

On the set of the largest prime divisors

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Abstract. In this paper we obtain lower bounds on the set of the largest prime divisors $P(a(n))$ of various sequences $a(n)$ for $n \leq x$. In particular we obtain such results for polynomial sequences and for linear recurrence sequences.

1. Introduction

For an integer k we use $P(k)$ to denote the largest prime divisor of k (we also put $P(0) = 0$ and $P(\pm 1) = 1$).

Give an integer-valued sequence $\mathcal{A} = (a(n))_{n=1}^{\infty}$ and a real positive x , we denote

$$\mathcal{S}_{\mathcal{A}}(x) = \{P(a(n)) : n \leq x\}.$$

Certainly studying the size and other properties of $P(a(n))$ for various sequences $\mathcal{A}$ is a classical number theoretic question, which has been studied for various sequences including shifted primes, polynomials and linear recurrence sequences, for example, see [1], [3], [7]–[9], [11]–[17] and references therein. On the other hand, the question about the cardinality of set $\mathcal{S}_{\mathcal{A}}(x)$ appears to be new. We however mention a result of [10] about

$$\{P(a_1 + \cdots + a_k) : a_i \in \mathcal{A}_i, i = 1, \dots, k\}$$

where $\mathcal{A}_1, \dots, \mathcal{A}_k$ are k arbitrary sufficiently dense sets of integers.

It also follows immediately from the result of [2] that for the sequence $\mathcal{P}_a = (\ell(n) + a)_{n=1}^{\infty}$ of consecutive shifted prime numbers (where $\ell(n)$ denotes the n th

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prime) the corresponding set $\mathcal{S}_{\mathcal{P}_a}(x)$ consists of all primes in the interval $[1, x^\gamma]$ for any $\gamma < 17/33$.

Throughout the paper, any implied constants in the symbols ‘ O ’, ‘ $\ll$ ’ and ‘ $\gg$ ’ may depend (where obvious) on the sequence $\mathcal{A}$ and are absolute otherwise. We recall that the statements $A \ll B$ and $B \gg A$ are equivalent to $A = O(B)$ for positive functions A and B .

2. Auxiliary results

We employ some well known results on the distribution of the values of the largest prime divisor for various sequences.

For a given nonconstant polynomial $g(X) \in \mathbb{Z}[X]$, we use $\psi_g(x, y)$ to denote the number of positive integers $n \leq x$ with $P(g(n)) \leq y$, that is,

$$\psi_g(x, y) = \#\{n \leq x : P(g(n)) \leq y\}.$$

We have the following bound from [18], which in turn improves some results from [5]:

Lemma 1. *Let $g(X) \in \mathbb{Z}[X]$ be a polynomial of degree $\deg g = k \geq 2$ having t irreducible divisors over $\mathbb{Z}$. Then, for any fixed $\varepsilon > 0$ and all sufficiently large x , we have*

$$\psi_g(x, y) \leq \frac{(t + \varepsilon)^{\lfloor v \rfloor} x}{k(k-1)^{\lfloor v \rfloor - 1} v^{\lfloor v \rfloor}}$$

for $y = x^{1/v}$, and $1 \leq v \leq \sqrt{\log x / (2 + \varepsilon)}$.

Let $\mathcal{U} = (u(n))_{n=1}^\infty$ be a linear recurrence sequence of integers satisfying a homogeneous linear recurrence relation

$$c_k u(n+k) + c_{k-1} u(n+k-1) + \cdots + c_0 u(n) = 0, \quad k = 1, 2, \dots,$$

with the characteristic polynomial

$$c_k x^k + c_{k-1} x^{k-1} + \cdots + c_1 x + c_0 \in \mathbb{Z}[X].$$

where $c_k \neq 0$ and $c_0 \neq 0$. We recall that $\mathcal{U}$ is called *non-degenerate* if $\alpha_i^s \neq \alpha_j^s$, $1 \leq i < j \leq m$, $s = 1, 2, \dots$, where $\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_m$ are pairwise distinct roots of the characteristic polynomial.

For an integer q and a real x we denote by $R_{\mathcal{U}}(x, q)$ the number of positive integers $n \leq x$ with $u(n) \equiv 0 \pmod{q}$. We need the following bound from [11].

Lemma 2. *If the linear recurrent sequence $\mathcal{U} = (u(n))_{n=1}^{\infty}$ is non-degenerate then for any integer $q \geq 2$ and real $x \geq 0$,*

$$R_{\mathcal{U}}(x, q) \ll x/\log q + 1.$$

Let $\mathcal{L}$ be an arbitrary set of primes and let $A_{\mathcal{U}}(\mathcal{L}, x)$ be the number of $n \leq x$ such that $u(n)$ is composed only out of primes from $\mathcal{L}$. The following bound is given in [12].

Lemma 3. *If the linear recurrent sequence $\mathcal{U} = (u(n))_{n=1}^{\infty}$ is non-degenerate then for any set $\mathcal{L}$ of $r = \#\mathcal{L}$ primes and real $x \geq 0$,*

$$A_{\mathcal{U}}(\mathcal{L}, x) \ll r(\log x)^2.$$

For an integer q and a real x we denote by $T(x, q)$ the number positive integers $n \leq x$ with $n! + 1 \equiv 0 \pmod{q}$. We need the following bound which is a partial case of a more general estimate from [9].

Lemma 4. *For any prime p and real x with $p > x \geq 1$, we have*

$$T(x, p) \ll x^{2/3}.$$

Let $\mathcal{V} = (v(n))$ where

$$v(n) = \prod_{j=1}^n \ell(j) + 1 \tag{1}$$

and $\ell(n)$ denotes the n th prime. For a prime p and a real x , let $W(x, p)$ be the number of positive integers $n \leq x$ such that $v(n) \equiv 0 \pmod{p}$. We have the following bound which is a special case of a more general result from [6].

