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Existence of compact quotients of homogeneous spaces, measurably proper actions, and decay of matrix coefficients


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EXISTENCE OF COMPACT QUOTIENTS OF HOMOGENEOUS SPACES, MEASURABLY PROPER ACTIONS, AND DECAY OF MATRIX COEFFICIENTS

BY GREGORY MARGULIS (*)

ABSTRACT. — The main purpose of the present paper is to give a new approach for constructing examples of homogeneous spaces $G/H$ with no compact quotients where $G$ is a Lie group and $H$ is a closed noncompact subgroup. This approach is based on the study of the restriction to $H$ of matrix coefficients of unitary representations of $G$. A similar method also gives a criterion when the restriction to $H$ of an action of $G$ on a locally compact space $X$ with a $G$-invariant infinite measure is measurably proper in the sense that, for almost all $x \in X$, the natural map $h \mapsto hx$ of $H$ onto $Hx$ is proper.

RESUME. — Le but principal de cet article est de donner une nouvelle méthode pour construire des exemples d’espaces homogènes $G/H$ qui n’admettent pas de quotients compacts où $G$ est un groupe de Lie et $H$ est un sous-groupe fermé non compact. Cette méthode est basée sur l’étude de la restriction à $H$ des coefficients matriciels de représentations unitaires de $G$. Une méthode similaire donne un critère pour que la restriction à $H$ d’une action de $G$ sur un espace localement compact $X$ qui admet une mesure $G$-invariante infinie soit mesurablement propre ce qui veut dire que l’application naturelle $H \rightarrow Hx$, $h \mapsto hx$, est propre pour presque tout $x \in X$.

Let $G$ be a Lie group, and $H$ a closed subgroup of $G$. There is a natural question: when does $G/H$ have a compact quotient? More precisely when can one find a discrete subgroup $\Gamma$ of $G$ such that $\Gamma$ acts properly on $G/H$ and the quotient space $\Gamma \backslash G/H$ is compact? If $G$ is semisimple and $H$ is compact then according to a theorem of Borel $G/H$ always has a compact form. But if $H$ is not compact the answer to the question is unknown even for semisimple $G$. For a connected semisimple group $G$ and a connected reductive subgroup $H$ all known examples of homogeneous

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spaces $G/H$ which have compact quotients by discrete subgroups are based on the following construction. Suppose that there exists a connected closed subgroup $F \subset G$ such that $G = F \cdot H$ and $F \cap H$ is compact. Then $G/H$ is naturally isomorphic to $F/F \cap H$. In particular if $F$ is semisimple or, more generally, reductive we can use Borel's theorem to construct a compact quotient of $G/H$ by a discrete subgroup.

On the other hand, there are many examples of homogeneous spaces $G/H$ without compact quotients (see surveys [1], [2] and references therein). To prove that $G/H$ has no compact quotients several criteria are used. These criteria are mostly based on considerations from topology, ergodic theory and the theory of linear groups. In this paper we give a new criterion which is based on the study of the restriction to $H$ of matrix coefficients of unitary representations of $G$. This criterion gives many new examples of homogeneous spaces $G/H$ without compact quotients.

The study of matrix coefficients also gives a criterion when the restriction to $H$ of an action of $G$ on a locally compact space $X$ with a $G$-invariant (infinite) measure $\mu$ is measurably proper (in the sense that for almost all $x \in X$, the natural map $h \mapsto hx$ of $H$ onto $Hx$ is proper).

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1. $(G,K,H)$-tempered actions

In this section $G$ is a locally compact group, $K$ is a compact subgroup of $G$, and $H$ is a closed subgroup of $G$. Let $\theta$ denote a (left invariant) Haar measure on $H$.

Let $G$ act continuously by measure preserving transformations on a (noncompact) locally compact space $X$ with an infinite regular Borel measure $\mu$. Consider the regular unitary representation $\rho$ of $G$ on $L^2(X,\mu)$:

$$(\rho(g)f)(x) = f(g^{-1}x); \quad g \in G, \ x \in X, \ f \in L^2(X,\mu).$$

Definition 1. — We say that the action of $G$ on $X$ is $(G,K,H)$-tempered if there exists a (positive) function $q \in L^1(H,\theta)$ such that

$$(1) \quad |\langle \rho(h)f_1,f_2 \rangle| \leq q(h)\|f_1\| \cdot \|f_2\|$$

for any $h \in H$ and any $\rho(K)$-invariant functions $f_1,f_2 \in L^2(X,\mu)$.

