

Physics 2610H: Lab III

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Abstract

1 Introduction

Spectroscopy is a useful tool in many fields. A visible light spectrometer—such as the one employed in this experiment—can be used to determine the composition of an object by measuring emission or absorption of specific wavelengths of photons by that object.

This experiment seeks to employ a digital visible light spectrometer to verify calculated values for electron energy level transitions in a helium atom, determine the components of unknown visible light emitters, and determine a method to resolve merged spectral lines for energy level transitions with similar emitted photons.

2 Theory

Electrons in orbit around atomic nuclei exist in discrete, quantized, energy levels and may only move between these levels when a “hole” is available for them to do so. In order to “jump” up to a higher energy level an electron must be given energy, usually by a photon, whose energy is given by

$$E = \frac{hc}{\lambda}$$

where h is Planck’s constant[3], c the speed of light in the medium through which the photon moves, and λ the wavelength of the photon. Electrons may also decay to a lower energy level, emitting the energy lost in that process as a photon of energy given by the difference in energy between the final and initial energy levels.

Visible light spectrometers record these energy level transitions by recording the intensity of light due to the emitted photons and mapping it to its corresponding wavelength.

3 Methods

This experiment utilized a software controlled device known as a monochromator to diffract incoming light into its component wavelengths and measure the intensity of each individually. The monochromator utilizes a reflective diffraction grating alongside entrance and exit slits and several internal mirrors to diffract, collimate, and deliver incoming light to a visible light sensitive photodiode connected to an Arduino. A MicroPython script was utilized to control the device and record data produced by the photodiode.

Three light sources were measured with the monochromator. The light from each was directed to a lens which focused it onto the input slit. The output slit width remained constant throughout the experiment and only the wavelength step, range, and input slit width were varied.

Light sources were placed such that the photodiode registered the maximum emission strength when the diffraction grating was in its rest position.

4 Discussion

4.1 Helium Spectrum

Assigned Transition	Pred. wave-length, $\lambda_p(\text{nm})$	Obs. wave-length, $\lambda_o(\text{nm})$	% Diff	Comments
$1s0s^1S$ $1s3p^1P$	392			
$1s0s^3S$ $1s3p^3P$	412			
$1s1s^1S$ $1s3p^1P$	505	505 ± 1.7	0.337	Extremely faint
$1s1s^3S$ $1s3p^3P$	471	471 ± 0.6	0.127	
$1s2s^1S$ $1s1p^1P$	397			
$1s2s^1S$ $1s2p^1P$	502	502 ± 1.6	0.319	
$1s2s^3S$ $1s3p^3P$	707	707 ± 1.5	0.212	
$1s3s^1P$ $1s0p^1D$	439			
$1s3s^1P$ $1s1p^1D$	492	492 ± 1.6	0.325	
$1s3s^1P$ $1s2p^1D$	668	668 ± 1.8	0.269	
$1s3s^1S$ $1s3p^1P$	728	728 ± 1.5	0.206	
$1s3s^3P$ $1s0p^3D$	403			
$1s3s^3P$ $1s1p^3D$	447	447 ± 1.6	0.358	
$1s3s^3P$ $1s2p^3D$	588	588 ± 1.5	0.255	
$1s3s^3S$ $1s2p^3P$	389	389 ± 1.4	0.360	

4.1.1 “Missing” Wavelengths

Five expected wavelengths (see 4.1) in the low wave-length region are missing from the recorded data. This is likely because the diode is less sensitive at those lower wavelengths[2] however there is still a strong peak at $(389.0 \pm 1.4)\text{nm}$ which is the lowest expected approximately visible wavelength.

