

# ON A GENERALIZATION OF A THEOREM BY VOSPER

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*Received: 4/7/00, Accepted: 8/4/00, Published: 8/4/00*

## Abstract

Let  $S, T$  be subsets of  $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$  with  $\min\{|S|, |T|\} > 1$ . The Cauchy–Davenport theorem states that  $|S + T| \geq \min\{p, |S| + |T| - 1\}$ . A theorem by Vosper characterizes the critical pair in the above inequality. We prove the following generalization of Vosper’s theorem. If  $|S + T| \leq \min\{p - 2, |S| + |T| + m\}$ ,  $2 \leq |S|, |T|$ , and  $|S| \leq p - \binom{m+4}{2}$ , then  $S$  is a union of at most  $m + 2$  arithmetic progressions with the same difference. The term  $\binom{m+4}{2}$  is best possible, i.e. cannot be replaced by a smaller number.

## 1. Introduction

One of the subjects of additive number theory is the study of *inverse problems*, i.e. the study of the structure of subsets  $S$  and  $T$  of a group such that the cardinality  $|S + T|$  is “small”. The oldest result in this vein is the Cauchy–Davenport theorem which states that  $|S + T| \geq \min\{p, |S| + |T| - 1\}$  for any subsets  $S, T$  of a group of prime order  $p$ . Vosper’s theorem [6] characterizes the sets for which equality holds. It states :

**Theorem 1 (Vosper)** *Let  $S$  and  $T$  be subsets of a group of prime order  $p$  such that  $|S| \geq 2$ ,  $|T| \geq 2$ , and  $|S + T| < p - 1$ . Then either  $|S + T| \geq |S| + |T|$ , or  $S$  and  $T$  are in arithmetic progression with the same difference.*

Freiman [1] gave the following improvement of Vosper’s Theorem in the case when  $S = T$ .

**Theorem 2 (Freiman)** *Let  $S$  be a subset of a group of prime order  $p$  such that  $|S| < p/35$ . Suppose that  $|S + S| \leq 2|S| + m$  with  $m \leq \frac{2}{5}|S| - 3$ . Then  $S$  is contained in an arithmetic progression of length at most  $|S| + m + 1$ .*

As far as we know, the first improvement of Vosper's result for different sets  $S$  and  $T$  is the recent result of Hamidoune and Rødseth [5] who proved :

**Theorem 3 (Hamidoune-Rødseth)** *Let  $S$  and  $T$  be subsets of a group of prime order  $p$ , such that  $|S| \geq 3$ ,  $|T| \geq 3$ ,  $7 \leq |S + T| \leq p - 4$ . Then either  $|S + T| \geq |S| + |T| + 1$ , or  $S$  and  $T$  are contained in arithmetic progressions with the same difference and  $|S| + 1$  and  $|T| + 1$  elements respectively.*

In another direction, the Cauchy-Davenport theorem was generalized to arbitrary Abelian groups by Mann [2, p. 2] :

**Theorem 4 (Mann)** *Let  $S$  be a subset of an arbitrary Abelian group  $G$ . Then one of the following holds:*

- (i) *for every subset  $T$  such that  $S + T \neq G$  we have  $|S + T| \geq |S| + |T| - 1$ .*
- (ii) *there exists a proper subgroup  $H$  of  $G$  such that  $|S + H| < |S| + |H| - 1$ .*

The following theorem of Hamidoune [4] is both a generalization of Mann's theorem and of Vosper's theorem.

**Theorem 5 (Hamidoune)** *Let  $G$  be a (not necessarily Abelian) group generated by a finite subset  $S$  containing 0. Suppose that every nonzero element of  $G$  has order  $\geq |S|$ . Then one of the following holds:*

- (i) *for every subset  $T$  such that  $2 \leq |T| < \infty$ , we have  $|S + T| \geq \min(|G| - 1, |S| + |T|)$ .*
- (ii)  *$S$  is an arithmetic progression.*

Notice the similarity between Mann's and Hamidoune's theorems 4 and 5. Together they state, broadly speaking, that subsets  $S$  of a group for which  $S + T$  is "small" for some  $T$  tend either to cluster around subgroups or to be an arithmetic progression.

