Scifi-sound

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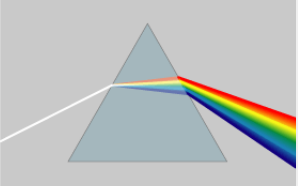
Task

Tapping a helical spring can make a sound like a "laser shot" in a science-fiction movie. Investigate and explain this phenomenon.

Basic explanation

Dispersion

- Phase velocity of a wave as a function of frequency
- Frequencies propagate at different velocities through the medium
- Only in certain materials (solids and liquids)
- Applies to optical as well as acoustic waves
- More dense materials are usually more dispersive

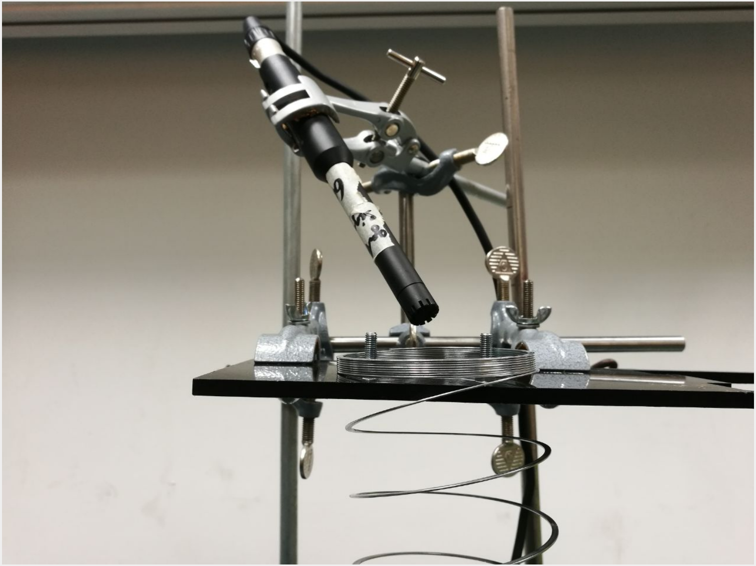


Slinky

- Helical spring often made of metal
- Highly dispersive
- Tapping it produces a short signal consisting of multiple frequencies
- Wave dissects into its component frequencies
- Higher frequencies are heard before the lower ones, thus producing the "scifi-sound"

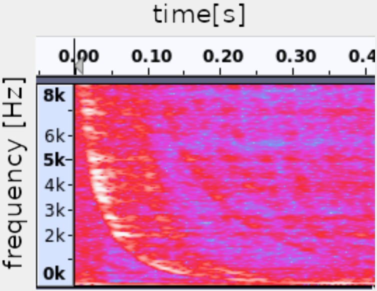
Experimental setup

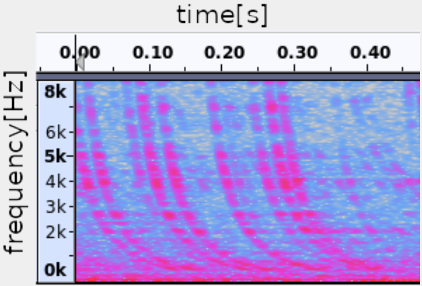
Experimental setup



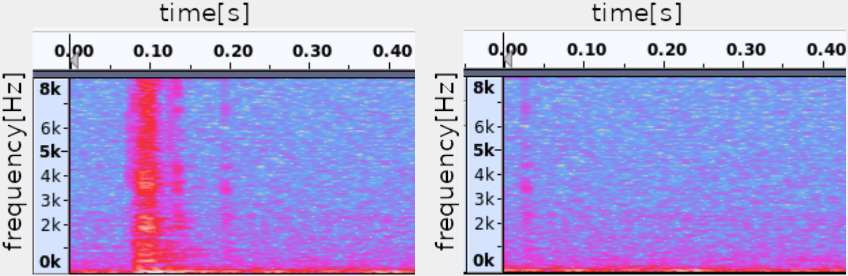
Experimental results

Response curve metal





Response curve plastic



Theory

Formulas

Euler-Bernoulli ideal bar equation[1]:

$$t_D = \frac{1}{2\sqrt{\pi\kappa f}} \tag{1}$$

$$f(t) = \frac{1}{8\pi\kappa t^2} \tag{2}$$

where:
f = frequency [Hz]
t = time [s]
t_D = duration time [s]
κ = fit parameter

[1] Parker, Julian, et al. 'Modeling methods for the highly dispersive slinky spring: a novel musical toy.' Proceedings of the 13th International Conference on Digital Audio Effects 2010.