4.2 Doublet Resolution

The ψ lamp exhibited two doublets between 588nm and 590.5nm. As can be seen in 4.2 the doublets were successfully resolved by decreasing the input slit width. And optimal value for this slit width is somewhere between 5 μm and 10 μm as a 0 μm slit significantly impacts the amount

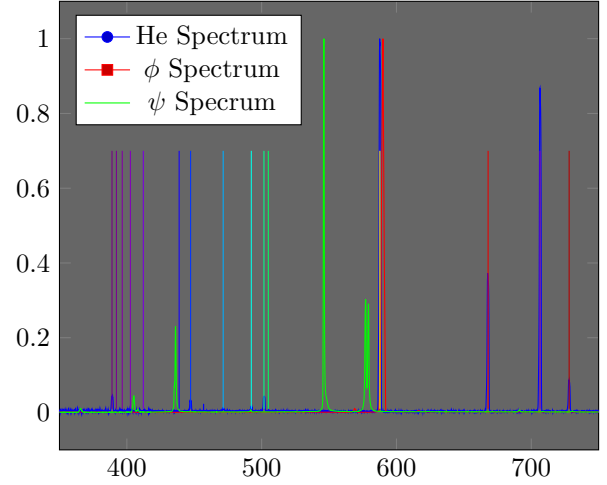


Figure 1: Helium, ψ , and ϕ lamp spectrum. Coloured lines denote predicted values for helium. See appendix for full size with log scale. Generated with TikZ

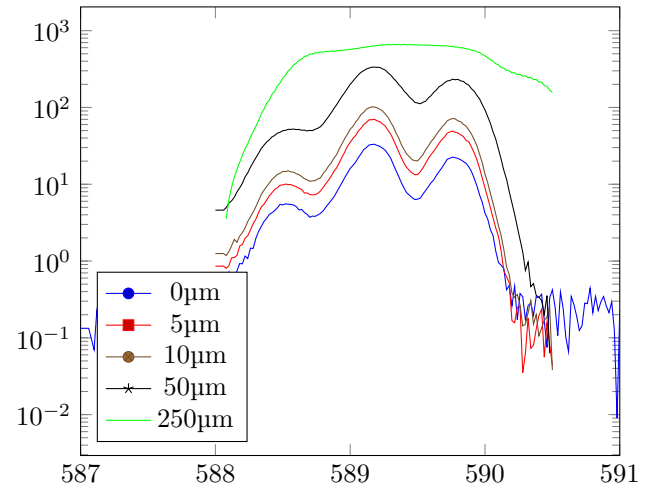


Figure 2: ψ lamp spectrum focused on yellow doublet. Note significantly decreased intensity for a 0 μm slit width requiring semilog scale. See appendix for full size.

of light entering the apparatus whereas a slit widths above $10\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ do not resolve the doublet well.

4.3 Guessing the ϕ Lamp

As can be seen in 4.1 the ϕ lamp has strong peaks at approximately 436 nm, 546 nm, 577 nm, 580 nm. Using the NIST Atomic Spectra Database[1] to determine materials with similar peaks suggests Mercury as a likely match. It exhibits many of the same emission peaks as the recorded data, with the recorded data only missing the peaks on the far ends of the visible spectrum where the photodiode employed in this experiment may not be as sensitive as the instruments employed by NIST.

4.4 Sources of error

4.4.1 Systematic Error

The most significant source of systematic error in this experiment stems from the fact that the experiment was not conducted in “total” darkness. A nearby window introduced not insignificant—though not quantified—levels of stray light alongside the screen of the computer used to control the monochromator and the lamps not being studied. These sources were largely constant throughout the experiment and the calibration of the raw data by subtracting the minimum nonzero reading from the photodiode eliminated the majority of their influence.

4.4.2 Random Error

The most significant source of random error in this experiment was likely the non-rigidity of the apparatus. Only the helium lamp was placed directly in front of the monochromator’s entrance slit, the ψ and ϕ lamps both had their light directed towards the entrance slit using a mirror that was not securely fixed to any rigid mounting point. The simplest way of reducing the effects of this non-rigidity would likely be performing the experiment on an optical table with securely fixed mirrors, lenses, and light sources.

5 Conclusion

This experiment successfully verified the hydrogen emission spectrum save for some lower wavelength emission peaks, likely due to the lower sensitivity of the employed photodiode in this range. The experiment also matched the ϕ lamp to the emission spectrum of mercury and successfully resolved the yellow doublet of the ψ lamp using a decreased entrance slit width on the monochromator.

