A CHARACTERIZATION OF STRICTLY APF EXTENSIONS

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Abstract. Let $K$ denote a finite extension of $\mathbb{Q}_p$. We give necessary and sufficient conditions for an infinite totally wildly ramified extension $L/K$ to be strictly APF in the sense of Fontaine-Wintenberger. Our conditions are phrased in terms of the existence of a certain tower of intermediate subfields. These conditions are well-suited to producing examples of strictly APF extensions, and in particular, our main theorem proves that the $\varphi$-iterate extensions previously considered by the first two authors are strictly APF.

1. Introduction

Let $p$ be a prime and $K$ a finite extension of $\mathbb{Q}_p$ with residue field $k$ and valuation $v_K$ normalized so that $v_K(K^\times) = \mathbb{Z}$. Fix an algebraic closure $\overline{K}$ of $K$, and for any subfield $E$ of $\overline{K}$ containing $K$ write $G_E := \text{Gal}(\overline{K}/E)$. Recall [13] that an infinite, totally wildly ramified extension $L/K$ is said to be arithmetically profinite (APF) if the upper numbering ramification groups $G_u^u G_L$ are open in $G_K$ for all $u \geq 0$. The field of norms machinery of Fontaine–Wintenberger [13] functorially associates to any such APF extension $L/K$ a complete, discretely valued field $X_K(L)$ of equicharacteristic $p$ and residue field $k$ with the amazing property that the étale sites of $L$ and $X_K(L)$ are equivalent; in particular, one has a canonical isomorphism of topological groups $G_L \simeq \text{Gal}(X_K(L)^{\text{sep}}/X_K(L))$ that is compatible with the upper numbering ramification filtrations. In certain special cases, this isomorphism plays a foundational role in Fontaine’s theory of $(\varphi, \Gamma)$-modules [6] and in the integral $p$-adic Hodge theory of Faltings [5], Breuil [2, 3], and Kisin [7], and in general provides a key ingredient of Scholze’s recent theory of perfectoid spaces and tilting [10].

A famous theorem of Sen [11] guarantees that any infinite, totally wildly ramified Galois extension $L/K$ with $\text{Gal}(L/K)$ a $p$-adic Lie group is strictly\footnote{The meaning of the strictness condition, whose definition (Definition 2.12) is somewhat technical, is that the norm field $X_K(L)$ of $L/K$ admits a canonical embedding into the fraction field $\mathcal{E}$ of Fontaine’s ring $\mathcal{E}^+ := \lim_{\leftarrow \varphi \to \varphi^p} \mathcal{O}_{C_K}/(p)$; see also Remark 2.13 for a geometric interpretation of strictness.} APF; however, there are many other interesting and important cases in which one is given an infinite and totally wildly ramified extension $L/K$, and one would like to decide whether or not $L/K$ is strictly APF. Such examples occur naturally in the theory of $p$-adic analytic dynamics as follows: Choosing a uniformizer $\pi_1$ of $K$, let $\varphi \in K[[x]]$ be a power series which reduces modulo $\pi_1$ to some power of the Frobenius endomorphism of $k[[x]]$ and which fixes zero, and let $\{\pi_n\}_{n \geq 1}$ be a compatible system (i.e., $\varphi(\pi_n) = \pi_n - 1$) of choices of roots of $\varphi^{(n)} - \pi_1$. The arithmetic of the rising union $L := \bigcup_{n \geq 1} K(\pi_n)$ is of serious interest (e.g., [9]). For example, if $G$ is a Lubin–Tate formal group over (the valuation ring of) a subfield of $F$ of $K$ and $\varphi$ is the power series giving multiplication by a uniformizer of $F$, then one may choose $\{\pi_n\}_{n \geq 1}$ so that $L/K$ is the Lubin–Tate extension generated by the $p$-power torsion points of $G$ in $\overline{K}$. While it is true

\text{Date:} February 20, 2014.

2010 Mathematics Subject Classification. Primary: Secondary:

Key words and phrases. Ramification theory.
that $L/K$ is strictly APF if its Galois closure $L^{\text{gal}}/K$ is \cite[Proposition 1.2.3(iii)]{13}, it is often very
difficult or impossible in practice to describe $\text{Gal}(L^{\text{gal}}/K)$, and so Sen’s theorem is of limited use in
these cases.

In this note, we establish the following elementary and explicit characterization of strictly APF
extensions:

**Theorem 1.1.** Let $L/K$ be an infinite, totally wildly ramified extension. Then $L/K$ is strictly APF
if and only if there exists a tower of finite extensions $\{E_n\}_{n \geq 2}$ of $E_1 := K$ inside $L$ with $L = \cup E_n$ and
a norm compatible sequence $\{\pi_n\}_{n \geq 1}$ with $\pi_n$ a uniformizer of $E_n$ such that:

1. The degrees $q_n := [E_{n+1} : E_n]$ are bounded above.
2. If $f_n(x) = x^{q_n} + a_{n,q_n-1}x^{q_n-1} + \cdots + a_{n,1}x + (-1)^n\pi_n \in E_n[x]$ is the minimal polynomial of
$\pi_{n+1}$ over $E_n$, then the non-constant and non-leading coefficients $a_{n,i}$ of $f_n$ satisfy $v_K(a_{n,i}) > \epsilon$
for some $\epsilon > 0$, independent of $n$ and $i$.

