

TWO NEW TRIANGLES OF q -INTEGERS VIA q -EULERIAN POLYNOMIALS OF TYPE A AND B

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ABSTRACT. The classical Eulerian polynomials can be expanded in the basis $t^{k-1}(1+t)^{n+1-2k}$ ($1 \leq k \leq \lfloor (n+1)/2 \rfloor$) with positive integers coefficients. This formula implies both the symmetry and the unimodality of the Eulerian polynomials. In this paper, we prove a q -analogue of this expansion for Carlitz's q -Eulerian polynomials as well as a similar formula for Chow-Gessel's q -Eulerian polynomials of type B . We shall give some applications of these two formulae, which involve two new sequences of polynomials in q with positive integral coefficients. An open problem is to give a combinatorial interpretation for these polynomials.

1. INTRODUCTION

The *Eulerian polynomials* $A_n(t) := \sum_{k=1}^n A_{n,k} t^{k-1}$ (see [FS70, Fo09, St97]) may be defined by

$$\sum_{k \geq 1} k^n t^k = \frac{A_n(t)}{(1-t)^{n+1}} \quad (n \in \mathbb{N}).$$

It is well known (see [FS70]) that there are nonnegative integers $a_{n,k}$ such that

$$A_n(t) = \sum_{k=1}^{\lfloor (n+1)/2 \rfloor} a_{n,k} t^{k-1} (1+t)^{n+1-2k}. \quad (1.1)$$

For example, for $n = 1, \dots, 4$, the identity reads

$$A_1(t) = 1, \quad A_2(t) = 1+t, \quad A_3(t) = (1+t)^2 + 2t^2, \quad A_4(t) = (1+t)^3 + 8t(1+t).$$

In particular, this formula implies both the *symmetry* and the *unimodality* of the Eulerian numbers $(A_{n,k})_{1 \leq k \leq n}$ for any fixed n . The coefficients $a_{n,k}$ defined by (1.1) satisfy the following recurrence relation:

$$a_{n,k} = k a_{n-1,k} + 2(n+2-2k) a_{n-1,k-1} \quad (1.2)$$

for $n \geq 2$ and $1 \leq k \leq \lfloor (n+1)/2 \rfloor$, with $a_{1,1} = 1$, and $a_{n,k} = 0$ for $k \leq 0$ or $k > \lfloor (n+1)/2 \rfloor$.

Date: March 15, 2012.

$n \setminus k$	1	2	3	4
1	1			
2	1			
3	1	2		
4	1	8		
5	1	22	16	
6	1	52	136	

$n \setminus k$	0	1	2	3
1	1			
2	1	4		
3	1	20		
4	1	72	80	
5	1	232	976	
6	1	716	766	3904

Table 1. The first values of $(a_{n,k})$ and $(b_{n,k})$

The classical Eulerian polynomials are the descent polynomials of symmetric groups or Coxeter group of type A . Analogues of Eulerian polynomials for other Coxeter groups were introduced and studied from combinatorial point of view in the last three decades. Recall that the Eulerian polynomial of type B are defined by

$$\sum_{n \geq 0} (2k+1)^n t^n = \frac{B_n(t)}{(1-t)^{n+1}}. \quad (1.3)$$

The type B version of (1.1) appeared quite recently (see [Pe07, St08, Ch08]) and reads as follows

$$B_n(t) = \sum_{k=0}^{\lfloor \frac{n}{2} \rfloor} b_{n,k} t^k (1+t)^{n-2k}, \quad (1.4)$$

where $b_{n,k}$ are positive integers satisfying the recurrence relation

$$b_{n,k} = (2k+1)b_{n-1,k} + 4(n+1-2k)b_{n-1,k-1}, \quad (1.5)$$

and for $n \geq 2$ and $0 \leq k \leq \lfloor n/2 \rfloor$, with $a_{1,0} = 1$, and $a_{n,k} = 0$ for $k \leq 0$ or $k > \lfloor n/2 \rfloor$.

The numbers $a_{n,k}$ and $4^{-k}b_{n,k}$ appear as A101280 and A008971 in *The On-Line Encyclopedia of Integer Sequences* : <http://oeis.org>.

The aim of this paper is to prove a q -analogue of (1.1) with a refinement of the triangle $(a_{n,k})$ for Carlitz's q -Eulerian polynomials [Ca75], and also a q -analogue of (1.4) with a refinement of the triangle $(b_{n,k})$ for Chow-Gessel's q -Eulerian polynomials of type B [CG07]. Note that some other extensions of (1.1) are discussed in [Br08, SW10, SZ10].

