

SUPERELLIPTIC EQUATIONS ARISING FROM SUMS OF CONSECUTIVE POWERS

MICHAEL A. BENNETT, VANDITA PATEL, AND SAMIR SIKSEK

ABSTRACT. Using only elementary arguments, Cassels solved the Diophantine equation $(x-1)^3 + x^3 + (x+1)^3 = z^2$ (with $x, z \in \mathbb{Z}$). The generalization $(x-1)^k + x^k + (x+1)^k = z^n$ (with $x, z, n \in \mathbb{Z}$ and $n \geq 2$) was considered by Zhongfeng Zhang who solved it for $k \in \{2, 3, 4\}$ using Frey-Hellegouarch curves and their corresponding Galois representations. In this paper, by employing some sophisticated refinements of this approach, we show that the only solution for $k = 5$ is $x = z = 0$, and that there are no solutions for $k = 6$. The chief innovation we employ is a computational one, which enables us to avoid the full computation of data about cuspidal newforms of high level.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1964, Leveque [21] applied a theorem of Siegel [28] to show that, if $f(x) \in \mathbb{Z}[x]$ is a polynomial of degree $k \geq 2$ with at least two simple roots, and $n \geq \max\{2, 5-k\}$ is an integer, then the *superelliptic* equation

$$(1) \quad f(x) = z^n$$

has at most finitely many solutions in integers x and z . This result was extended by Schinzel and Tijdeman [27], through application of lower bounds for linear forms in logarithms, to show that equation (1) has in fact at most finitely many solutions in integers x, z and *variable* $n \geq \max\{2, 5-k\}$ (where we count the solutions with $z^n = \pm 1, 0$ once).

While this latter result is effective (in the sense that the finite set of triples (x, z, n) is effectively computable), in practice such a determination has infrequently been achieved, due to the extraordinary size of the bounds for x, z and n arising from the proof. The few cases that have been treated in the literature have been restricted to polynomials with very few monomials, or with multiple linear factors over \mathbb{Q} .

One class of polynomials that has proved, in certain cases at least, amenable to such an approach, is that arising from sum of consecutive k -th powers. Let us define

$$S_k(x) = 1^k + 2^k + \cdots + x^k,$$

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where x and k are nonnegative integers. Equations of the shape

$$(2) \quad S_k(x) - S_k(y) = z^n$$

have been considered by a number of authors, under the hypotheses that $y = 0$ (see e.g. [10], [18], [19], [23], [24], [26], [34], [35]), that $y = \lfloor x/2 \rfloor$ ([38]) and that $y = x - 3$ ([13], [38]). In the first two of these situations, the resulting polynomials on the left hand side of equation (2) have at least two distinct linear factors over \mathbb{Q} , which allows the problem to be reduced to one of binomial Thue equations.

Regarding the last of these cases, Cassels [13] solved the Diophantine equation $(x - 1)^3 + x^3 + (x + 1)^3 = z^2$ in integers x and z , showing that the only solutions satisfy $x = 0, 1, 2$ and 24 ; the same equation in a slightly disguised form is treated by Uchiyama [33]. Zhongfeng Zhang [38] subsequently considered the more general equation

$$(3) \quad (x - 1)^k + x^k + (x + 1)^k = z^n, \quad x, z, k, n \in \mathbb{Z}, \quad k, n \geq 2.$$

Associating solutions to a Frey-Hellegouarch curve and applying standard level lowering arguments he proved that the only solutions with $k \in \{2, 3, 4\}$ are $(x, z, k, n) = (1, \pm 3, 3, 2), (2, \pm 6, 3, 2), (24, \pm 204, 3, 2), (\pm 4, \pm 6, 3, 3)$ and $(0, 0, 3, n)$.

In this paper, we extend Zhang's result, completely solving equation (3) in the cases $k = 5$ and $k = 6$. It should be emphasized that these results cannot apparently be obtained from the arguments of [38], using Frey-Hellegouarch curves over \mathbb{Q} . Indeed, the purpose of this paper is two-fold. On the one hand, we will use the case $k = 5$ to advertise the utility of the more powerful multi-Frey-Hellegouarch approach, first pioneered in [12] (see also, e.g. [2], [3], [4] and [11]). Our result here is as follows :

Theorem 1. *The only solutions to the equation*

$$(x - 1)^5 + x^5 + (x + 1)^5 = z^n, \quad x, z, n \in \mathbb{Z}, \quad n \geq 1$$

satisfy $x = z = 0$.

The other main purpose of this paper is to introduce a new computational approach to handle Diophantine problems where the problem of extracting information about associated forms arising from modularity is at the limit of current computational power. The method of Frey-Hellegouarch curves and Galois representations generally requires the explicit computation of weight 2 newforms of certain levels and also the computation of some of their Hecke eigenvalues. This computation can be completely impractical if the level is large. This turns out to be the case for equation (3) with $k = 6$, where required newforms have level $3^3 \cdot 3391$ and the newform space has dimension 4520. We develop a version of the standard 'method for bounding exponents' [29, Section 9] that does not require the computations of the newforms, but merely a few (computationally much less expensive) Hecke polynomials. This allows us to prove the following theorem.

Theorem 2. *The equation*

$$(x - 1)^6 + x^6 + (x + 1)^6 = z^n, \quad x, z, n \in \mathbb{Z}, \quad n \geq 1$$

has no solution.

In a forthcoming paper we treat the equation $(x - 1)^k + x^k = z^n$.

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2. THE CASE $k = 5$ AND TWO FERMAT EQUATIONS OF SIGNATURE $(p, p, 2)$

The equation $(x - 1)^5 + x^5 + (x + 1)^5 = z^n$ can be rewritten as

$$(4) \quad x(3x^4 + 20x^2 + 10) = z^n.$$

It suffices to deal with the case $n = p$ where p is a prime. We write $\alpha = \gcd(x, 10)$, whereby

$$(5) \quad x = \alpha^{p-1} z_1^p \quad \text{and} \quad 3x^4 + 20x^2 + 10 = \alpha z_2^p.$$

We shall use this factorization to construct two associated Fermat equations with signatures $(p, p, 2)$. We make use of the identity

$$7x^4 + (3x^4 + 20x^2 + 10) = 10(x^2 + 1)^2.$$

Substituting from (5) and dividing by α we obtain

$$(6) \quad 7\alpha^{4p-5} z_1^{4p} + z_2^p = (10/\alpha)(x^2 + 1)^2.$$

The reader will observe that this is a generalized Fermat equation with signature $(p, p, 2)$ where the three terms are coprime.