Moreover, if $L/K$ is strictly APF, one may take $\{E_n\}$ to be the tower of elementary subextensions
(see Definition 2.8) and $\{\pi_n\}$ to be any norm-compatible sequence of uniformizers.

As a consequence of our work, we are able to produce many concrete examples of (typically non-
Galois) strictly APF extensions as follows: let $\pi_1$ be a uniformizer of $E_1 := K$; for $n \geq 1$ and given
$E_n$ and $\pi_n \in E_n$ a uniformizer, choose a monic polynomial $\varphi_n(x) \in \mathcal{O}_{E_n}[x]$ satisfying $\varphi_n(0) = 0$
and $\varphi_n(x) \equiv x^{q_n} \mod \pi_n\mathcal{O}_{E_n}$ for $q_n > 1$ a power of $p$, and let $\pi_n$ be a choice of root of $f_n(x) :=$
$\varphi_n(x) - \pi_{n-1} = 0$. If the degrees $q_n$ are bounded above and the non-leading and non-constant
coefficients of the $f_n$ have $v_K$-valuation bounded below, then it follows at once from Theorem 1.1 that
$L := \cup_n E_n$ is a strictly APF extension of $K$. In particular, the “$\varphi$-iterate” extensions described above
are always strictly APF.

In §4, we provide several examples of infinite, totally ramified extensions $L/K$ which are not APF,
or which are APF but not strictly APF, to illustrate the subtlety of these conditions.

As any strictly APF extension $L/K$ has norm field $X_K(L)$ that is canonically identified with a
subfield of Fontaine’s field $\tilde{E}$, one can try to find a canonical and functorial lift of $X_K(L)$ to a subring
of $\tilde{A} := W(\tilde{E})$. Such lifts play a crucial role in Fontaine’s classification \cite{6} of $p$-adic representations of
$G_L$ by étale $\varphi$-modules. The question of functorially lifting $X_K(L)$ inside $\tilde{A}$ is studied in \cite{4} and \cite{1},
and the main theorem of the present paper provides essential input for \cite{4}.

**Remark 1.2.** Much of Theorem 1.1 continues to hold if we allow $K$ to be an equicharacteristic local
field. In particular, for $\{E_n\}$ satisfying Conditions (1) and (2), the field $L := \cup E_n$ is a strictly
APF extension of $K$. Conversely, for $L/K$ infinite totally wildly ramified and strictly APF and for
$\{E_n\}$ the tower of elementary subextensions and $\{\pi_n\}$ a norm compatible sequence of uniformizers, Condition (2)
continues to hold. (The proofs given below in the mixed characteristic case work in the
equal characteristic case as well.) However, Example 4.4 below shows we cannot expect Condition (1)
to hold in general.

**Remark 1.3.** The proofs below produce an explicit lower bound for the constant $c(L/K)$ appearing in
the definition of strictly APF (Definition 2.12). The lower bound is given in terms of $\max q_n$ and $\epsilon$ as
in Theorem 1.1.

2. Transition functions and ramification

Following \cite[8, 82]{20}, we briefly review the definition and properties of the Herbrand transition functions,
and recall the definitions of APF and strictly APF as in \cite[13, 1.2]{13}.
Let \( L/K \) be a finite, totally ramified extension contained in \( \bar{K} \), and \( \pi_L \) a uniformizer of \( L \). Write \( v_L \) for the valuation of \( \bar{K} \), normalized so that \( v_L(\pi_L) = 1 \). Denote by \( G \) the Galois set of all \( K \)-embeddings of \( L \) into \( \bar{K} \), and for real \( t \geq 0 \) set
\[
G_t := \{ \sigma \in G : v_L(\sigma(\pi_L) - \pi_L) \geq t \}.
\]
We define the transition function
\[
\phi_{L/K}(u) := \frac{1}{[L : K]} \int_0^u |G_t| \, dt;
\]
it is a continuous, piecewise linear and increasing bijection on \([0, \infty)\), so we may define \( \psi_{L/K} := \phi_{L/K}^{-1} \), which is again continuous, piecewise linear and increasing. For \( L'/L \) any finite, totally ramified extension contained in \( \bar{K} \), one has the transitivity relations
\[
\phi_{L'/K} = \phi_{L/K} \circ \phi_{L'/L} \quad \text{and} \quad \psi_{L'/K} = \psi_{L'/L} \circ \psi_{L/K}.
\]
In practice, we may compute \( \phi_{L'/L} \) as follows:

**Proposition 2.2** ([8, Lemma 1]). Let \( L'/L \) be a finite, totally ramified extension of subfields of \( \bar{K} \) containing \( K \). Choose a uniformizer \( \pi_{L'} \) of \( L' \) and let \( f(x) \in L[x] \) be the minimal polynomial of \( \pi_{L'} \) over \( L \). Set \( g(x) := f(x + \pi_{L'}) \in L'[x] \), and let \( \Psi_g \) be the function whose graph is the boundary of the Newton copolygon of \( g(x) = \sum_{n \geq 1} b_n x^n \) formed by the intersection of the half-planes \( \{ y \leq ix + v_K(b_i) \}_{i \geq 1} \). Then
\[
\phi_{L'/L}(x) = \psi_{L'/L}(x/e_{L/K}) = \psi_{L'/L}(x/e_{L/K}).
\]

If \( L/K \) is finite Galois, then the \( G_t \) are the usual lower-numbering ramification subgroups of \( G \), and we define the ramification subgroups in the upper-numbering to be \( G^t := G_{\psi_{L/K}(t)} \). Unlike the lower-numbering groups, the \( G^t \) are well-behaved with respect to quotients: if \( K' \) is a finite Galois extension of \( K \) contained in \( L \) then for \( H := \text{Gal}(L/K') \leq G \) one has \( (G/H)^t = G^t H/H \) for all real \( t \geq 0 \). It follows that by taking projective limits, we may define the upper numbering filtration \( \{ G^t \}_{t \geq 0} \) for any Galois extension \( L/K \), finite or infinite, contained in \( \bar{K} \); this is a separated and exhaustive decreasing filtration of \( G \) by closed normal subgroups.