The plan of this paper is as follows: we derive in Section 2 a q -analogue of (1.1) using Carlitz's q -Eulerian polynomials and derive some results about the q -tangent number $T_{2n+1}(q)$ studied in [FH09], in Section 3, we give a q -analogue of (1.4) using Chow-Gessel's q -Eulerian polynomials of type B , which yields a new q -analogue of secant numbers. In Section 4, we apply the ur constructions to some conjectures on the unimodality from [CG07]. Finally, we will briefly give some concluding remarks in the last section.

2. A q -ANALOGUE FOR TYPE A

The q -binomial coefficient $\begin{bmatrix} n \\ k \end{bmatrix}_q$ is defined by

$$\begin{bmatrix} n \\ k \end{bmatrix}_q = \frac{(q; q)_n}{(q; q)_k (q; q)_{n-k}}, \quad n \geq k \geq 0,$$

where $(x; q)_n = (1-x)(1-xq) \cdots (1-xq^{n-1})$ and $(x; q)_0 = 1$. Recall [Ca54] that Carlitz's q -Eulerian polynomials $A_n(t, q) := \sum_{k=1}^{n-1} A_{n,k}(q)t^k$ can be defined by

$$\sum_{k \geq 0} [k+1]_q^n t^k = \frac{A_n(t, q)}{(t; q)_{n+1}}, \quad (2.1)$$

where $[n]_q = 1 + q + \cdots + q^{n-1}$. It is easy to see that $A_{n,k}(q)$ satisfy the recurrence:

$$A_{n,k}(q) = [k]_q A_{n-1,k}(q) + q^{k-1} [n+1-k]_q A_{n-1,k-1}(q) \quad (1 \leq k \leq n). \quad (2.2)$$

The following is our q -analog of (1.1).

Theorem 1. *For any positive integer n , there are polynomials $a_{n,k}(q) \in \mathbb{N}[q]$ such that the q -Eulerian polynomials $A_n(t, q)$ can be written as follows:*

$$A_n(t, q) = \sum_{k=1}^{\lfloor (n+1)/2 \rfloor} a_{n,k}(q) t^{k-1} (-tq^k; q)_{n+1-2k}. \quad (2.3)$$

Moreover, the polynomials $a_{n,k}(q)$ satisfy the following recurrence relation

$$a_{n,k}(q) = [k]_q a_{n-1,k}(q) + (1 + q^{k-1}) q^{k-1} [n+2-2k]_q a_{n-1,k-1}(q) \quad (2.4)$$

for $n \geq 2$ and $1 \leq k \leq \lfloor (n+1)/2 \rfloor$, with $a_{1,1}(q) = 1$ and $a_{n,k}(q) = 0$ for $k \leq 0$ or $k > \lfloor (n+1)/2 \rfloor$.

Proof. Assume that $a_{n,k}(q)$ are coefficients satisfying (2.4). Then, by the q -binomial formula (cf. [An98, Theorem 3.3]),

$$(z; q)_N = \sum_{j=0}^N \begin{bmatrix} N \\ j \end{bmatrix}_q (-z)^j q^{j(j-1)/2}, \quad (2.5)$$

we see that (2.3) is equivalent to:

$$A_{n,k}(q) = \sum_{s \geq 1} \begin{bmatrix} n+1-2s \\ k-s \end{bmatrix}_q q^{(k-s)s + \binom{k-s}{2}} a_{n,s}(q). \quad (2.6)$$

Substituting (2.6) in (2.2), and using (2.4), we derive:

$$\begin{aligned} & \sum_{s \geq 1} \begin{bmatrix} n+1-2s \\ k-s \end{bmatrix}_q q^{(k-s)s + \binom{k-s}{2}} \left([s]_q a_{n-1,s}(q) + (1+q^{s-1})q^{s-1} [n+2-2s]_q a_{n-1,s-1}(q) \right) \\ &= \sum_{s \geq 1} q^{(k-s)s + \binom{k-s}{2}} \left([k]_q \begin{bmatrix} n-2s \\ k-s \end{bmatrix}_q + [n+1-k]_q \begin{bmatrix} n-2s \\ k-1-s \end{bmatrix}_q \right) a_{n-1,s}(q). \end{aligned}$$