We also make use of the identity

$$3(3x^4 + 20x^2 + 10) + 70 = (3x^2 + 10)^2.$$

Again substituting from (5) and dividing by α we obtain

$$(7) \quad 3z_2^p + \frac{70}{\alpha} = \alpha \left(\frac{3x^2 + 10}{\alpha} \right)^2.$$

Once again, the three terms in this equation are integral and coprime. We interpret this as a generalized Fermat equation with signature $(p, p, 2)$ by treating the term $70/\alpha$ as $(70/\alpha) \cdot 1^p$.

We will associate a Frey-Hellegouarch curve to each of the Fermat equations (6) and (7), and use the information derived simultaneously from both Frey-Hellegouarch curves to prove Theorem 1 for $n = p \geq 7$. We need to treat exponents $p = 2, 3$ and 5 separately; we do this in the next section.

3. THE CASE $k = 5$: SMALL VALUES OF p

Lemma 3.1. *The only solutions to (4) with $n = p = 2$ are $x = z = 0$.*

Proof. Write $X = 3\alpha x^2$ and $Y = 3\alpha x z_2$. From (5), it follows that (X, Y) is an integral point on the elliptic curve

$$E_\alpha : Y^2 = X(X^2 + 20\alpha X + 30\alpha^2).$$

Using the computer algebra package `Magma` [8], we determine the integral points on E_α . For this computation, `Magma` applies the standard linear forms in elliptic logarithms method [32, Chapter XIII]. The integral points on these curves are

$$(-6, \pm 18), \quad (-5, \pm 15), \quad (0, 0) \quad \text{and} \quad (1080, \pm 35820),$$

for $\alpha = 1$; the points $(-54, \pm 306)$ and $(0, 0)$ for $\alpha = 5$; and just the point $(0, 0)$ for $\alpha = 2$ or 10 . The lemma follows immediately. \square

Lemma 3.2. *The only solutions to (4) with $n = p = 3$ are $x = z = 0$.*

Proof. Let $X = 3\alpha z_2$ and $Y = 3\alpha(3x^2 + 10)$. From (7), we see that (X, Y) is an integral point on the elliptic curve

$$E_\alpha : Y^2 = X^3 + 630\alpha^2.$$

Again using **Magma**, we determined the integral points on these four elliptic curves. The curve E_1 has no integral points. The integral points on E_5 are $(-5, \pm 125)$ and $(99, \pm 993)$, while those on E_2 are $(-6, \pm 48)$, $(9, \pm 57)$ and $(46, \pm 316)$. Finally, the integral points on E_{10} are given by

$$(1, \pm 251), (30, \pm 300), (81, \pm 771) \text{ and } (330, \pm 6000).$$

The lemma follows. \square

Lemma 3.3. *The only solutions to (4) with $n = p = 5$ are $x = z = 0$.*

Proof. From (5) we have

$$x = \alpha^4 z_1^5, \quad (3x^2 + 10 + \sqrt{70})(3x^2 + 10 - \sqrt{70}) = 3\alpha z_2^5.$$

Let $K = \mathbb{Q}(\sqrt{70})$. This field has ring of integers $\mathcal{O}_K = \mathbb{Z}[\sqrt{70}]$ and fundamental unit $\varepsilon = 251 + 31\sqrt{70}$. We consider the following prime ideals

$$\begin{aligned} \mathfrak{p}_2 &= (2, \sqrt{70}), & \mathfrak{p}_3 &= (3, 1 + \sqrt{70}), & \mathfrak{p}'_3 &= (3, 1 - \sqrt{70}), \\ \mathfrak{p}_5 &= (25 + 3\sqrt{70})\mathcal{O}_K & \text{and} & & \mathfrak{p}_7 &= (7, \sqrt{70}). \end{aligned}$$

These satisfy

$$\mathfrak{p}_2^2 = 2\mathcal{O}_K, \quad \mathfrak{p}_5^2 = 5\mathcal{O}_K, \quad \mathfrak{p}_7^2 = 7\mathcal{O}_K \text{ and } \mathfrak{p}_3\mathfrak{p}'_3 = 3\mathcal{O}_K.$$

The field K has class number 2, with $\mathfrak{p}_2, \mathfrak{p}_3, \mathfrak{p}'_3$ and \mathfrak{p}_7 all representing the non-trivial ideal class. Observe that

$$\text{ord}_{\mathfrak{p}_3}(10 + \sqrt{70}) = 1 \quad \text{and} \quad \text{ord}_{\mathfrak{p}_3}(10 - \sqrt{70}) = 0.$$

Moreover,

$$\text{ord}_{\mathfrak{p}_2}(10 + \sqrt{70}) = \text{ord}_{\mathfrak{p}_5}(10 + \sqrt{70}) = 1.$$

Let $a = \text{ord}_2(\alpha)$ and $b = \text{ord}_5(\alpha)$, so that $a, b \in \{0, 1\}$. We deduce that

$$(3x^2 + 10 + \sqrt{70})\mathcal{O}_K = \mathfrak{a} \cdot \mathfrak{b}^5, \quad \text{where } \mathfrak{a} = \mathfrak{p}_2^a \cdot \mathfrak{p}_5^b \cdot \mathfrak{p}_3$$

and \mathfrak{b} is an ideal of \mathcal{O}_K . Observe that \mathfrak{b} is principal if and only if \mathfrak{a} is principal. Let

$$\mathfrak{q} = \begin{cases} 1 \cdot \mathcal{O}_K & \text{if } \mathfrak{a} \text{ is principal} \\ \mathfrak{p}_7 & \text{if } \mathfrak{a} \text{ is non-principal.} \end{cases}$$

