MINIMAL VECTORS
IN ARBITRARY BANACH SPACES

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Abstract. We extend the method of minimal vectors to arbitrary Banach spaces. It is proved, by a variant of the method, that certain quasinilpotent operators on arbitrary Banach spaces have hyperinvariant subspaces.

The method of minimal vectors was introduced by Ansari and Enflo in \cite{AE98} in order to prove the existence of invariant subspaces for certain classes of operators on a Hilbert space. Pearcy used it in \cite{P} to prove a version of Lomonosov’s theorem. Androulakis in \cite{A} adapted the technique to super-reflexive Banach spaces. In \cite{CPS} the method was independently generalized to reflexive Banach spaces. There has been hope that this technique could provide a positive solution to the invariant subspace problem for these spaces. In this note we present a version of the method of minimal vectors (based on \cite{A}) that works for arbitrary Banach spaces. In particular, it applies in the spaces where there are known examples of operators without invariant subspaces, e.g., \cite{E76, E87, R84, R85}. This shows that the method of minimal vectors alone cannot solve the invariant subspace problem for “good” spaces.

Suppose that \(X\) is a Banach space. For simplicity, we assume that \(X\) is a real Banach space, though the results can be adapted to the complex case in a straightforward manner. In the following, \(B(x_0, \varepsilon)\) stands for the closed ball of radius \(\varepsilon\) centered at \(x_0\) while \(B^0(x_0, \varepsilon)\) stands for the open ball, and \(S(x_0, \varepsilon)\) stands for the corresponding sphere.

Let \(Q\) be a bounded operator on \(X\). Since we will be interested in the hyperinvariant subspaces of \(Q\), we can assume, without loss of generality, that \(Q\) is one-to-one and has dense range, since otherwise \(\ker Q\) or \(\text{Range} Q\) would be hyperinvariant for \(Q\). By \(\{Q\}'\) we denote the commutant of \(Q\).

Fix a point \(x_0 \neq 0\) in \(X\) and a positive real \(\varepsilon < \|x_0\|\). Let \(K = Q^{-1}B(x_0, \varepsilon)\). Clearly, \(K\) is a convex closed set. Note that \(0 \notin K\) and \(K \neq \emptyset\) because \(Q\) has dense range. Let \(d = \inf_K \|z\|\). Then \(d > 0\). It is observed in \cite{AE98, A} that if \(X\) is reflexive, then there exists \(z \in K\) with \(\|z\| = d\). Such a vector is called a minimal vector for \(x_0, \varepsilon\) and \(Q\). Even without the reflexivity condition, however, one can always find \(y \in X\) with \(\|y\| \leq 2d\); such a \(y\) will be referred to as a 2-minimal vector for \(x_0, \varepsilon\) and \(Q\).
The set \( K \cap B(0, d) \) is the set of all minimal vectors; in general, this set may be empty. If \( z \) is a minimal vector, since \( z \in K = Q^{-1}B(x_0, \varepsilon) \), then \( Qz \in B(x_0, \varepsilon) \). Since \( z \) is an element of minimal norm in \( K \), then, in fact, \( Qz \in S(x_0, \varepsilon) \). Since \( Q \) is one-to-one, we have

\[
QB(0, d) \cap B(x_0, \varepsilon) = Q(B(0, d) \cap K) \subseteq S(x_0, \varepsilon).
\]

It follows that \( QB(0, d) \) and \( B^2(x_0, \varepsilon) \) are two disjoint convex sets. Since one of them has nonempty interior, they can be separated by a continuous linear functional (see, e.g., [AB99] Theorem 5.5). That is, there exists a functional \( f \) with \( \|f\| = 1 \) and a positive real \( c \) such that \( f(QB(0, d)) \leq c \) and \( f(B^2(x_0, \varepsilon)) \geq c \). By continuity, \( f|_{B(x_0, \varepsilon)} \geq c \). We say that \( f \) is a minimal functional for \( x_0, \varepsilon \), and \( Q \).

