

# Sprout Symmetric Functions

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(work in progress)

September 19, 2025

# Symmetric functions

$K$ : a field of characteristic 0

$\Lambda_K = \Lambda_K(\mathbf{x})$ : ring of symmetric functions over  $K$  in the variables  $\mathbf{x} = (x_1, x_2, \dots)$

bases  $m_\lambda$  (monomial symmetric functions),  $p_\lambda$  (power sums),  $h_\lambda$  (complete),  $e_\lambda$  (elementary),  $s_\lambda$  (Schur): knowledge assumed

# Sprout sequences and their seeds

**Definition.** A sequence  $\mathfrak{R} = (R_0 = 1, R_1, R_2, \dots)$  of symmetric functions is a **sprout sequence** if there exists a power series

$$\mathbf{F}(t) = \sum_{j \geq 0} a_j t^j \in K[[t]], \quad a_0 = 1$$

such that

$$\mathcal{F}(t) := \prod_i F(x_i t) = \sum_{n \geq 0} R_n t^n$$

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$F(t)$  is the **seed** of the sprout sequence  $\mathfrak{R}$ .

We also call  $R_0, R_1, \dots$  **sprout symmetric functions** (with respect to the seed  $F(t)$ ). Note  $R_0 = 1, R_1 = a_1 \sum x_i = a_1 p_1$ .

# Simple examples

1.  $F(t) = e^t$ . Then

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{F}(t) &= F(x_1 t)F(x_2 t)\cdots = \exp(x_1 t + x_2 t + \cdots) \\ &= \exp(p_1 t) = \sum_{n \geq 0} p_1^n \frac{t^n}{n!},\end{aligned}$$

whence  $R_n = \frac{p_1^n}{n!} = \frac{e_1^n}{n!} = \frac{h_1^n}{n!}$  ( $p, e, h, s$ -positive).

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3.  $F(t) = 1/(1 - t)$ , so  
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4.  $F(t) = 1 - t$  or  $e^{t+t^2}$  or  $e^{e^t-1}$  or  $\sum_{j \geq 0} C_j t^j$ , etc.: not  $s$ -positive.



## Five conditions

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- (b) There exist elements  $b_1, b_2, \dots \in K$  such that

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- (c) There exist elements  $a_0 = 1, a_1, a_2, \dots \in K$  such that for all  $n \geq 1$ ,

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- (d) There exist elements  $b_0 = 1, b_1, b_2, \dots$  in  $K$  such that for all  $n \geq 1$ ,

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Proofs are straightforward.

# The involution $\omega$

Recall  $\omega: \Lambda_K \rightarrow \Lambda_K$  is the linear transformation defined by  $\omega(h_\lambda) = e_\lambda$ . Then  $\omega$  is a  $K$ -algebra automorphism,  $\omega^2 = 1$ ,  $\omega(s_\lambda) = s_{\lambda'}$ , and  $\omega(p_n) = (-1)^{n-1} p_n$ .



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**Theorem.** *Let  $\mathfrak{R} = (1, R_1, R_2, \dots)$  be a sprout sequence with seed  $F(t)$ . Then  $(1, \omega R_1, \omega R_2, \dots)$  is a sprout sequence with seed  $1/F(-t)$ .*

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**Proof.** Straightforward.  $\square$

**Example.**  $F(t) = 1 + t$  and  $R_n = e_n$ . Then  $1/F(-t) = 1/(1 - t)$  and  $R_n = h_n$ .

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- (a) Each  $R_n$  is Schur positive.
- (b) We can write

$$F(t) = e^{\gamma t} \prod_{k \geq 1} \frac{1 + \alpha_k t}{1 - \beta_k t},$$

where  $\gamma \geq 0$  and the  $\alpha_k$ 's and  $\beta_k$ 's are nonnegative real numbers such that  $\sum_j (\alpha_k + \beta_k)$  is convergent. (This is an analytic, not formal or combinatorial, statement.)

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- (c) The matrix  $[a_{j-i}]_{i,j \geq 0}$  (where  $a_n = 0$  if  $n < 0$ ) is **totally nonnegative**, i.e., every minor is nonnegative.

