



# Product of derivations on $C^*$ -algebras

Sayed Khalil Ekrami<sup>a,\*</sup>, Madjid Mirzavaziri<sup>b</sup>, Hamid Reza Ebrahimi Vishki<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Mathematics, Payame Noor University, P.O. Box 19395-3697, Tehran, Iran

<sup>b</sup>Department of Pure Mathematics and Center of Excellence in Analysis on Algebraic Structures (CEAAS), Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, P.O. Box 1159, Mashhad 91775, Iran

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## Abstract

Let  $\mathfrak{A}$  be an algebra. A linear mapping  $\delta : \mathfrak{A} \rightarrow \mathfrak{A}$  is called a *derivation* if  $\delta(ab) = \delta(a)b + a\delta(b)$  for each  $a, b \in \mathfrak{A}$ . Given two derivations  $\delta$  and  $\delta'$  on a  $C^*$ -algebra  $\mathfrak{A}$ , we prove that there exists a derivation  $\Delta$  on  $\mathfrak{A}$  such that  $\delta\delta' = \Delta^2$  if and only if either  $\delta' = 0$  or  $\delta = s\delta'$  for some  $s \in \mathbb{C}$ .

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## 1. Introduction

Let  $\mathfrak{A}$  be an algebra. A linear mapping  $\delta : \mathfrak{A} \rightarrow \mathfrak{A}$  is called a *derivation* if it satisfies the Leibniz rule  $\delta(ab) = \delta(a)b + a\delta(b)$  for each  $a, b \in \mathfrak{A}$ . When  $\mathfrak{A}$  is a  $*$ -algebra,  $\delta$  is called a  *$*$ -derivation* if  $\delta(a^*) = \delta(a)^*$  for each  $a \in \mathfrak{A}$ .

Let  $\delta$  be a  $*$ -derivation on a  $C^*$ -algebra  $\mathfrak{A}$ , then  $\delta^2$  is a derivation if and only if  $\delta = 0$ . To see this, note that  $\delta^2$  is a derivation if and only if

$$\delta^2(x)y + 2\delta(x)\delta(y) + x\delta^2(y) = \delta^2(xy) = \delta^2(x)y + x\delta^2(y).$$

The latter is equivalent to the fact that  $\delta(x)\delta(y) = 0$  for each  $x, y \in \mathfrak{A}$ . Thus  $\delta(x)\delta(x)^* = \delta(x)\delta(x^*) = 0$  for each  $x \in \mathfrak{A}$ . Hence  $\|\delta(x)\|^2 = \|\delta(x)\delta(x)^*\| = 0$ . This shows that  $\delta(x) = 0$  for each  $x \in \mathfrak{A}$ .

As a typical example of a non-zero derivation in a non-commutative algebra, we can consider the *inner derivation*  $\delta_a$  implemented by an element  $a \in \mathfrak{A}$  which is defined as  $\delta_a(x) = xa - ax$  for each  $x \in \mathfrak{A}$ . Even for an inner derivation  $\delta_a$  on an algebra  $\mathfrak{A}$ , it is very probable that  $\delta_a^2$  is *not* a derivation.

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\*Corresponding author

*Email addresses:* [ekrami@pnu.ac.ir](mailto:ekrami@pnu.ac.ir), [khalil.ekrami@gmail.com](mailto:khalil.ekrami@gmail.com) (Sayed Khalil Ekrami),  
[mirezavaziri@um.ac.ir](mailto:mirezavaziri@um.ac.ir), [mirezavaziri@gmail.com](mailto:mirezavaziri@gmail.com) (Madjid Mirzavaziri), [vishki@um.ac.ir](mailto:vishki@um.ac.ir) (Hamid Reza Ebrahimi Vishki)

These considerations show that the set of derivations on an algebra  $\mathfrak{A}$  is not in general closed under product. There are various researches seeking for some conditions under which the product of two derivations will be again a derivation. Posner [9] was the first one who studied the product of two derivations on a prime ring. He showed that if the product of two derivations on a prime ring, with characteristic not equal to 2, is a derivation then one of them must be equal to zero. The same question has been investigated by several authors on various algebras, see for example [1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8] and references therein. In the realm of  $C^*$ -algebras, Mathieu [5] showed that, if the product of two derivations  $\delta$  and  $\delta'$  on a  $C^*$ -algebra is a derivation then  $\delta\delta' = 0$ . The same result was proved by Pedersen [8] for unbounded densely defined derivations on a  $C^*$ -algebra.

