MULTIPLICITY OF COMPLEX HYPERSURFACE SINGULARITIES, ROUCHÉ SATELLITES AND ZARISKI’S PROBLEM

CHRISTOPHE EYRAL AND ELIZABETH GASPARIM

Abstract. Let \( f, g : (\mathbb{C}^n, 0) \rightarrow (\mathbb{C}, 0) \) be reduced germs of holomorphic functions. We show that \( f \) and \( g \) have the same multiplicity at 0, if and only if, there exist reduced germs \( f' \) and \( g' \) analytically equivalent to \( f \) and \( g \), respectively, such that \( f' \) and \( g' \) satisfy a Rouché type inequality with respect to a generic ‘small’ plane circle around 0. As an application, we give a reformulation of Zariski’s multiplicity question and a partial positive answer to it.

1. Introduction

Let \( f, g : (\mathbb{C}^n, 0) \rightarrow (\mathbb{C}, 0) \) be reduced germs (at the origin) of holomorphic functions, with \( n \geq 2 \), \( V_f \), \( V_g \) the corresponding germs of hypersurfaces in \( \mathbb{C}^n \), and \( \nu_f, \nu_g \) the multiplicities at 0 of \( V_f, V_g \) respectively. By the multiplicity \( \nu_f \) we mean the number of points of intersection, near 0, of \( V_f \) with a generic (complex) line in \( \mathbb{C}^n \) passing arbitrarily close to 0 but not through 0. As we are assuming that \( f \) is reduced, \( \nu_f \) is also the order of \( f \) at 0, that is, the lowest degree in the power series expansion of \( f \) at 0. We denote by \( C(V_f), C(V_g) \) the tangent cones at 0 of \( V_f, V_g \), respectively (cf. [13]).

In Section 2, we prove that \( \nu_f = \nu_g \), if and only if, there exist reduced germs \( f' \) and \( g' \) analytically equivalent to \( f \) and \( g \), respectively, such that \( |f'(z) - g'(z)| < |f'(z)| \), for all \( z \in \partial \tilde{D} \), where \( \tilde{D} \) is the boundary of a generic ‘small’ plane disc around 0 (Theorem 2.6). We call such an inequality a Rouché inequality and we say that \( g' \) is a Rouché satellite of \( f' \).

In Section 3, we apply this result to Zariski’s multiplicity question. In particular, we show that the answer to Zariski’s question is yes, if and only if, for any two topologically equivalent reduced germs \( f \) and \( g \) there exist reduced germs \( f' \) and \( g' \) analytically equivalent to \( f \) and \( g \), respectively, such that \( g' \) is a Rouché satellite of \( f' \) (Theorem 3.6). In addition, we answer positively Zariski’s question in the special case of ‘small’ homeomorphisms for Newton nondegenerate isolated singularities (Corollary 3.3) and one–parameter families of isolated singularities (Corollary 3.5).

2. Multiplicity and Rouché satellites

Let \( L \) be a line through 0 in \( \mathbb{C}^n \) not contained in \( C(V_f) \cup C(V_g) \) (equivalently, \( L \cap (C(V_f) \cup C(V_g)) = \{0\} \)). Then \( \nu_f \) (respectively \( \nu_g \)) is the order at 0 of \( f|_L \) (respectively \( g|_L \)), and 0 is an isolated point of \( L \cap V_f \) and \( L \cap V_g \) (cf. [2]). In particular, there exists a closed disc \( D \subseteq L \) around 0 such that, for any closed disc \( D' \subseteq D \) around 0, \( D' \cap (V_f \cup V_g) = \{0\} \). We shall call such a disc \( D \) a good disc for \( f \) and for \( g \).

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Definition 2.1. We say that \( g \) is a Rouché satellite of \( f \) if there exists a good disc \( D \) (for \( f \) and for \( g \)) such that \( f \) and \( g \) satisfy a Rouché inequality with respect to the boundary \( \partial D \) of \( D \), that is,

\[
|f(z) - g(z)| < |f(z)|
\]

for all \( z \in \partial D \).

Theorem 2.2. If \( g \) is a Rouché satellite of \( f \), then \( \nu_g = \nu_f \).

