New results on the least common multiple of consecutive integers

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Abstract
When studying the least common multiple of some finite sequences of integers, the first author introduced the interesting arithmetic functions \( g_k(n) := \frac{n(n+1)...(n+k)}{\text{lcm}(n,n+1,...,n+k)} \) (\( \forall n \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} \)). He proved that \( g_k (k \in \mathbb{N}) \) is periodic and \( k! \) is a period of \( g_k \). He raised the open problem consisting to determine the smallest positive period \( P_k \) of \( g_k \). Very recently, S. Hong and Y. Yang have improved the period \( k! \) of \( g_k \) to \( \text{lcm}(1,2,...,k) \). In addition, they have conjectured that \( P_k \) is always a multiple of the positive integer \( \text{lcm}(1,2,...,k,k+1) \). An immediate consequence of this conjecture states that if \( (k+1) \) is prime then the exact period of \( g_k \) is precisely equal to \( \text{lcm}(1,2,...,k) \).

In this paper, we first prove the conjecture of S. Hong and Y. Yang and then we give the exact value of \( P_k \) (\( k \in \mathbb{N} \)). We deduce, as a corollary, that \( P_k \) is equal to the part of \( \text{lcm}(1,2,...,k) \) not divisible by some prime.

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1 Introduction

Throughout this paper, we let \( \mathbb{N}^* \) denote the set \( \mathbb{N} \setminus \{0\} \) of positive integers.
Many results concerning the least common multiple of sequences of integers are known. The most famous is nothing else than an equivalent of the prime number theorem; it states that \( \log \text{lcm}(1,2,...,n) \sim n \) as \( n \) tends to infinity (see e.g., [5]). Effective bounds for \( \text{lcm}(1,2,...,n) \) are also given by several authors (see e.g., [3] and [10]).
Recently, the topic has undergone important developments. In [1], Bateman, Kalb and Stenger have obtained an equivalent for \( \log \text{lcm}(u_1, u_2, \ldots, u_n) \) when \((u_n)_n\) is an arithmetic progression. In [2], Cilleruelo has obtained a simple equivalent for the least common multiple of a quadratic progression. For the effective bounds, Farhi [3] [4] got lower bounds for \( \text{lcm}(u_0, u_1, \ldots, u_n) \) in both cases when \((u_n)_n\) is an arithmetic progression or when it is a quadratic progression. In the case of arithmetic progressions, Hong and Feng [7] and Hong and Yang [8] obtained some improvements of Farhi’s lower bounds.

Among the arithmetic progressions, the sequences of consecutive integers are the most well-known with regards the properties of their least common multiple. In [4], Farhi introduced the arithmetic function \( g_k : \mathbb{N}^* \to \mathbb{N}^* \) \((k \in \mathbb{N})\) which is defined by:

\[
g_k(n) := \frac{n(n+1) \ldots (n+k)}{\text{lcm}(n, n+1, \ldots, n+k)} \quad (\forall n \in \mathbb{N}^*).
\]

Farhi proved that the sequence \((g_k)_{k \in \mathbb{N}}\) satisfies the recursive relation:

\[
g_k(n) = \gcd (k!, (n+k)g_{k-1}(n)) \quad (\forall k, n \in \mathbb{N}^*). \tag{1}
\]

Then, using this relation, he deduced (by induction on \(k\)) that \(g_k (k \in \mathbb{N})\) is periodic and \(k!\) is a period of \(g_k\). A natural open problem raised in [4] consists to determine the exact period (i.e., the smallest positive period) of \(g_k\).

For the following, let \(P_k\) denote the exact period of \(g_k\). So, first author’s result amounts that \(P_k\) divides \(k!\) for all \(k \in \mathbb{N}\). Very recently, Hong and Yang have shown that \(P_k\) divides \(\text{lcm}(1,2,\ldots,k)\). This improves Farhi’s result but it doesn’t solve the raised problem of determining the \(P_k\)’s. In their paper [3], Hong and Yang have also conjectured that \(P_k\) is a multiple of \(\frac{\text{lcm}(1,2,\ldots,k+1)}{k+1}\) for all nonnegative integer \(k\). According to the property that \(P_k\) divides \(\text{lcm}(1,2,\ldots,k)\) \((\forall k \in \mathbb{N})\), this conjecture implies that the equality \(P_k = \text{lcm}(1,2,\ldots,k)\) holds at least when \((k+1)\) is prime.

