Lattices and codes with long shadows

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Introduction.

By a characteristic vector of an integral unimodular lattice \( L \subset \mathbb{R}^n \) we mean a vector \( w \in L \) such that \((v, w) \equiv (v, v) \mod 2\) for all \( v \in L \). Such vectors are known to constitute a coset of \( 2L \) in \( L \) whose norms are congruent to \( n \mod 8 \) (see e.g. [Se, Ch.V]); dividing this coset by 2 yields a translate of \( L \) called the shadow of \( L \) in [CS2]. If \( L = \mathbb{Z}^n \) then \( w \in L \) is characteristic if and only if all its coordinates are odd, so every characteristic vector of \( \mathbb{Z}^n \) has norm at least \( n \). In [El] we proved that if \( L \not\cong \mathbb{Z}^n \) then \( L \) has characteristic vectors of norm \( \leq n - 8 \), and described without proof all lattices for which \( n - 8 \) is the minimum. Here we prove this result, and along the way also obtain congruences and a lower bound on the kissing number of unimodular lattices with minimal norm 2. We then state and prove analogues of these results for self-dual codes, and relate them directly to the lattice problems via Construction A.

Estimates for unimodular lattices

Any integral lattice \( L \) decomposes as the direct sum \( \mathbb{Z}^r \oplus L_0 \) where the \( \mathbb{Z}^r \) is generated by the vectors of norm 1 and \( L_0 \) is a lattice of minimal norm \( \geq 2 \). [This \( L_0 \) is called the “reduced form” or “initial lattice” of \( L \) in [CS1, p.414]; the latter terminology suggesting the infinite family of lattices \( L_0, L_0 \oplus \mathbb{Z}, L_0 \oplus \mathbb{Z}^2, \) etc., of which \( L_0 \) is the initial member.] If \( L \) (and thus also \( L_0 \)) is unimodular then the shadow of \( L \) is the orthogonal sum of the shadows of \( \mathbb{Z}^r \) and \( L_0 \). Replacing \( L \) by \( L_0 \) thus reduces both the rank of the lattice and the norm of its shortest characteristic vector by \( r \), and does not change the difference between these two integers. We may thus restrict attention to lattices with no vectors of norm 1 for which that difference is 8, and at the end recover all such lattices by adding arbitrarily many \( \mathbb{Z} \)'s.

Theorem 1. Let \( L \) be an integral unimodular lattice in \( \mathbb{R}^n \) with no vectors of norm 1. Then:

i) \( L \) has at least \( 2n(23 - n) \) vectors of norm 2.

ii) Equality holds if and only if \( L \) has no characteristic vectors of norm \( < n - 8 \).

iii) In that case the number of characteristic vectors of norm exactly \( n - 8 \) is \( 2^{n-1}n \).

Proof: We use theta series as in [El], though here we freely invoke modular
forms. For $t$ in the upper half-plane $H$ define

$$\theta_L(t) := \sum_{v \in L} e^{\pi iv|v|^2t} = \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} N_k e^{\pi ikt},$$

(1)

where $N_k$ is the number of lattice vectors of norm $k$, and

$$\theta'_L(t) := \sum_{v \in L + w} e^{\pi iv|v|^2t} = \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} N'_k e^{\pi ikt/4},$$

(2)

where $w \in L$ is any characteristic vector and $N'_k$ is the number of characteristic vectors of norm $k$, or equivalently the number of shadow vectors of norm $k/4$. In \[El\] we noted the identity

$$\theta_L\left(-\frac{1}{t} + 1\right) = \left(t/i\right)^{n/2} \theta'_L(t).$$

(3)

By a theorem of Hecke (see e.g. [CS1, Ch.7, Thm.7]), $\theta_L$ is a modular form of weight $n/2$ and can be written as a weighted-homogeneous polynomial $P_L(\theta_Z, \theta_E)$ in the modular forms

$$\theta_Z(t) := 1 + 2 \left(e^{\pi it} + e^{4\pi it} + e^{9\pi it} + \cdots\right)$$

