Taylor Series Revisited

Major: All Engineering Majors

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Transforming Numerical Methods Education for STEM Undergraduates

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What is a Taylor series?

Some examples of Taylor series which you must have seen

$$\cos(x) = 1 - \frac{x^2}{2!} + \frac{x^4}{4!} - \frac{x^6}{6!} + \cdots$$

$$\sin(x) = x - \frac{x^3}{3!} + \frac{x^5}{5!} - \frac{x^7}{7!} + \cdots$$

$$e^x = 1 + x + \frac{x^2}{2!} + \frac{x^3}{3!} + \cdots$$

General Taylor Series

The general form of the Taylor series is given by

$$f(x+h) = f(x) + f'(x)h + \frac{f''(x)}{2!}h^2 + \frac{f'''(x)}{3!}h^3 + \cdots$$

provided that all derivatives of f(x) are continuous and exist in the interval [x,x+h]

What does this mean in plain English?

As Archimedes would have said, "*Give me the value of the function at a single point, and the value of all (first, second, and so on) its derivatives at that single point, and I can give you the value of the function at any other point*" (*fine print excluded*)

Example—Taylor Series

Find the value of $f(6)$ given that $f(4)=125$, $f'(4)=74$, $f''(4)=30$, $f'''(4)=6$ and all other higher order derivatives of $f(x)$ at $x=4$ are zero.

Solution:

$$f(x+h) = f(x) + f'(x)h + f''(x)\frac{h^2}{2!} + f'''(x)\frac{h^3}{3!} + \cdots$$

$$x = 4$$

$$h = 6-4 = 2$$

Example (cont.)

Solution: (cont.)

Since the higher order derivatives are zero,

$$f(4+2) = f(4) + f'(4)2 + f''(4)\frac{2^2}{2!} + f'''(4)\frac{2^3}{3!}$$

$$f(6) = 125 + 74(2) + 30\left(\frac{2^2}{2!}\right) + 6\left(\frac{2^3}{3!}\right)$$

$$= 125 + 148 + 60 + 8$$

$$= 341$$

Note that to find $f(6)$ exactly, we only need the value of the function and all its derivatives at some other point, in this case $x = 4$

Derivation for Maclaurin Series for e^x

Derive the Maclaurin series

$$e^x = 1 + x + \frac{x^2}{2!} + \frac{x^3}{3!} + \cdots$$

The Maclaurin series is simply the Taylor series about the point x=0

$$f(x+h) = f(x) + f'(x)h + f''(x)\frac{h^2}{2!} + f'''(x)\frac{h^3}{3!} + f''''(x)\frac{h^4}{4} + f'''''(x)\frac{h^5}{5} + \cdots$$

$$f(0+h) = f(0) + f'(0)h + f''(0)\frac{h^2}{2!} + f'''(0)\frac{h^3}{3!} + f''''(0)\frac{h^4}{4} + f'''''(0)\frac{h^5}{5} + \cdots$$

Derivation (cont.)

Since $f(x) = e^x$, $f'(x) = e^x$, $f''(x) = e^x$, ..., $f^n(x) = e^x$ and $f^n(0) = e^0 = 1$

the Maclaurin series is then

$$f(h) = (e^0) + (e^0)h + \frac{(e^0)}{2!}h^2 + \frac{(e^0)}{3!}h^3 ...$$

$$= 1 + h + \frac{1}{2!}h^2 + \frac{1}{3!}h^3 ...$$

So,

$$f(x) = 1 + x + \frac{x^2}{2!} + \frac{x^3}{3!} + ...$$

Error in Taylor Series

The Taylor polynomial of order *n* of a function *f(x)* with *(n+1)* continuous derivatives in the domain [*x,x+h]* is given by

$$f(x+h) = f(x) + f'(x)h + f''(x)\frac{h^2}{2!} + \cdots + f^{(n)}(x)\frac{h^n}{n!} + R_n(x)$$

where the remainder is given by

$$R_n(x) = \frac{(x-h)^{n+1}}{(n+1)!} f^{(n+1)}(c)$$

where

$$x < c < x+h$$

that is, c is some point in the domain [x,x+h]

Example—error in Taylor series

The Taylor series for e^x at point $x=0$ is given by

$$e^x = 1 + x + \frac{x^2}{2!} + \frac{x^3}{3!} + \frac{x^4}{4!} + \frac{x^5}{5!} + \cdots$$

It can be seen that as the number of terms used increases, the error bound decreases and hence a better estimate of the function can be found.

How many terms would it require to get an approximation of e^1 within a magnitude of true error of less than 10^{-6}.

Example—(cont.)

Solution:

Using $(n+1)$ terms of Taylor series gives error bound of

$$R_n(x) = \frac{(x-h)^{n+1}}{(n+1)!} f^{(n+1)}(c) \qquad x = 0, h = 1, f(x) = e^x$$

$$R_n(0) = \frac{(0-1)^{n+1}}{(n+1)!} f^{(n+1)}(c)$$

$$= \frac{(-1)^{n+1}}{(n+1)!} e^c$$

Since

$$x < c < x + h$$

$$0 < c < 0 + 1$$

$$0 < c < 1$$

$$\frac{1}{(n+1)!} < |R_n(0)| < \frac{e}{(n+1)!}$$

Example—(cont.)

Solution: (cont.)

So if we want to find out how many terms it would require to get an approximation of e^1 within a magnitude of true error of less than 10^{-6},

$$\frac{e}{(n+1)!} < 10^{-6}$$

$$(n+1)! > 10^6 e$$

$$(n+1)! > 10^6 \times 3$$

$$n \geq 9$$

So 9 terms or more are needed to get a true error less than 10^{-6}

Additional Resources

For all resources on this topic such as digital audiovisual lectures, primers, textbook chapters, multiple-choice tests, worksheets in MATLAB, MATHEMATICA, MathCad and MAPLE, blogs, related physical problems, please visit

http://numericalmethods.eng.usf.edu/topics/taylor_series.html

THE END

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