All congruence lattice identities implying modularity have Mal'tsev conditions

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Dedicated to the memory of Alan Day

Abstract. For an arbitrary lattice identity implying modularity (or at least congruence modularity) a Mal'tsev condition is given such that the identity holds in congruence lattices of algebras of a variety if and only if the variety satisfies the corresponding Mal'tsev condition.

It is an old problem if all congruence lattice identities are equivalent to Mal'tsev (=Mal'cev) conditions. In other words, we say that a lattice identity λ can be characterized by a Mal'tsev condition if there exists a Mal'tsev condition M such that, for any variety $\mathcal{V}$, λ holds in congruence lattices of all algebras in $\mathcal{V}$ if and only if M holds in $\mathcal{V}$; and the problem is if all lattice identities can be characterized this way. This problem was raised first in Grätzer [15], where the notion of a Mal'tsev condition was defined. A *strong Mal'tsev condition* for varieties is a condition of the form "there exist terms $h_0, \dots, h_k$ satisfying a set Σ of identities" where k is fixed and the form of Σ is independent of the type of algebras considered. By a *Mal'tsev condition* we mean a condition of the form "there exists a natural number n such that P_n holds" where the P_n are strong Mal'tsev conditions and P_n implies P_{n+1} for every n. The condition "P_n implies P_{n+1}" is usually expressed by saying that a Mal'tsev condition must be weakening in its parameter. (For a more precise definition of Mal'tsev conditions cf. Taylor [23].) The problem was repeatedly asked by several authors, including Taylor [23], Jónsson [13] and Freese and McKenzie [11].

Certain lattice identities have known characterizations by Mal'tsev conditions. The first two results of this kind are Jónsson's characterization of (congruence) distributivity by the existence of Jónsson terms, cf. Jónsson [12], and Day's characterization of (congruence) modularity by the existence of Day terms, cf. Day [8]. Since Day's result will be needed in the sequel, we formulate it now. For $n \geq 2$ let $(\mathbf{D}_n)$ denote the strong Mal'tsev condition "there are quaternary terms $m_0, \dots, m_n$

Date: March 17, 2003.

1991 *Mathematics Subject Classification*: Primary 08B05, secondary 08B10.

Key words and phrases: congruence modularity, congruence identity, Mal'tsev condition, congruence lattice.

This research was partially supported by the NFSR of Hungary (OTKA), grant no. T034137 and T026243, and also by the Hungarian Ministry of Education, grant no. FKFP 0169/2001.

satisfying the identities

$$\begin{gathered} m_0(x,y,z,u)=x, \qquad m_n(x,y,z,u)=u, \\ m_i(x,y,y,x)=x \quad \text{for } i=0,1,\dots,n, \\ m_i(x,x,y,y)=m_{i+1}(x,x,y,y) \quad \text{for } i=0,1,\dots,n, \quad i \text{ even}, \\ m_i(x,y,y,z)=m_{i+1}(x,y,y,z) \quad \text{for } i=0,1,\dots,n, \quad i \text{ odd"}. \end{gathered}$$

Now Day's celebrated result says that a variety $\mathcal{V}$ is congruence modular iff the Mal'tsev condition "$(\exists n)(\mathbf{D}_n)$" holds in $\mathcal{V}$.

Jónsson terms and Day terms were soon followed by some similar characterizations for other lattice identities, given for example by Gedeonová [14] and Mederly [19], but Nation [20] and Day [9] showed that these Mal'tsev conditions are equivalent to the existence of Day terms or Jónsson terms; the reader is referred to Jónsson [13] and Chapter XIII in Freese and McKenzie [11] for more details.

The next milestone is Chapter XIII in Freese and McKenzie's book [11]. Let us call a lattice identity λ in n^2 variables a *frame identity* if λ implies modularity and λ holds in a modular lattice iff it holds for the elements of every (von Neumann) n-frame of the lattice. Freese and McKenzie showed that frame identities can be characterized by Mal'tsev conditions. Although that time there was a hope that their method combined with [17] gives a Mal'tsev condition for each λ that implies modularity, cf. p. 155 in [11], Pálfy and Szabó [21] destroyed this expectation.

