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Combinatorial structure of Sturmian words and continued fraction expansions of Sturmian numbers

YANN BUGEAUD and MICHEL LAURENT

Abstract. Let $\theta = [0; a_1, a_2, \dots]$ be the continued fraction expansion of an irrational real number $\theta \in (0, 1)$. It is well-known that the characteristic Sturmian word of slope θ is the limit of a sequence of finite words $(M_k)_{k \geq 0}$, with M_k of length q_k (the denominator of the k -th convergent to θ) being a suitable concatenation of a_k copies of M_{k-1} and one copy of M_{k-2} . Our first result extends this to any Sturmian word. Let $b \geq 2$ be an integer. Our second result gives the continued fraction expansion of any real number ξ whose b -ary expansion is a Sturmian word \mathbf{s} over the alphabet $\{0, b-1\}$. This extends a classical result of Böhmer who considered only the case where \mathbf{s} is characteristic. As a consequence, we obtain a formula for the irrationality exponent of ξ in terms of the slope and the intercept of \mathbf{s} .

1. Introduction

Sturmian words are infinite words over a two letters alphabet that have exactly $n+1$ factors of length n for every $n \geq 1$. They are the non-ultimately periodic words which are closest to ultimately periodic words. They admit several equivalent definitions and appear in many different areas of mathematics, including combinatorics, number theory, and dynamical systems; good references include Chapter 2 of [22], [5], and [7]. The arithmetic description of Sturmian words is as follows. Throughout this paper, we let $\lfloor x \rfloor$ (resp., $\lceil x \rceil$) denote the largest (resp., smallest) integer less than or equal (resp., greater than or equal) to the real number x .

Let θ and ρ be real numbers with $0 \leq \theta, \rho < 1$ and θ irrational. For $n \geq 1$, set

$$s_n := s_n(\theta, \rho) = \lfloor n\theta + \rho \rfloor - \lfloor (n-1)\theta + \rho \rfloor, \quad s'_n := s'_n(\theta, \rho) = \lceil n\theta + \rho \rceil - \lceil (n-1)\theta + \rho \rceil.$$

Then, the infinite words

$$\mathbf{s}_{\theta, \rho} := s_1 s_2 s_3 \dots, \quad \mathbf{s}'_{\theta, \rho} := s'_1 s'_2 s'_3 \dots$$

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are, respectively, the lower and upper Sturmian words of slope θ and intercept ρ , written over the alphabet $\{0, 1\}$. Observe that $\mathbf{s}_{\theta,0}$ and $\mathbf{s}'_{\theta,0}$ differ only by their first letter, thus, there exists an infinite word \mathbf{c}_θ , called the characteristic Sturmian word of slope θ , such that

$$\mathbf{s}_{\theta,0} = 0\mathbf{c}_\theta, \quad \mathbf{s}'_{\theta,0} = 1\mathbf{c}_\theta.$$

Explicitly, we have

$$\mathbf{c}_\theta = \mathbf{s}_{\theta,\theta} = \mathbf{s}'_{\theta,\theta} = c_1c_2c_3\dots,$$

with

$$c_n = \lfloor (n+1)\theta \rfloor - \lfloor n\theta \rfloor = \lceil (n+1)\theta \rceil - \lceil n\theta \rceil, \quad \text{for } n \geq 1.$$

Alternatively, the characteristic word $\mathbf{c}_\theta = \mathbf{s}_{\theta,\theta} = \mathbf{s}'_{\theta,\theta}$ can be defined as follows. Let $[0; a_1, a_2, \dots]$ denote the continued fraction expansion of the slope θ , with partial quotients a_1, a_2, \dots and convergents $p_k/q_k = [0; a_1, \dots, a_k]$ for $k \geq 1$. Let $(M_k)_{k \geq 0}$ be the sequence of finite words over the alphabet $\{\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b}\}$ associated with $(a_j)_{j \geq 1}$ defined by

$$M_0 = \mathbf{a}, \quad M_1 = \mathbf{a}^{a_1-1}\mathbf{b}, \quad M_k = (M_{k-1})^{a_k}M_{k-2}, \quad \text{for } k \geq 2.$$

Then, the limit $\lim_{k \rightarrow +\infty} M_k$ exists: it is the characteristic Sturmian word of slope θ over $\{\mathbf{a}, \mathbf{b}\}$. Replacing \mathbf{a} by 0 and \mathbf{b} by 1, we get

$$\mathbf{c}_\theta = \lim_{k \rightarrow +\infty} M_k. \tag{1.1}$$

Furthermore, the length (that is, the number of letters) of M_k is equal to q_k for $k \geq 1$.

Our first result, stated as Theorem 2.1, extends (1.1) by showing how an arbitrary Sturmian word of slope θ and intercept ρ can be expressed as the limit of a sequence of finite words $(V_k)_{k \geq 0}$, with V_k (of length q_k) being a suitable concatenation of a_k copies of V_{k-1} and one copy of V_{k-2} , defined in terms of the θ -Ostrowski expansion of the intercept ρ .

Then, we will consider some Diophantine properties of the real numbers whose sequence of digits in some given integer base b form a Sturmian word. Such real numbers are called b -Sturmian numbers, or shortly Sturmian numbers, when we do not need to refer to the base. The transcendence of characteristic Sturmian numbers was established by Böhmer [10] in 1927, assuming that the sequence of partial quotients $(a_k)_{k \geq 1}$ is unbounded. He also gave explicitly their continued fraction expansion; see Theorem 2.2 below. This has been rediscovered by Danilov [15], Davison [16], and by Adams and Davison [6] (see also [2], Theorem 7.22 in [12], and Section 9.3 of [5] for a special case). Ferenczi and Mauduit [17] used combinatorial properties of Sturmian words and a deep result from Diophantine approximation (Ridout's theorem, which is a p -adic extension of Roth's theorem) to establish that Sturmian numbers are transcendental. Specifically, they proved that every Sturmian word contains, for some positive ε , infinitely many $(2 + \varepsilon)$ -powers of blocks (that is, a block followed by itself and by a prefix of it of relative length at least ε) occurring not too far from its beginning.

Subsequently, Berthé, Holton and Zamboni [8] established that any Sturmian word, whose slope has a bounded continued fraction expansion, has infinitely many prefixes which

are $(2 + \varepsilon)$ -powers of blocks, for some positive real number ε depending only on the word. This implies that the associated Sturmian number ξ is rather close to rational numbers whose b -ary expansion is purely periodic and gives that the irrationality exponent of ξ is at least equal to $2 + \varepsilon$.

Definition 1.1. *The irrationality exponent $\mu(\zeta)$ of an irrational real number ζ is the supremum of the real numbers μ such that the inequality*

$$\left| \zeta - \frac{p}{q} \right| < \frac{1}{q^\mu}$$

has infinitely many solutions in rational numbers $\frac{p}{q}$. If $\mu(\zeta)$ is infinite, then ζ is called a Liouville number.

Recall that the irrationality exponent of an irrational number ζ is always at least equal to 2, with equality for almost all ζ , in the sense of the Lebesgue measure. As observed in [1] (see also Section 8.5 of [12]), it follows from the results of [8] and [4] that the irrationality exponent of any Sturmian number exceeds 2. Further progress has been made recently in [13], where it is proved that the irrationality exponent of a b -Sturmian number can be read on its b -ary expansion. This is equivalent to say that, among the very good rational approximants to a b -Sturmian number, infinitely many of them can be constructed by cutting its b -ary expansion and completing by periodicity.

Furthermore, Theorem 4.3 of [13] asserts that the irrationality exponent of a Sturmian number is at least equal to $\frac{5}{3} + \frac{4\sqrt{10}}{15} = 2.5099\dots$, and that equality occurs in some cases. This result is obtained by means of a careful analysis of the repetitions occurring near the beginning of a given Sturmian word.

Our second main result, stated as Theorem 2.3, extends Böhmer's result and gives explicitly the continued fraction expansion of any b -Sturmian number over the alphabet $\{0, b - 1\}$. From this we deduce in Theorem 2.4 an exact formula giving its irrationality exponent. Our approach also allows us to improve the best known transcendence measures for Sturmian numbers, see Theorem 2.7.

2. Results

Before stating our first result, we briefly recall the definition of the Ostrowski numeration system; see e.g. Proposition 2 of [9]. We keep the notation from Section 1. Set $q_0 = 1$ and $\theta_k = q_k\theta - p_k$ for $k \geq 0$. Note that $\theta_k < 0$ if and only if k is odd. Let σ be an arbitrary number in the interval $[-\theta, 1 - \theta]$. Then σ can be written as

$$\sigma = \sum_{k \geq 1} b_k \theta_{k-1},$$

where $0 \leq b_1 \leq a_1 - 1$, $0 \leq b_k \leq a_k$ for $k \geq 2$, and $b_k = 0$ if $b_{k+1} = a_{k+1}$ (these are the so-called Ostrowski numeration rules). Assume that σ does not belong to $\mathbf{Z}\theta + \mathbf{Z}$, or that σ belongs to $\mathbf{Z}_{\geq 0}\theta + \mathbf{Z}$. Then, we can moreover ensure that there are infinitely many odd (resp., even) integers k such that $b_k < a_k$. The latter condition guarantees the unicity of the representation which is called the *Ostrowski expansion of σ* . When σ belongs to $\mathbf{Z}_{\geq 0}\theta + \mathbf{Z}$, the digits b_k vanish for large k .

Theorem 2.1. *Let θ and ρ be real numbers with $0 \leq \theta, \rho < 1$ and θ irrational. Assume that ρ does not belong to $\mathbf{Z}\theta + \mathbf{Z}$, or that ρ belongs to $\mathbf{Z}_{\geq 1}\theta + \mathbf{Z}$. Then $\mathbf{s}_{\theta, \rho} = \mathbf{s}'_{\theta, \rho}$. Let*

$$\rho - \theta = \sum_{h \geq 1} b_h \theta_{h-1}$$

be the Ostrowski expansion of $\rho - \theta$ in base θ . Define the words V_{-1}, V_0, V_1, \dots by $V_{-1} = 1$, $V_0 = 0$, $V_1 = 0^{a_1 - b_1 - 1} 10^{b_1}$, and

$$V_{k+1} = V_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1}} V_{k-1} V_k^{b_{k+1}}, \quad k \geq 1.$$

Then, the sequence $(V_k)_{k \geq 0}$ converges and

$$\mathbf{s}_{\theta, \rho} = \mathbf{s}'_{\theta, \rho} = \lim_{k \rightarrow +\infty} V_k.$$

Furthermore, setting

$$t_k = b_1 + b_2 q_1 + \dots + b_k q_{k-1} \quad \text{and} \quad r_k = q_k - t_k,$$

and denoting by T_k (resp., R_k) the prefix (resp., suffix) of length t_k (resp., r_k) of M_k for $k \geq 1$, we have

$$V_k = R_k T_k \quad \text{and} \quad M_k = T_k R_k, \quad k \geq 1.$$

A similar result holds in the remaining case where $\rho - \theta = -m\theta + p$ for integers $m \geq 1$ and p . This case corresponds to the sequences which are ultimately equal to the characteristic word \mathbf{c}_θ . Some technical difficulties occur, due to the fact that the choice of the lower / upper integral part does matter; see Section 3 for a precise statement and its proof.

Theorem 2.1 is a key tool for our extension of the following result of Böhmer [10].

Theorem 2.2 (Böhmer). *For a positive real irrational number $\theta = [0; a_1, a_2, \dots]$ in $(0, 1)$ and an integer $b \geq 2$, set*

$$\xi_b(\theta) = (b-1) \sum_{j=1}^{+\infty} \frac{1}{b^{\lfloor j/\theta \rfloor}}.$$

For $k \geq 1$, let p_k/q_k denote the k -th convergent to θ and set

$$A_k := \frac{b^{q_k} - b^{q_{k-2}}}{b^{q_{k-1}} - 1},$$

where $q_{-1} = 0$ and $q_0 = 1$. Then, we have

$$\xi_b(\theta) = [0; A_1, A_2, A_3, \dots]$$

and the irrationality exponent of $\xi_b(\theta)$ is given by

$$\mu(\xi_b(\theta)) = 1 + \limsup_{k \rightarrow +\infty} \frac{q_k}{q_{k-1}}.$$

Note that A_k is an integer multiple of b^{q_k-2} since $q_k - q_{k-2}$ is an integer multiple of q_{k-1} .

The last assertion of the theorem follows from the well-known fact that the irrationality exponent of an irrational real number $\zeta = [A_0; A_1, A_2, \dots]$ is given by

$$\mu(\zeta) = 1 + \limsup_{j \rightarrow +\infty} \frac{\log Q_{j+1}}{\log Q_j},$$

where $[A_0; A_1, A_2, \dots, A_j] = P_j/Q_j$, for $j \geq 1$. Indeed, the sequence $(P_j/Q_j)_{j \geq 1}$ comprises all the best rational approximations to ζ and we have

$$\frac{1}{2Q_{j+1}Q_j} < \left| \zeta - \frac{P_j}{Q_j} \right| < \frac{1}{Q_{j+1}Q_j}.$$

Theorem 2.2 describes the first known class of real numbers having the property that both their b -ary expansion (for some integer $b \geq 2$) and their continued fraction expansion are explicitly determined. There are only few such classes; see Section 7.6 of [12] for other examples.

Our second main result extends Böhmer's theorem to an arbitrary b -Sturmian number with digits in $\{0, b-1\}$. Define

$$\xi_b(\theta, \rho) = (b-1) \sum_{n=1}^{+\infty} \frac{s_n(\theta, \rho)}{b^n}, \quad \xi'_b(\theta, \rho) = (b-1) \sum_{n=1}^{+\infty} \frac{s'_n(\theta, \rho)}{b^n}.$$

Let ξ denote one of these numbers. Let $(b_k)_{k \geq 1}$ and $(t_k)_{k \geq 1}$ be the sequences of integers defined in Theorem 2.1 (or in Theorem 4.2 if ρ is of the form $-m\theta + p$, with m, p nonnegative integers) applied to the Sturmian sequence defining ξ . Put $t_0 = 0$ and $r_0 = 1$. For $k \geq 0$, set

$$c_k = b^{r_k+q_{k-1}} \frac{b^{(a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}-1)q_k} - 1}{b^{q_k} - 1}, \quad d_k = b^{t_k} - 1,$$

$$e_k = b^{r_k} - 1, \quad f_k = b^{t_k} \frac{b^{b_{k+1}q_k} - 1}{b^{q_k} - 1}.$$

We point out that some elements of these four sequences may not be positive integers. For example, f_k is equal to 0 when $b_{k+1} = 0$ and c_{k+1} is equal to 0 when $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2} + 1$. More intriguing is the case where $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2}$. Then, we have $b_{k+1} = 0$, thus $r_k + q_{k+1} = r_{k+1} + q_k$ and

$$c_{k+1} = b^{r_{k+1}+q_k} \frac{b^{-q_{k+1}} - 1}{b^{q_{k+1}} - 1} = \frac{b^{r_k} - b^{r_k+q_{k+1}}}{b^{q_{k+1}} - 1} = -b^{r_k} = -e_k - 1$$

is a negative integer. Keeping this in mind, and with some abuse of language, the next theorem asserts that

$$[0; c_0, d_0, 1, e_0, f_0, c_1, d_1, 1, e_1, f_1, c_2, \dots]$$

is an (improper) continued fraction expansion of ξ . The precise statement is as follows.

Theorem 2.3. *Let ξ be as above and keep the notation introduced above. If $a_k - b_k \geq 2$ and $b_k \geq 1$ for every $k \geq 1$, then the continued fraction expansion of ξ is given by*

$$\xi_b(\theta, \rho) = [0; c_0 + 1, e_0, f_0, c_1, d_1, 1, e_1, f_1, c_2, \dots].$$

Otherwise, let A_1, A_2, A_3, \dots be the sequence of positive integers obtained from the sequence $c_0, d_0, 1, e_0, f_0, c_1, d_1, 1, e_1, f_1, c_2, \dots$ after the application of the following rules:

(i) For every k such that $c_{k+1} < 0$, replace the nine integers $c_k, d_k, 1, e_k, f_k, c_{k+1}, d_{k+1},$

$1, e_{k+1}$ by the positive integer $c_k + 1 + e_{k+1}$;

(ii) Replace any three consecutive elements of this new sequence of the form $x, 0, y$ by the integer $x + y$.

Then, the continued fraction expansion of ξ is given by

$$\xi_b(\theta, \rho) = [0; A_1, A_2, A_3, \dots].$$

Observe that the sequence $(A_j)_{j \geq 1}$ is well-defined. Indeed, c_k and c_{k+1} cannot be both negative, since we cannot have simultaneously $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2}$ and $a_{k+1} = b_{k+1}$.

