Constructing skew left braces whose additive group has trivial centre

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Abstract. A complete description of all possible multiplicative groups of finite skew left braces whose additive group has trivial centre is given. As a consequence, some earlier results of Tsang can be improved and an answer to an open question set by Tsang at Ischia Group Theory 2024 Conference is provided.

1 Introduction

Skew brace structure plays a key role in the combinatorial theory of the Yang–Baxter equation. Skew left braces, introduced in [8], can be regarded as extensions of Jacobson radical rings and show connections with several areas of mathematics such as triply factorized groups and Hopf–Galois structures (see [1, 3, 4])

Skew left braces classify solutions of the Yang–Baxter equation (see [8]). This connection to the Yang–Baxter equation motivates the search for constructions of skew braces and classification results.

Recall that a *skew left brace* is a set endowed with two group structures $(B, +)$, not necessarily abelian, and $(B, \cdot)$ which are linked by the distributive-like law $a(b + c) = ab - a + ac$ for $a, b, c \in B$.

In the sequel, the word *brace* refers to a skew left brace.

Given a brace B, there is an action of the multiplicative group on the additive group by means of the so-called *lambda map*:

$$\lambda: a \in (B, \cdot) \longmapsto \lambda_a \in \mathrm{Aut}(B, +), \quad \lambda_a(b) = -a + ab, \text{ for all } a, b \in B.$$

Braces can be described in terms of regular subgroups of the holomorph of the additive group. Recall that the holomorph of a group G is the semidirect product $\mathrm{Hol}(G) = [G]\mathrm{Aut}(G)$. Let B be a brace and set $K = (B, +)$. Then $H = \{(a, \lambda_a) \mid a \in B\}$ is a regular subgroup of the holomorph $\mathrm{Hol}(K)$ isomorphic to $(B, \cdot)$ (see [8, Theorem 4.2]). If we consider the subgroup $S = KH \leq \mathrm{Hol}(K)$, then

$$S = KH = KE = HE,$$

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where $E = \{(0, \lambda_b) \mid b \in B\}$ and $C_E(K) = K \cap E = H \cap E = 1$. We call $\mathsf{S}(B) = (S, K, H, E)$ the *small trifactorized group* associated with B.

In [9], Tsang showed it is possible to construct finite braces by just looking at the automorphism group of the additive group instead of looking at the whole holomorph. This is a significant improvement both from an algebraic and computational approach.

Theorem 1 (see [9, Corollary 2.2])   *If the finite group G is the multiplicative group of a brace with additive group K, then there exist two subgroups X and Y of $\mathrm{Aut}(K)$ that are quotients of G satisfying*

$$XY = X\mathrm{Inn}(K) = Y\mathrm{Inn}(K).$$

She looked for a sort of converse of the above theorem in the case of finite braces with an additive group of trivial centre, and proved the following.

Theorem 2 (see [9, Proposition 2.7])   *Suppose that the centre of a finite group $(K, +)$ is trivial and let P be a subgroup of $\mathrm{Aut}(K)$ containing $\mathrm{Inn}(K)$. If $P = XY$ is a factorization by two subgroups X and Y such that $X \cap Y = 1$, $X\mathrm{Inn}(K) = Y\mathrm{Inn}(K) = P$ and X splits over $X \cap \mathrm{Inn}(K)$, then there exists a brace B whose additive group is isomorphic to $(K, +)$ and whose multiplicative group is isomorphic to a semidirect product $[X \cap \mathrm{Inn}(K)]Y$ for a suitable choice of the action $\alpha \colon Y \longrightarrow \mathrm{Aut}(X \cap \mathrm{Inn}(K))$.*

The above two theorems are the key to prove the main results of [9, 10].

In [11], Tsang posed the following question.

Question 3   *Is it possible to extend Theorem 2 by dropping the assumption that X splits over $X \cap \mathrm{Inn}(K)$?*

The aim of this article is to give a complete characterization of the multiplicative groups of a brace with additive group of trivial centre. As a consequence, we present an improved version of Theorem 2 (on which the main result of [9] heavily depends), and we give an affirmative answer to Question 3.

