreducible representation.) Since $(\chi_H)^0 = \varphi_H$ is irreducible, we easily see that $\chi_H$ is irreducible too.
But now, by Theorem A of [5], we have that \( \chi_H \) is \( p \)-special. Therefore, \( L \subseteq \ker \chi_H \subseteq \ker(\chi) = 1 \). We conclude that \( N = G \). In this case, the principal Brauer character of \( G \) is the only Brauer irreducible Brauer character of \( G \), and the proof of the lemma is complete.

In the proof of Theorem A we shall use vertices of Brauer characters and a result of A. Watanabe ([11]). This result of Watanabe is proven in a different form in [8]. Even more recently, another proof is presented in [2], which uses techniques closer to the ones used in this paper.

In \( p \)-solvable groups, vertices of Brauer characters are particularly easy to understand: If \( \varphi \in \text{IBr}(G) \), then \( \varphi \) is induced from some \( \mu \in \text{IBr}(U) \) of \( p' \)-degree (see Huppert’s Theorem (10.11) of [9]), and the Sylow \( p \)-subgroups of \( U \) are uniquely determined by \( \varphi \) up to \( G \)-conjugacy (see [7]). These are the vertices of \( \varphi \). If \( \varphi \) has vertex \( Q \), then we have that \( \varphi(1)_p = |G|_p/|Q| \).

**Lemma 2.2** (Watanabe). Suppose that \( G \) is \( p \)-solvable, and \( \varphi \in \text{IBr}(G) \). Let \( N \triangleleft G \) and \( \theta \in \text{IBr}(N) \) be under \( \varphi \). Then there exists a vertex \( Q \) of \( \varphi \) such that \( Q \cap N \) is a vertex of \( \theta \).

Now we prove Theorem A. The final assertion on the stabilizers was also noticed in [1].

**Theorem 2.3.** Suppose that \( G \) is \( p \)-solvable, where \( p \) is odd. Let \( \chi \in \text{Irr}(G) \) with \( \chi^0 = \varphi \in \text{IBr}(G) \). Suppose that \( G/N \) is a \( p \)-group. If \( \theta \in \text{Irr}(N) \) is under \( \chi \), then \( \theta^0 \in \text{IBr}(N) \). Furthermore the stabilizers \( I_G(\theta) = I_G(\theta^0) \) coincide.

Proof. We argue by induction on \( |G:N| \) that \( \theta^0 \in \text{IBr}(N) \). Suppose that \( N \triangleleft M \triangleleft G \), with \( |G:M| = p \), and let \( \psi \in \text{Irr}(M) \) be between \( \chi \) and \( \theta \). By induction we have that \( \psi^0 \in \text{IBr}(M) \) and also, by induction, we have that \( \theta^0 \in \text{IBr}(N) \). Hence we may assume that \( |G:N| = p \).

First suppose that \( \theta^G = \chi \). Then \( (\theta^0)^G = \varphi \) is irreducible and necessarily \( \theta^0 = \eta \in \text{IBr}(N) \) is irreducible too. Hence, we may assume that \( \chi_N = \theta \).

Now, let \( \gamma \in \text{Irr}(W) \) be a primitive character inducing \( \chi \). Then \( \gamma = \alpha \beta \), where \( \alpha \) is \( p' \)-special and \( \beta \) is \( p \)-special. Since \( \gamma^0 \in \text{IBr}(W) \), it follows that \( \beta^0 \in \text{IBr}(W) \). By Lemma 2.1, we deduce that \( \gamma \) has \( p' \)-degree. Thus \( \chi(1)_p = |G|_p/|Q| \), where \( Q \in \text{Syl}_p(W) \). Also, since \( WN = G \) by Mackey (Problem (5.7) of [6]), it follows that \( NQ = G \). Notice now that \( \varphi = (\gamma^0)^G \) and \( Q \) is a vertex for \( \varphi \).

Now, let \( \tau \in \text{IBr}(N) \) a Brauer constituent of \( \theta^0 \), which therefore lies under \( \varphi \). By Lemma 2.2, there exists a vertex \( Q_1 \) of \( \varphi \) such that \( Q_1 \cap N \) is a vertex for \( \tau \). Now, \( Q_1 = Q^n \) for some \( n \in N \) (because \( QN = G \)), and hence we may assume that \( Q_1 = Q \). Thus \( Q \cap N \) is a vertex for \( \tau \). Therefore \( \tau(1)_p = |N|_p/|Q \cap N| \). But then

\[
\varphi(1)_p = \tau(1)_p.
\]
Since $G/N$ is a $p$-group, we also deduce that $\varphi(1)_{\phi'} = \tau(1)_{\phi'}$ (using Theorem (8.30) of [9]), and therefore $\varphi(1) = \tau(1)$. Hence $\varphi_N = \tau$. Now $\varphi(1) = \chi(1) \geq \theta(1) \geq \tau(1) = \varphi(1)$, and hence $\theta(1) = \tau(1)$, and $\theta^0 = \tau$.

Finally, we prove that $G_\theta$, the stabilizer of $\theta$ in $G$ equals $G_{\theta^0}$, the stabilizer of $\theta^0$ in $G$. Write again $\tau = \theta^0 \in \text{IBr}(N)$. Of course, we have that $G_\theta \subseteq G_\tau$. By Green’s theorem and the Clifford’s correspondence, notice that $\varphi(1) = |G : G_\tau| \tau(1)$. Now, using $\varphi(1) = \chi(1) \geq |G : G_\theta| \theta(1) \geq |G : G_\tau| \tau(1) = \varphi(1)$, and the proof of the theorem is complete.

We should perhaps mention that Theorem A holds in general if $\chi$ has $p'$-degree. Indeed, in this case $\chi_N = \theta$ has $p'$-degree and therefore there exists $\tau \in \text{IBr}(N)$ in the decomposition of $\theta^0$ which is $P$-invariant, where $P \in \text{Syl}_p(G)$. Now by Green’s Theorem (8.11) of [9], we have that there is a unique Brauer character of $G$ over $\tau$, which necessarily is $\varphi$. In this case, $\varphi_N = \tau$ and by degrees, $\theta^0 = \tau$.

References