

Let k_0 be the “lab frame,” then k_1 has velocity v_1 relative to k_0 , and k_2 has velocity v_2 relative to k_1 . Then the transform from $k_0 \rightarrow k_1$ is:

$$A_{01} = \begin{pmatrix} \gamma_1 & v_1\gamma_1 & 0 & 0 \\ v_1\gamma_1 & \gamma_1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}$$

Where $\gamma_1 = (1 - v_1^2)^{-\frac{1}{2}}$. And the transform from $k_1 \rightarrow k_2$ is:

$$A_{12} = \begin{pmatrix} \gamma_2 & v_2\gamma_2 & 0 & 0 \\ v_2\gamma_2 & \gamma_2 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}$$

With $\gamma_2 = (1 - v_2^2)^{-\frac{1}{2}}$. So, transforming from $k_0 \rightarrow k_2$,

$$A_{02} = A_{12}A_{01} \tag{1}$$

$$= \begin{pmatrix} \gamma_1\gamma_2 + \gamma_1\gamma_2v_1v_2 & \gamma_1\gamma_2v_2 + \gamma_1\gamma_2v_1 & 0 & 0 \\ \gamma_1\gamma_2v_2 + \gamma_1\gamma_2v_1 & \gamma_1\gamma_2 + \gamma_1\gamma_2v_1v_2 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \tag{2}$$

$$= \begin{pmatrix} \gamma_1\gamma_2(1 + v_1v_2) & \gamma_1\gamma_2(v_1 + v_2) & 0 & 0 \\ \gamma_1\gamma_2(v_1 + v_2) & \gamma_1\gamma_2(1 + v_1v_2) & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \tag{3}$$

Then, to make this look like a single Lorentz transform, try $\gamma = \gamma_1\gamma_2(1 + v_1v_2)$ and $v\gamma = \gamma_1\gamma_2(v_1 + v_2)$. So,

$$v = \frac{v_1 + v_2}{1 + v_1v_2} \tag{4}$$

So I have the right v . Now, let's see if this works for γ . I need

$$\gamma = \frac{1}{\sqrt{1 - v^2}} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{1 - \left(\frac{v_1 + v_2}{1 + v_1v_2}\right)^2}} \tag{5}$$

Well,

$$\gamma = \frac{\gamma_1 \gamma_2 (1 + v_1 v_2)}{1 + v_1 v_2} \quad (6)$$

$$= \frac{1}{\sqrt{(1 + v_1^2)(1 - v_2^2)}} \quad (7)$$

$$= \frac{1}{\left(\frac{1 - v_2^2 - v_1^2 + v_1^2 v_2^2}{(1 + v_1 v_2)^2}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}}} \quad (8)$$

$$= \frac{1}{\left(\frac{1 - v_2^2 - v_1^2 + v_1^2 v_2^2 + 2v_1 v_2 - 2v_1 v_2}{(1 + v_1 v_2)^2}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}}} \quad (9)$$

$$= \frac{1}{\left(\frac{(1 + 2v_1 v_2 + v_1^2 v_2^2) - (v_1^2 + 2v_1 v_2 + v_2^2)}{(1 + v_1 v_2)^2}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}}} \quad (10)$$

$$= \frac{1}{\left(\frac{(1 + v_1 v_2)^2}{(1 + v_1 v_2)^2} - \frac{(v_1 + v_2)^2}{(1 + v_1 v_2)^2}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}}} \quad (11)$$

$$\gamma = \frac{1}{\sqrt{1 - \left(\frac{v_1 + v_2}{1 + v_1 v_2}\right)^2}} \quad (12)$$

Which is what I said I needed. So, two successive transforms is the same as one transform with $v = \frac{v_1 + v_2}{1 + v_1 v_2}$.