# Around some extensions of Casas-Alvero conjecture for non-polynomial functions

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**Abstract.** We show that two natural extensions of the real Casas-Alvero conjecture in the non-polynomial setting do not hold.

## 1  Introduction and main results

The Casas-Alvero conjecture affirms that if a complex polynomial $P$ of degree $n > 1$ shares roots with all its derivatives, $P^{(k)}, k = 1, 2 \ldots, n-1$, then there exist two complex numbers, $a$ and $b \neq 0$, such that $P(z) = b(z-a)^n$. Notice that, in principle, the common root between $P$ and each $P^{(k)}$ might depend on $k$. Casas-Alvero arrived to this problem at the turn of this century, when he was working in his paper [1] trying to obtain an irreducibility criterion for two variable power series with complex coefficients. See [2] for an explanation of the problem in his own words.

Although several authors have got partial answers, to the best of our knowledge the conjecture remains open. For $n \leq 4$ the conjecture is a simple consequence of the wonderful Gauss-Lucas Theorem ([6]). In 2006 it was proved in [5], by using Maple, that it is true for $n \leq 8$. Afterwards in [6, 7] it was proved that it holds when $n$ is $p^m, 2p^m, 3p^m$ or $4p^m$, for some prime number $p$ and $m \in \mathbb{N}$. The first cases left open are those where $n = 24, 28$ or $30$. See again [6] for a very interesting survey or [3, 8] for some recent contributions on this question.

Adding the hypotheses that $P$ is a real polynomial and all its $n$ roots, taking into account their multiplicities, are real, the conjecture has a real counterpart, that also remains open. It says that $P(x) = b(x-a)^n$ for some real numbers $a$ and $b \neq 0$. For this real case, the conjecture can be proved easily for $n \leq 4$, simply by using Rolle's Theorem. This tool does not suffice for $n \geq 5$, see for instance [4] for more details, or next section.

Also in the real case, in [6] it is proved that if the condition for one of the derivatives of $P$ is removed, then there exist polynomials satisfying the remaining $n-2$ conditions, different from $b(x-a)^n$. The construction of some of these polynomials presented in that paper is very nice and is a consequence of the Brouwer's fixed point Theorem in a suitable context.

Finally, it is known that if the conjecture holds in $\mathbb{C}$, then it is true over all fields of characteristic 0. On the other hand, it is not true over all fields of characteristic $p$, see again [7]. For instance, consider $P(x) = x^2(x^2 + 1)$ in characteristic 5 with roots $0, 0, 2$ and $3$. Then $P'(x) = 2x(2x^2 + 1)$, $P''(x) = 12x^2 + 2 = 2(x^2 + 1)$ and $P'''(x) = 4x$ and all them share roots with $P$.

The aim of this note is to present two natural extensions of the real Casas-Alvero conjecture to smooth functions and show that none of them holds.

**Question 1.** *Fix $1 < n \in \mathbb{N}$. Let $F$ be a class $\mathcal{C}^n$ real function such that $F^{(n)}(x) \neq 0$ for all $x \in \mathbb{R}$, and has $n$ real zeroes, taking into account their multiplicities. Assume that $F$ shares zeroes with all its derivatives, $F^{(k)}, k = 1, 2 \ldots, n - 1$. Is it true that $F(x) = b(f(x))^n$ for some $0 \neq b \in \mathbb{R}$ and some $f$, a class $\mathcal{C}^n$ real function, that has exactly one simple zero?*

Notice that one of the hypotheses of the real Casas-Alvero conjecture can be reformulated as follows: The polynomial $F$ shares roots with all its derivatives but one, precisely the one corresponding to its degree. Trivially, this is so, because all the derivatives of order higher than $n$ are identically zero. The second question that we consider is:

**Question 2.** *Fix $1 < n \in \mathbb{N}$. Let $F$ be a real analytic function that shares zeroes with all its derivatives but one, say $F^{(n)}$. Is it true that $F(x) = b(f(x))^n$ for some $0 \neq b \in \mathbb{R}$ and some real analytic function $f$, that has exactly one simple zero?*

**Theorem A.** *(i) The answer to the Question 1 is "yes" for $n \leq 4$ and "no" for $n = 5$.*
*(ii) The answer to the Question 2 is already "no" for $n = 2$.*

Our result reinforces the intuitive idea that Casas-Alvero conjecture is mainly a question related with the rigid structure of the polynomials.