# Proof

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**Hint #1.** Let  $H = [h_{j-i}]$ . Then every minor of  $H$  is either 0 or a skew-Schur function (by the Jacobi-Trudi identity). Every Schur function appears as a minor, and every skew Schur function is Schur positive.

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**Hint #2.** Consider the homomorphism  $\varphi: \Lambda_K \rightarrow K$  defined by  $\varphi(h_n) = a_n$ .

## A corollary

**Corollary.** *Let  $d \geq 1$ . If the seed  $F(t) = \sum a_i t^i$  generates a Schur positive sprout sequence  $\mathfrak{R}$ , then  $F_d(t) := \sum a_{di} t^i$  generates a Schur positive sprout sequence  $\mathfrak{R}_d$ .*

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**Proof.** Let  $M_d = [a_{d(j-i)}]_{i,j \geq 0}$ . Every minor of  $M_1$  is nonnegative since  $\mathfrak{R}$  is Schur positive. But  $M_d$  is a submatrix of  $M_1$ , so every minor of  $M_d$  is Schur positive. Hence  $\mathfrak{R}_d$  is Schur positive.  $\square$ .

## $e$ and $h$ -positivity

**Recall:**  $e$ -positivity  $\Rightarrow$  Schur positivity and  $h$ -positivity  $\Rightarrow$  Schur positivity.

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**Proposition.**

- (a) If all  $\beta_j = 0$ , then each  $R_n$  is  $e$ -positive.
- (b) If all  $\alpha_j = 0$ , then each  $R_n$  is  $h$ -positive.

# Easy proof

**Proposition** (repeated).

- (a) *If all  $\beta_j = 0$ , then each  $R_n$  is e-positive.*
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**Proof.** (a) Assume all  $\beta_j = 0$ . Then

$$\begin{aligned}\sum R_n t^n &= \prod_i e^{\gamma x_i t} \prod_{j \geq 1} (1 + \alpha_j x_i t) \\ &= e^{\gamma e_1 t} \prod_j \prod_i (1 + \alpha_j x_i t) \\ &= e^{\gamma e_1 t} \prod_j \left( \sum_{n \geq 0} \alpha_j^n e_n t^n \right), \text{ etc.}\end{aligned}$$

(b) is completely analogous.  $\square$

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**Conjecture.** The converse holds. (True for  $e^{-\gamma t} F(t) \in \mathbb{R}(t)$ .)



# The function $\phi(\lambda)$

Amdeberhan-Ono-Singh (2024):

$$\phi(\lambda) := (2n)! \cdot \prod_{k=1}^n \frac{1}{m_k!} \left( \frac{4^k(4^k - 1)B_{2k}}{(2k)(2k)!} \right)^{m_k},$$

where  $\lambda = \langle 1^{m_1}, \dots, n^{m_n} \rangle \vdash n = \sum im_i$  ( $\lambda$  is a partition of  $n$  with  $m_i$   $i$ 's) and  $B_{2k}$  is a Bernoulli number.

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**Original motivation.** Express a certain theta function of Ramanujan in terms of Eisenstein series (not explained here).

# Euler numbers $E_{2n}$

**Our motivation.** Not hard to see that

$$\phi(\lambda) \in \mathbb{Z}, \quad \sum_{\lambda \vdash n} |\phi(\lambda)| = E_{2n},$$

an **Euler number** or **secant number**, defined by

$$\sec x = \sum_{n \geq 0} E_{2n} \frac{x^{2n}}{(2n)!}.$$

**Well-known:**  $E_{2n}$  is equal to the number of **alternating permutations**  $a_1 a_2 \cdots a_{2n} \in \mathfrak{S}_{2n}$ , i.e.,

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**Question:** what does  $|\phi(\lambda)|$  count?

## Record partitions

$$\mathfrak{A}_{2n} := \{w \in \mathfrak{S}_{2n} : w \text{ alternating}\}$$

Recall  $\sum_{\lambda \vdash n} |\phi(\lambda)| = E_{2n} = \#\mathfrak{A}_{2n}$ .