The goal of the present paper is to prove that each lattice identity implying modularity is equivalent to a Mal'tsev condition. Moreover, this Mal'tsev condition is very easy to construct. In order to formulate a slightly stronger statement, some definitions come first.

A lattice identity λ is said to imply modularity in congruence varieties, in notation $\lambda \models_c$ mod, if for any variety V if all the congruence lattices $\mathrm{Con}(A)$, $A \in V$, satisfy λ then all these lattices are modular. If λ implies modularity in the usual lattice theoretic sense then of course $\lambda \models_c$ mod as well. However, it was a great surprise by Nation [20] that $\lambda \models_c$ mod is possible even when λ does not imply modularity in the usual sense. Jónsson [13] gives an overview of similar results. We mention that there is an algorithm to test if $\lambda \models_c$ mod, cf. [5], which is based on Day and Freese [10].

Given a lattice term p and $k \geq 2$, we define $p^{(k)}$ via induction as follows. If p is a variable then let $p^{(k)} = p$. If $p = r \wedge s$ then let $p^{(k)} = r^{(k)} \cap s^{(k)}$. Finally, if $p = r \vee s$ then let $p^{(k)} = r^{(k)} \circ s^{(k)} \circ r^{(k)} \circ s^{(k)} \circ \dots$ with k factors on the right. When congruences or, more generally, reflexive compatible relations are substituted for the variables of $p^{(k)}$ then the operations $\cap$ and $\circ$ will be interpreted as intersection and relational product, respectively. Now and in the sequel by a *lattice identity* λ we mean an *inequality* $p \leq q$ where p and q are lattice terms. This does not hurt generality, for each $p \leq q$ is equivalent to an appropriate identity $r = s$ modulo lattice theory and vice versa. If $\lambda : p \leq q$ is a lattice identity and $m, n \geq 2$ then we can consider the *inclusion* $p^{(m)} \subseteq q^{(n)}$. If A is an algebra then $p^{(m)}$ and $q^{(n)}$ do not give congruences in general when their variables are substituted by congruences of A. However, it makes sense to say that $p^{(m)} \subseteq q^{(n)}$ holds or fails for congruences of A. Now Wille [24] and Pixley [22] give an easy algorithm to construct a strong Mal'tsev condition $M(p^{(m)} \subseteq q^{(n)})$ such that, for any variety $\mathcal{V}$, $p^{(m)} \subseteq q^{(n)}$ holds for congruences of all algebras in $\mathcal{V}$ if and only if $M(p^{(m)} \subseteq q^{(n)})$ holds in $\mathcal{V}$. (Notice that the construction of $M(p^{(m)} \subseteq q^{(n)})$ is outlined in Freese and McKenzie [11], and, with the notation $U(G_m(p) \leq G_n(q))$, it is detailed in [4].) Wille and Pixley showed also that $p^{(m)} \subseteq q$ holds for congruences of algebras in $\mathcal{V}$ if and only if $\mathcal{V}$ satisfies the Mal'tsev condition "there is an n such that $M(p^{(m)} \subseteq q^{(n)})$ holds"; this will be needed in our proof. Now we can formulate the main result.

Theorem 1. *Let $\lambda : p \leq q$ be a lattice identity such that $\lambda \models_c$ modularity. Then for any variety $\mathcal{V}$ the following two conditions are equivalent.*

(a) For all $A \in \mathcal{V}$, λ holds in the congruence lattice of A.

(b) $\mathcal{V}$ satisfies the Mal'tsev condition "there is an $n \geq 2$ such that $M(p^{(3)} \subseteq q^{(n)})$ and $(\mathbf{D}_n)$ hold".

This paper will not detail the construction of $M(p^{(3)} \subseteq q^{(n)})$, but we mention that if we consider $\lambda : x \wedge (y \vee (x \wedge z)) \leq (x \wedge y) \vee (x \wedge z)$, the modular law, then Day's characterization of congruence modularity becomes a particular case of Theorem 1.