Proposition 1. — If the action of $G$ on $X$ is $(G,K,H)$-tempered then $\mu(X - HM) > 0$ and, consequently, $HM \neq X$ for any compact subset $M$ of $X$. 

Proof. — Let $M$ be a compact subset of $X$. Then there exists a non-negative $K$-invariant continuous function $f$ on $X$ with compact support such that $f(x) > 1$ for any $x \in M$. Consider a function

$$\varphi = \int_{H} \rho(h)f \, d\theta(h), \quad \varphi(x) = \int_{H} f(h^{-1}x) \, d\theta(h).$$

(The function $\varphi$ can be infinite, and if $HM$ is not compact then usually $\varphi$ is not in $L^2(X, \mu)$.\) Since $f$ is continuous, $M$ is compact and $f(x) > 1$ for any $x \in M$, there exists a neighborhood $W$ of $e \in H$ such that $f(w^{-1}x) > \frac{1}{2}$ for all $x \in M$ and $w \in W$. Now if $x \in HM$ then $\varphi(x) > \frac{1}{2} \theta(W)$ (because if $h^{-1}x \in M$ then $f((hw)^{-1}x) > \frac{1}{2}$ for any $w \in W$). Thus

$$\varphi(x) > \frac{1}{2} \theta(W) \quad \text{for any} \quad x \in HM.
$$

Take a compact subset $L$ of $H$ such that

$$\int_{H-L} q(h) \, d\mu(h) < \frac{1}{2 \|f\|} \theta(W) \quad \text{(3)}$$

where $\|f\| = \sup \{ f(x) \mid x \in X \}$. Since the measure $\mu$ is Borel and infinite and the support $\text{supp} f$ of $f$ is not compact, there exists a $K$-invariant set $A \subset X$ such that $\mu(A) = 1$ and $(L \cdot \text{supp} f) \cap A = \emptyset$. Let $\chi_A$ denote the characteristic function of $A$. Then using (1) and (3) we get

$$\int_{A} \varphi(x) \, d\mu(x) = \int_{X} \varphi \cdot \chi_A(x) \, d\mu(x)$$

$$= \int_{H} \left( \int_{X} ((\rho(h)f)\chi_A)(x) \, d\mu(x) \right) \, d\theta(h)$$

$$= \int_{H} \langle \rho(h)f, \chi_A \rangle \, d\theta(h) = \int_{H-L} \langle \rho(h)f, \chi_A \rangle \, d\theta(h)$$

$$\leq \int_{H-L} q(h) \|f\| \cdot \|\chi_A\| \, d\theta(h) = \|f\| \int_{H-L} q(h) \, d\theta(h)$$

$$< \frac{1}{2} \theta(W). \quad \text{(4)}$$

The equality $\mu(A) = 1$ and the inequalities (2) and (4) imply that $\mu(A-HM) > 0$ and, consequently $\mu(X-HM) > 0$. \]

**Proposition 2.** — Let $A$ be a bounded Borel subset of $X$. For any $x \in X$, let $\psi_A(x)$ denote the $\theta$-measure of the set $\{ h \in H \mid hx \in A \}$. Suppose that the action of $G$ on $X$ is $(G,K,H)$-tempered.
(a) The function $\psi_A$ is locally integrable, that is

$$\int_B \psi_A(x) \, d\mu(x) < \infty$$

for any bounded Borel subset $B$ of $X$.

(b) If $X$ is $\sigma$-compact then $\psi_A(x) < \infty$ for almost all $x \in X$.