Proof. Let \( D \subseteq L \) be a good disc for \( f \) and for \( g \) (for some line \( L \) through 0 not contained in \( C(V_f) \cup C(V_g) \)) such that \( |f_L(z) - g_L(z)| < |f_L(z)| \) for all \( z \in \partial D \). By Rouché theorem (cf. e.g. [7, Chapter VI, Theorem 1.6]), \( f_L \) and \( g_L \) have the same number of zeros, counted with their multiplicities, in the interior of \( D \). Thus, since \( f_L \) and \( g_L \) vanish only at 0 on \( D \), the orders at 0 of \( f_L \) and \( g_L \) are equal. In other words, \( \nu_f = \nu_g \).

Example 2.3. Consider the germs \( f, g \colon (\mathbb{C}^3, 0) \to (\mathbb{C}, 0) \) defined by

\[
f(z_1, z_2, z_3) = z_1^2 + z_2^3 + z_3^4 + z_1^2 + z_2^2 \quad \text{and} \quad g(z_1, z_2, z_3) = z_1^2 + z_2^3 + z_3^4 + z_1^2 + z_2^2.
\]

Then \( g \) is a Rouché satellite of \( f \). Indeed, set \( L = \{(z_1, 0, z_3) \in \mathbb{C}^3 \mid z_1 = z_3\} \); then

\[
V_f \cap L = \left\{ (0, 0, 0), \left( -\frac{1}{2}, 0, -\frac{1}{2} \right) \right\} \quad \text{and} \quad V_g \cap L = \{(0, 0, 0), (a, 0, a), (\bar{a}, 0, \bar{a})\},
\]

where \( a = (−1 – i\sqrt{3})/2 \) and \( \bar{a} \) is the complex conjugate of \( a \). So, the disc \( D \subseteq L \) of radius 1/4 is good for \( f \) and for \( g \), and, for all \( z \in \partial D \),

\[
|f(z) - g(z)| \leq \frac{5}{4^4} < \frac{2}{4^3} \leq |f(z)|.
\]

Hence \( g \) is a Rouché satellite of \( f \). In fact, here, \( f \) is also a Rouché satellite of \( g \). Indeed, for all \( z \in \partial D \), we have

\[
|f(z) - g(z)| \leq \frac{5}{4^4} < \frac{11}{4^4} \leq |g(z)|.
\]

Of course, in general, \( g \) may be a Rouché satellite of \( f \) without \( f \) being a Rouché satellite of \( g \). For example, take \( g = f/2 \). Also, it is not difficult to construct \( f \) and \( g \) such that \( \nu_f = \nu_g \) but neither \( g \) is a Rouché satellite of \( f \) nor \( f \) a Rouché satellite of \( g \). Take for example \( g = −f \). Nevertheless, such an unpleasant situation is resolved by Theorem 2.5 below.

Definition 2.4. If there exists a germ of homeomorphism \( \varphi \colon (\mathbb{C}^n, 0) \to (\mathbb{C}^n, 0) \) such that:

(1) \( \varphi(V_g) = V_f \) then \( f \) and \( g \) are called topologically equivalent (denoted \( f \sim_t g \));

(2) \( \varphi(V_g) = V_f \) and \( \varphi \) is an analytic isomorphism, then \( f \) and \( g \) are called analytically equivalent (denoted \( f \sim_a g \));

(3) \( g = f \circ \varphi \) then \( f \) and \( g \) are called topologically right equivalent (denoted \( f \sim_{tr} g \)).

Note that the definition makes sense only for reduced germs. In the special case of an isolated singularity, the hypothesis \( n \geq 2 \) automatically implies that the germ is reduced. Note also that (2) \( \Rightarrow \) (1) and (3) \( \Rightarrow \) (1).

Theorem 2.2 has the weak following converse.

Theorem 2.5. If \( \nu_f = \nu_g \), then there exist reduced germs \( f' \sim_{a} f \) and \( g' \sim_{a} g \) such that \( g' \) is a Rouché satellite of \( f' \).