6 Bibliography

References

- [1] A. Kramida, Yu. Ralchenko, J. Reader, and NIST ASD Team (2024). *NIST Atomic Spectra Database (version 5.12)*. 2025. URL: <https://physics.nist.gov/asd>.
- [2] ThorLabs. *Calibrated Photodiodes*. 2025. URL: https://www.thorlabs.com/newgrouppage9.cfm?objectgroup_id=2822.
- [3] Eite Tiesinga, Peter J. Mohr, David B. Newell, and Barry N. Taylor. *The 2022 CODATA Recommended Values of the Fundamental Physical Constants*. 2022. URL: <https://physics.nist.gov/constants>.

7 Appendix

7.1 Figures

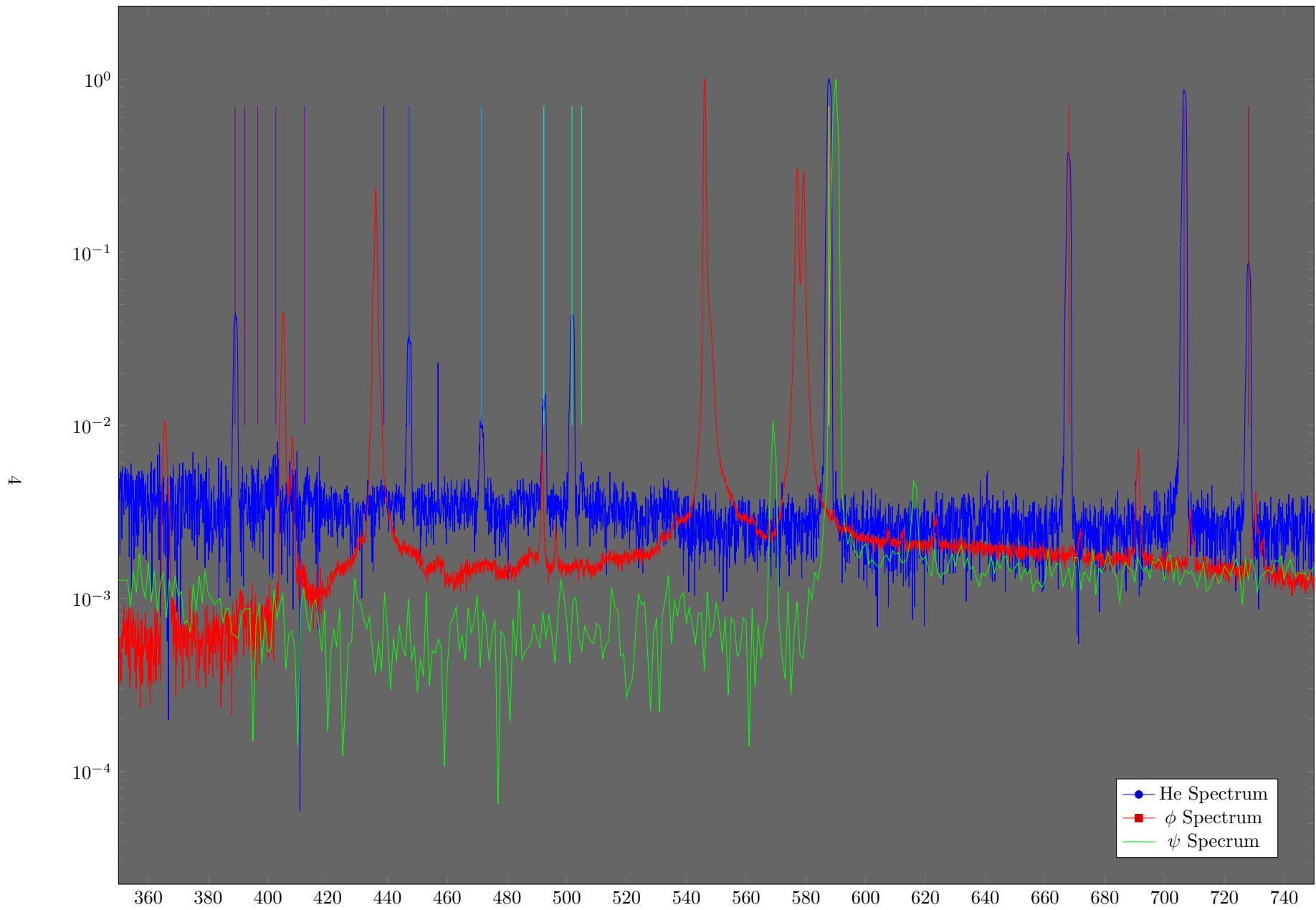


Figure 3: Helium spectrum. Coloured lines denote predicted values.