(4)

of weight 1/2 and

$$\theta_E(t) = 1 + 240 \sum_{m=1}^{\infty} \frac{m^3 e^{2\pi imt}}{1 - e^{2\pi imt}} = 1 + 240e^{2\pi it} + 2160e^{4\pi it} + \cdots$$

(5)

of weight 4. From (3) it follows that $\theta'_L$ is given by

$$\theta'_L = P_L(\theta'_Z, \theta_E),$$

(6)

where

$$\theta'_Z(t) = 2 \sum_{m=0}^{\infty} e^{\pi i(m+\frac{1}{2})^2t} = 2e^{\pi it/4} \left(1 + e^{2\pi it} + e^{6\pi it} + e^{12\pi it} + \cdots\right),$$

(7)

and we used the fact that $\theta'_E = \theta_E$ because $E$ is an even lattice. Since $\theta'_Z(t) \sim 2e^{\pi it/4}$ as $t \to i\infty$, while $E_4(i\infty) = 1$ is nonzero, we see from (3) that the norm of the shortest characteristic vectors is simply the exponent of $X$ in the factorization of $P_L(X, Y)$.

\[1\] We could now recover our theorem from \[El\] by observing that this exponent is at most $n$, with equality if and only if $\theta_L$ is proportional to $\theta^n_Z$, etc.; but this is really the same proof because the crucial fact that $\theta_Z$ vanishes at one cusp and nowhere else is also an essential ingredient of Hecke’s theorem.
In our setting \( N_0 = 1 \) and \( N_1 = 0 \). We first prove part (ii) of our theorem. If \( L \) has no characteristic vectors of norm \( n < 8 \) then \( P_L(X,Y) \) is a linear combination of \( X^n \) and \( X^{n-8}Y \). The known values of \( N_0, N_1 \) determine this combination uniquely: we find that

\[
\theta_L = \theta^n_Z - \frac{n}{8} \theta^{n-8}_Z (\theta^8_Z - \theta_{E_8}) = 1 + 0 e^{\pi i t} + 2n(23-n)e^{2\pi i t} + \cdots \quad (8)
\]

Thus \( L \) indeed has \( 2n(23-n) \) vectors of norm 2. Conversely if \( L \) is an integral unimodular lattice with \( N_1 = 0 \) and \( N_2 \leq 2n(23-n) \) then \( n < 24 \) and \( P_L \) has at most 3 terms, whose coefficients are determined uniquely by \( N_0, N_1, N_2 \):

\[
\theta_L = \theta^n_Z - \frac{n}{8} \theta^{n-8}_Z (\theta^8_Z - \theta_{E_8}) + \frac{N_2 - (2n(23-n))}{16^2} \theta^{n-16}_Z (\theta^8_Z - \theta_{E_8})^2 \quad (9)
\]

But then by (8) we have

\[
N_{n-16} = 2^{n-24}[N_2 - (2n(23-n))], \quad (10)
\]

Since \( N_{n-16} \geq 0 \) we conclude that \( N_2 \geq 2n(23-n) \) even for \( n < 24 \), as claimed in part (i) of the theorem; and equality occurs if and only if \( N_{n-16} \) vanishes, whence the reverse implication in part (ii) follows. Finally to prove part (iii) we use (8) to compute

\[
\theta'_L = \theta'^n_Z - \frac{n}{8} \theta'^{n-8}_Z (\theta'^8_Z - \theta'_{E_8}) = 2^{n-11} n e^{(n-8)\pi i t} + \cdots \quad (11)
\]

so \( N'_{n-8} = 2^{n-11} n \) as claimed. \( \square \)