Then we can write

$$(3x^2 + 10 + \sqrt{70})\mathcal{O}_K = (\mathfrak{a}\mathfrak{q}^{-5}) \cdot (\mathfrak{b}\mathfrak{q})^5$$

where both $\mathfrak{a}\mathfrak{q}^{-5}$ and $\mathfrak{b}\mathfrak{q}$ are principal; the former is a fractional ideal, while the latter is an integral ideal. Write

$$\mathfrak{a}\mathfrak{q}^{-5} = \frac{r + s\sqrt{70}}{d}\mathcal{O}_K$$

where $r, s, d \in \mathbb{Z}$, with $d \geq 1$ as small as possible. Now

$$3x^2 + 10 + \sqrt{70} = \frac{1}{d}(r + s\sqrt{70}) \cdot \varepsilon^c \cdot (u + v\sqrt{70})^5, \quad -2 \leq c \leq 2$$

with u, v in \mathbb{Z} . Comparing coefficients of 1, $\sqrt{70}$, and recalling that $x = \alpha^4 z_1^5$ we have

$$(8) \quad f(u, v) = d(3\alpha^8 z_1^{10} + 10) \quad \text{and} \quad g(u, v) = d,$$

where $f, g \in \mathbb{Z}[u, v]$ are homogenous of degree 5. Observe that d is determined by α , while f and g are determined by α and c . For each possibility for α and c we checked the system (8) for solubility modulo $2^6, 3^3, 5^3, 7^3$ and all primes $11 \leq q < 100$. This allowed us to eliminate all possibilities except for $(\alpha, c) = (2, 2)$ and $(\alpha, c) = (10, 0)$. For both these possibilities $d = 1$. The second equation in (8) is in fact a Thue equation. We used **Magma** to solve both Thue equations; for the theory behind **Magma**'s Thue equation solver see [32, Chapter VII].

For $(\alpha, c) = (2, 2)$ this Thue equation is

$$5521u^5 + 230960u^4v + 3864700u^3v^2 + 32334400u^2v^3 + 135264500uv^4 + 226340800v^5 = 1,$$

and we found that it has no solutions. For $(\alpha, c) = (10, 0)$, the corresponding Thue equation is

$$u^5 + 50u^4v + 700u^3v^2 + 7000u^2v^3 + 24500uv^4 + 49000v^5 = 1.$$

The only solution is $(u, v) = (1, 0)$. Since the first equation in (8) is, in this case, $10u^5 + 350u^4v + 7000u^3v^2 + 49000u^2v^3 + 245000uv^4 + 343000v^5 = 3 \cdot 10^8 \cdot z_1^{10} + 10$, it follows that $z_1 = 0$ and hence $x = 0$ as required. \square

4. THE CASE $k = 5$: FIRST FREY-HELLEGOUARCH CURVE

Henceforth we suppose that $p \geq 7$ and that $x \neq 0$. We apply the recipes of the first author and Skinner [7, Section 2] to equation (6) (see also [29]; this latter reference is a comprehensive tutorial on the modular approach). The recipes lead us to attach to (6) a Frey-Hellegouarch curve $E_{x,\alpha}$ which depends on α as well as x . The possible values for α are 1, 5, 2 and 10. The corresponding Frey-Hellegouarch elliptic curves are

$$(9) \quad E_{x,1} : Y^2 = X^3 + 20(x^2 + 1)X^2 + 10(3x^4 + 20x^2 + 10)X$$

$$(10) \quad E_{x,5} : Y^2 = X^3 + 4(x^2 + 1)X^2 + \frac{2(3x^4 + 20x^2 + 10)}{5}X$$

$$(11) \quad E_{x,2} : Y^2 + XY = X^3 + \frac{(5x^2 + 4)}{4}X^2 + \frac{35x^4}{128}X$$

$$(12) \quad E_{x,10} : Y^2 + XY = X^3 + \frac{x^2}{4}X^2 + \frac{7x^4}{640}X.$$

For a non-zero integer u and a set of primes S , we define $\text{Rad}_S(u)$ to be the product of the distinct prime divisors of u that do not belong to S . For an elliptic curve E/\mathbb{Q} , we denote its minimal discriminant and conductor by $\Delta(E)$ and $N(E)$.

Lemma 4.1. *The elliptic curves $E_{x,\alpha}$ have non-trivial 2-torsion over \mathbb{Q} . Their discriminant and conductors are*

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta(E_{x,1}) &= 2^9 \cdot 5^3 \cdot 7 \cdot z_1^{4p} \cdot z_2^{2p}, & N(E_{x,1}) &= 2^8 \cdot 5^2 \cdot 7 \cdot \text{Rad}_{\{2,5,7\}}(z_1 z_2) \\ \Delta(E_{x,5}) &= 2^9 \cdot 5^{4p-5} \cdot 7 \cdot z_1^{4p} \cdot z_2^{2p}, & N(E_{x,5}) &= 2^8 \cdot 5 \cdot 7 \cdot \text{Rad}_{\{2,5,7\}}(z_1 z_2) \\ \Delta(E_{x,2}) &= 2^{8p-22} \cdot 5^3 \cdot 7^2 \cdot z_1^{8p} \cdot z_2^p, & N(E_{x,2}) &= 2 \cdot 5^2 \cdot 7 \cdot \text{Rad}_{\{2,5,7\}}(z_1 z_2) \\ \Delta(E_{x,10}) &= 2^{8p-22} \cdot 5^{8p-10} \cdot 7^2 z_1^{8p} \cdot z_2^p, & N(E_{x,10}) &= 2 \cdot 5 \cdot 7 \cdot \text{Rad}_{\{2,5,7\}}(z_1 z_2). \end{aligned}$$

Proof. This follows from [7, Lemma 2.1]. \square

α	$\dim S_2^{\text{new}}(L_\alpha)$	number of conjugacy classes of forms	$(d, \text{number of newforms of degree } d)$
1	912	196	(1, 52), (2, 32), (3, 12), (4, 22), (5, 8), (6, 28), (8, 12), (9, 8), (12, 16), (16, 2), (18, 4)
5	192	64	(1, 20), (2, 12), (3, 12), (4, 4), (6, 16)
2	10	8	(1, 6), (2, 2)
10	1	1	(1, 1)

TABLE 1. Information for weight 2 newforms of level L_α , where L_α is given by Lemma 4.2.

