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On the Carlitz problem on the number of solutions to some special equations over finite fields

par Ioulia N. BAOULINA

Résumé. On considère une équation de la forme suivante

$$a_1x_1^2 + \cdots + a_nx_n^2 = bx_1 \cdots x_n$$

sur le corps fini $\mathbb{F}_q = \mathbb{F}_{p^s}$. Carlitz a obtenu des formules pour le nombre de solutions de cette équation dans le cas $n = 3$ et le cas $n = 4$ avec $q \equiv 3 \pmod 4$. Dans des travaux anciens, on a démontré des formules pour le nombre de solutions lorsque $d = \gcd(n-2, (q-1)/2) = 1$ ou 2 ou 4, et aussi lorsque $d > 1$ et -1 est une puissance de p modulo $2d$. Dans ce papier, on démontre des formules pour le nombre de solutions lorsque $d = 2^t$, $t \geq 3$, $p \equiv 3$ ou $5 \pmod 8$ ou $p \equiv 9 \pmod{16}$. On obtient aussi une borne inférieure pour le nombre de solutions dans le cas général.

Abstract. We consider an equation of the type

$$a_1x_1^2 + \cdots + a_nx_n^2 = bx_1 \cdots x_n$$

over the finite field $\mathbb{F}_q = \mathbb{F}_{p^s}$. Carlitz obtained formulas for the number of solutions to this equation when $n = 3$ and when $n = 4$ and $q \equiv 3 \pmod 4$. In our earlier papers, we found formulas for the number of solutions when $d = \gcd(n-2, (q-1)/2) = 1$ or 2 or 4; and when $d > 1$ and -1 is a power of p modulo $2d$. In this paper, we obtain formulas for the number of solutions when $d = 2^t$, $t \geq 3$, $p \equiv 3$ or $5 \pmod 8$ or $p \equiv 9 \pmod{16}$. For general case, we derive lower bounds for the number of solutions.

1. Introduction

Let $\mathbb{F}_q$ be a finite field of characteristic $p > 2$ with $q = p^s$ elements and $\mathbb{F}_q^* = \mathbb{F}_q \setminus \{0\}$. By η denote the quadratic character on $\mathbb{F}_q$ ($\eta(x) = +1, -1, 0$ accordingly as x is a square, a nonsquare or zero in $\mathbb{F}_q$). L. Carlitz [7] proposed the problem of finding an explicit formula for the number of solutions in $\mathbb{F}_q^n$ to the equation

$$a_1x_1^2 + \cdots + a_nx_n^2 = bx_1 \cdots x_n, \tag{1.1}$$

where $a_1, \dots, a_n, b \in \mathbb{F}_q^*$ and $n \geq 3$. He proved that (1.1) has

$$q^2 + 1 + [\eta(-a_1a_2) + \eta(-a_1a_3) + \eta(-a_2a_3)]\, q$$

solutions if $n = 3$. Moreover, Carlitz showed that, for $n = 4$, equation (1.1) has

$$q^3 - 1 - [\eta(-a_1a_2) + \eta(-a_1a_3) + \eta(-a_1a_4) + \eta(-a_2a_3) + \eta(-a_2a_4) + \eta(-a_3a_4)]q \\ - \eta(a_1a_2a_3a_4)q + Tq$$

solutions, where $T = 0$ if $q \equiv 3 \pmod 4$, and

$$T = [\eta(a_1) + \eta(a_2) + \eta(a_3) + \eta(a_4)] \sum_{x \in \mathbb{F}_q} \eta\left(x\left(x^2 + \frac{4a_1a_2a_3a_4}{b^2}\right)\right)$$

if $q \equiv 1 \pmod 4$. Combining Carlitz's expression for $n = 4$, $q \equiv 1 \pmod 4$ with the result of Katre and Rajwade [8, Theorem 2] gives the explicit formula for the number of solutions.

For $n = 3$, $a_1 = a_2 = a_3 = 1$, $b = 3$ (so-called Markoff equation) A. Baragar [5] studied a structure of the set of solutions and calculated the zeta-function.

Let g be a generator of the cyclic group $\mathbb{F}_q^*$. Notice that by multiplying (1.1) by properly chosen element of $\mathbb{F}_q^*$ and also by replacing x_i by h_ix_i for a suitable $h_i \in \mathbb{F}_q^*$ and permuting the variables, (1.1) can be reduced to the form

$$x_1^2 + \cdots + x_m^2 + gx_{m+1}^2 + \cdots + gx_n^2 = cx_1 \cdots x_n, \tag{1.2}$$

where $c \in \mathbb{F}_q^*$ and $n/2 \leq m \leq n$. It follows from this that it is sufficient to evaluate the number of solutions to (1.2).

Denote by N_q the number of solutions to (1.2) in $\mathbb{F}_q^n$. In [1], we found formulas for N_q when $\gcd(n-2, (q-1)/2) = 1$ or 2. In another paper [2], we determined N_q when $d = \gcd(n-2, (q-1)/2) > 1$ and -1 is a power of p modulo $2d$. Besides, we considered there the case when n is even, $m = n/2$, $2d \nmid (n-2)$, and -1 is a power of p modulo d. In [3], we obtained formulas for N_q when $\gcd(n-2, (q-1)/2) = 4$.

The aim of this paper is to find certain explicit formulas for N_q when $\gcd(n-2, (q-1)/2) = 2^t$ with $t \geq 3$. Our main results are Theorems 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1 and 5.2, in which we cover the cases $p \equiv 3$ or $5 \pmod 8$ and $p \equiv 9 \pmod{16}$ (Theorems 4.1 and 4.2 include the case $t = 2$). All of the evaluations in Sections 3-5 are effected in terms of parameters occurring in quadratic partitions of some powers of q. Besides, in Section 6 we obtain explicit lower bounds for N_q and show that (1.2) has at least one nontrivial solution except in the case $m = n = q = 3$.

2. Preliminary Lemmas

Let g be a generator of the cyclic group $\mathbb{F}_q^*$. Let $n \geq 3$ and $n/2 \leq m \leq n$. Let ψ be a nontrivial character on $\mathbb{F}_q$. We extend ψ to all of $\mathbb{F}_q$ by setting $\psi(0) = 0$. The sum $T(\psi)$ over $\mathbb{F}_q$ is defined by

$$T(\psi) = \frac{1}{q-1} \sum_{x_1,\dots,x_n \in \mathbb{F}_q} \psi(x_1^2 + \cdots + x_m^2 + gx_{m+1}^2 + \cdots + gx_n^2)\bar{\psi}(x_1 \cdots x_n).$$

In the following lemma we express N_q in terms of $T(\psi)$ (for proof, see [1, Lemma 1]).

Lemma 2.1. *Let* $\gcd(n-2, (q-1)/2) = d$. *Then*

$$\begin{aligned} N_q =& q^{n-1} + \frac{1}{2}[1 + (-1)^n](-1)^{m+\lfloor \frac{n}{2} \rfloor \frac{q-1}{2}} q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) \\ &+ (-1)^{m+1}[(-1)^{\frac{q-1}{2}} q - 1]^{n-m} \sum_{\substack{k=0 \\ 2|k}}^{2m-n} (-1)^{\frac{k(q-1)}{4}} \binom{2m-n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} \\ &+ \sum_{\substack{\psi^d=\varepsilon \\ \psi \neq \varepsilon}} \bar{\psi}(c) T(\psi), \end{aligned}$$

where $\sum_{\psi^d=\varepsilon, \psi\neq\varepsilon}$ *means that the summation is taken over all nontrivial characters* ψ *on* $\mathbb{F}_q$ *of order dividing* d.

