

# ON THE EQUATION $s^2 + y^{2p} = \alpha^3$

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ABSTRACT. We describe a criterion for showing that the equation  $s^2 + y^{2p} = \alpha^3$  has no non-trivial proper integer solutions for specific primes  $p > 7$ . This equation is a special case of the generalized Fermat equation  $x^p + y^q + z^r = 0$ . The criterion is based on the method of galois representations and modular forms together with an idea of Kraus for eliminating modular forms for specific  $p$  in the final stage of the method [7]. The criterion can be computationally verified for primes  $7 < p < 10^7$  and  $p \neq 31$ .

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A solution  $(\alpha, s, y) \in \mathbb{Z}^3$  to the equation  $s^2 + y^{2p} = \alpha^3$  is said to be non-trivial if  $sy \neq 0$ , and proper if  $(\alpha, s, y) = 1$ . In this paper, we describe a criterion for showing that equation  $s^2 + y^{2p} = \alpha^3$  has no non-trivial proper integer solutions for specific primes  $p > 7$ . This equation is a special case of the generalized Fermat equation  $x^p + y^q + z^r = 0$  (cf. [8] and its references for a recent survey of this equation).

The proper solutions to the diophantine equation  $s^2 + y^{2p} = \alpha^3$  naturally arise as certain suitably-defined integral points on a twist of the modular curve associated to the subgroup  $\Gamma_3$  of index 2 of  $\mathrm{SL}_2(\mathbb{Z})$  (for a description of this viewpoint as applied to familiar cases, see [5]). This was in fact the initial motivation for considering the above diophantine equation. A uniformizer for this genus 0 modular curve is usually denoted  $\gamma_3$  in the classical literature.

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For  $p > 3$  a prime and  $q$  a prime of the form  $np + 1$ , let  $\Omega_{p,q}$  be the subset of elements  $\bar{\zeta} \in \mathbb{F}_q^\times$  such that  $\bar{\zeta} = \bar{A}^p$  and  $\bar{\zeta} + \frac{1}{27} = \bar{U}^2$  for some  $\bar{A} \in \mathbb{F}_q^\times$ ,  $\bar{U} \in \mathbb{F}_q$ . For  $\bar{\zeta} \in \Omega_{p,q}$ , let  $E_{\bar{\zeta}}$  denote the isomorphism class of the elliptic curve over  $\mathbb{F}_q$  given by  $Y^2 = X^3 + 2\bar{U}X^2 + \frac{1}{27}X$  where  $\bar{\zeta} + \frac{1}{27} = \bar{U}^2$  (note the choices of  $U$  give rise to elliptic curves which are twists of each other). Let  $E_0$  be denote an elliptic curve over  $\mathbb{Q}$  of conductor 96.

**Theorem 1.** *Let  $p > 7$  be a prime. Suppose there exists a prime  $q$  of the form  $np + 1$  such that  $a_q(E_0)^2 \not\equiv 4 \pmod{p}$  and for all  $\bar{\zeta} \in \Omega_{p,q}$  we have  $a_q(E_{\bar{\zeta}})^2 \not\equiv a_q(E_0)^2 \pmod{p}$ . Then there are no triples  $(\alpha, s, y) \in \mathbb{Z}^3$  satisfying  $s^2 + y^{2p} = \alpha^3$  with  $(\alpha, s, y) = 1$  and  $sy \neq 0$ .*

**Corollary 2.** *Let  $7 < p < 10^7$  and  $p \neq 31$  be a prime. Then there are no triples  $(\alpha, s, y) \in \mathbb{Z}^3$  satisfying  $s^2 + y^{2p} = \alpha^3$  with  $(\alpha, s, y) = 1$  and  $sy \neq 0$ .*

**Corollary 3.** *Let  $p > 7$  be a prime such that  $q = 2p + 1$  is prime. If  $\left(\frac{q}{7}\right) = 1$  and  $\left(\frac{q}{13}\right) = (-1)^{\frac{p+1}{2}}$ , then there are no triples  $(\alpha, s, y) \in \mathbb{Z}^3$  satisfying  $s^2 + y^{2p} = \alpha^3$  with  $(\alpha, s, y) = 1$  and  $sy \neq 0$ .*

For instance, the hypotheses of Corollary 3 are satisfied for

$$p = 100000000000000014611, q = 200000000000000029223.$$

Based on the conjectures described in [6], the conclusion of the above theorem should hold if  $p > 3$ .

## 2. PROOF OF THEOREM 1

We first recall the parametrization of solutions to the equation  $s^2 + t^2 = \alpha^3$ .