We note in passing that we have already used the assumption $x \neq 0$. If $x = 0$, then $z_1 = 0$ and the curves $E_{x,\alpha}$ are not elliptic curves but merely singular Weierstrass equations (i.e. the discriminant $\Delta(E_{x,\alpha}) = 0$). We maintain the assumption $x \neq 0$ throughout.

For an elliptic curve E/\mathbb{Q} , we write $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ for the mod p representation giving the action of $G_{\mathbb{Q}} = \text{Gal}(\bar{\mathbb{Q}}/\mathbb{Q})$ on the p -torsion $E[p]$:

$$\bar{\rho}_{E,p} : G_{\mathbb{Q}} \rightarrow \text{Aut}(E[p]) \cong \text{GL}_2(\mathbb{F}_p).$$

If $\bar{\rho}_{E,p}$ arises from a newform f then we write $E \sim_p f$.

Lemma 4.2. *Let $E_{x,\alpha}$ be the Frey-Hellegouarch curve in (9)–(12). Then $E_{x,\alpha} \sim_p f$ where f is a newform of weight 2 and level L_α :*

$$L_1 = 2^8 \cdot 5^2 \cdot 7, \quad L_5 = 2^8 \cdot 5 \cdot 7, \quad L_2 = 2 \cdot 5^2 \cdot 7 \quad \text{and} \quad L_{10} = 2 \cdot 5 \cdot 7.$$

Proof. This is immediate from [7, Lemma 3.2] which in turn relies on modularity of elliptic curves over \mathbb{Q} due to Wiles, Breuil, Conrad, Diamond and Taylor [36], [9], on Ribet's level lowering theorem [25] and also on irreducibility theorems for mod p representations of elliptic curves due to Mazur [22]. It is here that the assumption $p \geq 7$ is used to ensure the irreducibility of the representation $\bar{\rho}_{E_{x,\alpha},p}$. \square

Using `Magma`, we computed the weight 2 newforms of levels L_α . The results of this computation are summarized in Table 1. For this computation we used `Magma`'s highly optimized Hilbert modular forms package (the classical newforms we are computing can be regarded as Hilbert newforms over \mathbb{Q}). The theory and algorithms behind this package are described in [15].

5. THE CASE $k = 5$: SECOND FREY-HELLEGOUARCH CURVE

Applying the recipes of Bennett and Skinner [7, Section 2] to equation (7) leads us to associate to this the Frey-Hellegouarch elliptic curve

$$(13) \quad F_{x,\alpha} : Y^2 = X^3 + 2(3x^2 + 10)X^2 + 70X.$$

Although the equation for this Frey-Hellegouarch curve is independent of α , the discriminant and conductor do depend on α .

α	$\dim S_2^{\text{new}}(M_\alpha)$	number of conjugacy classes of forms	$(d, \text{number of newforms of degree } d)$
1	192	112	(1, 64), (2, 28), (3, 12), (4, 4), (5, 4)
5	912	356	(1, 176), (2, 64), (3, 12), (4, 36), (5, 28), (6, 8), (7, 24), (9, 8)
2	384	128	(1, 48), (2, 16), (3, 16), (4, 28), (6, 8), (8, 12)
10	1824	396	(1, 124), (2, 60), (3, 20), (4, 52), (5, 8), (6, 40), (8, 28)

TABLE 2. Information for weight 2 newforms of level M_α , where M_α is given by Lemma 5.2.

Lemma 5.1. *The elliptic curve $F_{x,\alpha}$ has non-trivial 2-torsion over \mathbb{Q} . Its discriminant and conductor are given by*

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta(F_{x,1}) &= 2^8 \cdot 3 \cdot 5^2 \cdot 7^2 \cdot z_2^p, & N(F_{x,1}) &= 2^7 \cdot 3 \cdot 5 \cdot 7 \cdot \text{Rad}_{\{2,3,5,7\}}(z_2) \\ \Delta(F_{x,5}) &= 2^8 \cdot 3 \cdot 5^3 \cdot 7^2 \cdot z_2^p, & N(F_{x,5}) &= 2^7 \cdot 3 \cdot 5^2 \cdot 7 \cdot \text{Rad}_{\{2,3,5,7\}}(z_2) \\ \Delta(F_{x,2}) &= 2^9 \cdot 3 \cdot 5^2 \cdot 7^2 \cdot z_2^p, & N(F_{x,2}) &= 2^8 \cdot 3 \cdot 5 \cdot 7 \cdot \text{Rad}_{\{2,3,5,7\}}(z_2) \\ \Delta(F_{x,10}) &= 2^9 \cdot 3 \cdot 5^3 \cdot 7^2 \cdot z_2^p, & N(F_{x,10}) &= 2^8 \cdot 3 \cdot 5^2 \cdot 7 \cdot \text{Rad}_{\{2,3,5,7\}}(z_2). \end{aligned}$$

Proof. Again this follows from [7, Lemma 2.1]. \square

Lemma 5.2. *Let $F_{x,\alpha}$ be the Frey-Hellegouarch curve in (13). Then $F_{x,\alpha} \sim_p g$ where g is a newform of weight 2 and level M_α , where*

$$M_1 = 2^7 \cdot 3 \cdot 5 \cdot 7, \quad M_5 = 2^7 \cdot 3 \cdot 5^2 \cdot 7, \quad M_2 = 2^8 \cdot 3 \cdot 5 \cdot 7 \quad \text{and} \quad M_{10} = 2^8 \cdot 3 \cdot 5^2 \cdot 7.$$

Proof. Again this is immediate from [7, Lemma 3.2]. \square

Table 2 gives information about the spaces of newforms of weight 2 and level M_α .

6. PROOF OF THEOREM 1

The following standard lemma [29, Proposition 5.1] will be helpful in exploiting Lemmata 4.2 and 5.2.

Lemma 6.1. *Let E/\mathbb{Q} be an elliptic curve of conductor N and $f = q + \sum_{i \geq 2} c_i q^i$ be a newform of weight 2 and level $N' \mid N$. Write $K = \mathbb{Q}(c_1, c_2, \dots)$ for the totally real number field generated by the Fourier coefficients of f . Suppose $E \sim_p f$ for some prime p . Then there is some prime ideal $\mathfrak{p} \mid p$ of K such that for all primes ℓ ,*

- if $\ell \nmid pNN'$ then $a_\ell(E) \equiv c_\ell \pmod{\mathfrak{p}}$,
- if $\ell \nmid pN'$ and $\ell \parallel N$ then $\pm(\ell + 1) \equiv c_\ell \pmod{\mathfrak{p}}$.