A very interesting feature of Hamidoune's proof of his result is that it unites Theorems 1 and 4 under a short, elegant, and insightful explanation. This involves defining  $k$ -isoperimetric numbers and  $k$ -atoms associated to  $S$ . It turns out that the 1-atoms lead naturally to the subgroup  $H$  in Theorem 4 and that the 2-atoms lead to the difference of the arithmetic progression in Theorem 5.

In this paper, we study the 2-atoms of an arbitrary subset  $S$  of a group of prime order and give a sufficient condition on  $|S|$  for them to be of cardinality two. We shall see that this condition is necessary in very many situations. This leads to a further generalization of Vosper's theorem in the prime order case. Our main result is :

**Theorem 6** *Let  $m$  be a non-negative integer and let  $S$  be a subset of a group of prime order  $p$  such that  $2 \leq |S| < p - \binom{m+4}{2}$ . Then either*

$$|S + T| > |S| + |T| + m,$$

*for any subset  $T$  such that  $2 \leq |T|$  and  $|S + T| \leq p - 2$ , or  $S$  is the union of at most  $m + 2$  arithmetic progressions with the same difference.*

Our proof leads to the condition  $|S| < p - \binom{m+4}{2}$  in a natural way, and we shall see that this bound is best possible. More precisely, there exist subsets  $S$  of  $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$  with cardinality  $p - \binom{m+4}{2}$  that are not the union of at most  $m + 2$  arithmetic progressions and for which  $|S + T| \leq |S| + |T| + m \leq p - 2$  for some subset  $|T| \geq 2$ . Note that this situation is unlike that of  $\mathbb{Z}$ , but these sets  $S$  have to be “large”, i.e.  $|S| \geq p - \binom{m+4}{2}$ .

**2. Atoms**

Let  $S$  be a fixed subset of  $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$  with  $0 \in S$ . For a subset  $X \subset G$  we write

$$N_S(X) = (X + S) \setminus X.$$

We omit the subscript  $S$  when the reference to it is clear from the context. If  $0 \in X$ , we write  $X^* = X \setminus \{0\}$ .

Following the terminology of Hamidoune [4], we say that  $S$  is  $k$ -separable if there is  $X \subset \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$  such that  $|X| \geq k$  and  $|X + S| \leq p - k$ . If  $S$  is  $k$ -separable, the  $k$ -isoperimetric connectivity of  $S$  is

$$\kappa_k(S) = \min\{|N(X)|, X \subset \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}, k \leq |X| \text{ and } |X + S| \leq p - k\},$$

and the  $k$ -isoperimetric number of  $S$  is

$$d_k(S) = \min\{|N(X)|, X \subset \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}, |X| = k\}.$$

We say that a subset  $F \subset G$  is a  $k$ -fragment of  $S$  if  $|N(F)| = \kappa_k(S)$ ,  $|F| \geq k$  and  $|F + S| \leq p - k$ . A  $k$ -fragment of minimum cardinality is said to be a  $k$ -atom of  $S$ . We denote by  $\alpha_k(S)$  the cardinality of a  $k$ -atom of  $S$ . Note that  $\alpha_k(S) > k$  if and only if  $\kappa_k(S) < d_k(S)$ . Note also that, when  $|S| = 2$  and  $S$  is  $k$ -separable, then  $\alpha_k(S) = k$  and  $\kappa_k(S) = 1$ . To avoid trivial cases we always assume that  $|S| > 2$ .

The following basic property of  $k$ -atoms is proved in [4].

**Theorem 7** *Let  $A$  be a  $k$ -atom and let  $F$  be a  $k$ -fragment of a subset  $S \subset \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$  with  $0 \in S$ . Then, either  $A \subset F$  or  $|A \cap F| \leq k - 1$ .*

This theorem has a number of consequences. We use it here to derive some intermediate results that we shall need. For the rest of this section it is always assumed that  $S$  is a 2-separable subset of  $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$ ,  $0 \in S$ , and  $|S| \geq 3$ .

