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Claude-Alexandre Simonetti

► To cite this version:

| Claude-Alexandre Simonetti. A new mathematical symbol: the termirial. 2020. hal-02556204v1

HAL Id: hal-02556204

<https://hal.science/hal-02556204v1>

Preprint submitted on 27 Apr 2020 (v1), last revised 3 Jun 2020 (v4)

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A new mathematical symbol : the termirial

Claude-Alexandre Simonetti^{1,2,3}

¹*LPC Caen*

²*EAMEA Cherbourg*

³*ENSICAEN*

(Dated: 27 avril 2020)

The understanding of probability can be difficult for a few young scientists. Consequently, this new mathematical symbol, related to binomial coefficients, could be helpful to science education, and perhaps to other scientific subjects as well.

I. STUDY OF BINOMIAL COEFFICIENTS

A. Reminder

In a set of n elements, the number of combinations of parts of p elements is the following :

$$\binom{n}{p} = \frac{n!}{p! (n-p)!} \quad (1)$$

With $\binom{n}{p}$ the binomial coefficient, $(n, p) \in \mathbb{N}^2$ and $p \leq n$. And the exclamation point in equation (1) is named “factorial” and is defined as, $\forall n \in \mathbb{N}^*$:

$$\begin{aligned} n! &= n \cdot (n-1) \cdot (n-2) \dots 3 \cdot 2 \cdot 1 \\ n! &= \prod_{i=1}^n i \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

For $n = 0$, by definition : $0! = 1$.

B. From factorial to termirial

For its part, the termirial is defined as, $\forall n \in \mathbb{N}^*$:

$$\begin{aligned} n! &= n + (n-1) + \dots + 3 + 2 + 1 \\ n! &= \sum_{i=1}^n i \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

The termirial symbol is almost like the factorial symbol, with just a little difference, however : the dot (\cdot) of the interrogation point, which could be a reminder of a multiplication, is replaced by a “plus” (+) sign. Indeed, instead of multiplying factors of a multiplication – factorial – one adds terms of an addition, hence the name of “termirial”. Up to this point, things look quite basic. However, as the termirial is the n^{th} partial sum of an arithmetic sequence $(U_n)_{n \in \mathbb{N}^*}$ with $U_1 = 1$ as first term and $r = 1$ as common difference, one can notice a first thing, $\forall n \in \mathbb{N}^*$:

$$n! = \frac{n \cdot (n+1)}{2} = \binom{n+1}{2} = \binom{n+1}{n-1} \quad (4)$$

One will get back to it later, with the “generalized” termirial.

C. Intellectual path

At the beginning, I was studying the black body radiation (Max Planck’s law). In this context, suppose one has n particles to fill up in 2 discrete energy levels determined by quantum mechanics. Suppose that the first energy level named m_1 can contain p particles, and that the second one (m_2) can contain $(n-p)$ particles. The number of possible combinations is same as equation (1) :

$$\binom{n}{p} = \frac{n!}{p! (n-p)!} \quad (5)$$

Let us start with a simple example : $n = 5$ and $p = 2$. The figure 1 tries to explain the intellectual path which has led to the termirial. One can see the energy level m_1 containing $p = 2$ particles, with all the ways to fill it up, for particles ranked from 1 to 5. In this case, as a reminder, it is an unordered sampling without replacement, the rank order of the particles has no importance : $\{1\ 2\}$ and $\{2\ 1\}$ are counted only once. Finally : $\binom{5}{2} = 4! = 10$.

Let us make things a little bit more complicated, with $n = 5$ and $p = 3$. In terms of binomial coefficients, one has the same result as before : $\binom{5}{3} = \binom{5}{2} = 10$. But the intellectual path is a bit different, see figure 2.

One can see a kind of “termirial of termirials” :

$$\begin{aligned} n!^{(2)} &= n! + (n-1)! + \dots + 3! + 2! + 1! \\ n!^{(2)} &= \sum_{k=1}^n k! = \sum_{k=1}^n \sum_{i=1}^k i = \sum_{k=1}^n \frac{k(k+1)}{2!} \end{aligned} \quad (6)$$

$$n!^{(2)} = \binom{n+2}{3} = \binom{n+2}{n-1} = \frac{n(n+1)(n+2)}{3!} \quad (7)$$

The transition from (6) to (7) can be done with mathematical induction. Indeed, if the following proposition $P(n)$ is true :

$$n!^{(2)} = \sum_{k=1}^n \frac{k(k+1)}{2!} = \frac{n(n+1)(n+2)}{3!} \quad (8)$$

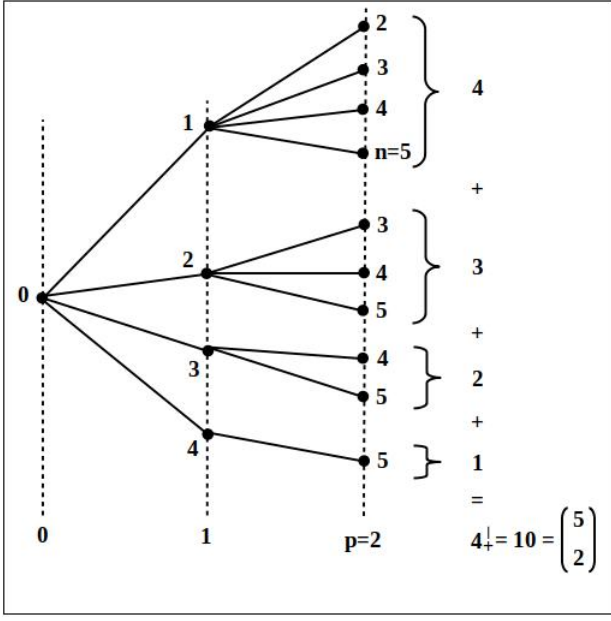


FIGURE 1. This figure represents the intellectual path from the binomial coefficient $\binom{5}{2}$ to the termirial of 4, through a classical tree view. Here, only the energy level m_1 is represented, which is sufficient, because one only has 2 energy levels, not more.

