Dualities and Representations of Lie Superalgebras

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Dualities and Representations of Lie Superalgebras
To Mei-Hui, Xiaohui, Isabelle, and our parents
## Contents

Preface \hspace{2cm} xiii

Chapter 1. Lie superalgebra ABC

§1.1. Lie superalgebras: Definitions and examples 1
1.1.1. Basic definitions 2
1.1.2. The general and special linear Lie superalgebras 4
1.1.3. The ortho-symplectic Lie superalgebras 6
1.1.4. The queer Lie superalgebras 8
1.1.5. The periplectic and exceptional Lie superalgebras 9
1.1.6. The Cartan series 10
1.1.7. The classification theorem 12

§1.2. Structures of classical Lie superalgebras 13
1.2.1. A basic structure theorem 13
1.2.2. Invariant bilinear forms for $\mathfrak{gl}$ and $\mathfrak{osp}$ 16
1.2.3. Root system and Weyl group for $\mathfrak{gl}(m|n)$ 16
1.2.4. Root system and Weyl group for $\mathfrak{spo}(2m|2n+1)$ 17
1.2.5. Root system and Weyl group for $\mathfrak{spo}(2m|2n)$ 17
1.2.6. Root system and odd invariant form for $\mathfrak{q}(n)$ 18

§1.3. Non-conjugate positive systems and odd reflections 19
1.3.1. Positive systems and fundamental systems 19
1.3.2. Positive and fundamental systems for $\mathfrak{gl}(m|n)$ 21
1.3.3. Positive and fundamental systems for $\mathfrak{spo}(2m|2n+1)$ 22
1.3.4. Positive and fundamental systems for $\mathfrak{spo}(2m|2n)$ 23
1.3.5. Conjugacy classes of fundamental systems 25

§1.4. Odd and real reflections 26
1.4.1. A fundamental lemma 26
1.4.2. Odd reflections 27
1.4.3. Real reflections 28
1.4.4. Reflections and fundamental systems 28
1.4.5. Examples 30

§1.5. Highest weight theory 31
1.5.1. The Poincaré-Birkhoff-Witt (PBW) Theorem 31
1.5.2. Representations of solvable Lie superalgebras 32
1.5.3. Highest weight theory for basic Lie superalgebras 33
1.5.4. Highest weight theory for $q(n)$ 35

§1.6. Exercises 37
Notes 40

Chapter 2. Finite-dimensional modules 43

§2.1. Classification of finite-dimensional simple modules 43
2.1.1. Finite-dimensional simple modules of $gl(m|n)$ 43
2.1.2. Finite-dimensional simple modules of $spo(2m|2)$ 45
2.1.3. A virtual character formula 45
2.1.4. Finite-dimensional simple modules of $spo(2m|2n+1)$ 47
2.1.5. Finite-dimensional simple modules of $spo(2m|2n)$ 50
2.1.6. Finite-dimensional simple modules of $q(n)$ 53

§2.2. Harish-Chandra homomorphism and linkage 55
2.2.1. Supersymmetrization 55
2.2.2. Central characters 56
2.2.3. Harish-Chandra homomorphism for basic Lie superalgebras 57
2.2.4. Invariant polynomials for $gl$ and $osp$ 59
2.2.5. Image of Harish-Chandra homomorphism for $gl$ and $osp$ 62
2.2.6. Linkage for $gl$ and $osp$ 65
2.2.7. Typical finite-dimensional irreducible characters 68

§2.3. Harish-Chandra homomorphism and linkage for $q(n)$ 69
2.3.1. Central characters for $q(n)$ 70
2.3.2. Harish-Chandra homomorphism for $q(n)$ 70
2.3.3. Linkage for $q(n)$ 74
2.3.4. Typical finite-dimensional characters of $q(n)$ 76