**Lemma 4.** *A triple  $(\alpha, s, t) \in \mathbb{Z}^3$  with  $(\alpha, s, t) = 1$  satisfies  $s^2 + t^2 = \alpha^3$  only if  $(\alpha, s, t) = (u^2 + v^2, u(u^2 - 3v^2), v(3u^2 - v^2))$  for some  $(u, v) \in \mathbb{Z}^2$ .*

*Proof.* c.f. Lemma 3.2.2 in [3]. □

**Lemma 5.** *Let  $p$  be an odd prime. Suppose  $(u, v) \in \mathbb{Z}^2$  gives rise to a triple  $(\alpha, s, t) = (u^2 + v^2, u(u^2 - 3v^2), v(3u^2 - v^2))$  satisfying  $(\alpha, s, t) = 1$  and  $st \neq 0$ . Then the constraint that  $t = y^p$  for some  $y \in \mathbb{Z}$  implies either*

- (1)  $v = r^p$  and  $3u^2 - v^2 = a^p$  for some  $a, r \in \mathbb{Z}$ , where  $3 \nmid a, r$  and  $a, r, u$  are non-zero pairwise coprime,
- or
- (2)  $v = 3^{pj-1}r^p$  and  $3u^2 - v^2 = 3a^p$  for some  $a, r \in \mathbb{Z}$  and positive  $j \in \mathbb{Z}$ , where  $3 \nmid a, r, u$  and  $a, r, u$  are non-zero pairwise coprime.

*Proof.* Since  $(\alpha, s, y) = 1$ , it is necessary that  $(u, v) = 1$ . If  $d \mid v$  and  $d \mid 3u^2 - v^2$ , then  $d \mid 3u^2$ . Since  $(u, v) = 1$ , we have that  $d \mid 3$ . Hence,  $(v, 3u^2 - v^2) \mid 3$ .

If  $3 \nmid v$ , then  $(v, 3u^2 - v^2) = 1$ . The condition that  $t = v(3u^2 - v^2) = y^p$  for some  $y \in \mathbb{Z}$  implies by unique factorization that  $v = r^p$  and  $3u^2 - v^2 = a^p$  for coprime  $a, r \in \mathbb{Z}$ . It now follows that  $3 \nmid a, r$  and  $a, r, u$  are pairwise coprime.

If  $3 \mid v$ , then  $(v, 3u^2 - v^2) = 3$ . The condition that  $t = v(3u^2 - v^2) = y^p$  for some  $y \in \mathbb{Z}$  implies by unique factorization that  $v = 3^n r^p$  and  $3u^2 - v^2 = 3^m a^p$  for coprime  $a, r \in \mathbb{Z}$ ,  $3 \nmid a, r$ , and positive  $n, m \in \mathbb{Z}$ . It is now easily checked that  $3 \nmid u$ ,  $m = 1$ ,  $n = pj - 1$  for some positive  $j \in \mathbb{Z}$ , and  $a, r, u$  are pairwise coprime.  $\square$

**Corollary 6.** *Let  $p$  be an odd prime. Suppose  $(u, v) \in \mathbb{Z}^2$  gives rise to a triple  $(\alpha, s, t) = (u^2 + v^2, u(u^2 - 3v^2), v(3u^2 - v^2))$  satisfying  $(\alpha, s, t) = 1$  and  $st \neq 0$ . Then the constraint that  $t = y^p$  for some  $y \in \mathbb{Z}$  implies there are non-zero pairwise coprime  $a, r, u \in \mathbb{Z}$  and positive  $j \in \mathbb{Z}$  satisfying either*

- (1)  $a^p + (r^2)^p = 3u^2$  with  $3 \nmid a, r$ ,
- or
- (2)  $a^p + 3^{2pj-3}(r^2)^p = u^2$  with  $3 \nmid a, u$ .

**Theorem 7.** *Let  $p > 3$  be a prime. Suppose  $(a, r, u) \in \mathbb{Z}^3$  satisfies  $a^p + (r^2)^p = 3u^2$  with  $a, r, u$  pairwise coprime and  $3 \nmid a, r$ . Then  $aru = 0$ .*

*Proof.* This is a special case of Theorem 1.1 in [1].  $\square$

For non-zero  $a, d \in \mathbb{Z}$ , let  $\text{Rad}_d(a)$  be the product of primes dividing  $a$  but not  $d$ .