Extracting the coefficients of $a_{n-1,s}(q)$ we obtain:

$$\begin{aligned} & \begin{bmatrix} n+1-2s \\ k-s \end{bmatrix}_q [s]_q + \begin{bmatrix} n-1-2s \\ k-s-1 \end{bmatrix}_q (1+q^s)[n-2s]_q \\ &= [k]_q \begin{bmatrix} n-2s \\ k-s \end{bmatrix}_q + [n+1-k]_q \begin{bmatrix} n-2s \\ k-1-s \end{bmatrix}_q. \end{aligned}$$

Canceling the common factors we get:

$$[n+1-2s]_q [s]_q + [n-k-s+1]_q (1+q^s)[k-s]_q = [k]_q [n-k-s+1]_q + [n+1-k]_q [k-s]_q.$$

The last identity is easy to verify, and this shows that (2.3) is satisfied. \square

The first values of the coefficients $a_{n,k}(q)$ read as follows:

$n \setminus k$	1	2	3
1	1		
2	1		
3	1	$q + q^2$	
4	1	$2q(1+q)^2$	
5	1	$q(1+q)(3+5q+3q^2)$	$2q^3(1+q)^2(1+q^2)$
6	1	$q(1+q)^2(4+5q+4q^2)$	$q^3(1+q)^2(1+q^2)(5+7q+5q^2)$

In [FH09] Foata and Han defined a new sequence of q -tangent numbers $T_{2n+1}(q)$ by

$$T_{2n+1}(q) = (-1)^n q^{\binom{n}{2}} A_{2n+1}(-q^{-n}, q). \quad (2.7)$$

We derive easily the following result from Theorem 1, which is the most difficult part of the main result in [FH09, Theorem 1.1].

Corollary 2. *The q -tangent number $T_{2n+1}(q)$ is a polynomial with positive integral coefficients.*

Proof. Let $a_{n,k}^*(q) = q^{-k(k+1)/2} a_{n,k}(q)$. Then (2.4) becomes

$$a_{n,k}^*(q) = [k]_q a_{n-1,k}^*(q) + (1+q^{k-1})[n+2-2k]_q a_{n-1,k-1}^*(q)$$

with the same initial conditions as $a_{n,k}(q)$. This proves that $a_{n,k}^*(q)$ is a polynomial in q with nonnegative integral coefficients. Now we show that $T_{2n+1}(q) = a_{2n+1,n+1}^*(q)$, which

is sufficient to conclude. Let $n := 2n + 1, k := n + 1, t := -q^{-n}$ in (2.3), we get

$$A_{2n+1}(-q^{-n}, q) = \sum_{k=1}^{n+1} a_{2n+1,k}(q)(-q^{-n})^{k-1}(q^{k-n}; q)_{2n+2-2k} = a_{2n+1,n+1}(q)(-q^{-n})^n,$$

since $(q^{k-n}; q)_{2n+2-2k} = 0$ for $k = 1, 2, \dots, n$. The result follows then from (2.7). \square

We can also derive straightforwardly the following result, which was proved in [FH09] using combinatorics of doubletons.

Corollary 3. *The quotient $A_{2n}(t, q)/(1 + tq^n)$ is a polynomial in t and q with positive integral coefficients.*

Proof. Note that

$$A_{2n}(t, q) = \sum_{k=1}^n a_{2n,k}(q)t^{k-1}(-tq^k; q)_{2n+1-2k}.$$

The result follows then from the fact that $(-tq^k; q)_{2n+1-2k} = (1 + tq^k) \cdots (1 + tq^{2n-k})$ contains the factor $1 + tq^n$ for $k = 1, \dots, n$. \square

For any nonnegative integer n , set

$$f_n(q) := \sum_{k=0}^{2n+1} \binom{2n+1}{k} \frac{(-1)^k}{1 + q^{k-n}}. \quad (2.8)$$

Using doubleton model Foata-Han [FH09] proved that

$$d_n(q) := \frac{T_{2n+1}(q)}{(1+q)(1+q^2)\cdots(1+q^n)} = \frac{(-1)^{n+1}(-1; q)_{n+2}}{(1-q)^{2n+1}} f_n(q)$$

is a polynomial in $\mathbb{N}[q]$. Actually we can prove the integrability of $d_n(q)$ without using the combinatorial device.