§2.4. Extremal weights of finite-dimensional simple modules 77
2.4.1. Extremal weights for $gl(m|n)$ 77
2.4.2. Extremal weights for $spo(2m|2n+1)$ 80
2.4.3. Extremal weights for $spo(2m|2n)$ 82

§2.5. Exercises 85
Notes 89

Chapter 3. Schur duality 91
3.1. Generalities for associative superalgebras
3.1.1. Classification of simple superalgebras
3.1.2. Wedderburn Theorem and Schur’s Lemma
3.1.3. Double centralizer property for superalgebras
3.1.4. Split conjugacy classes in a finite supergroup

§3.2. Schur-Sergeev duality of type $A$
3.2.1. Schur-Sergeev duality, I
3.2.2. Schur-Sergeev duality, II
3.2.3. The character formula
3.2.4. The classical Schur duality
3.2.5. Degree of atypicality of $\lambda^\natural$
3.2.6. Category of polynomial modules

§3.3. Representation theory of the algebra $\mathcal{H}_n$
3.3.1. A double cover
3.3.2. Split conjugacy classes in $\widetilde{B}_n$
3.3.3. A ring structure on $R^-$
3.3.4. The characteristic map
3.3.5. The basic spin module
3.3.6. The irreducible characters

§3.4. Schur-Sergeev duality for $q(n)$
3.4.1. A double centralizer property
3.4.2. The Sergeev duality
3.4.3. The irreducible character formula

§3.5. Exercises

Notes

Chapter 4. Classical invariant theory

§4.1. FFT for the general linear Lie group
4.1.1. General invariant theory
4.1.2. Tensor and multilinear FFT for $GL(V)$
4.1.3. Formulation of the polynomial FFT for $GL(V)$
4.1.4. Polarization and restitution

§4.2. Polynomial FFT for classical groups
4.2.1. A reduction theorem of Weyl
4.2.2. The symplectic and orthogonal groups
4.2.3. Formulation of the polynomial FFT
4.2.4. From basic to general polynomial FFT
4.2.5. The basic case

§4.3. Tensor and supersymmetric FFT for classical groups
4.3.1. Tensor FFT for classical groups
4.3.2. From tensor FFT to supersymmetric FFT
Chapter 5. Howe duality

§5.1. Weyl-Clifford algebra and classical Lie superalgebras
  5.1.1. Weyl-Clifford algebra
  5.1.2. A filtration on Weyl-Clifford algebra
  5.1.3. Relation to classical Lie superalgebras
  5.1.4. A general duality theorem
  5.1.5. A duality for Weyl-Clifford algebras

§5.2. Howe duality for type $A$ and type $Q$
  5.2.1. Howe dual pair $(\text{GL}(k), \text{gl}(m|n))$
  5.2.2. $(\text{GL}(k), \text{gl}(m|n))$-Howe duality
  5.2.3. Formulas for highest weight vectors
  5.2.4. $(\mathfrak{q}(m), \mathfrak{q}(n))$-Howe duality

§5.3. Howe duality for symplectic and orthogonal groups
  5.3.1. Howe dual pair $(\text{Sp}(V), \text{osp}(2m|2n))$
  5.3.2. $(\text{Sp}(V), \text{osp}(2m|2n))$-Howe duality
  5.3.3. Irreducible modules of $\text{O}(V)$
  5.3.4. Howe dual pair $(\text{O}(k), \text{spo}(2m|2n))$
  5.3.5. $(\text{O}(V), \text{spo}(2m|2n))$-Howe duality

§5.4. Howe duality for infinite-dimensional Lie algebras
  5.4.1. Lie algebras $\mathfrak{a}_\infty$, $\mathfrak{c}_\infty$, and $\mathfrak{d}_\infty$
  5.4.2. The fermionic Fock space
  5.4.3. $(\text{GL}(\ell), \mathfrak{a}_\infty)$-Howe duality
  5.4.4. $(\text{Sp}(k), \mathfrak{c}_\infty)$-Howe duality
  5.4.5. $(\text{O}(k), \mathfrak{d}_\infty)$-Howe duality