Let us briefly show that Theorem 2.3 includes Böhmer's result. First, note that $\xi_b(\theta) = \xi_b(\theta, \theta)$, since, for a positive integer j , we have $\lfloor j/\theta \rfloor$ equals the integer ℓ if and only if $\ell < j/\theta < \ell + 1$, that is, if and only if, $\lfloor (\ell + 1)\theta \rfloor - \lfloor \ell\theta \rfloor = 1$. Then, observe that the Ostrowski expansion of $\theta - \theta = 0$ in base θ is given by the constant sequence equal to 0. Consequently, the sequences defined in Theorem 2.3 are equal to

$$d_k = f_k = 0, \quad e_k = b^{q_k} - 1, \quad c_k = b^{q_k + q_{k-1}} \frac{b^{(a_{k+1}-1)q_k} - 1}{b^{q_k} - 1}, \quad k \geq 0.$$

It then follows from Theorem 2.3 that

$$\begin{aligned} \xi_b(\theta) &= \left[0; b^{q_0+0} \frac{b^{(a_1-1)q_0} - 1}{b^{q_0} - 1}, 0, 1, b^{q_0} - 1, 0, b^{q_1+q_0} \frac{b^{(a_2-1)q_1} - 1}{b^{q_1} - 1}, 0, 1, b^{q_1} - 1, 0, c_2, \dots \right] \\ &= \left[0; b^{q_0+0} \frac{b^{(a_1-1)q_0} - 1}{b^{q_0} - 1} + 1, b^{q_0} - 1 + b^{q_1+q_0} \frac{b^{(a_2-1)q_1} - 1}{b^{q_1} - 1} + 1, b^{q_1} - 1, 0, c_2, \dots \right] \\ &= \left[0; \frac{b^{a_1 q_0} - 1}{b^{q_0} - 1}, \frac{b^{q_2} - b^{q_0}}{b^{q_1} - 1}, b^{q_1} - 1, 0, c_2, \dots \right] \\ &= \left[0; \frac{b^{q_1} - 1}{b^{q_0} - 1}, \frac{b^{q_2} - b^{q_0}}{b^{q_1} - 1}, \frac{b^{q_3} - b^{q_1}}{b^{q_2} - 1}, \dots \right]. \end{aligned}$$

We get the sequence of partial quotients $c_0 + 1, e_0 + c_1 + 1, e_1 + c_2 + 1, \dots$ and we recover Theorem 2.2.

Theorem 2.3 is proved in Section 7, where we give additional informations on the shape of the convergents to ξ and its partial quotients; see Proposition 7.2.

As a consequence of Theorem 2.3, we obtain an expression for the irrationality exponent of any Sturmian number in terms of its slope and its intercept.

Keep our notation and define

$$\nu_k(1) = 2 + \frac{t_k}{r_{k+1}}, \quad \nu_k(2) = 2 + \frac{r_k}{r_{k+1} + t_k},$$

$$\nu_k(3) = 1 + \frac{q_{k+1}}{r_{k+1} + q_k}, \quad \nu_k(4) = 1 + \frac{r_{k+2}}{q_{k+1}}.$$

Put

$$\nu(1) = \limsup_{k \rightarrow +\infty} \{\nu_k(1) : a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} \geq 1 \text{ and } a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1\},$$

$$\nu(2) = \limsup_{k \rightarrow +\infty} \{\nu_k(2) : a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1\},$$

and, for $j = 3, 4$,

$$\nu(j) = \limsup_{k \rightarrow +\infty} \nu_k(j).$$

Theorem 2.4. *Let ξ be as above. Then, its irrationality exponent is equal to*

$$\max\{\nu(1), \nu(2), \nu(3), \nu(4)\}.$$

We recover, for the initial repetitions, the formulas found in [8] for the critical initial exponent, namely the contributions of $\nu(2)$ and $\nu(4)$. Theorem 2.4 is established at the end of Section 6; see Theorem 6.3.

Furthermore, we derive easily a necessary and sufficient condition under which a Sturmian number is a Liouville number, thereby reproving the first part of Théorème 3.1 of [4] (see also [19]).

Corollary 2.5. *A Sturmian number is a Liouville number if and only if its slope has unbounded partial quotients in its continued fraction expansion.*

Theorem 2.4 allows us to study in depth the irrationality exponents of Sturmian numbers. For instance, we can fix a slope θ and consider the spectrum $\mathcal{L}(\theta)$ consisting of the set the irrationality exponents of Sturmian numbers of slope θ .

Theorem 2.6. *Let θ be an irrational number in $(0, 1)$ with bounded partial quotients. Then,*

$$\mathcal{L}(\theta) \subset \left[\frac{5}{3} + \frac{4\sqrt{10}}{15}, 1 + \mu(\xi_b(\theta)) \right]$$

and there exists an intercept $\rho(\theta)$ such that

$$\mu(\xi_b(\theta, \rho(\theta))) = 1 + \mu(\xi_b(\theta)).$$

A detailed study of the sets $\mathcal{L}(\theta)$ will be the purpose of a forthcoming work.

Theorem 2.3 allows us also to improve the best known transcendence measures for Sturmian numbers. Let ζ be a transcendental real number. Following Koksma [18], for any integer $d \geq 1$, we denote by $w_d^*(\zeta)$ the supremum of the exponents w for which

$$0 < |\zeta - \alpha| < H(\alpha)^{-w-1}$$

has infinitely many solutions in real algebraic numbers α of degree at most d . Here, $H(\alpha)$ stands for the naïve height of the minimal defining polynomial of α over \mathbf{Z} . Clearly, the functions $\mu - 1$ and w_1^* are equal and the functions w_d^* are invariant by rational translation and by multiplication by a nonzero rational number, for $d \geq 1$. We direct the reader to [11] for classical results on the functions w_d^* and on Mahler's and Koksma's classifications of real numbers. As a particular case of Théorème 1.1 of [4], we know that, for any Sturmian number ξ which is not a Liouville number, there exists a positive real number c , depending only on ξ , such that

$$w_d^*(\xi) \leq (2d)^{c(\log 3d)(\log \log 3d)}, \quad d \geq 1.$$

This can be improved as follows.

Theorem 2.7. *Let ξ be a Sturmian number. Assume that the partial quotients of its slope are ultimately bounded from above by M . Then, there exists a positive real number κ , depending only on M , such that*

$$w_d^*(\xi) \leq (2d)^{\kappa(\log \log 3d)}, \quad d \geq 1.$$

We point out that the transcendence measure obtained in Theorem 2.7 does not depend on the intercept of the Sturmian number.

We believe that Theorem 2.1 will have many applications. We will use it in a follow-up work devoted to the transcendence of Hecke–Mahler series evaluated at algebraic points. We refer to [14, 20, 21] for various applications of Sturmian numbers to the dynamics of piecewise affine maps.

The present paper is organized as follows. We show in Section 3 that any Sturmian word \mathbf{s} of slope θ and intercept ρ can be expressed in a similar way as in (1.1) and we define its formal intercept. The link between the formal intercept and the expansion of the intercept ρ in the θ -Ostrowski numeration system is established in Section 4, thereby proving Theorem 2.1. In Section 5, we apply Theorem 2.1 to give a precise description of the repetitions occurring near the beginning of \mathbf{s} . From this, in the next section, we deduce four one-parametric families of rational numbers which approximate very well the Sturmian number ξ associated to \mathbf{s} , the exact rate of approximation to ξ by these rational numbers being given in Theorem 6.1. We derive the continued fraction expansion of ξ in Section 7, thereby proving Theorems 2.4 and 2.5, since we see that all the very good approximants to ξ belong to one of the four families defined in Section 6. The final Section is devoted to the proofs of the other results stated in Section 2.

3. The formal intercept of a Sturmian word

We keep the notation of Section 1 with the alphabet $\{0, 1\}$. Let \mathbf{s} be an arbitrary Sturmian word of slope θ . The goal of this section is to establish that any Sturmian word

can be expressed as in (1.1), that is, as the limit of a suitable sequence $(V_k)_{k \geq 1}$ of binary words V_k of length q_k constructed inductively.

Throughout, the length $|W|$ of a finite word W , that is, the number of letters composing W , is denoted by $|W|$. If W has at least one letter (resp., at least two letters), then W^- (resp., W^{--}) denotes the word W deprived of its last letter (resp., its last two letters).

Definition 3.1. *A word V is a conjugate of M_k if there exist words T and R such that*

$$V = RT \quad \text{and} \quad M_k = TR,$$

with $0 \leq t := |T| < q_k$. Then, R is the non-empty suffix of M_k of length $q_k - t$.

Observe that the q_k conjugates V of the word M_k are distinct. We label these translated words V by the length $t, 0 \leq t < q_k$ of the (possibly empty) prefix T in the decomposition $M_k = TR, V = RT$. The whole set of conjugates V of M_k is clearly obtained as the set of factors of length q_k in the word $M_k M_k^-$. Each such factor V is determined by its $q_k - 1$ first letters which form the q_k distinct factors of length $q_k - 1$ contained in the word $M_k M_k^{--}$.

As an example, for $k = 1$, we have $M_1 = 0^{a_1-1}1$. Any conjugate V of M_1 can be written in the form

$$V = 0^{a_1-1-b_1}10^{b_1} = RT, \quad M_1 = TR, \quad \text{with} \quad T = 0^{b_1}, \quad R = 0^{a_1-1-b_1}1,$$

for some integer b_1 with $0 \leq b_1 \leq a_1 - 1$. Thus, in this case, we have $t = b_1$.

Definition 3.2. *For each $k \geq 1$, let V_k be the conjugate of M_k whose first $q_k - 1$ letters coincide with those of \mathbf{s} . Let T_k and R_k be the words such that*

$$V_k = R_k T_k \quad \text{and} \quad M_k = T_k R_k,$$

with R_k non-empty. Denote by t_k the length of T_k . Put $R_{-1} = 1, R_0 = 0$, and let T_{-1} and T_0 be the empty word.

Then, the following recursion formulae hold. The notion of formal intercept was first introduced by Wojcik [23], but our presentation is different.

Lemma 3.3 (formal intercept). *Put $t_1 = b_1^*$. For any $k \geq 1$, there exists an integer b_{k+1}^* such that $0 \leq b_{k+1}^* \leq a_{k+1}$ and*

$$t_{k+1} = t_k + b_{k+1}^* q_k.$$

When $b_{k+1}^* = a_{k+1}$, we necessarily have $t_k < q_{k-1}$, so that $b_k^* = 0$ and $t_k = t_{k-1}$ in this case. Moreover, the sequences of words $(T_k)_{k \geq 0}$ and $(R_k)_{k \geq 0}$ satisfy the recursion formulae

$$T_{k+1} = M_k^{b_{k+1}^*} T_k = T_k V_k^{b_{k+1}^*}$$

and

$$R_{k+1} = \begin{cases} R_k M_k^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}^*-1} M_{k-1} & \text{if } b_{k+1}^* < a_{k+1}, \\ R_{k-1} & \text{if } b_{k+1}^* = a_{k+1}, \end{cases}$$

for $k \geq 0$. The sequence $(b_k^*)_{k \geq 1}$ is called the formal intercept of \mathbf{s} .

Proof. The word V_{k+1} is a factor of the word $M_{k+1}M_{k+1}^-$ beginning somewhere on the first factor M_{k+1} . Assume first that V_{k+1} begins on the prefix $M_k^{a_{k+1}}$ of $M_{k+1} = M_k^{a_{k+1}}M_{k-1}$ and let P be the prefix of length q_k of V_{k+1} . Thus, for some integer $0 \leq b_{k+1}^* < a_{k+1}$, the prefix P begins on the second factor M_k in the product $M_k^{a_{k+1}} = M_k^{b_{k+1}^*}M_kM_k^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}^*-1}$. Then, P is a factor of

$$M_k M_k^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}^*-1} M_{k+1}^- = M_k M_k^{2a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}^*-1} M_{k-1}^-$$

beginning on the first factor M_k . Since $2a_{k+1} - b_{k+1}^* - 1 \geq 1$, we see that P is located over the product $M_k M_k^-$, where M_k^- is the prefix of $M_k^{2a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}^*-1}$ of length $q_k - 1$. As the first $q_k - 1$ letters of P coincide with those of \mathbf{s} , we deduce that $P = V_k = R_k T_k$, and next that

$$T_{k+1} = M_k^{b_{k+1}^*} T_k \quad \text{and} \quad R_{k+1} = R_k M_k^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}^*-1} M_{k-1}.$$

Note finally that

$$M_k^{b_{k+1}^*} T_k = (T_k R_k)^{b_{k+1}^*} T_k = T_k (R_k T_k)^{b_{k+1}^*} = T_k V_k^{b_{k+1}^*}.$$

Suppose now that V_{k+1} begins on the second factor M_{k-1} in

$$M_{k+1} M_{k+1}^- = M_k^{a_{k+1}} M_{k-1} M_{k+1}^- = M_k^{a_{k+1}} T_{k-1} R_{k-1} M_{k+1}^-$$

and put $b_{k+1}^* = a_{k+1}$. Then,

$$T_{k+1} = M_k^{a_{k+1}} T_{k-1} \quad \text{and} \quad R_{k+1} = R_{k-1},$$

observing that $V_{k-1} = R_{k-1} T_{k-1}$ equals the prefix of V_{k+1} of length q_{k-1} . Notice now that M_k is a prefix of $M_{k-1} M_{k+1}^-$. Writing

$$M_{k-1} M_{k+1}^- = M_k \cdots = T_{k-1} R_{k-1} M_{k-1}^{a_k-1} M_{k-2} \cdots$$

we see that $T_k = T_{k-1}$ and $R_k = R_{k-1} M_{k-1}^{a_k-1} M_{k-2}$. Thus $b_k^* = 0$ by the preceding case applied to the level $k - 1$. \square

We now deal with binary recursions expressing V_{k+1} in terms of V_k and V_{k-1} extending the classical formulae $M_{k+1} = M_k^{a_{k+1}} M_{k-1}$. Set $V_{-1} = R_{-1} T_{-1} = 1$ and $V_0 = R_0 T_0 = 0$.

Lemma 3.4 (binary recursion). *We have the relation $V_1 = V_0^{a_1-1-b_1^*} V_{-1} V_0^{b_1^*}$, while for any $k \geq 1$, we have*

$$V_{k+1} = V_k^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}^*} V_{k-1} V_k^{b_{k+1}^*}.$$

Proof. The expression

$$V_1 = 0^{a_1-1-b_1^*} 10^{b_1^*}$$

yields obviously the relation for V_1 .

For $k \geq 1$, we distinguish two cases, either $b_{k+1}^* < a_{k+1}$ or $b_{k+1}^* = a_{k+1}$. Assume first that $b_{k+1}^* < a_{k+1}$. According to Lemma 3.3, we write $V_{k+1} = R_{k+1} T_{k+1}$ with

$$\begin{aligned} R_{k+1} &= R_k M_k^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}^*-1} M_{k-1} = R_k (T_k R_k)^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}^*-1} T_{k-1} R_{k-1} \\ &= (R_k T_k)^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}^*-1} R_k T_{k-1} R_{k-1} = V_k^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}^*-1} R_k T_{k-1} R_{k-1} \end{aligned}$$

and

$$T_{k+1} = T_k V_k^{b_{k+1}^*}.$$

Thus

$$V_{k+1} = V_k^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}^*-1} R_k T_{k-1} R_{k-1} T_k V_k^{b_{k+1}^*}.$$

Since

$$R_k T_{k-1} R_{k-1} T_k = R_k T_{k-1} R_{k-1} T_{k-1} (R_{k-1} T_{k-1})^{b_k^*} = R_k T_k R_{k-1} T_{k-1} = V_k V_{k-1},$$

we get

$$V_{k+1} = V_k^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}^*} V_{k-1} V_k^{b_{k+1}^*}.$$

Assume now that $b_{k+1}^* = a_{k+1}$. Then $b_k^* = 0$. From Lemma 3.3, we know that $T_k = T_{k-1}$ and that

$$T_{k+1} = T_k V_k^{b_{k+1}^*} = T_{k-1} V_k^{b_{k+1}^*} \quad \text{and} \quad R_{k+1} = R_{k-1}.$$

Thus

$$V_{k+1} = R_{k+1} T_{k+1} = R_{k-1} T_{k-1} V_k^{b_{k+1}^*} = V_{k-1} V_k^{b_{k+1}^*},$$

as asserted. □

We conclude this section with a corollary, which shows how any prefix of M_{n+1} can be expressed in terms of M_0, \dots, M_n .

Recall that the Ostrowski numeration system in base θ is defined as follows: every positive integer N can be uniquely written in the form

$$N = d_1 + d_2 q_1 + \dots + d_{r+1} q_r,$$

where $0 \leq d_j \leq a_j$ for $j = 1, \dots, r+1$, $d_{r+1} > 0$, $d_1 < a_1$ and $d_j = 0$ if $d_{j+1} = a_{j+1}$.