Lemma 5. *For any prime p and real $x \geq 3$, we have*

$$W(x, p) \ll x \frac{\log \log x}{\log x}.$$

3. Main results

We now derive lower bounds for the sets $\mathcal{S}_{\mathcal{A}}(x)$ for various sequences $\mathcal{A}$. We start with polynomial sequences.

Theorem 6. *Let $g(X) \in \mathbb{Z}[X]$ be polynomial of degree $k \geq 2$ which does not split completely over $\mathbb{Z}$. Then for the sequence $\mathcal{G} = (g(n))_{n=1}^{\infty}$ we have*

$$\#\mathcal{S}_{\mathcal{G}}(x) \gg \frac{x}{4k^2} - 1.$$

PROOF. We partition the set of integers $n \leq x$ into the set $\mathcal{N}_1$ consisting of those $n \leq x$ such that $P(g(n)) \leq x$, and $\mathcal{N}_2$ consisting of those $n \leq x$ such that $P(g(n)) > x$.

Since $g(X)$ does not split over $\mathbb{Z}$ we see that the number t of its irreducible divisors satisfies $t \leq k - 1$. It immediately follows from Lemma 1, applied with $\varepsilon = 1/2$ and $v = 1$, that for a sufficiently large x ,

$$\#\mathcal{N}_1 \leq \frac{k - 1/2}{k}x.$$

Hence

$$\#\mathcal{N}_2 \geq x - \#\mathcal{N}_1 - 1 = \frac{x}{2k} - 1.$$

Let $\mathcal{Q} = \{P(g(n)) : n \in \mathcal{N}_2\}$. Then for some $p \in \mathcal{Q}$ and $p \geq x$, the congruence

$$g(n) \equiv 0 \pmod{p}, \quad n \in \mathcal{N}_2,$$

has at least $\#\mathcal{N}_2/\#\mathcal{Q}$ solutions. On the other hand, there can be at most $k(x/p + 1)$ solutions to this congruence. Therefore we have

$$\frac{\#\mathcal{N}_2}{\#\mathcal{Q}} \leq k \left(\frac{x}{p} + 1 \right) \leq 2k.$$

This leads us to the inequality

$$\#\mathcal{S}_{\mathcal{G}}(x) \geq \#\mathcal{Q} \geq \frac{\#\mathcal{N}_2}{2k} > \frac{x}{4k^2} - 1$$

and the result now follows. $\square$

Clearly, one can easily improve the constant $1/4k^2$. It is also clear that if $g(X)$ splits completely over $\mathbb{Z}$ then $\#\mathcal{S}_{\mathcal{G}}(x) \ll x/\log x$ and one can easily prove a matching lower bound.

Theorem 7. *Let $\mathcal{U} = (u(n))_{n=1}^{\infty}$ be a non-degenerate linear recurrent sequence. Then*

$$\#\mathcal{S}_{\mathcal{U}}(x) \gg \log x.$$

PROOF. Let $y = x/(\log x)^2$. We partition the set of integers $n \leq x$ into the set $\mathcal{M}_1$ consisting of those $n \leq x$ such that $P(u(n)) \leq y$, and $\mathcal{M}_2$ consisting of those $n \leq x$ such that $P(u(n)) > y$.

By Lemma 3, applied to the set $\mathcal{L}$ of the first $r = \pi(y) \sim x/(\log x)^3$ primes, we obtain $\#\mathcal{M}_1 \ll x/\log x$. Thus $\#\mathcal{M}_2 = (1 + o(1))x$.

As in the proof of Theorem 6 we conclude that there is a prime $p > y$ such that the congruence

$$u(n) \equiv 0 \pmod{p}, \quad n \in \mathcal{M}_2,$$

has at least $\#\mathcal{M}_2/\#\mathcal{R}$ solutions, where $\mathcal{R} = \{P(u(n)) : n \in \mathcal{M}_2\}$. Using Lemma 2, we derive

$$\frac{\#\mathcal{M}_2}{\#\mathcal{R}} \ll \frac{x}{\log p} + 1 \ll \frac{x}{\log y} \ll \frac{x}{\log x}$$

and the result now follows. $\square$

Theorem 8. Let $\mathcal{F} = (n! + 1)_{n=1}^\infty$. Then

$$\#\mathcal{S}_{\mathcal{F}}(x) \geq x^{1/3}.$$

PROOF. Clearly, there is a prime p such that the congruence

$$n! + 1 \equiv 0 \pmod{p}, \quad 1 \leq n \leq x,$$

has at least $\lfloor x \rfloor / \#\mathcal{S}_{\mathcal{F}}(x)$ solutions. We have two possible cases; one when $p > x$, and the second when $p \leq x$. If $p > x$, we can apply Lemma 4 directly. If $p \leq x$, we see that $P(n! + 1) = p$ only when $n < p$, and we can use Lemma 4 with $x = p$. Therefore

$$\frac{\lfloor x \rfloor}{\#\mathcal{S}_{\mathcal{F}}(x)} \ll \min\{x^{2/3}, p^{2/3}\} \ll x^{2/3}$$

and the result now follows. $\square$

Theorem 9. Let $\mathcal{V} = (v(n))_{n=1}^\infty$ where $v(n)$ is given by (1). We have

$$\#\mathcal{S}_{\mathcal{V}}(x) \geq \frac{\log x}{\log \log x}.$$

PROOF. As before, we note that there is a prime p such that the congruence

$$v(n) \equiv 0 \pmod{p}, \quad 1 \leq n \leq x,$$

has at least $\lfloor x \rfloor / \#\mathcal{S}_{\mathcal{V}}(x)$ solutions. Using Lemma 5, we finish the proof. $\square$

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