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If  $w = a_1 > a_2 < \cdots > a_{2n} \in \mathfrak{A}_{2n}$  define  $\hat{w} = a_1, a_3, \dots, a_{2n-1}$ .  
Write  $\hat{w} = b_1, b_2, \dots, b_n$ .

**record set**  $\text{rec}(\hat{w})$ : set of indices  $1 \leq i \leq n$  for which  $b_i$  is a left-to-right maximum (or **record**) in  $\hat{w}$ . (Always  $1 \in \text{rec}(\hat{w})$ .)

**record partition**  $rp(\hat{w})$ : if  $\text{rec}(\hat{w}) = \{r_1, r_2, \dots, r_j\}_<$ , then  $rp(\hat{w})$  is the partition of  $n$  with parts  $r_2 - r_1, r_3 - r_2, r_4 - r_3, \dots, n + 1 - r_j$  (in decreasing order)

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**Example.**  $w = 7, 2, 5, 4, 8, 3, 10, 6, 9, 5 \in \mathfrak{A}_{10}$ ,  $\hat{w} = 7, 5, 8, 10, 9$ ;  
 $r_1 = 1, r_2 = 3, r_3 = 4, r_2 - r_1 = 2, r_3 - r_2 = 1, 6 - r_3 = 2$ ,  
 $\text{rp}(\hat{w}) = (2, 2, 1)$

# Combinatorial interpretation of $\phi(\lambda)$

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**Note on proof.** Recall

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where  $\lambda = \langle 1^{m_1}, \dots, n^{m_n} \rangle \vdash \sum im_i$ . To get combinatorics into the picture, use

$$E_{2k-1} = 4^k(4^k - 1) \frac{|B_{2k}|}{2k}.$$

Remainder of proof is a bijective argument.

# A symmetric function

The general form  $\phi(\lambda) = (2n)! \prod \frac{1}{m_k!} f_k^{m_k}$  suggests defining a symmetric function in the variables  $\mathbf{x} = (x_1, x_2, \dots)$ :

$$A_n = A_n(\mathbf{x}) = \sum_{\lambda \vdash n} |\phi(\lambda)| \cdot p_\lambda,$$

where  $p_\lambda$  is a power sum symmetric function.

## Examples.

$$2! A_1 = p_1$$

$$4! A_2 = 3p_1^2 + 2p_2$$

$$6! A_3 = 15p_1^3 + 30p_2p_1 + 16p_3$$

$$8!, A_4 = 105p_1^4 + 420p_2p_1^2 + 140p_2^2 + 448p_3p_1 + 272p_4$$

$4! A_2$ :

$w$	$\hat{w}$	$\text{rp}(\hat{w})$
2143	24	11
3142	34	11
3241	34	11
4132	43	2
4231	43	2

# A sprout sequence

**Theorem.**  $\sum A_n t^n = \prod_i \sec(\sqrt{x_i t})$ , i.e.,  $\mathfrak{A} := (A_0, A_1, \dots)$  is a sprout sequence with seed  $\sec \sqrt{t}$ .

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**Proof.** Manipulatorics (**A. Garsia**).  $\square$



# $h$ -positivity

**Theorem.**  $A_n(\mathbf{x})$  is  $h$ -positive.

# *h*-positivity

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**Proof.** Weierstrass product formula

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Very noncombinatorial formula for the coefficients!

## Some data

$$2!A_1 = h_1$$

$$4!A_2 = h_1^2 + 4h_2$$

$$6!A_3 = h_1^3 + 12h_2h_1 + 48h_3$$

$$8!A_4 = h_1^4 + 24h_2h_1^2 + 256h_3h_1 + 16h_2^2 + 1088h_4$$

$$10!A_5 = h_1^5 + 40h_2h_1^3 + 800h_3h_1^2 + 80h_2^2h_1 + 9280h_4h_1 \\ + 640h_3h_2 + 39680h_5.$$

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**Open problem.** Sum of coefficients is  $E_{2n}$ . What are the coefficients themselves?

**Note.** Coefficient of  $h_n$  is  $nE_{2n-1}$ , the number of “cyclically alternating” permutations in  $\mathfrak{S}_{2n}$ .