**Remark 2.4.** Because of our desire to have the simple description of \( \phi_{L'/L} \) given in Proposition 2.2, our transition functions differ from the ones considered by Serre [12] and Wintenberger [13] by a shift. Indeed, following [8, §2], if \( \psi_{L'/L} \) denote the transition functions defined by Serre [12, IV §3], then one has the relations
\[
\phi_{L'/L}(x) = 1 + s \phi_{L'/L}(x - 1) \quad \text{and} \quad \psi_{L'/L}(x) = 1 + s \psi_{L'/L}(x - 1).
\]
Correspondingly, the relation between our ramification groups \( G_t \) and \( G^t \) and those defined by Serre \( sG_t, sG^t \) is a through shift of one: \( G_t = sG_{t-1} \) and \( G^t = sG^{t-1} \).

For any extension \( E \) of \( K \) contained in \( \bar{K} \), we define
\[
i(E/K) := \sup \{ t : G^t_E G_E = G_K \}.
\]

**Definition 2.6.** Let \( L/K \) be an arbitrary (possibly infinite) totally ramified extension of \( K \) contained in \( \bar{K} \). We say that \( L/K \) is arithmetically profinite (APF) if \( G^u_K G_L \) is open in \( G_K \) for all \( u \geq 0 \). If \( L/K \) is APF, we define
\[
\psi_{L/K}(u) := \int_0^u [G_K : G^v_K G_L] \, dv,
\]
which is a continuous and piecewise linear increasing bijection on \([0, \infty)\), and we write \(\phi_{L/K} := \psi_{L/K}^{-1}\).

Observe that any finite totally ramified extension \(L/K\) is APF, and the functions \(\phi_{L/K}\) and \(\psi_{L/K}\) of Definition 2.6 coincide with the previously defined transition functions of the same name. It follows from the definition that if \(L/K\) is an infinite APF extension, then the set of ramification breaks \(\left\{ b \in \mathbb{R}_{\geq 0} : G_{K}^{b+\varepsilon}G_{L} \neq G_{K}^{b}G_{L} \forall \varepsilon > 0 \right\} \) is discrete and unbounded, so we may enumerate these real numbers as \(b_1 < b_2 < \ldots\).

**Definition 2.8.** The \(n\)-th elementary subextension of \(L/K\) is the subfield \(K_n\) of \(\overline{K}\) fixed by \(G_{K}^{b_n}G_{L}\).

We note that each \(K_n\) is a finite extension of \(K\) contained in \(L\), that \(L\) is the rising union of the \(K_n\), and that \(K_{n+1}/K_n\) is elementary of level \(i_n\) for \(i_n := i(K_{n+1}/K_n) = i(L/K_n)\) in the sense that there is a unique break at \(u = i_n\) in the filtration \(\{G_{K_n}^{b_i}G_{K_{n+1}}\}_{u \geq 0}\) of \(G_{K_n}\). Equivalently, the transition function \(\phi_{K_{n+1}/K_n}\) is the boundary function of the intersection of the two half-planes \(y \leq x\) and \(y \leq [K_{n+1} : K_n]^{i_n}(x - i_n)\), and has a single vertex at \((i_n, i_n)\). As in [13, 1.4.1], it follows that \(\{i_n\}_{n \geq 1}\) is an increasing and unbounded sequence, and that one has

\[
\tag{2.9}
\frac{b_n}{i_2 - i_1} + \frac{i_3 - i_2}{[K_3 : K_1]} + \cdots + \frac{i_n - i_{n-1}}{[K_n : K_1]},
\]

with \(\{b_n\}_{n \geq 1}\) increasing and unbounded. It follows easily from definitions that the vertices of the function \(\phi_{L/K}\) of Definition 2.6 are \(\{(i_n, b_n)\}_{n \geq 1}\), and the slope of the segment immediately to the right of \((i_n, b_n)\) is \([K_{n+1} : K]^{-1}\).

We will make use of the following characterization:

**Proposition 2.10.** Let \(\{E_n\}_{n \geq 2}\) be a tower of finite extensions of \(E_1 := K\) and let \(L = \cup_{n \geq 1} E_n\) be their rising union. Set \(\Phi_n := \phi_{E_n/K}\) and define \(\alpha_n := \sup\{x : \Phi_{n+1}(x) = \Phi_n(x)\}\). Then \(L/K\) is APF if and only if the following two conditions hold:

1. We have \(\lim_{n \to \infty} \alpha_n = \infty\). In particular, the pointwise limit \(\Phi(x) := \lim_{n \to \infty} \Phi_n(x)\) exists, and moreover, for fixed \(x\), we have \(\Phi(x) = \Phi_n(x)\) for all \(x \leq x_1\) and all \(n\) sufficiently large.
2. The function \(\Phi(x)\) of (1) is piecewise linear and continuous, with vertices \(\{(i_n, b_n)\}_{n \geq 1}\) where \(\{i_n\}\) and \(\{b_n\}\) increasing and unbounded sequences.