Proposition 4. *We have $d_n(q) \in \mathbb{Z}[q]$.*

Proof. Let $g_n(q) = (-1)^{n+1}(-1; q)_{n+2}$. Then $f_n(q)g_n(q)$ is clearly a polynomial in $\mathbb{Z}[q]$. We must show that 1 is a zero of order $2n + 1$ of the polynomial $f_n(q)g_n(q)$ or

$$d^p(f_n(q)g_n(q))/dq^n|_{q=1} = 0 \quad \text{for } p = 0, \dots, 2n.$$

By the Leibniz rule it suffices to show that $f_n^{(p)}(1) = 0$ for $p = 0, \dots, 2n$.

For any $k \in \mathbb{Z}$ and $m \in \mathbb{N}$, we define the Laurent polynomial $P_{m,k}(x)$ by the relation:

$$h_k^{(m)}(x) = \left(\frac{d}{dx}\right)^m (1 + x^k)^{-1} = \frac{P_{m,k}(x)}{(1 + x^k)^{m+1}}.$$

So $P_{0,k} = 1, P_{1,k} = -kx^{k-1}$, and for $m \geq 0$, we have

$$P_{m+1,k}(x) = (1 + x^k)P'_{m,k}(x) - k(m+1)x^{k-1}P_{m,k}(x).$$

Therefore the $P_{m,k}$ can, for $m \geq 1$, be written as follows:

$$P_{m,k}(x) = \sum_{l=1}^m \alpha_{l,m} x^{lk-m},$$

where $\alpha_{1,1} = -k$ and for $m \geq 1$, $\alpha_{1,m+1} = (k-m)\alpha_{1,m}$, $\alpha_{m+1,m+1} = (m-k)\alpha_{m,m}$,

$$\alpha_{l,m+1} = (lk-m)\alpha_{l,m} + (lk-mk-2k-m)\alpha_{l-1,m}, \quad 2 \leq l \leq m.$$

This shows that for $m \geq 1$ and $1 \leq l \leq m$, the coefficient $\alpha_{l,m}$ is a polynomial in the variable k , with degree less than or equal to m . We deduce that $P_{m,k}(1) = \sum_{l=1}^m \alpha_{l,m}$ is also a polynomial in the variable k , with degree less than or equal to m , therefore we can write for some rational coefficients $a_j(m)$ only depending on m :

$$h_k^{(m)}(1) = \frac{P_{m,k}(1)}{2^{m+1}} = \sum_{j=0}^m a_j(m) k^j.$$

Thus, differentiating (2.8) m times ($m \geq 0$) and then setting $q = 1$, we get

$$\begin{aligned} f_n^{(m)}(1) &= \sum_{k=0}^{2n+1} \binom{2n+1}{k} (-1)^k \sum_{j=0}^m a_j(m) (k-n)^j \\ &= \sum_{j=0}^{2n} a_j(m) \sum_{k=0}^{2n+1} \binom{2n+1}{k} (-1)^k (k-n)^j. \end{aligned}$$

Now, applying $2n+1$ times the finite difference operator Δ ($\Delta f(x) := f(x+1) - f(x)$) to the polynomial $(n+1-x)^j$ ($0 \leq j \leq 2n$) and setting $x = 0$ we get

$$\Delta^{2n+1}(n+1-x)^j \Big|_{x=0} = \sum_{k=0}^{2n+1} \binom{2n+1}{k} (-1)^k (k-n)^j,$$

which should vanish because $(n+1-x)^j$ is a polynomial in x of degree $j < 2n+1$. \square

3. A q -ANALOGUE FOR TYPE B

A B_n -analogue of Carlitz's q -Eulerian polynomials are introduced by Chow and Gesel [CG07]. These polynomials $B(t, q)$ are defined by

$$\sum_{k \geq 0} [2k+1]_q^n t^k = \frac{B_n(t, q)}{(t; q^2)_{n+1}}. \quad (3.1)$$

Let $B(t, q) := \sum_{k=0}^n B_{n,k}(q) t^k$. Then, the coefficients $B_{n,k}(q)$ satisfy the recurrence relation [CG07, Prop. 3.2]:

$$B_{n,k}(q) = [2k+1]_q B_{n-1,k}(q) + q^{2k-1} [2n-2k+1]_q B_{n-1,k-1}(q) \quad 1 \leq k \leq n. \quad (3.2)$$

We have the following B_n -analog of (2.3).