Corollary 3.5 (product formula for prefixes). *Let T be the prefix of M_{n+1} of length $t < q_{n+1}$. Write*

$$t = d_1 + d_2q_1 + \cdots + d_{n+1}q_n$$

where d_1, \dots, d_{n+1} are the digits of the integer t in the Ostrowski numeration system in base θ . Then, we have the product formula

$$T = M_n^{d_{n+1}} M_{n-1}^{d_n} \cdots M_0^{d_1} = V_0^{d_1} V_1^{d_2} \cdots V_n^{d_{n+1}},$$

where the words V_0, \dots, V_n are defined recursively by the formulae

$$V_0 = 1, \quad V_1 = 0^{a_1-d_1-1}10^{d_1}, \quad V_{k+1} = V_k^{a_{k+1}-d_{k+1}}V_{k-1}V_k^{d_k}, \quad 1 \leq k < n.$$

Proof. By Lemma 3.3, we have $T = T_{n+1}$ and $t = t_{n+1}$. The recurrence relations

$$T_{k+1} = M_k^{d_{k+1}}T_k = T_kV_k^{d_{k+1}}$$

yield inductively the product formula

$$T = T_{n+1} = M_n^{d_{n+1}}M_{n-1}^{d_n} \cdots M_0^{d_1} = V_0^{d_1}V_1^{d_2} \cdots V_n^{d_{n+1}}.$$

This establishes the corollary. □

4. Linking formal intercept and Ostrowski numeration

We link the formal intercept, that is the sequence $(b_k^*)_{k \geq 1}$ such that

$$t_k = b_1^* + b_2^*q_1 + \cdots + b_k^*q_{k-1}, \quad k \geq 1,$$

to the intercept ρ thanks to the

Proposition 4.1. *Let $0 < \rho < 1$ be a real number either not belonging to $\mathbf{Z}\theta + \mathbf{Z}$, or of the form $\mathbf{Z}_{\geq 1}\theta + \mathbf{Z}$. Let*

$$\rho - \theta = \sum_{h \geq 1} b_h \theta_{h-1}$$

be the Ostrowski expansion of $\rho - \theta$ in base θ . For every $k \geq 1$, put

$$t_k = b_1 + b_2q_1 + \cdots + b_kq_{k-1}.$$

Then, t_k is the length of the word T_k associated to the Sturmian word $\mathbf{s}_{\theta, \rho} = \mathbf{s}'_{\theta, \rho}$. In other words, we have $b_k = b_k^*$ for $k \geq 1$, meaning that the formal intercept of this Sturmian word coincides with the sequence of digits of the number $\rho - \theta$ in its Ostrowski expansion in base θ .

Proof. By definition, we have

$$s_n = \lfloor n\theta + \rho \rfloor - \lfloor (n-1)\theta + \rho \rfloor, \quad n \geq 1,$$

and

$$s'_n = \lceil n\theta + \rho \rceil - \lceil (n-1)\theta + \rho \rceil, \quad n \geq 1,$$

while the n -th letter of \mathbf{c}_θ is

$$c_n = \lfloor (n+1)\theta \rfloor - \lfloor n\theta \rfloor = \lceil (n+1)\theta \rceil - \lceil n\theta \rceil, \quad n \geq 1.$$

Thus

$$s_n = \lfloor (n+1)\theta + \rho - \theta \rfloor - \lfloor n\theta + \rho - \theta \rfloor = \lfloor (n+1+t_k)\theta + \sigma_k \rfloor - \lfloor (n+t_k)\theta + \sigma_k \rfloor,$$

and

$$s'_n = \lceil (n+1)\theta + \rho - \theta \rceil - \lceil n\theta + \rho - \theta \rceil = \lceil (n+1+t_k)\theta + \sigma_k \rceil - \lceil (n+t_k)\theta + \sigma_k \rceil,$$

where we have set

$$\sigma_k = \sum_{h \geq k} b_{h+1}\theta_h.$$

We claim that

$$\lfloor q\theta + \sigma_k \rfloor = \lfloor q\theta \rfloor \quad \text{and} \quad \lceil q\theta + \sigma_k \rceil = \lceil q\theta \rceil$$

for every integer q with $1 \leq q \leq q_k + t_k$. This yields that

$$s_n = \lfloor (n+1+t_k)\theta + \sigma_k \rfloor - \lfloor (n+t_k)\theta + \sigma_k \rfloor = \lfloor (n+1+t_k)\theta \rfloor - \lfloor (n+t_k)\theta \rfloor = c_{n+t_k}$$

and

$$s'_n = \lceil (n+1+t_k)\theta + \sigma_k \rceil - \lceil (n+t_k)\theta + \sigma_k \rceil = \lceil (n+1+t_k)\theta \rceil - \lceil (n+t_k)\theta \rceil = c_{n+t_k}$$

for every $1 \leq n \leq q_k - 1$, and will establish the proposition, noting that $M_k M_k$ is a prefix of \mathbf{c}_θ .

To that purpose, we bound $|\sigma_k|$. Observe that θ_k is positive when k is even and negative when k is odd. Moreover $b_{h+1} \leq a_{h+1}$ for any $h \geq 1$, while $b_1 \leq a_1 - 1$. Thus,

$$\begin{aligned} |\sigma_k| &< \max(|a_{k+1}\theta_k + a_{k+3}\theta_{k+2} + \cdots|, |a_{k+2}\theta_{k+1} + a_{k+4}\theta_{k+3} + \cdots|) \\ &= \max(|\theta_{k-1}|, |\theta_k|) = |\theta_{k-1}|, \end{aligned}$$

noting that

$$\begin{aligned} a_{k+1}\theta_k + a_{k+3}\theta_{k+2} + \cdots &= \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \left(\left(\sum_{h=0}^n a_{k+2h+1} q_{k+2h} \right) \theta - \left(\sum_{h=0}^n a_{k+2h+1} p_{k+2h} \right) \right) \\ &= \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \left(\sum_{h=0}^n (q_{k+2h+1} - q_{k+2h-1}) \theta - \sum_{h=0}^n (p_{k+2h+1} - p_{k+2h-1}) \right) \\ &= \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \left((q_{k+2n+1} - q_{k-1}) \theta - (p_{k+2n+1} - p_{k-1}) \right) = -\theta_{k-1}. \end{aligned}$$

The inequality $|\sigma_k| < |\theta_{k-1}|$ is strict because either $\rho - \theta$ does not belong to $\mathbf{Z}\theta + \mathbf{Z}$, or $\rho - \theta$ belong to $\mathbf{Z}_{\geq 0}\theta + \mathbf{Z}$, so that the sequence of digits $(b_h)_{h \geq 1}$ cannot be ultimately of the form $a_{k+1}, 0, a_{k+3}, 0, \dots$

Observe now that

$$|\sigma_k - b_{k+1}\theta_k| < a_{k+2}|\theta_{k+1}| + a_{k+4}|\theta_{k+3}| + \dots = |\theta_k|.$$

It follows that σ_k and θ_k share the same sign when $b_{k+1} \geq 1$ and that $|\sigma_k| < |\theta_k|$ when $b_{k+1} = 0$. In particular, the stronger inequality $|\sigma_k| < |\theta_k|$ holds when θ_k and σ_k have opposite signs.

The upper bound $|\sigma_k| < |\theta_{k-1}|$ can also be sharpened when $t_k \geq q_{k-1}$. Indeed in this case we have $b_k \geq 1$ and thus b_{k+1} cannot be equal to a_{k+1} by Ostrowski's numeration rules. We now bound $b_{k+1} \leq a_{k+1} - 1$ to obtain

$$|\sigma_k| < |\theta_{k-1}| - |\theta_k|. \quad (4.1)$$

Denote by $\|x\|$ the distance from the real number x to the closest integer. We now show that $\|q\theta\|$ is larger than $|\sigma_k|$ when q differs from q_k , so that $q\theta$ and $q\theta + \sigma_k$ belong to the same integer open interval of length 1 and have thus the same upper and lower integer parts. We distinguish three cases. If $q < q_k$, then

$$\|q\theta\| \geq |\theta_{k-1}| > |\sigma_k|,$$

as required. Assume secondly that $t_k < q_{k-1}$ and $q = q_k + v$ for some $1 \leq v \leq t_k$. Then

$$\|q\theta\| = \|v\theta + \theta_k\| \geq \|v\theta\| - |\theta_k| \geq |\theta_{k-2}| - |\theta_k| = |\theta_{k-2} - \theta_k| \geq |\theta_{k-1}| > |\sigma_k|.$$

Thirdly, assume $t_k \geq q_{k-1}$ and $q = q_k + v$ with $1 \leq v \leq q_k - 1$. Then,

$$\|q\theta\| \geq \|v\theta\| - |\theta_k| \geq |\theta_{k-1}| - |\theta_k| > |\sigma_k|,$$

by (4.1).

These three cases cover all the values of q with $1 \leq q \leq q_k + t_k$, except $q = q_k$, which we consider now. We have $\|q_k\theta\| = |\theta_k|$. When θ_k and σ_k share the same sign, we have

$$|\theta_k| < |\theta_k + \sigma_k| = |\theta_k| + |\sigma_k| \leq |\theta_k| + |\theta_{k-1}| < 1.$$

Thus, $q_k\theta$ and $q_k\theta + \sigma_k$ both belong either to $(p_k, p_k + 1)$ or to $(p_k - 1, p_k)$. When θ_k and σ_k have opposite signs, we know that $|\sigma_k| < |\theta_k|$, so that θ_k and $\theta_k + \sigma_k$ have the same sign and both have absolute value less than 1. The claim is proved, which yields the proposition. \square

A similar result holds in the remaining case where $\rho - \theta = -m\theta + p$ for integers $m \geq 1$ and p . Assume first that ρ is positive, that is to say $m \geq 2$. Let $l \geq 0$ be defined by the inequalities $q_l < m \leq q_{l+1}$ and let

$$q_{l+1} - m = b_1q_0 + \dots + b_{l+1}q_l$$

be the Ostrowski expansion of the integer $q_{l+1} - m$ (see the definition at the end of Section 3). Observe that

$$b_{l+1} \leq a_{l+1} - 1 \quad \text{and that} \quad b_l = 0 \quad \text{when} \quad b_{l+1} = a_{l+1} - 1.$$

Then $\rho - \theta \in (-\theta, 1 - \theta)$ has two Ostrowski expansions of the form

$$\rho - \theta = b_1\theta_0 + \cdots + b_{l+1}\theta_l + \sum_{k \geq 1} a_{l+2k+1}\theta_{l+2k}$$

and

$$\rho - \theta = b_1\theta_0 + \cdots + b_l\theta_{l-1} + (b_{l+1} + 1)\theta_l + (a_{l+2} - 1)\theta_{l+1} + \sum_{k \geq 2} a_{l+2k}\theta_{l+2k-1},$$

when $l \geq 1$, or

$$\rho - \theta = (b_1 + 1)\theta_0 + (a_2 - 1)\theta_1 + \sum_{k \geq 2} a_{2k}\theta_{2k-1},$$

when $l = 0$. Set

$$b_{l+2} = 0, b_{l+3} = a_{l+3}, b_{l+4} = 0, b_{l+5} = a_{l+5}, \dots$$

and

$$b'_1 = b_1, \dots, b'_l = b_l, b'_{l+1} = b_{l+1} + 1, b'_{l+2} = a_{l+2} - 1, b'_{l+3} = 0, b'_{l+4} = a_{l+4}, \dots$$

when $l \geq 1$, or

$$b'_1 = b_1 + 1, b'_2 = a_2 - 1, b'_3 = 0, b'_4 = a_4, \dots$$

when $l = 0$, so that $(b_k)_{k \geq 1}$ and $(b'_k)_{k \geq 1}$ are the sequences of digits appearing in the two above expansions of $\rho - \theta$. Notice that both sequences satisfy the Ostrowski numeration rules for digits in base θ . When $\rho = 0$, we use the two proper expansions

$$1 - \theta = (a_1 - 1)\theta_0 + \sum_{k \geq 1} a_{2k+1}\theta_{2k},$$

and

$$-\theta = \sum_{k \geq 1} a_{2k}\theta_{2k-1},$$

to define respectively the sequences of digits $(b_k)_{k \geq 1}$ and $(b'_k)_{k \geq 1}$. Then, we have the following analogue of Theorem 2.1.

Theorem 4.2. *Assume that $\rho - \theta = -m\theta + p$ where $m \geq 1$ and p are integers. When $m \geq 2$, let $l \geq 0$ be defined by the inequalities $q_l < m \leq q_{l+1}$. When $m = 1$, set $l = 0$. Let $(V_k)_{k \geq 0}$ and $(V'_k)_{k \geq 0}$ be the two sequences of words recursively defined as in Theorem 2.1, with respect to the two sequences of digits $(b_k)_{k \geq 1}$ and $(b'_k)_{k \geq 1}$ defined above. When l is odd, we have*

$$\mathbf{s}_{\theta, \rho} = \lim_{k \rightarrow +\infty} V_k \quad \text{and} \quad \mathbf{s}'_{\theta, \rho} = \lim_{k \rightarrow +\infty} V'_k.$$

When l is even, we have

$$\mathbf{s}_{\theta,\rho} = \lim_{k \rightarrow +\infty} V'_k \quad \text{and} \quad \mathbf{s}'_{\theta,\rho} = \lim_{k \rightarrow +\infty} V_k.$$

Moreover, the analogous decompositions $V_k = R_k T_k$ and $V'_k = R'_k T'_k$, as in Theorem 2.1, hold true with

$$t_k = b_1 + \cdots + b_k q_{k-1} \quad \text{and} \quad t'_k = b'_1 + \cdots + b'_k q_{k-1}.$$

Proof. We only give a complete proof for the sequence of digits

$$(b_k)_{k \geq 1} = \left\{ b_1, \dots, b_{l+1}, 0, a_{l+3}, 0, a_{l+5}, \dots \right\}.$$

Assume that $m \geq 2$ and l is odd, and recall the notations

$$t_k = b_1 + \cdots + b_k q_{k-1} \quad \text{and} \quad \sigma_k = b_{k+1} \theta_k + b_{k+2} \theta_{k+2} + \cdots$$

The argumentation is similar to the proof of Proposition 4.1. It suffices to show that

$$\lfloor q\theta + \sigma_k \rfloor = \lfloor q\theta \rfloor \tag{4.2}$$

for every integer q with $1 \leq q \leq q_k + t_k$. If $k \leq l$, we compute

$$\sigma_k = b_{k+1} \theta_k + \cdots + b_{l+1} \theta_{l+1} - \theta_{l+1}.$$

Since the tail b_{k+1}, b_{k+2}, \dots of the sequence $(b_k)_{k \geq 1}$ contains the subsequence $\dots b_{l+1}, 0, a_{l+3}, \dots$ and that $b_{l+1} \leq a_{l+1} - 1$, observe that this tail is neither of the form $a_j, 0, a_{j+1}, 0, \dots$ nor $0, a_j, 0, a_{j+1}, \dots$. Then, (4.2) holds true by taking again the proof of Proposition 4.1. When $k \geq l + 1$, we have

$$t_k = \begin{cases} -m + q_{k-1} & \text{if } k = l + 2j, \quad (j \geq 1), \\ -m + q_k & \text{if } k = l + 2j + 1, \quad (j \geq 0), \end{cases}$$

and

$$\sigma_k = \begin{cases} -\theta_{k-1} & \text{if } k = l + 2j, \quad (j \geq 1), \\ -\theta_k & \text{if } k = l + 2j + 1, \quad (j \geq 0). \end{cases}$$

Assume first that k has the same parity as l , namely $k = l + 2j$ for some $j \geq 1$. Then $\sigma_k = -\theta_{k-1}$ and $t_k = -m + q_{k-1}$. In order to check (4.2), we distinguish three subcases. Assume first $q \leq q_{k-1}$. Then $\|q\theta\| \geq |\theta_{k-1}|$ with equality only when $q = q_{k-1}$. If $q \neq q_{k-1}$, we have

$$\|q\theta\| > |\theta_{k-1}|,$$

so that $q\theta$ and $q\theta - \theta_{k-1}$ are located in the same open interval of length one, so that (4.2) holds true. If $q = q_{k-1}$, then we have

$$q_{k-1} \theta - \theta_{k-1} = p_{k-1} \quad \text{and} \quad q_{k-1} \theta = p_{k-1} + \theta_{k-1},$$

so that (4.2) holds, since θ_{k-1} is positive, noting that $k-1 = l-1+2j$ is even. Assume secondly that $q = q_k$. Then,

$$q_k\theta - \theta_{k-1} = p_k + \theta_k - \theta_{k-1} \quad \text{and} \quad q_k\theta = p_k + \theta_k.$$

This shows that (4.2) holds, since both numbers θ_k and $\theta_k - \theta_{k-1}$ are negative with absolute value less than 1. Assume thirdly that $q = q_k + v$ for some integer v with $1 \leq v \leq t_k = -m + q_{k-1}$. Then,

$$q\theta - \theta_{k-1} = p_k + \theta_k - \theta_{k-1} + v\theta \quad \text{and} \quad q\theta = p_k + \theta_k + v\theta.$$

Notice now that $\|v\theta\| \geq |\theta_{k-2}|$ with equality only when $v = q_{k-2}$. If $v \neq q_{k-2}$, we have

$$\|v\theta\| > |\theta_{k-2}|.$$

Then, $q\theta$ and $q\theta - \theta_{k-1}$ are located in the same open interval of length one, since

$$|\theta_{k-2}| \geq |\theta_k| + |\theta_{k-1}|,$$

so that (4.2) holds true. If $v = q_{k-2}$, then we have

$$q\theta - \theta_{k-1} = p_k + p_{k-2} + \theta_k - \theta_{k-1} + \theta_{k-2} \quad \text{and} \quad q\theta = p_k + p_{k-2} + \theta_k + \theta_{k-2},$$

so that (4.2) holds, since $\theta_k - \theta_{k-1} + \theta_{k-2}$ and $\theta_k + \theta_{k-2}$ are both negative with absolute value less than 1.