Let ψ be a nontrivial character on $\mathbb{F}_q$. The Gauss sum $G(\psi)$ over $\mathbb{F}_q$ is defined by

$$G(\psi) = \sum_{x \in \mathbb{F}_q} \psi(x) e^{2\pi i \frac{\mathrm{Tr}(x)}{p}},$$

where $\mathrm{Tr}(x) = x + x^p + x^{p^2} + \cdots + x^{p^{s-1}}$ is the trace of x from $\mathbb{F}_q$ to $\mathbb{F}_p$.

Lemma 2.2. *For any nontrivial character* ψ *on* $\mathbb{F}_q$,

$$|G(\psi)| = \sqrt{q}.$$

Proof. See [6, Theorem 1.1.4(c)] or [9, Theorem 5.11]. □

The next lemma, which is Lemma 2 of [1], gives a relationship between sum $T(\psi)$ and Gauss sums.

Lemma 2.3. *Let* $\gcd(n-2, (q-1)/2) = d$, $d > 1$. *Let* ψ *be a character of order* δ *on* $\mathbb{F}_q$, *where* $\delta > 1$ *and* $\delta \mid d$. *Let* λ *be a character on* $\mathbb{F}_q$ *chosen so that* $\lambda^2 = \psi$ *and*

$$\mathrm{ord}\lambda = \begin{cases} \delta & \text{if } \delta \text{ is odd,} \\ 2\delta & \text{if } \delta \text{ is even.} \end{cases}$$

Then

$$T(\psi)=\frac{1}{2q}\,\lambda(g^{n-m})G(\psi)\,\Big[\,G(\bar\lambda)^2-G(\bar\lambda\eta)^2\Big]^{n-m}$$
$$\times\bigg[\Big[\,G(\bar\lambda)+G(\bar\lambda\eta)\Big]^{2m-n}+(-1)^{n+\frac{n-2}{\delta}}\Big[\,G(\bar\lambda)-G(\bar\lambda\eta)\Big]^{2m-n}\bigg].$$

Corollary 2.1. *With the notation of Lemma* 2.3*,*

$$|T(\psi)|\le\begin{cases}2^{m-1}q^{\frac{n-1}{2}} & \text{if } 2m\ne n,\\ 2^{\frac{n}{2}}q^{\frac{n-1}{2}} & \text{if } 2m=n.\end{cases}$$

Proof. Appealing to Lemma 2.2, we deduce that

$$|T(\psi)|\le\frac{1}{q}\,|G(\psi)|\cdot(|G(\bar\lambda)|^2+|G(\bar\lambda\eta)|^2)^{n-m}$$
$$\times\sum_{\substack{k=0\\ k\equiv n+\frac{n-2}{\delta}\ (\mathrm{mod}\ 2)}}^{2m-n}\binom{2m-n}{k}|G(\bar\lambda)|^{2m-n-k}|G(\bar\lambda\eta)|^k$$
$$=\frac{1}{q}\cdot\sqrt{q}\cdot 2^{n-m}q^{n-m}\cdot q^{m-\frac{n}{2}}\sum_{\substack{k=0\\ k\equiv n+\frac{n-2}{\delta}\ (\mathrm{mod}\ 2)}}^{2m-n}\binom{2m-n}{k}$$
$$\le\begin{cases}2^{m-1}q^{\frac{n-1}{2}} & \text{if } 2m\ne n,\\ 2^{\frac{n}{2}}q^{\frac{n-1}{2}} & \text{if } 2m=n,\end{cases}$$

as desired. □

The aim of the remainder of this section is to obtain a modification of the special case $\gcd(n-2,(q-1)/2)=2^t$ of Lemma 2.1, when $p\equiv 2^{h-1}\pm 1\pmod{2^h}$ with $h\ge 3$.

Lemma 2.4. *Let $\delta>1$ be an integer with $2\delta\mid(q-1)$. Then*

$$\sum_{\substack{\psi^\delta=\varepsilon\\ \psi\ne\varepsilon}}\bar\psi(c)T(\psi)=\frac{1}{2}\sum_{\substack{\lambda^{2\delta}=\varepsilon\\ \lambda^2\ne\varepsilon}}\bar\lambda(c^2)T(\lambda^2).$$

Proof. Let χ be a character of order 2δ on $\mathbb{F}_q$. Then χ^2 has order δ. We have

$$\sum_{\substack{\lambda^{2\delta}=\varepsilon\\ \lambda^2\ne\varepsilon}}\bar\lambda(c^2)T(\lambda^2)=\sum_{\substack{j=1\\ j\ne\delta}}^{2\delta-1}\bar\chi^j(c^2)T(\chi^{2j})=\sum_{j=1}^{\delta-1}\Big[\bar\chi^j(c^2)T(\chi^{2j})+\bar\chi^{j+\delta}(c^2)T(\chi^{2(j+\delta)})\Big]$$
$$=2\sum_{j=1}^{\delta-1}(\bar\chi^2)^j(c)T((\chi^2)^j)=2\sum_{\substack{\psi^\delta=\varepsilon\\ \psi\ne\varepsilon}}\bar\psi(c)T(\psi),$$

as desired. □

For $p \equiv 2^{h-1} \pm 1 \,(\mathrm{mod}\ 2^h)$, it is convenient to set

$$w = \begin{cases} h+1 & \text{if } p \equiv 2^{h-1} - 1 \pmod{2^h}, \\ h & \text{if } p \equiv 2^{h-1} + 1 \pmod{2^h}. \end{cases}$$

Lemma 2.5. *Let $p \equiv 2^{h-1} \pm 1 \pmod{2^h}$, $h \geq 3$, and λ be a character of order 2^r on $\mathbb{F}_q$, where $r \geq w$. Then $G(\bar{\lambda}) = G(\bar{\lambda}\eta)$.*

Proof. See [4, Lemma 2.13]. □

Comparing Lemmas 2.3 and 2.5, we obtain the next result.

Lemma 2.6. *Let $p \equiv 2^{h-1} \pm 1 \pmod{2^h}$, $h \geq 3$, $\gcd(n-2,(q-1)/2) = 2^t$, and λ be a character of order 2^r on $\mathbb{F}_q$, where $w \leq r \leq t+1$. Then*

$$T(\lambda^2) = \begin{cases} 2^{n-1} G(\bar{\lambda})^n G(\lambda^2)/q & \text{if } m = n, \\ 0 & \text{if } m < n. \end{cases}$$

Finally, Lemmas 2.1, 2.4 and 2.6 imply

Lemma 2.7. *Let $p \equiv 2^{h-1} \pm 1 \pmod{2^h}$, $h \geq 3$, $\gcd(n-2,(q-1)/2) = 2^t$, $t \geq w-1$. If $m = n$ then*

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0 \\ 2|k}}^{n} \binom{n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$
$$+ \sum_{\substack{\psi^{2^{w-2}}=\varepsilon \\ \psi\neq\varepsilon}} \bar{\psi}(c)T(\psi) + \frac{2^{n-2}}{q} \sum_{r=w}^{t+1} \sum_{\substack{\lambda^{2^r}=\varepsilon \\ \lambda^{2^{r-1}}\neq\varepsilon}} \bar{\lambda}(c^2) G(\bar{\lambda})^n G(\lambda^2).$$