Theorem 5. For any positive integer n , there are polynomials $b_{n,k}(q) \in \mathbb{N}[q]$ such that the q -Eulerian polynomials of type B can be written as follows:

$$B_n(t, q) = \sum_{k=0}^n B_{n,k}(q)t^k = \sum_{k=0}^{\lfloor n/2 \rfloor} b_{n,k}(q)t^k (-tq^{2k+1}; q^2)_{n-2k}. \quad (3.3)$$

Moreover, the coefficients $b_{n,k}(q)$ satisfy the following recurrence relation:

$$b_{n,k}(q) = [2k+1]_q b_{n-1,k}(q) + (1+q)(1+q^{2k-1})q^{2k-1} [n+1-2k]_{q^2} b_{n-1,k-1}(q) \quad (3.4)$$

for $n \geq 2$ and $0 \leq k \leq \lfloor n/2 \rfloor$, with $b_{1,0}(q) = 1$, and $b_{n,k}(q) = 0$ for $k < 0$ or $k > \lfloor n/2 \rfloor$.

Proof. Assume that $b_{n,k}(q)$ satisfy (3.4). Then, by applying (2.5) with substitution $q \leftarrow q^2$, we derive that (3.3) is equivalent to:

$$B_{n,k}(q) = \sum_{s \geq 0} \begin{bmatrix} n-2s \\ k-s \end{bmatrix}_{q^2} q^{k^2-s^2} b_{n,s}(q). \quad (3.5)$$

Substituting (3.5) in (3.2), and using (3.4), we get:

$$\begin{aligned} & \sum_{s \geq 0} \begin{bmatrix} n-2s \\ k-s \end{bmatrix}_{q^2} q^{k^2-s^2} ([2s+1]_q b_{n-1,s}(q) + (1+q)(1+q^{2s-1})q^{2s-1} [n+1-2s]_{q^2} b_{n-1,s-1}(q)) \\ &= \sum_{s \geq 0} q^{k^2-s^2} \left([2k+1]_q \begin{bmatrix} n-1-2s \\ k-s \end{bmatrix}_{q^2} + [2n+1-2k]_q \begin{bmatrix} n-1-2s \\ k-1-s \end{bmatrix}_{q^2} \right) b_{n-1,s}(q). \end{aligned}$$

Extracting the coefficients of $b_{n-1,s}(q)$ we obtain:

$$\begin{aligned} & \begin{bmatrix} n-2s \\ k-s \end{bmatrix}_{q^2} [2s+1]_q + \begin{bmatrix} n-2-2s \\ k-s-1 \end{bmatrix}_{q^2} (1+q)(1+q^{2s+1}) [n-1-2s]_{q^2} \\ &= [2k+1]_q \begin{bmatrix} n-1-2s \\ k-s \end{bmatrix}_{q^2} + [2n+1-2k]_q \begin{bmatrix} n-1-2s \\ k-1-s \end{bmatrix}_{q^2}. \end{aligned}$$

Canceling the common factors yields:

$$\begin{aligned} & [n-2s]_{q^2} [2s+1]_q + [n-k-s]_{q^2} (1+q)(1+q^{2s+1}) [k-s]_{q^2} \\ &= [2k+1]_q [n-k-s]_{q^2} + [2n+1-2k]_q [k-s]_{q^2}. \end{aligned}$$

The last identity is easy to verify. This proves (3.3). \square

For example, for $n = 1, \dots, 4$, the equation (3.3) reads:

$$B_1(t, q) = 1 + qt;$$

$$B_2(t, q) = (-tq; q^2)_2 + (q + 2q^2 + q^3)t;$$

$$B_3(t, q) = (-tq; q^2)_3 + (2q + 5q^2 + 6q^3 + 5q^4 + 2q^5)t(1 + tq^3);$$

$$\begin{aligned} B_4(t, q) &= (-tq; q^2)_4 + (3q + 9q^2 + 15q^3 + 18q^4 + 15q^5 + 9q^6 + 3q^7)t(-tq^3; q^2)_2 \\ &\quad + (2q^4 + 7q^5 + 11q^6 + 13q^7 + 14q^8 + 13q^9 + 11q^{10} + 7q^{11} + 2q^{12})t^2. \end{aligned}$$

Theorem 5 implies immediately the following result, of which the first was derived in [FH10', Theorem 1.1 (d)] with more work.

