

ON A SPECIAL CASE OF WATKINS' CONJECTURE

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ABSTRACT. Watkins' conjecture asserts that for a rational elliptic curve E the degree of the modular parametrization is divisible by 2^r , where r is the rank of E . In this paper we prove that if the modular degree is odd then E has rank 0. Moreover, we prove that the conjecture holds for all rank two rational elliptic curves of prime conductor and positive discriminant.

1. INTRODUCTION AND PRELIMINARIES

Given a rational elliptic curve E of conductor N , by the modularity theorem, there exists a morphism of a minimal degree

$$\phi : X_0(N) \rightarrow E,$$

that is defined over \mathbb{Q} , where $X_0(N)$ is the classical modular curve. Its degree, denoted by m_E , is called the *modular degree*. While analyzing experimental data, Watkins conjectured that for an elliptic curve of rank r , m_E is divisible by 2^r [8, Conjecture 4.1]. In particular, if the modular degree is odd, the rank should be zero; the proof of this assertion is the main result of this work.

The study of elliptic curves with odd modular degree was first developed in [1] by Calegari and Emerton, where they showed that a rational elliptic curve with odd modular degree has to satisfy a series of very restrictive hypotheses. For a detailed list of conditions see [1, Theorem 1.1]. Later, building on this work, Yazdani [7] studied abelian varieties having odd modular degree. As a by-product of his work, he proves that if a rational elliptic curve has odd modular degree then it has rank 0, except perhaps if it has prime conductor and even analytic rank (see [7, Theorem 3.8] for a more general statement). The main result of this paper is the following theorem:

Theorem 1.1. *If E/\mathbb{Q} is an elliptic curve of odd modular degree, then E has rank 0.*

By the aforementioned results it is enough to restrict ourselves to the case where E has prime conductor p and even analytic rank. Moreover, it is clear that we can assume that the curve E is the strong Weil curve, that is, the kernel of the map $J_0(p) \rightarrow E$ is connected ($J_0(p)$ is the Jacobian of $X_0(p)$).

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The elliptic curve E gives rise to a normalized newform $f_E \in S_2(\Gamma_0(p))$ by the modularity theorem. The main idea of the article is to associate to f_E (or E) an element v_E of the Picard group \mathcal{X} of a certain curve X (which is a disjoint union of curves of genus zero) as in [3]. More precisely, \mathcal{X} can be described as the free \mathbb{Z} -module of divisors supported on the isomorphism classes of supersingular elliptic curves over $\overline{\mathbb{F}}_p$, denoted by e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n , where $n - 1$ is the genus of $X_0(p)$. They are in bijection with the isomorphism classes of supersingular elliptic curves $E_i/\overline{\mathbb{F}}_p$. The action of Hecke correspondences on X induces an action on \mathcal{X} . There is a correspondence between modular forms of level p and weight 2 and elements of $\mathcal{X} \otimes \mathbb{C}$ that preserves the action of the Hecke operators ([3, Proposition 5.6]). Let $v_E = \sum v_E(e_i)e_i \in \mathcal{X}$ be an eigenvector for all Hecke operators t_m corresponding to f_E , i.e. $t_m v_E = a(m)v_E$, where $f_E(\tau) = \sum_{m=1}^{\infty} a(m)q^m$. We normalize v_E (up to sign) such that the greatest common divisor of all its entries is 1. We define a \mathbb{Z} -bilinear pairing

$$\langle -, - \rangle : \mathcal{X} \times \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathbb{Z},$$

by requiring $\langle e_i, e_j \rangle = w_i \delta_{i,j}$ for all $i, j \in \{1, \dots, n\}$, where $w_i = \frac{1}{2} \# \text{Aut}(E_i)$.

We have the following key result of Mestre that relates the norm of v_E to the modular degree m_E .

Proposition 1.2. [6, Theorem 3]

$$\langle v_E, v_E \rangle = m_E t,$$

where t is the size of $E(\mathbb{Q})_{\text{tors}}$.