We assume now that $k = l + 2j + 1$ for some $j \geq 0$. Then $\sigma_k = -\theta_k$ and $t_k = -m + q_k$. We distinguish again three subcases. Assume first that $q \leq q_k - 1$. Then, $\|q\theta\| \geq |\theta_{k-1}|$, so that $q\theta$ and $q\theta - \theta_k$ are located in the same open interval of length one. It follows that (4.2) holds. Assume secondly that $q = q_k$. Then,

$$q_k\theta - \theta_k = p_k \quad \text{and} \quad q_k\theta = p_k + \theta_k.$$

This shows that (4.2) holds, since θ_k is positive because $k = l + 2j + 1$ is even. Assume thirdly that $q = q_k + v$ for some integer v with $1 \leq v \leq t_k = -m + q_k$. Then,

$$q\theta - \theta_k = p_k + v\theta \quad \text{and} \quad q\theta = p_k + \theta_k + v\theta.$$

Notice now that $\|v\theta\| \geq |\theta_{k-1}| > |\theta_k|$. Thus (4.2) holds. All cases have been checked.

When l is even, the numbers θ_{l+2j} (resp. θ_{l+2j+1}) turn to be positive (resp. negative), and the above argumentation remains valid provided that we replace the usual integer part $[\cdot]$ by the upper integer part $\lceil \cdot \rceil$. □

To illustrate this statement, take $\rho = 0$, $a_1 = 5$, $a_2 = 3$, $a_3 = 2$; then

$$V_0 = 0, \quad V_1 = 10^4, \quad V_2 = 10^4 10^4 10^4 0,$$

$$\begin{aligned}
V_3 &= 10^4 10^4 10^4 10^4 0 10^4 10^4 0 = 10^4 10^4 10^4 10^5 10^4 10^4 10^5, \\
V'_0 &= 0, \quad V'_1 = 0^4 1, \quad V'_2 = 00^4 10^4 10^4 1, \\
V'_3 &= 00^4 10^4 10^4 100^4 10^4 10^4 10^4 1 = 0^5 10^4 10^4 10^5 10^4 10^4 10^4 1.
\end{aligned}$$

Note also that

$$\begin{aligned}
M_0 &= 0, \quad M_1 = 0^4 1, \quad M_2 = 0^4 10^4 10^4 10, \\
M_3 &= 0^4 10^4 10^4 100^4 10^4 10^4 100^4 1 = 0^4 10^4 10^4 10^5 10^4 10^4 10^5 1.
\end{aligned}$$

By induction, we check that V_n is the mirror image of V'_n . We know that M_n^{--} is a palindrome. We also have that

$${}^-V_n^- = {}^-(V'_n)^- = M_n^{--},$$

where ${}^-W$ means the word W deprived of its first letter. In other words, for $n \geq 1$, the words V_n and V'_n deprived of their first and last letters are equal to the palindrome M_n^{--} .

5. Repetitions in a Sturmian word

We keep our notation. Recall that \mathbf{s} denotes an arbitrary Sturmian word of slope θ .

We show that Proposition 1 of [14] can be deduced from the recursion formulae for the words V_k and we give further informations on the occurrence of the various cases. Proposition 5.1 will be used in the next section to compare \mathbf{s} with four families of (shifted for two of them) periodic words, depending on a parameter k , constructing thus families of strong rational approximations to the associated Sturmian number.

Proposition 5.1. *Let k be an integer with $k \geq 0$. Then, there exist a uniquely determined non-empty suffix U_k of $M_k M_{k+1} = (M_k)^{a_{k+1}+1} M_{k-1}$ and an integer \tilde{a}_{k+1} such that*

$$\tilde{a}_{k+1} \in \{a_{k+1}, a_{k+1} + 1\}$$

and

$$\mathbf{s} = U_k (M_k)^{\tilde{a}_{k+1}} M_{k-1} M_k^- \dots$$

More precisely, when $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 2$, we have

$$U_k = R_{k+1} \quad \text{and} \quad \tilde{a}_{k+1} = a_{k+1}.$$

When $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1$, we have

$$U_k = R_{k+1} \quad \text{and} \quad \tilde{a}_{k+1} = \begin{cases} a_{k+1} + 1 & \text{if } b_{k+3} < a_{k+3}, \\ a_{k+1} & \text{if } b_{k+3} = a_{k+3}. \end{cases}$$

When $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2}$, we have $U_k = R_k M_{k+1}$. Moreover $\tilde{a}_{k+1} = a_{k+1}$, unless

$$a_{k+2} = 1, \quad a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 2,$$

or

$$a_{k+2} = 1, a_{k+3} = 1, b_{k+3} = 0, a_{k+4} = b_{k+4},$$

in which cases $\tilde{a}_{k+1} = a_{k+1} + 1$.

Remark. The fact that $\mathbf{s} = U_k(M_k)^{\tilde{a}_{k+1}}M_{k-1}M_k^- \dots$ means that after the prefix of length $|U_k|$, we have exactly $\tilde{a}_{k+1} + 1$ copies of M_k , followed by the prefix of M_k of length $q_{k-1} - 2$, since $M_{k-1}M_k^-$ and $M_kM_{k-1}^-$ differ only by their last letter. In addition, we observe that when $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2}$ we have $b_{k+1} = 0$ and we take $U_{k-1} = R_k$.

Proof. The idea of the proof is to show that the prefix of \mathbf{s} of length $2q_{k+1} + q_k - 1$ coincides with one of the three words $V_{k+1}^2V_k^-$ or $V_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1}^-$ or $V_kV_{k+1}V_{k+1}^-$.

Assume first that $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 2$. Then

$$V_{k+2} = V_{k+1}^{a_{k+2}-b_{k+2}}V_kV_{k+1}^{b_{k+2}} = V_{k+1}^2V_k^- \dots,$$

observing that V_k^- is a prefix of V_{k+1} (this follows from Definition 2.2). But

$$\begin{aligned} V_{k+1}V_{k+1}V_k &= R_{k+1}T_{k+1}R_{k+1}T_{k+1}R_kT_k \\ &= R_{k+1}M_{k+1}T_{k+1}R_kT_k \\ &= R_{k+1}M_{k+1}M_k^{b_{k+1}}T_kR_kT_k \\ &= R_{k+1}M_{k+1}M_k^{b_{k+1}+1}T_k = R_{k+1}M_k^{a_{k+1}}M_{k-1}M_k \dots \end{aligned}$$

Assume secondly that $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1$ and that $a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1$. Then

$$V_{k+3} = V_{k+2}^{a_{k+3}-b_{k+3}}V_{k+1}V_{k+2}^{b_{k+3}} = V_{k+2}V_{k+1}^- \dots = (V_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1}^{b_{k+2}+1})^- \dots = V_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1}^- \dots$$

Actually, we can be more precise and claim that $V_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1}V_k^-$ is a prefix of \mathbf{s} . This is obvious unless $b_{k+2} = 0$ (then $a_{k+2} = 1$ and $V_{k+2} = V_{k+1}V_k$) and $a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} = 1$ and $b_{k+3} = 0$ (then $V_{k+3} = V_{k+2}V_{k+1} = V_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1}$). Assume that these three equalities hold. If $a_{k+4} > b_{k+4}$, we have

$$V_{k+4} = V_{k+3}V_{k+2}^- \dots = V_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1}V_{k+2}^- \dots = V_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1}V_{k+1}V_k^- \dots,$$

then $V_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1}V_k^-$ is indeed a prefix of \mathbf{s} . Otherwise, we have

$$V_{k+4} = V_{k+2}V_{k+3} \dots = V_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1} \dots = V_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1}V_k \dots,$$

and the same conclusion holds.

We claim that

$$V_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1}V_k = R_{k+1}M_k^{a_{k+1}+1}M_{k-1}M_k^{b_{k+1}+1}T_k,$$

which yields that $U_k = R_{k+1}$ and $\tilde{a}_{k+1} = a_{k+1} + 1$. For the proof, we distinguish two cases, either $a_{k+1} > b_{k+1}$, or $a_{k+1} = b_{k+1}$. In the first case, we have

$$T_{k+1} = M_k^{b_{k+1}}T_k \quad \text{and} \quad R_{k+1} = R_kM_k^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}-1}M_{k-1},$$

so that we compute

$$\begin{aligned}
V_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1}V_k &= R_{k+1}T_{k+1}R_kT_kR_{k+1}T_{k+1}R_kT_k \\
&= R_{k+1}M_k^{b_{k+1}}T_kR_kT_kR_kM_k^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}-1}M_{k-1}M_k^{b_{k+1}}T_kR_kT_k \\
&= R_{k+1}M_k^{a_{k+1}+1}M_{k-1}M_k^{b_{k+1}+1}T_k.
\end{aligned}$$

For the latter case, we have

$$T_k = T_{k-1}, \quad R_k = R_{k-1}M_{k-1}^{a_k-1}M_{k-2}, \quad T_{k+1} = M_k^{a_{k+1}}T_{k-1} = M_k^{a_{k+1}}T_k, \quad R_{k+1} = R_{k-1}.$$

Thus

$$\begin{aligned}
V_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1}V_k &= R_{k+1}T_{k+1}R_kT_kR_{k+1}T_{k+1}R_kT_k \\
&= R_{k+1}M_k^{a_{k+1}}T_{k-1}R_{k-1}M_{k-1}^{a_k-1}M_{k-2}T_{k-1}R_{k-1}M_k^{a_{k+1}}T_kR_kT_k \\
&= R_{k+1}M_k^{a_{k+1}+1}M_{k-1}M_k^{a_{k+1}+1}T_k.
\end{aligned}$$

The claim is established.

Assume thirdly that $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1$ and that $a_{k+3} = b_{k+3}$. Then, $b_{k+2} = 0$ and $a_{k+2} = 1$. We find

$$V_{k+3} = V_{k+1}V_{k+2}^{a_{k+3}} = V_{k+1}(V_{k+1}V_k)^{a_{k+3}} = V_{k+1}^2V_k \dots$$

The first case shows that $U_k = R_{k+1}$ and $\tilde{a}_{k+1} = a_{k+1}$, as asserted.

Suppose finally that $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2}$. Then $b_{k+1} = 0$ and $a_{k+3} > b_{k+3}$, since $a_{k+3} = b_{k+3}$ should yield $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2} = 0$. Thus,

$$V_{k+3} = V_{k+2}^{a_{k+3}-b_{k+3}}V_{k+1}V_{k+2}^{b_{k+3}} = V_{k+2}V_{k+1}^- \dots = V_kV_{k+1}^{a_{k+2}}V_{k+1}^- \dots = V_kV_{k+1}V_{k+1}^- \dots$$

Here, again, we can be more precise and show that \mathbf{s} is either of the form

$$\mathbf{s} = V_kV_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1}V_k^- \dots, \tag{5.1}$$

or of the form

$$\mathbf{s} = V_kV_{k+1}V_{k+1}V_k^- \dots \tag{5.2}$$

If $a_{k+2} \geq 2$, we have

$$V_{k+3} = V_{k+2}V_{k+1}^- \dots = V_kV_{k+1}^{a_{k+2}}V_k^- \dots = V_kV_{k+1}^2V_k^- \dots$$

Thus (5.2) holds. When $a_{k+2} = 1$ and $a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 2$, we have $V_{k+2} = V_kV_{k+1}$ and

$$V_{k+3} = V_{k+2}^2V_{k+1}^- \dots = V_kV_{k+1}V_kV_{k+1}V_k^- \dots$$

Thus (5.1) holds. When $a_{k+2} = 1$, $a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} = 1$ and $b_{k+3} \geq 1$, we have

$$V_{k+3} = V_{k+2}V_{k+1}V_{k+2}^{b_{k+3}} = V_kV_{k+1}^2V_{k+2}^{b_{k+3}},$$

so that (5.2) holds true. When $a_{k+2} = 1$, $a_{k+3} = 1$ and $b_{k+3} = 0$, we have $V_{k+3} = V_k V_{k+1}^2$. If $a_{k+4} - b_{k+4} \geq 1$, we have

$$V_{k+4} = V_{k+3} V_{k+2}^- \dots = V_k V_{k+1}^2 V_k^- \dots$$

so that (5.2) holds, while

$$V_{k+4} = V_{k+2} V_{k+3} \dots = V_k V_{k+1} V_k V_{k+1}^2 \dots$$

if $a_{k+4} = b_{k+4}$. Then (5.1) holds. Now, we compute

$$\begin{aligned} V_k V_{k+1} V_{k+1} V_k &= R_k T_k R_{k+1} T_{k+1} R_{k+1} T_{k+1} R_k T_k = R_k T_k (R_k M_k^{a_{k+1}-1} M_{k-1}) M_{k+1} T_k R_k T_k \\ &= R_k M_k^{a_{k+1}} M_{k-1} M_k^{a_{k+1}} M_{k-1} M_k T_k = R_k M_{k+1} M_k^{a_{k+1}} M_{k-1} T_k, \end{aligned}$$

and

$$\begin{aligned} V_k V_{k+1} V_k V_{k+1} V_k &= R_k T_k R_{k+1} T_{k+1} R_k T_k R_{k+1} T_{k+1} R_k T_k \\ &= R_k T_k R_k M_k^{a_{k+1}-1} M_{k-1} T_k R_k T_k R_k M_k^{a_{k+1}-1} M_{k-1} T_k R_k T_k \\ &= R_k M_k^{a_{k+1}} M_{k-1} M_k^{a_{k+1}+1} M_{k-1} M_k T_k \\ &= R_k M_{k+1} M_k^{a_{k+1}+1} M_{k-1} M_k T_k. \end{aligned}$$

Thus $U_k = R_k M_{k+1}$ in both cases. We have $\tilde{a}_{k+1} = a_{k+1}$ when (5.2) holds, while $\tilde{a}_{k+1} = a_{k+1} + 1$ whenever (5.1) is satisfied. \square

We have used at several places the obvious property that V_k^- is a prefix of V_{k+1} , which holds since by definition V_k , V_{k+1} and \mathbf{s} share the same prefix of length $q_k - 1$. A question which arises naturally is to know when V_k is a prefix of V_{k+1} .

Proposition 5.2. *For any $k \geq 0$, the word V_k is a prefix of V_{k+1} if and only if the sequence b_1, \dots, b_{k+1} differs from $0, a_2, 0, a_4, \dots, a_{k+1}$ when k is odd, or differs from $a_1 - 1, 0, a_3, 0, \dots, a_{k+1}$ when k is even.*

For $k \geq 0$, let W_k denote the longest common prefix of $V_{k+1} V_k$ and $V_k V_{k+1}$.

Lemma 5.3. *We have $W_0 = 0^{a_1-1-b_1}$ and $W_{k+1} = V_{k+1}^{a_{k+2}-b_{k+2}} W_k$ for $k \geq 0$. Consequently, the length w_k of W_k is given by*

$$w_k = a_1 - 1 - b_1 + \sum_{j=1}^k (a_{j+1} - b_{j+1}) q_j = q_{k+1} + q_k - t_{k+1} - 2, \quad k \geq 0.$$

Proof. Recall that $V_{-1} = 1$, $V_0 = 0$, and $V_1 = V_0^{a_1-1-b_1} V_{-1} V_0^{b_1}$. This implies that $V_0 V_1 = V_0^{a_1-b_1} V_{-1} V_0^{b_1}$, thus

$$W_0 = V_0^{a_1-1-b_1}, \quad w_0 = a_1 - 1 - b_1.$$

We proceed by induction. Let $k \geq 0$ be an integer.

Assume first that $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1$.

