

Zeitschrift: L'Enseignement Mathématique
Herausgeber: Commission Internationale de l'Enseignement Mathématique
Band: 44 (1998)
Heft: 3-4: L'ENSEIGNEMENT MATHÉMATIQUE

Artikel: NEW PROOF OF VINCENT'S THEOREM
Autor: Alesina, Alberto / Galuzzi, Massimo
Kapitel: 7. Chen's proof of Vincent's theorem
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-63903>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 18.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

7. CHEN'S PROOF OF VINCENT'S THEOREM

The proof given by Chen in 1987 [17] has the merit of focusing on the fractional linear transformations of the complex plane into itself as one of the principal tools involved in Vincent's theorem. Keeping the previous notation, we observe that the variable substitution

$$x \leftarrow \frac{a + bx}{1 + x}$$

whose effect we have considered in detail, corresponds to the map $\mathcal{F}: \mathbf{C} \rightarrow \mathbf{C}$ defined by

$$(7.1) \quad y = \mathcal{F}(x) = \frac{x - a}{b - x}.$$

Chen's proof, which also carries over to the case of multiple roots, depends on a careful consideration of the effect of the map (7.1) on the roots of a polynomial.

Another essential tool is given by Obreschkoff's generalization of Descartes' rule of signs which may be stated as follows:

THEOREM 7.1 [30, p. 84]. *The number of roots of a real algebraic equation of degree n with V variations, whose argument φ verifies the inequality*

$$-\frac{\pi}{n - V} < \varphi < \frac{\pi}{n - V},$$

is equal to V or is less than V by an even number.

We list some properties of the map (7.1) we are going to use.

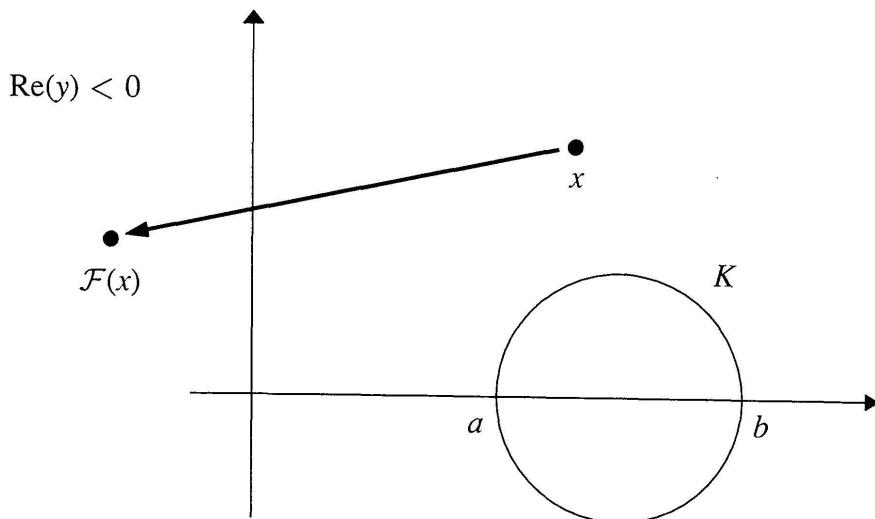


FIGURE 1a

- If $x \in \mathbf{R}$ then $\mathcal{F}(x) \in \mathbf{R}$ and, more precisely, if $x \in (a, b)$ then $\mathcal{F}(x) \in \mathbf{R}^+$.
- The map (7.1) transforms the circle K

$$\left| x - \frac{a+b}{2} \right| = \frac{1}{2} |b-a|$$

into the line $\operatorname{Re}(y) = 0$, and the exterior of this circle into the half-plane $\operatorname{Re}(y) < 0$ (see Fig. 1a).

- The map (7.1) (see Fig. 1b) transforms the left half plane $\operatorname{Re}(x) < 0$ into the interior of the circle H

$$\left| x + \frac{a+b}{2b} \right| = \frac{|a-b|}{2b}$$

whose diameter endpoints are -1 and $-\frac{a}{b}$. The imaginary axis is transformed into H .