Proof. By an analytic change of coordinates, one can assume that the \( z_n \)-axis, \( O z_n \), is not contained in the tangent cones \( C(V_f), C(V_g) \), so that \( f(0, \ldots, 0, z_n) \neq 0 \) and \( g(0, \ldots, 0, z_n) \neq 0 \), for any \( z_n \neq 0 \) close enough to 0. By the Weierstrass preparation theorem, for \( z \) near 0, the germ
We will say that the homeomorphism  
\[ \text{Definition 3.1.} \]

where  \( f'(z) = f''(z) \), and  \( f''(z) \) is a germ of holomorphic function which does not vanish around 0 and where  \( f'(z) \) is of the form  
\[ f'(z_1, \ldots, z_n) = z_1^{\nu_1} + z_2^{\nu_2} + \cdots + z_n^{\nu_n} + f_1(z_1, \ldots, z_{n-1}) + \cdots + f_{\nu}(z_1, \ldots, z_{n-1}), \]
with, for  \( 1 \leq i \leq \nu_f, f_i \in \mathbb{C}[z_1, \ldots, z_{n-1}] \),  \( f_i(0) = 0 \) and the order of  \( f_i \) at 0 is  \( i \). Similarly,  \( g(z) = g'(z) g''(z) \), with  \( g''(z) \neq 0 \) for all  \( z \) near 0, and  
\[ g'(z_1, \ldots, z_n) = z_1^{\nu_g} + z_2^{\nu_g} + \cdots + z_n^{\nu_g} + g_1(z_1, \ldots, z_{n-1}) + \cdots + g_{\nu_g}(z_1, \ldots, z_{n-1}), \]
with, for  \( 1 \leq i \leq \nu_g, g_i \in \mathbb{C}[z_1, \ldots, z_{n-1}] \),  \( g_i(0) = 0 \) and the order of  \( g_i \) at 0 is  \( i \). Clearly  \( f' \) and  \( g' \) are reduced, and, since  \( V_f = V_{f'} \) and  \( V_g = V_{g'} \),  \( f' \sim_a f \) and  \( g' \sim_a g \). On the other hand, since  \( \nu_f = \nu_g, f'_0(O_z) = g'_0(O_z). \) But for any disc  \( D \subseteq O_z \) around 0 (in particular for any good disc in  \( O_z \) for  \( f' \) and  \( g' \)),  \( |f'(z)| = |g'(z)| \neq 0 \) for all  \( z \in D \), where  \( r \) is the radius of  \( D \).  

Since the multiplicity is an invariant of the (embedded) reduced analytic type, we can summarize Theorems 2.2 and 2.5 as follows.

**Theorem 2.6.** The multiplicities  \( \nu_f \) and  \( \nu_g \) are the same, if and only if, there exist reduced germs  \( f' \sim_a f \) and  \( g' \sim_a g \) such that  \( g' \) is a Rouché satellite of  \( f' \).

### 3. Applications to Zariski’s multiplicity question

In [14], Zariski posed the following question: if  \( f \sim_a g \), then is it true that  \( \nu_f = \nu_g \)? The question is, in general, still unsettled (even for hypersurfaces with isolated singularities). The answer is, nevertheless, known to be yes in several special cases the list of which can be found in the recent first author’s survey article [3]. In particular, Ephraim [2] proved that multiplicity is preserved by ambient  \( C^1 \)-diffeomorphisms; his paper inspired some of our proofs. In this section, we give a partial positive answer to Zariski’s question in the special case of ‘small’ homeomorphisms for Newton nondegenerate isolated singularities and one–parameter families of isolated singularities. In addition, we give an equivalent reformulation of Zariski’s question in terms of Rouché satellites.

We start with the following result which asserts that if  \( f \) and  \( g \) are topologically right equivalent via a sufficiently ‘small’ homeomorphism, then they have the same multiplicity. More precisely suppose  \( f \sim_{tr} g \). Then there are representatives  \( f : U \to \mathbb{C} \) and  \( g : U' \subseteq U \to \mathbb{C} \) of the germs  \( f \) and  \( g \) respectively and a homeomorphism  \( \varphi : U' \to \varphi(U') \subseteq U \) such that  \( \varphi(0) = 0 \) and  \( g = f \circ \varphi \). Since  \( f \) is uniformly continuous on a compact small ball  \( B_r \subseteq U \) around 0, there exists  \( \eta > 0 \) such that, for any  \( z, w \in B_r \),  
\[ |z - w| < \eta \Rightarrow |f(z) - f(w)| < \inf_{u \in D_\rho} |f(u)|, \]
where  \( D_\rho \) is a good disc at 0 for  \( f \) and for  \( g = f \circ \varphi \) with radius  \( \rho \leq r/2 \).

