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# On interpolation of reflexive variable Lebesgue spaces on which the Hardy-Littlewood maximal operator is bounded

Lars Diening, Alexei Karlovich, and Eugene Shargorodsky

*To Professor Stefan Samko on the occasion of his 80th birthday*

ABSTRACT. We show that if the Hardy-Littlewood maximal operator  $M$  is bounded on a reflexive variable exponent space  $L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$ , then for every  $q \in (1, \infty)$ , the exponent  $p(\cdot)$  admits, for all sufficiently small  $\theta > 0$ , the representation  $1/p(x) = \theta/q + (1 - \theta)/r(x)$ ,  $x \in \mathbb{R}^d$  such that the operator  $M$  is bounded on the variable Lebesgue space  $L^{r(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$ . This result can be applied for transferring properties like compactness of linear operators from standard Lebesgue spaces to variable Lebesgue spaces by using interpolation techniques.

## 1. Introduction

Let  $L^0(\mathbb{R}^d)$  denote the space of all (equivalence classes of) Lebesgue measurable complex-valued functions on  $\mathbb{R}^d$  with the topology of convergence in measure on sets of finite measure. Let  $p(\cdot) : \mathbb{R}^d \rightarrow [1, \infty]$  be a measurable a.e. finite function. By  $L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$  we denote the set of all functions  $f \in L^0(\mathbb{R}^d)$  such that

$$I_{p(\cdot)}(f/\lambda) := \int_{\mathbb{R}^d} |f(x)/\lambda|^{p(x)} dx < \infty$$

for some  $\lambda > 0$ . This set becomes a Banach space when equipped with the Luxemburg-Nakano norm

$$\|f\|_{p(\cdot)} := \inf \{ \lambda > 0 : I_{p(\cdot)}(f/\lambda) \leq 1 \}.$$

It is easy to see that if  $p(\cdot) = p$  is constant, then  $L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$  is nothing but the standard Lebesgue space  $L^p(\mathbb{R}^d)$ . The space  $L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$  is referred to as a *variable Lebesgue space*.

Let  $1 \leq q < \infty$ . Given  $f \in L^q_{\text{loc}}(\mathbb{R}^d)$ , the  $q$ -th maximal operator is defined by

$$(M_q f)(x) := \sup_{Q \ni x} \left( \frac{1}{|Q|} \int_Q |f(y)|^q dy \right)^{1/q},$$

where the supremum is taken over all cubes  $Q \subset \mathbb{R}^d$  containing  $x$  (here, and throughout, cubes will be assumed to have their sides parallel to the coordinate axes). Note that  $M := M_1$  is the usual Hardy-Littlewood maximal operator. By

$\mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  denote the set of all measurable a.e. finite functions  $p(\cdot) : \mathbb{R}^d \rightarrow [1, \infty]$  such that the Hardy-Littlewood maximal operator is bounded on  $L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$ .

We will use the following standard notation:

$$p_- := \operatorname{ess\,inf}_{x \in \mathbb{R}^d} p(x), \quad p_+ := \operatorname{ess\,sup}_{x \in \mathbb{R}^d} p(x).$$

It is well known that the space  $L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$  is reflexive if and only if  $1 < p_- \leq p_+ < \infty$ . In this case, its dual space is isomorphic to  $L^{p'(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$ , where

$$1/p(x) + 1/p'(x) = 1, \quad x \in \mathbb{R}^d$$

(see, e.g., [5, Chap. 3]).

Suppose that  $1 < p_- \leq p_+ < \infty$  and there exist constants  $c_0, c_\infty \in (0, \infty)$  and  $p_\infty \in (1, \infty)$  such that

$$|p(x) - p(y)| \leq \frac{c_0}{\log(e + 1/|x - y|)}, \quad x, y \in \mathbb{R}^d, \quad (1.1)$$

$$|p(x) - p_\infty| \leq \frac{c_\infty}{\log(e + |x|)}, \quad x \in \mathbb{R}^d. \quad (1.2)$$

Then  $p(\cdot) \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  (see [3, Theorem 3.16] or [5, Theorem 4.3.8]). Following [5, Section 4.1] or [3, Section 2.1], we will say that  $p(\cdot)$  is *globally log-Hölder continuous* if conditions (1.1)–(1.2) are satisfied. The class of all globally log-Hölder continuous exponents will be denoted by  $\mathcal{P}^{\log}(\mathbb{R}^d)$ .