In this paper, we first prove the conjecture of Hong and Yang and then we give the exact value of \(P_k\) \((\forall k \in \mathbb{N})\). As a corollary, we show that \(P_k\) is equal to the part of \(\text{lcm}(1,2,\ldots,k)\) not divisible by some prime and that the equality \(P_k = \text{lcm}(1,2,\ldots,k)\) holds for an infinitely many \(k \in \mathbb{N}\) for which \((k+1)\) is not prime.

## 2 Proof of the conjecture of Hong and Yang

We begin by extending the functions \(g_k (k \in \mathbb{N})\) to \(\mathbb{Z}\) as follows:

- We define \(g_0 : \mathbb{Z} \to \mathbb{N}^*\) by \(g_0(n) = 1, \forall n \in \mathbb{Z}\).
- If, for some \(k \geq 1\), \(g_{k-1}\) is defined, then we define \(g_k\) by the relation:

\[
g_k(n) = \gcd (k!, (n+k)g_{k-1}(n)) \quad (\forall n \in \mathbb{Z}). \tag{1}
\]
These extensions are easily seen to be periodic and to have the same period as their restriction to \( \mathbb{N}^* \). The following proposition plays a vital role in what follows:

**Proposition 2.1** For any \( k \in \mathbb{N} \), we have \( g_k(0) = k! \).

**Proof.** This follows by induction on \( k \) with using the relation [1].

We now arrive at the theorem implying the conjecture of Hong and Yang.

**Theorem 2.2** For all \( k \in \mathbb{N} \), we have:

\[
P_k = \frac{lcm(1, 2, \ldots, k + 1)}{k + 1}, gcd(P_k + k + 1, lcm(P_k + 1, P_k + 2, \ldots, P_k + k)).
\]

The proof of this theorem needs the following lemma:

**Lemma 2.3** For all \( k \in \mathbb{N} \), we have:

\[
lcm(P_k, P_k + 1, \ldots, P_k + k) = lcm(P_k + 1, P_k + 2, \ldots, P_k + k).
\]

**Proof of the Lemma.** Let \( k \in \mathbb{N} \) fixed. The required equality of the lemma is clearly equivalent to say that \( P_k \) divides \( lcm(P_k + 1, P_k + 2, \ldots, P_k + k) \). This amounts to showing that for any prime number \( p \):

\[
v_p(P_k) \leq v_p(lcm(P_k + 1, \ldots, P_k + k)) = \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(P_k + i).
\]

So it remains to show (2). Let \( p \) be a prime number. Because \( P_k \) divides \( lcm(1, 2, \ldots, k) \) (according to the result of Hong and Yang [3]), we have \( v_p(P_k) \leq v_p(lcm(1, 2, \ldots, k)) \), that is \( v_p(P_k) \leq \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(i) \). So there exists \( i_0 \in \{1, 2, \ldots, k\} \) such that \( v_p(P_k) \leq v_p(i_0) \). It follows, according to the elementary properties of the \( p \)-adic valuation, that we have:

\[
v_p(P_k) = \min(v_p(P_k), v_p(i_0)) \leq v_p(P_k + i_0) \leq \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(P_k + i),
\]

which confirms (2) and completes this proof.

**Proof of Theorem 2.2.** Let \( k \in \mathbb{N} \) fixed. The main idea of the proof is to calculate in two different ways the quotient \( \frac{g_k(P_k)}{g_k(P_k + 1)} \) and then to compare the obtained results. On one hand, we have from the definition of the function \( g_k \):

\[
\frac{g_k(P_k)}{g_k(P_k + 1)} = \frac{P_k(P_k + 1) \ldots (P_k + k)}{lcm(P_k, P_k + 1, \ldots, P_k + k)} \div \frac{(P_k + 1)(P_k + 2) \ldots (P_k + k + 1)}{lcm(P_k + 1, P_k + 2, \ldots, P_k + k + 1)}
\]

\[
= \frac{P_k}{(P_k + k + 1)lcm(P_k, P_k + 1, \ldots, P_k + k)}
\]