**Proposition 8** *Let  $A$  be a 2-atom of  $S$ . Then,  $|A|(|A| - 1) \leq 2\kappa_2(S)$ .*

*Proof.* We may assume  $|A| > 2$ . Let  $S = \{0 = s_0, s_1, \dots, s_r\}$ ,  $r \geq 2$ . We have

$$\kappa_2(S) = |A + S| - |A| = \left| \bigcup_{i=1}^r [(A + s_i) \setminus \cup_{0 \leq j < i} (A + s_j)] \right|. \tag{1}$$

If  $A$  is a 2-atom then so is  $A + z$  for any  $z$ . Therefore equation (1) and Theorem 7 imply

$$\kappa_2(S) \geq (|A| - 1) + (|A| - 2) + \max\{|A| - 3, 0\} + \dots + \max\{|A| - r, 0\}.$$

If  $|A| > |S|$  then  $|A + S| - |A| \geq (|A| - 1) + (|A| - 2) \geq 2|A| - 3 \geq 2|S| - 1 \geq d_2(S)$ , which implies  $\alpha_2(S) = 2$ . Hence  $|A| \leq |S|$ . Therefore,

$$\kappa_2(S) \geq (|A| - 1) + \dots + 2 + 1 = |A|(|A| - 1)/2,$$

as claimed. ■

Recall that  $X \subset G$  is a Sidon set if  $|2X| = \binom{|X|+1}{2}$ , that is, there are no two unordered pairs of (possibly equal) elements in  $X$  with the same sum. The following is an easy consequence of Theorem 7.

**Proposition 9** *Let  $A$  be a 2-atom of  $S$ . If  $|A| > 2$  then  $A$  is a Sidon set.*

*Proof.* Suppose that  $x + y = x' + y'$  for  $x, y, x', y'$  in  $A$ . Then  $\{x, y'\} \in (A + x - x') \cap A$ . Since  $A + z$  is a 2-atom for each  $z \in \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$ , Theorem 7 implies either  $x = y'$  or  $x = x'$ . Hence, all twofold sums of elements of  $A$  are different and  $A$  is a Sidon set. ■

**Proposition 10** *Suppose  $S$  is a Sidon set in  $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$ . Then,  $\alpha_2(S) = 2$ .*

*Proof.*

For each  $x \in \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$ ,  $x \neq 0$ , we have  $|S \cap (S + x)| \leq 1$ . For  $k \leq |S|$  let  $X = \{x_1, \dots, x_k\} \subset \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$ . Then,

$$\begin{aligned} |N(X)| &= |S + X| - |X| = \left| \bigcup_{i=1}^k [(S + x_i) \setminus \bigcup_{j < i} (S + x_j)] \right| - |X| \\ &\geq [|S| + (|S| - 1) + (|S| - 2) + \dots + (|S| - |X| + 1)] - |X| = \frac{1}{2}|X|(2|S| - |X| - 1). \end{aligned}$$

In particular,

$$d_k(S) \geq \frac{1}{2}k(2|S| - k - 1). \tag{2}$$

Let  $A$  be a 2-atom of  $S$  and suppose that  $|A| > 2$ , so that  $|N(A)| < d_2(S)$ . We have, for any  $s \in S^*$ ,  $|S + \{0, s\}| = 2|S| - 1$  so that  $|N(\{0, s\})| = 2|S| - 3$ : we conclude therefore that  $|N(A)| < 2|S| - 3$ . But according to the lower bound (2), which is a quadratic function of  $k$  with negative leading term and zeros at  $k = 0$  and  $k = 2|S| - 1$ , this implies  $|A| > 2|S| - 3$ . By Proposition 8 we then have  $(2|S| - 3)(2|S| - 4) < 2(2|S| - 4)$ , which implies  $|S| < 3$  against our assumption. Hence,  $\alpha_2(S) = 2$ . ■