Fix a possible value for $\alpha \in \{1, 2, 5, 10\}$. For convenience, we write E_x and F_x for the curves $E_{x,\alpha}$ and $F_{x,\alpha}$. Note that the levels L_α and M_α in Lemmata 4.2 and 5.2 depend only on α . Now fix a weight 2 newform $f = q + \sum c_i q^i$ of level L_α and another $g = q + \sum d_i q^i$ of level M_α . Suppose $E_x \sim_p f$ and $F_x \sim_p g$. Write

$K_1 = \mathbb{Q}(c_1, c_2, \dots)$ and $K_2 = \mathbb{Q}(d_1, d_2, \dots)$, and let $\ell > 7$ be a prime. We would like to apply Lemma 6.1 to obtain information about p . Suppose for now that $\ell \neq p$. The Frey-Hellegouarch curves E_x and F_x depend on the unknown x . However, their traces modulo ℓ depend only on x modulo ℓ . Let $0 \leq a \leq \ell - 1$ and suppose $x \equiv a \pmod{\ell}$. We shall write $\Delta_1(x)$ for the discriminant of the Weierstrass model E_x and $\Delta_2(x)$ for the discriminant of the Weierstrass model F_x (these are polynomials in x). Let

$$(14) \quad R_\ell(f, a) = \begin{cases} \text{Norm}_{K_1/\mathbb{Q}}((\ell + 1)^2 - c_\ell^2) & \text{if } \ell \mid \Delta_1(a) \\ \text{Norm}_{K_1/\mathbb{Q}}(a_\ell(E_a) - c_\ell) & \text{if } \ell \nmid \Delta_1(a). \end{cases}$$

It follows from Lemma 6.1 and Lemma 4.2 that $p \mid R_\ell(f, a)$. Let

$$S_\ell(g, a) = \begin{cases} \text{Norm}_{K_2/\mathbb{Q}}((\ell + 1)^2 - d_\ell^2) & \text{if } \ell \mid \Delta_2(a) \\ \text{Norm}_{K_2/\mathbb{Q}}(a_\ell(F_a) - d_\ell) & \text{if } \ell \nmid \Delta_2(a). \end{cases}$$

It further follows from Lemma 6.1 and Lemma 5.2 that $p \mid S_\ell(g, a)$. Now let

$$T_\ell(f, g, a) = \gcd(R_\ell(f, a), S_\ell(g, a)).$$

Then $p \mid T_\ell(f, g, a)$. Observe that while a is unknown, as it is the residue of x modulo ℓ , we may suppose that $0 \leq a \leq \ell - 1$. Let

$$T_\ell(f, g) = \ell \prod_{0 \leq a \leq \ell - 1} T_\ell(f, g, a).$$

Then $p \mid T_\ell(f, g)$. We had assumed above that $\ell \neq p$. However as ℓ is a factor in the product defining $T_\ell(f, g)$, the conclusion $p \mid T_\ell(f, g)$ is true even if $\ell = p$. Finally we let

$$U(f, g) = \gcd_{11 \leq \ell < 100} T_\ell(f, g)$$

where the gcd is taken over all primes ℓ in the range $11 \leq \ell < 100$. It follows that $p \mid U(f, g)$. To complete the proof of Theorem 1, we employ a simple `Magma` script that computes for each pair (f, g) the quantity $U(f, g)$ and verifies that it is not divisible by primes ≥ 7 . The computation took roughly 4 days on a 2500MHz AMD Opteron, dominated by the computation of the newforms.

Remark. It is appropriate to comment at this stage as to whether the single Frey-Hellegouarch approach (using either of the Frey-Hellegouarch curves $E_{x,\alpha}$ or $F_{x,\alpha}$ on its own) would have allowed us to establish Theorem 1. The above argument is a multi-Frey-Hellegouarch version of the standard single Frey-Hellegouarch method for bounding exponents (see [29, Section 9]). With notation as above, let

$$B_\ell(f) = \ell \prod_{0 \leq a \leq \ell - 1} R_\ell(f, a),$$

for $\ell \neq 2, 5, 7$ (note that 3 does not divide the possible levels of f). Under the assumption $E_x \sim f$, the single Frey-Hellegouarch method for bounding exponents asserts that $p \mid B_\ell(f)$ and succeeds in bounding p if we can find a prime $\ell \neq 2, 5, 7$ such that $B_\ell(f) \neq 0$. Likewise, let

$$C_\ell(g) = \ell \prod_{0 \leq a \leq \ell - 1} S_\ell(g, a),$$

for $\ell \neq 2, 3, 5, 7$. Under the assumption $F_x \sim g$, we have $p \mid C_\ell(g)$. We first note that the solution $(x, z, n) = (0, 0, p)$ of equation (4) leads to an elliptic curve $F_{0,10}$

(i.e. a non-singular Weierstrass equation) with Cremona reference 134400BG1. Let g be the eigenform (of level $M_{10} = 134400$) corresponding to the elliptic curve $F_{0,10}$. Then $a_\ell(F_{0,10}) = d_\ell$ where $g = q + \sum d_i q^i$. Hence $S_\ell(g, 0) = 0$ and so $C_\ell(g) = 0$ for all possible ℓ . Thus the single Frey-Hellegouarch method with the second Frey-Hellegouarch curve $F_{x,\alpha}$ fails to bound the exponent p .

The single Frey-Hellegouarch approach succeeds with the first Frey-Hellegouarch curve $E_{x,\alpha}$ in the sense that for all possible eigenforms f , we are able to find some prime $\ell \neq 2, 5, 7$ such that $B_\ell(f) \neq 0$. For any ℓ , the bound $B_\ell(f)$ can be very large (especially if the field of coefficients of f has large degree). However, we consider instead

$$B(f) = \gcd_{\ell \in \{3, 11, 13, \dots, 97\}} B_\ell(f).$$

If $E_x \sim f$ then $p \mid B(f)$. We computed the $B(f)$ for the possible newforms f and found many of them to be divisible by 7 and 13 though not by larger primes. It is possible to reduce the cases $p = 7$ and $p = 13$ to Thue equations as in the proofs of Lemma 3.3. However the coefficients of these Thue equations will be so unpleasant that we do not expect to be able to solve them (unconditionally).

