Math 403 Chapter 4: Cyclic Groups

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1. **Introduction:** The simplest type of group (where the word "type" doesn't have a clear meaning just yet) is a cyclic group.

2. **Definition:** A group G is *cyclic* if there is some $g \in G$ with $G = \langle g \rangle$. Here g is a *generator* of the group G. Recall that $\langle g \rangle$ means all "powers" of g which can mean addition if that's the operation.

   (a) **Example:** $\mathbb{Z}_6$ is cyclic with generator 1. Are there other generators?

   (b) **Example:** $\mathbb{Z}_n$ is cyclic with generator 1.

   (c) **Example:** $\mathbb{Z}$ is cyclic with generator 1.

   (d) **Example:** $\mathbb{R}^*$ is not cyclic.

   (e) **Example:** $U(10)$ is cylic with generator 3.

3. **Important Note:** Given any group G at all and any $g \in G$ we know that $\langle g \rangle$ is a cyclic subgroup of G and hence any statements about cyclic groups applies to any $\langle g \rangle$.

4. **Properties Related to Cyclic Groups Part 1:**

   (a) **Intuition:** If $|g| = 10$ then $\langle g \rangle = \{1, g, g^2, ..., g^9\}$ and the elements cycle back again. For example we have $g^2 = g^{12}$ and in general $g^i = g^j$ iff $10 \mid (i - j)$.

   (b) **Theorem:** Let G be a group and $g \in G$.

      (i) If $|g| = \infty$ then $g^i = g^j$ iff $i = j$.

      (ii) if $|g| = n$ then $\langle g \rangle = \{1, g, g^2, , , , .g^{n-1}\}$ and $g^i = g^j$ iff $n \mid (i - j)$.

      (iii) In both cases we have $|g| = |\langle g \rangle|$.

   Proof:

   For (i), if $|g| = \infty$ then by definition we never have $g^i = e$ unless $i = 0$. Thus $g^i = g^j$ iff $g^{i-j} = e$ iff $i - j = 0$.

   For (ii), If $|g| = n < \infty$ first note that $\{1, g, g^2, ..., g^{n-1}\} \subseteq \langle g \rangle$ by definition of the right side. To show that $\langle g \rangle \subseteq \{1, g, g^2, ..., g^{n-1}\}$, suppose $g^k \in \langle g \rangle$. Write $k = qn + r$ with $0 \leq r < n$ and then $g^k = (g^n)^q g^r = e^q g^r = g^r$ so g^k is one of those elements.

   Now for the iff. If $g^i = g^j$ then $g^{i-j} = e$. Write $i - j = qn + r$ with $0 \leq r < n$. Then $e = g^{qn} g^r = g^r$. Since n (the order) is the least positive but $r < n$ we must have $r = 0$ and so $n \mid (i - j)$.

   If $n \mid (i - j)$ then $i - j = qn$ and then $g^i = g^j g^{qn} = g^j$.
   For (iii), it follows immediately.

   $\mathcal{QED}$

   (c) **Corollary:** For any $g \in G$ with $|g| = n$, $g^i = e$ iff $n \mid i$.

   Proof: This is the theorem with $j = 0$. $\mathcal{QED}$

   Example: If $|g| = 10$ then if $g^i = e$ then $10 \mid i$, meaning we only get e when the powers are multiples of 10.

5. **Properties Related to Cyclic Groups Part 2:**

(a) **Intuition:** If $|g| = 30$ then if we examine something like $\left\langle g^{24} \right\rangle$ we find:

$$\begin{aligned} g^{24} &= g^{24} \\ \left(g^{24}\right)^2 &= g^{48} = g^{18} \\ \left(g^{24}\right)^3 &= g^{72} = g^{12} \\ \left(g^{24}\right)^4 &= g^{96} = g^{6} \\ \left(g^{24}\right)^5 &= g^{120} = g^{0} = e \end{aligned}$$

We then see that $\left\langle g^{24} \right\rangle = \{e, g^6, g^{12}, g^{18}, g^{24}\} = \left\langle g^6 \right\rangle$. which is a bit nicer since the 6 is easier to work with. Note that $6 = \gcd(30, 24)$.

From this we also see $\left|g^{24}\right| = \left|g^{\gcd(30,24)}\right|$.

Likewise we can easily compute the order of g^{24}. We see it cycles every 5, just like g^6, and observe that $5 = 30/\gcd(30, 24)$.