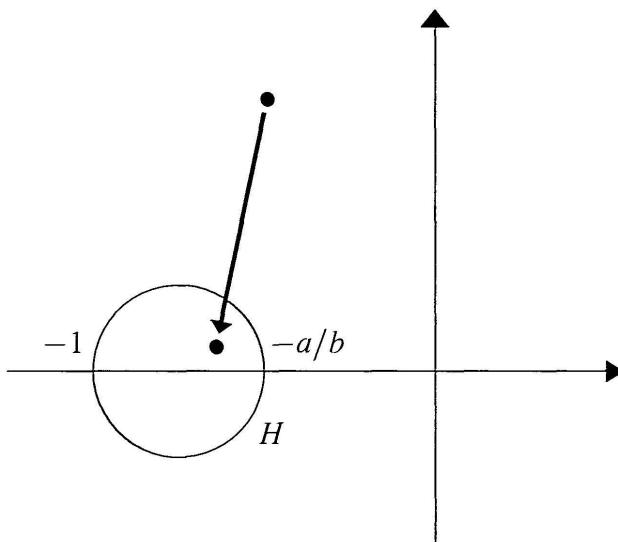


FIGURE 1b

With the help of these observations, we can prove the following

THEOREM 7.2 (Chen's Theorem 1). *Let $f(x)$ be a real polynomial of degree n whose least roots distance is Δ , and let $\gamma = [c_0, c_1, \dots]$ with c_i non-negative integers, be a continued fraction, whose k -th convergent is denoted by $\frac{p_k}{q_k}$. Suppose that $F_h F_{h-1} \Delta > 1$. Then the polynomial*

$$f_{h+1}(x) = (q_{h-1} + q_h x)^n f\left(\frac{p_{h-1} + p_h x}{q_{h-1} + q_h x}\right)$$

has at most one root in the right half plane: one root if $f_{h+1}(x)$ has a positive number of variations, and no root if it has no variations.

Proof. We set, as before, $a = \frac{p_{h-1}}{q_{h-1}}$, $b = \frac{p_h}{q_h}$ and make the change of variable $x \leftarrow \frac{q_{h-1}}{q_h}x$. Once again we are led to study the number of variations of

$$\phi(x) = (1+x)^n f\left(\frac{a+bx}{1+x}\right).$$

Since

$$|b-a| = \frac{1}{q_h q_{h-1}} \leq \frac{1}{F_h F_{h-1}} < \Delta$$

at most one root of $f(x)$ (which is necessarily real) may be in the interior of K .

If no root is in the interior of K , all the roots are mapped by \mathcal{F} into the left half plane, and $\phi(x)$ has only factors with positive coefficients, and consequently has no variations. If a root $x_0 (> 0)$ is in the interior of K , then $\mathcal{F}(x_0)$ is a positive real number and $\phi(x)$, having a positive root, must have a positive number of variations. \square

Chen is now in a position to prove the following theorem.

THEOREM 7.3 (Chen's Theorem 2). *Suppose that the real polynomial $f(x)$ of degree n has only one root x_0 in the right half plane, and consider the continued fraction $\gamma = [c_0, c_1, \dots]$ with c_i non-negative integers. Suppose that the integer h is sufficiently large to have*

$$\min(p_h q_{h-1}, p_{h-1} q_h) > \frac{n}{6}.$$

If the polynomial $f_{h+1}(x)$ has V variations, then V is exactly the multiplicity of x_0 and $x_0 \in \left(\frac{p_{h-1}}{q_{h-1}}, \frac{p_h}{q_h}\right)$.

Proof. To avoid trivial cases, we suppose that $n \geq 3$ and that $V \geq 3$. We substitute $\phi(x)$ for $f_{h+1}(x)$ as in the previous theorem.

By hypothesis f has only one (real) root x_0 in the right half plane. If $x_0 \notin \left(\frac{p_{h-1}}{q_{h-1}}, \frac{p_h}{q_h}\right)$ then $\phi(x)$ has no variations: hence a contradiction. Therefore, $x_0 \in \left(\frac{p_{h-1}}{q_{h-1}}, \frac{p_h}{q_h}\right)$ and the multiplicity of the root $\mathcal{F}(x_0)$ of $\phi(x)$ is smaller than V . Since \mathcal{F} is one-to-one it follows that the multiplicity of x_0 is also smaller than V .

By the fundamental theorem of algebra the number of roots of $f(x)$ in the left half plane or on the imaginary axis is greater than $n - V$.

\mathcal{F} transforms all the roots different from x_0 into or on the circle H , hence $\phi(x)$ has a positive real root $\mathcal{F}(x_0)$ and all the other roots, whose number is greater than $n - V$, are inside H or on its circumference.

Let $g(x) = \phi(-x)$ and denote by $-H$ the circle symmetric to H with respect to the imaginary axis. The polynomial $g(x)$ has at least $n - V$ roots inside $-H$ or on its circumference. Denoting by V' the number of variations of $g(x)$ we have

$$V' \leq n - V.$$

We prove that the number of the roots of $g(x)$ within $-H$ (or on its boundary) is exactly $n - V$.