Since $V_{k+2} = V_{k+1}^{a_{k+2}-b_{k+2}} V_k V_{k+1}^{b_{k+2}}$, we get

$$V_{k+2} V_{k+1} = V_{k+1}^{a_{k+2}-b_{k+2}} V_k V_{k+1}^{b_{k+2}+1}$$

and

$$V_{k+1} V_{k+2} = V_{k+1}^{a_{k+2}-b_{k+2}+1} V_k V_{k+1}^{b_{k+2}},$$

thus

$$W_{k+1} = V_{k+1}^{a_{k+2}-b_{k+2}} W_k.$$

Assume now that $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2}$. In that case, we know that $b_{k+1} = 0$. Then,

$$V_{k+2} V_{k+1} = V_k V_{k+1}^{a_{k+2}+1} = V_k V_k^{a_{k+1}} V_{k-1} V_k^{a_{k+1}} V_{k-1} V_{k+1}^{a_{k+2}-1}$$

and

$$V_{k+1} V_{k+2} = V_k^{a_{k+1}} V_{k-1} V_k V_{k+1}^{a_{k+2}},$$

thus

$$W_{k+1} = V_k^{a_{k+1}} W_{k-1} = W_k = V_{k+1}^{a_{k+2}-b_{k+2}} W_k.$$

Since q_k is the length of V_k , this proves the lemma. \square

Proof of Proposition 5.2. The word V_k is a prefix of V_{k+1} exactly when $w_k \geq q_k$. Lemma 5.3 tells us that $w_k \geq q_k$ if and only if $t_{k+1} \leq q_{k+1} - 2$. Observe finally that $t_{k+1} \leq q_{k+1} - 1$ with equality if and only if

$$b_{k+1} = a_{k+1}, b_k = 0, b_{k-1} = a_{k-1}, b_{k-2} = 0, \dots$$

This completes the proof. \square

6. The sequence of convergents contributing to the exponent of irrationality

In this section and the next one, $b \geq 2$ is an integer and ξ denotes one of the numbers $\xi_b(\theta, \rho)$ or $\xi'_b(\theta, \rho)$. We analyze the convergents which contribute to the exponent of irrationality of ξ , which we call ‘strong convergents’. According to [13], all of them are obtained by truncating the b -ary expansion of ξ and completing by periodicity. Thus, their denominators are either of the form $b^s - 1$ (purely periodic case) or $b^r(b^s - 1)$ (existence of a preperiod).

We adopt the following conventions of writing. Any finite word $Y = y_1 \dots y_r$ with letters in $\{0, \dots, b-1\}$ is as well viewed as the natural integer

$$Y = y_1 b^{r-1} + \dots + y_r,$$

whose sequence of b -ary digits is given by Y . Then, for any words $Y = y_1 \dots y_r$ and $Z = z_1 \dots z_s$, we have the b -ary expansions

$$\frac{Z}{b^s - 1} = 0.Z^\infty,$$

and

$$\frac{YZ - Y}{b^r(b^s - 1)} = 0.YZ^\infty,$$

where $0.z_1z_2\dots = \frac{z_1}{b} + \frac{z_2}{b^2} + \dots$ and YZ stands for the number whose b -ary sequence of digits is the concatenation of the words Y and Z , that is, $YZ = y_1 \dots y_r z_1 \dots z_s$.

Let u and v be two positive quantities depending upon a parameter k . As usual, we write $u \asymp v$ when there exist positive constants c_1 and c_2 , independent of k , such that $c_1u \leq v \leq c_2u$.

The candidates for the sequence of strong convergents belong to four types. We label them by the index $k \geq 0$. The sequences of finite words $(R_k)_{k \geq 0}$, $(T_k)_{k \geq 0}$, $(V_k)_{k \geq 0}$ are given by Theorem 2.1 (or Theorem 4.2), but we now replace the alphabet $\{0, 1\}$ by $\{0, b-1\}$. We recall that $R_0 = 0$ and T_0 is the empty word. Below, the height means the logarithmic height $\log H / \log b$, that is, roughly speaking, the largest exponent of b appearing in the denominator.

The first possible convergent is

$$(1)_k = \frac{R_{k+1} - R_k}{b^{r_k}(b^{r_{k+1}-r_k} - 1)},$$

with height $\asymp r_{k+1}$ and b -ary expansion

$$(1)_k = 0.R_k(M_k^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}-1}M_{k-1})^\infty.$$

Of course $(1)_k$ is meaningful only when $r_{k+1} > r_k$, that is to say when $a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} \geq 1$. The second candidate is

$$(2)_k = \frac{R_{k+1}T_k}{b^{r_{k+1}+t_k} - 1},$$

with height $\asymp r_{k+1} + t_k$, associated to the periodic word $(R_{k+1}T_k)^\infty$. The third is

$$(3)_k = \frac{R_{k+1}M_k - M_k}{b^{r_{k+1}}(b^{q_k} - 1)},$$

with height $\asymp r_{k+1} + q_k$, associated to the word $R_{k+1}M_k^\infty$. The fourth is

$$(4)_k = \frac{V_{k+1}}{b^{q_{k+1}} - 1},$$

with height $\asymp q_{k+1} = r_{k+1} + t_{k+1}$, associated to the periodic word $V_{k+1}^\infty = (R_{k+1}T_{k+1})^\infty$.

We say that a rational x precedes another one y , and we write $x \prec y$, when the height of x is less than the height of y . Clearly

$$(1)_k \prec (2)_k \preceq (4)_k.$$

We have $(2)_k = (4)_k$ exactly when $t_k = t_{k+1}$, that is to say when $b_{k+1} = 0$. Then,

$$(1)_k \prec (2)_k = (4)_k \prec (3)_k.$$

If $b_{k+1} \geq 1$, we have

$$t_{k+1} \geq t_k + q_k,$$

so that

$$(1)_k \prec (2)_k \prec (3)_k \prec (4)_k,$$

in this case. When $a_{k+1} = b_{k+1}$, obviously $b_{k+1} \geq 1$, so that the above inequality

$$(2)_k \prec (3)_k \prec (4)_k$$

hold with $(1)_k$ being omitted.

An important observation is that we have the following coincidences between levels $k-2$, $k-1$ and k .

If $a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} = 1$, then we have

$$(1)_k = (3)_{k-1},$$

since

$$R_k(M_k^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}-1}M_{k-1})^\infty = R_kM_{k-1}^\infty.$$

If $a_{k+1} = b_{k+1}$, then we have

$$(2)_k = (4)_{k-2},$$

since we have $R_{k+1} = R_{k-1}$ and $T_k = T_{k-1}$ (because $b_k = 0$), so that

$$R_{k+1}T_k = R_{k-1}T_{k-1} = V_{k-1}.$$

If, in addition, $b_{k-1} = 0$, then $T_{k-1} = T_{k-2}$ and $(2)_{k-2} = (2)_k = (4)_{k-2}$.

Observe also that if $a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} = 1$, then we have

$$(2)_k = \frac{V_k V_{k-1}}{b^{q_k+q_{k-1}} - 1},$$

since

$$R_{k+1}T_k = R_k M_{k-1} M_{k-1}^{b_k} T_{k-1} = R_k T_k R_{k-1} T_{k-1} = V_k V_{k-1},$$

noting that

$$T_k R_{k-1} = T_{k-1} V_{k-1}^{b_k} R_{k-1} = T_{k-1} (R_{k-1} T_{k-1})^{b_k} R_{k-1} = (T_{k-1} R_{k-1})^{b_k+1} = M_{k-1}^{b_k+1}.$$

To go further for linking consecutive blocks (with indices $k-1$ and k), we need to know when the rationals $(1)_k, (2)_k, (3)_k, (4)_k$ are indeed convergents. We indicate as well in the next proposition the value of the exponential rate of approximation $\mu_k(j)$ such

$$|\xi - (j)_k| \asymp \frac{1}{H((j)_k)^{\mu_k(j)}} = \frac{1}{b^{h((j)_k)^{\mu_k(j)}}},$$

for all large k and $1 \leq j \leq 4$, where $h((j)_k)$ is the base- b logarithm of the height $H((j)_k)$ of $(j)_k$. We determine in which cases the exponent $\mu_k(j)$ is bigger than 2, thanks to Proposition 5.1. To that purpose, let us introduce the following quantities

$$\begin{aligned}\nu_k(1) &= 1 + \frac{r_{k+1} + t_k}{r_{k+1}}, & \nu_k(2) &= 1 + \frac{r_{k+1} + q_k}{r_{k+1} + t_k}, \\ \nu_k(3) &= 1 + \frac{q_{k+1}}{r_{k+1} + q_k}, & \nu_k(4) &= 1 + \frac{r_{k+2}}{q_{k+1}}.\end{aligned}$$

They are equal to one plus the ratio of the height of two consecutive points in the sequence $\dots (1)_k, (2)_k, (3)_k, (4)_k, (1)_{k+1}, \dots$. Then, we can state the following criterion.

Proposition 6.1. *Let $k \geq 2$ be an integer such that t_{k-1} is positive. The rational*

$$(1)_k = \frac{R_{k+1} - R_k}{b^{r_k}(b^{r_{k+1}-r_k} - 1)}$$

is a convergent to ξ if and only if

$$a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} \geq 1, a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1 \quad \text{and then} \quad \mu_k(1) = \nu_k(1),$$

or

$$b_k \geq 1, a_{k+1} = 1, b_{k+1} = 0, a_{k+2} = b_{k+2} \quad \text{and then} \quad \mu_k(1) = \nu_{k-1}(3).$$

The rational

$$(2)_k = \frac{R_{k+1}T_k}{b^{r_{k+1}+t_k} - 1}$$

is a convergent to ξ if and only if $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1$ and then

$$\mu_k(2) = \begin{cases} \nu_k(2) & \text{if } b_{k+1} \geq 1, \\ \nu_k(4) & \text{if } b_{k+1} = 0, a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1, \\ \nu_{k+2}(2) & \text{if } b_{k+1} = 0, a_{k+3} = b_{k+3}. \end{cases}$$

The rational

$$(3)_k = \frac{R_{k+1}M_k - R_{k+1}}{b^{r_{k+1}}(b^{q_k} - 1)}$$

is a convergent to ξ if and only if

$$b_{k+1} \geq 1, a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 2 \quad \text{and then} \quad \mu_k(3) = \nu_k(3),$$

or

$$a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1, a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1 \quad \text{and then} \quad \mu_k(3) = \nu_{k+1}(1),$$

or

$$b_{k+1} \geq 1, a_{k+2} = 1, b_{k+2} = 0, a_{k+3} = b_{k+3} \quad \text{and then} \quad \mu_k(3) = \nu_k(3),$$

The rational

$$(4)_k = \frac{V_{k+1}}{b^{q_{k+1}} - 1}$$

is a convergent to ξ if and only if

$$a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 2, a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1 \quad \text{and then} \quad \mu_k(4) = \nu_k(4),$$

or

$$b_{k+1} = 0, a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1, a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1 \quad \text{and then} \quad \mu_k(4) = \nu_k(2) = \nu_k(4),$$

or

$$a_{k+3} = b_{k+3} \quad \text{and then} \quad \mu_k(4) = \nu_{k+2}(2) = 1 + \nu_k(4).$$

Proof. We only prove Proposition 6.1 assuming that t_{k-1} is large enough. In fact, crude estimates of the constants involved in the symbols \asymp show that the lower bound $b^{t_{k-1}} \geq 4$ is sufficient for our purpose. Relaxing the assumption to $t_{k-1} \geq 1$ follows from an alternative argumentation which will be given in the next Section 7. Our present approach is based on Legendre's theorem asserting that P/Q is a convergent to ξ when $|\xi - P/Q| < 1/(2Q^2)$.

Let \mathbf{s} be the Sturmian word composed of the b -ary digits of ξ .

For $(1)_k$, the relevant assumption is $a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} \geq 1$. Assume first that $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1$. Then, Proposition 5.1 gives

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{s} &= R_{k+1} M_k^{\tilde{a}_{k+1}} M_{k-1} M_k^- \dots \\ &= R_k M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1} M_k^{\tilde{a}_{k+1}} M_{k-1} \dots \\ &= R_k M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1} M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_k^{\tilde{a}_{k+1} - a_{k+1} + b_{k+1} + 1} M_{k-1} \dots \\ &= R_k M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1} M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_k M_{k-1} \dots, \end{aligned}$$

to be compared with the word $R_k(M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1})^\infty$. When $a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} \geq 2$, we can write

$$R_k(M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1})^\infty = R_k M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1} M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1} M_k \dots$$

to obtain the estimate

$$|\xi - (1)_k| \asymp \frac{1}{b^{r_k + 2(a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1)q_k + 2q_{k-1} + q_k}} = \frac{1}{b^{2r_{k+1} + t_k}}.$$

When $a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} = 1$ the same estimate holds, since then

$$\mathbf{s} = R_k M_{k-1} M_k M_{k-1} \dots = R_k M_{k-1}^{a_k + 1} M_{k-2} M_{k-1} \dots,$$

while

$$R_k(M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1})^\infty = R_k M_{k-1}^\infty = R_k M_{k-1}^{a_k + 1} M_{k-1} M_{k-2} \dots$$

Thus $(1)_k$ is a convergent to ξ and

$$\mu_k(1) = \frac{2r_{k+1} + t_k}{r_{k+1}} = 1 + \frac{r_{k+1} + t_k}{r_{k+1}} = \nu_k(1).$$

When $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2}$, we have $b_{k+1} = 0$, $U_k = R_k M_{k+1}$, and Proposition 5.1 gives

$$\mathbf{s} = U_k \dots = R_k M_k^{a_{k+1}-1} M_k M_{k-1} \dots$$

We distinguish two subcases. If $a_{k+1} \geq 2$, we write

$$R_k (M_k^{a_{k+1}-1} M_{k-1})^\infty = R_k M_k^{a_{k+1}-1} M_{k-1} M_k M_k^{a_{k+1}-2} M_{k-1} \dots$$

Thus,

$$|\xi - (1)_k| \asymp \frac{1}{b^{r_k + a_{k+1}q_k + q_{k-1}}} = \frac{1}{b^{r_{k+1} + q_k}},$$

so that

$$(r_{k+1} + q_k) - 2r_{k+1} = q_k - r_{k+1} = q_k - (r_k + (a_{k+1} - 1)q_k + q_{k-1}) = t_k - q_{k+1} + q_k$$

is negative, since $q_{k+1} > 2q_k$. Therefore $(1)_k$ is not a convergent in this subcase. When $a_{k+1} = 1$, write

$$\mathbf{s} = R_k M_k M_{k-1} \dots = R_k M_{k-1}^{a_k} M_{k-2} M_{k-1} \dots,$$

while

$$R_k M_{k-1}^\infty = R_k M_{k-1}^{a_k} M_{k-1} M_{k-2} \dots$$

Thus,

$$|\xi - (1)_k| \asymp \frac{1}{b^{r_k + (a_k+1)q_{k-1} + q_{k-2}}} = \frac{1}{b^{r_k + q_k + q_{k-1}}} = \frac{1}{b^{r_{k+1} + q_k}},$$

so that

$$\begin{aligned} (r_{k+1} + q_k) - 2r_{k+1} &= -r_{k+1} + q_k = -(r_k + q_{k-1}) + q_k \\ &= t_k - q_{k-1} = t_{k-1} + (b_k - 1)q_{k-1}. \end{aligned}$$

We conclude by noticing that $t_{k-1} + (b_k - 1)q_{k-1}$ is positive if $b_k \geq 1$ and negative when $b_k = 0$. Thus,

$$\mu_k(1) = \frac{r_{k+1} + q_k}{r_{k+1}} = 1 + \frac{q_k}{r_{k+1}} = 1 + \frac{q_k}{r_k + q_{k-1}} = \nu_{k-1}(3).$$

Observe that, in this case, we have the ordering

$$(1)_k = (3)_{k-1} \prec (2)_{k+1} = (4)_{k-1},$$

while $(2)_k, (3)_k, (4)_k$ and $(1)_{k+1}$ are not convergents to ξ .

We now deal with $(2)_k$. Assume first that $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1$.

In the subcase $a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} \geq 1$ and $b_{k+1} \geq 1$, we have $R_{k+1} = R_k M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1}$ and Proposition 5.1 gives

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbf{s} &= R_{k+1} M_k^{\tilde{a}_{k+1}} M_{k-1} M_k^- \dots \\ &= R_k M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1} M_k^{\tilde{a}_{k+1}} M_{k-1} M_k^- \dots \\ &= R_k M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1} M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1}} M_k^{\tilde{a}_{k+1} - a_{k+1} + b_{k+1}} M_{k-1} M_k^- \dots \\ &= R_k M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1} M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1}} M_k M_{k-1} \dots \end{aligned}$$

since $\tilde{a}_{k+1} - a_{k+1} + b_{k+1} \geq 1$. Comparing with the word

$$(R_k M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1} T_k)^\infty = R_k M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1} M_k^{a_{k+1} - b_{k+1}} M_{k-1} M_k \dots,$$

we obtain

$$|\xi - (2)_k| \asymp \frac{1}{b^{r_k + 2(a_{k+1} - b_{k+1})q_k + 2q_{k-1}}} = \frac{1}{b^{2(r_{k+1} + t_k) + r_k}}.$$

Thus, $(2)_k$ is a convergent of ξ and

$$\mu_k(2) = \frac{2(r_{k+1} + t_k) + r_k}{r_{k+1} + t_k} = 2 + \frac{r_k}{r_{k+1} + t_k} = 1 + \frac{r_{k+1} + q_k}{r_{k+1} + t_k} = \nu_k(2).$$

In the subcase $a_{k+1} = b_{k+1}$ (and thus $b_{k+1} \geq 1$), we have $(2)_k = (4)_{k-2}$. Assuming temporarily that Proposition 6.1 has been checked for $(4)_{k-2}$, it yields that $(2)_k$ is again a convergent to ξ with exponent $\mu_k(2) = \mu_{k-2}(4) = \nu_k(2)$ as asserted.