# 2   Proof of Theorem A

(*i*) The answer to Question 1 is "yes" for $n = 2, 3, 4$ because the proof of the real Casas-Alvero conjecture for the same values of $n$, based on the Rolle's Theorem and given in [4], does not uses at all that $P$ is a polynomial. Let us adapt it to our setting. Since $F^{(n)}$ does not vanish we know that $F$ has exactly $n$ real zeroes, taking into account their multiplicites. Moreover we know that $F$ has to have at least a double zero, that without loss of generality can be taken as 0. Next we can do a case by case study to discard all situations except that $F$ has only a zero and it is of multiplicity $n$. For the sake of brevity, we give all the details only in the most difficult case, $n = 4$.

Assume, to arrive to a contradiction, that $n = 4$, $F$ is under the hypotheses of Question 1 and $x = 0$ is not a zero of multiplicity four. Notice that by Rolle's theorem, for $k = 1, 2, 3$, each $F^{(k)}$ has exactly $4 - k$ zeroes, taking into account their multiplicities. Moreover, the only zero of $F'''$ must be one of the zeroes of $F$.

If $F''(0) = 0$ and $F'''(0) \neq 0$ then $F$ has only another zero at $x = a$ and, without loss of generality, we can assume that $a > 0$. Applying three times Rolle's theorem we get that $F'''(b) = 0$ for some $b \in (0, a)$ which is a contradiction with the hypotheses. If $F''(0) \neq 0$ then $F$ has two more zeroes counting multiplicities. There are three possibilities. The first one is that there is $a > 0$ such that $F(a) = F'(a) = 0$. In this case, applying two times Rolle's theorem we obtain that there

exist $b, c \in (0, a)$ with $F''(b) = F''(c) = 0$ and they are the only zeroes of $F''$. This fact gives again a contradiction because none of them is a zero of $F$. The second one is that there exist $a_1, a_2 \in \mathbb{R}$ with $0 \in (a_1, a_2)$ such that $F(a_1) = F(a_2) = 0$. Also in this case, by applying two times Rolle's theorem we obtain that there exist $b, c \in (a_1, a_2)$ such that $0 \in (b, c)$ and $F''(b) = F''(c) = 0$ giving us the desired contradiction. Lastly, assume that the other two zeroes of $F$ are $a_1$ and $a_2$, with $0 < a_1 < a_2$. By Rolle's Theorem the zeroes of $F'$ are $0, b_1$ and $b_2$ and satisfy $0 < b_1 < a_1 < b_2 < a_2$. Then, since $F''$ has to have two zeroes, say $c_1, c_2$, and they satisfy $0 < c_1 < b_1 < c_2 < b_2$, the hypotheses force that $c_2 = a_1$. Hence the zero of $F'''$ has to be between $c_1$ and $c_2 = a_1$, that is in particular in $(0, a_1)$, interval that contains no zero of $F$, arriving once more to the desired contradiction.

In short, we have proved for $n \leq 4$, that $F(x) = x^n G(x)$, for some class $\mathcal{C}^n$ function $G$, that does not vanish. Hence

$$F(x) = \operatorname{sign}(G(0)) \left( x \sqrt[n]{\frac{G(x)}{\operatorname{sign}(G(0))}} \right)^n = b(f(x))^n,$$

where $f$ has only one zero, $x = 0$, that is simple, as we wanted to prove.

To find a map $F$ for which the answer to Question 1 is "no" we consider $n = 5$ and a configuration of zeroes of $F$ and its derivatives proposed in [4] as the simplest one, compatible with the hypotheses of the Casas-Alvero conjecture and Rolle's Theorem. Specifically, we will search for a function $F$, of class at least $\mathcal{C}^5$, with the five zeroes $0, 0, 1, c, d$, to be fixed, satisfying $0 < 1 < c < d$, and moreover

$$F'(0) = 0, \quad F''(1) = 0, \quad F'''(c) = 0, \quad F^{(4)}(1) = 0, \tag{1}$$

and such that $F^{(5)}$ does not vanish. Notice that $F'(0) = 0$ is not a new restriction.