§5.5. Character formula for Lie superalgebras
  5.5.1. Characters for modules of Lie algebras $\mathfrak{c}_\infty$ and $\mathfrak{d}_\infty$
  5.5.2. Characters of oscillator $\mathfrak{osp}(2m|2n)$-modules
  5.5.3. Characters for oscillator $\mathfrak{spo}(2m|2n)$-modules

§5.6. Exercises

Notes

Chapter 6. Super duality

§6.1. Lie superalgebras of classical types
  6.1.1. Head, tail, and master diagrams
  6.1.2. The index sets
  6.1.3. Infinite-rank Lie superalgebras
  6.1.4. The case of $m = 0$
  6.1.5. Finite-dimensional Lie superalgebras
6.1.6. Central extensions 213

§6.2. The module categories 214
6.2.1. Category of polynomial modules revisited 215
6.2.2. Parabolic subalgebras and dominant weights 217
6.2.3. The categories $O, \overline{O}$, and $\widetilde{O}$ 218
6.2.4. The categories $O_n, \overline{O}_n$, and $\widetilde{O}_n$ 220
6.2.5. Truncation functors 221

§6.3. The irreducible character formulas 222
6.3.1. Two sequences of Borel subalgebras of $\tilde{g}$ 223
6.3.2. Odd reflections and highest weight modules 225
6.3.3. The functors $T$ and $\overline{T}$ 228
6.3.4. Character formulas 231

§6.4. Kostant homology and KLV polynomials 232
6.4.1. Homology and cohomology of Lie superalgebras 232
6.4.2. Kostant $u^-$-homology and $u$-cohomology 235
6.4.3. Comparison of Kostant homology groups 236
6.4.4. Kazhdan-Lusztig-Vogan (KLV) polynomials 239
6.4.5. Stability of KLV polynomials 240

§6.5. Super duality as an equivalence of categories 241
6.5.1. Extensions à la Baer-Yoneda 241
6.5.2. Relating extensions in $O, \overline{O}$, and $\widetilde{O}$ 243
6.5.3. Categories $O^f, \overline{O}^f$, and $\widetilde{O}^f$ 247
6.5.4. Lifting highest weight modules 247
6.5.5. Super duality and strategy of proof 248
6.5.6. The proof of super duality 250

§6.6. Exercises 255

Notes 258

Appendix A. Symmetric functions 261

§A.1. The ring $\Lambda$ and Schur functions 261
A.1.1. The ring $\Lambda$ 261
A.1.2. Schur functions 265
A.1.3. Skew Schur functions 268
A.1.4. The Frobenius characteristic map 270

§A.2. Supersymmetric polynomials 271
A.2.1. The ring of supersymmetric polynomials 271
A.2.2. Super Schur functions 273

§A.3. The ring $\Gamma$ and Schur $Q$-functions 275
A.3.1. The ring $\Gamma$ 275
A.3.2. Schur $Q$-functions 277
A.3.3. Inner product on $\Gamma$ 278
Lie algebras, Lie groups, and their representation theories are parts of the mathematical language describing symmetries, and they have played a central role in modern mathematics. An early motivation of studying Lie superalgebras as a generalization of Lie algebras came from supersymmetry in mathematical physics. Ever since a Cartan-Killing type classification of finite-dimensional complex Lie superalgebras was obtained by Kac [60] in 1977, the theory of Lie superalgebras has established itself as a prominent subject in modern mathematics. An independent classification of the finite-dimensional complex simple Lie superalgebras whose even subalgebras are reductive (called simple Lie superalgebras of classical type) was given by Scheunert, Nahm, and Rittenberg in [106].