We claim that \( f(x_0) \geq \varepsilon \). Indeed, for every \( x \) with \( \|x\| \leq 1 \) we have \( x - \varepsilon x \in B(x_0, \varepsilon) \). It follows that \( f(x_0 - \varepsilon x) \geq c \), so that \( f(x_0) \geq c + \varepsilon f(x) \). Taking sup over all \( x \) with \( \|x\| \leq 1 \) we get \( f(x_0) \geq c + \varepsilon \|f\| \geq \varepsilon \).

Observe that the hyperplane \( Q^*f = c \) separates \( K \) and \( B(0, d) \). Indeed, if \( z \in B(0, d) \), then \( (Q^*f)(z) = f(Qz) \leq c \), and if \( z \in K \), then \( Qz \in B(x_0, \varepsilon) \) so that \( (Q^*f)(z) = f(Qz) \geq c \). For every \( z \) with \( \|z\| \leq 1 \) we have \( dz \in B(0, d) \), so that \( (Q^*f)(dz) \leq c \). It follows that \( \|Q^*f\| \leq \frac{c}{d} \). On the other hand, for every \( \delta > 0 \) there exists \( z \in K \) with \( \|z\| \leq d + \delta \). Then \( (Q^*f)(z) \geq c \geq \frac{c}{d + \delta} \|z\| \), whence \( \|Q^*f\| \geq \frac{c}{d} \). It follows that \( \|Q^*f\| = \frac{c}{d} \). For every \( z \in K \) we have \( (Q^*f)(z) \geq c = d\|Q^*f\| \). In particular, if \( y \) is a 2-minimal vector, then

\[
(1) \quad (Q^*f)(y) \geq \frac{1}{2} \|Q^*f\| \|y\|.
\]

We proceed to the main theorem.

**Theorem.** Let \( Q \) be a quasinilpotent operator on a Banach space \( X \), and suppose that there exists a closed ball \( B \) such that \( 0 \notin B \) and for every sequence \( (x_n) \) in \( B \) there is a subsequence \( (x_{n_i}) \) and a sequence \( (K_i) \) in \( \{Q\}' \) such that \( \|K_i\| \leq 1 \) and \( (K_i x_{n_i}) \) converges in norm to a nonzero vector. Then \( Q \) has a hyperinvariant subspace.

**Remark.** The hypothesis of the theorem is slightly weaker than the condition (\( * \)) in [A], where it is required that for every \( \varepsilon \in (0, 1) \), there exists \( x_0 \) of norm one such that the ball \( B(x_0, \varepsilon) \) satisfies the rest of the condition.

**Proof.** Without loss of generality, \( Q \) is one-to-one and has dense range. Let \( x_0 \neq 0 \) and \( \varepsilon \in (0, \|x_0\|) \) be such that \( B = B(x_0, \varepsilon) \). For every \( n \geq 1 \) choose a 2-minimal vector \( y_n \) and a minimal functional \( f_n \) for \( x_0, \varepsilon \), and \( Q^n \).

Since \( Q \) is quasinilpotent, there is a subsequence \( (y_{n_i}) \) such that \( \|y_{n_{i+1}} - y_{n_i}\| \to 0 \).

Indeed, otherwise there would exist \( \delta > 0 \) such that \( \|y_{n_{i+1}} - y_{n_i}\| > \delta \) for all \( n \), so that \( \|y_1\| \geq \delta \|y_2\| \geq \cdots \geq \delta^n \|y_{n+1}\| \). Since \( Q^n y_{n+1} \in Q^{-1}B \), we have

\[
\|Q^n y_{n+1}\| \geq d \geq \|y_{n+1}\|/2 \geq \delta^n \|y_{n+1}\|.
\]

It follows that \( \|Q^n\| \geq \delta^n/2 \), which contradicts the quasinilpotence of \( Q \).

Since \( \|f_n\| = 1 \) for all \( i \), we can assume (by passing to a further subsequence), that \( (f_n) \) weak*-converges to some \( g \in X^* \). Since \( f_n(x_0) \geq \varepsilon \) for all \( n \), it follows that \( g(x_0) \geq \varepsilon \). In particular, \( g \neq 0 \).