7. DEALING WITH SMALL EXPONENTS FOR THE CASE $k = 6$

We now consider the equation

$$(x - 1)^6 + x^6 + (x + 1)^6 = z^n, \quad x, z, n \in \mathbb{Z}, \quad n \geq 2,$$

which corresponds to the case $k = 6$ of (3). This can be rewritten as

$$3x^6 + 30x^4 + 30x^2 + 2 = z^n,$$

whereby necessarily $z^n \equiv 2 \pmod{3}$ and hence n is odd. Moreover the polynomial $3t^6 + 30t^4 + 30t^2 + 2$ only takes values 2 and 3 as t ranges over \mathbb{F}_7 . As these values are not cubes in \mathbb{F}_7 , we see that $3 \nmid n$. Thus to prove Theorem 2 for $k = 6$ it is sufficient to show that the equation

$$(15) \quad 3x^6 + 30x^4 + 30x^2 + 2 = z^p$$

has no solutions with prime exponent $p \geq 5$.

Lemma 7.1. *Equation (15) has no solutions with $p = 5, 7, 11, 13$.*

Proof. Write $f = 3t^6 + 30t^4 + 30t^2 + 2$. The polynomial f is irreducible over \mathbb{Q} . Let θ be a root of the equation $f(t) = 0$, write $K = \mathbb{Q}(\theta)$ and let \mathcal{O}_K be the ring integers of K . The field K has unit rank 2 with -1 as a generator for the roots of unity, and class group $\cong (\mathbb{Z}/2\mathbb{Z})^3 \times (\mathbb{Z}/36\mathbb{Z})$.

Let $g(t) = f(t)/(x - \theta) \in K[t]$. There are prime ideals $\mathfrak{p}, \mathfrak{q}, \mathfrak{r}_1, \mathfrak{r}_2, \mathfrak{r}_3, \mathfrak{r}_4$ such that

$$\begin{aligned} 2 \cdot \mathcal{O}_K &= \mathfrak{p}^6, & 3 \cdot \mathcal{O}_K &= \mathfrak{q}^6, & 3391 \cdot \mathcal{O}_K &= \mathfrak{r}_1^2 \mathfrak{r}_2^2 \mathfrak{r}_3 \mathfrak{r}_4, \\ \theta \cdot \mathcal{O}_K &= \mathfrak{p} \mathfrak{q}^{-1} & \text{and} & & g(\theta) \cdot \mathcal{O}_K &= \mathfrak{p}^{11} \mathfrak{q}^3 \mathfrak{r}_1 \mathfrak{r}_2. \end{aligned}$$

From (15), we know that

$$(x - \theta)g(x) = z^p.$$

Now $\text{ord}_{\mathfrak{q}}(\theta) = -1$. As $x \in \mathbb{Z}$, we have $\text{ord}_{\mathfrak{q}}(x - \theta) = -1$. Let $\mathcal{P} \neq \mathfrak{q}$ be a prime ideal and suppose that $\text{ord}_{\mathcal{P}}(x - \theta) \not\equiv 0 \pmod{p}$, whence $\text{ord}_{\mathcal{P}}(g(x)) \not\equiv 0 \pmod{p}$. From the factorisation of $\theta \cdot \mathcal{O}_K$ we know that $\text{ord}_{\mathcal{P}}(x - \theta) > 0$. It is easy to see that

p	\mathcal{T}_p
5	{11, 191, 251, 691}
7	{11, 337, 421, 491, 547}
11	{397, 727, 859}
13	{859, 1249}

TABLE 3. The sets \mathcal{T}_p appearing in the proof of Lemma 7.1

$\mathcal{P} \mid g(\theta)$. But $\text{ord}_2(z) = 0$ so $\mathcal{P} = \mathfrak{r}_1$ or \mathfrak{r}_2 . Let $S = \{\mathfrak{q}, \mathfrak{r}_1, \mathfrak{r}_2\}$. Hence $(x - \theta)K^{*p}$ belongs to the ‘ p -Selmer group’

$$K(S, p) = \{\alpha \in K^*/K^{*p} : \text{ord}_{\mathcal{P}}(\alpha) \equiv 0 \pmod{p} \text{ for all } \mathcal{P} \notin S\}.$$

This is an \mathbb{F}_p -vector space of finite dimension and, for a given p , easy to compute from the class group and unit group information (see [30, Proof of Proposition VIII.1.6]). Let

$$\mathfrak{S}_p = \{\alpha \in K(S, p) : \text{Norm}(\alpha) = (1/3)\mathbb{Q}^{*p}\}.$$

Observe that $\text{Norm}(x - \theta) = z^p/3$ so that $x - \theta \in \mathfrak{S}_p$. Using **Magma**, we compute $K(S, p)$ and \mathfrak{S}_p for $p = 5, 7, 11, 13$. In all cases, $K(S, p)$ has \mathbb{F}_p -dimension equal to 5, and the set \mathfrak{S}_p has p^3 elements.

