

# Representations and Cohomology of Categories

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A question

What is a  
representation of a  
category?

The representation  
type of EI  
categories

# Outline

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The most substantial results I will talk about are work of my student, Liping Li. They will appear in his thesis.

# A question about cyclic $p$ -groups

Let  $G = C_{p^n}$  be a cyclic  $p$ -group where  $p$  is a prime,  $k = \mathbb{F}_p$ .

Consider the **category of homomorphisms of  $kG$ -modules**.

Objects: diagrams  $M \rightarrow N$  of finite dimensional  $kG$ -modules.

Morphisms: commutative squares.

We have **direct sums** of objects:

$$(M \rightarrow N) \oplus (M_1 \rightarrow N_1) := (M \oplus M_1) \rightarrow (N \oplus N_1).$$

An object is **indecomposable** if it is not (isomorphic to) a non-trivial direct sum.

## Question:

How many isomorphism types of indecomposable objects are there?

Are there finitely many? Infinitely many?

### A question

What is a representation of a category?

The representation type of EI categories

# The evidence!

We are dealing with  $kG = \mathbb{F}_p C_{p^n}$ .

There are only finitely indecomposable  $kG$ -modules  $V_1, \dots, V_{p^n}$ . There are up to isomorphism only finitely many morphisms  $V_i \rightarrow V_j$  for each  $i, j$ . It is hard to see how to combine these morphisms together in many ways.

If  $0 \rightarrow A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow 0$  is a short exact sequence of  $kG$ -modules, it is indecomposable if and only if  $B \rightarrow C$  is indecomposable. (Exercise) There only seem to be finitely many indecomposable short exact sequences.

Example: for  $\mathbb{F}_3 C_3$  there is an indecomposable morphism  $(V_3 \oplus V_1) \rightarrow (V_3 \oplus V_2)$ . ( $V_3$  maps to the second layer of  $V_3$  and onto  $V_2$ ,  $V_1$  maps to the socle of  $V_2$ ).

Any morphism  $(V_1 \oplus V_3 \oplus V_1) \rightarrow (V_3 \oplus V_2)$  decomposes.

## A question

What is a representation of a category?

The representation type of EI categories

# Would you bet on it?

## A question

What is a  
representation of a  
category?

The representation  
type of EI  
categories

What do you think?

Are there only finitely many indecomposable morphisms?

Infinitely many indecomposable morphisms?

Would you take me on with a bet?

How do I know that the morphisms in the last example are decomposable or indecomposable?

# Representations

Let  $R$  be a commutative ring with 1. A **representation** of a category  $\mathcal{C}$  over  $R$  is a functor  $M : \mathcal{C} \rightarrow R\text{-mod}$ .

A homomorphism of representations is a natural transformation of the functors.

Straightforward example:

$\mathcal{C}$  is the category with five morphisms  $\bullet \longleftarrow \bullet \longrightarrow \bullet$ .

A representation is a diagram of modules  $B \longleftarrow A \longrightarrow C$ .

We may be interested in

- ▶ the direct limit of this diagram: the pushout;
- ▶ is this operation exact?
- ▶ Etc.

A question

What is a representation of a category?

The representation type of EI categories

# We DO understand what a representation of a category is!

A question

What is a  
representation of a  
category?

The representation  
type of EI  
categories

A representation of a category is a diagram of modules.

# Well-studied examples of representations

- ▶ When  $\mathcal{C}$  is a **group** we get homomorphism  $\mathcal{C} \rightarrow \text{End}_R(V)$ .
- ▶ When  $\mathcal{C}$  is a **poset** we get a module for the incidence algebra.
- ▶ When  $\mathcal{C}$  is the **free category** associated to a quiver we get a representation of the quiver.

The theory of representations of the above examples is well developed and we do not expect to get more information about them from this general theory. We are more interested in other categories, such as the orbit category associated to a family of subgroups of a group, or the categories which arise with  $p$ -local finite groups.

A question

What is a representation of a category?

The representation type of EI categories

# Further examples

A question

What is a  
representation of a  
category?