Corollary 6. *For $n \geq 0$, we have*

$$B_{2n+1}(-q^{-2n-1}, q) = 0, \quad (3.6)$$

$$B_{2n}(-q^{-2n-1}, q) = (-1)^n q^{-n(2n+1)} b_{2n,n}(q). \quad (3.7)$$

Proof. By (3.3) we get

$$B_{2n+1}(-q^{-2n-1}, q) = \sum_{k=0}^n b_{2n+1,k}(q) (-q^{-2n-1})^k (q^{-2n+2k}; q^2)_{2n+1-2k} = 0.$$

Substituting n by $2n$ and t by $-q^{-2n-1}$ in (3.3) yields

$$\begin{aligned} B_{2n}(-q^{-2n-1}, q) &= \sum_{k=0}^n b_{2n,k}(q) (-q^{-2n-1})^k (q^{-2n+2k}; q^2)_{2n-2k} \\ &= (-1)^n q^{-n(2n+1)} b_{2n,n}(q). \end{aligned} \quad \square$$

The above result leads to define a q -analogue of $B_n(1) = 4^n E_{2n}$ by

$$E_{2n}^*(q) := (-1)^n q^{n(n+1)} B_{2n}(-q^{-2n-1}, q). \quad (3.8)$$

Theorem 7. *There is a polynomial $G_{2n}^*(q) \in \mathbb{Z}[q]$ such that $G_{2n}^*(1) = E_{2n}$ and*

$$E_{2n}^*(q) = (1+q)(1+q^3)(1+q^5) \cdots (1+q^{2n-1}) \cdot (1+q)^n \cdot G_{2n}^*(q).$$

Proof. Recall that $E_{2n}^*(q) = (-1)^n q^{n(n+1)} B_{2n}(-q^{-2n-1}, q)$. From (3.1) we derive

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{B_n(t, q)}{(t; q^2)_{n+1}} &= (1-q)^{-n} \sum_{j \geq 0} (1-q^{2j+1})^n t^j \\ &= (1-q)^{-n} \sum_{j \geq 0} t^j \sum_{k=0}^n \binom{n}{k} (-q^{2j+1})^k \\ &= (1-q)^{-n} \sum_{k=0}^n \binom{n}{k} \frac{(-q)^k}{1-tq^{2k}}. \end{aligned}$$

Substituting n by $2n$ and $t = -q^{-2n-1}$ we obtain

$$E_{2n}^*(q) = (-1)^n q^{n(n+1)} \frac{(-q^{-2n-1}; q^2)_{2n+1}}{(1-q)^{2n}} \sum_{k=0}^{2n} \binom{2n}{k} \frac{(-q)^k}{1+q^{2k-2n-1}}.$$

Let

$$\begin{aligned} G_{2n}^*(q) &:= \frac{E_{2n}^*(q)}{(1+q)(1+q^3)\dots(1+q^{2n-1})(1+q)^n} \\ &= (-1)^n q^{-n-1} \frac{(-q; q^2)_{n+1}}{(1+q)^n (1-q)^{2n}} \sum_{k=0}^{2n} \binom{2n}{k} \frac{(-q)^k}{1+q^{2k-2n-1}}. \end{aligned}$$

For any nonnegative integer n , set

$$f_n^*(q) := \sum_{k=0}^{2n} \binom{2n}{k} \frac{(-q)^k}{1+q^{2k-2n-1}}. \quad (3.9)$$

Let $g_n^*(q) = (-1)^n q^{-n-1} (-q; q^2)_{n+1} / (1+q)^n$. Then $f_n^*(q)g_n^*(q)$ is clearly a polynomial in $\mathbb{Z}[q]$. We must show that 1 is a zero of order $2n$ of the polynomial $f_n^*(q)g_n^*(q)$ or

$$d^p(f_n^*(q)g_n^*(q))/dq^n|_{q=1} = 0 \quad \text{for } p = 0, \dots, 2n-1.$$

By the Leibniz rule it suffices to show that $d^p(f_n^*(q))/dq^p|_{q=1} = 0$ for $p = 0, \dots, 2n-1$. The rest of the proof is almost the same as that of Proposition 4. \square

Conjecture 8. *All the coefficients of the polynomials $G_{2n}^*(q)$ are positive.*

Since $G_{2n}^*(1) = E_{2n}$, the above conjecture would yield a new refinement of the secant number.