Proof. — Clearly (a) implies (b). Let us prove (a). Replacing $A$ by $KA$ and $B$ by $KB$, we can assume that $A$ and $B$ are $K$-invariant. Let $\chi_A$ and $\chi_B$ denote the characteristic functions of $A$ and $B$. It is easy to see that

$$\psi_A = \int_H \rho(h) \chi_A \, d\theta(h).$$

Then using (1) we get

$$\int_B \psi_A(x) \, d\mu(x) = \langle \psi_A, \chi_B \rangle = \int_H \langle \rho(h) \chi_A, \chi_B \rangle \, d\theta(h)$$

$$\leq \int_H q(h) \langle \chi_A, \chi_B \rangle \, d\theta(h) < \infty.$$

\[ \square \]

2. $(G,K)$-tempered subgroups

In this section $G,K,H$ and $\theta$ denote the same as in §1.

Definition 2. — We say that $H$ is $(G,K)$-tempered if there exists a function $q \in L^1(H,\theta)$ such that

$$|\langle \pi(h)w_1, w_2 \rangle| \leq q(h) \|w_1\| \cdot \|w_2\|$$

for any $h \in H$, any $\pi(K)$-invariant vectors $w_1$ and $w_2$ and any unitary representation $\pi$ of $G$ without non-trivial $\pi(G)$-invariant vectors.

Remark 1. — As in §1 let us consider a continuous action of $G$ by measure preserving transformations on a locally compact space $X$ with an infinite regular Borel measure $\mu$, and let us denote by $\rho$ the regular representation of $G$ on $L^2(X,\mu)$. If $a > 0, f \in L^2(X,\mu)$ and $\rho(G)f = f$, then the sets

$$\{ x \in X \mid f(x) > a \} \quad \text{and} \quad \{ x \in X \mid f(x) < -a \}$$

have finite measure and they are $G$-invariant (modulo sets of measure 0). Hence if $X$ has no $G$-invariant subsets of finite non-zero measure and the
subgroup $H$ is $(G, K)$-tempered then the action of $G$ on $X$ is $(G, K, H)$-tempered.

**Remark 2.** — Let

$$\pi = \int_Y \pi_y \, d\sigma(y)$$

be a decomposition of $\pi$ into a continuous sum of irreducible unitary representations, and let

$$W = \int_Y W_y \, d\sigma(y), \quad w_1 = \int_Y w_{1y} \, d\sigma(y), \quad w_2 = \int_Y w_{2y} \, d\sigma(y),$$

$w_{1y}, w_{2y} \in W_y$, be corresponding decompositions of the space $W$ of the representation $\pi$ and of vectors $w_1, w_2 \in W$. Suppose that for all $y \in Y$

$$|\langle \pi_y(h)w_1, w_2 \rangle| \leq q(h) \|w_1\| \cdot \|w_2\|.$$  

Then using Cauchy-Schwartz inequality we get

$$|\langle \pi(h)w_1, w_2 \rangle| = \left| \int_Y \langle \pi_y(h)w_1, w_2 \rangle \, d\sigma(y) \right|$$

$$\leq q(h) \int_Y \|w_1\| \cdot \|w_2\| \, d\sigma(y)$$

$$\leq q(h) \sqrt{\int_Y \|w_1\|^2 \, d\sigma(y)} \sqrt{\int_Y \|w_2\|^2 \, d\sigma(y)}$$

$$= q(h) \|w_1\| \cdot \|w_2\|.$$  

Thus $H$ is $(G, K)$-tempered if and only if the inequality (5) is true for any $h \in H$, any $\pi(K)$-invariant vectors $w_1$ and $w_2$ and any non-trivial irreducible unitary representation $\pi$ of $G$.

Let us now give some examples of $(G, K)$-tempered subgroups. We give only indications of the proofs because more precise and general results are obtained by Hee Oh (see [3]).

**Examples.**

(a) Let $G$ be a connected semisimple Lie group having Kazhdan’s property $(T)$ and $K$ a maximal compact subgroup of $G$. Then any commutative diagonalizable subgroup $H$ of $G$ is $(G, K)$-tempered. To show this it is enough to use Howe-Moore estimates which provide uniform exponential decay for matrix coefficients corresponding to $K$-invariant vectors and irreducible nontrivial unitary representations of semisimple groups with property $(T)$.  