The goal of this book is a systematic account of the structure and representation theory of finite-dimensional complex Lie superalgebras of classical type. The book intends to serve as a rigorous introduction to representation theory of Lie superalgebras on one hand, and, on the other hand, it covers a new approach developed in the past few years toward understanding the Bernstein-Gelfand-Gelfand (BGG) category for classical Lie superalgebras. In spite of much interest in representations of Lie superalgebras stimulated by mathematical physics, these basic topics have not been treated in depth in book form before. The reason seems to be that the representation theory of Lie superalgebras is dramatically different from that of complex semisimple Lie algebras, and a systematic, yet accessible, approach toward the basic problem of finding irreducible characters for Lie superalgebras was not available in a great generality until very recently.

We are aware that there is an enormous literature with numerous partial results for Lie superalgebras, and it is not our intention to make this book an encyclopedia. Rather, we treat in depth the representation theory of the three most important classes of Lie superalgebras, namely, the general linear Lie superalgebras $\mathfrak{gl}(m|n)$,
the ortho-symplectic Lie superalgebras $\mathfrak{osp}(m|2n)$, and the queer Lie superalgebras $q(n)$. To a large extent, representations of $\mathfrak{sl}(m|n)$ can be understood via $\mathfrak{gl}(m|n)$. The lecture notes [32] by the authors can be considered as a prototype for this book. The presentation in this book is organized around three dualities with a unifying theme of determining irreducible characters:

Schur duality, Howe duality, and super duality.

The new book of Musson [90] treats in detail the ring theoretical aspects of the universal enveloping algebras of Lie superalgebras as well as the basic structures of simple Lie superalgebras.

There are two superalgebra generalizations of Schur duality. The first one, due to Sergeev [110] and independently Berele-Regev [7], is an interplay between the general linear Lie superalgebra $\mathfrak{gl}(m|n)$ and the symmetric group, which incorporates the trivial and sign modules in a unified framework. The irreducible polynomial characters of $\mathfrak{gl}(m|n)$ arising this way are given by the super Schur polynomials. The second one, called Sergeev duality, is an interplay between the queer Lie superalgebra $q(n)$ and a twisted hyperoctahedral group algebra. The Schur $Q$-functions and related combinatorics of shifted tableaux appear naturally in the description of the irreducible polynomial characters of $q(n)$.

It has been observed that much of the classical invariant theory for the polynomial algebra has a parallel theory for the exterior algebra as well. The First Fundamental Theorem (FFT) for both polynomial invariants and skew invariants for classical groups admits natural reformulation and extension in the theory of Howe’s reductive dual pairs [51, 52]. Lie superalgebras allow an elegant and uniform treatment of Howe duality on the polynomial and exterior algebras (cf. Cheng-Wang [29]). For the general linear Lie groups, Schur duality, Howe duality, and FFT are equivalent. Unlike Schur duality, Howe duality treats classical Lie groups and (super)algebras beyond type $A$ equally well. The Howe dualities allow us to determine the character formulas for the irreducible modules appearing in the dualities.

The third duality, super duality, has a completely different flavor. It views the representation theories of Lie superalgebras and Lie algebras as two sides of the same coin, and it is an unexpected and rather powerful approach developed in the past few years by the authors and their collaborators, culminating in Cheng-Lam-Wang [24]. The super duality approach allows one to overcome in a conceptual way various major obstacles in super representation theory via an equivalence of module categories of Lie algebras and Lie superalgebras.

Schur, Howe, and super dualities provide approaches to the irreducible character problem in increasing generality and sophistication. Schur and Howe dualities only offer a solution to the irreducible character problem for modules in some semisimple subcategories. On the other hand, super duality provides a conceptual solution to the long-standing irreducible character problem in fairly general BGG
categories (including all finite-dimensional modules) over classical Lie superalgebras in terms of the usual Kazhdan-Lusztig polynomials of classical Lie algebras. Totally different and independent approaches to the irreducible character problem of finite-dimensional $\mathfrak{gl}(m|n)$-modules have been developed by Serganova [107] and Brundan [11]. Also Brundan’s conjecture on irreducible characters of $\mathfrak{gl}(m|n)$ in the full BGG category $\mathcal{O}$ has recently been proved in [26]. Super duality again plays a crucial role in the proof. However, this latest approach to the full BGG category $\mathcal{O}$ is beyond the scope of this book.