We start assuming that $F^{(5)}(x) = r - \sin(x)$, for some $r > 1$ to be determined. By imposing that conditions (1) hold, together with $F(0) = 0$, we get that

$$F(x) = \int_0^x \int_0^u \int_1^w \int_c^z \int_1^y \left( r - \sin(t) \right) \mathrm{d}t \, \mathrm{d}y \, \mathrm{d}z \, \mathrm{d}w \, \mathrm{d}u.$$

Some straightforward computations give that

$$F(x) = \frac{r}{120} x^5 - \frac{r + \cos(1)}{12} x^4 + \frac{2rc - 2\sin(c) + 2\cos(1)c - rc^2}{12} x^3$$
$$+ \frac{6\sin(c) + 2r + 9\cos(1) - 6rc + 3rc^2 - 6\cos(1)c}{12} x^2 - 1 + \cos(x).$$

Imposing now that $F(1) = 0$ we obtain that

$$r = \frac{5\left(8\cos(1)c - 41\cos(1) - 8\sin(c) + 24\right)}{4(5c^2 - 10c + 4)} = R(c).$$

Next we have to impose that $F(c) = 0$. By replacing the above expression of $r$ in $F$ we obtain that

$$F(c) = \frac{G(c)}{96(5c^2 - 10c + 4)},$$

where

$$G(c) = -\,c^2 \left(12\,c^4 - 369\,c^3 + 1437\,c^2 - 1708\,c + 532\right) \cos\left(1\right) - 8\,c^2 \left(c - 1\right) \left(c - 2\right)^2 \sin\left(c\right)$$
$$+ \left(480\,c^2 - 960\,c + 384\right) \cos\left(c\right) - 24\left(c - 1\right) \left(9\,c^4 - 36\,c^3 + 24\,c^2 + 24\,c - 16\right).$$

A carefully study shows that $G$ has exactly one real zero $c_1 \in (17/10, 19/10) = I$, with $c_1 \approx 1.79343096$. To prove its existence it suffices to show that

$$G\left(\frac{17}{10}\right) = -\frac{99211099}{500000}\,\cos\left(1\right) - \frac{18207}{12500}\,\sin\left(\frac{17}{10}\right) + \frac{696}{5}\,\cos\left(\frac{17}{10}\right) + \frac{1583211}{12500} > 0,$$
$$G\left(\frac{19}{10}\right) = -\frac{180110481}{500000}\,\cos\left(1\right) - \frac{3249}{12500}\,\sin\left(\frac{19}{10}\right) + \frac{1464}{5}\,\cos\left(\frac{19}{10}\right) + \frac{3616677}{12500} < 0.$$

By using Taylor's formula we know that for any $c > 0$, $S^-(c) < \sin(c) < S^+(c)$ and $C^-(c) < \cos(c) < C^+(c)$ where

$$S^\pm(c) = c - \frac{c^3}{3!} + \frac{c^5}{5!} - \frac{c^7}{7!} + \frac{c^9}{9!} \pm \frac{c^{11}}{11!} \quad \text{and} \quad C^\pm(c) = 1 - \frac{c^2}{2!} + \frac{c^4}{4!} - \frac{c^6}{6!} + \frac{c^8}{8!} \pm \frac{c^{10}}{10!}.$$

Hence we can replace the values of the trigonometric functions in $G$ by rational numbers to have upper or lower bounds of this function evaluated at 1, 17/10 or 19/10. For instance,

$$0.5403023 \approx \frac{1960649}{3628800} = C^-(1) < \cos(1) < C^+(1) = \frac{280093}{518400} \approx 0.5403028.$$

We obtain that

$$G\left(\frac{17}{10}\right) > -\frac{99211099}{500000}\,C^+\left(1\right) - \frac{18207}{12500}\,S^+\left(\frac{17}{10}\right) + \frac{696}{5}\,C^-\left(\frac{17}{10}\right) + \frac{1583211}{12500}$$
$$= \frac{3444600099561969856969}{49896000000000000000000} > 0$$

and

$$G\left(\frac{19}{10}\right) < -\frac{180110481}{500000}\,C^-\left(1\right) - \frac{3249}{12500}\,S^-\left(\frac{19}{10}\right) + \frac{1464}{5}\,C^+\left(\frac{19}{10}\right) + \frac{3616677}{12500}$$
$$= -\frac{1689627895469649855823}{1663200000000000000000} < 0.$$