Consider the sequence \( (Q^{n_i-1} y_{n_{i-1}})_{i=1}^\infty \). It is contained in \( B \), so that by passing to yet a further subsequence, if necessary, we find a sequence \( (K_i) \) in \( \{Q\}' \) such
that \( \|K_i\| \leq 1 \) and \( K_iQ^{n_i-1}y_{n_i-1} \) converges in norm to some \( w \neq 0 \). Put
\[
Y = \{Q\}'Qw = \{TQw \mid T \in \{Q\}'\}.
\]

One can easily verify that \( Y \) is a linear subspace of \( X \) invariant under \( \{Q\}' \). Notice that \( Y \) is nontrivial because \( Q \) is one-to-one and \( 0 \neq Qw \in Y \). We will show that \( Y \subseteq \ker g \), so that \( Y \) is a proper \( Q \)-hyperinvariant subspace.

Take \( T \in \{Q\}' \); we will show that \( g(TQw) = 0 \). It follows from (1) that \( (Q^{n_i}f_n)(y_n) \neq 0 \) for every \( i \), so that \( X = \text{span}\{y_n\} \oplus \ker(Q^{n_i}f_n) \). Then one can write \( TQy_{n_i-1} = \alpha_i y_{n_i} + r_i \), where \( \alpha_i \) is a scalar and \( r_i \in \ker(Q^{n_i}f_n) \).

We claim that \( \alpha_i \to 0 \). Indeed,
\[
(Q^{n_i}f_n)(TQy_{n_i-1}) = \alpha_i(Q^{n_i}f_n)(y_n),
\]
and, combining this with (1), we get
\[
\left| (Q^{n_i}f_n)(TQy_{n_i-1}) \right| \geq \frac{|\alpha_i|}{2} \|Q^{n_i}f_n\| \|y_n\|.
\]

On the other hand,
\[
\left| (Q^{n_i}f_n)(TQy_{n_i-1}) \right| \leq \|Q^{n_i}f_n\| \cdot \|T\| \cdot \|y_{n_i-1}\|.
\]

It follows from (3) and (1) that
\[
|\alpha_i| \leq 2\|T\| \frac{\|y_{n_i-1}\|}{\|y_n\|} \to 0.
\]

Then (2) yields that
\[
\left| f_{n_i}(Q^{n_i}TQy_{n_i-1}) \right| = \left| \alpha_i f_{n_i}(Q^{n_i}y_n) \right|
\leq |\alpha_i| \cdot \|f_{n_i}\| \cdot \|Q^{n_i}y_n\| \leq |\alpha_i| \cdot 1 \cdot (\|x_0\| + \varepsilon) \to 0,
\]
so that \( f_{n_i}(Q^{n_i}TQy_{n_i-1}) \to 0 \). On the other hand, since \( T, K_i \in \{Q\}' \) we have
\[
Q^{n_i}TQy_{n_i-1} = TQK_iQ^{n_i-1}y_{n_i-1} = TQw
\]
in norm, while \( f_{n_i} \xrightarrow{w} g \), so that \( f_{n_i}(Q^{n_i}TQy_{n_i-1}) \to g(TQw) \). Hence, \( g(TQw) = 0 \).

Clearly, the argument will work as well for \( \lambda \)-minimal vectors for any \( \lambda > 1 \).

Suppose that \( Q \) is a quasinilpotent operator commuting with a compact operator \( K \). Then \( Q \) satisfies the hypothesis of the theorem. Indeed, without loss of generality, \( \|K\| = 1 \). Fixing \( \varepsilon = \frac{1}{2} \), there exists \( x_0 \) with \( \|x_0\| = 1 \) such that \( \|Kx_0\| \geq \frac{\varepsilon}{2} \) and \( 0 \notin KB(x_0, \varepsilon) \). For every sequence \( (x_n) \) in \( B(x_0, \varepsilon) \), the sequence \( (Kx_n) \) has a convergent subsequence \( (Kx_{n_i}) \). Take \( K_i = K \) for all \( i \); since \( 0 \notin KB(x_0, \varepsilon) \) we have \( \lim_i K_i x_{n_i} \neq 0 \). It follows from the theorem that if \( Q \) is a quasinilpotent operator on a real or complex Banach space commuting with a nonzero compact operator, then \( Q \) has a hyperinvariant subspace. This fact is not new though: for complex Banach spaces it is a special case of the celebrated Lomonosov’s theorem \([1, 73]\), and for real Banach spaces it follows from Theorem 2 of \([1, 81]\).
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References


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