The book is largely self-contained and should be accessible to graduate students and non-experts as well. Besides assuming basic knowledge of entry-level graduate algebra (and some familiarity with basic homological algebra in the final Chapter 6), the other prerequisite is a one-semester course in the theory of finite-dimensional semisimple Lie algebras. For example, either the book by Humphreys or the first half of the book by Carter on semisimple Lie algebras is sufficient. Some familiarity with symmetric functions and representations of symmetric groups can be sometimes useful, and Appendix A provides a quick summary for our purpose. It is possible that super experts may also benefit from the book, as several “folklore” results are rigorously proved and occasionally corrected in great detail here, sometimes with new proofs. The proofs of some of these results can be at times rather difficult to trace or read in the literature (and not merely because they might be in a different language).

Here is a broad outline of the book chapter by chapter. Each chapter ends with exercises and historical notes. Though we have tried to attribute the main results accurately and fairly, we apologize beforehand for any unintended omissions and mistakes.

Chapter 1 starts by defining various classes of Lie superalgebras. For the basic Lie superalgebras, we introduce the invariant bilinear forms, root systems, fundamental systems, and Weyl groups. Positive systems and fundamental systems for basic Lie superalgebras are not conjugate under the Weyl group, and the notion of odd reflections is introduced to relate non-conjugate positive systems. The PBW theorem for the universal enveloping algebra of a Lie superalgebra is formulated, and highest weight theory for basic Lie superalgebras and $\mathfrak{q}(n)$ is developed.

In Chapter 2, we focus on Lie superalgebras of types $\mathfrak{gl}$, $\mathfrak{osp}$ and $\mathfrak{q}$. We classify their finite-dimensional simple modules using odd reflection techniques. We then formulate and establish precisely the images of the respective Harish-Chandra homomorphisms and linkage principles. We end with a Young diagrammatic description of the extremal weights in the simple polynomial $\mathfrak{gl}(m|n)$-modules and finite-dimensional simple $\mathfrak{osp}(m|2n)$-modules. It takes considerably more effort to formulate and prove these results for Lie superalgebras than for semisimple Lie algebras because of the existence of non-conjugate Borel subalgebras and the limited role of Weyl groups for Lie superalgebras.
Schur duality for Lie superalgebras is developed in Chapter 3. We start with some results on the structure of associative superalgebras including the super variants of the Wedderburn theorem, Schur’s lemma, and the double centralizer property. The Schur-Sergeev duality for $\mathfrak{gl}(m|n)$ is proved, and it provides a classification of irreducible polynomial $\mathfrak{gl}(m|n)$-modules. As a consequence, the characters of the simple polynomial $\mathfrak{gl}(m|n)$-modules are given by the super Schur polynomials. On the algebraic combinatorial level, there is a natural super generalization of the notion of semistandard tableau, which is a hybrid of the traditional version and its conjugate counterpart. The Schur-Sergeev duality for $\mathfrak{q}(n)$ requires understanding the representation theory of a twisted hyperoctahedral group algebra, which we develop from scratch. The characters of the simple polynomial $\mathfrak{q}(n)$-modules are given by the Schur $Q$-polynomials up to some 2-powers.

In Chapter 4, we give a quick introduction to classical invariant theory, which serves as a preparation for Howe duality in the next chapter. We describe several versions of the FFT for the classical groups, i.e., a tensor algebra version, a polynomial algebra version, and a supersymmetric algebra version.