The final ingredient we need is the Gross-Waldspurger formula on special values of L -series [3]. An alternative approach is to use Gross-Kudla formula for the special values of triple products of L -functions [4].

In [5], while studying supersingular zeros of divisor polynomials of elliptic curves, the authors posed the following conjecture.

Conjecture 1. *If E is an elliptic curve of prime conductor p , root number 1, and $\text{rank}(E) > 0$, then $v_E(e_i)$ is an even number for all e_i with $j(E_i) \in \mathbb{F}_p$.*

The conclusion of the conjecture holds for any elliptic curve E/\mathbb{Q} of prime conductor and root number -1 , as well as for any curve of prime conductor that has positive discriminant and no rational points of order 2 (see [5, Theorems 1.1, 1.2, 1.4]).

In the last paragraph of this paper we will show the connection between this conjecture and Watkins' conjecture:

Theorem 1.3. *Let E/\mathbb{Q} be an elliptic curve of prime conductor such that $\text{rank}(E) > 0$. If $v_E(e_i)$ is even number for all e_i with $j(E_i) \in \mathbb{F}_p$, then $4|m_E$.*

In particular, as remarked before, this verifies Watkins' conjecture if E has prime conductor, $\text{disc}(E) > 0$ and $\text{rank}(E) = 2$.

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2. PROOF OF THE MAIN THEOREM

We will give a series of propositions that will allow us to prove Theorem 1.1.

Proposition 2.1. *If E/\mathbb{Q} has non-zero rank, then $L(E, 1) = 0$.*

Proof. This is a classical application of Gross-Zagier and Kolyvagin theorems. For a reference see [2, Theorem 3.22]. \square

Proposition 2.2. *If E/\mathbb{Q} has prime conductor and non-zero rank, then $E(\mathbb{Q})_{tors}$ is trivial.*

Proof. This is a well known result; for example in [6] it is shown that the isogeny classes of rational elliptic curves with conductor p and non-trivial rational torsion subgroup are either 11.a, 17.a, 19.a and 37.b, or the so called Neumann-Setzer curves that have a 2-rational point. All these curves have rank 0; this follows from a classical 2-descent. \square

Proposition 2.3. *Let $v_E = \sum_{i=1}^n v_E(e_i)e_i \in \mathcal{X}$ be the vector corresponding to f_E . We have that $\sum_{i=1}^n v_E(e_i) = 0$.*

Proof. The vector $e_0 = \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{e_i}{w_i}$ corresponds to the Eisenstein series. Moreover, the pairing $\langle -, - \rangle : \mathcal{X} \times \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathbb{Z}$ is compatible with the Hecke operators. Since the space of cuspforms is orthogonal to the Eisenstein series, we obtain

$$\langle v_E, e_0 \rangle = \sum_{i=1}^n v_E(e_i) = 0.$$

\square

Proposition 2.4. *If $p \equiv 1, 5 \pmod{12}$, then all the w_i are odd. On the other hand if $p \equiv 7, 11 \pmod{12}$ there is exactly one even w_k (and in fact $w_k = 2$).*

Proof. See [3, Table 1.3 p. 117]. \square

Given $-D$ a fundamental negative discriminant, Gross defines

$$b_D = \sum_{i=1}^n \frac{h_i(-D)}{u(-D)} e_i,$$

where $h_i(-D)$ is the number of optimal embeddings of the order of discriminant $-D$ into $End(E_i)$ modulo conjugation by $End(E_i)^\times$ and $u(-D)$ is the number of units of the order. We are in position to state (a special case of) Gross-Waldspurger formula [3, Proposition 13.5].