To show the uniqueness of the zero in $I$, we will prove that $G$ is strictly decreasing in this interval. It holds that

$$G'(c) = T(c)\cos\left(1\right) + U(c)\sin\left(c\right) + V(c)\cos\left(c\right) + W(c),$$

with

$$U(c) = -\,8\left(5\,c^2 - 10\,c + 4\right)\left(c^2 - 2\,c + 12\right), \qquad V(c) = -8\left(c - 1\right)\left(c^4 - 4\,c^3 + 4\,c^2 - 120\right),$$
$$T(c) = -\,c\left(72\,c^4 - 1845\,c^3 + 5748\,c^2 - 5124\,c + 1064\right), \quad W(c) = -120(9c^4 - 36c^3 + 36c^2 - 8).$$
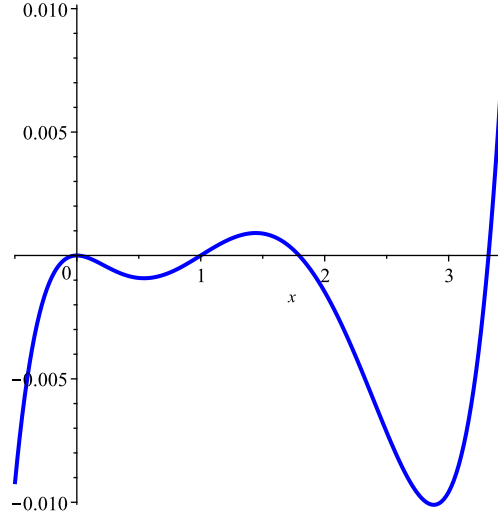
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Figure 1: Plot of a map $F$ for which the answer to Question 1 for $n = 5$ is "no".

By computing the Sturm sequences of $T, U$ and $V$ we can prove that $T(c) < 0$, $U(c) < 0$ and $V(c) > 0$ for all $c \in I$. Hence, for $c \in I$,

$$G'(c) < T(c)C^-(c) + U(c)S^-(c) + V(c)C^+(c) + W(c) = Q(c),$$

where

$$Q(c) = \frac{72469}{64800} c - \frac{669211}{43200} c^2 + \frac{18852329}{302400} c^3 - \frac{8854991}{80640} c^4 + \frac{4732471}{50400} c^5 - \frac{532}{15} c^6 + \frac{8}{7} c^7 + \frac{191}{70} c^8$$
$$- \frac{797}{1890} c^9 - \frac{34}{405} c^{10} + \frac{1651}{103950} c^{11} + \frac{3533}{2494800} c^{12} - \frac{193}{623700} c^{13} + \frac{1}{142560} c^{14} - \frac{1}{831600} c^{15}.$$

The Sturm sequence of $Q$ shows that it has no zeroes in $I$. Moreover, it is negative in this interval, and as a consequence, $G'$ is also negative, as we wanted to prove.

We fix $c = c_1$. Then, $r = R(c_1)$ and $F$ is also totally fixed. Moreover, by using the same techniques we get that $r = R(c_1) > R(19/10) > 1$ and as a consequence $F^{(5)}$ does not vanish. In fact, $r = R(c_1) \approx 1.04591089$. Finally, $F$ has one more real zero $d \in (33/10, 34/10)$. In fact, $d \approx 3.32178369$. This $F$ gives our desired example, see Figure 1.

$(ii)$ Consider $F(x) = 4x^2 + \pi^2(\cos(x) - 1)$ that has a double zero at $0$ and also vanishes at $\pm\pi/2$. Moreover, $F'(x) = 8x - \pi^2 \sin(x)$ vanishes at $x = 0$, $F''(x) = 8 - \pi^2 \cos(x)$ has no common zeroes with $F$ and, for any $k > 1$, $|F^{(2k)}(x)| = \pi^2|\cos(x)|$ vanishes at $x = \pi/2$ and $|F^{(2k-1)}(x)| = \pi^2|\sin(x)|$ vanishes at $x = 0$.

A similar example for $n = 3$ is $F(x) = 4x^3 - 6\pi x^2 + \pi^3(1 - \cos(x))$, that vanishes at $0, \pi$ (double zeroes) and $\pi/2$.

## Acknowledgements

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