4. APPLICATION TO UNIMODAL PROBLEMS

A sequence $\{\alpha_0, \dots, \alpha_d\}$ is *unimodal* if there exists an index $0 \leq j \leq d$ such that $\alpha_i \leq \alpha_{i+1}$ for $i = 0, \dots, j-1$ and $\alpha_i \geq \alpha_{i+1}$ for $i = j, \dots, d$. Chow and Gessel [CG07] studied a kind of unimodality property of the q -Eulerian numbers assuming that q is a real number. In this section, we derive some unimodal properties of the sequence $(A_{n,k}(q))_{1 \leq k \leq n}$ and $(B_{n,k}(q))_{1 \leq k \leq n}$ from our previous results. From Theorem 1, we are able to deduce the following corollary, which provides a further support to the Conjecture 4.8 in [CG07].

Proposition 9. *Let $n \geq 2$ be an integer and $j = \lfloor (n+1)/2 \rfloor$. Then for $k = 1, \dots, j-1$, we have $A_{n,k+1}(q) > A_{n,k}(q)$ if $q > 1$ and $A_{n,n-k+1}(q) < A_{n,n-k}(q)$ if $q < 1$.*

Proof. We start from (2.6), which can be rewritten

$$A_{n,k}(q) = \sum_{s=1}^k \begin{bmatrix} n+1-2s \\ k-s \end{bmatrix}_q q^{(k-s)(k+s-1)/2} a_{n,s}(q),$$

for $k = 1, \dots, n$, where we assume $a_{n,s}(q) = 0$ for $s > j$. Thus we can write for $k = 1, \dots, j-1$:

$$A_{n,k+1}(q) - A_{n,k}(q) = a_{n,k+1}(q) + \sum_{s=1}^k \begin{bmatrix} n+1-2s \\ k+1-s \end{bmatrix}_q q^{(k+1-s)(k+s)/2} a_{n,s}(q) \left(1 - q^{-k} \frac{1 - q^{k+1-s}}{1 - q^{n+1-k-s}} \right).$$

We know that the q -binomial coefficient is a polynomial in q with nonnegative integer coefficients, and from Theorem 1 that this is also true for $a_{n,s}(q)$, $s = 1, \dots, k+1$. Therefore it is enough to show that the coefficient between brackets is nonnegative for $1 \leq s \leq k \leq j-1$. This coefficient can be rewritten as:

$$\frac{q^{n+1} - q^{k+s} + q^s - q^{k+1}}{q^{n+1} - q^{k+s}}.$$

Assume first that $q > 1$. As $k+s \leq 2j-2 \leq n-1 < n+1$, the denominator of this fraction is positive. Moreover, it is not difficult to see that under the conditions $1 \leq s \leq k \leq j-1$, and by using $(n-1)/2 \leq j \leq (n+1)/2$, we have the following inequalities:

$$\begin{aligned} q^{n+1} - q^{k+s} + q^s - q^{k+1} &\geq q^{n+1} - q^{2k} + q^k - q^{k+1} \\ &\geq q^{n+1} - q^{2j-2} + q^{j-1} - q^j \\ &\geq q^{n+1} - q^{n-1} + q^{(n-3)/2} - q^{(n+1)/2}. \end{aligned}$$

This last expression can be rewritten $(q^{(n+1)/2} - 1)(q^{(n+1)/2} - q^{(n-3)/2})$ and is nonnegative, which shows that $A_{n,k+1}(q) \geq A_{n,k}(q)$ for $k = 1, \dots, j-1$.

In the case $0 < q < 1$, we only need to use the well-known relation $A_{n,n-k+1}(q) = q^{n(n-1)/2} A_{n,k}(1/q)$ for any $k = 1, \dots, n$, and the result is obvious from the case $q > 1$. \square

In the type B case, it is conjectured in [CG07, Conjecture 4.6] that the sequence $(B_{n,k}(q))_{0 \leq k \leq n}$ is unimodal. By Theorem 5, we are able to confirm partially this conjecture.

Proposition 10. *Let $n \geq 2$ be an integer and $j = \lfloor n/2 \rfloor$. Then for $k = 1, \dots, j-1$, we have $B_{n,k+1}(q) > B_{n,k}(q)$ if $q > 1$ and $B_{n,n-k}(q) < B_{n,n-k-1}(q)$ if $q < 1$.*