*Bulletin de la Société Mathématique de France*
(b) Let $G = \mathrm{SL}_n(\mathbb{R})$, $K = \mathrm{SO}(n)$, and $\alpha_n$ the $n$-dimensional irreducible representation of $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbb{R})$. Suppose that $n \geq 4$. Then the subgroup $H = \alpha_n(\mathrm{SL}(2, \mathbb{R}))$ is $(G, K)$-tempered. Let us show this in the case where $n = 4$ and

$$\alpha_4(d_t) = r_t, \quad d_t = \begin{pmatrix} e^t & 0 \\ 0 & e^{-t} \end{pmatrix}, \quad r_t = \begin{pmatrix} e^{3t} & 0 \\ e^t & e^{-t} \\ 0 & e^{-3t} \end{pmatrix}.$$

It is well known that the restriction of any nontrivial irreducible unitary representation $\pi$ of $\mathrm{SL}_4(\mathbb{R})$ to the subgroup

$$F = \left\{ \begin{pmatrix} A & 0 \\ 0 & I \end{pmatrix} \ | \ A \in \mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbb{R}) \right\}$$

does not contain complementary series. But $r_t$ belongs to the subgroup

$$\left\{ \begin{pmatrix} a & 0 & 0 & b \\ 0 & A & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 \\ c & 0 & 0 & d \end{pmatrix} \ | \ A \in \mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbb{R}), \ \begin{pmatrix} a & b \\ c & d \end{pmatrix} \in \mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbb{R}) \right\}$$

which is the direct product of two conjugates of $F$.

Using these facts and formulas for matrix coefficients of the principal series of unitary representations of $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbb{R})$ we easily get that for some $c > 0$

$$|\langle \pi(r_t)w, w \rangle| \leq ce^{-4t}t^2 \cdot |\langle w, w \rangle|, \quad t \geq 0,$$

for any $\pi(K)$-invariant vector $w$. Now it remains to notice that the function

$$f(k_1d_tk_2) = e^{-4t}t^2, \quad k_1, k_2 \in \mathrm{SO}(2), \ t \geq 0,$$

is integrable on $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbb{R})$ because the Haar measure of the set

$$\{k_1d_tk_2 \ | \ k_1, k_2 \in \mathrm{SO}(2), \ 0 \leq t \leq T \}$$

is asymptotically $ce^{2T}$ when $T \to +\infty$.\[\text{TOME 125 — 1997 — N° 3}\]
(c) Let $L$ be a connected simple Lie group, $n \geq 3$, $\varphi : L \to \text{SL}_n(\mathbb{R})$ an $n$-dimensional representation of $L$, and $\varphi = \varphi_1 \oplus \cdots \oplus \varphi_i$ a decomposition of $\varphi$ into the sum of irreducible representations of $L$. Let us denote by $\beta$ the sum of the positive roots of $L$ with respect to a maximal $\mathbb{R}$-split torus $S \subset L$ and an ordering on the character group $X(S)$ of $S$, and by $\chi_j$ the highest weight of the representation $\varphi_j$, $1 \leq j \leq i$. Then using arguments similar to those from the example (b) one can prove that the subgroup $\varphi(L)$ is $(\text{SL}_n(\mathbb{R}), \text{SO}(n))$-tempered whenever

\begin{equation}
\sum_{j \in J} \chi_j > \beta(1 + \varepsilon) \quad \text{for some } \varepsilon > 0, \quad \text{where } J = \{ j \mid \dim \varphi_j \geq 2 \}.
\end{equation}

From this we easily deduce the existence of $N > 0$ such that if

$$\sum_{j \in J} \dim \varphi_j > N$$

then $\varphi(L)$ is $(\text{SL}_n(\mathbb{R}), \text{SO}(n))$-tempered. (Let us note that $\sum_{j \in J} \dim \varphi_j$ is the codimension in $\mathbb{R}^n$ of the subspace of $\varphi(L)$-invariant vectors.)

