

5007-47-88

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The n -linear Bohnenblust–Hille inequality asserts that there is a constant $C_n \in [1, \infty)$ such that the $\ell_{\frac{2n}{n+1}}$ -norm of $(U(e_{i_1}, \dots, e_{i_n}))_{i_1, \dots, i_n=1}^N$ is bounded above by C_n times the supremum norm of U , for any n -linear form $U : \mathbb{C}^N \times \dots \times \mathbb{C}^N \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$ and $N \in \mathbb{N}$ (the same holds for real scalars). The power $2n/(n+1)$ is sharp but the values and asymptotic behavior of the optimal constants remain a mystery. The first estimates for these constants had exponential growth. We prove what we call *Fundamental Lema*, which brings new information on the optimal constants (denoted by $(K_n)_{n=1}^\infty$) for both real and complex scalars. For instance,

$$K_{n+1} - K_n < \frac{0.87}{n^{0.473}}$$

for infinitely many n 's. For complex scalars we give a formula (of surprisingly low growth), in which π, e and the famous Euler–Mascheroni constant γ appear together:

$$K_n < \frac{2}{\sqrt{\pi}} (n-1)^{\log_2(e^{\frac{1}{2}-\frac{\gamma}{2}})}$$

for every integer $n \geq 2$. (Received May 10, 2013)