Consider finally the subcase $b_{k+1} = 0$. Then $(2)_k = (4)_k$ and Proposition 6.1 for $(4)_k$, tells us that $(2)_k$ is indeed a convergent to ξ with exponent $\mu_k(2) = \mu_k(4)$ which will be computed below.

Assume now that $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2}$. Then, Proposition 5.1 gives

$$\mathbf{s} = R_k M_{k+1} \dots = R_k M_k^{a_{k+1}} M_{k-1} \dots = R_k M_k^{a_{k+1} - 1} M_k M_{k-1} \dots,$$

while

$$(R_{k+1} T_k)^\infty = R_k M_k^{a_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1} T_k R_k \dots = R_k M_k^{a_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1} M_k \dots$$

since $b_{k+1} = 0$. It follows that

$$|\xi - (2)_k| \asymp \frac{1}{b^{r_k + a_{k+1}q_k + q_{k-1}}} = \frac{1}{b^{r_{k+1} + q_k}} = \frac{1}{b^{2(r_{k+1} + t_k) - (q_{k+1} - r_k)}}.$$

Then $(2)_k$ is not a convergent to ξ .

We now deal with $(3)_k$. Assume first that $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1$. Proposition 5.1 gives

$$\mathbf{s} = R_{k+1} M_k^{\tilde{a}_{k+1}} M_{k-1} M_k^- \dots$$

Since

$$R_{k+1} M_k^\infty = R_{k+1} M_k^{\tilde{a}_{k+1}} M_k M_{k-1} \dots$$

we obtain the estimate

$$|\xi - (3)_k| \asymp \frac{1}{b^{r_{k+1} + (\tilde{a}_{k+1} + 1)q_k + q_{k-1}}}.$$

Write

$$\begin{aligned} (r_{k+1} + (\tilde{a}_{k+1} + 1)q_k + q_{k-1}) - 2(r_{k+1} + q_k) &= -r_{k+1} + (\tilde{a}_{k+1} - 1)q_k + q_{k-1} \\ &= t_{k+1} + (\tilde{a}_{k+1} - a_{k+1} - 1)q_k. \end{aligned}$$

If $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1$ and $a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1$, we know that $\tilde{a}_{k+1} = a_{k+1} + 1$, so that $t_{k+1} + (\tilde{a}_{k+1} - a_{k+1} - 1)q_k > 0$. If $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 2$, or if $a_{k+2} = 1, b_{k+2} = 0, a_{k+3} = b_{k+3}$, we know that $\tilde{a}_{k+1} = a_{k+1}$, so that

$$t_{k+1} + (\tilde{a}_{k+1} - a_{k+1} - 1)q_k = t_k + (b_{k+1} - 1)q_k.$$

Now, $t_k + (b_{k+1} - 1)q_k$ is positive when $b_{k+1} \geq 1$ and negative when $b_{k+1} = 0$. We get the three cases announced. Concerning the exponent $\mu_k(3)$, we find

$$\mu_k(3) = \frac{r_{k+1} + (\tilde{a}_{k+1} + 1)q_k + q_{k-1}}{r_{k+1} + q_k}.$$

When $\tilde{a}_{k+1} = a_{k+1}$, we get

$$\mu_k(3) = \frac{r_{k+1} + q_{k+1} + q_k}{r_{k+1} + q_k} = 1 + \frac{q_{k+1}}{r_{k+1} + q_k} = \nu_k(3),$$

while, in the case $\tilde{a}_{k+1} = a_{k+1} + 1$, we have

$$\mu_k(3) = \frac{r_{k+1} + q_{k+1} + 2q_k}{r_{k+1} + q_k} = 1 + \frac{q_{k+1} + q_k}{r_{k+1} + q_k} = 1 + \frac{r_{k+2} + t_{k+1}}{r_{k+2}} = \nu_{k+1}(1),$$

since $r_{k+2} = r_{k+1} + q_k$ when $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1$. It remains for us to prove that $(3)_k$ is not a convergent when $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2}$. Then, $b_{k+1} = 0$ and $r_{k+1} = r_k + (a_{k+1} - 1)q_k + q_{k-1}$. In this case, Proposition 5.1 gives

$$\mathbf{s} = R_k M_{k+1} \dots = R_k M_k^{a_{k+1} - 1} M_k M_{k-1} \dots$$

while

$$R_{k+1} M_k^\infty = R_k M_k^{a_{k+1} - 1} M_{k-1} M_k \dots$$

Thus

$$|\xi - (3)_k| \asymp \frac{1}{b^{r_k + a_{k+1}q_k + q_{k-1}}} \asymp \frac{1}{b^{r_{k+1} + q_k}},$$

and $(3)_k$ is not a convergent to ξ .

For the last rational

$$(4)_k = \frac{V_{k+1}}{b^{q_{k+1}} - 1}$$

Proposition 5.1 tells us that $\mathbf{s} = V_{k+1}^2 V_k^- \dots$ whenever

$$a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 2$$

or

$$a_{k+2} = 1 \quad \text{and} \quad b_{k+2} = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad a_{k+3} = b_{k+3}.$$

Then, the initial exponent of repetition of V_{k+1} is clearly larger than 2, so that $(4)_k$ is a convergent to ξ . When $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1$ and $a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1$, we have

$$\mathbf{s} = V_{k+1} V_k V_{k+1}^- \dots$$

By Lemma 5.3, the common prefix W_k to $V_k V_{k+1}$ and $V_{k+1} V_k$ has length

$$w_k = a_1 - 1 - b_1 + \sum_{j=1}^k (a_{j+1} - b_{j+1}) q_j = q_{k+1} + q_k - t_{k+1} - 2.$$

Noting that

$$t_{k+1} = \sum_{j=0}^k b_{j+1} q_j$$

is larger or smaller than q_k when $b_{k+1} \geq 1$ or $b_{k+1} = 0$, we deduce that $(4)_k$ is then a convergent to ξ when $b_{k+1} = 0$ and is not when $b_{k+1} \geq 1$. This yields the case

$$b_{k+1} = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1 \quad \text{and} \quad a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1.$$

When $a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1$ and $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1$, Proposition 5.1, with k replaced by $k + 1$, tells us that

$$\mathbf{s} = R_{k+2} M_{k+1} \dots = R_{k+1} M_{k+1}^{a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} - 1} M_k M_{k+1} \dots,$$

while

$$V_{k+1}^\infty = R_{k+1} M_{k+1}^\infty = R_{k+1} M_{k+1}^{a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} - 1} M_{k+1} M_k \dots$$

It follows that

$$|\xi - (4)_k| \asymp \frac{1}{b^{r_{k+1} + (a_{k+2} - b_{k+2}) q_{k+1} + q_k}} = \frac{1}{b^{r_{k+2} + q_{k+1}}}.$$

Thus,

$$\mu_k(4) = \frac{r_{k+2} + q_{k+1}}{q_{k+1}} = 1 + \frac{r_{k+2}}{q_{k+1}} = \nu_k(4).$$

Notice that $\nu_k(4) = \nu_k(2)$ in the case $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1$ and $b_{k+1} = 0$, since $(1)_{k+1} = (3)_k$ and $(4)_k = (2)_k$.

When $a_{k+3} = b_{k+3}$, Proposition 5.1 with k replaced by $k + 1$, gives

$$\mathbf{s} = R_{k+1} M_{k+2} M_{k+1}^{\tilde{a}_{k+2}} \dots = R_{k+1} M_{k+1}^{a_{k+2}} M_k M_{k+1} \dots$$

It follows that

$$|\xi - (4)_k| \asymp \frac{1}{b^{r_{k+1} + (a_{k+2} + 1)q_{k+1} + q_k}} = \frac{1}{b^{r_{k+2} + 2q_{k+1}}},$$

since $r_{k+2} = r_{k+1} + (a_{k+2} - 1)q_{k+1} + q_k$. Thus,

$$\mu_k(4) = \frac{r_{k+2} + 2q_{k+1}}{q_{k+1}} = 2 + \frac{r_{k+2}}{q_{k+1}} = 1 + \nu_k(4) = \nu_{k+2}(2),$$

noting that

$$r_{k+2} + q_{k+1} = r_{k+1} + q_{k+2} = r_{k+3} + q_{k+2},$$

and

$$q_{k+1} = r_{k+1} + t_{k+1} = r_{k+3} + t_{k+2},$$

since $b_{k+2} = 0$.

When $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2}$, the word \mathbf{s} has a prefix of the form

$$\mathbf{s} = V_{k+2} \dots = V_k V_{k+1}^{b_{k+2}} \dots$$

and the common prefix of V_{k+1}^∞ and \mathbf{s} has length at most

$$w_k \leq q_{k+1} + q_k - 2 < 2q_{k+1}.$$

Thus, $(4)_k$ cannot be a convergent to ξ . □

The next proposition describes a tail of the sequence of strong convergents ordered by increasing height. We start with the cyclic sequence \mathcal{S}

$$(1)_0, (2)_0, (3)_0, (4)_0, (1)_1, \dots, (4)_{k-1}, (1)_k, (2)_k, (3)_k, (4)_k, (1)_{k+1}, \dots$$

built with the $(j)_k$. As already observed, some elements of \mathcal{S} may coincide and the height function is not necessarily increasing along \mathcal{S} . Assume that \mathbf{s} differs from \mathbf{c}_θ , so that t_k is positive for any $k \geq h$ and some $h \geq 1$. Then, let \mathcal{S}^+ be the tail of \mathcal{S} formed by the elements $(j)_k$ with $k \geq h + 1$. Assuming moreover that $1 \leq b_k \leq a_k - 2$ for every $k \geq h + 1$, Proposition 6.1 tells us that the sequence of strong convergents $(j)_k$, restricted to the indices $k \geq h + 1$, coincides with \mathcal{S}^+ . Otherwise, the following modifications are needed.

Proposition 6.2. *A tail of the ordered sequence of strong convergents to ξ is obtained by applying to \mathcal{S}^+ the following replacement rules.*

(i) *Assume $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2}$. When $b_k \geq 1$, we replace the string of seven elements $(4)_{k-1}, \dots, (2)_{k+1}$ by the single element $(4)_{k-1} = (2)_{k+1}$. When $b_k = 0$, we replace the string of nine elements $(2)_{k-1}, \dots, (2)_{k+1}$ by the single element $(2)_{k-1} = (4)_{k-1} = (2)_{k+1}$.*

(ii) *Assume $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1$ and $a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1$. When $b_{k+1} \geq 1$, we replace the three elements $(3)_k, (4)_k, (1)_{k+1}$ by the single element $(3)_k = (1)_{k+1}$, and the four elements $(2)_k, (3)_k, (4)_k, (1)_{k+1}$ by the pair*

$$(2)_k = (4)_k \prec (3)_k = (1)_{k+1},$$

when $b_{k+1} = 0$.

(iii) Assume that $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 2$ and $a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1$. When $b_{k+1} = 0$, we replace the three elements $(2)_k, (3)_k, (4)_k$ by the single element $(2)_k = (4)_k$.

Remark. Observe that there is no overlap for the above replacement rules, since the case (i) cannot appear for two consecutive indices k by Ostrowski's numeration rules.

Proof. We check in each case (i), (ii) and (iii) that the elements $(j)_k$ in \mathcal{S} which are erased do not belong to the list provided by Proposition 6.1, while the remaining ones belong indeed to the list.

For instance, in the case (i) with $b_k = 0$, Proposition 6.1 tells us that $\mu_{k-1}(2) = \nu_{k+1}(2)$. Moreover,

$$(2)_{k-1} = (4)_{k-1} = (2)_{k+1} \prec (3)_{k+1}$$

are convergents to ξ , while the intermediate rationals $(3)_{k-1}, (1)_k, (2)_k, (3)_k, (4)_k, (1)_{k+1}$ are not, as can be verified by reading the necessary and sufficient conditions displayed in Proposition 6.1 for each element involved. \square

It will be proved in Proposition 7.2 that the subset of convergents to ξ given by Proposition 6.1 provides all the convergents contributing to the irrationality exponent of ξ . We thus obtain the

Theorem 6.3. *The irrationality exponent of ξ is equal to*

$$\limsup_{k \rightarrow +\infty} \max\{\mu_k(1), \mu_k(2), \mu_k(3), \mu_k(4)\} = \max\{\nu(1), \nu(2), \nu(3), \nu(4)\},$$

where

$$\nu(1) = \limsup_{k \rightarrow +\infty} \{\nu_k(1) : a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} \geq 1 \text{ and } a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1\},$$

$$\nu(2) = \limsup_{k \rightarrow +\infty} \{\nu_k(2) : a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1\},$$

$$\nu(3) = \limsup_{k \rightarrow +\infty} \{\nu_k(3)\},$$

$$\nu(4) = \limsup_{k \rightarrow +\infty} \{\nu_k(4)\}.$$

Proof. For any convergent $(j)_k$ to ξ , we have expressed $\mu_k(j)$ as some value $\nu_{k'}(j')$, thanks to Proposition 6.1. Conversely, for any given $\nu_k(j)$, we analyze under which conditions it contributes to the exponent of irrationality of ξ . For instance, Proposition 6.1 tells us that $\nu_k(1)$ occurs exactly when $a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} \geq 1$ and $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1$, leading to the definition of $\nu(1)$. Similarly, $\nu_k(2)$ appears in Proposition 6.1 if and only if

$$b_{k+1} \geq 1, \quad a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1,$$

or

$$b_{k+1} = 0, \quad a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1, \quad a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1,$$

or

$$a_{k+1} = b_{k+1}.$$

Remark first that the third case is included in the first case, because $a_{k+1} = b_{k+1}$ implies $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1$ by Ostrowski's rules. Recall that $(2)_k = (4)_k$ when $b_{k+1} = 0$. Observe now that the assumptions $b_{k+1} = 0$ and $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1$ yield the inequality $\nu_k(2) \leq \nu_k(4)$, with equality if and only if $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1$, since $t_{k+1} = t_k$ and

$$\nu_k(2) = 1 + \frac{r_{k+1} + q_k}{r_{k+1} + t_k} = 1 + \frac{r_{k+2} - (a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} - 1)q_{k+1}}{q_{k+1}} \leq 1 + \frac{r_{k+2}}{q_{k+1}} = \nu_k(4).$$

We may thus remove the condition $b_{k+1} \geq 1$ in the first case, since the additional contributions are taken into account by $\nu(4)$. Finally, the single constraint $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1$ remains. We are thus led to introduce the quantity $\nu(2)$.

We now deal with the contribution of $\nu_k(4)$. It occurs in Proposition 6.1 exactly when

$$a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 2, \quad a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1,$$

or

$$b_{k+1} = 0, \quad a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1, \quad a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1.$$

Observe that $\nu_k(4) = 1 + \frac{r_{k+2}}{q_{k+1}}$ is at most equal to 2 when $b_{k+1} \geq 1$ and $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1$, since then

$$r_{k+2} = r_{k+1} + q_k = \begin{cases} r_k + q_{k+1} - b_{k+1}q_k \leq q_{k+1} - t_k & \text{if } a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} \geq 1, \\ r_{k-1} + q_k \leq q_{k+1} & \text{if } a_{k+1} = b_{k+1}. \end{cases}$$

We may thus forget the condition $b_{k+1} = 0$ in the second case above. Observe also that $\nu_k(4) < 2$ when $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2}$. It remains the constraint $a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1$. Notice however that we may remove this last constraint as asserted. Indeed, when $a_{k+3} = b_{k+3}$, Proposition 6.1 tells us that $(4)_k = (2)_{k+2}$ is a convergent to ξ with approximation exponent $\nu_{k+2}(2) = 1 + \nu_k(4)$. Since $a_{k+4} - b_{k+4} \geq 1$ by Ostrowski's rules, the number $\nu_{k+2}(2) > \nu_k(4)$ is taken into account by $\nu(2)$. We may thus define $\nu(4)$ unconditionally as above.