If $m < n$ then

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + (-1)^m q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1)$$
$$+ (-1)^{m+1}(q-1)^{n-m} \sum_{\substack{k=0 \\ 2|k}}^{2m-n} \binom{2m-n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} + \sum_{\substack{\psi^{2^{w-2}}=\varepsilon \\ \psi\neq\varepsilon}} \bar{\psi}(c)T(\psi).$$

Remark 1. Let a be a nonsquare in $\mathbb{F}_q$. Suppose that $p \equiv 1 \pmod 4$. Then $(a^{\frac{q-1}{4}})^2 + 1 = 0$ and the equation $x^2+1=0$ has exactly two roots in $\mathbb{F}_p$. Hence $a^{\frac{q-1}{4}} \in \mathbb{F}_p$. By abuse of notation, let $a^{\frac{q-1}{4}}$ also denote any integer $\equiv a^{\frac{q-1}{4}} \pmod p$. Similarly, if $p \equiv 1$ or $3 \pmod 8$ and s is even, we have $(a^{\frac{q-1}{8}} + a^{\frac{3(q-1)}{8}})^2 + 2 = 0$ and the equation $x^2+2=0$ has exactly two roots in $\mathbb{F}_p$. Therefore $a^{\frac{q-1}{8}} + a^{\frac{3(q-1)}{8}} \in \mathbb{F}_p$ and we identify $a^{\frac{q-1}{8}} + a^{\frac{3(q-1)}{8}}$ with any integer $\equiv a^{\frac{q-1}{8}} + a^{\frac{3(q-1)}{8}} \pmod{p}$. This abuse of notation will be kept in the sequel.

Remark 2. In Lemmas 3.3, 4.2 and 5.2 of [4], we evaluated certain sums of the form

$$\frac{1}{q}\sum_{\substack{j=1\\ 2\nmid j}}^{2^r} \psi^j(a)G(\psi^j)^n G(\bar{\psi}^{2j}),$$

where ψ is a character of order 2^r on $\mathbb{F}_q$ and $2^r \mid (n-2)$. It is easy to see that these lemmas and also Lemmas 2.14, 2.15, 2.17 and 2.18 of [4] remain valid with $2^r \mid (n-2)$ replaced by $2^{r-1} \mid (n-2)$ (in Lemma 2.15, the factor $(-1)^j$ will be replaced by $(-1)^{j+\frac{n-2}{2^{k+j}}}$). Furthermore, $2^r \mid (q-1)$ implies that -1 is a 2^{r-1}th power in $\mathbb{F}_q$. Hence, for any positive integer $u \le r$, c^2 is a 2^uth power in $\mathbb{F}_q$ if and only if c is a 2^{u-1}th power in $\mathbb{F}_q$. In view of these observations, in Sections 3-5 we employ the mentioned results for $2^{r-1} \mid (n-2)$ and $a = c^2$ without any additional comments.

3. The Case $p \equiv 3 \pmod 8$

The next lemma is a special case of [3, Lemma 12].

Lemma 3.1. *Let $p \equiv 3 \pmod 8$, $4 \mid s$, $2 \mid n$, and η denote the quadratic character on $\mathbb{F}_q$. Then*

$$T(\eta) = \begin{cases} -2^{n-1}q^{\frac{n-1}{2}} & \text{if } m = n,\\ 0 & \text{if } m < n.\end{cases}$$

Lemma 3.2. *Let $p \equiv 3 \pmod 8$, $8 \mid (n-2)$, and ψ be a character of order 4 on $\mathbb{F}_q$ such that $\psi(g) = i$. Then*

$$\bar{\psi}(c)T(\psi) + \psi(c)T(\bar{\psi}) = 2^{n-\frac{m}{2}+1}M^{n-m}q^{\frac{n-2}{4}}T\sum_{\substack{k=0\\ 2\mid k}}^{m-\frac{n}{2}}\binom{m-\frac{n}{2}}{k}L^{m-\frac{n}{2}-k}q^{\frac{k}{2}},$$

where

$$T = \begin{cases} \sin\frac{\pi m}{4} & \text{if } c \text{ is a 4th power in } \mathbb{F}_q,\\ -\sin\frac{\pi m}{4} & \text{if } c \text{ is a square but not a 4th power in } \mathbb{F}_q,\\ \cos\frac{\pi m}{4} & \text{if } cg \text{ is a 4th power in } \mathbb{F}_q,\\ -\cos\frac{\pi m}{4} & \text{if } cg \text{ is a square but not a 4th power in } \mathbb{F}_q.\end{cases} \tag{3.1}$$

The integers L and $|M|$ are uniquely determined by

$$q = L^2 + 2M^2, \qquad L \equiv -1 \pmod 4, \qquad p \nmid L. \tag{3.2}$$

If $m < n$ then the sign of M is determined by

$$2M \equiv L(g^{\frac{q-1}{8}} + g^{\frac{3(q-1)}{8}}) \pmod p. \tag{3.3}$$

Proof. Since $8 \mid (n-2)$, we have

$$\cos\frac{\pi(n-m)}{4} = \cos\frac{\pi(2-m)}{4} = \sin\frac{\pi m}{4},$$
$$\sin\frac{\pi(n-m)}{4} = \sin\frac{\pi(2-m)}{4} = \cos\frac{\pi m}{4},$$

and the result easily follows from [3, Lemma 18] (see the proof of [3, Theorem 19]). □

Lemmas 2.7, 3.1 and 3.2 enable us to determine N_q when $m < n$.

Theorem 3.1. *Let* $\gcd(n-2,(q-1)/2) = 2^t$, $t \geq 3$, $p \equiv 3 \pmod 8$, *and* $m < n$. *Then*

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + (-1)^m q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) + (-1)^{m+1}(q-1)^{n-m} \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{2m-n} \binom{2m-n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$
$$+ 2^{n-\frac{m}{2}+1} M^{n-m} q^{\frac{n-2}{4}} T \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{m-\frac{n}{2}} \binom{m-\frac{n}{2}}{k} L^{m-\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}},$$

where T *is determined by* (3.1) *and the integers* L *and* M *are uniquely determined by* (3.2) *and* (3.3).

Next, we consider the case $m = n$.

Lemma 3.3. *Let* $p \equiv 3 \pmod 8$ *and* ψ *be a character of order* 2^r *on* $\mathbb{F}_q$, *where* $r \geq 4$ *and* $2^{r-1} \mid (n-2)$. *Then*

$$\frac{1}{q}\sum_{\substack{j=1\\2\nmid j}}^{2^r} \psi^j(c^2) G(\psi^j)^n G(\bar{\psi}^{2j}) = 2^{r-1} q^{\frac{(2^{r-2}-1)n-2^{r-2}+2}{2^{r-1}}}$$
$$\times \begin{cases} L_r & \text{if } c \text{ is a } 2^{r-1}\text{th power in } \mathbb{F}_q, \\ -L_r & \text{if } c \text{ is a } 2^{r-2}\text{th power but not a } 2^{r-1}\text{th power in } \mathbb{F}_q, \\ -M_r & \text{if } c \text{ is a } 2^{r-4}\text{th power but not a } 2^{r-3}\text{th power in } \mathbb{F}_q, \\ 0 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

The integers L_r *and* $|M_r|$ *are uniquely determined by*

$$q^{\frac{n-2}{2^{r-2}}} = L_r^2 + 2M_r^2, \qquad L_r \equiv -1 \pmod 4, \qquad p \nmid L_r. \tag{3.4}$$

If c *is a* 2^{r-4}*th power but not a* 2^{r-3}*th power in* $\mathbb{F}_q$ *then the sign of* M_r *is determined by*

$$2M_r \equiv L_r(c^{\frac{q-1}{2^{r-1}}} + c^{\frac{3(q-1)}{2^{r-1}}}) \pmod p. \tag{3.5}$$