3. Compact quotients of homogeneous spaces

As usual we say that a continuous action of a locally compact group $G$ on a locally compact space $X$ is proper if, for every compact subset $L \subset X$, the set $\{ g \in G \mid gL \cap L \neq \emptyset \}$ is compact. If $G$ acts properly on $X$ then the quotient space $G \backslash X$ is Hausdorff. We say that the action of $G$ on $X$ is cocompact if there exists a compact subset $L$ of $X$ such that $X = GL$. For proper actions this property is equivalent to the compactness of $G \backslash X$.

It is well known and easy to check that, for any locally compact group $G$ and any closed subgroups $P$ and $Q$ of $G$, the following conditions are equivalent:

(I) the action of $P$ on $G/Q$ by left translations is proper (resp. cocompact);

(II) the action of $Q$ on $P \backslash G$ by right translations is proper (resp. cocompact);

(III) the action $(p, q)g = pgq^{-1}$, $p \in P$, $q \in Q$, $g \in G$, of $P \times Q$ on $G$ is proper (resp. cocompact).

It is natural to call the equivalence (I) $\Leftrightarrow$ (II) the duality principle.

**Theorem 1.** — *Let $G$ be a unimodular locally compact group, $H$ a closed subgroup of $G$, and $F$ a closed subgroup of $H$. Suppose that $H$ is $(G, K)$-tempered for some compact subgroup $K$ of $G$.*

**BULLETIN DE LA SOCIÉTÉ MATHÉMATIQUE DE FRANCE**
(a) If $\Gamma$ is a discrete subgroup of $G$ such that the volume of $\Gamma \backslash G$ with respect to Haar measure is infinite then the action of $\Gamma$ on $G/F$ by left translations is not cocompact.

(b) If $F$ is not compact then there are no discrete subgroups $\Gamma$ of $G$ such that $\Gamma$ acts properly on $G/F$ by left translations and the quotient $\Gamma \backslash (G/F)$ is compact.

Proof.

(a) The group $G$ is unimodular. Therefore the action of $G$ on $\Gamma \backslash G$ by right translations preserves Haar measure $\mu$. Since $\mu(\Gamma \backslash G) = \infty$ there are no $G$-invariant subsets in $\Gamma \backslash G$ of finite measure. Hence (see Remark 1 after Definition 2) the action of $G$ on $\Gamma \backslash G$ is $(G, K, H)$-tempered. Now applying Proposition 1 we get that the action of $H$ on $\Gamma \backslash G$ and, consequently, the action of $F$ on $\Gamma \backslash G$ are not cocompact. From this, using the above mentioned duality principle, we deduce that the action of $\Gamma$ on $G/F$ is not cocompact.

(b) In view of (a) it is enough to consider the case where $\mu(\Gamma \backslash G) < \infty$, but in this case $F$ can not act properly on $\Gamma \backslash G$ because any continuous action of a noncompact group by transformations preserving a finite nonzero regular Borel measure is not proper. 

Combining Theorem 1 with examples (b) and (c) from §2 we get the following two corollaries.

COROLLARY 1. — Let $\alpha_n$ denote the $n$-dimensional irreducible representation of $\text{SL}_2(\mathbb{R})$. Let $G = \text{SL}_n(\mathbb{R})$, $H = \alpha_n(\text{SL}_2(\mathbb{R})) \subset G$, and $F$ a closed subgroup of $H$. Suppose that $n \geq 4$. Then for $G, H$ and $F$ the statements (a) and (b) in Theorem 1 are true. In particular $G/H$ has no compact quotients by discrete subgroups.

COROLLARY 2. — Let $L$ be a connected simple Lie group, $n \geq 3$, and let $\varphi: L \to \text{SL}_n(\mathbb{R})$ be an $n$-dimensional representation of $L$ such that the condition from example (c) of §2 is satisfied. Then the statements (a) and (b) of Theorem 1 are true for $G = \text{SL}_n(\mathbb{R})$, $H = \varphi(L)$ and a closed subgroup $F$ of $H$.