We finally deal with the contribution of $\nu_k(3)$. It appears when

$$b_{k+1} \geq 1, \quad a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 2,$$

or

$$b_{k+1} \geq 1, \quad a_{k+2} = 1, \quad b_{k+2} = 0, \quad a_{k+3} = b_{k+3}.$$

We may relax the constraints as follows. We first forget the assumption $b_{k+1} \geq 1$, since when $b_{k+1} = 0$, we have $r_{k+1} = r_k + q_{k+1} - q_k$, so that

$$\nu_k(3) = 1 + \frac{q_{k+1}}{r_{k+1} + q_k} = 1 + \frac{q_{k+1}}{r_k + q_{k+1}} < 2.$$

We may also relax the assumptions $a_{k+2} = 1, b_{k+2} = 0, a_{k+3} = b_{k+3}$ in the second case above to $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1$, since when $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} = 1$ and $a_{k+3} - b_{k+3} \geq 1$, we have $(3)_k = (1)_{k+1}$, while

$$\nu_k(3) = 1 + \frac{q_{k+1}}{r_{k+1} + q_k} = 1 + \frac{q_{k+1}}{r_{k+2}} < 1 + \frac{q_{k+1} + q_k}{r_{k+2}} = 1 + \frac{r_{k+2} + t_{k+1}}{r_{k+2}} = \nu_{k+1}(1).$$

The additional contributions are then covered by $\nu(1)$. It remains the constraint $a_{k+2} - b_{k+2} \geq 1$. But when $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2}$, we have $b_{k+1} = 0$, so that $\nu_k(3) \leq 2$, as already observed. \square

7. The partial quotients

We keep the notation of the previous section.

For $k \geq 0$, recall that we have set

$$c_k = b^{r_k + q_{k-1}} \frac{b^{(a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} - 1)q_k} - 1}{b^{q_k} - 1}, \quad d_k = b^{t_k} - 1,$$

$$e_k = b^{r_k} - 1, \quad f_k = b^{t_k} \frac{b^{b_{k+1}q_k} - 1}{b^{q_k} - 1}.$$

The integers c_k, d_k, e_k, f_k are positive, unless $t_k = 0$ (and then $d_k = 0$) or $b_{k+1} = 0$ (and then $f_k = 0$) or $a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} \leq 1$ (and then $c_k = 0$ if $a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} = 1$, while otherwise $c_k = -b^{r_k - 1} = -e_{k-1} - 1$, by (2.3)).

Recall that we have defined the possible convergents by

$$(1)_k = \frac{R_{k+1} - R_k}{b^{r_k}(b^{r_{k+1} - r_k} - 1)}, \quad (2)_k = \frac{R_{k+1}T_k}{b^{r_{k+1} + t_k} - 1}, \quad k \geq 0,$$

$$(3)_k = \frac{R_{k+1}M_k - M_k}{b^{r_{k+1}}(b^{q_k} - 1)}, \quad (4)_k = \frac{V_{k+1}}{b^{q_{k+1}} - 1}, \quad k \geq 0.$$

Put also

$$(4)_{-1} = \frac{V_0}{b^{q_0} - 1} = \frac{0}{b - 1}.$$

From a Diophantine point of view, $(1)_k$ is meaningful only when $r_{k+1} > r_k$, that is to say when $a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} \geq 1$. Nevertheless, it can be formally defined as well when $r_{k+1} < r_k$, in which case numerator and denominator are negative integers.

In the sequel, the notation $(1)_k = c_k \cdot (4)_{k-1} + (3)_{k-1}$ means that the numerator (resp., denominator) of $(1)_k$ is equal to c_k times the numerator (resp., denominator) of $(4)_{k-1}$ plus the numerator (resp., denominator) of $(3)_{k-1}$. With some abuse of notation,

$$(2)_k - (1)_k = \frac{R_{k+1}T_k - (R_{k+1} - R_k)}{b^{r_{k+1} + t_k} - 1 - (b^{r_{k+1}} - b^{r_k})}$$

stands below for the ratio of the difference between the numerators and denominators of $(2)_k$ and $(1)_k$.

Lemma 7.1. For $k \geq 0$, we have the following relations:

$$(1)_k = c_k \cdot (4)_{k-1} + (3)_{k-1}, \quad (k \neq 0),$$

$$(2)_k - (1)_k = d_k \cdot (1)_k + (4)_{k-1},$$

$$(2)_k = 1 \cdot ((2)_k - (1)_k) + (1)_k,$$

$$(3)_k = e_k \cdot (2)_k + ((2)_k - (1)_k),$$

$$(4)_k = f_k \cdot (3)_k + (2)_k.$$

Proof. Let us begin with the first equality. If $a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} \geq 1$, then

$$\begin{aligned} c_k(b^{q_k} - 1) + b^{r_k}(b^{q_{k-1}} - 1) &= b^{r_k+q_{k-1}}(b^{(a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}-1)q_k} - 1) + b^{r_k}(b^{q_{k-1}} - 1) \\ &= b^{r_k+(a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}-1)q_k+q_{k-1}} - b^{r_k} \\ &= b^{r_{k+1}} - b^{r_k}, \end{aligned}$$

which is the denominator of $(1)_k$. Likewise, we have

$$\begin{aligned} V_k \times b^{r_k+q_{k-1}} \frac{b^{(a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}-1)q_k} - 1}{b^{q_k} - 1} \\ &= R_k T_k \times (b^{r_k+q_{k-1}} + b^{r_k+q_{k-1}+q_k} + \dots + b^{r_k+q_{k-1}+(a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}-2)q_k}) \\ &= (R_k T_k)^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}-1} b^{r_k+q_{k-1}} \\ &= (R_k T_k)^{a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}-1} R_k M_{k-1} - R_k M_{k-1} \\ &= R_{k+1} - R_k M_{k-1} = (R_{k+1} - R_k) - (R_k M_{k-1} - R_k), \end{aligned}$$

if $a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} \geq 2$, while

$$V_k \times b^{r_k+q_{k-1}} \frac{b^{(a_{k+1}-b_{k+1}-1)q_k} - 1}{b^{q_k} - 1} = 0 = (R_{k+1} - R_k) - (R_k M_{k-1} - R_k),$$

if $a_{k+1} - b_{k+1} = 1$, because we then have $R_{k+1} = R_k M_{k-1}$. In both cases we end up with the numerator of $(1)_k$ minus the numerator of $(4)_{k-1}$.

Now, assume that $a_{k+1} = b_{k+1}$. Then, $c_k = -b^{r_{k-1}}$ and we check that

$$(-b^{r_{k-1}})(b^{q_k} - 1) + b^{r_k}(b^{q_{k-1}} - 1) = b^{r_{k-1}} - b^{r_k} = b^{r_{k+1}} - b^{r_k},$$

since $r_{k-1} + q_k = r_k + q_{k-1}$ and $r_{k-1} = r_{k+1}$. As for the numerators, we have

$$\begin{aligned} V_k \times (-b^{r_{k-1}}) &= -V_k R_{k-1} + R_{k-1} \\ &= -R_k T_k R_{k-1} + R_{k-1} \\ &= -R_k M_{k-1} + R_{k+1} = (R_{k+1} - R_k) - (R_k M_{k-1} - R_k), \end{aligned}$$

which confirms our claim.

For the second equality, observe that

$$b^{t_k} (b^{r_k} (b^{r_{k+1}-r_k} - 1)) + (b^{q_k} - 1) = b^{q_k+r_{k+1}} - b^{t_k+r_k} + b^{q_k} - 1 = b^{q_k+r_{k+1}} - 1$$

is the denominator of $(2)_k$. Note also that

$$b^{t_k} (R_{k+1} - R_k) = R_{k+1}T_k - R_kT_k = R_{k+1}T_k - V_k$$

is the numerator of $(2)_k$ minus the numerator of $(4)_k$. This completes the proof of the second equality. The third one is a tautology. The remaining two equalities are proved in a similar way than the second one. We omit the details. \square

Define two sequences $(P_j)_{j \geq -1}$ and $(Q_j)_{j \geq -1}$ of integers by setting

$$P_{-1} = b - 1, \quad Q_{-1} = 0, \quad P_0 = 0, \quad Q_0 = b - 1,$$

and, denoting by $(\alpha_j)_{j \geq 1}$ the sequence of integers $c_0, d_0, 1, e_0, f_0, c_1, \dots$,

$$P_{j+2} = \alpha_{j+2}P_{j+1} + P_j, \quad Q_{j+2} = \alpha_{j+2}Q_{j+1} + Q_j, \quad j \geq -1.$$

Since

$$c_0 = \frac{b^{a_1-b_1} - b}{b-1}, \quad d_0 = 0, \quad e_0 = b - 1,$$

we get

$$\begin{aligned} P_1 &= b - 1, \quad Q_1 = b^{a_1-b_1} - b, \quad P_2 = P_0, \quad Q_2 = Q_0, \\ P_3 &= b - 1, \quad Q_3 = b^{a_1-b_1} - 1, \quad P_4 = (b - 1)^2, \quad Q_4 = b^{a_1-b_1}(b - 1), \dots \end{aligned}$$

Thus

$$\frac{P_1}{Q_1} = (1)_0, \quad \frac{P_2}{Q_2} = (2)_0 - (1)_0, \quad \frac{P_3}{Q_3} = (2)_0, \quad \frac{P_4}{Q_4} = (3)_0, \quad \dots$$

Using Lemma 7.1, we check by induction on $j \geq 1$ that the greatest prime divisor of the integers P_j and Q_j is equal to $b-1$ and that P_j and Q_j are the numerator and denominator of a fraction of one of the five types $(1)_k, (2)_k - (1)_k, (2)_k, (3)_k, (4)_k$, more precisely, they correspond to

- * the fraction $(1)_k$ if $\alpha_j = c_k$;
- * the fraction $(2)_k - (1)_k$ if $\alpha_j = d_k$;
- * the fraction $(2)_k$ if $\alpha_j = 1$;
- * the fraction $(3)_k$ if $\alpha_j = e_k$;
- * the fraction $(4)_k$ if $\alpha_j = f_k$.

We explain below how to derive the sequence of partial quotients of ξ from the sequence $(\alpha_j)_{j \geq 1}$.

To do this, we work with matrices and recall that

$$\begin{aligned} \begin{pmatrix} P_{j+1} & P_j \\ Q_{j+1} & Q_j \end{pmatrix} &= \begin{pmatrix} P_j & P_{j-1} \\ Q_j & Q_{j-1} \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_{j+1} & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \\ &= \begin{pmatrix} 0 & b-1 \\ b-1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdots \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_{j+1} & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}, \quad j \geq 0. \end{aligned}$$

So we have a product of elementary integer 2 by 2 matrices $\begin{pmatrix} \alpha_j & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$, exactly as in the continued fraction algorithm. Here, however, some coefficients α_j may be 0 or negative. The point is that it is possible to transform this formal infinite product into a product of elementary integer 2 by 2 matrices $\begin{pmatrix} \alpha_j'' & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$ where all the α_j'' 's are positive. This defines a regular continued fraction and we show that this is precisely the continued fraction expansion of ξ .

Simple calculations show that for nonnegative integers x and y we have

$$\begin{pmatrix} x & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} -x-1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} -1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \quad (7.1)$$

and

$$\begin{pmatrix} y & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} -1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} y & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix}. \quad (7.2)$$

If for some integer $j \geq 1$ the integer $\alpha_{j+5} = c_{k+1}$ is negative, then $c_{k+1} = -e_k - 1$ and, as $b_{k+1} = 0$, we get $d_{k+1} = d_k$, $f_k = 0$, and the septuple $(\alpha_{j+1}, \dots, \alpha_{j+7})$ is equal to $(d_k, 1, e_k, 0, -e_k - 1, d_k, 1)$. Consequently, by (7.1) and (7.2), we have

$$\begin{pmatrix} \alpha_{j+1} & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdots \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_{j+7} & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix}.$$

We derive that

$$\begin{aligned} \begin{pmatrix} P_{j+8} & P_{j+7} \\ Q_{j+8} & Q_{j+7} \end{pmatrix} &= \begin{pmatrix} P_{j-1} & P_{j-2} \\ Q_{j-1} & Q_{j-2} \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_j & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdots \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_{j+8} & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \\ &= \begin{pmatrix} P_{j-1} & P_{j-2} \\ Q_{j-1} & Q_{j-2} \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_j & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_{j+8} & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \\ &= \begin{pmatrix} P_{j-1} & P_{j-2} \\ Q_{j-1} & Q_{j-2} \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} \alpha_j + \alpha_{j+8} + 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \\ &= \begin{pmatrix} (\alpha_j + \alpha_{j+8} + 1)P_{j-1} + P_{j-2} & P_{j-2} \\ (\alpha_j + \alpha_{j+8} + 1)Q_{j-1} + Q_{j-2} & Q_{j-2} \end{pmatrix} \\ &= \begin{pmatrix} (c_k + e_{k+1} + 1)P_{j-1} + P_{j-2} & P_{j-1} \\ (c_k + e_{k+1} + 1)Q_{j-1} + Q_{j-2} & Q_{j-1} \end{pmatrix}. \end{aligned} \quad (7.3)$$

This shows that P_{j-1} is followed by $P_{j+8} = (c_k + e_{k+1} + 1)P_{j-1} + P_{j-2}$, and similarly for Q_{j-1} .

Consider now the sequence $(\alpha'_j)_{j \geq 1}$ constructed inductively from $(\alpha_j)_{j \geq 1}$ as follows. We put $\alpha'_j = \alpha_j$ for $j < j_0$, where $j_0 \geq 1$ is the smallest integer such that $\alpha_{j_0} = c_k$, with $\alpha_{j_0+5} = c_{k+1} < 0$. Then, we put $\alpha'_{j_0} = c_k + e_{k+1} + 1$ and $\alpha'_{j_0+1} = \alpha_{j_0+9} = f_{k+1}$. We continue with $\alpha'_{j_0+2} = c_{k+2}$, unless $c_{k+3} < 0$, in which case we put $\alpha'_{j_0+2} = c_{k+2} + e_{k+3} + 1$. And so on. The sequence $(\alpha'_j)_{j \geq 1}$ is well-defined since c_k and c_{k+1} cannot be simultaneously negative.

Said differently, for each index k such that $c_{k+1} < 0$, we replace the 10 consecutive partial quotients $c_k, d_k, \dots, e_{k+1}, f_{k+1}$ by the 2 partial quotients $c_k + e_{k+1} + 1, f_{k+1}$. Let us add that f_{k+1} is positive since b_{k+2} is positive.

We have constructed from $(\alpha_j)_{j \geq 1}$ a sequence of nonnegative integers $(\alpha'_j)_{j \geq 1}$. Define

$$P'_{-1} = b - 1, \quad P'_0 = 0, \quad Q'_{-1} = 0, \quad Q'_0 = b - 1,$$

and

$$P'_{j+2} = \alpha'_{j+2}P'_{j+1} + P'_j, \quad Q'_{j+2} = \alpha'_{j+2}Q'_{j+1} + Q'_j, \quad j \geq -1.$$

By construction, the sequence of pairs $((P'_j, Q'_j))_{j \geq 0}$ is a subsequence of $((P_j, Q_j))_{j \geq 0}$. Furthermore, it follows from (7.3) that P'_j and Q'_j are the numerator and denominator of

- * the fraction $(1)_k$ if $\alpha'_j = c_k$;
- * the fraction $(2)_k - (1)_k$ if $\alpha'_j = d_k$;
- * the fraction $(2)_k$ if $\alpha'_j = 1$;
- * the fraction $(3)_k$ if $\alpha'_j = e_k$;
- * the fraction $(3)_{k+1}$ if $\alpha'_j = c_k + e_{k+1} + 1$;
- * the fraction $(4)_k$ if $\alpha'_j = f_k$.

Now, we have to get rid of the 0's in $(\alpha'_j)_{j \geq 1}$ and construct a sequence $(\alpha''_j)_{j \geq 1}$ of positive integers. Since e_k is positive for $k \geq 0$, there are no sequences of more than 3 consecutive 0's in $(\alpha'_j)_{j \geq 1}$.

As already observed, we have for nonnegative integers x and y we have

$$\begin{pmatrix} x & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} y & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} x+y & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

and, if $\alpha'_{j+1} = 0$, we get

$$\begin{aligned} \begin{pmatrix} P'_{j+2} & P'_{j+1} \\ Q'_{j+2} & Q'_{j+1} \end{pmatrix} &= \begin{pmatrix} P'_{j-1} & P'_{j-2} \\ Q'_{j-1} & Q'_{j-2} \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} \alpha'_j & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} \alpha'_{j+1} & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} \alpha'_{j+2} & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \\ &= \begin{pmatrix} P'_{j-1} & P'_{j-2} \\ Q'_{j-1} & Q'_{j-2} \end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} \alpha'_j + \alpha'_{j+2} & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \\ &= \begin{pmatrix} (\alpha'_j + \alpha'_{j+2})P'_{j-1} + P'_{j-2} & P'_{j-1} \\ (\alpha'_j + \alpha'_{j+2})Q'_{j-1} + Q'_{j-2} & Q'_{j-1} \end{pmatrix}. \end{aligned} \tag{7.4}$$

This shows that P'_{j-1} is followed by $P'_{j+2} = (\alpha'_j + \alpha'_{j+2})P'_{j-1} + P'_{j-2}$, and similarly for Q'_{j-1} .