Proof. See [4, Lemma 3.3]. □

Lemmas 2.7, 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 imply

Theorem 3.2. *Let* $\gcd(n-2,(q-1)/2)=2^t$, $t\geq 3$, $p\equiv 3 \pmod 8$, *and* $m=n$. *If* c *is a* 2^t*th power in* $\mathbb{F}_q$ *then*

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{n}\binom{n}{k}q^{\frac{k}{2}} - 2^{n-1}q^{\frac{n-1}{2}} + 2^{\frac{n}{2}+1}q^{\frac{n-2}{4}}\sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}}\binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k}L^{\frac{n}{2}-k}q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$
$$+ 2^{n-2}\sum_{r=4}^{t+1}2^{r-1}q^{\frac{(2^{r-2}-1)n-2^{r-2}+2}{2^{r-1}}}L_r.$$

If c *is a* 2^{t-1}*th power but not a* 2^t*th power in* $\mathbb{F}_q$ *then*

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{n}\binom{n}{k}q^{\frac{k}{2}} - 2^{n-1}q^{\frac{n-1}{2}} + 2^{\frac{n}{2}+1}q^{\frac{n-2}{4}}\sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}}\binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k}L^{\frac{n}{2}-k}q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$
$$+ 2^{n-2}\sum_{r=4}^{t}2^{r-1}q^{\frac{(2^{r-2}-1)n-2^{r-2}+2}{2^{r-1}}}L_r - 2^{n+t-2}q^{\frac{(2^{t-1}-1)n-2^{t-1}+2}{2^{t}}}L_{t+1}.$$

If $t\geq 4$ *and* c *is a* 2^{t-2}*th power but not a* 2^{t-1}*th power in* $\mathbb{F}_q$ *then*

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{n}\binom{n}{k}q^{\frac{k}{2}} - 2^{n-1}q^{\frac{n-1}{2}} + 2^{\frac{n}{2}+1}q^{\frac{n-2}{4}}\sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}}\binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k}L^{\frac{n}{2}-k}q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$
$$+ 2^{n-2}\sum_{r=4}^{t-1}2^{r-1}q^{\frac{(2^{r-2}-1)n-2^{r-2}+2}{2^{r-1}}}L_r - 2^{n+t-3}q^{\frac{(2^{t-2}-1)n-2^{t-2}+2}{2^{t-1}}}L_{t}.$$

If $t\geq 5$ *and* c *is a* 2^v*th power but not a* 2^{v+1}*th power in* $\mathbb{F}_q$, $2\leq v\leq t-3$, *then*

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{n}\binom{n}{k}q^{\frac{k}{2}} - 2^{n-1}q^{\frac{n-1}{2}} + 2^{\frac{n}{2}+1}q^{\frac{n-2}{4}}\sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}}\binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k}L^{\frac{n}{2}-k}q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$
$$+ 2^{n-2}\sum_{r=4}^{v+1}2^{r-1}q^{\frac{(2^{r-2}-1)n-2^{r-2}+2}{2^{r-1}}}L_r - 2^{n+v-1}q^{\frac{(2^{v}-1)n-2^{v}+2}{2^{v+1}}}L_{v+2}$$
$$- 2^{n+v+1}q^{\frac{(2^{v+2}-1)n-2^{v+2}+2}{2^{v+3}}}M_{v+4}.$$

If c is a square but not a 4th power in $\mathbb{F}_q$ then

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{n} \binom{n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} - 2^{n-1} q^{\frac{n-1}{2}} - 2^{\frac{n}{2}+1} q^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} L^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$

$$- \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } t = 3, \\ 2^{n+2} q^{\frac{7n-6}{16}} M_5 & \text{if } t \geq 4. \end{cases}$$

If c is not a square in $\mathbb{F}_q$ then

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{n} \binom{n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} + 2^{n-1} q^{\frac{n-1}{2}} - 2^{n+1} q^{\frac{3n-2}{8}} M_4.$$

The integers L, L_r and $|M_r|$ are uniquely determined by (3.2) and (3.4), $4 \leq r \leq t+1$. If c is a 2^{r-4}th power but not a 2^{r-3}th power in $\mathbb{F}_q$, $4 \leq r \leq t+1$, then the sign of M_r is determined by (3.5).

4. The Case $p \equiv 5 \pmod 8$

The next lemma is the special case $4 \mid (n-2)$ of [3, Lemma 11].

Lemma 4.1. *Let $p \equiv 1 \pmod 4$, $4 \mid (n-2)$, and η denote the quadratic character on $\mathbb{F}_q$. Then*

$$T(\eta) = (-1)^{m+1} 2^{\frac{n}{2}} B^{n-m} q^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{m-\frac{n}{2}} \binom{m-\frac{n}{2}}{k} A^{m-\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}},$$

where the integers A and B are uniquely determined by

$$q = A^2 + B^2, \qquad A \equiv 1 \pmod 4, \qquad p \nmid A, \tag{4.1}$$

$$B g^{\frac{q-1}{4}} \equiv A \pmod p. \tag{4.2}$$

First, we consider the case $m < n$. Lemmas 2.7 and 4.1 imply

Theorem 4.1. *Let $\gcd(n-2, (q-1)/2) = 2^t$, $t \geq 2$, $p \equiv 5 \pmod 8$, and $m < n$. Then*

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + (-1)^m q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) + (-1)^{m+1}(q-1)^{n-m} \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{2m-n} \binom{2m-n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$

$$+ (-1)^{m+1} 2^{\frac{n}{2}} B^{n-m} q^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \eta(c) \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{m-\frac{n}{2}} \binom{m-\frac{n}{2}}{k} A^{m-\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}},$$

where the integers A and B are uniquely determined by (4.1) and (4.2).

Next, we consider the case $m = n$.

Lemma 4.2. *Let $p \equiv 5 \pmod 8$ and ψ be a character of order 2^r on $\mathbb{F}_q$, where $r \geq 3$ and $2^{r-1} \mid (n-2)$. Then*

$$\frac{1}{q}\sum_{\substack{j=1\\ 2\nmid j}}^{2^r} \psi^j(c^2)G(\psi^j)^n G(\bar{\psi}^{2j}) = (-1)^{\frac{s}{2^{r-2}}} \cdot 2^{r-1} q^{\frac{(2^{r-1}-1)n-2^{r-1}+2}{2^r}}$$

$$\times \begin{cases} -E_r & \text{if } c \text{ is a } 2^{r-1}\text{th power in } \mathbb{F}_q,\\ E_r & \text{if } c \text{ is a } 2^{r-2}\text{th power but not a } 2^{r-1}\text{th power in } \mathbb{F}_q,\\ -F_r & \text{if } c \text{ is a } 2^{r-3}\text{th power but not a } 2^{r-2}\text{th power in } \mathbb{F}_q,\\ 0 & \text{otherwise.}\end{cases}$$

The integers E_r and $|F_r|$ are uniquely determined by

$$q^{\frac{n-2}{2^{r-1}}} = E_r^2 + F_r^2, \qquad E_r \equiv 1 \pmod 4, \qquad p \nmid E_r. \tag{4.3}$$