**Proposition 8.** *Let  $p > 3$  be a prime. Suppose  $(a, r, u) \in \mathbb{Z}^3$  satisfies  $a^p + 3^{2pj-3}(r^2)^p = u^2$  with  $a, r, u$  non-zero pairwise coprime,  $3 \nmid a, u$ , and positive  $j \in \mathbb{Z}$ . Associate to  $(a, r, u)$  the elliptic curve  $E$  over  $\mathbb{Q}$  given by*

- (1)  $Y^2 = X^3 + 2uX^2 + 3^{2pj-3}r^{2p}X$  if  $ar$  is odd,
- (2)  $Y^2 + XY = X^3 + \frac{\pm u - 1}{4}X^2 + \frac{3^{2pj-3}(r^2)^p}{64}X$  if  $ar$  is even,

where the sign in  $\pm u$  is chosen so that  $\pm u \equiv 1 \pmod{4}$ . Then the conductor  $N$  of  $E$  and the Artin conductor  $M$  of  $\rho_{E,p}$  are given in each case by

- (1)  $N = 96 \cdot \text{Rad}_6(ab)$  and  $M = 96$ ,
- (2)  $N = 6 \cdot \text{Rad}_6(ab)$  and  $M = 6$ .

Furthermore, the representation  $\rho_{E,p}$  is flat at  $p$ .

*Proof.* This follows from Lemma 2.1 of [1].  $\square$

The above proposition allows us to invoke the machinery of galois representations and modular forms to establish Theorem 1.

*Proof of Theorem 1.* Suppose  $(\alpha, s, y) \in \mathbb{Z}^3$  satisfies  $s^2 + y^{2p} = \alpha^2$  with  $(s, t, \alpha) = 1$  and  $sy \neq 0$ . By Corollary 6, we obtain non-zero pairwise coprime  $a, r, u \in \mathbb{Z}$  satisfying  $a^p + (r^2)^p = 3u^2$  with  $3 \nmid a, r$ , or non-zero pairwise coprime  $a, r, u \in \mathbb{Z}$  and positive  $j \in \mathbb{Z}$  satisfying  $a^p + 3^{2pj-3}(r^2)^p = u^2$  with  $3 \nmid a, u$ . In the former case, Theorem 7 allows us to deduce that  $aru = 0$ , a contradiction. In the latter case, let  $E$  be the elliptic curve over  $\mathbb{Q}$  associated to  $(a, r, u)$  by Proposition 8. Since  $E$  is modular [2], it follows that  $\rho_{E,p}$  is modular.

The elliptic curve  $E$  has one odd prime of multiplicative reduction, namely  $q = 3$ . By Corollary 4.4 in [9],  $E$  having at least one prime odd prime  $q$  of multiplicative reduction and  $\rho_{E,p}$  reducible implies that  $p = 2, 3, 5, 7, 13$ . If  $p = 13$  however, then  $E$  would give rise to a non-cuspidal rational point on  $X_0(26)$  as  $E$  also has a rational point of order

2, contradicting [10]. Since  $p > 7$  we may assume now that  $\rho_{E,p}$  is irreducible. Since  $\rho_{E,p}$  has Artin conductor  $M = 6$  or  $M = 96$  and is flat at  $p$ , it follows by level lowering [11] that  $\rho_{E,p} \cong \rho_{g,p}$  where  $g$  is a weight 2 newform on  $\Gamma_0(M)$ . There are no weight 2 newforms on  $\Gamma_0(6)$  so we are left with the case that  $M = 96$ .

There are two possibilities for  $g$  corresponding to the isogeny classes labelled as 96A, 96B respectively in Cremona's tables [4]. Let  $E_0$  be the elliptic over  $\mathbb{Q}$  corresponding to  $g$ .

If  $q$  is a prime and  $q \neq 2, 3, p$ , then the fact that  $\rho_{E,p} \cong \rho_{E_0,p}$  implies  $p \mid a_q(E)^2 - a_q(E_0)^2$  if  $E$  has good reduction at  $q$  and  $p \mid a_q(E_0)^2 - (q+1)^2$  if  $E$  has multiplicative bad reduction at  $q$ . If  $E_0$  does not have a rational point of order 2, then it is possible to find a prime  $q$  (independently of the exponent  $p$  and the solution  $(a, r, u)$ ) so that  $a_q(E_0)$  is odd. On the other hand,  $a_q(E)$  is even so that  $a_q(E) - a_q(E_0)$  is non-zero. The quantity  $a_q(E_0)^2 - (q+1)^2$  is non-zero by Hasse's bounds. Hence, we obtain a bound on  $p$ . This method to bound  $p$  is used in the proof of Theorem 7 [1].

Unfortunately, all elliptic curves over  $\mathbb{Q}$  of conductor 96 have a rational point of order 2. Thus, it is not possible to use the above method to bound  $p$ . However, in this situation, the method in [7] can be used to obtain a contradiction for specific  $p$ .