(b) **Theorem:** Let $g \in G$ with $|g| = n$ and let $k \in \mathbb{Z}^+$ then

(i) $\left\langle g^k \right\rangle = \left\langle g^{\gcd(n,k)} \right\rangle$

(ii) $\left|g^k\right| = \left|g^{\gcd(n,k)}\right|$

(iii) $|g^k| = n/\gcd(n, k)$

Proof: For (i) since $\gcd(n, k) \mid k$ we know that $\alpha \gcd(n, k) = k$ for some $\alpha \in \mathbb{Z}$ and so

$$g^k = \left(g^{\gcd(n,k)}\right)^\alpha \in \left\langle g^{\gcd(n,k)} \right\rangle$$

and so:

$$\left\langle g^k \right\rangle \subseteq \left\langle g^{\gcd(n,k)} \right\rangle$$

Then write $\gcd(n, k) = \alpha n + \beta k$ and observe that

$$g^{\gcd(n,k)} = (g^n)^\alpha + (g^k)^\beta = (g^k)^\beta \in \left\langle g^k \right\rangle$$

so that

$$\left\langle g^{\gcd(n,k)} \right\rangle \subseteq \left\langle g^k \right\rangle$$

Thus the two are equal.

Then (ii) follows immediately from the previous theorem.

For (iii) first observe that

$$\left(g^{\gcd(n,k)}\right)^{n/\gcd(n,k)} = g^n = e$$

so that:

$$|g^{\gcd(n,k)}| \leq \frac{n}{\gcd(n, k)}$$

On the other hand if we had $|g^{\gcd(n,k)}| = b < n/\gcd(n,k)$ then we have $e = (g^{\gcd(n,k)})^b = g^{b\gcd(n,k)}$ with $b\gcd(n,k) < n$, contradicting $|g| = n$. Thus we have:

$$|g^{\gcd(n,k)}| = \frac{n}{\gcd(n,k)}$$

Thus we have:

$$|g^k| = \left|g^{\gcd(n,k)}\right| = \frac{n}{\gcd(n,k)}$$

$\mathcal{QED}$

(c) **Corollary:** In a finite cyclic group the order of an element divides the order of a group.
Proof: Follows since every element looks like g^k and we have $|g^k|\gcd(n,k) = n$. $\mathcal{QED}$
Example: In a cyclic group of order 200 the order of every element must divide 200. In such a group an element could not have order 17, for example.

(d) **Corollary:** Suppose $g \in G$ and $|g| = n < \infty$. Then:

$$\left\langle a^i \right\rangle = \left\langle a^j \right\rangle \text{ iff } \gcd(n,i) = \gcd(n,j) \text{ iff } |a^i| = |a^j|$$

Proof: Follows immediately. $\mathcal{QED}$
Example: If $|g| = 18$ then the fact that $\gcd(18,12) = 6 = \gcd(18,6)$ guarantees that $|g^{12}| = |g^6|$.

(e) **Corollary:** Suppose $g \in G$ and $|g| = n < \infty$. Then:

$$\langle a \rangle = \left\langle a^j \right\rangle \text{ iff } \gcd(n,j) = 1 \text{ iff } |a| = |a^j|$$

Proof: Follows immediately. $\mathcal{QED}$
Example: If $|g| = 32$ then the fact that $\gcd(15,32) = 1$ guarantees that $\left\langle g^{15} \right\rangle = \langle g \rangle$, meaning g^{15} is a generator of $\langle g \rangle$.

(f) **Corollary:** Suppose $g \in G$ and $|g| = n < \infty$. Then there are $\phi(n)$ generators of $\langle g \rangle$.
Proof: The generators are g^k with $\gcd(n,k) = 1$. $\mathcal{QED}$

(g) **Corollary:** An integer $k \in \mathbb{Z}_n$ is a generator of $\mathbb{Z}_n$ iff $\gcd(n,k) = 1$.
Proof: Follows immediately. $\mathcal{QED}$
Example: The generators of $\mathbb{Z}_{10}$ are $1, 3, 7, 9$.

6. **Classification of Subgroups of Cyclic Groups:**

(a) **Theorem (Fundamental Theorem of Cyclic Groups):**
Suppose $G = \langle g \rangle$ is cyclic.

(i) Every subgroup of G is cyclic.
(ii) If $|G| = n$ then the order of any subgroup of G divides n.
(iii) If $|G| = n$ then for any $k \mid n$ the subgroup $\left\langle g^{n/k} \right\rangle$ is the unique subgroup of order k.