Theorem A   *Let K be a finite group with trivial centre. For every brace B with additive group $K = (B, +)$ and multiplicative group $C = (B, \cdot)$, there exist subgroups X and Y of $Aut(K)$ satisfying the following properties:*

(a) $XY = X\mathrm{Inn}(K) = Y\mathrm{Inn}(K)$,

(b)   *there are two subgroups N and M of $\mathrm{Inn}(K)$ such that $N \trianglelefteq X$ and $M \trianglelefteq Y$,*

(c)   *there exists an isomorphism $\gamma \colon Y/M \longrightarrow X/N$ such that*

$$\mathrm{Inn}(K) = \{xy^{-1} \mid x \in X, \ y \in Y, \ \gamma(yM) = xN\},$$

(d) $|K| = |X||M| = |Y||N|$.

In this case,

(e)   *C has two normal subgroups T and V with $T \cap V = 1$, $X \cong C/T$ and $Y \cong C/V$, that is, C is a subdirect product of X and Y.*

Conversely, for every pair X, Y of subgroups of $\mathrm{Aut}(K)$ *satisfying conditions (a)–(d), there exists a brace B with* $K = (B, +)$ *and* $C = (B, \cdot)$ *satisfying (e).*

Corollary 4   *Let K be a finite group with trivial centre. Suppose that there exist subgroups X, Y of* $\mathrm{Aut}(K)$ *such that* $X \cap Y = 1$ *and* $XY = X\mathrm{Inn}(K) = Y\mathrm{Inn}(K)$. *Then there exists a brace with additive group K and a multiplicative group that is isomorphic to a subdirect product of X and Y.*

Proof   Assume that $X \cap Y = 1$. Consider $N = X \cap \mathrm{Inn}(K)$, $M = Y \cap \mathrm{Inn}(K)$. Then $|X||M| = |K|$ as $|X||Y| = |\mathrm{Inn}(K)||Y|/|Y \cap \mathrm{Inn}(K)|$. Analogously, $|Y||N| = |K|$. Moreover, since

$$Y/M \cong Y\mathrm{Inn}(K)/\mathrm{Inn}(K) = X\mathrm{Inn}(K)/\mathrm{Inn}(K) \cong X/N,$$

we have an isomorphism $\gamma\colon Y/M \longrightarrow X/N$ given by $\gamma(bM) = aN$, where $b \in Y$, $a \in X$ such that $ab^{-1} \in \mathrm{Inn}(K)$. Since $X \cap Y = 1$, for each $k \in K$, conjugation by k can be expressed as ab^{-1}, for a unique $a \in X$ and $b \in Y$. Then, the groups X and Y satisfy Statements (a)–(d) of Theorem A, and therefore, there exists a brace whose additive group is K and whose multiplicative group is isomorphic to a subdirect product of X and Y. ∎

Corollary 4 also allows to give a considerably shorter proof of the main results of [9, 10] about the almost simple groups K that can appear as additive groups of braces with soluble multiplicative group. By Corollary 4, it is enough to find two subgroups X and Y of $\mathrm{Aut}(K)$ such that $X \cap Y = 1$ and $XY = X\mathrm{Inn}(K) = Y\mathrm{Inn}(K)$. Therefore, Codes 2, 3, and 4 in the proof of [9, Theorem 1.3] can be avoided, as well as checking in every case that the subgroup X splits over $X \cap \mathrm{Inn}(K)$.

In Section 3, we present a worked example of a construction of a brace with additive group $K = \mathrm{PSL}_2(25)$ by means of subgroups X and Y of $\mathrm{Aut}(K)$ satisfying all conditions of Theorem A but $X \cap Y \neq 1$.

2   Proof of Theorem A

Proof of Theorem A   Suppose that B is a brace with additive group K and lambda map λ. Let $H = \{(b, \lambda_b) \mid b \in B\}$ be the regular subgroup of $\mathrm{Hol}(K)$ appearing in the small trifactorized group $\mathsf{S}(B) = (S, K, H, E)$ associated with B. Recall that H is isomorphic to the multiplicative group $(C, \cdot)$ of B, $E = \{(0, \lambda_b) \mid b \in B\} \leq \mathrm{Hol}(K)$, and $S = KH = KE = HE$ with $K \cap E = H \cap E = 1$.