**Definition 3.1.** We will say that the homeomorphism  \( \varphi : U' \to \varphi(U') \subseteq U \) is  \( f \)-small if there exists a triple  \( (r, \rho, \eta) \) as above such that, for all  \( z \in B_r \),  
\[ |z - \varphi(z)| < \inf \{\eta, \rho\}. \]

**Theorem 3.2.** With the above notation, if the homeomorphism  \( \varphi : U' \to \varphi(U') \subseteq U \) is  \( f \)-small, then  \( \nu_f = \nu_g \).

**Proof.** By hypothesis, for all  \( z \in D_\rho \),  \( \varphi(z) \in B_r \) and  
\[ |f(z) - f \circ \varphi(z)| < \inf_{u \in D_\rho} |f(u)| \leq |f(z)|. \]
Therefore  \( g = f \circ \varphi \) is a Rouché satellite of  \( f \). Then, by Theorem 2.2,  \( \nu_f = \nu_g \).  \( \square \)
Theorem 3.6. The answer to Zariski’s multiplicity question is yes, if and only if, the relation $f \sim_{t} g$. On the other hand, by another theorem of King [5], for a one–parameter holomorphic family of isolated singularities $(f_s)_s$ in $\mathbb{C}^n$, with $n \neq 3$, if the relation $f_s \sim_{t} f_0$ holds for all $s$ near 0, then so does $f_s \sim_{t} f_0$. So, when considering isolated Newton nondegenerate singularities or families of isolated singularities, the Zariski problem refers immediately to right equivalent germs.

Corollary 3.3. Assume that $f$ has an isolated critical point at 0 and a nondegenerate Newton principal part, and suppose $g \sim_{t} f$. In this case, there are representatives $f: U \to \mathbb{C}$ and $g: U' \subseteq U \to \mathbb{C}$ of $f$ and $g$, respectively, and a homeomorphism $\varphi: U' \to \varphi(U') \subseteq U$ such that $\varphi(0) = 0$ and $g = f \circ \varphi$. If $\varphi$ is $f$–small, then $\nu_f = \nu_g$.

Remark 3.4. If, in addition, $f$ is convenient (cf. [6]), then the hypothesis of having an isolated singularity at 0 is automatically satisfied (cf. [10]).

Corollary 3.3 is complementary to the result of Abderrahmane and Saia–Tomazella concerning $\mu$–constant families of Newton nondegenerate (isolated) singularities (cf. [1] and [12]).

Corollary 3.5. Let $(f_s)_s$ be a topologically constant (or $\mu$–constant) one–parameter holomorphic family of isolated hypersurface singularities, with $n \neq 3$. In this case, for all $s$ near 0, there are representatives $f_0: U_0 \to \mathbb{C}$ and $f_s: U_s \subseteq U_0 \to \mathbb{C}$ of $f_0$ and $f_s$, respectively, and a homeomorphism $\varphi_s: U_s \to \varphi(U_s) \subseteq U_0$ such that $\varphi_s(0) = 0$ and $f_s = f_0 \circ \varphi_s$. If, for all $s$ near 0, $\varphi_s$ is $f_0$–small, then $(f_s)_s$ is equimultiple (i.e., for all $s$ near 0, $\nu_{f_s} = \nu_{f_0}$).

We conclude with the following nice consequence of Theorem 2.6 which is reformulation of Zariski’s multiplicity question in terms of Rouché satellites.

Theorem 3.6. The answer to Zariski’s multiplicity question is yes, if and only if, the relation $f \sim g$ implies that there exist reduced germs $f' \sim_a f$ and $g' \sim_a g$ such that $g'$ is a Rouché satellite of $f'$.

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Max-Planck Institut für Mathematik, Vivatsgasse 7, 53111 Bonn, Germany
E-mail address: eyralchr@yahoo.com

Department of Mathematical Sciences, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces NM 88003-8001, USA
E-mail address: gasparim@nmsu.edu