If \(L/K\) is APF, then \(\Phi(x) = \phi_{L/K}\) for \(\phi_{L/K}\) as in Definition 2.6.\)

**Proof.** Assume first that the two numbered conditions hold. From the assumption that the \(\{b_n\}\) sequence is unbounded, we know the inverse function \(\Phi^{-1}(x)\) is defined for all \(x \geq 0\) and is the pointwise limit of \(\Phi_n^{-1}(x)\) (for any \(x\), we have \(\Phi^{-1}(x) = \Phi_n^{-1}(x)\) for all \(n\) suitably large). By definition, \(\Phi_n^{-1}(x) = \phi_{E_n/K}(x) = \psi_{E_n/K}(x)\). Thus, the convergence condition (and the definition of \(\psi\)) implies that for any \(u\) we have \([G_K : G_K^{u}G_{E_n}] = [G_K : G_K^{u}G_{E_{n+1}}]\) for all \(n\) suitably large. Writing momentarily \(K'\) for the fixed field of \(G_K^{u}\) acting on \(K\), it follows that \(K' \cap E_n = K' \cap E_{n+1}\) for all \(n\) sufficiently large. Hence this intersection is also equal to \(K' \cap L\) and so, for fixed \(u\), we find \([G_K : G_K^{u}G_{E_n}] = [G_K : G_K^{u}G_L]\) for \(n\) suitably large. In particular, \(G_LG_K^{u}\) is of finite index—and hence open—in \(G_K\) for every \(u\), and \(L/K\) is APF.

Now assume \(L/K\) is APF, and let \(\{K_n\}\) be the associated tower of elementary extensions as in Definition 2.8. By [13, 1.4.1], we have \(\lim_{n \to \infty} i(L/K_n) = \infty\). This implies that for any fixed \(u\), there exists \(n_0 := n_0(u)\) with \([G_K^{n_0} : G_K^{n_0}G_{E_n}] = 1\) and hence \(\psi_{L/K_n}(u) = u\) for all \(n \geq n_0\). As \(L = \cup E_m\), for any \(u\) there exists \(m_0 = m_0(u)\) with \(E_m \geq K_{m_0}(u)\) whenever \(m \geq m_0(u)\). We then have \(\alpha_{m+1} \geq u\) for all \(m \geq m_0(u);\) as \(u\) was arbitrary, this implies (1). It follows that \(\Phi := \lim_{n \to \infty} \Phi_n\) is well-defined,
Corollary 2.11 ([13, 1.4.2]). Set \( E_1 := K \) and for \( n \geq 1 \), assume that \( E_{n+1}/E_n \) is elementary of level \( i_n \) with \( \{i_n\} \) strictly increasing and unbounded, and let \( \{b_n\} \) be given by (2.9). Then \( L := \cup_n E_n \) is an APF extension of \( K \) if and only if \( \{b_n\} \) is unbounded. Moreover, if \( L/K \) is APF, then \( E_n \) is the \( n \)-th elementary subextension of \( L/K \) as in Definition 2.8.

Definition 2.12 ([13, 1.4.1]). Let \( L/K \) be an infinite APF extension with associated elementary tower \( \{K_n\} \), and recall the function \( i(\cdot) \) of (2.5). We define

\[
c(L/K) := \inf_{u \geq i(L/K)} \frac{\psi_{L/K}(u)}{[G_K : G^u_KG_L]} = \inf_{K_n+1 : K} i_n
\]

for \( i_n := i(K_{n+1}/K_n) = i(L/K_n) \). We say that \( L/K \) is strictly APF if \( c(L/K) > 0 \).

Remark 2.13. If \( L/K \) is an infinite APF extension, it follows immediately from Definition 2.12 and the discussion preceding Proposition 2.10 that the constant \( c(L/K) \) is equal to \( \inf v_n m_n \) where \( v_n \) is the \( x \)-coordinate of the \( n \)-th vertex of \( \phi_{L/K} \) and \( m_n \) is the slope of the segment of \( \phi_{L/K} \) immediately to the right of \( v_n \). Thus, \( L/K \) is strictly APF if and only if the sequence \( \{v_n m_n\} \) is bounded below by a constant \( c > 0 \). More geometrically, the strictness condition is equivalent to \([G_K : G^u_KG_L]^{-1} \geq c/u\) for \( u \geq i(L/K) \), which, upon integrating, is equivalent to the bound

\[
\phi_{L/K}(x) \geq c \log(x) + d \quad \text{for} \quad d := i(L/K) - c \log(i(L/K))
\]

for all \( x \geq i(L/K) \).