Conditions (1.1) and (1.2) are optimal for the boundedness of  $M$  in the sense of modulus of continuity; the corresponding examples are contained in [16] and [2]. However, neither (1.1) nor (1.2) is necessary for  $p(\cdot) \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$ . Thus

$$\mathcal{P}^{\log}(\mathbb{R}^d) \subsetneq \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d).$$

Here we mention results by Nekvinda [14, 15] and Lerner [13] and further discussion in the monographs [3, Chap. 4] and [5, Chaps. 4–5].

The following result was obtained in a somewhat more complete form by the first author (see [4, Theorem 8.1] or [5, Theorem 5.7.2]).

**THEOREM 1.1.** *Let  $p(\cdot) : \mathbb{R}^d \rightarrow [1, \infty]$  be a measurable function satisfying  $1 < p_- \leq p_+ < \infty$ . The following statements are equivalent:*

- (a)  *$M$  is bounded on  $L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$ ;*
- (b)  *$M$  is bounded on  $L^{p'(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$ ;*
- (c) *there exists an  $s \in (1/p_-, 1)$  such that  $M$  is bounded on  $L^{sp(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$ ;*
- (d) *there exists a  $q \in (1, \infty)$  such that  $M_q$  is bounded on  $L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$ .*

Rabinovich and Samko [17] (see also [12, Section 9.1.2]) observed that if a variable exponent  $p(\cdot) \in \mathcal{P}^{\log}(\mathbb{R}^d)$  satisfies  $1 < p_- \leq p_+ < \infty$ , then it can be decomposed as

$$\frac{1}{p(x)} = \frac{\theta}{2} + \frac{1-\theta}{r(x)}, \quad x \in \mathbb{R}^d, \quad (1.3)$$

where  $\theta \in (0, 1)$  and  $r(\cdot)$  satisfies  $1 < r_- \leq r_+ < \infty$  and belongs to  $\mathcal{P}^{\log}(\mathbb{R}^d)$ . This observation was important in the “transfer of the compactness techniques” from  $L^2(\mathbb{R}^d)$  to  $L^{p(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$  by means of the one-sided interpolation of the compactness property between the spaces  $L^{r(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$  (where an operator is merely bounded) and  $L^2(\mathbb{R}^d)$  (where an operator is compact).

The second author and Spitkovsky [11] exploited this idea for more general variable exponents  $p(\cdot) \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  based on the following result obtained by the first author and published in [11, Theorem 4.1].

**THEOREM 1.2.** *Let  $p(\cdot) : \mathbb{R}^d \rightarrow [1, \infty]$  be a measurable function satisfying  $1 < p_- \leq p_+ < \infty$ . If  $p(\cdot) \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$ , then there exist numbers  $q \in (1, \infty)$  and  $\theta \in (0, 1)$  such that the variable exponent  $r(\cdot)$  defined by*

$$\frac{1}{p(x)} = \frac{\theta}{q} + \frac{1-\theta}{r(x)}, \quad x \in \mathbb{R}^d, \quad (1.4)$$

*belongs to  $\mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$ .*

The above theorem has the disadvantage that the constant  $q$  depends on the variable exponent  $p(\cdot)$ . It is desirable to avoid such a dependence and to find, for a given  $p(\cdot) \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$ , a  $\theta \in (0, 1)$  such that (1.3) holds and  $r(\cdot)$  belongs to  $\mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$ . This would allow one to simplify formulations of several results in the literature, where it was supposed that  $p(\cdot)$  is of the form (1.3) with  $r(\cdot) \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  and some sufficiently small  $\theta \in (0, 1)$  (see, e.g., [7, Corollary 2.1, Theorem 3.2], [8, Theorem 1.2], [9, Theorem 2.1]). The second author asked in [10, Section 4.4] whether for a given  $p(\cdot) \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  satisfying  $1 < p_- \leq p_+ < \infty$ , one can find a number  $\tau_{p(\cdot)} \in (0, 1]$  such that the variable exponent  $r(\cdot)$  defined by (1.3) belongs to  $\mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  for every  $\theta \in (0, \tau_{p(\cdot)})$ .