Finally we have :

**Proposition 11** *Let  $A$  be a 2-atom of  $S$ . Then,  $\alpha_2(A) = 2$ . Moreover,  $|A| \leq m + 3$ , where  $m = \kappa_2(S) - |S|$ .*

*Proof.* If  $\alpha_2(S) = |A| = 2$  there is nothing to prove. Suppose that  $|A| > 2$ . We may assume that  $0 \in A$ . By Proposition 9,  $A$  is a Sidon set. By Proposition 10 we have  $\alpha_2(A) = 2$ .

On the other hand, we have  $|S + A| - |A| = |S| + m$ , which implies

$$|A| + m = |S + A| - |S| \geq \kappa_2(A) = d_2(A) = 2|A| - 3.$$

Hence  $|A| \leq m + 3$ . ■

### 3. Surjective pairs of subsets

To prove that a set  $S$  is the union of sufficiently few arithmetic progressions, say of difference  $a$ , our basic strategy is to show that  $\{0, a\}$  is a 2-atom of  $S$ . This is why, in this section, we study 2-atoms  $A$  of sets  $S$  such that  $|A| > 2$ . We shall prove that these 2-atoms have very special structure, namely that they define, together with  $S$ , *surjective pairs*. Before defining this concept we need some notation.

Let  $Y$  be a fixed subset of  $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$ . For each subset  $X \subset \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$  and each integer  $i \geq 2$  we denote

$$N_i(X) = N_Y(X + (i - 1)Y),$$

where  $iY = \underbrace{Y + \dots + Y}_i$ . We write  $N_0(X) = X$  and  $N_1(X) = N_Y(X)$ . Note that

$$N_{i+1}(X) = (N_i(X) + Y) \setminus \bigcup_{0 \leq j \leq i} N_j(X).$$

For a subset  $U$  of  $Y$  and  $i \geq 1$ , we denote by  $N_i^U(X)$  the set of elements  $z \in N_i(X)$  such that  $z - U \subset N_{i-1}(X)$  and  $U$  is a maximal subset of  $Y$  with this property. We also write

$$N_i^{\leq U}(X) = \bigcup_{V \subset U} N_i^V(X).$$

**Lemma 12** For each  $U \subset Y$  and  $i \geq 1$ , if  $N_{i+1}^U(X) \neq \emptyset$  then

$$N_{i+1}^U(X) - U \subset N_i^{\leq U}(X).$$

*Proof.* Let  $z \in N_{i+1}^U(x)$ ,  $u \in U$  and  $z' = z - u \in N_i(X)$ . Then  $z' \in N_i^V(X)$  for some subset  $V$  of  $Y$ . But, for any  $v \in V$ , we have  $z - v = z' - v + u \in N_j(X)$  for some  $j < i + 1$ . Since  $z \in N_{i+1}(X)$  we must have  $j = i$ : this implies  $V \subset U$ . In particular, if  $N_{i+1}^U(X) \neq \emptyset$ , then  $N_{i+1}^U(X) - U \subset \cup_{V \subset U} N_i^V(X) = N_i^{\leq U}(X)$ . ■

**Definition** A pair  $(X, Y)$  of subsets of  $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$  is said to be *h-surjective* if  $X, Y \neq \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$  and

$$|(z - Y) \cap X| \geq h \text{ for each } z \in N_Y(X). \tag{3}$$

The following two lemmas are the key steps in our proof of Theorem 6.

**Lemma 13** Let  $S$  be a 2-separable subset of  $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$  and let  $A$  be a 2-atom of  $S$  such that  $|A^*| \geq 2$ . Then

- (i)  $(S, A)$  is a 2-surjective pair, and
- (ii)  $(S + A, A)$  is a  $|A^*|$ -surjective pair.