# Chromatic symmetric functions

$G$ : finite simple graph on vertex set  $V(G) = \{v_1, v_2, \dots, v_p\}$

$$X_G = X_G(\mathbf{x}) := \sum_{\substack{\kappa: V(G) \rightarrow \mathbb{P} \\ uv \in E(G) \Rightarrow \kappa(u) \neq \kappa(v)}} X_{\kappa(v_1)} X_{\kappa(v_2)} \cdots X_{\kappa(v_p)}$$



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$$X_G(\underbrace{1, 1, \dots, 1}_{m \text{ 1's}}, 0, 0, \dots) = \chi_G(m),$$

the **chromatic polynomial** of  $G$ .

# Interval orders

$\mathcal{I} = \{[a_1, b_1], \dots, [a_n, b_n]\}$ , a collection of closed intervals in  $\mathbb{R}$ , so  $a_i < b_i$ .

$G_{\mathcal{I}}$ : graph with vertex set  $\mathcal{I}$ , with  $[a_i, b_i]$  adjacent to  $[a_j, b_j]$  if  $[a_i, b_i] \cap [a_j, b_j] \neq \emptyset$  (incomparability graph of the corresponding interval order:  $[a_i, b_i] < [a_j, b_j]$  if  $b_i < a_j$ ).

$M$ : a complete matching  $a_1 b_1, a_2 b_2, \dots, a_n b_n$  on  $[2n] := \{1, 2, \dots, 2n\}$ , with  $a_i < b_i$  (so  $\{a_1, b_1, \dots, a_n, b_n\} = [2n]$ )

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$\mathcal{I}(M) := \{[a_1, b_1], \dots, [a_n, b_n]\}$

**Theorem.**  $(2n)! \omega(A_n) = \sum_{M \in \mathcal{M}_n} X_{G_{\mathcal{I}(M)}}$ , where  $\mathcal{M}_n$  is the set of all  $(2n-1)!!$  complete matchings on  $[2n]$ , and  $X_{G_{\mathcal{I}(M)}}$  is the chromatic symmetric function of the graph  $G_{\mathcal{I}(M)}$ .

## The case $n = 2$

matching $M$	graph $G_{I(M)}$	$X_{G_{I(M)}}$
12, 34	$\bullet \quad \bullet$	$e_1^2$
13, 24	$\bullet \text{---} \bullet$	$2e_2$
14, 23	$\bullet \text{---} \bullet$	$2e_2$

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**Problem.** Are there other “nice” examples of sums (or linear combinations) of  $X_G$ ’s being e-positive?

# Monomial symmetric functions

**Example.** Coefficient of  $m_{311}$  in  $(10)!A_5$  is the number of  $w = a_1, \dots, a_{10} \in \mathfrak{S}_{10}$  satisfying

$$\underbrace{a_1 > a_2 < a_3 > a_4 < a_5 > a_6}_{\text{length } 6=2\lambda_1} \underbrace{a_7 > a_8}_{2=2\lambda_2} \underbrace{a_9 > a_{10}}_{2=2\lambda_3}.$$



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**Proof sketch.** Expand

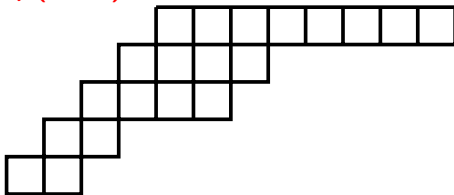
$$\sum_n A_n t^n = \prod_i \sec(\sqrt{x_i} t) = \prod_i \left( \sum_n E_{2n} \frac{x_i^n t^n}{(2n)!} \right)$$

$$(2n)! [m_\lambda] A_n = (2n)! [x_1^{\lambda_1} x_2^{\lambda_2} \cdots] A_n = \binom{2n}{2\lambda_1, 2\lambda_2, \dots} E_{2\lambda_1} E_{2\lambda_2} \cdots,$$

etc.