4. Measurably proper actions

Let $H$ be a locally compact second countable group acting continuously on a locally compact second countable space $X$ with an $H$-quasi-invariant Borel measure $\mu$. Let $\theta$ be a left invariant Haar measure on $H$. Then the following conditions are equivalent:

tome 125 — 1997 — n° 3
(a) for almost all (with respect to $\mu$) points $x \in X$, the orbit $Hx$ is closed in $X$ and the stabilizer $H_x = \{ h \in H \mid hx = x \}$ is compact;

(b) for almost all $x \in X$, the stabilizer $H_x$ is compact and the natural map $hH_x \mapsto hx$ of $H/H_x$ onto $Hx$ is a homeomorphism;

(c) for almost all $x \in X$, the natural map $h \mapsto hx$ of $H$ onto $Hx$ is proper or, in other words, the set $\{ h \in H \mid Hx \in A \}$ is bounded in $H$ for any bounded subset $A$ of $X$;

(d) for almost all $x \in X$ and any bounded subset $A$ of $X$, the $\theta$-measure of the set $\{ h \in H \mid hx \in A \}$ is finite.

The equivalences (a) $\iff$ (b) and (b) $\iff$ (c) are standard facts about group actions. The implication (c) $\implies$ (d) is trivial. To prove (d) $\implies$ (c) let us consider a bounded neighborhood $U$ of $e$ in $H$. Then

$$\{ h \in H \mid hx \in UA \} = U \{ h \in H \mid hx \in A \}.$$ 

Therefore if $\{ h \in H \mid hx \in A \}$ is unbounded then $\{ h \in H \mid hx \in UA \}$ has infinite measure. It remains to notice that if $A$ is bounded then $UA$ is also bounded.

If the conditions (a)-(d) are satisfied then we say the action of $H$ on $X$ is measurable proper. It is easy to see that if the action of $H$ on $X$ is measurably proper then almost all components in the decomposition of $\mu$ into $H$-ergodic measures are supported on closed $H$-orbits $Hx$ with compact stabilizers $H_x$. In particular if the measure $\mu$ is $H$-ergodic then there exists $x \in X$ such that $\mu(X - Hx) = 0$, $Hx$ is closed in $X$ and $H_x$ is compact. Let us also note that if $H$ acts measurably proper on $X$ and $F$ is a closed subgroup of $H$ then the action of $F$ is also measurably proper.

**Theorem 2.** — Let $G$ be a locally compact second countable group acting continuously on a locally compact second countable space $X$ with a $G$-invariant (regular infinite) Borel measure $\mu$, let $H$ be a closed subgroup of $G$, and $K$ a compact subgroup of $G$.

(a) If the action of $G$ on $X$ is $(G,K,H)$-tempered then the restriction of this action to $H$ is measurably proper.

(b) If the subgroup $H$ is $(G,K)$-tempered and $X$ has no $G$-invariant subsets of finite nonzero measure then the action of $H$ on $X$ is measurably proper.

**Proof.**

(a) follows from Proposition 2 (b). In view of Remark 1 from §2, (a) implies (b). ☐
Remarks.

(I) In view of examples (a)--(c) from §2, Theorem 2 (b) can be applied in the following cases:

(a) $G$ is a connected semisimple Lie group having Kazhdan’s property (T) and $H$ is a commutative diagonalizable subgroup of $G$;

(b) $G = \text{SL}_n(\mathbb{R})$ and $H = \pi_n(\text{SL}_2(\mathbb{R}))$ where $n \geq 4$ and $\pi_n$ is the $n$-dimensional irreducible representation of $\text{SL}_2(\mathbb{R})$.

(c) $G = \text{SL}_n(\mathbb{R})$ and $H = \varphi(L)$ where $L$ is a connected simple Lie group and $\varphi: L \to \text{SL}_n(\mathbb{R})$ is an $n$-dimensional representation of $L$ such that the condition (*) from example (c) of §2 is satisfied.

(II) Let $G$ be a unimodular locally compact second countable group, $H$ a closed subgroup of $G$, and $\Gamma$ a discrete subgroup of $G$. Suppose that the Haar measure of $G/\Gamma$ is infinite and that $H$ is $(G, K)$-tempered for some compact subgroup $K$ of $G$. Then as a corollary of Theorem 2 we have that the action of $H$ on $G/\Gamma$ by left translations is measurably proper. In particular if in addition $H$ is not open then the action of $H$ on $G/\Gamma$ is not ergodic.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