*Proof.* We may assume that  $0 \in A$ . Let  $z \in N_A(S)$  and suppose that there is only a single element  $z' \in A$  such that  $z - z' \in S$ . Let  $A' = A \setminus \{z'\}$ . Then  $|A + S| = |(A' + S) \cup \{z\}| = |A' + S| + 1$ . Therefore,  $|N_S(A)| = |N_S(A')|$  and  $|A'| \geq 2$ , contradicting the minimality of  $A$ . Hence,  $(S, A)$  is 2-surjective.

Let  $U$  be a subset of  $A^*$  with at most  $|A| - 2$  elements.

By Lemma 12 and the Cauchy-Davenport theorem, if  $N_i^U(S) \neq \emptyset$  for some  $i \geq 2$ , then we have

$$|N_{i-1}^{\leq U}(S)| \geq |N_i^U(S) - U| \geq |N_i^U(S)| + |U| - 1. \tag{4}$$

If  $|U| \leq |N_1^{\leq U}(S)|$ , then

$$|S + (A \setminus U)| - |A \setminus U| \geq |S + A| - |N_1^{\leq U}(S)| + |U| - |A| \leq |S + A| - |A|,$$

thus contradicting the hypothesis that  $A$  is a 2-atom. Hence,

$$|N_1^{\leq U}(S)| \leq |U| - 1, \quad U \subset A^*, |U| \leq |A| - 2.$$

Therefore, if  $N_2^U(S) \neq \emptyset$ , then (4) implies

$$|N_2^U(S)| \leq |N_1^{\leq U}(S)| - (|U| - 1) \leq 0,$$

a contradiction. Hence  $N_2^U(S) = \emptyset$  for each proper subset of  $A^*$  and therefore  $(S + A, A)$  is an  $|A^*|$ -surjective pair. ■

**Lemma 14** *Let  $(X, Y)$  be an  $h$ -surjective pair in  $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$  and  $i \geq 1$ . If  $X + iY \neq \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$  then  $(X + iY, Y)$  is also an  $h$ -surjective pair. In particular, if  $|N_i^{\leq U}(X)| < h$  for some  $U \subset Y$  and  $i \geq 1$  then  $N_{i+1}^U(X) = \emptyset$ .*

*Proof.* Assume that  $(X + (i-1)Y, Y)$  is  $h$ -surjective for some  $i \geq 1$ . We have  $N_1(X + (i-1)Y) = N_i(X)$ . For each subset  $U$  of  $Y$  with strictly less than  $h$  elements, we have  $N_i^{\leq U}(X) = \emptyset$ . If  $N_{i+1}^U(X) \neq \emptyset$ ,  $i \geq 1$  then Lemma 12 implies  $N_{i+1}^U(X) - U \subset N_i^{\leq U}(X) = \emptyset$ , a contradiction. Therefore,  $(X + iY, Y)$  is also  $h$ -surjective. The first part of the result follows by induction.

Suppose now that  $|N_i^{\leq U}(X)| < h$  for some  $U \subset Y$ . Then, if  $N_{i+1}^U(X) \neq \emptyset$ , Lemma 12 implies  $h > |N_i^{\leq U}(X)| \geq |N_{i+1}^U(X) - U| \geq |U|$ , this contradicts the  $h$ -surjectivity of  $(X + iY, Y)$ . ■

**Theorem 15** *Let  $S \subset \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$  be a 2-separable subset. If  $\alpha_2(S) > 2$  then*

$$|S| \geq p - \binom{m+4}{2},$$

where  $m = \kappa_2(S) - |S|$ .

*Proof.* We may assume  $|S| > 2$ . Let  $A$  be a 2-atom of  $S$  containing 0 and suppose that  $|A| > 2$ .

We use the above notation with  $Y = S$ , namely,  $N_i(S) = N_A(S + (i-1)A)$ . By definition of  $\kappa_2(S)$  and  $m$  we have  $|S + A| = |A| + |S| + m$ , so that  $|N_1(S)| = |A| + m$ .