There are known algebras  $\mathfrak{A}$  such that each derivation on  $\mathfrak{A}$  is inner which is implemented by an element of the algebra  $\mathfrak{A}$  or an algebra  $\mathfrak{B}$  containing  $\mathfrak{A}$ . For example, each derivation on a von Neumann algebra  $\mathfrak{M}$  is inner and is implemented by an element of  $\mathfrak{M}$ . Moreover, each derivation on a  $C^*$ -algebra  $\mathfrak{A}$  acting on a Hilbert space  $\mathfrak{H}$  is inner and implemented by an element of the weak closure  $\mathfrak{M}$  of  $\mathfrak{A}$  in  $\mathbf{B}(\mathfrak{H})$  (See [4, 10]).

In the present paper, we are concerned with the following problem: “Given two derivations  $\delta$  and  $\delta'$  on a  $C^*$ -algebra  $\mathfrak{A}$ , find necessary and sufficient condition under which there exists a derivation  $\Delta$  on  $\mathfrak{A}$  satisfying  $\delta\delta' = \Delta^2$ .”

We affirm that the condition is: either  $\delta' = 0$  or  $\delta = s\delta'$  for some  $s \in \mathbb{C}$ . We do this in two steps; for the matrix algebra  $M_n(\mathbb{C})$  and for an arbitrary  $C^*$ -algebra.

## 2. The equation for the case of matrix algebras

In this section we are mainly concerned with the structure of derivations on the matrix algebra  $M_n(\mathbb{C})$ . Let  $A = [a_{ij}] \in M_n(\mathbb{C})$ . We denote the diagonal matrix whose diagonal entries are  $a_{ii}$  by  $A^D$ .

**Proposition 2.1.** *Let  $A = [a_{ij}], B = [b_{ij}] \in M_n(\mathbb{C})$ . Then there exists a  $C = [c_{ij}] \in M_n(\mathbb{C})$  such that  $\delta_A\delta_B = \delta_C^2$  if and only if either  $\delta_B = 0$  or  $\delta_A = s\delta_B$  for some  $s \in \mathbb{C}$ .*

**Proof .** Let  $\{E_{ij}\}_{1 \leq i, j \leq n}$  be the standard system of matrix units for  $M_n(\mathbb{C})$ . First we show that  $a_{ik}b_{lj} = b_{ik}a_{lj}$  for all  $1 \leq i, k, \ell, j \leq n$  if and only if  $AXB = BXA$  for all  $X \in M_n(\mathbb{C})$ .

To see this, suppose that  $a_{ik}b_{lj} = b_{ik}a_{lj}$  for all  $1 \leq i, k, \ell, j \leq n$  then we can write

$$(E_{ii}AE_{k\ell})(E_{\ell\ell}BE_{jj}) = a_{ik}b_{lj}E_{ij} = b_{ik}a_{lj}E_{ij} = (E_{ii}BE_{k\ell})(E_{\ell\ell}AE_{jj}).$$

We thus have

$$\left(\sum_{i=1}^n E_{ii}\right)AE_{k\ell}B\left(\sum_{j=1}^n E_{jj}\right) = \left(\sum_{i=1}^n E_{ii}\right)BE_{k\ell}A\left(\sum_{j=1}^n E_{jj}\right).$$

This shows that  $AE_{k\ell}B = BE_{k\ell}A$  for each  $1 \leq k, \ell \leq n$ . We can therefore deduce that  $AXB = BXA$  for all  $X \in M_n(\mathbb{C})$ . On the other hand, if  $AXB = BXA$  for all  $X \in M_n(\mathbb{C})$ , then

$$a_{ij}b_{k\ell}E_{i\ell} = (E_{ii}AE_{jk})(E_{kk}BE_{\ell\ell}) = (E_{ii}BE_{jk})(E_{kk}AE_{\ell\ell}) = b_{ij}a_{k\ell}E_{i\ell}.$$