Observe that S acts on K by means of the homomorphism $\pi\colon (b, \omega) \in S \mapsto \omega \in \mathrm{Aut}(K)$. On the other hand, S also acts on K by conjugation. In fact, this action naturally induces a homomorphism $\alpha\colon S \to \mathrm{Aut}(K)$. In particular, for every $b \in B$ and every $k \in K$, $(0, \lambda_b)(k, 1)(0, \lambda_b)^{-1} = (\lambda_b(k), 1)$, that is, $\alpha(0, \lambda_b) = \lambda_b = \pi(0, \lambda_b)$. Thus, $\alpha(E) = \pi(E) = \pi(H)$.

The restrictions of π and α to H induce two actions of H on K, with respective kernels $\mathrm{Ker}\,\pi|_H = K \cap H \trianglelefteq H$ and $\mathrm{Ker}\,\alpha|_H = \mathrm{C}_H(K) \trianglelefteq H$. Moreover, it holds that

$$\mathrm{Ker}\,\pi|_H \cap \mathrm{Ker}\,\alpha|_H = K \cap H \cap \mathrm{C}_H(K) = K \cap H \cap \mathrm{C}_S(K)$$
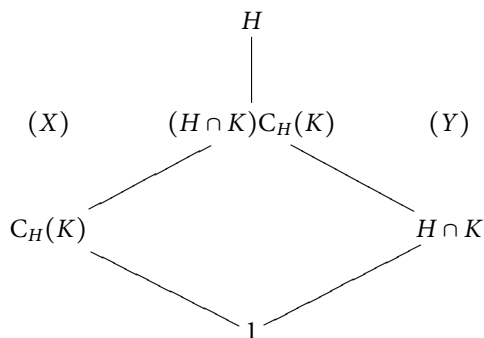$$= H \cap \mathrm{C}_K(K) = H \cap \mathrm{Z}(K) = 1 \quad \text{(see Figure 1)}.$$

Figure 1: Structure of the multiplicative group in Theorem A.

Let $X := \alpha(H)$ and $Y := \pi(H) = \alpha(E) = \{\lambda_b \mid b \in B\}$ such that $X \cong H/C_H(K)$ and $Y \cong H/(K \cap H)$. Since $\alpha(K) = \mathrm{Inn}(K)$, we have that

$$\alpha(S) = \alpha(HE) = \alpha(KH) = \alpha(KE)$$
$$= \alpha(H)\alpha(E) = \alpha(K)\alpha(H) = \alpha(K)\alpha(E)$$
$$= XY = (\mathrm{Inn}(K))X = (\mathrm{Inn}(K))Y.$$

Take $R := (H \cap K)C_H(K) \trianglelefteq H$. Then, $N := \alpha(R) \trianglelefteq \alpha(H) = X$ and $M := \pi(R) \trianglelefteq \pi(H) = Y$. It follows that $N = \alpha(H \cap K) \le \alpha(K) = \mathrm{Inn}(K)$. On the other hand, $M = \pi(C_H(K))$ and if $(b, \lambda_b) \in C_H(K)$, then for every $k \in K$,

$$(b, \lambda_b)(k, 1)(b, \lambda_b)^{-1} = (b + \lambda_b(k) - b, 1) = (k, 1),$$

that is, λ_b coincides with the inner automorphism of K induced by $-b$. Thus, $M \le \mathrm{Inn}(K)$. Moreover, we see that

$$Y/M \cong (H/\mathrm{Ker}\,\pi|_H)/(R/\mathrm{Ker}\,\pi|_H) \cong H/R$$
$$\cong (H/\mathrm{Ker}\,\alpha|_H)/(R/\mathrm{Ker}\,\alpha|_H) \cong X/N;$$

here the isomorphism $\gamma \colon Y/M \longrightarrow X/N$ is given by $\gamma(\lambda_b M) = \alpha_b \lambda_b N$, where α_b is the inner automorphism of K induced by b. Given $a \in \gamma(\lambda_b M)$, we have that $a\lambda_b^{-1} \in \alpha_b N \subseteq \mathrm{Inn}(K)$. Furthermore, given $x \in \mathrm{Inn}(K)$, we have that $x = \alpha_b$ for some $b \in B$ and so $\gamma(\lambda_b M) = \alpha_b \lambda_b N = x\lambda_b N$ with $(\alpha_b \lambda_b)\lambda_b^{-1} = x$.