Fortunately the integral unimodular lattices of rank \( n < 24 \) are completely known, and those with \( N_1 = 0 \) are conveniently listed with their \( N_2 \) values in the table of \([CST1]\) pp.416–7. For \( n < 16 \) the shortest characteristic vector must have norm at least \( n - 8 \), so any unimodular lattice of minimal norm \( \geq 1 \) must have \( 2n(23-n) \) vectors of norm 2; this is confirmed by the table. When \( 16 \leq n \leq 23 \) some lattices can have more than \( 2n(23-n) \) such vectors, but it turns out there is always at least one lattice with \( N_2 = 2n(23-n) \). (Can this be proved a priori?) Thus, as observed by J.H. Conway, the lattices of parts (ii), (iii) of our theorem are precisely the integral unimodular lattices of rank \( n < 24 \) with \( N_1 = 0 \) that minimize \( N_2 \) given \( n \). As noted in \([El]\), there are fourteen such lattices; in the following list, adapted from \([El]\), we label them as in the table of \([CST]\) by the root system of norm-2 vectors:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccccccc}
 n & 8 & 12 & 14 & 15 & 16 & 17 & 18 & 19 & 20 & 21 & 22 & 23 \\
 N_2 & 240 & 264 & 252 & 240 & 224 & 204 & 180 & 152 & 120 & 84 & 44 & 0 \\
 E_8 & D_{12} & E_7^2 & A_{15} & D_8^2 & A_{11}E_6 & D_6^2, A_3^2 & D_5^2 & D_4^1, A_5^2 & A_3^2 & A_3^2 & A_3^{22} & O_{23}
\end{array}
\]

We noted in \([El]\) that from our characterization of \( \mathbb{Z}^n \) we could also recover the fact that \( \mathbb{Z}^n \) is the only integral unimodular lattice of rank \( n \) for \( n < 8 \). Likewise from part (iii) of Theorem 1 we can recover the fact that every integral
unimodular lattice of rank \( n < 12 \) is either \( \mathbb{Z}^n \) or \( \mathbb{Z}^{n-8} \oplus E_8 \). Indeed there would otherwise be such a lattice of rank 9, 10, or 11 with no vector of norm 1, but then by (iii) the lattice would have \( N'_{n-8} = 2^{n-11}n \), which is impossible because \( N'_{n-8} \) is an even integer for any lattice of rank \( n \neq 8 \).

Having obtained (11), we used \( N'_{n-16} \geq 0 \) to prove \( N_2 \geq 2n(23 - n) \). Since \( N'_{n-16} \) is always an even integer unless \( n = 16 \) and \( 0 \) is a characteristic vector (\( \iff \) \( L \) is its own shadow \( \iff L \) is an even lattice), it follows that in fact

\[
N_2 \equiv 2n(23 - n) \pmod{2^{25-n}} \tag{12}
\]

for any even unimodular lattice with no vectors of norm 1, with the exception of the two even lattices \( E_8^2 \), \( D_{16}^+ \) of rank 16, which have \( N_2 = 480 \). (This is similar to the argument used in [CS1, Ch.19, p.440] to prove that there are no “extremal Type I lattices” with \( 16 \leq n \leq 22 \), a fact which now also follows from part (i) of our Theorem.) The congruence (12) is confirmed by the table of [CS1], which also reveals that \( N_2 - 2n(23 - n) \) is always a multiple of \( 2^4 \) even for \( n = 22 \) and \( n = 23 \); a “conceptual” (but far from easy) proof of this is found in [3c, Thm. 4.4.2(3)]. Note that even though we have only proved (12) for \( n < 24 \), it in fact holds for all \( n \), since \( N_2 \) is always an even integer.