Howe duality is the main topic of Chapter 5. Like Schur duality, Howe duality involves commuting actions of a classical Lie group $G$ and a classical superalgebra $\mathfrak{g}'$ on a supersymmetric algebra. The precise relation between the classical Lie superalgebras and Weyl-Clifford algebras $\mathcal{W}C$ is established. According to the FFT for classical invariant theory in Chapter 4 when applied to the $G$-action on the associated graded algebra $\text{gr} \mathcal{W}C$, the basic invariants generating $(\text{gr} \mathcal{W}C)^G$ turn out to form the associated graded space for a Lie superalgebra $\mathfrak{g}'$. From this it follows that the algebra of $G$-invariants $\mathcal{W}C^G$ is generated by $\mathfrak{g}'$. Multiplicity-free decompositions for various $(G, \mathfrak{g}')$-Howe dualities are obtained explicitly. Character formulas for the irreducible $\mathfrak{g}'$-modules appearing in $(G, \mathfrak{g}')$-Howe duality are then obtained via a comparison with Howe duality involving classical groups $G$ and infinite-dimensional Lie algebras, which we develop in detail.

Finally in Chapter 6, we develop a super duality approach to obtain a complete and conceptual solution of the irreducible character problem in certain parabolic Bernstein-Gelfand-Gelfand categories for general linear and ortho-symplectic Lie superalgebras. This chapter is technically more sophisticated than the earlier chapters. Super duality is an equivalence of categories between parabolic categories for Lie superalgebras and their Lie algebra counterparts at an infinite-rank limit, and it matches the corresponding parabolic Verma modules, irreducible modules, Kostant $u$-homology groups, and Kazhdan-Lusztig-Vogan polynomials. Truncation functors are introduced to relate the BGG categories for infinite-rank and finite-rank Lie superalgebras. In this way, we obtain a solution à la Kazhdan-Lusztig of the irreducible character problem in the corresponding parabolic BGG categories for finite-dimensional basic Lie superalgebras.
There is an appendix in the book. In Appendix A, we have included a fairly self-contained treatment of some elementary aspects of symmetric function theory, including Schur functions, supersymmetric functions and Schur $Q$-functions. The celebrated boson-fermion correspondence serves as a prominent example relating superalgebras to mathematical physics and algebraic combinatorics. The Fock space therein is used in setting up the Howe duality for infinite-dimensional Lie algebras in Chapter 5.

For a one-semester introductory course on Lie superalgebras, we recommend two plausible ways of using this book. A first approach uses Chapters 1, 2, 3, with possible supplements from Chapter 5 and Appendix A. A second approach uses Chapters 1, 3, 5 with possible supplements from Chapter 4 and Appendix A. It is also possible to use this book for a course on the interaction between representations of Lie superalgebras and algebraic combinatorics. The more advanced Chapter 6 can be used in a research seminar.

Acknowledgment. The book project started with the lecture notes [32] of the authors, which were an expanded written account of a series of lectures delivered by the second-named author in the summer school at East China Normal University, Shanghai, in July 2009. In a graduate course at the University of Virginia in Spring 2010, the second-named author lectured on what became a large portion of Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of the book. The materials in Chapter 3 on Schur duality have been used by the second-named author in the winter school in Taipei in December 2010. Part of the materials in the first three chapters have also been used by the first-named author in a lecture series in Shanghai in March 2011, and then in a lecture series by both authors in a workshop in Tehran in May 2011. We thank the participants in all these occasions for their helpful suggestions and feedback, and we especially thank Constance Baltera, Jae-Hoon Kwon, Li Luo, Jinkui Wan, and Youjie Wang for their corrections. We are grateful to Ngau Lam for his collaboration which has changed our way of thinking about the subject of Lie superalgebras.

The first-named author gratefully acknowledges the support from the National Science Council, Taiwan, and the second-named author gratefully acknowledges the continuing support of the National Science Foundation, USA.