Since $\mathrm{Ker}\,\pi|_H \cap \mathrm{Ker}\,\alpha|_H = (H \cap K) \cap C_H(K) = 1$, we have that $|R| = |H \cap K||C_H(K)|$ and $|M| = |R/(H \cap K)| = |C_H(K)|$, $|N| = |R/C_H(K)| = |H \cap K|$. As $|X| = |K|/|C_H(K)|$ and $|Y| = |K|/|H \cap K|$, the claim about the order follows.

Item (e) follows by the fact that H is isomorphic to the multiplicative group $(C, \cdot)$ of B, so that T and V are respectively isomorphic to $\mathrm{Ker}\,\alpha|_H$ and $\mathrm{Ker}\,\pi|_H$.

Now, suppose that $\text{Aut}(K)$ possesses subgroups X and Y satisfying conditions (a)–(d). Let

$$W = \{(x, y) \mid x \in X,\ y \in Y,\ \gamma(yM) = xN\}$$

be a subdirect product of X and Y with amalgamated factor group $Y/M \cong X/N$ (see [6, Chapter A, Definition 19.2]). By [6, Chapter A, Proposition 19.1], and the hypothesis, we have that $|W| = |K|$. Since $Z(K)$ is trivial, the map $\zeta: K \longrightarrow \text{Inn}(K)$, where $\zeta(k)$ is the inner automorphism of K induced by k, is an isomorphism. By hypothesis, the map $W \longrightarrow \text{Inn}(K)$ given by $(x, y) \longmapsto xy^{-1}$ is surjective. Since $|W| = |\text{Inn}(K)| = |K|$, it is a bijection. We can consider $H = \{(b, y) \mid (x, y) \in W,\ \zeta(b) = xy^{-1}\} \subseteq \text{Hol}(K)$. Given $(b, y), (b_1, y_1) \in H$, we have that $(b, y)(b_1, y_1) = (b + y(b_1), yy_1)$, $\zeta(b) = xy^{-1}$, and $\zeta(b_1) = x_1 y_1^{-1}$ with $(x, y), (x_1, y_1) \in B$. Then

$$\zeta(b + y(b_1)) = \zeta(b)\zeta(y(b_1)) = \zeta(b)y\zeta(b_1)y^{-1} = xy^{-1}yx_1 y_1^{-1} y^{-1} = (xx_1)(yy_1)^{-1}$$

with $(xx_1, yy_1) = (x, y)(x_1, y_1) \in W$. Furthermore, if $(b, y) \in H$, with $\zeta(b) = xy^{-1}$, we have that $(b, y)^{-1} = (y^{-1}(-b), y^{-1})$ and

$$\zeta(y^{-1}(-b)) = y^{-1}\zeta(-b)y = y^{-1}\zeta(b)^{-1}y = y^{-1}yx^{-1}y = x^{-1}(y^{-1})^{-1}$$

with $(x^{-1}, y^{-1}) = (x, y)^{-1} \in W$. We conclude that H is a subgroup of $\text{Hol}(K)$. As the projection onto its first component is surjective, it turns out that it H is a regular subgroup of $\text{Hol}(K)$ by [2, Proposition 2.5] and so it is isomorphic to the multiplicative group of a brace with additive group K (see [8, Theorem 4.2]).

We finish the proof by showing that the map $\phi: H \to W$ given by $(b, y) \longmapsto (\zeta(b)y, y)$, where $\zeta(b) = xy^{-1}$ and $(x, y) \in W$, is an isomorphism. Indeed, if $\zeta(b) = xy^{-1}$, $\zeta(b_1) = x_1 y_1^{-1}$, where $(x, y), (x_1, y_1) \in W$, we have that

$$\phi(b, y)\phi(b_1, y_1) = (\zeta(b)y, y)(\zeta(b_1)y_1, y_1) = (x, y)(x_1, y_1) = (xx_1, yy_1),$$
$$\phi((b, y)(b_1, y_1)) = \phi(b + y(b_1), yy_1) = (\zeta(b + y(b_1))yy_1, yy_1)$$
$$= (\zeta(b)y\zeta(b_1)y^{-1}yy_1, yy_1) = (xy^{-1}yx_1 y_1^{-1} y_1, yy_1)$$
$$= (xx_1, yy_1).$$