**Estimates for self-dual binary codes**

We recall some basic facts about binary linear codes; see for instance [CS1, Ch.3, §2.2]. Let \( F = \mathbb{Z}/2\mathbb{Z} \) be the two-element field. We work in the vector space \( F^n \), whose elements we regard as “words” of length \( n \) whose “letters” are taken from the “alphabet” \( F \). The (Hamming) “weight” \( wt(w) \) of a word \( w = (w_1, w_2, \ldots, w_n) \in F^n \) is \( \#\{ j : w_j = 1 \} \) of nonzero coordinates of \( w \). A “binary linear code” of length \( n \) is a subspace \( C \subset F^n \). A binary self-dual code is a linear code which is its own annihilator under the nondegenerate pairing \( (\cdot, \cdot) : C \times C \to F \), defined by \( (v, w) = \sum_{j=1}^n v_jw_j \). Such a code must have dimension \( n/2 \), and thus can only exist if \( n \) is even, which we henceforth assume.

Note that under our pairing we have

\[
(w, w) = (w, 1^n) \equiv wt(w) \pmod{2} \tag{13}
\]

for all \( w \in F^n \), where \( 1^n \) is the all-ones vector in \( F^n \). Thus if \( C \) is a self-dual code then \( C \ni 1^n \) and all the words in \( C \) have even weight.

The “weight enumerator” \( W_C \) of \( C \) is a generating function for the weight distribution of \( C \):

\[
W_C(x, y) := \sum_{c \in C} x^{n-wt(c)}y^{wt(c)}. \tag{14}
\]

For a binary self-dual code a theorem of Gleason (Thm.6 of [CS1, Ch.7]), analogous to Hecke’s theorem for theta series of lattices, states that \( W_C \) is a weighted-homogeneous polynomial \( P_W(x^2 + y^2, x^8 + 14x^4y^4 + y^8) \) in the weight enumerators of the double repetition code \( z := \{(0, 0), (1, 1)\} \subset F^2 \) and the extended Hamming code in \( F^8 \) respectively.
Analogous to the homomorphism \( v \mapsto |v|^2 \mod 2 \) from an integral lattice to \( \mathbb{Z}/2 \) we have for any self-dual code \( C \subset F^n \) a linear map from \( C \) to \( F \) taking any \( c \in C \) to \( \frac{1}{2} \) wt(\( c \)) mod 2. We can use the pairing on \( F^n \) to represent any linear functional on a self-dual code by a unique coset of the code; thus we find a coset \( C' \) of \( C \) consisting of all \( c' \in F^n \) such that

\[
\frac{1}{2} \text{wt}(c) \equiv (c, c') \mod 2
\]  

for all \( c \in C \). As in [CS2] we call \( C' \) the shadow of \( C \), in analogy with the shadow of an integral unimodular lattice. Let

\[
W'_C(x, y) := \sum_{c \in C'} x^n - \text{wt}(c)y^{\text{wt}(c)}
\]  

be the generating function for the weight distribution of \( C' \). Using discrete Poisson inversion as in the proof of the MacWilliams identity and the characterization \([15]\) of \( C' \) we find as in [CS2]

\[
W'_C(x, y) = 2^{-n/2} \sum_{c \in C} (-1)^{\text{wt}(c)/2}(x + y)^{n - \text{wt}(c)}(x - y)^{\text{wt}(c)}
\]

\[
= 2^{-n/2} W_C(x + y, i(x - y)).
\]  

Thus from \( W_C(x, y) = P_W(x^2 + y^2, x^8 + 14x^4y^4 + y^8) \) we obtain

\[
W'_C(x, y) = P_W(2xy, x^8 + 14x^4y^4 + y^8).
\]  

(18)

Note that all the words in the shadow thus have weight congruent to \( n/2 \mod 4 \). We could have also obtained this directly from the MacWilliams identity

\[
W_C(x, y) = 2^{-n/2} W_C(x + y, x - y),
\]  

(19)

(which also underlies Gleason’s theorem); this would more closely parallel the analytic proof of \( |w|^2 \equiv n \mod 8 \) in [El].