Our main result is the following refinement of Theorem 1.2, which gives positive answers to the above questions.

**THEOREM 1.3 (Main result).** *Let  $p(\cdot) : \mathbb{R}^d \rightarrow [1, \infty]$  be a measurable function satisfying  $1 < p_- \leq p_+ < \infty$ . Then  $p(\cdot) \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  if and only if for every  $q \in (1, \infty)$ , there exists a number  $\Theta_{p(\cdot), q} \in (0, 1)$  such that for every  $\theta \in (0, \Theta_{p(\cdot), q})$  the variable exponent  $r(\cdot)$  defined by (1.4) belongs to  $\mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$ .*

Note that representation (1.4) implies that  $0 < \theta/q \leq 1/p(x) \leq \theta/q + 1 - \theta < 1$  for  $\theta > 0$ , whence  $1 < p_- \leq p_+ < \infty$ .

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we formulate an interpolation lemma due to Cruz-Uribe [1], which immediately implies the proof of the sufficiency portion of Theorem 1.3. In Section 3, we show that if  $p(\cdot) \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  satisfies  $1 < p_- \leq p_+ < \infty$ , then the variable exponents  $\left(\frac{1}{t} \left(\frac{p(\cdot)}{s}\right)'\right)'$  belong to  $\mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  for all  $s, t \geq 1$  sufficiently close to 1. Based on this result, we complete the proof of the necessity portion of Theorem 1.3 in Section 4.

## 2. Proof of the sufficiency portion of Theorem 1.3

The sufficiency portion is an immediate corollary of the following result obtained by Cruz-Uribe [1, Corollary 3] (see also [6, Corollary 2.5] for the case  $1 < (p_j)_- \leq (p_j)_+ < \infty$ ,  $j = 0, 1$ ) and the boundedness of the Hardy-Littlewood maximal operator  $M$  on the standard Lebesgue space  $L^q(\mathbb{R}^d)$  with  $q \in (1, \infty)$ .

**LEMMA 2.1.** *If  $p_i(\cdot) \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  for  $i = 0, 1$ , then for every  $\theta \in (0, 1)$ , the variable exponent  $p_\theta(\cdot)$  defined by*

$$\frac{1}{p_\theta(x)} = \frac{\theta}{p_0(x)} + \frac{1-\theta}{p_1(x)}, \quad x \in \mathbb{R}^d, \quad (2.1)$$

belongs to  $\mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  and

$$\|M\|_{L^{p_\theta(\cdot)} \rightarrow L^{p_\theta(\cdot)}} \leq 96 \|M\|_{L^{p_0(\cdot)} \rightarrow L^{p_0(\cdot)}}^\theta \|M\|_{L^{p_1(\cdot)} \rightarrow L^{p_1(\cdot)}}^{1-\theta}. \quad (2.2)$$

Note that inequality (2.2) is stated in [1] with the constant 48, which seems to be a typo. This result was obtained as a consequence of the pointwise inequality  $|T_f f| \leq Mf \leq 2T_f|f|$ , where each  $T_f$  is a linear integral operator with a positive kernel. On the other hand, it was shown in [1, Theorem 1] that if  $T$  is a linear integral operator with a positive kernel that satisfies  $\|Tf\|_{p_i(\cdot)} \leq B_i \|f\|_{p_i(\cdot)}$  for  $i = 0, 1$  and all  $f \in L^{p_i(\cdot)}(\mathbb{R}^d)$  with  $B_i$  independent of  $f$ , then

$$\|Tf\|_{p_\theta(\cdot)} \leq 48 B_0^\theta B_1^{1-\theta} \|f\|_{p_\theta(\cdot)}.$$

### 3. Doubly iterated “left-openness and then duality” trick

Our construction is similar to that of the proof of [11, Theorem 4.1]. It is based on the consecutive application of the “left-openness” of the class  $\mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  (see Theorem 1.1(c)) and then the “duality” of the class  $\mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  (see Theorem 1.1(b)). In order to succeed, we repeat this procedure two times. The main novelty is that we can guarantee that the constructed exponents belong to  $\mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  in certain ranges of parameters.