Before proving Theorem 1 we give some definitions and remarks. Reflexive symmetric compatible relations of an algebra are called *tolerances*, cf. Chajda [1] for an overview. The set of tolerances of A will be denoted by $\operatorname{Tol} A$. The *transitive closure* of a tolerance $\Phi \in \operatorname{Tol} A$ will be denoted by

$$\Phi^* = \bigcup_{n=1}^{\infty} (\Phi \circ \Phi \circ \Phi \circ \ldots) \quad (n \text{ factors}).$$

Note that Φ^* always belongs to $\operatorname{Con} A$, the congruence lattice of A, and

$$\alpha \vee \beta = (\alpha \cup \beta)^* \tag{1}$$

holds for any $\alpha, \beta \in \operatorname{Con} A$. Our interest in tolerances started with generalizing the Shifting Principle from Gumm [16] for congruence distributive varieties, cf. [2] and [3]. It appeared soon that formulas give stronger generalizations than diagrams both for the congruence distributive and for the congruence modular case, and we proved in [6] that if $\mathcal{V}$ is a congruence modular variety, $A \in \mathcal{V}$ and $\Gamma, \Phi, \Psi \in \operatorname{Tol} A$ then

$$\Gamma \cap (\Phi \cup (\Gamma \cap \Psi))^* \subseteq ((\Gamma \cap \Phi) \cup (\Gamma \cap \Psi))^*. \tag{2}$$

Notice that formally, according to (1), (2) is a variant of the modular law. Substituting 0 for Ψ in (2) we obtained, cf. Proposition 1 in [6], that

$$\Gamma \cap \Phi^* \subseteq (\Gamma \cap \Phi)^*. \tag{3}$$

Notice that it is essential to consider varieties here, for [6] presents a single algebra with modular congruence lattice, a tolerance Φ and a congruence Γ of this algebra such that $\Gamma \cap \Phi^* \subseteq (\Gamma \cap \Phi)^*$ fails. As the next step towards Theorem 1, Radeleczki [7] and later, independently, Kearnes [18] noticed that (3) trivially implies a more useful statement: if A belongs to a congruence modular variety and $\Gamma, \Phi \in \operatorname{Tol} A$ then

$$\Gamma^* \cap \Phi^* = (\Gamma \cap \Phi)^*. \tag{4}$$

Indeed, applying (3) for Γ^* and Φ, and then for Φ and Γ we obtain the nontrivial inclusion part of (4). To make the present paper self-contained, we will give a direct proof of (3), which is of course a special (and therefore a bit shorter) case of the proof of (2).

Proof. In order to prove Theorem 1 first we prove (3). Let V be a congruence modular variety with Day-terms $m_0, \ldots, m_n$. Let Γ and Φ be tolerances of an algebra A in V. First we show that

$$\Gamma \cap (\Phi \circ \Phi) \subseteq (\Gamma \cap \Phi)^*. \tag{5}$$

Suppose $(a, b) \in \Gamma \cap (\Phi \circ \Phi)$. Then there is an element $c \in A$ with $(a, c), (c, b) \in \Phi$, and of course, $(a, b) \in \Gamma$. Now we define further elements. Let $d_i = m_i(a, c, c, b)$ for $i = 0, \ldots, n$ and let $e_i = m_i(a, a, b, b)$ for i even, $i = 0, \ldots, n$. Notice that $d_i = d_{i+1}$ for i odd. Let j denote an arbitrary even index. Then $(d_j, e_j) \in \Phi$ is clear. Since

$$\begin{aligned} d_j &= m_j(m_j(a, c, c, b), a, a, m_j(a, c, c, b)) \; \Gamma \; m_j(m_j(a, c, c, a), a, b, m_j(b, c, c, b)) \\ &= m_j(a, a, b, b) = e_j, \end{aligned}$$

we obtain $(d_j, e_j) \in \Gamma \cap \Phi$. Since $e_j = m_j(a, a, b, b) = m_{j+1}(a, a, b, b)$, we conclude $(d_{j+1}, e_j) \in \Gamma \cap \Phi$ exactly the same way. Since any two neighbouring members of the sequence

$$a = d_0,\ e_0,\ d_1 = d_2,\ e_2,\ d_3 = d_4,\ e_4,\ d_5 = d_6,\ \ldots,\ d_n = b$$

are in the relation $\Gamma \cap \Phi$, we infer $(a, b) \in (\Gamma \cap \Phi)^*$. This proves (5).