If \( c \in C \) has weight 2 then every codeword either contains or is disjoint from \( c \). Thus \( C \) decomposes as a direct sum of a double repetition code \( z \) generated by \( c \) and the self-dual code of length \( n - 2 \) consisting of codewords disjoint from \( c \). Iterating this we decompose \( C \) as \( C_0 \oplus z^r \), where \( r \) is the number of weight-2 words in \( C \), and \( C_0 \) is a self-dual code of length \( n - 2r \) with no words of weight 2. Now for any self-dual codes \( C_1, C_2 \), their direct sum \( C_1 \oplus C_2 \) has shadow

\[
(C_1 \oplus C_2)' = C_1' \oplus C_2'.
\]  

(20)

Since the shadow of \( z \) is \( \{(0,1), (1,0)\} \) it follows that the shadow of \( z^r \) consists entirely of words of weight \( r \), and if \( C = C_0 \oplus z^r \) then the minimal weight of \( C_0 \) is \( r \) less than that of \( C' \).
Since \( C' \) contains \( w + 1 \) whenever it contains \( w \) it is clear that the minimal weight of \( C' \) cannot exceed the value \( n/2 \) attained by \( z^{n/2} \). This is much easier than proving the corresponding fact for characteristic vectors of unimodular lattices, but it does not show that \( z^{n/2} \) is the only self-dual code whose shadow has minimal weight \( n/2 \). We prove this, as we did for lattices, by noting that such a code \( C \) must have \( W'_C(x, y) = (2xy)^{n/2} \), whence \( W_C(x, y) = (x^2 + y^2)^{n/2} \).

Since \( C \) contains \( n/2 \) words of weight 2, then, it can only be \( z^{n/2} \).

We have shown that the shadow of a binary self-dual code \( C \) other than \( z^{n/2} \) contains some words of weight \( < n/2 \). Thus \( C' \) has minimal weight at most \((n - 8)/2 \). We next characterize all \( C \) attaining this bound. If \( C = C_0 \oplus z' \) then \( C \) attains the bound if and only if \( C_0 \) does, so we need only consider codes without weight-2 words.

**Theorem 1A.** Let \( C \) be a binary self-dual code of length \( n \) with no codewords of weight 2. Then:

i) \( C \) has at least \((22 - n)/8 \) codewords of weight 4.

ii) Equality holds if and only if the shadow of \( C \) contains no codewords of weight \( < (n - 8)/2 \).

iii) In that case the number of codewords of weight exactly \((n - 8)/2 \) in the shadow is \( 2^{(n-14)/2} \).

**Proof:** We can mimic the proof of Theorem 1. If the minimal weight of \( C' \) is at least \((n - 8)/2 \) then \( W'_C \) is a linear combination of \((xy)^{n/2} \) and \((xy)^{(n-8)/2}(x^8 + 14x^4y^4 + y^8) \), and thus \( W_C(x, y) \) is a linear combination of \((x^2 + y^2)^{n/2} \) and \((x^2 + y^2)^{(n-8)/2}(x^8 + 14x^4y^4 + y^8) \). The condition that \( C \) have no weight-2 codewords then forces

\[
W_C(x, y) = (x^2 + y^2)^{n/2} - \frac{n}{8}(x^2 + y^2)^{(n-8)/2}((x^2 + y^2)^4 - (x^8 + 14x^4y^4 + y^8))
\]

\[= x^n + 0x^{n-2}y^2 + \frac{n(22 - n)}{8}x^{n-4}y^4 + \ldots \] (21)

and

\[
W_C(x, y) = (2xy)^{n/2} - \frac{n}{8}(2xy)^{(n-8)/2}[(2xy)^4 - (x^8 + 14x^4y^4 + y^8)]
\]

\[= 2^{(n-14)/2}(xy)^{(n-8)/2}[nx^8 + (128 - 2n)x^4y^4 + ny^8] \] (22)