Next, using Lemma 2.3 and the well-known formula \( \text{\textasciitilde} ab = lcm(a, b)gcd(a, b) \) \((\forall a, b \in \mathbb{N}^*)\), we have:

\[
(P_k + k + 1)lcm(P_k, P_k + 1, \ldots, P_k + k) = (P_k + k + 1)lcm(P_k + 1, P_k + 2, \ldots, P_k + k)
\]
\[
= \text{lcm}(P_k + k + 1, \text{lcm}(P_k + k, k + 1)) \\
\times \gcd (P_k + k + 1, \text{lcm}(P_k + 1, \ldots, P_k + k)) \\
= \text{lcm}(P_k + 1, P_k + 2, \ldots, P_k + k + 1)) \gcd (P_k + k + 1, \text{lcm}(P_k + 1, \ldots, P_k + k)).
\]

By substituting this into (3), we obtain:
\[
\frac{g_k(P_k)}{g_k(P_k + 1)} = \frac{P_k}{\gcd (P_k + k + 1, \text{lcm}(P_k + 1, \ldots, P_k + k))}. \tag{4}
\]

On other hand, according to Proposition \text{2.1} and to the definition of \( P_k \), we have:
\[
\frac{g_k(P_k)}{g_k(P_k + 1)} = k! = \frac{\text{lcm}(1, 2, \ldots, k + 1)}{k + 1}. \tag{5}
\]

Finally, by comparing (4) and (5), we get:
\[
P_k = \frac{\text{lcm}(1, 2, \ldots, k + 1)}{k + 1} \gcd (P_k + k + 1, \text{lcm}(P_k + 1, P_k + 2, \ldots, P_k + k)),
\]
as required. The proof is complete. \( \blacksquare \)

From Theorem \text{2.2} we derive the following interesting corollary, which confirms the conjecture of Hong and Yang \cite{8}.

\textbf{Corollary 2.4} For all \( k \in \mathbb{N} \), the exact period \( P_k \) of \( g_k \) is a multiple of the positive integer \( \frac{\text{lcm}(1, 2, \ldots, k, k + 1)}{k + 1} \). In addition, for all \( k \in \mathbb{N} \) for which \( (k + 1) \) is prime, we have precisely \( P_k = \text{lcm}(1, 2, \ldots, k) \).

\textbf{Proof.} The first part of the corollary immediately follows from Theorem \text{2.2}. Furthermore, we remark that if \( k \) is a natural number such that \( (k + 1) \) is prime, then we have \( \frac{\text{lcm}(1, 2, \ldots, k, k + 1)}{k + 1} = \text{lcm}(1, 2, \ldots, k) \). So, \( P_k \) is both a multiple and a divisor of \( \text{lcm}(1, 2, \ldots, k) \). Hence \( P_k = \text{lcm}(1, 2, \ldots, k) \). This finishes the proof of the corollary. \( \blacksquare \)

Now, we exploit the identity of Theorem \text{2.2} in order to obtain the \( p \)-adic valuation of \( P_k \) \((k \in \mathbb{N})\) for most prime numbers \( p \).

\textbf{Theorem 2.5} Let \( k \geq 2 \) be an integer and \( p \in [1, k] \) be a prime number satisfying:
\[
v_p(k + 1) < \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(i). \tag{6}
\]
Then, we have:
\[
v_p(P_k) = \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(i). \tag{7}
\]

\textbf{Proof.} The identity of Theorem \text{2.2} implies the following equality:
\[
v_p(P_k) = \max_{1 \leq i \leq k+1} (v_p(i)) - v_p(k + 1) + \min \left\{ v_p(P_k + k + 1), \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} (v_p(P_k + i)) \right\}. \tag{7}
\]
Now, using the hypothesis (3) of the theorem, we have:

$$\max_{1 \leq i \leq k+1} (v_p(i)) = \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} (v_p(i))$$ \hfill (8)

and

$$\max_{1 \leq i \leq k+1} (v_p(i)) - v_p(k+1) > 0.$$ \hfill (7)

According to (7), this last inequality implies that:

$$\min \left\{ v_p(P_k + k + 1), \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(P_k + i) \right\} < v_p(P_k).$$ \hfill (9)