If c is a 2^{r-3}th power but not a 2^{r-2}th power in $\mathbb{F}_q$, then the sign of F_r is determined by

$$F_r c^{\frac{q-1}{2^{r-1}}} \equiv E_r \pmod p. \tag{4.4}$$

Proof. See [4, Lemma 4.2]. □

Lemmas 2.7, 4.1 and 4.2 imply

Theorem 4.2. *Let $\gcd(n-2,(q-1)/2) = 2^t$, $t \geq 2$, $p \equiv 5 \pmod 8$, and $m = n$. If c is a 2^tth power in $\mathbb{F}_q$ then*

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\ 2\mid k}}^{n}\binom{n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} - 2^{\frac{n}{2}} q^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \sum_{\substack{k=0\\ 2\mid k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} A^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$

$$- 2^{n-2}\sum_{r=3}^{t} 2^{r-1} q^{\frac{(2^{r-1}-1)n-2^{r-1}+2}{2^r}} E_r - (-1)^{\frac{s}{2^{t-1}}} \cdot 2^{n+t-2} q^{\frac{(2^t-1)n-2^t+2}{2^{t+1}}} E_{t+1}.$$

If c is a 2^{t-1}th power but not a 2^tth power in $\mathbb{F}_q$ then

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\ 2\mid k}}^{n}\binom{n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} - 2^{\frac{n}{2}} q^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \sum_{\substack{k=0\\ 2\mid k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} A^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$

$$- 2^{n-2}\sum_{r=3}^{t} 2^{r-1} q^{\frac{(2^{r-1}-1)n-2^{r-1}+2}{2^r}} E_r + (-1)^{\frac{s}{2^{t-1}}} \cdot 2^{n+t-2} q^{\frac{(2^t-1)n-2^t+2}{2^{t+1}}} E_{t+1}.$$

If $t \ge 3$ and c is a 2^vth power but not a 2^{v+1}th power in $\mathbb{F}_q$, $1 \le v \le t-2$, then

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{n} \binom{n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} - 2^{\frac{n}{2}} q^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} A^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$
$$- 2^{n-2} \sum_{r=3}^{v+1} 2^{r-1} q^{\frac{(2^{r-1}-1)n-2^{r-1}+2}{2^r}} E_r + 2^{n+v-1} q^{\frac{(2^{v+1}-1)n-2^{v+1}+2}{2^{v+2}}} E_{v+2}$$
$$- (-1)^{\frac{s}{2^{v+1}}} \cdot 2^{n+v} q^{\frac{(2^{v+2}-1)n-2^{v+2}+2}{2^{v+3}}} F_{v+3}.$$

If c is not a square in $\mathbb{F}_q$ then

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{n} \binom{n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} + 2^{\frac{n}{2}} q^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} A^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$
$$- (-1)^{\frac{s}{2}} \cdot 2^n q^{\frac{3n-2}{8}} F_3.$$

The integers A, E_r and $|F_r|$ are uniquely determined by (4.1) and (4.3), $3 \le r \le t+1$. If c is a 2^{r-3}th power but not a 2^{r-2}th power in $\mathbb{F}_q$, $3 \le r \le t+1$, then the sign of F_r is determined by (4.4).

5. The Case $p \equiv 9 \pmod{16}$

Lemma 5.1. *Let $p \equiv 1 \pmod 8$. Suppose that $2^{r-3} \mid s$ for some positive integer $r \ge 4$. Let A and $|B|$ be uniquely determined by (4.1) and let $|A_0|$ and $|B_0|$ be uniquely determined by $p = A_0^2 + B_0^2$, $2 \mid B_0$. Then $2^{r-1} \mid B$ and*

$$\frac{B}{2^{r-1}} \equiv \frac{B_0 s}{2^{r-1}} \pmod 2.$$

Proof. Since $p \equiv 1 \pmod 8$, we have $4 \mid B_0$. By [8, Proposition 4],

$$B = \pm \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2\nmid k}}^{s} (-1)^{\frac{k-1}{2}} \binom{s}{k} A_0^{s-k} B_0^k.$$

Since $2^{r-3} \mid s$, it is not hard to see that $2^{r-3} \,\Big|\, \binom{s}{k}$ for each odd k. Thus,

$$B \equiv \pm A_0^{s-1} B_0 s \pmod{2^r},$$

so that $2^{r-1} \mid B$ and

$$\frac{B}{2^{r-1}} \equiv \pm \frac{A_0^{s-1} B_0 s}{2^{r-1}} \equiv \frac{B_0 s}{2^{r-1}} \pmod 2,$$

as desired. □

Lemma 5.2. *Let $p\equiv 1 \pmod 8$, $8\mid (n-2)$, $2\mid s$ and ψ be a character of order 4 on $\mathbb{F}_q$ such that $\psi(g)=i$. Then*

$$\bar\psi(c)T(\psi)+\psi(c)T(\bar\psi)=2^{n-\frac{m}{2}+1}M^{n-m}q^{\frac{n-2}{8}}T\sum_{\substack{k=0\\2\mid k}}^{m-\frac{n}{2}}\binom{m-\frac{n}{2}}{k}L^{m-\frac{n}{2}-k}q^{\frac{k}{2}},$$

where

$$T=\begin{cases}E\sin\frac{\pi m}{4}+F\cos\frac{\pi m}{4} & \text{if } c \text{ is a 4th power in } \mathbb{F}_q,\\ -E\sin\frac{\pi m}{4}-F\cos\frac{\pi m}{4} & \text{if } c \text{ is a square}\\ & \text{but not a 4th power in } \mathbb{F}_q,\\ -F\sin\frac{\pi m}{4}+E\cos\frac{\pi m}{4} & \text{if } cg \text{ is a 4th power in } \mathbb{F}_q,\\ F\sin\frac{\pi m}{4}-E\cos\frac{\pi m}{4} & \text{if } cg \text{ is a square}\\ & \text{but not a 4th power in } \mathbb{F}_q.\end{cases}\tag{5.1}$$

The integers L and $|M|$ are uniquely determined by (3.2). If $m<n$ then the sign of M is determined by (3.3). The integers E and F are uniquely determined by

$$q^{\frac{n-2}{4}}=E^2+F^2,\quad E\equiv 1 \pmod 4,\quad p\nmid E,\tag{5.2}$$

$$Fg^{\frac{q-1}{4}}\equiv E \pmod p.\tag{5.3}$$

Proof. Let A and B be determined by (4.1) and (4.2). Lemma 5.1 implies that $8\mid B$. In view of Lemma 21 of [3] and the remarks at the beginning of the proof of Lemma 3.2, we conclude that (see the proof of Theorem 22 of [3])

$$\bar\psi(c)T(\psi)+\psi(c)T(\bar\psi)=2^{n-\frac{m}{2}+1}M^{n-m}q^{\frac{n-2}{8}}T\sum_{\substack{k=0\\2\mid k}}^{m-\frac{n}{2}}\binom{m-\frac{n}{2}}{k}L^{m-\frac{n}{2}-k}q^{\frac{k}{2}},$$

where T is determined by (5.1),

$$E=\sum_{\substack{k=0\\2\mid k}}^{\frac{n-2}{4}}(-1)^{\frac{k}{2}}\binom{\frac{n-2}{4}}{k}A^{\frac{n-2}{4}-k}B^k,\qquad F=\sum_{\substack{k=0\\2\nmid k}}^{\frac{n-2}{4}}(-1)^{\frac{k-1}{2}}\binom{\frac{n-2}{4}}{k}A^{\frac{n-2}{4}-k}B^k.$$

Since $q=|A+Bi|^2$, we have $q^{\frac{n-2}{4}}=|E+Fi|^2=E^2+F^2$. Further, since $A\equiv 1 \pmod 4$ and $2\mid B$, we deduce that $E\equiv A^{\frac{n-2}{4}}\equiv 1 \pmod 4$. Also, $B^2\equiv -A^2 \pmod p$ implies $E\equiv 2^{\frac{n-2}{4}-1}A^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \pmod p$, and so $p\nmid E$. Finally,

$$\begin{aligned} Fg^{\frac{q-1}{4}} &\equiv Bg^{\frac{q-1}{4}} \sum_{\substack{k=0 \\ 2\nmid k}}^{\frac{n-2}{4}} (-1)^{\frac{k-1}{2}} \binom{\frac{n-2}{4}}{k} A^{\frac{n-2}{4}-k} \cdot (-1)^{\frac{k-1}{2}} A^{k-1} \\ &\equiv 2^{\frac{n-2}{4}-1} A^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \equiv E \pmod{p}. \end{aligned}$$

This completes the proof. □

Lemmas 2.7, 4.1 and 5.2 allow us to give the explicit formula for N_q when $m < n$.