We can assume that  $a_{11} = b_{11} = c_{11} = 0$ . This is due to the fact that  $\delta_{A-a_{11}I} = \delta_A$ ,  $\delta_{B-b_{11}I} = \delta_B$  and  $\delta_{C-c_{11}I} = \delta_C$ . Then  $\delta_A\delta_B = \delta_C^2$  if and only if

$$ABE_{k\ell} - AE_{k\ell}B - BE_{k\ell}A + E_{k\ell}BA = C^2E_{k\ell} - 2CE_{k\ell}C + E_{k\ell}C^2,$$

for each  $1 \leq k, \ell \leq n$ . This is equivalent to the fact that

$$E_{ii}(ABE_{k\ell} - AE_{k\ell}B - BE_{k\ell}A + E_{k\ell}BA)E_{jj} = E_{ii}(C^2E_{k\ell} - 2CE_{k\ell}C + E_{k\ell}C^2)E_{jj},$$

for each  $1 \leq i, j, k, \ell \leq n$ . Now for  $i \neq k$  and  $j \neq \ell$  we have

$$(0 - a_{ik}b_{\ell j} - b_{ik}a_{\ell j} + 0)E_{ij} = (0 - 2c_{ik}c_{\ell j} + 0)E_{ij}. \tag{2.1}$$

For  $i \neq k$  and  $j = \ell$  we have

$$\left(\sum_{m=1}^n a_{im}b_{mk} - a_{ik}b_{\ell\ell} - b_{ik}a_{\ell\ell} + 0\right)E_{i\ell} = \left(\sum_{m=1}^n c_{im}c_{mk} - 2c_{ik}c_{\ell\ell} + 0\right)E_{i\ell}. \tag{2.2}$$

For  $i = k$  and  $j \neq \ell$  we have

$$\left(0 - a_{kk}b_{\ell j} - b_{kk}a_{\ell j} + \sum_{m=1}^n b_{\ell m}a_{mj}\right)E_{kj} = \left(0 - 2c_{kk}c_{\ell j} + \sum_{m=1}^n c_{\ell m}c_{mj}\right)E_{kj}. \tag{2.3}$$

And finally for  $i = k$  and  $j = \ell$  we have

$$\left(\sum_{m=1}^n a_{km}b_{mk} - a_{kk}b_{\ell\ell} - b_{kk}a_{\ell\ell} + \sum_{m=1}^n b_{\ell m}a_{m\ell}\right)E_{k\ell} = \left(\sum_{m=1}^n c_{km}c_{mk} - 2c_{kk}c_{\ell\ell} + \sum_{m=1}^n c_{\ell m}c_{m\ell}\right)E_{k\ell}. \tag{2.4}$$

If  $k \neq \ell$  then putting  $i = \ell$  and  $j = k$  in the equation (2.1) we have  $c_{\ell k}^2 = a_{\ell k}b_{\ell k}$ . Thus for  $i \neq k$  and  $j \neq \ell$  we have  $(a_{ik}b_{\ell j} + b_{ik}a_{\ell j})^2 = 4c_{ik}^2c_{\ell j}^2 = 4a_{ik}b_{ik}a_{\ell j}b_{\ell j}$ . This implies that

$$a_{ik}b_{\ell j} = b_{ik}a_{\ell j}, \text{ for } i \neq k, j \neq \ell. \tag{2.5}$$

Now, if  $b_{\ell j} \neq 0$  for some  $1 \leq \ell, j \leq n$  with  $\ell \neq j$ , then the equation

$$a_{ik} = \frac{a_{\ell j}}{b_{\ell j}}b_{ik}, \text{ for } i \neq k,$$

implies the existence of some  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  with  $|\alpha| + |\beta| \neq 0$  such that

$$\alpha(A - A^D) = \beta(B - B^D). \tag{2.6}$$

If  $b_{\ell j} = 0$  for all  $1 \leq \ell, j \leq n$  with  $\ell \neq j$ , then  $B = B^D$  and so the equation (2.6) holds for  $\alpha = 0$  and any nonzero  $\beta \in \mathbb{C}$ .