It follows that $x - \theta = \alpha\xi^p$ for some $\alpha \in \mathfrak{S}_p$ and $\xi \in K^*$. We are now in a position to finally obtain a contradiction. Fix an $\alpha \in \mathfrak{S}_p$ such that $x - \theta = \alpha\xi^p$. Let $\ell \neq 3$ be a rational prime and $\mathfrak{l}_1, \dots, \mathfrak{l}_r$ be the prime ideals of K dividing it. Suppose that none of the \mathfrak{l}_i belong to the support of α . Let $x \equiv a \pmod{\ell}$ where $a \in \{0, 1, \dots, \ell - 1\}$. Then $(a - \theta)/\alpha \equiv \xi^p \pmod{\mathfrak{l}_i}$ for $i = 1, \dots, r$. Thus we may eliminate α if for each $a \in \{0, 1, \dots, \ell - 1\}$ there is some i such $(a - \theta)/\alpha$ is not a p -th power modulo \mathfrak{l}_i . For this to succeed, $\#\mathbb{F}_{\ell_i} = \text{Norm}(\mathfrak{l}_i)$ needs to be $\equiv 1 \pmod{\ell}$. For $p = 5, 7, 11$ and 13 , we have, in each case, been able to find a set of primes ℓ that we denote by \mathcal{T}_p which allows us to eliminate all $\alpha \in \mathfrak{S}_p$. The sets \mathcal{T}_p are recorded in Table 3. □

8. FREY-HELLEGOUARCH CURVE FOR CASE $k = 6$

In this section, we construct a Frey-Hellegouarch curve attached to the equation (15). In view of the previous section, we may suppose that the exponent p in (15) is a prime ≥ 17 . The first author and Dahmen [5] attach a Frey-Hellegouarch curve to any equation of the form $F(u, v) = z^p$ where F is a homogenous cubic form. We now reproduce their recipe. Let

$$H(u, v) = -\frac{1}{4} \begin{vmatrix} F_{uu} & F_{uv} \\ F_{uv} & F_{vv} \end{vmatrix} \quad \text{and} \quad G(u, v) = \begin{vmatrix} F_u & F_v \\ H_u & H_v \end{vmatrix}.$$

Associate to the solution (u, v, z) of the equation $F(u, v) = z^p$ the Frey-Hellegouarch elliptic curve

$$(16) \quad E'_{u,v} : Y^2 = X^3 - 3H(u, v)X + G(u, v).$$

This model has discriminant $2^4 \cdot 3^6 \cdot \Delta_F \cdot z^{2p}$, where Δ_F is the discriminant of the binary form F . Now consider the homogenous cubic form

$$F(u, v) = 3u^3 + 30u^2v + 30uv^2 + 2v^3.$$

We note that $F(x^2, 1) = 3x^6 + 30x^4 + 30x^2 + 2$. Thus we may obtain a Frey-Hellegouarch curve for (15) by letting $(u, v) = (x^2, 1)$ in (16). It turns out that the model $E'_{x^2, 1}$ has bad reduction at 2, but its quadratic twist by 2 has good reduction at 2, and we choose this to be the Frey-Hellegouarch curve associated to (15). A model which is minimal at 2 for this Frey-Hellegouarch curve is

$$(17) \quad E_x : Y^2 + Y = X^3 + \frac{(-945x^4 - 1269x^2 - 1080)}{2}X + \frac{(-15093x^6 - 18630x^4 + 26730x^2 + 19061)}{4}.$$

Lemma 8.1. *The model E_x is integral, minimal and has discriminant and conductor*

$$\Delta_x = 3^9 \cdot 3391 \cdot z^{2p} \quad \text{and} \quad N = 3^3 \cdot 3391 \cdot \text{Rad}_{\{3, 3391\}}(z).$$

Proof. It is clear from (15) that x is odd, whence one deduces that the model E_x is integral. The discriminant for this model is

$$\Delta_x = 3^9 \cdot 3391 \cdot (3x^6 + 30x^4 + 30x^2 + 2)^2 = 3^9 \cdot 3391 \cdot z^{2p},$$

and the usual c_4 -invariant is

$$c_4 = 2^3 \cdot 3^4 \cdot (35x^4 + 47x^2 + 40).$$

We find that

$$\text{Res}(c_4, \Delta_x) = 2^{40} \cdot 3^{84} \cdot 3391^{12}.$$

Thus E_x is minimal and semistable except possibly at $p \in \{2, 3, 3391\}$. Since Δ_x is odd, E_x in fact has good reduction at 2. We now show that E_x has multiplicative reduction at 3391. The solutions to $c_4 \equiv 0 \pmod{3391}$ are

$$x \equiv 983, 2408 \pmod{3391}.$$

Both of these are roots to $3x^6 + 30x^4 + 30x^2 + 2$ modulo 3391. However for a solution (x, z) to (15), we know that

$$3x^6 + 30x^4 + 30x^2 + 2 \equiv 0 \pmod{3391^2}.$$

We checked that 983, 2408 do not lift to roots for this congruence. Hence $3391 \nmid c_4$. It follows that E_x has multiplicative reduction at 3391. Applying Tate's algorithm [31, Chapter IV], we found that the E_x has reduction type IV^* at 3 with the valuation of the conductor equal to 3. The lemma follows. \square

Lemma 8.2. *Let (x, z, p) be a solution to (15) with $p \geq 17$ prime. Let $E = E_x$ as in (17). Then $\bar{\rho}_{E, p}$ is irreducible.*

Proof. Suppose $\bar{\rho}_{E, p}$ is reducible. As $p \geq 17$, it follows from the proof of Mazur's famous theorem on isogenies of elliptic curves that the j -invariant of E belongs to $\mathbb{Z}[1/2]$ (see [22, Corollary 4.4]). However, E has multiplicative reduction at 3391 and so 3391 appears in the denominator of its j -invariant. This contradiction shows that $\bar{\rho}_{E, p}$ is irreducible. \square

9. PROOF OF THEOREM 2

Lemma 9.1. *Let (x, z, p) be a solution to (15) with prime exponent $p \geq 17$. Then $E_x \sim_p f$ for some newform f of weight 2 and level $3^3 \cdot 3391$.*

Proof. This follows from Lemmata 8.1 and 8.2 together with Ribet's level lowering theorem [25] (the special case [29, Section 5] is enough for our purpose). \square

From Cremona's Database [14], there are precisely four elliptic curves having conductor $3^3 \cdot 3391$:

$$\begin{aligned} F_1 &: y^2 + y = x^3 + 405x + 22673 \\ F_2 &: y^2 + y = x^3 + 45x - 840 \\ F_3 &: y^2 + y = x^3 - 42x - 104 \\ F_4 &: y^2 + y = x^3 - 378x + 2801. \end{aligned}$$

Lemma 9.2. $E_x \not\sim_p F_i$ for $i = 1, 2, 3, 4$.