Theorem 5.1. *Let* $\gcd(n-2,(q-1)/2) = 2^t$, $t \geq 3$, $p \equiv 9 \pmod{16}$, *and* $m < n$. *Then*

$$\begin{aligned} N_q = {} & q^{n-1} + (-1)^m q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) + (-1)^{m+1}(q-1)^{n-m} \sum_{\substack{k=0 \\ 2\mid k}}^{2m-n} \binom{2m-n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} \\ & + (-1)^{m+1} 2^{\frac{n}{2}} B^{n-m} q^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \eta(c) \sum_{\substack{k=0 \\ 2\mid k}}^{m-\frac{n}{2}} \binom{m-\frac{n}{2}}{k} A^{m-\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} \\ & + 2^{n-\frac{m}{2}+1} M^{n-m} q^{\frac{n-2}{8}} T \sum_{\substack{k=0 \\ 2\mid k}}^{m-\frac{n}{2}} \binom{m-\frac{n}{2}}{k} L^{m-\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}}, \end{aligned}$$

where T *is determined by* (5.1). *The integers* A, B, E, F, L *and* M *are uniquely determined by* (3.2), (3.3), (4.1), (4.2), (5.2) *and* (5.3).

Next, we consider the case $m = n$.

Lemma 5.3. *Let* $p \equiv 9 \pmod{16}$ *and* ψ *be a character of order* 2^r *on* $\mathbb{F}_q$, *where* $r \geq 4$ *and* $2^{r-1} \mid (n-2)$. *Then*

$$\frac{1}{q} \sum_{\substack{j=1 \\ 2\nmid j}}^{2^r} \psi^j(c^2) G(\psi^j)^n G(\bar{\psi}^{2j}) = (-1)^{\frac{B}{2^{r-1}}} \cdot 2^{r-1} q^{\frac{(2^{r-1}-3)n-2^{r-1}+6}{2^r}}$$

$$\times \begin{cases} E_r L_r & \text{if } c \text{ is a } 2^{r-1}\text{th power in } \mathbb{F}_q, \\ -E_r L_r & \text{if } c \text{ is a } 2^{r-2}\text{th power but not a } 2^{r-1}\text{th power in } \mathbb{F}_q, \\ F_r L_r & \text{if } c \text{ is a } 2^{r-3}\text{th power but not a } 2^{r-2}\text{th power in } \mathbb{F}_q, \\ (F_r - E_r) M_r & \text{if } c \text{ is a } 2^{r-4}\text{th power but not a } 2^{r-3}\text{th power in } \mathbb{F}_q, \\ 0 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

The integer $|B|$ *is uniquely determined by* (4.1). *The integers* E_r *and* $|F_r|$ *are uniquely determined by* (4.3). *If* c *is a* 2^{r-4}*th power but not a* 2^{r-2}*th* *power in* $\mathbb{F}_q$ *then the sign of* F_r *is determined by*

$$E_r \equiv \begin{cases} F_r c^{\frac{q-1}{2^{r-1}}} \pmod p & \text{if } c \text{ is a } 2^{r-3}\text{th power} \\ & \text{but not a } 2^{r-2}\text{th power in } \mathbb{F}_q, \\ F_r c^{\frac{q-1}{2^{r-2}}} \pmod p & \text{if } c \text{ is a } 2^{r-4}\text{th power} \\ & \text{but not a } 2^{r-3}\text{th power in } \mathbb{F}_q. \end{cases} \tag{5.4}$$

The integers L_r *and* $|M_r|$ *are uniquely determined by* (3.4)*. If* c *is a* 2^{r-4}*th power but not a* 2^{r-3}*th power in* $\mathbb{F}_q$ *then the sign of* M_r *is determined by* (3.5)*.*

Proof. We define the integers $|A_0|$ and $|B_0|$ by the conditions $p = A_0^2 + B_0^2$, $2 \mid B_0$. By Lemma 5.1, $B/2^{r-1}$ and $B_0 s/2^{r-1}$ have the same parity. Hence $(-1)^{B/2^{r-1}} = (-1)^{B_0 s/2^{r-1}}$, and the result follows from [4, Lemma 5.2]. $\square$

Lemmas 2.7, 4.1, 5.2 and 5.3 imply

Theorem 5.2. *Let* $\gcd(n-2,(q-1)/2) = 2^t$*,* $t \geq 3$*,* $p \equiv 9 \pmod{16}$*, and* $m = n$*. If* c *is a* 2^t*th power in* $\mathbb{F}_q$ *then*

$$\begin{aligned} N_q = {} & q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{n} \binom{n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} - 2^{\frac{n}{2}} q^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} A^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} \\ & + 2^{\frac{n}{2}+1} q^{\frac{n-2}{8}} E \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} L^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} + 2^{n-2} \sum_{r=4}^{t} 2^{r-1} q^{\frac{(2^{r-1}-3)n-2^{r-1}+6}{2^r}} E_r L_r \\ & + (-1)^{\frac{B}{2^t}} \cdot 2^{n+t-2} q^{\frac{(2^t-3)n-2^t+6}{2^{t+1}}} E_{t+1} L_{t+1}. \end{aligned}$$

If c *is a* 2^{t-1}*th power but not a* 2^t*th power in* $\mathbb{F}_q$ *then*

$$\begin{aligned} N_q = {} & q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{n} \binom{n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} - 2^{\frac{n}{2}} q^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} A^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} \\ & + 2^{\frac{n}{2}+1} q^{\frac{n-2}{8}} E \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} L^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} + 2^{n-2} \sum_{r=4}^{t} 2^{r-1} q^{\frac{(2^{r-1}-3)n-2^{r-1}+6}{2^r}} E_r L_r \\ & - (-1)^{\frac{B}{2^t}} \cdot 2^{n+t-2} q^{\frac{(2^t-3)n-2^t+6}{2^{t+1}}} E_{t+1} L_{t+1}. \end{aligned}$$

If $t \geq 4$ and c is a 2^{t-2}th power but not a 2^{t-1}th power in $\mathbb{F}_q$ then

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{n} \binom{n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} - 2^{\frac{n}{2}} q^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} A^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$
$$+ 2^{\frac{n}{2}+1} q^{\frac{n-2}{8}} E \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} L^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} + 2^{n-2} \sum_{r=4}^{t-1} 2^{r-1} q^{\frac{(2^{r-1}-3)n-2^{r-1}+6}{2^r}} E_r L_r$$
$$- 2^{n+t-3} q^{\frac{(2^{t-1}-3)n-2^{t-1}+6}{2^t}} E_t L_t + (-1)^{\frac{B}{2^t}} \cdot 2^{n+t-2} q^{\frac{(2^t-3)n-2^t+6}{2^{t+1}}} F_{t+1} L_{t+1}.$$