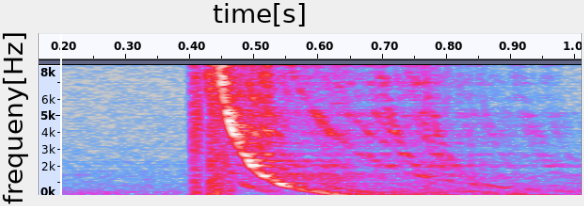
Fit parameter κ

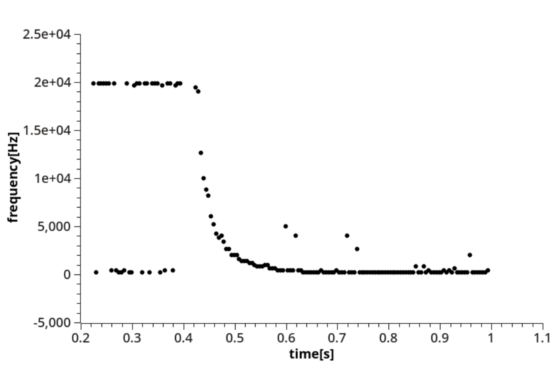
κ determines how widely spread the frequencies are.
It is dependent on material properties, such as:

- Density
- E-Modulus
- Length

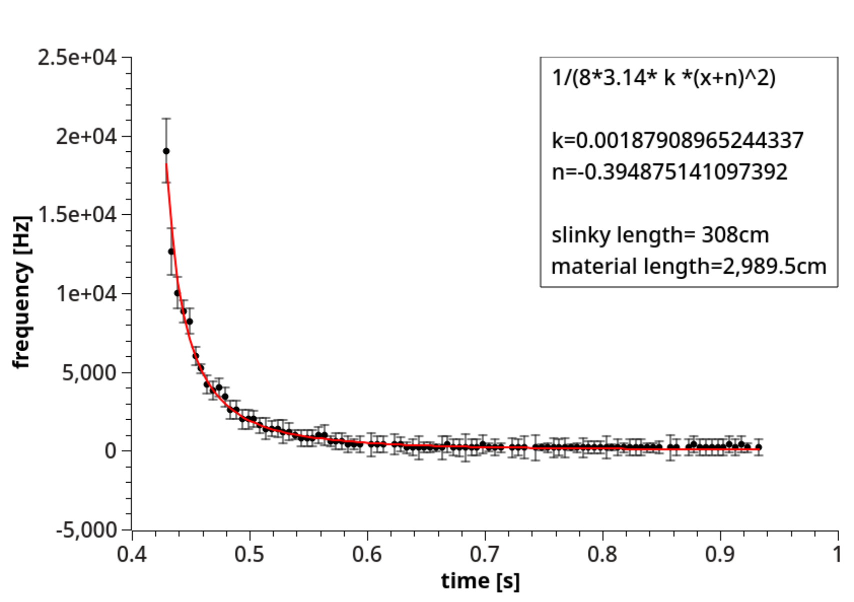
Theory-Experiment Comparison

Data processing

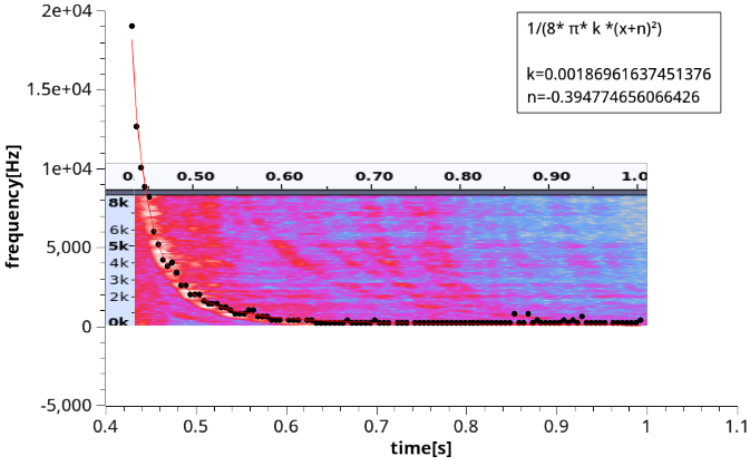




Fitted function



Direct comparison



Conclusion

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I was able to:

- Explain and reproduce the phenomenon
- Qualitatively investigate it in a controlled experiment
- Find a fitting theory
- Compare the theory with my measured data

Outlook

For the future, I plan to:

- Further investigate material and length of the spring
- Investigate the phenomenon in a steel cable
- Quantify my results
- κ(*length*) plot