The representation  
type of EI  
categories

- ▶  $\mathcal{C}$  = finite dimensional vector spaces over some field.  
We get **generic representation theory**.
- ▶ Various constructions in topology and the cohomology of groups: homotopy colimits, the Quillen category.

## Back to the question

Let  $G$  be a group. Consider the category

$$\mathcal{C} = G \bullet_x \xrightarrow{{}_G G_G} \bullet_y G$$

There are two objects, labelled  $x$  and  $y$ , with  $\text{End}(x) \cong \text{End}(y) \cong G$ . The morphisms from  $x$  to  $y$  are the biset  ${}_G G_G$  with composition given by the action of the two groups  $G$  on the biset.

A representation  $M$  of  $\mathcal{C}$  is the specification of  $RG$ -modules  $M(x)$  and  $M(y)$  together with linear maps  $M(g) : M(x) \rightarrow M(y)$  for each  $g$  in  ${}_G G_G$ .

Since  $g1 = 1g$  we have  $M(g)M(1) = M(1)M(g)$ . Thus  $M(1)$  is an  $RG$ -module homomorphism, and it determines all the  $M(g)$ .

A question

What is a representation of a category?

The representation type of EI categories

# Reformulation of the question

A homomorphism of these representations is a commutative diagram of  $RG$ -modules.

The 'category of homomorphisms' is the same as the category of representations of

$$G \underset{x}{\bullet} \xrightarrow{G G} \underset{y}{\bullet} G.$$

A question

What is a representation of a category?

The representation type of EI categories

# The Category Algebra

The **category algebra**  $RC$  is the free  $R$ -module with the morphisms of  $\mathcal{C}$  as a basis. We define the product of these basis elements to be composition if possible, zero otherwise.

Examples:

- ▶ When  $\mathcal{C}$  is a **group** we get the group algebra.
- ▶ When  $\mathcal{C}$  is a **poset** we get the incidence algebra.
- ▶ When  $\mathcal{C}$  is the **free category** associated to a quiver we get the path algebra of the quiver.
- ▶ When  $\mathcal{C} = G \bullet_x \xrightarrow{G} \bullet_y G$  we get

$$\begin{pmatrix} RG & RG \\ 0 & RG \end{pmatrix}$$

A question

What is a representation of a category?

The representation type of EI categories

# Equivalence of representations and modules

## Theorem (B. Mitchell)

*Representations are 'the same' as  $RC$ -modules, if  $\mathcal{C}$  has finitely many objects.*

Example:

- ▶ When  $\mathcal{C}$  is a **group**, representations are the same as modules for the group algebra.
- ▶ When  $\mathcal{C}$  is the **free category** associated to a quiver, representations are the same as modules for the path algebra.

Under this correspondence a representation  $M$  corresponds to an  $RC$ -module  $\bigoplus_{x \in \text{Ob } \mathcal{C}} M(x)$ . Natural transformations of functors correspond to module homomorphisms.

A question

What is a representation of a category?

The representation type of EI categories

# The question again

A question

What is a  
representation of a  
category?

The representation  
type of EI  
categories

What is the representation type of

$$\begin{pmatrix} \mathbb{F}_p C_{p^n} & \mathbb{F}_p C_{p^n} \\ 0 & \mathbb{F}_p C_{p^n} \end{pmatrix}?$$

A question

What is a  
representation of a  
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The representation  
type of El  
categories

This work is done mainly by Liping Li, and the principal results are his.

An **El-category** is one in which every **E**ndomorphism is an **I**somorphism.

The problem: classify El categories of finite representation type.

An **EI-quiver** is a structure  $\mathcal{Q} = (Q_0, Q_1, s, t, f, g)$  where  $(Q_0, Q_1, s, t)$  is a quiver,  $f : Q_0 \rightarrow \text{Groups}$ , and for each edge  $\alpha : x \rightarrow y$  in  $Q_1$ ,  $g(\alpha)$  is a  $(f(y), f(x))$ -biset.