Proof. We start from (3.5), which can be rewritten

$$B_{n,k}(q) = \sum_{s=0}^k \begin{bmatrix} n-2s \\ k-s \end{bmatrix}_{q^2} q^{k^2-s^2} b_{n,s}(q),$$

for $k = 0, \dots, n$, where we assume $b_{n,s}(q) = 0$ for $s > j$. Thus we can write for $k = 0, \dots, j-1$:

$$B_{n,k+1}(q) - B_{n,k}(q) = b_{n,k+1}(q) + \sum_{s=0}^k \begin{bmatrix} n-2s \\ k+1-s \end{bmatrix}_{q^2} q^{(k+1)^2-s^2} b_{n,s}(q) \left(1 - q^{-2k-1} \frac{1 - q^{2(k+1-s)}}{1 - q^{2(n-k-s)}} \right).$$

We know that the q -binomial coefficient is a polynomial in q with nonnegative integer coefficients, and from Theorem 5 that this is also true for $b_{n,s}(q)$, $s = 0, \dots, k+1$. Therefore it is enough to show that the coefficient between brackets is nonnegative for $0 \leq s \leq k \leq j-1$. This coefficient can be rewritten as:

$$\frac{q^{2n} - q^{2s+2k} + q^{2s-1} - q^{2k+1}}{q^{2n} - q^{2k+2s}}.$$

Assume first that $q > 1$. As $k+s \leq 2j-2 \leq n-2 < n$, the denominator of this fraction is positive. Moreover, it is not difficult to see that under the conditions $0 \leq s \leq k \leq j-1$, and by using $n/2 - 1 \leq j \leq n/2$, we have the following inequalities:

$$\begin{aligned} q^{2n} - q^{2s+2k} + q^{2s-1} - q^{2k+1} &\geq q^{2n} - q^{4k} + q^{2k-1} - q^{2k+1} \\ &\geq q^{2n} - q^{4j-4} + q^{2j-3} - q^{2j-1} \\ &\geq q^{2n} - q^{2n-4} + q^{n-5} - q^{n-1}. \end{aligned}$$

This last expression can be rewritten $(q^{2n} - q^{n-1})(1 - q^{-4})$ and is nonnegative, which shows that $B_{n,k+1}(q) \geq B_{n,k}(q)$ for $k = 0, \dots, j-1$.

In the case $0 < q < 1$, we only need to use the well-known relation $B_{n,n-k}(q) = q^{n^2} B_{n,k}(1/q)$ for any $k = 0, \dots, n$, and the result is obvious from the case $q > 1$. \square

5. AN OPEN PROBLEM ON THE COMBINATORIAL INTERPRETATIONS

By Theorems 1 and 5, the polynomials $a_{n,k}(q)$ and $b_{n,k}(q)$ have positive integral coefficients. It is then natural to ask the following question.

Problem 11. *What are the combinatorial interpretations for $a_{n,k}(q)$ and $b_{n,k}(q)$?*

We can give a combinatorial interpretation for the *odd central terms* $a_{2n+1,n+1}(q)$ by using the *doubloon* model. Recall [FH09] that a *doubloon* of order $(2n+1)$ is defined to be a permutation of the word $012 \cdots (2n+1)$, represented as a $2 \times (n+1)$ -matrix $\delta = \begin{pmatrix} a_0 & \cdots & a_n \\ b_0 & \cdots & b_n \end{pmatrix}$. Define

$$\text{cmaj}' \delta := \text{maj}(a_0 \cdots a_n b_n \cdots b_0) - (n+1) \text{des}(a_0 \cdots a_n b_n \cdots b_0) + n^2,$$

where “des” and “maj” are the usual *number of descents* and *major index* defined for words. A doubloon $\delta = \begin{pmatrix} a_0 & \cdots & a_n \\ b_0 & \cdots & b_n \end{pmatrix}$ is said to be *interlaced*, if for every $k = 1, 2, \dots, n$ the sequence $(a_{k-1}, a_k, b_{k-1}, b_k)$ or one of its three *cyclic rearrangements* is monotonic increasing or decreasing. By Theorem 1.5 in [FH09] we have the following result.

Proposition 12. *The polynomial $a_{2n+1,n+1}(q)$ is the generating function for the set of interlaced doubletons of order $2n + 1$ by the statistic $\text{cma}j'$.*

Another sequence of q -secant numbers is introduced in [FH10'] by

$$E_{2n}(q) = (-1)^n q^{n^2} B_{2n}(-q^{-2n}, q).$$

Unfortunately, it seems not easy to relate our coefficients $b_{n,k}(q)$ from Section 3 to the doubletons of type B , even for the central cases.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was partially supported by the grant ANR-08-BLAN-0243-03. The second author is grateful to Frédéric Chapoton for several discussions at the initial stage of this work.

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