Proposition 2.5. *If $-D$ is a fundamental negative discriminant with $\left(\frac{-D}{p}\right) = -1$, then*

$$L(E, 1)L(E \otimes \varepsilon_D, 1) = \frac{(f_E, f_E)}{\sqrt{D}} \frac{m_D^2}{\langle v_E, v_E \rangle},$$

where ε_D is the quadratic character associated to $-D$, (f_E, f_E) is the Petersson inner product on $\Gamma_0(p)$ and

$$m_D = \langle v_E, b_D \rangle.$$

We will use the formula in the case that $-D = -4$ (and thus $p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$). We know that $u(-4) = 4$ and $h_i = 0$ unless, following the notation from Proposition 2.4, $i = k$. In that case it is easy to see that $h_k(-4) = 2$. Combining these observations we obtain that $b_4 = \frac{1}{2}e_k$ where k is the only index such that $w_k = 2$ (this corresponds to the elliptic curve E_k with complex multiplication by $\mathbb{Z}[i]$).

Now we have the necessary ingredients in order to prove Theorem 1.1.

Proof of Theorem 1.1. As remarked in the introduction, it is enough to prove the theorem when E has prime conductor p and it is the strong Weil curve. Suppose on the contrary that E has positive rank. In consequence, by Proposition 1.2 and Proposition 2.2 we know that $\langle v_E, v_E \rangle$ must be odd. Moreover,

$$\langle v_E, v_E \rangle = \sum_{i=1}^n w_i v_E(e_i)^2 \equiv \sum_{i=1}^n w_i v_E(e_i) \pmod{2}.$$

Using Propositions 2.3 and 2.4 we obtain that if $p \equiv 1, 5 \pmod{12}$ $\langle v_E, v_E \rangle$ is even and if $p \equiv 7, 11 \pmod{12}$ then $\langle v_E, v_E \rangle \equiv v_E(e_k) \pmod{2}$, where $k \in \mathbb{N}$ is the only index such that $w_k = 2$. In that case, since $L(E, 1) = 0$ (by Proposition 2.1), Proposition 2.5 implies that

$$m_4 = \langle v_E, b_4 \rangle = 0.$$

Since $b_4 = \frac{1}{2}e_k$, we get that

$$m_4 = v_E(e_k) = 0.$$

Therefore, $\langle v_E, v_E \rangle$ is even, leading to a contradiction. \square

Remark. Another proof along the same lines uses that if $L(E, 1) = 0$ then

$$\sum_i w_i^2 v_E(e_i)^3 = 0.$$

This is proved in [4, Corollary 11.5], as a consequence of the Gross-Kudla formula of special values of triple product L -functions. The number $\sum_i w_i^2 v_E(e_i)^3$ clearly has the same parity as $\langle v_E, v_E \rangle$, leading to the desired contradiction.

3. THE PROOF OF THE THEOREM 1.3

Proof of Theorem 1.3. For a given e_i , denote by $\bar{i} \in \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ the unique index such that $e_{\bar{i}}$ corresponds to the curve E_i^p . Then [3, Proposition 2.4] implies that $v(e_i) = v(e_{\bar{i}})$. As in the proof of Theorem 1.1, we have that $v_E(e_k) = 0$ whenever $w_k \neq 1$, hence Proposition 2.2 implies that

$$m_E \equiv \sum_i v_E(e_i)^2 \pmod{4}.$$

If E_i is defined over \mathbb{F}_p (i.e. $\bar{i} = i$), then by the assumption

$$v_E(e_i)^2 \equiv 0 \pmod{4}.$$

Hence

$$m_E \equiv \sum_i' 2v_E(e_i)^2 \pmod{4},$$

where we sum over the pairs $\{i, \bar{i}\}$ with $i \neq \bar{i}$. Note that Gross-Kudla formula implies that

$$\sum_i v_E(e_i)^3 \equiv \sum_i' 2v_E(e_i) \equiv 0 \pmod{4},$$

where the second sum is over the pairs $\{i, \bar{i}\}$ for which $v_E(e_i)$ is odd. It follows that the number of such pairs is even, hence $m_E \equiv 0 \pmod{4}$. □

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