From

$$\min(p_{h-1} q_h, p_h q_{h-1}) > \frac{n}{6},$$

we have

$$\frac{1}{2p_{h-1}q_h} < \frac{3}{n} \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{1}{2p_hq_{h-1}} < \frac{3}{n}.$$

Hence

$$\frac{3}{n} < \frac{\pi}{n} < \tan \frac{\pi}{n}.$$

It follows that

$$\frac{1}{2p_{h-1}q_h} < \tan \frac{\pi}{n}, \quad \frac{1}{2p_hq_{h-1}} < \tan \frac{\pi}{n}.$$

The maximum absolute value of the tangent of the argument of a point inside the circle $-H$ is given by

$$\frac{|a - b|}{2\sqrt{ab}} = \frac{1}{2\sqrt{p_h q_{h-1} p_{h-1} q_h}},$$

and

$$\frac{1}{2\sqrt{p_h q_{h-1}}} \frac{1}{\sqrt{p_{h-1} q_h}} \leq \frac{1}{2 \min(p_h q_{h-1}, p_{h-1} q_h)}.$$

It follows that the circle $-H$ is contained in the sector

$$W = \left\{ x : |\arg(x)| < \frac{\pi}{n} \right\}.$$

The polynomial $g(x)$ has degree n and it has V' variations. Since $V' < n$, we have

$$\frac{\pi}{n - V'} > \frac{\pi}{n}.$$

We may apply Obreschkoff's result to conclude that the number of roots of $g(x)$ within the sector

$$W' = \left\{ x : |\arg(x)| < \frac{\pi}{n - V'} \right\}$$

is less than $V' \leq n - V$. But since $g(x)$ has at least $n - V$ roots within or on the boundary of $-H \subseteq W \subseteq W'$, the number of roots of $g(x)$ within or on $-H$ is exactly $n - V$. Then $\phi(x)$ and therefore $f_{h+1}(x)$ has exactly $n - V$ roots in the left half plane. Hence V is the multiplicity of the only positive root of $f_{h+1}(x)$ and therefore of $f(x)$. \square

THEOREM 7.4. *Let $f(x)$ be an integral polynomial of degree $n \geq 3$, with only one root x_0 in the right half plane, and suppose it has at least 3 variations. Let m be the smallest integer such that*

$$m > \frac{1}{2} \log_{\phi} n,$$

where $\phi = \frac{1+\sqrt{5}}{2}$. Let $\gamma = [c_0, c_1, \dots]$ with c_i positive integers. If V is the number of variations of f_{m+1} , then the root x_0 has multiplicity V and $x_0 \in \left(\frac{p_{m-1}}{q_{m-1}}, \frac{p_m}{q_m} \right)$.

Proof. Since

$$m > \frac{1}{2} \log_{\phi} n,$$

we have

$$\phi^{2m} > n.$$

Let $\psi = \frac{1-\sqrt{5}}{2}$. Writing the n -th Fibonacci number F_n in our notation (see note 4) as

$$F_n = \frac{1}{\sqrt{5}}(\phi^{n+1} - \psi^{n+1}),$$

we easily deduce

$$F_{m-1}^2 \geq \frac{n}{6}.$$

The hypothesis $c_i \geq 1$ implies that $p_k > q_k$ for every k , hence

$$\min(p_m q_{m-1}, p_{m-1} q_m) > F_{m-1}^2 \geq \frac{n}{6}$$

and we may apply the previous theorem¹⁹). \square

¹⁹) The reason why Chen does not explicitly require $F_{m-1}^2 > n/6$ is not clear, but we have followed his approach.

THEOREM 7.5 (Chen's Main Theorem). *Let $f(x)$ be an integral polynomial of degree $n \geq 3$ with at least 3 variations. Let h be the smallest positive integer for which*

$$F_{h-1}^2 \Delta > 1,$$

and let m be the smallest positive integer such that

$$m > \frac{1}{2} \log_\phi n.$$

Let $k = h + m$. For an arbitrary continued fraction $\gamma = [c_0, c_1, \dots] > 0$, consider the polynomial f_{k+1} constructed by F_k . If V is the number of variations of f_{k+1} then the polynomial f has a unique positive root in $\left(\frac{p_{k-1}}{q_{k-1}}, \frac{p_k}{q_k}\right)$ and V is its multiplicity.

Proof. After h steps, the polynomial f_{h+1} might have no variations, and then f_{k+1} will have no variations. If f_{h+1} has V variations, by Chen's Theorem 1 it has a positive root in the right half plane. The partial quotients c_i are ≥ 1 for $i > h$, and so we may apply Chen's Theorem 2. \square

8. A NEW PROOF OF VINCENT'S THEOREM

In this section we give a new and simpler proof of Vincent's theorem, which in turn improves on Chen's result. For the sake of clarity, we prefer to deal separately with the two cases of simple and multiple roots.

8.1 THE CASE OF SIMPLE ROOTS

In the case of simple roots, we show that Vincent's theorem holds under the only assumption

$$\Delta F_h F_{h-1} > \frac{2}{\sqrt{3}}$$

independently of the polynomial degree n .

Our proof depends on the following result by Obreschkoff [30, p. 81].

LEMMA 8.1. *Let $f(x)$ be a real polynomial with V variations in the sequence of its coefficients; let V_1 be the number of variations of the polynomial $f_1(x) = (x^2 + 2\rho x \cos \varphi + \rho^2)f(x)$ (where $\rho > 0$ and $|\varphi| < \frac{\pi}{V+2}$). Then $V \geq V_1$, and the difference $V - V_1$ is an even number.*