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Index

εδ-sequence, 22, 23

adjoint action, 3
adjoint map, 3
algebra
  Clifford, 114, 183, 285
  exterior, 10, 52
  Hecke-Clifford, 114
  Heisenberg, 287
  supersymmetric, 53
  universal enveloping, 31
  Weyl, 153
  Weyl-Clifford, 153
atypical, 75

bilinear form
  even, 6
  invariant, 3
  odd, 6
  skew-supersymmetric, 6
  supersymmetric, 6
Boolean characteristic function, 181
boson fermion correspondence, 287
boundary, 233

category
  Ø, 219
  Æ, 219
  O, 218
  polynomial modules, 108
Cauchy identity, 267
central character, 57
character formula, 232
characteristic map, 116
  Frobenius, 270
charge, 286

Chevalley automorphism, 6
Chevalley generators, 21
coboundary, 234
cocycle, 214
cohomology, 234
  Kostant, 235
  restricted, 234
  unrestricted, 244
column determinant, 165
conjugacy class
  split, 97
contraction, 134
coroot, 14
cycle
  signed, 110
  type of, 110
  support of, 110
degree
  atypicality, 65, 75, 106, 107
  even, 2
  odd, 2
derivation, 3
diagram
  Dynkin, 21, 22, 24, 206, 207, 211
  head, 207
  master, 207
  Maya, 282
  charge of, 282
  skew, 268
tail, 206
dimension, 2
duality
  super, 249
energy, 286
extension, 108, 242
Baer-Yoneda, 241
central, 180, 181, 213
fermionic Fock space, 284
FFT, 132
multilinear
GL(\(V\)), 134
polynomial
GL(\(V\)), 135
O(\(V\)), Sp(\(V\)), 141
supersymmetric
O(\(V\)), Sp(\(V\)), 149
tensor
GL(\(V\)), 133
O(\(V\)), Sp(\(V\)), 146
First Fundamental Theorem, 132
Fock space
fermionic, 183
Frobenius coordinates, 78, 281
half-integral, 285
modified, 80, 215
functor
\(T\), 228
\(T\), 228
duality, 235
parity reversing, 2, 71, 92
truncation, 221, 240
fundamental system, 19
group
orthogonal, 139
symplectic, 139
harmonic, 173
highest weight, 34
highest weight vector, 34
homology, 233
Kostant, 235
homomorphism
Harish-Chandra, 57
Lie superalgebra, 3
module, 2
Howe dual pair, 160
ideal, 2
identity matrix, 2
Jacobi triple product identity, 289
Kac module, 44
Kazhdan-Lusztig-Vogan polynomial, 239
level, 182
Lie algebra
orthogonal, 139
symplectic, 139
Lie superalgebra, 3
\(\mathfrak{g}-\mathfrak{g},\), 214
basic, 13
Cartan type
\(H(n)\), 12
\(\overline{S}(n)\), 11
\(W(n)\), 10
\(\overline{H}(n)\), 12
\(\overline{S}(n)\), 11
classical, 13
exceptional
\(D(2|1,\alpha)\), 9
\(F(3|1)\), 10
\(G(3)\), 10
general linear, 4
ortho-symplectic, 6
perplectic, 9
queer, 8
solvable, 32
special linear, 5
type \(\alpha\), 209
type \(\ast\), 209
type \(b\), 210
type \(c\), 209
type \(\delta\), 210
linkage principle
\(\mathfrak{gl},\mathfrak{osp}\), 68
\(q\), 75
Littlewood-Richardson coefficient, 268
module
Kac, 44, 45
oscillator
\(\mathfrak{osp}(2m|2n)\), 174
\(\mathfrak{spo}(2m|2n)\), 179
parabolic Verma, 218
polynomial, 108, 215, 217
spin, 97
basic, 118
type \(\mathfrak{m}\), 94
type \(q\), 94
multiplicity-free
strongly, 159
nilradical, 217
opposite, 217
normal ordered product, 184
odd reflection, 27
odd trace, 19
operator
boundary, 233
charge, 286
coboundary, 234
energy, 286
parity
Index