# Schur function expansion

**Example.** To get the coefficient of  $s_{5311}$  in  $20! \cdot A_{10}$ , take the conjugate partition 42211 and double each part:  $\mu = 84422$ . Form the skew shape  $\rho(5311)$ :

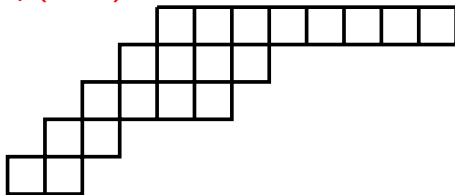


Row lengths are the parts of  $\mu$ .

Each row begins one square to the left of the row above.

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Row lengths are the parts of  $\mu$ .

Each row begins one square to the left of the row above.

**Theorem.** For general  $\lambda \vdash n$ , the coefficient of  $s_\lambda$  in  $(2n)!A_n$  is the number  $f^{\rho(\lambda)}$  of standard Young tableaux of (skew) shape  $\rho(\lambda)$ .  
(Well-known determinantal formula.)

# First generalization

Let  $c \geq 1$  and

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$m$ ,  $p$ ,  $s$ -expansions straightforward generalizations of  $c = 2$  case.  
In particular, there are “natural” skew shapes  $\rho(\lambda, c)$  for which

$$(cn)! R_n = \sum_{\lambda \vdash n} f^{\rho(\lambda, c)} s_{\lambda}.$$

## $h$ -expansion of $R_n$ for the seed $F_c(t)$

We don't know poles of  $F_c(t)$  (a **Mittag-Leffler function**) explicitly for  $c \geq 3$ , but can show  $F_c(t) = \prod (1 - \beta_j t)^{-1}$  either by a direct analytic argument or the earlier corollary:

**Corollary.** *Let  $d \geq 1$ . If the seed  $F(t) = \sum a_i t^i$  generates a Schur positive sprout  $\mathfrak{R}$ , then  $F_d(t) := \sum a_{di} t^i$  generates a Schur positive sprout  $\mathfrak{R}_d$ .*

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Recall coefficients of  $h$ -expansion of  $(2n)! R_n$  for  $F_2(t)$  sum to  $E_{2n}$ , and a combinatorial interpretation is open. For arbitrary  $c$ , the coefficients sum to

$$\#\{w \in \mathfrak{S}_{cn} : \text{Des}(w) = \{c, 2c, 3c, \dots, (n-1)c\}\},$$

where  $\text{Des}(w)$  denotes the descent set of  $w$ .

## A $q$ -analogue of $F_c(t)$

$$F_c(t, q) = \left( \sum_{n \geq 0} \frac{(-1)^n t^n}{(cn)!_q} \right)^{-1},$$

where  $(m)!_q = 1 \cdot (1 + q)(1 + q + q^2) \cdots (1 + q + \cdots + q^{m-1})$ , the standard  $q$ -analogue of  $m!$ .



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If  $c = 2$  then

$$(4)!_q R_2 = (q^4 + q^3 + 2q^2 + q)h_1^2 + (q^4 + q^3 + 2q^2 + q - 1)h_2,$$

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**Note.** No nice  $q$ -analogue of total positivity or Edrei-Thoma is known.

## Schur expansion of $R_n$ for the seed $F_d(q, t)$

Recall that for  $F_c(t) = (\sum (-1)^n t^n / (cn)!)^{-1}$  we have

$$(cn)! R_n = \sum_{\lambda \vdash n} f^{\rho(\lambda, c)} s_{\lambda}. \quad (*)$$

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**Theorem.** For the seed  $F_c(q, t)$  we have

$$(cn)!_q R_n = \sum_{\lambda \vdash n} \left( \sum_{\substack{\text{SYT } T \\ \text{sh}(T) = \rho(\lambda, c)}} q^{\text{maj}(T)} \right) s_\lambda,$$

the “nicest” possible  $q$ -analogue of  $(*)$ .