Interchanging  $\ell \leftrightarrow i, j \leftrightarrow k$  and  $k \leftrightarrow \ell$  in (2.3) we have

$$\sum_{m=1}^n b_{im}a_{mk} - a_{\ell\ell}b_{ik} - b_{\ell\ell}a_{ik} = \sum_{m=1}^n c_{im}c_{mk} - 2c_{\ell\ell}c_{ik}, \text{ for } i \neq k. \tag{2.7}$$

It follows from (2.2) and (2.7) that

$$\sum_{m=1}^n a_{im}b_{mk} = \sum_{m=1}^n b_{im}a_{mk}, \text{ for } i \neq k.$$

Returning to the fact that  $a_{im}b_{mk} = b_{im}a_{mk}$  for  $m \neq i, k$ , we have

$$a_{ii}b_{ik} + a_{ik}b_{kk} = b_{ii}a_{ik} + b_{ik}a_{kk}, \text{ for } i \neq k.$$

This implies that

$$a_{ik}(b_{ii} - b_{kk}) = b_{ik}(a_{ii} - a_{kk}). \quad (2.8)$$

Putting  $k = \ell$  in (2.4) we get

$$\sum_{m=1}^n a_{km}b_{mk} - a_{kk}b_{kk} = \sum_{m=1}^n c_{km}c_{mk} - c_{kk}c_{kk}.$$

Thus it follows from (2.4) that

$$a_{kk}b_{kk} - a_{kk}b_{\ell\ell} - b_{kk}a_{\ell\ell} + b_{\ell\ell}a_{\ell\ell} = c_{kk}c_{kk} - 2c_{kk}c_{\ell\ell} + c_{\ell\ell}c_{\ell\ell}.$$

For  $\ell = 1$  we have

$$c_{kk}^2 = a_{kk}b_{kk},$$

and then  $a_{kk}b_{\ell\ell} + b_{kk}a_{\ell\ell} = 2c_{kk}c_{\ell\ell}$ . Thus for all  $1 \leq k, \ell \leq n$  we have  $(a_{kk}b_{\ell\ell} + b_{kk}a_{\ell\ell})^2 = 4c_{kk}^2c_{\ell\ell}^2 = 4a_{kk}b_{kk}a_{\ell\ell}b_{\ell\ell}$ . This implies that

$$a_{kk}b_{\ell\ell} = b_{kk}a_{\ell\ell}, \text{ for all } k, \ell.$$

A similar argument as about the equation (2.5) implies the existence of some  $\alpha'$  and  $\beta'$  with  $|\alpha'| + |\beta'| \neq 0$  such that

$$\alpha' A^D = \beta' B^D.$$

Using (2.8) we have

$$b_{jj}a_{ik}(b_{ii} - b_{kk}) = b_{ik}b_{jj}(a_{ii} - a_{kk}) = b_{ik}a_{jj}(b_{ii} - b_{kk}).$$

Now let  $B^D \notin \mathbb{C}I$ . Then  $b_{ii} \neq b_{kk}$  for some  $i$  and  $k$ . This shows that  $b_{jj}a_{ik} = a_{jj}b_{ik}$ . So we have  $\alpha = \alpha'$  and  $\beta = \beta'$ . By a similar argument we can say that if  $A^D \notin \mathbb{C}I$  then  $\alpha = \alpha'$  and  $\beta = \beta'$ . We therefore have

$$\text{if } A^D \notin \mathbb{C}I \text{ or } B^D \notin \mathbb{C}I \text{ then } \alpha A = \beta B \text{ for some } \alpha \text{ and } \beta \text{ with } |\alpha| + |\beta| \neq 0.$$

On the other hand, if  $A^D = sI$  and  $B^D = tI$  for some  $s, t \in \mathbb{C}$  then

$$\alpha' A^D + \alpha(A - A^D) = s(\alpha' - \alpha)I + \alpha A,$$

and

$$\beta' B^D + \beta(B - B^D) = t(\beta' - \beta)I + \beta B.$$

Therefore  $s(\alpha' - \alpha)I + \alpha A = t(\beta' - \beta)I + \beta B$ . Summarizing these we can say that  $\delta_A \delta_B = \delta_C^2$  if and only if  $\alpha A = \beta B + rI$  for some  $\alpha, \beta, r \in \mathbb{C}$  with  $|\alpha| + |\beta| \neq 0$ . This is equivalent to the fact that either  $\delta_B = 0$  or  $\delta_A = s\delta_B$  for some  $s \in \mathbb{C}$ .  $\square$

A natural question is the following: Is it true in general that  $\delta\delta' = \Delta^2$  on an algebra  $\mathcal{A}$  is equivalent to either  $\delta' = 0$  or  $\delta = s\delta'$  for some  $s \in \mathbb{C}$ ? In this case we of course have  $\Delta = \sqrt{s}\delta'$ . The following example shows that the answer is not affirmative in general.