Lemma 2.14. Let \( \{E_n\}_{n \geq 2} \) be a tower of finite extensions of \( E_1 := K \) and \( L := \cup_n E_n \). Suppose that \( L/K \) is APF, and let \( \Phi \) and \( \Phi_n \) be the transition functions of Proposition 2.10. Let \( V_n \) be the set of \( x \)-coordinates of vertices of \( \Phi_n \), and for \( v \in V_n \) let \( m_v \) be the slope of the segment of \( \Phi_n \) immediately to the right of \( v \). Then

\[
c(L/K) \geq \liminf_{n \to \infty} \left( \min_{v \in V_n} vm_v \right)
\]

Proof. Writing \( V \) for the set of \( x \)-coordinates of vertices of \( \Phi \), we have \( c(L/K) = \inf_{v \in V} vm_v \) by Remark 2.13. This means that for any \( \epsilon > 0 \), we can find \( v \in V \) such that \( vm_v < c(L/K) + \epsilon \). It follows from Proposition 2.10(1) that any vertex \( v \) of \( \Phi \) is a vertex of \( \Phi_n \) for all \( n \) sufficiently large, and the slopes of the segments on \( \Phi \) and \( \Phi_n \) to the immediate right of \( v \) agree. Thus \( \min_{v \in V_n} vm_v < c(L/K) + \epsilon \) for all \( n \) sufficiently large, which completes the proof.

3. Proof of Theorem 1.1

From now until the end of Proposition 3.4, fix an infinite totally wildly ramified extension \( L/K \) with a tower of subextensions \( \{E_n\} \) satisfying Conditions (1) and (2) from Theorem 1.1. We will show that such an extension \( L/K \) is strictly APF, thus proving one direction of Theorem 1.1.

Lemma 3.1. Let \( f_n(x) \) and \( \pi_n \) be as in Theorem 1.1(2). Write

\[
f_n(x) = x^{h_n} + a_{n, q_n - 1} x^{h_n - 1} + \cdots + a_{n, 1} x + (-1)^p \pi_n,
\]
satisfies

\[ v < e \]

so

\[ g_n(x) := f_n(x + \pi_{n+1}) = \sum_{i=1}^{q_n} b_{n,i} x^i, \quad \text{for} \quad b_{n,i} := \sum_{j \geq i} a_{n,j} \binom{j}{i} \pi_{n+1}^{j-i}. \]

Let \( 1 > \epsilon > 0 \) be such that \( v_K(a_{n,i}) > \epsilon \) for all \( 0 < i < q_n \). If \( 0 < i < q_n \), then \( v_K(b_{n,i}) > \epsilon \).

**Proof.** If \( j \neq q_n \), then \( v_K(a_{n,j}) > \epsilon \) by hypothesis and so \( v_K(a_{n,j} \binom{j}{i} \pi_{n+1}^{j-i}) > \epsilon \). If \( j = q_n \) and \( 0 < i < q_n \), then \( v_K(1) \geq v_K(p) \geq 1 \).

\[ \Box \]

**Proposition 3.3.** The extension \( L/K \) is APF.

**Proof.** We prove this by verifying Conditions (1) and (2) of Proposition 2.10. We begin with Condition (1). Because \( \Phi_{n+1}(x) = \Phi_n(\phi_{E_{n+1}/E_n}(x)) \), we know that \( \Phi_{n+1}(x) = \Phi_n(x) \) for all \( x \leq v \), where \( v \) is the \( x \)-coordinate of the first vertex of \( \phi_{E_{n+1}/E_n}(x) \). Let \( q := \max(q_n) \), let \( \epsilon \) be \( \epsilon \) as in Lemma 3.1, and set \( x_0 := \frac{\epsilon}{q} \). We claim that \( v \geq e_{E_{n+1}/K} x_0 \), which will complete the verification of Condition (1).

By Proposition 2.2, it suffices to show that the first vertex of \( \Psi_g(x) \) has \( x \)-coordinate at least \( x_0 \), where as usual \( g_n(x) := f_n(x + \pi_{n+1}) \) and \( f_n(x) \) is the minimal polynomial of \( \pi_{n+1} \) over \( E_n \). From Lemma 3.1, the only contribution to the Newton copolygon of \( g_n(x) \) with \( y \)-intercept 0 occurs with slope \( q_n \). All other contributions to the Newton copolygon have positive slope and \( y \)-intercept at least \( \epsilon \). The line \( y = q_n x \) crosses the line \( y = \epsilon \) at \( x = \epsilon/q_n \geq \epsilon/q, \) as required.

We now verify that Condition (2) of Proposition 2.10 holds. We have seen that \( \Phi(x) = \Phi_n(x) \) for all \( x \leq e_{E_{n+1}/K} x_0 \). If \( \max(q_n) = p^s \), then \( \Phi_n(x) \) has at most \( n s \) vertices and so \( i_{n+1} \geq e_{E_{n+1}/K} x_0 \), and in particular, the sequence \( \{i_n\} \) is unbounded. It remains to check that the \( \{b_n\} \) sequence is unbounded. Because \( \Phi(x) \) is monotone increasing, it suffices to show that \( \lim_{x \to \infty} \Phi(x) = \infty \). This will follow from the claim that for any \( x \geq e_{E_{n+1}/K} x_0 \), we have \( \Phi(x) \geq q_1 x_0 + (q_2 - 1)x_0 + \cdots + (q_n - 1)x_0 \). To see this, notice that between \( x = e_{E_i/K} x_0 \) and \( x = e_{E_{i+1}/K} x_0 \), the slope of \( \Phi(x) \) is at least \( \frac{1}{e_{E_i/K}} = \frac{1}{q_1 \cdots q_{i-1}} \). We then compute that for \( x \geq e_{E_{n+1}/K} x_0 \), we have

\[ \Phi(x) \geq 1 \cdot q_1 x_0 + \frac{1}{q_1} (q_1 q_2 - q_1) x_0 + \cdots + \frac{1}{q_1 \cdots q_{n-1}} (q_1 \cdots q_n - q_1 \cdots q_{n-1}) x_0, \]

which completes the proof.

\[ \Box \]

**Proposition 3.4.** The extension \( L/K \) is strictly APF.

**Proof.** By Proposition 3.3, we know that \( L/K \) is APF; let \( \Phi_n(x) \) and \( \Phi(x) \) be the functions of Proposition 2.10 and let \( V_n \) be the set of \( x \)-coordinates of vertices of \( \Phi_n \). For \( x_0 = \epsilon/q \) as in the proof of Proposition 3.3, we will prove that

\[ \min_{v \in V_n} \text{vm}_v \geq x_0; \]

it will then follow from Lemma 2.14 that \( L/K \) is strictly APF.