Proof:

(i) Let $H \leq G$. If $H = \{e\}$ then we're done so assume $H \neq \{e\}$. Choose $g^m \in H$ with minimal $m \in \mathbb{Z}^+$ by well-ordering. Clearly $\langle g^m \rangle \subseteq H$. If some $g^k \in H$ then put $k = qm + r$ with $0 \leq r < m$ so $r = k - qm$ and then $g^r = g^k (g^m)^{-q} \in H$ and so $r = 0$ by minimality of m and so $g^k = (g^m)^q$ and hence $g^k \in \langle g^m \rangle$.

(ii) Take a subgroup $H \leq G$. We know H is cyclic by (i) with $H = \langle g^m \rangle$ with minimal $m \in \mathbb{Z}^+$ by well-ordering. Write $n = qm + r$ with $0 \leq r < m$ so $r = n - qm$ and then $g^r = g^n (g^m)^{-q} \in H$ and so $r = 0$ by minimality of m and so $n = qm$ and then

$$|H| = |\langle g^m \rangle| = |g^m| = \frac{n}{\gcd(n, m)} = \frac{n}{m}$$

and so $m|H| = n$ and so $|H| \mid n$.

(iii) Observe first that for any $k \mid n$ we have

$$\left| \left\langle g^{n/k} \right\rangle \right| = \left| g^{n/k} \right| = \frac{n}{\gcd(n, n/k)} = \frac{n}{n/k} = k$$

Thus certainly $\left\langle g^{n/k} \right\rangle$ is a subgroup of order k. We must show that it is unique.

Let $H \leq G$ with $|H| = k \mid n$. Since $H \leq G$ by (i) and (ii) we have $H = \langle g^m \rangle$ with $m \mid n$. Then we have:

$$k = |H| = |\langle g^m \rangle| = |g^m| = \frac{n}{\gcd(n, m)} = \frac{n}{m}$$

Thus $m = n/k$ and so $H = \langle g^m \rangle = \left\langle g^{n/k} \right\rangle$.

$\mathcal{QED}$

Example: This categorizes cyclic groups completely. For example suppose a cyclic group has order 20. Every subgroup is cyclic and there are unique subgroups of each order $1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 20$. If G has generator g then generators of these subgroups can be chosen to be $g^{20/1} = g^{20}$, $g^{20/2} = g^{10}$, $g^{20/4} = g^5$, $g^{20/5} = g^4$, $g^{20/10} = g^2$, $g^{20/20} = g$ respectively.

(b) **Corollary:** For each positive divisor k of $n \in \mathbb{Z}^+$, the set $\langle n/k \rangle$ is the unique subgroup of $\mathbb{Z}_n$ of order k. Moreover these are the only subgroups of $\mathbb{Z}_k$.

Proof: Follows immediately. $\mathcal{QED}$

Example: In $\mathbb{Z}_{10} = \langle 1 \rangle$ the subgroup $\langle 1 \rangle$ is the unique subgroup of order $10/1 = 10$, the subgroup $\langle 2 \rangle$ is the unique subgroup of order $10/2 = 5$, the subgroup $\langle 5 \rangle$ is the unique subgroup of order $10/1 = 2$, the subgroup $\langle 10 \rangle = \langle 0 \rangle$ is the unique subgroup of order $10/10 = 1$.

(c) **Definition:** Define $\phi(1) = 1$ and for any $n \in \mathbb{Z}$ with $n > 1$ define $\phi(n)$ to be the number of positive integers less than n and coprime to n.

Example: We have $\phi(20) = 8$ since $1, 3, 7, 9, 11, 13, 17, 19$ are coprime.

(d) **Theorem:** Suppose G is cyclic of order n. If $d \mid n$ then there are $\phi(d)$ elements of order d in G.

Proof: Every element of order d generates a cyclic subgroup of order d but there is only one such cyclic subgroup, thus every element of order d is in that single cyclic subgroup of order d. If that cyclic subgroup is $\langle g \rangle$ with $|g| = d$ then note that the only elements of order d in it are those g^k with $\gcd(d, k) = 1$ and there are $\phi(d)$ of those. $\mathcal{QED}$

Example: In a cyclic group of order 100 noting that $20 \mid 100$ we then know there are $\phi(20) = 8$ elements of order 20.

(e) **Theorem:** If G is a finite group then the number of elements of order d is a multiple of $\phi(d)$.

Outline of Proof: Elements of order d can be collected $\phi(d)$ at a time into subgroups of order d. $\mathcal{QED}$

Example: If G is an arbitrary finite group then the number of elements of order 20 is a multiple of 8. Keep in mind that this might be zero!