**Example 2.2.** Let  $\mathcal{A}$  be the subalgebra of  $M_2(\mathbb{C})$  generated by  $E_{11}$  and  $E_{12}$ . If  $\delta = \delta_{E_{12}}$  and  $\delta' = \delta_{E_{11}}$  then for each  $X = xE_{11} + yE_{12} \in \mathcal{A}$  we have

$$\delta\delta'(X) = \delta(xE_{11} + yE_{12} - xE_{11}) = \delta(yE_{12}) = 0.$$

Thus  $\delta\delta' = \delta_0^2$ . But  $\delta' \neq 0$  and  $\delta$  is not a multiple of  $\delta'$ .

**Lemma 2.3.** *Let  $\mathcal{A}$  be the subalgebra of  $M_2(\mathbb{C})$  generated by  $E_{11}$  and  $E_{12}$ . Then each derivation on  $\mathcal{A}$  is of the form  $\delta = \delta_{cE_{12}-dE_{11}}$  for some  $c, d \in \mathbb{C}$ .*

**Proof .** Let  $\delta : \mathcal{A} \rightarrow \mathcal{A}$  be a derivation defined by  $\delta(xE_{11} + yE_{12}) = f(x, y)E_{11} + g(x, y)E_{12}$ . Since  $\delta$  is linear,

$$f(x, y) = f(x, 0) + f(0, y) = xf(1, 0) + yf(0, 1).$$

We therefore have  $f(x, y) = ax + by$  and  $g(x, y) = cx + dy$  for some  $a, b, c, d \in \mathbb{C}$ . Moreover,

$$\begin{aligned} & \delta((xE_{11} + yE_{12})(x'E_{11} + y'E_{12})) \\ &= \delta(xE_{11} + yE_{12})(x'E_{11} + y'E_{12}) + (xE_{11} + yE_{12})\delta(x'E_{11} + y'E_{12}) \end{aligned}$$

implies

$$f(xx', xy')E_{11} + g(xx', xy')E_{12} = f(x, y)x'E_{11} + f(x, y)y'E_{12} + xf(x', y')E_{11} + xg(x', y')E_{12}.$$

We thus have

$$\begin{aligned} f(xx', xy') &= f(x, y)x' + xf(x', y'), \\ g(xx', xy') &= f(x, y)y' + xg(x', y'). \end{aligned}$$

By using the fact that  $f(x, y) = ax + by$  and  $g(x, y) = cx + dy$ , we have  $f(x, y) = 0$ . Whence  $\delta = \delta_{cE_{12}-dE_{11}}$ .  $\square$

**Proposition 2.4.** *Let  $\mathcal{A}$  be the subalgebra of  $M_2(\mathbb{C})$  generated by  $E_{11}$  and  $E_{12}$  and  $\delta, \delta'$  be two derivations on  $\mathcal{A}$ . Then  $\delta\delta' = \Delta^2$  if and only if  $\delta' = 0$  or  $\delta' = \delta_{\alpha'E_{12}}$  for some  $\alpha' \in \mathbb{C}$  implies  $\delta = \delta_{\alpha E_{12}}$  for some  $\alpha \in \mathbb{C}$ , or equivalently  $\delta' = 0$  or  $\delta'^2 = 0$  implies  $\delta^2 = 0$ .*

**Proof .** Let  $\delta = \delta_{\alpha E_{12}-\beta E_{11}}, \delta' = \delta_{\alpha' E_{12}-\beta' E_{11}}$  and  $\Delta = \delta_{r E_{12}-s E_{11}}$ . Then  $\delta\delta' = \Delta^2$  if and only if  $rs = \beta\alpha'$  and  $s^2 = \beta\beta'$ . The latter is equivalent to the fact that  $\delta' = 0$  or  $\delta' = \delta_{\alpha' E_{12}}$  for some  $\alpha' \in \mathbb{C}$  implies  $\delta = \delta_{\alpha E_{12}}$  for some  $\alpha \in \mathbb{C}$ . On the other hand, a derivation  $\delta$  on  $\mathcal{A}$  is of the form  $\delta_{\lambda E_{12}}$  for some  $\lambda \in \mathbb{C}$  if and only if  $\delta^2 = 0$ .  $\square$