If $t \geq 5$ and c is a 2^vth power but not a 2^{v+1}th power in $\mathbb{F}_q$, $2 \leq v \leq t-3$, then

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{n} \binom{n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} - 2^{\frac{n}{2}} q^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} A^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$
$$+ 2^{\frac{n}{2}+1} q^{\frac{n-2}{8}} E \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} L^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} + 2^{n-2} \sum_{r=4}^{v+1} 2^{r-1} q^{\frac{(2^{r-1}-3)n-2^{r-1}+6}{2^r}} E_r L_r$$
$$- 2^{n+v-1} q^{\frac{(2^{v+1}-3)n-2^{v+1}+6}{2^{v+2}}} E_{v+2} L_{v+2} + 2^{n+v} q^{\frac{(2^{v+2}-3)n-2^{v+2}+6}{2^{v+3}}} F_{v+3} L_{v+3}$$
$$+ (-1)^{\frac{B}{2^{v+3}}} \cdot 2^{n+v+1} q^{\frac{(2^{v+3}-3)n-2^{v+3}+6}{2^{v+4}}} (F_{v+4} - E_{v+4}) M_{v+4}.$$

If c is a square but not a 4th power in $\mathbb{F}_q$ then

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{n} \binom{n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} - 2^{\frac{n}{2}} q^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} A^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$
$$- 2^{\frac{n}{2}+1} q^{\frac{n-2}{8}} E \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} L^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} + (-1)^{\frac{B}{8}} 2^{n+1} q^{\frac{5n-2}{16}} F_4 L_4$$
$$+ \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } t = 3, \\ (-1)^{\frac{B}{16}} \cdot 2^{n+2} q^{\frac{13n-10}{32}} (F_5 - E_5) M_5 & \text{if } t \geq 4. \end{cases}$$

If c is not a square in $\mathbb{F}_q$ *then*

$$N_q = q^{n-1} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1) - \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{n} \binom{n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} + 2^{\frac{n}{2}} q^{\frac{n-2}{4}} \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} A^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$

$$+ 2^{\frac{n}{2}+1} q^{\frac{n-2}{8}} F \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{\frac{n}{2}} \binom{\frac{n}{2}}{k} L^{\frac{n}{2}-k} q^{\frac{k}{2}} + (-1)^{\frac{B}{8}} \cdot 2^{n+1} q^{\frac{5n-2}{16}} (F_4 - E_4) M_4.$$

The integers A, $|B|$, E, $|F|$, E_r, $|F_r|$, L, L_r *and* $|M_r|$ *are uniquely determined by* (3.2), (3.4), (4.1), (4.3) *and* (5.2), $4 \le r \le t+1$. *If c is a* 2^{r-4}*th power but not a* 2^{r-2}*th power in* $\mathbb{F}_q$, $4 \le r \le t+1$, *then the sign of* F_r *is determined by* (5.4). *If c is a* 2^{r-4}*th power but not a* 2^{r-3}*th power in* $\mathbb{F}_q$, $4 \le r \le t+1$, *then the sign of* M_r *is determined by* (3.5). *If c is not a square in* $\mathbb{F}_q$ *then the sign of F is determined by*

$$Fc^{\frac{q-1}{4}} \equiv E \pmod p.$$

6. Lower bounds for the number of solutions

The following result is a straightforward consequence of Lemma 2.1 and Corollary 2.1.

Theorem 6.1. *Let* $\gcd(n-2, (q-1)/2) = d$. *Then*

$$N_q \ge q^{n-1} + \frac{1}{2}[1+(-1)^n](-1)^{m+\lfloor\frac{n}{2}\rfloor\frac{q-1}{2}} q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}(q-1)$$

$$+ (-1)^{m+1}[(-1)^{\frac{q-1}{2}}q - 1]^{n-m} \sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{2m-n} (-1)^{\frac{k(q-1)}{4}} \binom{2m-n}{k} q^{\frac{k}{2}}$$

$$- \begin{cases} 2^{m-1}(d-1)q^{\frac{n-1}{2}} & \text{if } 2m \ne n,\\ 2^{\frac{n}{2}}(d-1)q^{\frac{n-1}{2}} & \text{if } 2m = n.\end{cases}$$

We can simplify this inequality and obtain a compact expression for lower bound.

Theorem 6.2. *Let* $\gcd(n-2, (q-1)/2) = d$. *Then*

$$N_q \ge \begin{cases} q^{n-1} - 2^{m-1}dq^{\frac{n-1}{2}} + q^{\lfloor\frac{n-1}{2}\rfloor} + (-1)^{n-1} & \text{if } 2m \ne n,\\ q^{n-1} - 2^{\frac{n}{2}}dq^{\frac{n-1}{2}} + q^{\frac{n-2}{2}} - 1 & \text{if } 2m = n.\end{cases}$$

Proof. We have

$$
\begin{aligned}
&(-1)^{m+1}[(-1)^{\frac{q-1}{2}}q-1]^{n-m}\sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{2m-n}(-1)^{\frac{k(q-1)}{4}}\binom{2m-n}{k}q^{\frac{k}{2}}\\
&=\frac{1}{2}\,[\,1+(-1)^n](-1)^{m+1+\lfloor\frac{n}{2}\rfloor\frac{q-1}{2}}q^{\frac{n}{2}}+(-1)^{n-1}\\
&\quad+(-1)^{n-1}\sum_{\substack{0\le j\le n-m\\0\le k\le 2m-n\\2|k\\(j,k)\ne(0,0),(n-m,2m-n)}}(-1)^{j+\left(j+\frac{k}{2}\right)\frac{q-1}{2}}\binom{n-m}{j}\binom{2m-n}{k}q^{j+\frac{k}{2}}\\
&\ge\frac{1}{2}\,[\,1+(-1)^n](-1)^{m+1+\lfloor\frac{n}{2}\rfloor\frac{q-1}{2}}q^{\frac{n}{2}}+(-1)^{n-1}\\
&\quad-q^{\lfloor\frac{n-1}{2}\rfloor}\sum_{\substack{0\le j\le n-m\\0\le k\le 2m-n\\2|k\\(j,k)\ne(0,0),(n-m,2m-n)}}\binom{n-m}{j}\binom{2m-n}{k}\\
&\ge\frac{1}{2}\,[1+(-1)^n](-1)^{m+1+\lfloor\frac{n}{2}\rfloor\frac{q-1}{2}}q^{\frac{n}{2}}+(-1)^{n-1}+q^{\lfloor\frac{n-1}{2}\rfloor}+\frac{1}{2}\,[1+(-1)^n]q^{\frac{n-2}{2}}\\
&\quad-q^{\frac{n-1}{2}}\cdot\begin{cases}2^{m-1} & \text{if } 2m\ne n,\\ 2^{\frac{n}{2}} & \text{if } 2m=n,\end{cases}
\end{aligned}
$$

and the result follows from Theorem 6.1. □

Corollary 6.1. *Let* $\gcd(n-2,(q-1)/2)=d$. *Then*

$$
N_q>\begin{cases}q^{n-1}-2^{n-2}dq^{\frac{n-1}{2}}+1 & \textit{if } m<n,\\ q^{n-1}-2^{n-1}dq^{\frac{n-1}{2}}+1 & \textit{if } m=n.\end{cases}
$$

Remark 3. In the case $p\equiv 2^{h-1}\pm 1 \pmod{2^h}$, $h\ge 3$, $\gcd(n-2,(q-1)/2)=2^t$, $t\ge w-1$, $m<n$, if instead of Lemma 2.1 one uses Lemma 2.7, then one obtains lower bounds for N_q, given in Theorem 6.1, Theorem 6.2 and Corollary 6.1, with d replaced by 2^{w-2}.