We will prove (3.5) using induction on \( n \). In the proof of Proposition 3.3, we showed that any \( v \in V_2 \) satisfies \( v \geq q_1 x_0 \); on the other hand, the slopes of \( \Phi_2(x) \) are all at least \( 1/q_1 \). This settles the base case \( n = 2 \). For the inductive step, let \( v \in V_{n+1} \) and consider the following two cases:

1. **Assume** \( v < e_{E_{n+1}/K} x_0 \). In this range, \( \Phi_{n+1}(x) = \Phi_n(x) \) and we are finished by the inductive hypothesis.
2. **Assume** \( v \geq e_{E_{n+1}/K} x_0 \). Then \( \text{vm}_v \geq e_{E_{n+1}/K} x_0 m_v \geq e_{E_{n+1}/K} x_0 \cdot e_{E_{n+1}/K}^{-1} = x_0 \).
Proposition 3.4 concludes the proof that $L/K$ is strictly APF, giving one direction of Theorem 1.1. The remainder of this section is devoted to proving the converse.

We now fix an infinite and totally wildly ramified strictly APF extension $L/K$, and let $\{K_n\}_{n \geq 1}$ be the associated tower of elementary extensions as in Definition 2.8, so that $K_1 = K$ and $K_{n+1}/K_n$ is elementary of level $i_n$; we set $q_n := [K_{n+1} : K_n]$, so that $[K_{n+1} : K] = q_1 q_2 \cdots q_n$. Let $\pi_n \in K_n$ be any choice of a norm-compatible family of uniformizers.\(^2\)

**Proposition 3.6.** Let 
\[
f_n(x) = x^{q_n} + a_{n,q_n-1} x^{q_n-1} + \cdots + a_{n,1} x + (-1)^p \pi_n
\]
denote the minimal polynomial of $\pi_{n+1}$ over $K_n$. Then the valuations of the coefficients $v_K(a_{n,i})$ for $0 < i < q_n$ are bounded below by a positive constant (independent of $n$ and $i$).

**Proof.** We prove this by contradiction. As $L/K$ is strictly APF, there exists $c > 0$ such that 
\[(3.7) \quad \inf_n \frac{i_n}{q_1 \cdots q_n} \geq c.
\]
Suppose that
\[(3.8) \quad v_K(a_{n,i}) < c\]
for some $n$ and $i$. From (3.7) and (3.8) we will reach a contradiction.

Because $K_{n+1}/K_n$ is elementary, from the discussion following Definition 2.8 we know that the transition function $\phi_{K_{n+1}/K_n}(x)$ has a unique vertex $(i_n, i_n)$. By Proposition 2.2, this means that for $g_n(x) := f_n(x + \pi_n)$, the copolygon boundary function $\Psi_{g_n}(x)$ has a unique vertex with $x$-coordinate $i_n/(q_1 \cdots q_n)$. By the correspondence between Newton polygons and copolygons (see for example [8, §1]), we know that the Newton polygon of $g_n$ has exactly one segment of slope 
\[(3.9) \quad -\frac{i_n}{q_1 \cdots q_n} \leq -c,
\]
where the inequality follows from (3.7). On the other hand, writing $g_n(x) = \sum_{j \geq 1} b_{n,j} x^j$ we have
\[(3.10) \quad v_K(b_{n,i}) = v_K \left( \sum_{j \geq 1} a_{n,j} \binom{j}{i} \pi_{n+1}^{j-i} \right) = \min_{j \geq 1} v_K \left( a_{n,j} \binom{j}{i} \pi_{n+1}^{j-i} \right)
\]
as the valuations of the nonzero terms in the sum are all distinct: in fact, they are all distinct modulo $1/(q_1 \cdots q_n-1)$. Now, using (3.8), we have $v_K(b_{n,i}) \leq v_K \left( a_{n,i} \binom{i}{i} \pi_{n+1}^{0} \right) < c$.

We now compute the Newton polygon associated to $g_n$. It must pass through the point $(q_n, 0)$ and by the discussion in the previous paragraph, it must pass below the point $(i, c)$. Such a Newton polygon has slope strictly greater than (i.e., negative and smaller in absolute value than) $-\frac{c}{q_n-1} \geq -c$. This contradicts (3.9).