1. Suppose first  $|A| = 3$ , so that  $N_1(S) = |A| + 3$ .

By Lemma 13 and Lemma 14, if  $S + iA \neq \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$ ,  $i \geq 1$ , then  $(S + iA, A)$  is a 2-surjective pair. Therefore  $N_i(S) = N_i^{A^*}(S)$  for  $i \geq 2$ . If  $N_i(S) \neq \emptyset$ , then Lemma 12 implies  $N_i(S) - A^* \subset N_{i-1}(S)$ . By the Cauchy-Davenport theorem this implies, for all  $i \geq 2$  such that  $N_i(S) \neq \emptyset$ ,

$$|N_i(S)| \leq |N_{i-1}(S)| - 1.$$

Therefore,  $|N_i(S)| \leq (m+3) - (i-1) = m+4-i$  and  $N_i(S) = \emptyset$  for  $i \geq m+4$ . Hence,  $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z} = \cup_{i=0}^{m+3} N_i(X)$  which implies

$$|S| \geq p - \sum_{i=1}^{m+3} |N_i(S)| \geq p - \frac{(m+3)(m+4)}{2},$$

as claimed.

2. Suppose now that  $h+1 = |A| > 3$ . Let us write  $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z} = \cup_{i=0}^k N_i(X)$ , so that we have

$$|S| = p - \sum_{i=1}^k |N_i(S)|.$$

By Lemma 13 and Lemma 14, if  $S + iA \neq \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$ ,  $i \geq 1$ , then  $(S + iA, A)$  is an  $h$ -surjective pair. Therefore  $N_i(S) = N_i^{A^*}(S)$  for  $i \geq 2$ . If  $N_i(S) \neq \emptyset$ , then Lemma 12 implies  $N_i(S) - A^* \subset N_{i-1}(S)$ . Since  $A^*$  is a Sidon set with more than 2 elements, it is not an arithmetic progression. By Vosper's theorem this implies, for all  $i \geq 2$  such that  $|N_i(S)| > 1$ ,

$$|N_i(S)| \leq |N_{i-1}(S)| - h.$$

Therefore,  $|N_2(S)| \leq m + |A| - h = m + 1$ , and if  $k \geq 3$ ,

- (i)  $|N_i(S)| \leq (m + 1) - (i - 2)h$  for all  $i$  such that  $3 \leq i \leq k - 1$ , and
- (ii) either  $|N_k(S)| = 1$  and  $|N_{k-1}(S)| = h$  or  $|N_k(S)| \leq (m + 1) - (k - 2)h$ .

In every case we get  $k \leq 2 + (m + 1)/h$ .

By Proposition 11,  $|N_1(S)| = m + |A| \leq 2m + 3$ ; therefore, if  $k = 2$  we get

$$|N_1(S)| + |N_2(S)| \leq 3m + 4$$

and it is routinely checked that this is always smaller than  $\binom{m+4}{2}$ .

If  $k \geq 3$  we get

$$\sum_{i=1}^k |N_i(S)| \leq (2m + 3) + (m + 1)(k - 1) - h \frac{(k - 2)(k - 1)}{2} + 1$$

which gives, since we have supposed  $h \geq 2$ ,

$$\sum_{i=1}^k |N_i(S)| \leq (2m + 4) + (k - 1)[(m + 1) - (k - 2)] \leq (2m + 4) + (k - 1)m,$$

and, since  $k - 1 \leq 1 + (m + 1)/h$ , we get

$$\sum_{i=1}^k |N_i(S)| \leq (3m + 4) + m(m + 1)/2$$

which is less than  $\binom{m+4}{2}$ .