Now let $\Phi_0 = \Phi$ and $\Phi_{n+1} = \Phi_n \circ \Phi_n$, these are tolerances again. We claim that, for all n,

$$\Gamma \cap \Phi_n \subseteq (\Gamma \cap \Phi)^*. \tag{6}$$

This is evident for $n = 0$. If (6) holds for some n then, applying (5) for Γ and Φ_n and using the induction hypothesis, we have

$$\Gamma \cap \Phi_{n+1} = \Gamma \cap (\Phi_n \circ \Phi_n) \subseteq (\Gamma \cap \Phi_n)^* \subseteq ((\Gamma \cap \Phi)^*)^* = (\Gamma \cap \Phi)^*.$$

Hence (6) holds for all n. Therefore we obtain

$$\Gamma \cap \Phi^* = \Gamma \cap \bigcup_{n=0}^{\infty} \Phi_n = \bigcup_{n=0}^{\infty} (\Gamma \cap \Phi_n) \subseteq \bigcup_{n=0}^{\infty} (\Gamma \cap \Phi)^* = (\Gamma \cap \Phi)^*$$

This proves (3) for any tolerances Γ and Φ.

Applying (3) first for Γ^* and Φ and then for Φ and Γ we obtain

$$\Gamma^* \cap \Phi^* \subseteq (\Gamma^* \cap \Phi)^* = (\Phi \cap \Gamma^*)^* \subseteq ((\Phi \cap \Gamma)^*)^* = (\Gamma \cap \Phi)^*,$$

i.e., $\Gamma^* \cap \Phi^* \subseteq (\Gamma \cap \Phi)^*$. Since forming transitive closure is a monotone operation, the reverse inclusion is evident. This proves (4).

For tolerances Φ and Ψ it is easy to see that $\Phi \circ \Psi \circ \Phi$ is again a tolerance. It follows from reflexivity that

$$(\Phi \circ \Psi \circ \Phi)^* = \Phi^* \vee \Psi^*, \tag{7}$$

where the join is taken in $\operatorname{Con} A$. An easy induction shows that if $r = r(x_1, \dots, x_k)$ is a lattice term and $\Phi_1, \dots, \Phi_k$ are tolerances or, as a particular case, congruences of an algebra A then $r^{(3)}(\Phi_1, \dots, \Phi_k)$ is a tolerance again. Now let $\mathcal{V}$ be a variety and assume (a). Let p and q be, say, k-ary lattice terms. Since an easy induction shows that, for any $A \in \mathcal{V}$ and any congruences $\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k$ of A we have $p^{(3)}(\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k) \subseteq p(\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k)$, we conclude that $p^{(3)} \subseteq q$ holds for congruences of any $A \in \mathcal{V}$. Hence the afore-mentioned result of Wille and Pixley yields that $M(p^{(3)} \subseteq q^{(n_1)})$ holds in $\mathcal{V}$ for some n_1. Since $\lambda \models_c \text{mod}$, there is an n_2 such that $\mathbf{D}_{n_2}$ holds in $\mathcal{V}$. Now let n be the maximum of n_1 and n_2. Since Mal'tsev conditions are weakening in their parameter, we obtain that $\mathcal{V}$ satisfies (b).

Now, to show the reverse implication, assume that (b) holds. By Day's result, $\mathcal{V}$ is congruence modular, whence (4) holds as well. The afore-mentioned result of Wille and Pixley gives that $p^{(3)} \subseteq q$ holds for congruences in V. So for any congruences $\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k$ of $A \in V$, we have $p^{(3)}(\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k) \subseteq q(\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k)$. Hence

$$p_3(\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k)^* \subseteq q(\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k)^*. \tag{8}$$

Since $q(\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k)$ is a congruence, it equals its transitive closure. On the other hand, a trivial induction based on (4) and (7) gives that

$$p_3(\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k)^* = p(\alpha_1^*, \dots, \alpha_k^*) = p(\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k).$$

This way (8) turns into

$$p(\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k) \subseteq q(\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k),$$

proving that λ holds in $\operatorname{Con}(A)$ for all $A \in V$. Thus (a) holds. □

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