Proof. Suppose $E_x \sim_p F_i$. As 2 is a prime of good reduction for both elliptic curves, Then $a_2(E_x) \equiv a_2(F_i) \pmod{p}$. From (17) and the fact that x is odd, we find that

$$E/\mathbb{F}_2 : Y^2 + Y = X^3 + X + 1.$$

It follows that $a_2(E_x) = 2$. Since

$$a_2(F_1) = 2, \quad a_2(F_2) = -2, \quad \text{and} \quad a_2(F_3) = a_2(F_4) = 0,$$

we thus have $i = 1$.

Next we apply the method of bounding the exponents. For a prime $\ell \neq 3, 3391$, let

$$(18) \quad R_\ell(a) = \begin{cases} (\ell + 1)^2 - a_\ell(F_1)^2 & \text{if } \ell \mid \Delta_a \\ a_\ell(E_a) - a_\ell(F_1) & \text{if } \ell \nmid \Delta_a, \end{cases}$$

and

$$B_\ell = \ell \prod_{0 \leq a \leq \ell-1} R_\ell(a).$$

It follows from Lemma 6.1 that $p \mid B_\ell$. We find that $B_{11} = 5^4 \times 7^3 \times 11$. As $p \geq 17$, we obtain a contradiction. \square

The space $S_2^{\text{new}}(3^3 \cdot 3391)$ has dimension 4520. Using **Magma**, we compute the conjugacy classes of eigenforms belonging to this space and find that these have degrees 1, 1, 1, 1, 554, 556, 564, 564, 565, 565, 574 and 574. The four rational eigenforms, of course, correspond to the four elliptic curves F_i . Unfortunately we have found it impossible to compute the coefficients of the irrational eigenforms due to the enormous size of their fields of coefficients. For a prime $\ell \neq 3, 3391$, write T_ℓ for the Hecke operator acting on $S_2^{\text{new}}(3^3 \cdot 3391)$, and let $C_\ell \in \mathbb{Z}[t]$ be the characteristic polynomial of T_ℓ (i.e. the ℓ -th Hecke polynomial); this is a polynomial of degree 4520. Using **Magma**, we found it straightforward (though somewhat time-consuming) to compute the polynomials $C_\ell(t)$ for $\ell < 100$. The polynomial C_ℓ satisfies

$$C_\ell(t) = \prod (t - a_\ell(f))$$

where f runs through the eigenforms of weight 2 and level $3^3 \cdot 3391$. Note that $t - a_\ell(F_i)$ divides $C_\ell(t)$ for $i = 1, 2, 3$ and 4. We let

$$C'_\ell(t) = \frac{C_\ell(t)}{\prod_{1 \leq i \leq 4} (t - a_\ell(F_i))}.$$

We now let

$$R_\ell(a) = \begin{cases} C'_\ell(\ell + 1) \cdot C'_\ell(\ell - 1) & \text{if } \ell \mid \Delta_a, \\ C'_\ell(a_\ell(E_a)) & \text{if } \ell \nmid \Delta_a. \end{cases}$$

If $\ell \neq 2$, we let

$$B_\ell = \ell \cdot \prod_{0 \leq a \leq \ell} R_\ell(a)$$

and set $B_2 = C'_2(2)$.

Lemma 9.3. *Let (x, z, p) be a solution to (15) with $p \geq 17$ prime. Let $\ell \neq 3, 3391$ be prime. Then $p \mid B_\ell$.*

Proof. By Lemmata 9.1 and 9.2, we know that $E_x \sim_p f$ where f is an irrational eigenform of weight 2 and level $3^3 \cdot 3391$. It follows from the above that $t - a_\ell(f)$ is a factor of C'_ℓ . The lemma now follows from Lemma 6.1 (for $\ell = 2$ we are making use of the fact that E_x has good reduction at 2 and that $a_2(E_x) = 2$). \square

Proof of Theorem 2. Let (x, z, p) be a solution to (15) with $p \geq 11$. Let

$$P = \{2\} \cup \{5, 7, 11, \dots, 97\}$$

be the set of primes less than 100, excluding 3. Using **Magma**, we find that

$$\gcd(\{B_\ell : \ell \in P\}) = 2^{27} \cdot 3^{28} \cdot 5^3 \cdot 7.$$

This computation took roughly 21 hours on a 2500MHz AMD Opteron. The computation time was dominated by the computation of the polynomials C'_ℓ . The desired result then follows from Lemma 9.3. \square

We remark in passing that the integers B_ℓ are extremely large which is why we do not reproduce any of them here. By way of example, $|B_2| \approx 1.1 \times 10^{569}$.

10. THE EQUATION $(x - 1)^k + x^k + (x + 1)^k = y^p$ WITH $k \geq 7$

It is natural to wonder if it is possible to attach a Frey-Hellegouarch curve a solution of the equation $(x - 1)^k + x^k + (x + 1)^k = z^p$ for exponents $k \geq 7$. It is easy to see that

$$(x - 1)^k + x^k + (x + 1)^k = \begin{cases} f_k(x^2) & \text{if } k \text{ is even} \\ x f_k(x^2) & \text{if } k \text{ is odd,} \end{cases}$$

where $f_k \in \mathbb{Z}[x]$. For $7 \leq k \leq 50$, say, we find that the polynomials f_k are irreducible and all their roots are real. We are unable to prove that this is true in general for higher values of k (and, indeed, this property is not shared by the polynomials arising from the analogous equation $(x - 1)^k + x^k = y^n$). Suppose now that f_k is indeed a totally real irreducible polynomial, let θ be a root, and let $K = \mathbb{Q}(\theta)$. By a standard descent argument, $x^2 - \theta = \alpha \xi^p$ where α belongs to a finite set and ξ is an integer in K . This can be viewed as a $(p, p, 2)$ Fermat equation to which one can apply modularity and level-lowering results over the totally real field K , in a similar manner to that of several recent papers, e.g. [6], [16], [17]. We hope to pursue this approach in a forthcoming paper.

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DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, VANCOUVER, B.C., V6T 1Z2 CANADA

E-mail address: `bennett@math.ubc.ca`

MATHEMATICS INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK, COVENTRY CV4 7AL, UNITED KINGDOM

E-mail address: `vandita.patel@warwick.ac.uk`

MATHEMATICS INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK, COVENTRY CV4 7AL, UNITED KINGDOM

E-mail address: `S.Siksek@warwick.ac.uk`