in supergroup, 110
in superspace, 2
parity reversing functor, 2
partition, 215, 261, 282
  size, 261
  conjugate, 261
  dominance order, 261
  even, 199, 269
  generalized, 186
  hook, 49, 215
  length, 261
  odd, 111, 275
  part, 261
  strict, 111, 275
Pfaffian, 277
Pieri’s formula, 269
Poincaré’s lemma, 199
Poincaré-Birkhoff-Witt Theorem, 31
polarization, 135
polynomial
  doubly symmetric, 271
  Kazhdan-Lusztig-Vogan, 239
  Schur, 265
  supersymmetric, 271
positive system, 19
  standard, 21, 23
pullback, 242
pushout, 251
reflection
  odd, 27, 225
  real, 28
restitution, 135
restricted dual, 233
ring of symmetric functions, 262
root
  even, 14
  isotropic, 15
  odd, 14
  simple, 19
root system, 14
  \( \mathfrak{gl}(m|n) \), 16
  \( \mathfrak{g}(n) \), 18
  \( \mathfrak{osp}(2m|2n) \), 17
  \( \mathfrak{osp}(2m|2n+1) \), 17
Schur function, 265
  skew, 268
  super, 274
Schur polynomial, 265
Schur’s lemma, 95
spherical harmonics, 199
strongly multiplicity-free, 159
subalgebra, 2
  Borel, 19, 20
  \( \mathfrak{b}^\circ(n) \), 224
  \( \mathfrak{b}^\circ(n) \), 224
standard, 18, 21, 22, 215, 217
  Cartan, 14
  standard, 17, 18, 215
  Levi, 221
  standard, 217
  parabolic, 217, 221
subspace, 2
super duality, 249
superalgebra, 2
  Clifford, 114, 153, 285
  exterior, 10
  semisimple, 94
  simple, 2
  Weyl-Clifford, 153
supercharacter, 56
superdimension, 2
supergroup, 96
superspace, 2
supertableau, 102
  content of, 102
supertrace, 5
supertranspose, 6
symbol, 154
symbol map, 155, 159
symmetric function
  complete, 262
  elementary, 262
  involution \( \omega \), 264
  monomial, 262
  power sum, 262
  ring of, 262
system
  fundamental, 19
  positive, 19
  root, 14
tableau
  semistandard, 268
  skew, 268
trace
  odd, 19
typical, 65, 75
univeral enveloping algebra, 31
vector
  highest weight, 34
  singular, 70
  vacuum, 284
virtual character, 46
Wedderburn’s theorem, 94
weight
  dominant, 218, 221
  dominant integral, 45
  extremal, 77
  half-integer, 48
highest, 34
integer, 48
linked
$\mathfrak{gl},\mathfrak{osp}$, 65
$q$, 74
polynomial, 108
Weyl group, 14
Weyl symbol, 154
Weyl vector, 20
This book gives a systematic account of the structure and representation theory of finite-dimensional complex Lie superalgebras of classical type and serves as a good introduction to representation theory of Lie superalgebras. Several folklore results are rigorously proved (and occasionally corrected in detail), sometimes with new proofs. Three important dualities are presented in the book, with the unifying theme of determining irreducible characters of Lie superalgebras. In order of increasing sophistication, they are Schur duality, Howe duality, and super duality. The combinatorics of symmetric functions is developed as needed in connections to Harish-Chandra homomorphism as well as irreducible characters for Lie superalgebras. Schur-Sergeev duality for the queer Lie superalgebra is presented from scratch with complete detail. Howe duality for Lie superalgebras is presented in book form for the first time. Super duality is a new approach developed in the past few years toward understanding the Bernstein-Gelfand-Gelfand category of modules for classical Lie superalgebras. Super duality relates the representation theory of classical Lie superalgebras directly to the representation theory of classical Lie algebras and thus gives a solution to the irreducible character problem of Lie superalgebras via the Kazhdan-Lusztig polynomials of classical Lie algebras.