\(^2\)Such a choice exists as $L/K$ is (strictly) APF. Indeed, the norm field of $L/K$ is by definition $X_K(L) := \lim \langle E \in E_{L/K} \rangle E$, where $E_{L/K}$ is the collection of finite extensions of $K$ in $L$ and the limit is taken with respect to the Norm mappings. For any nonzero $(a_E) \in X_K(L)$, one defines $v(a) := v_K(a_E)$. By [13, 2.2.4, 2.3.1], one knows that $(X_K(L), v)$ is a complete, discretely valued field with residue field $k$, and any choice of uniformizer in $X_K(L)$ corresponds to a norm compatible sequence $(\pi_E)_E$ with $\pi_E$ a uniformizer of $E$. 

\[\blacksquare\]
Proposition 3.11. With notation as in Proposition 3.6, the degrees \( q_n \) are bounded above.

Proof. The proof is similar to the proof of Proposition 3.6. As \( L/K \) is strictly APF, we can find a positive constant \( c \) such that for all \( n \),

\[
\frac{i_n}{q_1 \cdots q_n} \geq c.
\]

Since \( K_{n+1}/K_n \) is elementary, the Newton polygon of \( f_n(x + \pi_{n+1}) \) consists of a single segment with slope having absolute value greater than or equal to \( c \). In the notation of (3.10), this implies that

\[
(3.12) \quad c \leq \frac{v_K(b_{n,1})}{q_n - 1} = \frac{v_K\left(\sum_{j \geq 1} a_{n,j} q_n^{-j+1}\right)}{q_n - 1} \leq \frac{v_K\left(q_n^{q_{n+1} - 1}\right)}{q_n - 1} = \frac{v_K(p) \cdot \log_q(q_n) + \frac{q_n - 1}{q_1^{. . .} q_n}}{q_n - 1}.
\]

This implies \( \{q_n\}_{n \geq 1} \) is bounded.

Remark 3.13. Notice that in the equicharacteristic case, the term \( v_K(p) \) appearing in (3.12) is \( v_K(0) \), and so our argument fails. See also Example 4.4.

Proof of Theorem 1.1. The content of Theorem 1.1 is that, in order for \( L/K \) to be strictly APF, it is necessary and sufficient that there exist a tower of subfields satisfying Conditions (1) and (2). That an infinite totally wildly ramified extension containing such a tower of subextensions is strictly APF follows from Proposition 3.4. That the tower of elementary subextensions of a strictly APF extension, together with any norm compatible family of uniformizers, satisfies Conditions (1) and (2) follows from Proposition 3.6 and Proposition 3.11.

4. Examples

We conclude with examples which illustrate the subtlety of the APF and strictly APF conditions.

Example 4.1. Fix a sequence of positive integers \( \{r_n\}_{n \geq 1} \) and set \( q_n := p^{r_n} \). Let \( K \) be a finite extension of \( \mathbb{Q}_p \), choose a uniformizer \( \pi_1 \) of \( K \), and for \( n \geq 1 \) recursively choose a root \( \pi_{n+1} \) of \( f_n(x) := x^{q_n} + \pi_1 x + (-1)^p \pi_n = 0 \). Set \( E_1 := K \) and for \( n \geq 2 \) let \( E_{n+1} := E_n(\pi_{n+1}) \) and put \( L = \bigcup_{n \geq 1} E_n \).

We first claim that \( E_{n+1}/E_n \) is elementary of level \( i_n = q_1 q_2 \cdots q_n/(q_n - 1) \). As in the proof of Proposition 3.6, we would like to show that the Herbrand transition function \( \varphi_{E_{n+1}/E_n}(x) \) has exactly two segments: a segment of slope 1 from \( x = 0 \) to \( x = i_n \), and a segment of slope \( 1/q_n \) for \( x > i_n \). Equivalently, it suffices to show that the Newton polygon of \( f_n(x + \pi_{n+1}) \) has exactly one segment of slope \(-i_n/e_{E_{n+1}/K} \). (As always, we use the \( v_K \) valuation for drawing Newton polygons.)

Using that \( q_n \) is a power of \( p \), the binomial theorem shows that the Newton polygon of \( f_n(x + \pi_{n+1}) \) is the lower convex hull of the collection of vertices containing \((1,1),(q_n,0)\), and other vertices with \( y \)-coordinate at least 1. Hence the Newton polygon consists of a single segment of slope \(-1/(q_n - 1) \). Thus \( i_n = q_1 q_2 \cdots q_n/(q_n - 1) \), as desired.

Notice that the \( \{i_n\} \) is strictly increasing. We may thus use Corollary 2.11 to analyze the extension \( L/K \). Define \( b_n \) as in (2.9). Substituting \( i_n = q_1 q_2 \cdots q_n/(q_n - 1) \) into the definition of the terms \( b_n \), we find

\[
b_n = \frac{q_1}{q_1 - 1} + \sum_{k=2}^{n} \left( \frac{q_k}{q_k - 1} - \frac{1}{q_{k-1} - 1} \right),
\]
and it follows from Corollary 2.11 that $L/K$ is APF for every choice of $q_n$ (i.e., for every choice of $r_n$). On the other hand, by Definition 2.12, $L/K$ is strictly APF if and only if

$$\inf_{n>0} \frac{i_n}{[E_{n+1} : K]} = \inf_{n>0} \frac{1}{(q_n - 1)} > 0.$$ 

In other words, the extension $L/K$ is strictly APF if and only if the degrees $q_n$ are bounded above.

Example 4.2. Fix an increasing sequence $\{s_n\}_{n \geq 1}$ of positive integers and let $K$ be a finite extension of $\mathbb{Q}_p$ with absolute ramification index $e$. Choose a uniformizer $\pi_1$ of $K$, set $E_1 := K$ and for $n \geq 2$ recursively choose $\pi_{n+1}$ a root of $x^p + \pi_n^{s_n}x - \pi_n = 0$ and put $E_{n+1} := E_n(\pi_{n+1})$. Set $L = \bigcup_{n \geq 1} E_n$.