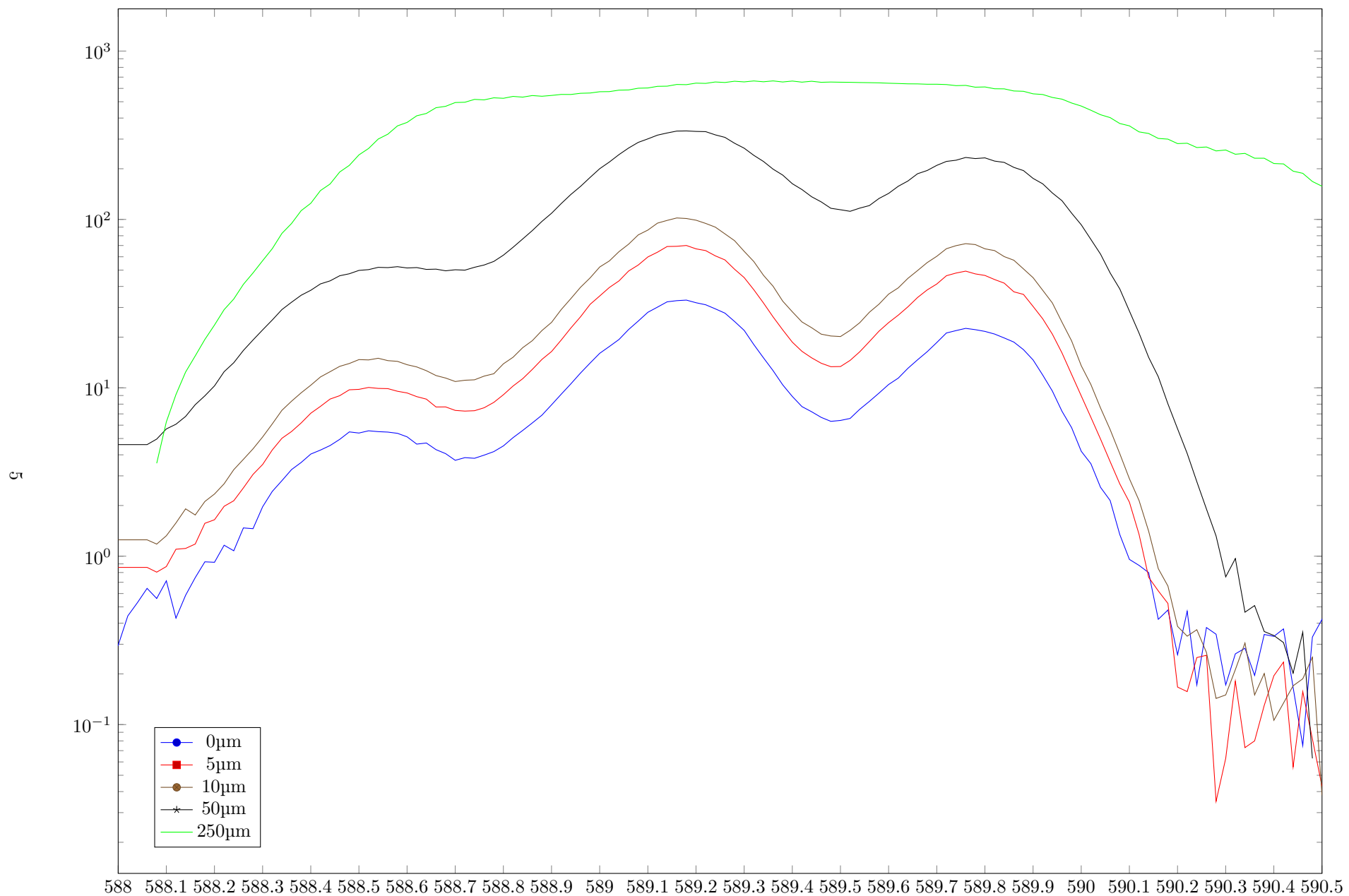


Figure 4: ψ lamp spectrum focused on yellow doublet. Note significantly decreased intensity for a 0 μm slit width requiring semilog scale.