We conclude that ϕ is a group homomorphism. Assume that $\phi(b, y) = (\zeta(b)y, y) = (1, 1)$, with $\zeta(b) = xy^{-1}$ and $(x, y) \in W$, then $y = 1$ and so $\zeta(b) = x = 1$, which implies that $b = 0$. Consequently, ϕ is injective. As W and H are finite and have the same order, we obtain that ϕ is an isomorphism. Since C is isomorphic to H we have just proved that (e) holds for C. ∎

3 A worked example

In general, we do not have that $X \cap Y = 1$. Let us consider $K = \text{PSL}_2(25)$. Its automorphism group $A = \text{Aut}(K)$ is generated by $\text{Inn}(K)$, the diagonal automorphism d induced by the conjugation by the matrix

$$D = \begin{bmatrix} \zeta & 0 \\ 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix} \in \text{GL}_2(25),$$

where ζ is a primitive 24th-root of unity of $GF(25)$, and the field automorphism f. The group A possesses a subgroup X generated by the inner automorphisms c_1, c_2, and c_3 induced by the matrices

$$C_1 = \begin{bmatrix} \zeta^4 & 0 \\ 0 & \zeta^{20} \end{bmatrix}, \qquad C_2 = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ \zeta & 1 \end{bmatrix}, \qquad C_3 = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 1 \end{bmatrix},$$

respectively, and df. We have that c_1 has order 3, $\langle c_2, c_3 \rangle$ is an elementary abelian group of order 25, c_1 normalises $\langle c_2, c_3 \rangle$, $(df)c_1(df)^{-1} = c_1^{-1}$, df has order 8, and df normalizes $\langle c_2, c_3 \rangle$. Then the group $\langle df, c_1, c_2, c_3 \rangle$ has order 600.

Let u_1 and u_2 be the inner automorphisms induced by the conjugation by

$$U_1 = \begin{bmatrix} \zeta^3 & \zeta^{16} \\ \zeta^{13} & \zeta^{11} \end{bmatrix}, \qquad U_2 = \begin{bmatrix} \zeta^5 & \zeta^5 \\ \zeta^9 & \zeta^{22} \end{bmatrix}.$$

Let $Y = \langle u_1, df u_2 \rangle$. We have that u_1 has order 13. Let

$$R = \begin{bmatrix} \zeta & 0 \\ 0 & \zeta \end{bmatrix} \in Z(GL_2(25)), \qquad T = \begin{bmatrix} 3 & 0 \\ 4 & 2 \end{bmatrix}$$

and let t be the automorphism induced by conjugation by T. Then $(df u_2)^2 = df u_2 df u_2 = d^f u_2 d^5 u_2$ is the automorphism induced by conjugation by

$$(1) \qquad\qquad\qquad DU_2^{(5)}D^5U_2 = R^{15}T,$$

where $U_2^{(5)}$ denotes the matrix whose entries are obtained from the entries of U_2 by applying the Frobenius field automorphism, that is, $(df u_2)^2 = t$. As $(R^{15}T)^2 = R^3$, we conclude that $df u_2$ has order 4. We can also check that $(df u_2)u_1(df u_2)^{-1} = u_1^8$. It follows that Y has order 52.

By [5], X and Y are maximal subgroups of the almost simple group $Inn(K)\langle df \rangle$. Observe that $(df)^4 c_3^2 = (df df)^2 c_3^2 = (dd^5)^2 c_3^2 = d^{12} c_3^2$ is induced by $D^{12}C_3^2 = R^{18}T$, consequently, $(df)^4 c_3^2 = t$. This, together with Equation (1), shows that $t \in X \cap Y$. We note that $Inn(K)X = Inn(K)Y = Inn(K)\langle df \rangle$. Moreover, $|X \cap Y|$ divides $\gcd(|X|, |Y|) = 4$. If $|X \cap Y| = 4$, then $X \cap Y$ is contained in $X \cap Inn(K)$, but it is not contained in $Y \cap Inn(K)$. This shows that $|X \cap Y| \leq 2$. Hence $|X \cap Y| = 2$. As $XY \subseteq Inn(K)\langle df \rangle$,

$$15\,600 = |Inn(K)\langle df \rangle| \geq |XY| = \frac{|X||Y|}{|X \cap Y|} = 15\,600 \cdot \frac{2}{|X \cap Y|} = 15\,600,$$

and so $XY = Inn(K)\langle df \rangle$.