As in Example 4.1, if we assume that $s_n \leq p^{n-1}e$, we compute that $E_{n+1}/E_n$ is elementary of level $i_n = ps_n/(p-1)$, and because we have chosen $s_n$ to be an increasing sequence, we may again apply Corollary 2.11. With $b_n$ as in (2.9), we compute

$$b_n = \frac{ps_1}{p-1} + \frac{p}{p-1} \sum_{k=2}^n \frac{s_k - s_{k-1}}{p^{k-1}}.$$ 

As the following examples illustrate, whether or not the extension $L/K$ is APF, strictly APF, or neither, depends crucially on the choice of $s_n$:

1. If one takes $s_n = n$, then the $b_n$ terms are increasing but bounded. In this case, the extension $L/K$ is not APF.
2. Assume $p \geq 5$ and take $s_n = \lfloor p^{n-1}/n \rfloor$. Then $\{i_n\}_{n \geq 1}$ is strictly increasing (using the hypothesis $p \geq 5$). Moreover, the sequence $\{b_n\}_{n \geq 1}$ is increasing and unbounded and so $L/K$ is APF, but

$$\inf_{n>0} \frac{i_n}{[E_{n+1} : K]} = \inf_{n>0} \frac{s_n}{p^{n-1}(p-1)} = 0,$$

and so $L/K$ is APF but not strictly APF.
3. If we take $s_n = p^{n-1}$, then $\{b_n\}_{n \geq 1}$ is increasing and unbounded, and

$$\inf_{n>0} \frac{s_n}{p^{n-1}(p-1)} = \frac{1}{p-1} > 0,$$

so $L/K$ is strictly APF.

Remark 4.3. (1) Assume $L/K$ is an infinite totally wildly ramified strictly APF extension. One cannot expect that Condition (1) of Theorem 1.1 hold for every tower of subextensions $\{E_n\}$. For example, for $K$ a finite extension of $\mathbb{Q}_p$ and $\pi_1$ a uniformizer of $K$, consider the extension $L/K$ formed by recursively extracting roots of the polynomials $f_n(x) = x^{p^n} - \pi_n$. These polynomials determine the same extension as the polynomials $f_n(x) = x^p - \pi_n$; however the former collection of polynomials has unbounded degrees, while the degrees in the latter collection are all equal to $p$.

(2) The authors do not know whether Condition (2) of Theorem 1.1 holds for every tower of subextensions and every norm-compatible choice of uniformizers.

Example 4.4. Here we give an example to show that the full strength of our theorem does not hold in characteristic $p$; see Remark 1.2 for positive results. Assume $K$ is a local field of characteristic $p$, and let $\pi_1 \in K$ denote a uniformizer. Consider the polynomials

$$f_n(x) = x^{p^n} + \pi_1^{p^n}x - \pi_n,$$
and let $\pi_{n+1}$ denote a root of $f_n(x)$. Set $E_{n+1} := E_n(\pi_{n+1})$ and $L := \cup E_n$. We claim that $L/K$ is strictly APF, and that $\{E_n\}$ is the associated tower of elementary extensions. Because the degrees $\deg f_n = p^n$ are unbounded, this shows that Theorem 1.1 is not true for local fields of characteristic $p$.

We compute $f_n(x + \pi_{n+1}) = x^{p^n} + \pi_1^{p^n} x$ and so the Newton polygon is a single segment with slope

$$\frac{-p^n}{p^n - 1} = \frac{-i_n}{p \cdot p^2 \cdots p^n},$$

which implies

$$i_n = \frac{p \cdot p^2 \cdots p^n \cdot p^n}{p^n - 1}.$$  

This is a strictly increasing sequence, so we can apply Corollary 2.11 as above. One checks that the sequence $\{b_n\}$ defined by (2.9) is increasing and unbounded and

$$\inf \frac{i_n}{[E_{n+1} : E_1]} > 0.$$  

Corollary 2.11 then shows that $L/K$ is strictly APF, as desired.

Remark 4.5. Theorem 1.1 is perhaps better suited to producing strictly APF extensions than to establishing whether a given extension $L/K$ is strictly APF. For example, consider the extension $\mathbb{Q}_p(\mu_p^\infty, p^1/p^\infty)/\mathbb{Q}_p$. This is a Galois extension with Galois group a $p$-adic Lie group, hence is strictly APF extension by Sen’s theorem [11, §4]. However, the authors do not know how to verify this fact using Theorem 1.1, because we do not know how to select a tower $\{E_n\}_{n \geq 1}$ and a norm compatible family of uniformizers $\{\pi_n\}_{n \geq 1}$ which is amenable to explicitly computing the polynomials $f_n$ as in the statement of Theorem 1.1.

Acknowledgments. The first author is supported by an NSA “Young Investigator” grant (H98230-12-1-0238). The second author is partially supported by the Danish National Research Foundation through the Centre for Symmetry and Deformation (DNRF92). The first two authors largely worked on this project together while visiting Lars Hesselholt at Nagoya University and Takeshi Saito at the University of Tokyo; special thanks to them for their support and useful discussions.

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Translated from the French by Marvin Jay Greenberg.

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