Note that equation (1.2) always has the trivial solution $(0,\dots,0)$. The estimates in Corollary 6.1 can be employed to establish the existence of nontrivial solutions to (1.2).

Theorem 6.3. *Equation* (1.2) *always has a nontrivial solution unless* $m=n=q=3$.

Proof. First, suppose that $q=3$. Then $d=1$ and

$$\sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{2m-n}(-1)^{\frac{k(q-1)}{4}}\binom{2m-n}{k}q^{\frac{k}{2}}=\sum_{\substack{k=0\\2|k}}^{2m-n}\binom{2m-n}{k}(i\sqrt{q})^k$$
$$=(-1)^n\cdot 2^{2m-n-1}\left[\left(\frac{-1+i\sqrt{3}}{2}\right)^{2m-n}+\left(\frac{-1-i\sqrt{3}}{2}\right)^{2m-n}\right]$$
$$=\begin{cases}(-1)^n\cdot 2^{2m-n} & \text{if } 3\mid(2m-n),\\ (-1)^{n-1}\cdot 2^{2m-n-1} & \text{if } 3\nmid(2m-n).\end{cases}$$

Appealing to Lemma 2.1, we find that

$$N_q=\begin{cases}3^{n-1}-2^n+(-1)^{m+\frac{n}{2}}\cdot 2\cdot 3^{\frac{n-2}{2}} & \text{if } 2\mid n \text{ and } 3\mid(2m-n),\\ 3^{n-1}+2^{n-1}+(-1)^{m+\frac{n}{2}}\cdot 2\cdot 3^{\frac{n-2}{2}} & \text{if } 2\mid n \text{ and } 3\nmid(2m-n),\\ 3^{n-1}-2^n & \text{if } 2\nmid n \text{ and } 3\mid(2m-n),\\ 3^{n-1}+2^{n-1} & \text{if } 2\nmid n \text{ and } 3\nmid(2m-n).\end{cases}$$

Since $3^{n-1}-2^n>2^{n-1}+1$ for each $n\geq 4$, we see that $N_q=1$ if and only if $m=n=3$.

Next, suppose that $q\geq 5$. If $m<n$ then, by Corollary 6.1,

$$N_q>2^{n-1}q^{\frac{n-1}{2}}\left(\left(\frac{q}{4}\right)^{\frac{n-1}{2}}-\frac{d}{2}\right)+1>2^{n-1}q^{\frac{n-1}{2}}\left(\left(\frac{q}{4}\right)^{\frac{n-1}{2}}-\frac{q}{4}\right)+1\geq 1.$$

Now assume that $m=n$. Note that, by Corollary 6.1, the inequality $(q/4)^{\frac{n-1}{2}}\geq d$ implies $N_q>1$. Since

$$\left(\frac{q}{4}\right)^{\frac{n-1}{2}}=\left(1+\frac{q-4}{4}\right)^{\frac{n-1}{2}}\geq 1+\frac{n-1}{2}\cdot\frac{q-4}{4}$$
$$\geq\begin{cases}n>d & \text{if } q\geq 13 \text{ and } n\geq 3,\\ q-3\geq\dfrac{q-1}{2}\geq d & \text{if } q\geq 5 \text{ and } n\geq 9,\end{cases}$$

it remains to examine the case when $q\in\{5,7,9,11\}$ and $n\in\{3,4,5,6,7,8\}$. Direct calculations show that the inequality $(q/4)^{\frac{n-1}{2}}\geq d$ holds except when $q=5$, $n=4$ or 6. Finally, we observe that for any $c\in\mathbb{F}_5^*$ the equation $x_1^2+x_2^2+x_3^2+x_4^2=cx_1x_2x_3x_4$ has the nontrivial solution (0,0,1,2) and the equation $x_1^2+x_2^2+x_3^2+x_4^2+x_5^2+x_6^2=cx_1x_2x_3x_4x_5x_6$ has the nontrivial solution (0,0,0,0,1,2). This completes the proof. $\square$

Remark 4. Theorem 6.3 can also be proved without using the low bounds for N_q. Indeed,

$$\begin{aligned}N_q &\geq \#\{(x_2,\dots,x_n)\in\mathbb{F}_q^{n-1} \mid x_2^2+\cdots+x_m^2+gx_{m+1}^2+\cdots+gx_n^2=0\}\\ &= \begin{cases} q^{n-2} & \text{if } n \text{ is even},\\ q^{n-2}+\eta((-1)^{\frac{n-1}{2}}g^{n-m})q^{\frac{n-3}{2}}(q-1) & \text{if } n \text{ is odd},\end{cases}\\ &\geq q^{\frac{n-3}{2}}(q^{\frac{n-1}{2}}-q+1),\end{aligned}$$

where, in the penultimate step, we used the explicit formulas for the number of solutions to quadratic equations (see [6, Theorem 10.5.1] or [9, Theorems 6.26 and 6.27]). Hence $N_q > 1$ except possibly for $n = 3$. From Lemma 2.1, we deduce for $n = 3$ that

$$N_q = \begin{cases} q^2+1-(-1)^{\frac{q-1}{2}}q & \text{if } m=2,\\ q^2+1+(-1)^{\frac{q-1}{2}}3q & \text{if } m=3.\end{cases}$$

Thus $N_q = 1$ if and only if $m = n = q = 3$. Note that for $n > 3$ we actually proved that (1.2) always has a nontrivial solution with $x_1 \cdots x_n = 0$.

In view of Remark 4, it is of interest to give conditions for the existence of a solution with $x_1 \cdots x_n \neq 0$. Let N_q^* be the number of solutions to equation (1.2) in $(\mathbb{F}_q^*)^n$. From the proof of [1, Lemma 1],

$$\begin{aligned}N_q^* = \frac{(q-1)^n}{q} &+ \frac{(-1)^{m+1}[(-1)^{\frac{q-1}{2}}q-1]^{n-m}}{q}\sum_{\substack{k=0\\2\mid k}}^{2m-n}(-1)^{\frac{k(q-1)}{4}}\binom{2m-n}{k}q^{\frac{k}{2}}\\ &+\sum_{\substack{\psi^d=\varepsilon\\ \psi\neq\varepsilon}}\bar{\psi}(c)T(\psi).\end{aligned}$$

Proceeding then by the same arguments as in the proofs of Theorems 6.2 and 6.3, we find that

$$N_q^* = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } q=3 \text{ and } 3\mid(2m-n),\\ 2^{n-1} & \text{if } q=3 \text{ and } 3\nmid(2m-n),\end{cases}$$

and

$$N_q^* > \frac{(q-1)^n}{q} - \begin{cases} 2^{n-2}dq^{\frac{n-1}{2}} & \text{if } m<n,\\ 2^{n-1}dq^{\frac{n-1}{2}} & \text{if } m=n,\end{cases}$$

and obtain the next result.

Theorem 6.4. *Equation* (1.2) *is always solvable with* $x_1 \cdots x_n \neq 0$ *except in the following cases:*
(a) $q = 3$ *and* $3 \mid (2m-n)$*;*
(b) $q = 5$, $m = n = 4$ *and* c *is a nonsquare in* $\mathbb{F}_q$*.*

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