Let $i_0 \in \{1, 2, \ldots, k\}$ such that $\max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(i) = v_p(i_0)$. Since $P_k$ divides $\text{lcm}(1, 2, \ldots, k)$, we have $v_p(P_k) \leq v_p(i_0)$, which implies that $v_p(P_k + i_0) \geq \min(v_p(P_k), v_p(i_0)) = v_p(P_k)$. Thus $\max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(P_k + i) \geq v_p(P_k)$. It follows from (7) that

$$\min \left\{ v_p(P_k + k + 1), \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(P_k + i) \right\} = v_p(P_k + k + 1) < v_p(P_k).$$ \hfill (10)

So, we have

$$\min (v_p(P_k), v_p(k+1)) \leq v_p(P_k + k + 1) < v_p(P_k),$$

which implies that

$$v_p(k+1) < v_p(P_k)$$

and then, that

$$v_p(P_k + k + 1) = \min (v_p(P_k), v_p(k+1)) = v_p(k+1).$$

According to (10), it follows that

$$\min \left\{ v_p(P_k + k + 1), \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(P_k + i) \right\} = v_p(k+1).$$ \hfill (11)

By substituting (8) and (11) into (7), we finally get:

$$v_p(P_k) = \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(i),$$

as required. The theorem is proved. \hfill \blacksquare

Using Theorem 2.5, we can find infinitely many natural numbers $k$ so that $(k+1)$ is not prime and the equality $P_k = \text{lcm}(1, 2, \ldots, k)$ holds. The following corollary gives concrete examples for such numbers $k$.

**Corollary 2.6** If $k$ is an integer having the form $k = 6^r - 1$ ($r \in \mathbb{N}, r \geq 2$), then we have

$$P_k = \text{lcm}(1, 2, \ldots, k).$$

Consequently, there are an infinitely many $k \in \mathbb{N}$ for which $(k+1)$ is not prime and the equality $P_k = \text{lcm}(1, 2, \ldots, k)$ holds.
Proof. Let \( r \geq 2 \) be an integer and \( k = 6^r - 1 \). We have \( v_2(k+1) = v_2(6^r) = r \) while \( \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_2(i) \geq r+1 \) (since \( k \geq 2^{r+1} \)). Thus \( v_2(k+1) < \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_2(i) \). Similarly, we have \( v_3(k+1) = v_3(6^r) = r \) while \( \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_3(i) \geq r+1 \) (since \( k \geq 3^{r+1} \)). Thus \( v_3(k+1) < \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_3(i) \).

Finally, for any prime \( p \in [5, k] \), we clearly have \( v_p(k+1) = v_p(6^r) = 0 \) and \( \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(i) \geq 1 \). Hence \( v_p(k+1) < \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(i) \). This shows that the hypothesis of Theorem 2.5 is satisfied for any prime number \( p \). Consequently, we have for any prime \( p \): \( v_p(P_k) = \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(i) = v_p(\text{lcm}(1, 2, \ldots, k)) \). Hence \( P_k = \text{lcm}(1, 2, \ldots, k) \), as required.

\[ \]

3 Determination of the exact value of \( P_k \)

Notice that Theorem 2.5 successfully computes the value of \( v_p(P_k) \) for almost all primes \( p \) (in fact we will prove in Proposition 3.3 that Theorem 2.5 fails to provide this value for at most one prime). In order to evaluate \( P_k \), all we have left to do is compute \( v_p(P_k) \) for primes \( p \) so that \( v_p(k+1) \geq \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(i) \).

In particular we will prove:

Lemma 3.1 Let \( k \in \mathbb{N} \). If \( v_p(k+1) \geq \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(i) \), then \( v_p(P_k) = 0 \).

From which the following result is immediate:

Theorem 3.2 We have for all \( k \in \mathbb{N} \):

\[ P_k = \prod_{p \text{ prime, } p \leq k} \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } v_p(k+1) \geq \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(i) \\ p^{\max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(i)} & \text{else} \end{cases} \]

In order to prove this result, we will need to look into some of the more detailed divisibility properties of \( g_k(n) \). In this spirit we make the following definitions:

Let \( S_{n,k} = \{n, n+1, n+2, \ldots, n+k\} \) be the set of integers in the range \([n, n+k]\).