This concludes the proof. ■

#### 4. A Proof of Theorem 6: Discussion

Suppose  $S$  is a subset of  $\mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$  satisfying the conditions of Theorem 6 and suppose there exists  $T \subset \mathbb{Z}/p\mathbb{Z}$  such that  $2 \leq |T|$ ,  $|S + T| \leq p - 2$ , and  $|S + T| \leq |S| + |T| + m$ . Then, without loss of generality we may suppose  $0 \in S$ , and  $S$  is a 2-separable set for which  $\kappa_2(S) \leq |S| + m$ . Let  $A$  be a 2-atom of  $S$  containing 0. By Theorem 15 we have  $|A| = 2$  and therefore

$$|S + A| \leq |S| + |A| + m = |S| + m + 2.$$



Let  $A = \{0, a\}$ . Let  $S = S_1 \cup \dots \cup S_h$  be a partition of  $S$  into arithmetic progressions of difference  $a$  such that  $(S_i + a) \cap S_j = \emptyset$  for each pair of different subscripts  $i, j$ . Then,

$$|S + A| = \sum_{i=1}^h |S_i + \{0, a\}| = |S| + h,$$

which implies  $h \leq m + 2$  and Theorem 6 is proved.

We now show that the term  $\binom{m+4}{2}$  in Theorem 6 cannot be reduced. First consider the following example. Let  $p$  be a prime number of the form  $p = 3b + 1$  for some positive integer  $b$  and let  $S = [0, b - 1] \cup [b + 1, 2b - 2] \cup [2b + 1, 3b - 3]$  and  $A = \{0, 1, b\}$ . Then  $|S + A| = |S| + |A|$ , i.e.  $|N_S(A)| = |S|$ . Note that  $|S| = p - 6 = \binom{4+0}{2}$ . Note also that  $|N_S(\{0, x\})| \geq |S| + 1$  for any  $x \neq 0$ , since otherwise Vosper's theorem would imply that  $S$  is an arithmetic progression of difference  $x$ , which can be easily checked not to be the case. This shows that 2-atoms of size more than 2 do exist. Furthermore, by Proposition 11, the size of a 2-atom is at most 3 in this example, so that  $A$  is actually a 2-atom of  $S$ .

This example can be generalized to sets  $S$  with  $\kappa_2(S) = |S| + m$  for  $m > 0$  and for which  $\alpha_2(S) = 3$ . They are built with a similar pattern. Let  $b$  be a positive integer such that  $p = (m + 3)b + 1$  is a prime number. Let

$$S = [0, b - 1] \cup [b + 1, 2b - 2] \cup [2b + 1, 3b - 3] \cup \dots \cup [(m + 2)b + 1, (m + 3)b - (m + 3)].$$

Again set  $A = \{0, 1, b\}$ . We have  $|S + A| = |S| + |A| + m$ . Note that  $|S| = p - \binom{m+4}{2}$ , i.e. exactly the bound of Theorem 6. It is not quite clear to us how to formally prove that  $d_2(S) > |S| + m$ , or, equivalently, that  $S$  is not the union of  $k$  arithmetic progressions for  $k \leq m + 2$ , but this can be checked by exhaustive search for many values of  $m$  as long as  $p$  is not too large. In these cases we actually have  $\kappa_2(S) = |S| + m$ . This is because the second part of the proof of Theorem 15 shows us that atoms of size  $> 3$  are incompatible with  $|S|$  achieving the bound  $p - \binom{m+4}{2}$ : therefore  $A$  actually is a 2-atom.

The above examples are sets  $S$

- (i) that satisfy  $|S + T| = |S| + |T| + m < p - 2$  for some set  $T$  containing more than one element,
- (ii) that are the union of  $m + 3$  arithmetic progressions with the same difference but not less.

Additional examples of sets  $S$  of cardinality larger than  $p - \binom{m+4}{2}$  can be found

- (i) that are the union of  $m + k$  arithmetic progressions but not less, for  $k > 3$ ,
- (ii) for which we also have  $|S + T| = |S| + |T| + m < p - 2$  for some set  $T$  containing more than one element.

As a simple example, take  $A = \{0, 1, 3, 13, 41\} \subset \mathbb{Z}/91\mathbb{Z}$ . Then translates  $S$  of  $\mathbb{Z}/91\mathbb{Z} \setminus (A + A)$  have  $\kappa_2(S) = |S| + 5$ ,  $\alpha_2(S) = 5$ , and  $S$  is not the union of less than 9 arithmetic progressions.

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