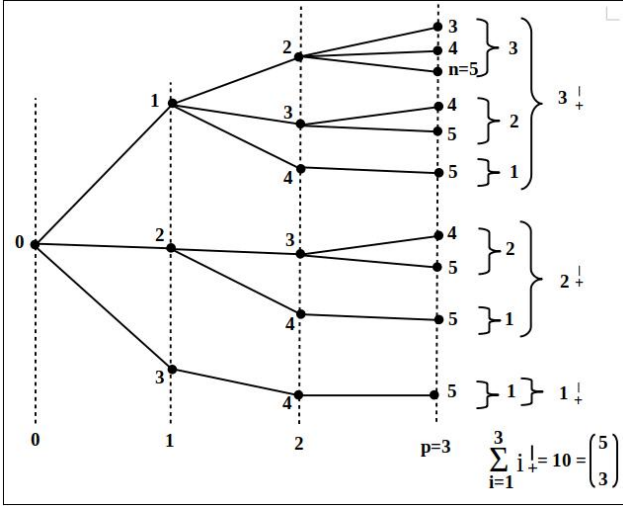


FIGURE 2. This figure represents the intellectual path from the binomial coefficient $\binom{5}{3}$ to a sum of termirials, a kind of “termirial of termirials” or a 2^{nd} termirial. From now, one can generalize to the 3^{rd} termirial, the 4^{th} termirial, etc.

And, for $P(1)$:

$$1!^{(2)} = \sum_{k=1}^1 \frac{k(k+1)}{2} = \frac{1 \cdot (1+1)}{2} = 1$$

$$\binom{3}{3} = \frac{1(1+1)(1+2)}{3!} = 1$$

Finally, with $P(n+1)$:

$$\begin{aligned} (n+1)!^{(2)} &= \sum_{k=1}^n \frac{k(k+1)}{2} + \frac{(n+1)(n+2)}{2} \\ &= \frac{n(n+1)(n+2)}{3!} + \frac{(n+1)(n+2)}{2} \\ &= \frac{n(n+1)(n+2)}{6} + 3 \frac{(n+1)(n+2)}{6} \\ (n+1)!^{(2)} &= \frac{(n+1)(n+2)(n+3)}{3!} \end{aligned} \quad (9)$$

QED.

From now on, one can generalize to the p^{th} termirial.

II. GENERALIZATION OF THE TERMIRIAL

A. The p^{th} termirial

Obviously, the p^{th} termirial will be defined as, $\forall(n, p) \in \mathbb{N}^* \times \mathbb{N}^*$:

$$n!^{(p)} = \sum_{m=1}^n \sum_{l=1}^m \dots \sum_{j=1}^k \sum_{i=1}^j i \quad (10)$$

$$n!^{(p)} = \sum_{k=1}^n k!^{(p-1)} = \sum_{k=1}^n \frac{1}{p!} \prod_{i=0}^{p-1} (k+i) \quad (11)$$

$$n!^{(p)} = \binom{n+p}{p+1} = \binom{n+p}{n-1} \quad (12)$$

$$n!^{(p)} = \frac{1}{(p+1)!} \prod_{i=0}^p (n+i) \quad (13)$$

With, for the equation (10), a number of *sigmas* (\sum) symbols equal to p .

For $p=0$, one can define the 0^{th} termirial as :

$$n!^{(0)} = n = \binom{n}{1}$$

The proof to go from (11) to (12) (or from (11) to (13)) can be done with mathematical induction as well. Indeed, admitting that the following $P(n)$ proposition is true :

$$\sum_{k=1}^n \frac{1}{p!} \prod_{i=0}^p (k+i) = \frac{1}{(p+1)!} \prod_{i=0}^p (n+i) \quad (14)$$

On a, pour $P(1)$:

$$1!^{(p)} = \frac{1}{p!} \prod_{i=0}^{p-1} (1+i) = \frac{p!}{p!} = 1$$

$$\frac{1}{(p+1)!} \prod_{i=0}^p (1+i) = \frac{(p+1)!}{(p+1)!} = 1 \quad (15)$$

Et, pour $P(n+1)$:

$$\begin{aligned}
 (n+1)!\downarrow^{(p)} &= \sum_{k=1}^n \frac{1}{p!} \prod_{i=0}^{p-1} (k+i) + \frac{1}{p!} \prod_{i=0}^{p-1} (n+1+i) \\
 &= \frac{1}{(p+1)!} \prod_{i=0}^p (n+i) + \frac{(p+1)}{(p+1)!} \prod_{i=1}^p (n+i) \\
 &= \frac{(n+p+1)}{(p+1)!} \prod_{i=1}^p (n+i) \\
 (n+1)!\downarrow^{(p)} &= \frac{1}{(p+1)!} \prod_{i=1}^{p+1} (n+i) = \binom{n+p+1}{p+1} \quad (16)
 \end{aligned}$$

QED.

B. Pascal's rule

Let us remind you on Pascal's rule :

$$\binom{n}{p} + \binom{n}{p+1} = \binom{n+1}{p+1}$$

It is possible to adapt it to termirials :

$$(n+1)!\downarrow^{(p)} + (n)!\downarrow^{(p+1)} = (n+1)!\downarrow^{(p+1)}$$

III. CONCLUSION

The termirial is a symbol which could be helpful to scientific students, for the understanding of probability. As well, it could be perhaps helpful in other subjects than science education, that are out of this pré-publication.

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