By (7.4), if $x, 0, y$ are consecutive elements in $(\alpha'_j)_{j \geq 1}$, they have to be replaced by the single element $x + y$ in $(\alpha''_j)_{j \geq 1}$ and the pair associated with the partial quotients $x + y$ is the pair associated to α'_{j+2} , that is, the pair (P'_{j+2}, Q'_{j+2}) . Define recursively

$$P''_{-1} = b - 1, \quad P''_0 = 0, \quad Q''_{-1} = 0, \quad Q''_0 = b - 1,$$

and

$$P''_{j+2} = \alpha''_{j+2}P''_{j+1} + P''_j, \quad Q''_{j+2} = \alpha''_{j+2}Q''_{j+1} + Q''_j, \quad j \geq -1.$$

By construction, the sequence of pairs $((P'_j, Q'_j))_{j \geq 0}$ is a subsequence of $((P_j, Q_j))_{j \geq 0}$, hence of $((P_j, Q_j))_{j \geq 0}$. Let us discuss more in details which are the possible elements of the sequence $(\alpha''_j)_{j \geq 1}$. The following cases may occur:

(i) $1, e_k, f_k = 0, c_{k+1} + e_{k+2} + 1 \neq 0, f_{k+2}$ are consecutive elements of $(\alpha'_j)_{j \geq 1}$, in which case we get the partial quotient $e_k + c_{k+1} + e_{k+2} + 1$ in $(\alpha''_j)_{j \geq 1}$ and

$$[0; \alpha''_1, \dots, e_k + c_{k+1} + e_{k+2} + 1] = (3)_{k+2},$$

the preceding convergent being $(2)_k$.

(ii) $1, e_k, f_k = 0, c_{k+1} \neq 0, d_{k+1} \neq 0$ are consecutive elements of $(\alpha'_j)_{j \geq 1}$, in which case we get the partial quotient $e_k + c_{k+1}$ in $(\alpha''_j)_{j \geq 1}$ and

$$[0; \alpha''_1, \dots, e_k + c_{k+1}] = (1)_{k+1},$$

the preceding convergent being $(2)_k$.

(iii) $e_k, f_k \neq 0, c_{k+1} = 0, d_{k+1} \neq 0, 1$ are consecutive elements of $(\alpha'_j)_{j \geq 1}$, in which case we get the partial quotient $f_k + d_{k+1}$ in $(\alpha''_j)_{j \geq 1}$ and

$$[0; \alpha''_1, \dots, e_k, f_k + d_{k+1}] = (2)_{k+1} - (1)_{k+1},$$

the preceding convergent being $(3)_k$.

(iv) $1, e_k, f_k = 0, c_{k+1} \neq 0, d_{k+1} = 0, 1$ are consecutive elements of $(\alpha'_j)_{j \geq 1}$, in which case we get the partial quotient $e_k + c_{k+1} + 1$ in $(\alpha''_j)_{j \geq 1}$ and

$$[0; \alpha''_1, \dots, e_k + c_{k+1} + 1] = (2)_{k+1},$$

the preceding convergent being $(2)_k$.

(v) $1, e_k, f_k \neq 0, c_{k+1} \neq 0, d_{k+1} = 0, 1$ are consecutive elements of $(\alpha'_j)_{j \geq 1}$, in which case we get the partial quotient $c_{k+1} + 1$ in $(\alpha''_j)_{j \geq 1}$ and

$$[0; \alpha''_1, \dots, c_{k+1} + 1] = (2)_{k+1},$$

the preceding convergent being $(4)_k$.

(vi) $1, e_k, f_k = 0, c_{k+1} = 0, d_{k+1} = 0, 1$ are consecutive elements of $(\alpha'_j)_{j \geq 1}$, in which case we get the partial quotient $e_k + 1$ in $(\alpha''_j)_{j \geq 1}$ and

$$[0; \alpha''_1, \dots, e_k + 1] = (2)_{k+1},$$

the preceding convergent being $(2)_k$.

The cases (iv) to (vi) occur only when $d_{k+1} = 0$, that is, when $b_1 = \dots = b_{k+1} = 0$. They are not reflected in Proposition 6.2, where it is assumed that t_k is positive.

Note that if $f_k = c_{k+1} = 0$ or if $c_{k+1} = d_{k+1} = 0$, then there is nothing to do: we simply remove these two 0's from the sequence $(\alpha'_j)_{j \geq 1}$.

The link with Proposition 6.2 is as follows:

* Case (i) of Proposition 6.2 corresponds to the construction of $(\alpha'_j)_{j \geq 1}$ from $(\alpha_j)_{j \geq 1}$, with, if in addition b_k is nul, Case (i) above.

* Case (ii) of Proposition 6.2 corresponds to Case (iii) above if b_{k+1} is positive, while if $b_{k+1} = 0$ we remove two consecutive 0's in the sequence $(\alpha'_j)_{j \geq 1}$, thereby deleting two putative convergents.

* Case (iii) of Proposition 6.2 corresponds to Case (ii) above.

Since the sequence $(\alpha''_j)_{j \geq 1}$ is composed of positive integers, the real number

$$\zeta := [0; \alpha''_1, \alpha''_2, \dots]$$

is well defined by its continued fraction expansion. We have proved that all of its convergents are of the form P_j/Q_j for some index j .

It also follows from our discussion that $(2)_{k+1}$ is a convergent to ζ if c_{k+1} and c_{k+2} are nonnegative. If $c_{k+1} < 0$ and $f_{k-1} > 0$, then f_{k-1} is an element of $(\alpha''_j)_{j \geq 1}$, associated with $(4)_{k-1} = (2)_{k+1}$. If $c_{k+1} < 0$ and $f_{k-1} = 0$, then $b_k = 0$ and $1, e_{k-1} + c_k + e_{k+1} + 1$ are consecutive elements of $(\alpha''_j)_{j \geq 1}$, with this partial quotient 1 being associated to $(2)_{k-1}$ and we have $(2)_{k-1} = (4)_{k-1} = (2)_{k+1}$. To summarize, we have shown that $(2)_{k+1}$ is a convergent to ζ unless c_{k+2} is negative, that is, unless $a_{k+3} = b_{k+3}$. However, Proposition 6.1 asserts that $(2)_{k+1}$ is a convergent to ξ if and only if $a_{k+3} \geq b_{k+3} + 1$. Since there are infinitely many h such that $a_h \geq b_h + 1$, we deduce that ξ and ζ have infinitely many partial quotients in common, thus $\xi = \zeta$.

The next statement summarizes what we have established. For $j \geq 1$, write $P_j/Q_j = [0; \alpha''_1, \alpha''_2, \dots, \alpha''_j]$ for the j -th convergent to ξ .

Proposition 7.2. *All of the convergents to ξ are of one of the five types $(1)_k, (2)_k - (1)_k, (2)_k, (3)_k, (4)_k$. All its partial quotients are of the form*

$$1, c_k, d_k, e_k, f_k,$$

or belong to the set

$$\{c_k + e_{k+1} + 1, e_{k-1} + c_k + e_{k+1} + 1, e_k + c_{k+1}, f_k + d_{k+1}, e_k + c_{k+1} + 1, e_k + 1, c_k + 1\}.$$

More precisely, we have

$$P_j/Q_j = \begin{cases} (1)_k & \text{if } \alpha''_j \in \{c_k, e_{k-1} + c_k\}, \\ (2)_k - (1)_k & \text{if } \alpha''_j \in \{d_k, f_{k-1} + d_k\}, \\ (2)_k & \text{if } \alpha''_j \in \{1, e_{k-1} + c_k + 1, e_{k-1} + 1, c_k + 1\}, \\ (3)_k & \text{if } \alpha''_j \in \{e_k, c_{k-1} + e_k + 1, e_{k-2} + c_{k-1} + e_k + 1\}, \\ (4)_k & \text{if } \alpha''_j = f_k. \end{cases}$$

8. Remaining proofs

Proof of Corollary 2.5. Assume that θ has unbounded partial quotients (the case of bounded partial quotients is treated in Theorem 2.6). Let \mathcal{K} be an infinite set of positive

integers such that the subsequence $(a_k)_{k \in \mathcal{K}}$ is increasing. Assume first that there exists an infinite set $\mathcal{K}' \subset \mathcal{K}$ such that $(a_k - b_k)_{k \in \mathcal{K}'}$ is increasing. For $k \geq 3$ in \mathcal{K}' we have

$$\nu_{k-2}(4) = 1 + \frac{r_k}{q_{k-1}} \geq 1 + \frac{(a_k - b_k - 1)q_{k-1}}{q_{k-1}},$$

and, since $a_k - b_k$ can be arbitrarily large with k in \mathcal{K}' , we deduce that $\nu(4)$ is infinite.

Assume now that there exist an infinite set $\mathcal{K}' \subset \mathcal{K}$ and a nonnegative integer δ such that $a_k - b_k = \delta$ for k in \mathcal{K}' . For $k \geq 3$ in \mathcal{K}' we have

$$\nu_{k-1}(3) = 1 + \frac{q_k}{r_k + q_{k-1}} \geq \frac{a_k q_{k-1}}{r_{k-1} + \delta q_{k-1} + q_{k-2}} \geq \frac{a_k}{\delta + 2}.$$

We deduce that $\nu(3)$ is infinite. Consequently, any Sturmian number whose slope has unbounded partial quotients is a Liouville number. \square

Proof of Theorem 2.6. Assume that θ has bounded partial quotients. Observe that

$$\nu_k(3) = 1 + \frac{q_{k+1}}{r_{k+1} + q_k} \leq 1 + \frac{q_{k+1}}{q_k}, \quad \nu_k(4) = 1 + \frac{r_{k+2}}{q_{k+1}} \leq 1 + \frac{q_{k+2}}{q_{k+1}}.$$

If $a_{k+1} = b_{k+1}$, then $r_{k+1} = r_{k-1}$ and $t_k = t_{k-1}$, thus

$$\nu_k(2) = 2 + \frac{r_k}{r_{k+1} + t_k} = 2 + \frac{r_k}{r_{k-1} + t_{k-1}} \leq 2 + \frac{q_k}{q_{k-1}}.$$

If $a_{k+1} > b_{k+1}$, then $r_{k+1} \geq r_k + q_{k-1}$, thus

$$\nu_k(2) = 2 + \frac{r_k}{r_{k+1} + t_k} \leq 2 + \frac{r_k}{r_k + t_k} \leq 3,$$

and

$$\nu_k(1) = 2 + \frac{t_k}{r_{k+1}} \leq 2 + \frac{t_k}{r_k + q_{k-1}} \leq 2 + \frac{q_k}{q_{k-1}}.$$

This shows that the irrationality exponent of $\xi_b(\theta, \rho)$ satisfies

$$\mu(\xi_b(\theta, \rho)) \leq 2 + \limsup_{k \rightarrow +\infty} \frac{q_k}{q_{k-1}} = 1 + \mu(\xi_b(\theta)). \quad (8.1)$$

Let us now show that there exist intercepts ρ for which equality holds. Let \mathcal{K} be an infinite set of positive integers such that

$$\lim_{k \rightarrow +\infty, k \in \mathcal{K}} \frac{q_k}{q_{k-1}} = \mu(\xi_b(\theta)) - 1.$$

Take $k_1 \geq 3$ in \mathcal{K} and set $b_1 = \dots = b_{k_1} = 0$. Put $a_{k_1+1} = b_{k_1+1}$ and $b_{k_1+2} = b_{k_1+3} = \dots = b_{k_2} = 0$, where $k_2 > k_1 + 2$ is in \mathcal{K} and sufficiently large to ensure that $r_{k_2} \geq q_{k_2}/2$. Then, put $b_{k_2+1} = a_{k_2+1}$ and $b_{k_2+2} = \dots = b_{k_3} = 0$, where $k_3 > k_2 + 2$ is in \mathcal{K} and sufficiently large to ensure that $r_{k_3} \geq 2q_{k_3}/3$. Proceeding like this, we define inductively an increasing

sequence $(k_j)_{j \geq 2}$ of integers in \mathcal{K} such that $b_{k_j+1} = a_{k_j+1}$ and $b_k = 0$ for every k not in $(k_j)_{j \geq 2}$. In addition, we have $r_{k_j} \geq (j-1)q_{k_j}/j$, for $j \geq 2$.

Denote by ρ the intercept defined by this sequence $(b_k)_{k \geq 1}$ and let us determine the irrationality exponent of $\xi_b(\theta, \rho)$.

Recall that for an index h such that $b_{h+1} = a_{h+1}$ we have $r_{h+1} = r_{h-1}$ and $t_h = t_{h-1}$, thus

$$\nu_h(2) = 2 + \frac{r_h}{r_{h+1} + t_h} = 2 + \frac{r_h}{r_{h-1} + t_{h-1}} = 2 + \frac{r_h}{q_{h-1}}.$$

Consequently, we get

$$\nu_{k_j}(2) \geq 2 + \frac{(j-1)q_{k_j}}{jq_{k_j-1}}, \quad j \geq 2,$$

and

$$\mu(\xi_b(\theta, \rho)) \geq \nu(2) \geq 2 + \limsup_{j \rightarrow +\infty} \frac{q_{k_j}}{q_{k_j-1}} = 2 + \lim_{k \rightarrow +\infty, k \in \mathcal{K}} \frac{q_k}{q_{k-1}} = \mu(\xi_b(\theta)) + 1.$$

The reverse inequality follows from (8.1). Consequently, we get

$$\mu(\xi_b(\theta, \rho)) = 1 + \mu(\xi_b(\theta)).$$

This proves the theorem. □

Proof of Theorem 2.7. Assume that not all b_k are 0. Let k be an integer large enough to ensure that t_k is positive and that a_k, a_{k+1}, \dots are all at most equal to M . Then, it follows from Proposition 6.2 that there are four (possibly overlapping) cases:

- (i) If $a_{k+2} = b_{k+2}$, then $(2)_{k+1}$ is a convergent to ξ ;
- (ii) If $a_{k+3} = b_{k+3}$, then $(2)_{k+2}$ is a convergent to ξ ;
- (iii) If $a_{k+4} = b_{k+4}$, then $(2)_{k+3}$ is a convergent to ξ ;
- (iv) If (i), (ii), and (iii) do not hold, then $(1)_{k+1}$ and $(2)_{k+1}$ are convergents to ξ .

In case (i), the rate of approximation of ξ by $(2)_{k+1}$ is at least equal to

$$\nu_{k+1}(2) = 2 + \frac{r_{k+1}}{r_{k+2} + t_{k+1}} = 2 + \frac{r_{k+1}}{q_k} \geq 2 + \frac{q_{k-1}}{q_k} \geq 2 + \frac{1}{M+1},$$

since $r_{k+2} = r_k$, $t_{k+1} = t_k$, and $r_{k+1} \geq q_{k-1}$.

Similarly, in case (ii) (resp., (iii)), the rate of approximation of ξ by $(2)_{k+2}$ (resp., by $(2)_{k+3}$) is at least equal to $2 + 1/(M+1)$.

In case (iv), note that $r_{k+2} + t_{k+1} \leq (a_{k+2} + 1)q_{k+1}$, thus

$$\nu_{k+1}(1) = 2 + \frac{t_{k+1}}{r_{k+2}} \geq 2 + \frac{t_{k+1}}{(M+1)q_{k+1}}, \quad \nu_{k+1}(2) = 2 + \frac{r_{k+1}}{r_{k+2} + t_{k+1}} \geq 2 + \frac{r_{k+1}}{(M+1)q_{k+1}}.$$

Recalling that $r_{k+1} + t_{k+1} = q_{k+1}$, we get

$$\max\{\nu_{k+1}(1), \nu_{k+1}(2)\} \geq 2 + \frac{1}{2(M+1)}.$$

This shows that, for every sufficiently large k , there exists a rational number P/Q with

$$b^{qk} \leq Q \leq b^{qk+4} \quad (8.2)$$

such that $|\xi - P/Q| \leq Q^{-2-1/(2(M+1))}$. We are then in position to apply Théorème 3.1 of [3] with $\varepsilon = \frac{1}{2(M+1)}$ and \mathcal{S} the empty set. Note that, by (8.2), the number c introduced in (3.2) of its proof can be taken to be $(M+1)^5$. Consequently, the upper bound

$$w_d^*(\xi) \leq (2d)^{\kappa(\log \log 3d)}, \quad d \geq 1,$$

given by Théorème 3.1 of [3] holds with a real number κ depending only on M .

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