We may construct the **free EI-category on  $\mathcal{Q}$**  as follows. It has objects  $Q_0$  and morphisms

$\text{Mor}(x, y) := \coprod g(\alpha_n) \circ \cdots \circ g(\alpha_1)$  where the disjoint union is taken over all chains of arrows

$x = x_0 \xrightarrow{\alpha_1} x_1 \xrightarrow{\alpha_2} \cdots \xrightarrow{\alpha_n} x_n = y$  in  $Q_1$  and  $\circ$  indicates the biset product over the common group of the bisets.

A **free EI-category** is one which is equivalent to a free EI-category on some EI-quiver.

A question

What is a representation of a category?

The representation type of EI categories

# Characterization of free EI-categories.

A question

What is a  
representation of a  
category?

The representation  
type of EI  
categories

Free EI-categories are characterized by a universal property and by the uniqueness of factorization of morphisms as words in the generators.

## Theorem (Liping Li, 2010)

*Let  $\mathcal{C}$  be a free EI-category and let  $R$  be a field in which the orders of all groups  $\text{End}(x)$  are invertible. Then the category algebra  $R\mathcal{C}$  is hereditary.*

Li gives an explicit construction of the Ext quiver of  $R\mathcal{C}$  and this gives a complete description of the representation type of  $R\mathcal{C}$ . When  $\mathcal{C}$  is an EI category which is not free, it is an image of a free EI-category, and if the free EI-category has finite representation type, so does  $\mathcal{C}$ .

This result plays a role in the determination of representation type when  $R$  is of arbitrary characteristic.

A question

What is a representation of a category?

The representation type of EI categories

A question

What is a  
representation of a  
category?The representation  
type of EI  
categories

# Representation type in positive characteristic

## Theorem (Liping Li, 2010)

Let  $\mathcal{C}$  be a finite EI-category and  $R$  a field of positive characteristic  $p \geq 5$ . Suppose that  $RC$  has finite representation type. Then

1. for all objects  $x$  of  $\mathcal{C}$ ,  $\text{End}(x)$  has cyclic Sylow  $p$ -subgroups,
2.  $O^{p'} \text{End}(x)$  acts trivially on  $\text{Hom}(x, y)$  and on  $\text{Hom}(y, x)$  for all objects  $y \neq x$  of  $\mathcal{C}$ , and
3. the quotient category formed by factoring out  $O^{p'}(\text{End}(x))$  from  $\text{End}(x)$  for each object  $x$  has finite representation type.

Li asks whether the converse is true when  $p \geq 5$ . Note that in the third condition the quotient category has the property that all automorphism groups have order invertible in  $R$ .

# Categories with $p$ -group endomorphisms

## Theorem ( Li, Webb)

*Let  $R$  be a field of positive characteristic  $p$  and let  $\mathcal{C}$  have two objects  $x$  and  $y$ . Suppose  $\text{End}(x)$  and  $\text{End}(y)$  are cyclic  $p$ -groups and there is only one other morphism in  $\mathcal{C}$ . Then  $\mathcal{C}$  has finite representation type.*

This result says that for an EI-category with two objects whose endomorphism groups are  $p$ -groups, the three conditions of the last theorem imply finite representation type.

A question

What is a representation of a category?

The representation type of EI categories

# The answer

## Proposition (Li, Webb)

*When  $p$  is a prime and  $G = C_{p^n}$  is a cyclic  $p$ -group the category*

$$G\bullet \xrightarrow{G} \bullet G$$

*has finite representation type if and only if  $p^n = 2$  or  $3$ .*

When  $p^n = 2$  there are 8 indecomposables and when  $p^n = 3$  there are 27 indecomposables. The method of proof is to calculate the Auslander-Reiten quiver. When  $p^n \geq 3$  there is a node in the tree class of the stable quiver of valence 3. We eliminate type D. We show there is a periodic vertex. This produces an upper bound for the number of modules if we have finite type. We construct more than this number if  $p^n > 4$ .

A question

What is a representation of a category?

The representation type of EI categories

# Some other developments

A question

What is a  
representation of a  
category?

The representation  
type of EI  
categories

- ▶ The Schur multiplier of a category.
- ▶ Fei Xu's counterexample to the conjecture that Hochschild cohomology is finitely generated module nilpotent elements.
- ▶ The orbit category and Alperin's weight conjecture.