LEMMA 3.1. *If  $p(\cdot) \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  satisfies  $1 < p_- \leq p_+ < \infty$ , then there exist  $s_0, t_0 \in (1, \infty)$  such that*

$$\left( \frac{1}{t} \left( \frac{p(\cdot)}{s} \right)' \right)' \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d) \quad \text{for all } s \in [1, s_0], \quad t \in [1, t_0]. \quad (3.1)$$

PROOF. By Theorem 1.1(c), there exists a number  $s_0 \in (1, \infty)$  such that  $p(\cdot)/s_0 \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$ . Then it follows from Theorem 1.1(b) that  $p'(\cdot)$  and  $(p(\cdot)/s_0)'$  belong to  $\mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$ . Applying Theorem 1.1(c) once again, we see that there exist  $t_1, t_2 \in (1, \infty)$  such that

$$\frac{p'(\cdot)}{t_1} \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d), \quad \frac{1}{t_2} \left( \frac{p(\cdot)}{s_0} \right)' \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d).$$

It follows from Lemma 2.1 (one can employ also a more elementary argument using Jensen’s inequality as in [6, p. 43]) that

$$\frac{p'(\cdot)}{t} \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d) \quad \text{for all } t \in [1, t_1], \quad \frac{1}{t} \left( \frac{p(\cdot)}{s_0} \right)' \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d) \quad \text{for all } t \in [1, t_2].$$

Put

$$t_0 := \min\{t_1, t_2\}.$$

Then it is clear that  $t_0 \in (1, \infty)$  and

$$\frac{p'(\cdot)}{t} \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d), \quad \frac{1}{t} \left( \frac{p(\cdot)}{s_0} \right)' \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d) \quad \text{for all } t \in [1, t_0]. \quad (3.2)$$

Take any  $s \in [1, s_0]$  and set  $\theta := \frac{s_0 - s}{s_0 - 1} \in [0, 1]$ . Then  $s = \theta + (1 - \theta)s_0$ . Further, for  $x \in \mathbb{R}^d$ , we have

$$\left( \frac{1}{t} \left( \frac{p(x)}{s} \right)' \right)^{-1} = t \left( \frac{p(x)/s}{p(x)/s - 1} \right)^{-1} = t \frac{p(x) - s}{p(x)}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
&= t \frac{p(x)(\theta + (1 - \theta)) - (\theta + (1 - \theta)s_0)}{p(x)} \\
&= t\theta \frac{p(x) - 1}{p(x)} + t(1 - \theta) \frac{p(x) - s_0}{p(x)} \\
&= \theta \left( \frac{p'(x)}{t} \right)^{-1} + (1 - \theta) \left( \frac{1}{t} \left( \frac{p(x)}{s_0} \right)' \right)^{-1}. \tag{3.3}
\end{aligned}$$

It follows from (3.2)–(3.3) and Lemma 2.1 that

$$\frac{1}{t} \left( \frac{p(\cdot)}{s} \right)' \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d) \quad \text{for all } s \in [1, s_0], \quad t \in [1, t_0].$$

Applying Theorem 1.1(b) one more time, one arrives at (3.1).  $\square$

#### 4. Proof of the necessity portion of Theorem 1.3

Suppose that  $q \in (1, \infty)$  and  $p(\cdot)$  satisfies  $1 < p_- \leq p_+ < \infty$  and belongs to  $\mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$ . We need to prove that  $r(\cdot)$  defined by (1.4) belongs to  $\mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$  for all sufficiently small positive values of  $\theta$ . We will show that one can choose  $s$  and  $t$  in such a way that  $r(\cdot) = \left( \frac{1}{t} \left( \frac{p(\cdot)}{s} \right)' \right)'$ , and use Lemma 3.1 to conclude that  $r(\cdot) \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d)$ .

