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§ 1. COXETER GROUPS

In this section, W denotes a group written multiplicatively, with identity element 1, and S denotes a set of generators of W such that $S = S^{-1}$ and $1 \notin S$. Every element of W is the product of a finite sequence of elements of S . From no. 3 onwards we assume that every element of S is of order 2.

§ 2. LENGTH AND REDUCED DECOMPOSITIONS

DEFINITION 1. Let $w \in W$. The length of w (with respect to S), denoted by $l(w)$ or simply by $l(w)$, is the smallest integer $q \geq 0$ such that w is the product of a sequence of q elements of S . A reduced decomposition of w (with respect to S) is any sequence $s = (s_1, \dots, s_q)$ of elements of S such that $w = s_1 \dots s_q$ and $q = l(w)$.

Thus 1 is the unique element of length 0 and S consists of the elements of length 1.

PROPOSITION 1. Let w and w' be in W . We have the formulas:

$$l(ww') \leq l(w) + l(w'), \quad (1)$$

$$l(w^{-1}) = l(w), \quad (2)$$

$$|l(w) - l(w')| \leq l(ww'^{-1}). \quad (3)$$

Let (s_1, \dots, s_p) and (s'_1, \dots, s'_q) be reduced decompositions of w and w' , respectively. Thus $l(w) = p$ and $l(w') = q$. Since $ww' = s_1 \dots s_p s'_1 \dots s'_q$, we have $l(ww') \leq p + q$, proving (1). Since $S = S^{-1}$ and $w^{-1} = s_p^{-1} \dots s_1^{-1}$, we have $l(w^{-1}) \leq p = l(w)$. Replacing w by w^{-1} gives the opposite inequality $l(w) \leq l(w^{-1})$, proving (2). Replacing w by ww'^{-1} in (1) and (2) gives the relations

$$l(w) - l(w') \leq l(ww'^{-1}), \quad (4)$$

$$l(ww'^{-1}) = l(w'w^{-1}). \quad (5)$$