For a prime number \( p \), let \( g_{p,k}(n) := v_p(g_k(n)) \). Let \( P_{p,k} \) be the exact period of \( g_{p,k} \). Since a positive integer is uniquely determined by the number of times each prime divides it, \( P_k = \text{lcm}_{p \text{ prime}}(P_{p,k}) \).

Now note that

\[ g_{p,k}(n) = \sum_{m \in S_{n,k}} v_p(m) - \max_{m \in S_{n,k}} v_p(m) \]

\[ = \sum_{e>0, m \in S_{n,k}} (1 \text{ if } p^e|m) - \sum_{e>0} (1 \text{ if } p^e \text{ divides some } m \in S_{n,k}) \]

\[ = \sum_{e>0} \max(0, \#\{m \in S_{n,k} : p^e|m\} - 1). \]
Let $e_{p,k} = \lfloor \log_p(k) \rfloor = \max_{1 \leq i \leq k} v_p(i)$ be the largest exponent of a power of $p$ that is at most $k$. Clearly there is at most one element of $S_{n,k}$ divisible by $p^e$ if $e > e_{p,k}$, therefore terms in the above sum with $e > e_{p,k}$ are all 0. Furthermore, for each $e \leq e_{p,k}$, at least one element of $S_{p,k}$ is divisible by $p^e$. Hence we have that

$$g_{p,k}(n) = \sum_{e=1}^{e_{p,k}} \left( \# \{ m \in S_{n,k} : p^e | m \} - 1 \right).$$

(12)

Note that each term on the right hand side of (12) is periodic in $n$ with period $p^{e_{p,k}}$ since the condition $p^e | (n + m)$ for fixed $m$ is periodic with period $p^e$. Therefore $P_{p,k} | p^{e_{p,k}}$. Note that this implies that the $P_{p,k}$ for different $p$ are relatively prime, and hence we have that

$$P_k = \prod_{p \text{ prime, } p \leq k} P_{p,k}.$$  

We are now prepared to prove our main result

**Proof of Lemma 3.1.** Suppose that $v_p(k+1) \geq e_{p,k}$. It clearly suffices to show that $v_p(P_{q,k}) = 0$ for each prime $q$. For $q \neq p$ this follows immediately from the result that $P_{q,k} | q^{e_{q,k}}$. Now we consider the case $q = p$.

For each $e \in \{1, \ldots, e_{p,k}\}$, since $p^e | (k + 1)$, it is clear that $\# \{ m \in S_{n,k} : p^e | m \} = \frac{k+1}{p^e}$, which implies (according to (12)) that $g_{k,n}$ is independent of $n$. Consequently, we have $P_{p,k} = 1$, and hence $v_p(P_{p,k}) = 0$, thus completing our proof. 

Note that a slightly more complicated argument allows one to use this technique to provide an alternate proof of Theorem 3.2.

We can also show that the result in Theorem 3.2 says that $P_k$ is basically $\text{lcm}(1,2,\ldots,k)$.

**Proposition 3.3** There is at most one prime $p$ so that $v_p(k+1) \geq e_{p,k}$. In particular, by Theorem 3.2 $P_k$ is either $\text{lcm}(1,2,\ldots,k)$, or $\frac{\text{lcm}(1,2,\ldots,k)}{p^{e_{p,k}}}$ for some prime $p$.

**Proof.** Suppose that for two distinct primes, $p, q \leq k$ that $v_p(k+1) \geq e_{p,k}$, and $v_q(k+1) \geq e_{q,k}$. Then

$$k + 1 \geq p^{v_p(k+1)} q^{v_q(k+1)} \geq p^{e_{p,k}} q^{e_{q,k}} > \min \left( p^{e_{p,k}}, q^{e_{q,k}} \right)^2 = \min \left( p^{2e_{p,k}}, q^{2e_{q,k}} \right).$$

But this would imply that either $k \geq p^{2e_{p,k}}$ or that $k \geq q^{2e_{q,k}}$ thus violating the definition of either $e_{p,k}$ or $e_{q,k}$.

**References**