Let $N = \langle c_1, c_2, c_3, (df)^2 \rangle \trianglelefteq X$, $M = \langle u_1 \rangle \trianglelefteq Y$. Then $|N| = 150$, $|M| = 13$, $N \leq X \cap Inn(K)$, $M \leq Y \cap Inn(K)$, $Y/M \cong X/N \cong C_4$, and $|K| = |X||M| = |Y||N|$. The isomorphism between Y/M and X/N is given by $\gamma((df u_2)^r M) = (df)^r N$ for $0 \leq r < 4$, and, since $d^6 \in Inn(K)$, it is clear that

$$(df)(dfu_2)^{-1} = c_0 u_0^{-1} \in \text{Inn}(K),$$
$$(df)^2(dfu_2)^{-2} = d^6 t^{-1} \in \text{Inn}(K),$$
$$(df)^3(dfu_2)^{-3} = (df)(d^6 t^{-1} u_2^{-1})(df)^{-1} \in \text{Inn}(K).$$

Let $z \in XY \cap \text{Inn}(K)$. Recall that $X \cap Y = \langle t \rangle$. Then there exist $x \in X$, $y \in Y$ with $z = xy^{-1} = (xt)(yt)^{-1}$. We observe that $t = (df)^4 c_3^2 \in N$, but $t \notin M$ by order considerations. Given $x \in X$, $y \in Y$, there exist $r, s \in \{0, 1, 2, 3\}$ such that $xN = (df)^r N$ and $yM = (dfc_3)^s M$. We also observe that $x \in \text{Inn}(K)$ if, and only if, $y \in \text{Inn}(K)$. To prove that we can choose $x \in X$, $y \in Y$ such that $z = xy^{-1}$ and $\gamma(yM) = xN$, it is enough to prove that for such a choice we have that $z = xy^{-1}$ and $r = s$. Note that if $x \in N$, then $r = 0$; if $x \in \text{Inn}(K) \backslash N$, then $r = 2$; and if $x \notin \text{Inn}(K)$, then $r \in \{1, 3\}$. Analogously, if $y \in M$, then $s = 0$; if $y \in \text{Inn}(K) \backslash M$, then $s = 2$; and if $y \notin \text{Inn}(K)$, then $s \in \{1, 3\}$. We also have that $tM = (dfu_2)^2 M$ and that $tN = N$, as $t \in \text{Inn}(K)$, $t \in N$, but $t \notin M$. If $x \in N$ and $y \in M$, we can choose $r = s = 0$ and $\gamma(yM) = xN$. Suppose that $x \in N$ and $y \notin M$. Then $y \in \text{Inn}(K)$ and so, $xN = N$ and $yM = (dfu_2)^2 M$. Consequently, $xtN = N$, $ytN = N$, and $\gamma(ytN) = xtN$. Suppose that $x \notin N$ and $y \in M$. We have that $x \in \text{Inn}(K)$ and so, $xN = (df)^2 N$ and $yM = M$. It follows that $xtN = (df)^2 N$ and $ytM = (dfu_2)^2 M$, that is, $\gamma(ytM) = xtN$. Suppose that $x, y \in \text{Inn}(K)$, $x \notin N$, and $y \notin M$. Then $xN = (df)^2 N$, $yM = (dfu_2)^2 M$, and $\gamma(yM) = xN$. Finally, suppose that x and $y \notin M$. Then $xN = (df)^r N$ and $yM = (dfu_2)^s M$, with $r, s \in \{1, 3\}$. If $r = s$, then $\gamma(yM) = xN$. If $r \neq s$, then $xtN = (df)^r N$ and $ytM = (dfu_2)^{s+2} M$, with $r \equiv s + 2 \pmod 4$. Thus $\gamma(ytM) = xtN$.

It follows that X, Y satisfy all conditions of Theorem A. We can also check with GAP [7] all this information about these subgroups.

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