If \( n < 24 \) and \( C \) is any binary self-dual code of length \( n \) containing no words of weight 2 and \((22 - n)/8 + d \) words of weight 4 then its weight enumerator exceeds \((23)\) by

\[
\frac{d}{16}(x^2 + y^2)^{(n-16)/2}[x^8 + 14x^4y^4 + y^8 - (x^2 + y^2)^4]^2 \]

(23)

so the weight enumerator of the shadow \( C' \) exceeds \((24)\) by

\[
\frac{d}{16}(2xy)^{(n-16)/2}(x^8 - 2x^4y^4 + y^8)^2 \]

(24)
Thus $C'$ contains $2^{(n-24)/2}d$ words of weight $(n - 16)/2$, from which we find that $d$ is a nonnegative multiple of $2^{(24-n)/2}$.

Alternatively we could deduce Theorem 1A from Theorem 1 via Construction A [CS1, Ch.7, §2]. Recall that this construction associates to a self-dual code $C \subset F^n$ the unimodular integral lattice

$$L_C := \{2^{-1/2}v \mid v \in \mathbb{Z}^n, v \mod 2 \in C\}. \quad (25)$$

The theta series of this lattice is given by

$$\theta_{L_C}(t) = W_C(\theta_{\mathbb{Z}^n}(2t), \theta_{\mathbb{Z}^n}(2t)); \quad (26)$$

in particular $L_C$ has no vectors of norm 1 if and only if $C$ has no codewords of weight 2 (NB $L_\mathbb{Z} \cong \mathbb{Z}^2$), and the $N_2(L_C) - 2n$ is $2^4$ times the number of weight-4 codewords in $C$. Moreover the set of characteristic vectors of $L_C$ is

$$\{2^{1/2}v \mid v \in \mathbb{Z}^n, v \mod 2 \in C'\} \quad (27)$$

(in effect the shadow of $L_C$ is obtained by applying Construction A to the shadow of $C$), so the norm of the shortest characteristic vectors is half the minimal weight of $C'$. Applying Theorem 1 to $L_C$ thus yields Theorem 1A immediately.

Thus also the codes $C$ of parts (ii), (iii) of Theorem 1A are precisely those for which $L_C$ is one of the 14 lattices listed in connection with Theorem 1. Of course not every such lattice arises because $n$ must be even; moreover, the root system can only involve $A_1$, $D_{2m}$, $E_7$ and $E_8$ if the lattice arises from construction $A$. This leaves only the seven lattices with root systems $E_8$, $D_{12}$, $E_7^2$, $D_8^2$, $D_6^2$, $D_4^2$, $A_7^2$ of rank 8, 12, 14, 16, 20, 22 respectively. It turns out that each of those lattices arises as $L_C$ for a unique code $C$ [PS, ES]. For instance the first of these arises from the extended Hamming code, and the last from what might be called the shorter binary Golay code; these are the shortest self-dual binary codes having minimal weight 4 and 6 respectively. Again it so happens that whenever there is a self-dual code of length $n < 24$ with minimal weight at least 4, there is such a code (this time unique) with only $n(22 - n)/8$ words of weight 4, so Conway’s description of our fourteen lattices also applies mutatis mutandis to our seven codes.

Can we go past $n - 8$?

Our results suggest the following questions:

For any $k > 0$ is there $N_k$ such that every integral unimodular lattice all of whose characteristic vectors have norm $\geq n - 8k$ is of the form $L_0 \oplus \mathbb{Z}^r$ for some lattice $L_0$ of rank at most $N_k$?
For any $k > 0$ is there $n_k$ such that every binary self-dual code of whose shadow has minimal norm $\geq (n - 8k)/2$ is of the form $C_0 \oplus z^r$ for some code $C_0$ of length at most $n_k$?

Of course a positive answer for lattices would imply one for codes, and vice versa for a negative answer, via Construction A, with $n_k \leq N_k$ in the former case. Even $k = 2$ seems difficult.

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