## Second special case

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**Theorem** (**Carlitz-Scoville-Vaughan** (1976) for  $d = 2$ ) Let  $d \geq 1$  and

$$F(t) = \sum_{n \geq 0} v_d(n) \frac{t^n}{n!^d}.$$

Then

$$v_d(n) = \#\{(w_1, \dots, w_d) \in \mathfrak{S}_n^d : \text{Des}(w_1) \cap \dots \cap \text{Des}(w_d) = \emptyset\}.$$

## First problem

**Problem 1.** Let  $F(t) = \left( \sum_{n \geq 0} \frac{(-1)^n t^n}{n!^d} \right)^{-1}$ .

E.g.,  $d = 2$ ,  $3!^2 R_3 = s_{111} + 8s_{21} + 19s_3$ .

$$\begin{aligned} \dim 3!^2 R_3 &= \langle p_1^3, 3!^2 R_3 \rangle \\ &= f^{111} + 8f^{21} + 19f^3 = 3!^2 \end{aligned}$$

$$19 = [s_3]3!^2 R_3 = \#\{(u, v) \in \mathfrak{S}_n^2 : D(u) \cap D(v) = \emptyset\} = v_2(3)$$

What statistic on  $\mathfrak{S}_3 \times \mathfrak{S}_3$  (or  $\mathfrak{S}_n \times \mathfrak{S}_n$  in general) do the other coefficients count? (open)

## Second problem

Analytic methods (**M. Kwaśnicki**, MO 477780) show that

$$F(t) := \left( \sum_{n \geq 0} \frac{(-1)^n t^n}{n!^d} \right)^{-1} = \prod (1 - \beta_i t)^{-1},$$

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**Problem 2.** For general  $d$ , sum of the coefficients for  $h$ -expansion of  $n!^d R_n$  is  $v_d(n)$ . What do they count? (open)

# The whole shebang

Let  $w = a_1, a_2, \dots, a_{cn} \in \mathfrak{S}_{cn}$  with  $D(w) \subseteq \{c, 2c, \dots, (n-1)c\}$ .

Define

$$\text{Asc}_c(w) = \#\{1 \leq i \leq n-1 : a_{ic} < a_{ic+1}\}.$$

Let

$$\begin{aligned} F(t) &:= \left( \sum_{n \geq 0} \frac{(-1)^n t^n}{(\mathbf{c}_1 n)!_{q_1} \cdots (\mathbf{c}_d n)!_{q_d}} \right)^{-1} \\ &= \sum_{n \geq 0} v_n(c_1, \dots, c_d) \frac{t^n}{(\mathbf{c}_1 n)!_{q_1} \cdots (\mathbf{c}_d n)!_{q_d}}. \end{aligned}$$

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Then

$$v_n(c_1, \dots, c_d) = \sum_{\substack{w_1 \in \mathfrak{S}_{nc_1}, \dots, w_d \in \mathfrak{S}_{nc_d} \\ \text{Asc}_{c_1}(w_1) \cap \dots \cap \text{Asc}_{c_d}(w_d) = \emptyset}} q_1^{\text{inv}(w_1)} \cdots q_d^{\text{inv}(w_d)}.$$

## The example $d = 2$ , $c_1 = 1$ , $c_2 = 2$

$w_1$	$\text{Asc}_1(w_1)$	$\text{inv}(w_1)$	$w_2$	$\text{Asc}_2(w_2)$	$\text{inv}(w_2)$
12	$\{1\}$	0	1324	$\emptyset$	1
12	$\{1\}$	0	1423	$\emptyset$	2
12	$\{1\}$	0	2314	$\emptyset$	2
12	$\{1\}$	0	2413	$\emptyset$	3
12	$\{1\}$	0	3412	$\emptyset$	4
21	$\emptyset$	1	1234	$\{1\}$	0
21	$\emptyset$	1	1324	$\emptyset$	1
21	$\emptyset$	1	1423	$\emptyset$	2
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21	$\emptyset$	1	3412	$\emptyset$	4

$$\Rightarrow v_3(1, 2) = qr^4 + qr^3 + 2qr^2 + qr + q + r^3 + 2r^2 + r,$$

where  $q_1 = q$ ,  $q_2 = r$ .

# Schur positivity

**Conjecture.**  $F(t)$  is an  $(s, q_1, \dots, q_d)$ -positive seed.

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What do the coefficients count? Coefficient of  $s_n$  is  $v_n(c_1, \dots, c_d)$ .

# The final slide

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