Now, (1.4) is equivalent to

$$\frac{1}{r(x)} = \frac{1}{1 - \theta} \frac{1}{p(x)} - \frac{\theta}{1 - \theta} \frac{1}{q}, \quad x \in \mathbb{R}^d,$$

while

$$\frac{1}{\left( \frac{1}{t} \left( \frac{p(x)}{s} \right)' \right)'} = 1 - t \left( 1 - \frac{s}{p(x)} \right) = st \frac{1}{p(x)} - (t - 1), \quad x \in \mathbb{R}^d.$$

So, we need to take  $s$  and  $t$  such that

$$st = \frac{1}{1 - \theta} \quad \text{and} \quad t - 1 = \frac{\theta}{1 - \theta} \frac{1}{q}.$$

An easy calculation shows that these equations are equivalent to

$$\theta = 1 - \frac{1}{st} \quad \text{and} \quad t = \frac{q - 1}{q - s}.$$

Let  $s_0 \in (1, \infty)$  and  $t_0 \in (1, \infty)$  be such that (3.1) holds. Put

$$t(s) := \frac{q - 1}{q - s}, \quad 1 < s < q. \tag{4.1}$$

Since  $1 < t(s) \rightarrow 1$  as  $s \rightarrow 1$ , there exists  $s_1 \in (1, s_0]$  such that

$$1 < t(s) \leq t_0 \quad \text{for all } s \in (1, s_1],$$

Let

$$\theta(s) := 1 - \frac{1}{st(s)} = 1 - \frac{q - s}{s(q - 1)} = \frac{q(s - 1)}{s(q - 1)} = \frac{q}{q - 1} \left( 1 - \frac{1}{s} \right). \tag{4.2}$$

Then  $0 < \theta(s) \rightarrow 0$  as  $s \rightarrow 1$ . So, there exists  $s_2 \in (1, s_1]$  such that

$$\Theta_{p(\cdot), q} := \theta(s_2) \in (0, 1).$$

It is clear from (4.2) that  $\theta(\cdot)$  is an increasing continuous function. Then

$$\theta((1, s_2]) = (0, \Theta_{p(\cdot), q}].$$

Take any  $\theta \in (0, \Theta_{p(\cdot), q}]$ . It follows from the above that there exists a unique  $s \in (1, s_2]$  such that  $\theta(s) = \theta$ . For this  $s$  and  $t := t(s)$ ,

$$r_\theta(\cdot) := \left( \frac{1}{t} \left( \frac{p(\cdot)}{s} \right)' \right)' \in \mathcal{B}_M(\mathbb{R}^d) \quad (4.3)$$

according to (3.1).

It follows from (4.1) that

$$q = \frac{st - 1}{t - 1}. \quad (4.4)$$

Combining (4.2), (4.3), (4.4), we get for  $x \in \mathbb{R}^d$ ,

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\theta}{q} + \frac{1 - \theta}{r_\theta(x)} &= \frac{\theta}{q} + (1 - \theta) \left( 1 - \frac{1}{\frac{1}{t} \left( \frac{p(x)}{s} \right)'} \right) \\ &= \left( 1 - \frac{1}{st} \right) \frac{t - 1}{st - 1} + \frac{1}{st} \left( 1 - t \left( 1 - \frac{s}{p(x)} \right) \right) \\ &= \frac{t - 1}{st} + \frac{1}{st} (1 - t) + \frac{1}{st} \cdot \frac{ts}{p(x)} \\ &= \frac{1}{p(x)}. \end{aligned}$$

Thus  $r_\theta(\cdot)$  satisfies (1.4) for every  $\theta \in (0, \Theta_{p(\cdot), q}]$ .  $\square$

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