The method works as follows. Recall we are in the situation where we have obtained non-zero pairwise coprime  $a, r, u \in \mathbb{Z}$  and positive  $j \in \mathbb{Z}$  satisfying  $a^p + 3^{2pj-3}(r^2)^p = u^2$  with  $3 \nmid a, u$ , and this solution gave rise to the elliptic curve  $E$  over  $\mathbb{Q}$  given by  $Y^2 = X^3 + 2uX^2 + 3^{2pj-3}r^{2p}X$ . For fixed exponent  $p$ , we search for  $q = np + 1$  prime such that  $a_q(E_0)^2 \not\equiv 4 \pmod{p}$  and  $a_q(E_{\bar{\zeta}})^2 \not\equiv a_q(E_0)^2 \pmod{p}$  for all  $\bar{\zeta} \in \Omega_{p,q}$ .

The existence of such a prime  $q$  for the given  $p$  now yields a contradiction as follows. If  $E$  were to have multiplicative reduction modulo  $q$ , then we would have that  $a_q(E_0)^2 \equiv (q+1)^2 \equiv 4 \pmod{p}$ , a contradiction. Hence,  $E$  has good reduction modulo  $q$ . By Lemma 2.1 in [1], the discriminant of  $E$  is equal to  $a^p r^{4p}$  up to factors of 2 and 3. Hence, both  $a, r$  are non-zero modulo  $q$ . If we let  $A = \frac{a}{r^2 3^{2j}}$  and  $U = \frac{u}{r^p 3^{pj}}$ , then  $\zeta + \frac{1}{27} = U^2$  where  $\zeta = A^p$ . The elliptic curve  $E$  is isomorphic to  $Y^2 = X^3 + 2UX^2 + \frac{1}{27}X$  over

$\mathbb{Q}(\sqrt{3^{pj}r^p})$  which also has good reduction modulo  $q$ . Hence, the reduction modulo  $q$  of  $E$  is isomorphic to a twist of  $E_{\bar{\zeta}}$  where  $\bar{\zeta} \in \Omega_{p,q}$  is the reduction modulo  $q$  of  $\zeta$ . Now,  $a_q(E)^2 = a_q(E_{\bar{\zeta}})^2$ . But then we would have that  $p \mid a_q(E)^2 - a_q(E_0)^2 = a_q(E_{\bar{\zeta}})^2 - a_q(E_0)^2$ , a contradiction.

Notice that the elliptic curves  $96A$  and  $96B$  are twists of each other and that the criterion above only depends on  $E_0$  up to twist.  $\square$

Although it is possible to treat the diophantine equation  $s^2 + y^{2p} = \alpha^3$  using the elliptic curves classified by the modular curve associated to  $\Gamma_3$  directly, much of the arguments are essentially equivalent to the work incorporated into the proof of Theorem 1.1 of [1].

*Proof of Corollary 2.* We were able to computationally verify the criterion of Theorem 1 for  $7 < p < 10^7$  and  $p \neq 31$  using MAGMA.  $\square$

Curiously, it is sometimes the case that  $\Omega_{p,q}$  is empty for specific  $p, q$  (e.g.  $p = 11, q = 23$ ). When this is the case, this last portion of the argument becomes completely elementary (but note the overall argument still requires [1]).

For example, suppose  $p > 3$  and  $n = 2$  so  $q = 2p + 1$  is prime. The set  $\Omega_{p,q}$  is not empty if and only if  $\pm 27 + 1 = 3x^2$  for some  $x \in \mathbb{F}_q^\times$ , in other words if and only if  $\left(\frac{28}{q}\right) = \left(\frac{3}{q}\right)$  or  $\left(\frac{-26}{q}\right) = \left(\frac{3}{q}\right)$ . Using quadratic reciprocity, we find that the set  $\Omega_{p,q}$  is empty if and only if  $\left(\frac{q}{7}\right) = 1$  and  $\left(\frac{q}{13}\right) = (-1)^{\frac{p+1}{2}}$ . This proves Corollary 3.

### 3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Algorithm 1:** Verifying the criterion in Theorem 1 for specific primes  $p, q$

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**input** : primes  $p, q$  such that  $p > 7$  and  $q = np + 1$

**output:** true if criterion of Theorem 1 is satisfied for  $p, q$ ; false otherwise

**if**  $a_q(E_0)^2 \equiv 4 \pmod{p}$  **then**

  | **return** false ;

**end**

**forall**  $\bar{\zeta} \in \mu_n(\mathbb{F}_q^\times)$  **do**

  | **if**  $\bar{\zeta} + \frac{1}{27} = \bar{U}^2$  and  $p \mid a_q(E_{\bar{\zeta}})^2 - a_q(E)^2$  **then**

    | **return** false

  | **end**

**end**

**return** true ;

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