### 3. Derivations on $C^*$ -algebras

**Theorem 3.1.** *Let  $\mathfrak{A}$  be a  $C^*$ -algebra and  $\delta, \delta'$  be two derivations on  $\mathfrak{A}$ . Then there exists a derivation  $\Delta$  on  $\mathfrak{A}$  such that  $\delta\delta' = \Delta^2$  if and only if either  $\delta' = 0$  or  $\delta = s\delta'$  for some  $s \in \mathbb{C}$ .*

**Proof .** Let  $\mathfrak{A}$  act faithfully on the Hilbert space  $\mathfrak{H}$  with the orthonormal basis  $\{\xi_i\}_{i \in \mathbb{I}}$ . For a bounded operator  $T \in B(\mathfrak{H})$ , let  $t_{ij} = \langle T\xi_j, \xi_i \rangle$  for  $i, j \in \mathbb{I}$ . We thus have  $T\xi_j = \sum_{i \in \mathbb{I}} t_{ij}\xi_i$  and we can write  $T = [t_{ij}]_{i, j \in \mathbb{I}}$ . The latter is called the matrix representation of  $T$ . For  $i, j \in \mathbb{I}$ , let  $E_{ij} \in B(\mathfrak{H})$  be the operator defined by  $E_{ij}\xi_j = \xi_i$  and  $E_{ij}\xi_k = 0$  for  $k \neq j$ . Then we have  $T = \sum_{p \in \mathbb{I}} \sum_{q \in \mathbb{I}} t_{qp} E_{qp}$  for every  $T \in B(\mathfrak{H})$ .

By the Kadison-Sakai theorem [4, 10],  $\delta = \delta_R, \delta' = \delta_S$  and  $\Delta = \delta_T$  for some  $R, S$  and  $T$  in  $B(\mathfrak{H})$ . Thus  $\delta\delta' = \Delta^2$  if and only if

$$RSE_{k\ell} - RE_{k\ell}S - SE_{k\ell}R + E_{k\ell}SR = T^2E_{k\ell} - 2TE_{k\ell}T + E_{k\ell}T^2,$$

for each  $k, \ell \in \mathbb{I}$ . This is equivalent to the fact that

$$E_{ii}(RSE_{k\ell} - RE_{k\ell}S - SE_{k\ell}R + E_{k\ell}SR)E_{jj} = E_{ii}(T^2E_{k\ell} - 2TE_{k\ell}T + E_{k\ell}T^2)E_{jj},$$

for each  $i, j, k, \ell \in \mathbb{I}$ . For  $i \neq k$  and  $j \neq \ell$  we have

$$r_{ik}s_{\ell j} + s_{ik}r_{\ell j} = 2t_{ik}t_{\ell j}.$$

Similarly, for  $i \neq k$  and  $j = \ell$  we have

$$\sum_{m \in \mathbb{I}} r_{im}s_{mk} - r_{ik}s_{\ell\ell} - s_{ik}r_{\ell\ell} = \sum_{m \in \mathbb{I}} t_{im}t_{mk} - 2t_{ik}t_{\ell\ell}.$$

Also, for  $i = k$  and  $j \neq \ell$  we have

$$-r_{kk}s_{\ell j} - s_{kk}r_{\ell j} + \sum_{m \in \mathbb{I}} s_{\ell m}r_{mj} = -2t_{kk}t_{\ell j} + \sum_{m \in \mathbb{I}} t_{\ell m}t_{mj}.$$

And finally for  $i = k$  and  $j = \ell$  we have

$$\sum_{m \in \mathbb{I}} r_{km}s_{mk} - r_{kk}s_{\ell\ell} - s_{kk}r_{\ell\ell} + \sum_{m \in \mathbb{I}} s_{\ell m}r_{m\ell} = \sum_{m \in \mathbb{I}} t_{km}t_{mk} - 2t_{kk}t_{\ell\ell} + \sum_{m \in \mathbb{I}} t_{\ell m}t_{m\ell}.$$

Now a similar verification as in Proposition 2.1 implies the result.  $\square$

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