Can You Feel the Beat? Measuring the Quantum Beat

by

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ABSTRACT

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What makes up the quantum nature of a system? Is it particle size? Is it the inclusion of the Planck constant? Is it that the system is probabilistic? While these may contribute to the quantum nature of a system, one of the hallmarks of a quantum system is in the indistinguishability of particles. Indistinguishability, also called indiscernible or identical particles, is the consideration that one particle can not be distinguished from another. While it is not the only hallmark of a quantum system, indistinguishability is a purely quantum effect (1) and is used to determine the nature of a system in question.

While the concept seems simple, it can have profound effects, particularly in quantum optics. But before we get there, let us begin with a little history. The concept of indistinguishability was introduced in order to explain experimental results. If we were to have two electrons that collide with one another and we were to question which electron took which path; how would we do so?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

Fig 1.1 – Which is the correct path?

Two particles that are inherently not different from one another, which path seems more correct? When we consider this with Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, a particle’s location ends up having very little meaning, and almost renders this question moot.

What we have above seems rather abstract, more like a thought experiment. However, the lack of indistinguishability in quantum experiments can lead to some very interesting physical results. This leads us to the work done by Legero, Wilk, Kuhn, and Rempe. In 2003 they produced a paper detailing the mathematical framework that would result in a quantum beat. In particular, they found that if there was a difference in frequency between the photons, i.e something that made the photons distinguishable, this would lead to an effect they called the quantum beat.

What is the quantum beat? When two photons, that are distinguishable, with a temporal delay that is far shorter than the wave packet length, can create an interference effect that looks like a beat effect, in which the intensity of the signal oscillates with respect to time. This is demonstrated experimentally by graphing coincidences vs. temporal separation. Though this is only part of the story.

In this paper I seek to convince the reader that the presence of a quantum beat can be used to determine the distinguishability of photon sources. I do this by demonstrating that the beat can be observed via the graphing of the second order correlation function, I then take this result and integrate it over all possible detection times (τ), to determine the probability distribution of all possible measurements. This will be contrasted with the probability distribution of the Hong-Ou-Mandel experiment. Although I’m getting a bit ahead of myself, before we get there, in Chapter 2 I will provide historical and mathematical context of the experiment and the analytic techniques used in this thesis. In Chapter 3, I will provide my own contributions to the demonstration of the quantum beat, with a detailed analysis of my findings. Finally, in Chapter 4, I will make my conclusions with future considerations and improvements.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT

Before I can delve into the work that I have done over this project, it is important that I provide context for the work, this includes historical and technical context along with an analysis of present work. This is done in three parts:

1. The Framework of Quantum Information Processing and Quantum Optics
2. The Hong Ou Mandel Experiment
3. Hanbury-Brown Twiss Experiment

2.1 Quantum Background

2.1.1 Quantum Information Processing

First proposed by Paul Benioff in 1980, and built upon by Feynman in 1981, quantum computation takes the framework of quantum mechanics to perform simulations that are beyond the ability of classical computation. A way that it does this is through the principle of superposition. Prior to measurement, a given quantum state is said to have access to and exists in multiple states. Upon measurement, a state is picked with some probability, and no information of its previous accessible states are available.

Before we continue to explain how this principle is used in quantum computation. Let us consider classical computation. The basic unit of computation in classical computation is the bit, which takes on either a 1 or 0 value. Given these bits, logic gates can be applied, which serve to compare and or combine the input bit values and provide an output bit in accordance to these gates and bits.

In quantum computation, the basic unit of computation is the qubit. A qubit’s information is encoded in the following forms:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2.1.1)  ( 2.1.2) |

This notation is called Dirac notation and equations 1.1 and 1.2 denote the ground and excited states, respectively. The qubit can exist as these states individually, or as a superposition of the two states. As stated previously, this means this exists as and has access to both the 0 and 1 states. This is represented in Dirac notation as:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2.1.3) |

This is a normalised superposition of the ground and excited states. Each state has a complex coefficient, in this case , the modulus square of which return the probabilities of measuring each state, which in this case would be . Thus, upon repeated measurement of the system we would be able to attain both the ground and excited states with a probability of . This elucidates the power of quantum computation over classical computation in its ability to produce all possible results over repeated iterations.

Another important reason that quantum computation supersedes classical computation is due to entanglement. We have thus far only considered single qubits, but suppose we consider multiple qubits instead. Like the single qubits, they exist as a superposition of basis states; however there exist states that can not be written as separable products of the individual states.

Consider a second qubit of the following form:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2.1.4) |

We can write binary qubit state, the tensor product of the two states, is given as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2.1.5) |

This is a separable state, as it can be written as a product state of the two qubits. The state is spanned by four basis states, of which each qubit brings two basis states.

A non-separable state is one that can not be decomposed into a product of the two qubits. There exists some correlation term that can not be cleanly divided between the two qubits. When the state has this form it is said to be an entangled state. The Bell states are examples of non-separable states, and they represent all combinations of maximally entangled basis vectors. They are:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2..6) |
|  |  | ( 2..7) |
|  |  | ( 2..8) |
|  |  | ( 2..9) |

* + 1. Quantum Harmonic Oscillator

I have used the ground and excited states quite liberally in the previous section; however I have not defined the framework from which they come from. Much like in classical computation, quantum computation also utilises a two-level system. This piggybacks off of the solutions for the quantum harmonic oscillator and the problem is defined as follows:

Consider a particle in an infinite square well of length L. It is confined by an infinite potential on either side, however it is a free particle within this well. This has the following Hamiltonian:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2.1.10) |

Wherein:

* is the particle momentum
* is the particle mass
* is the particle position
* And is the particle oscillation frequency

In order to make this a ‘quantum’ harmonic oscillator, I will quantize the variables. For the purposes of this paper, this will seem as though I’m simply putting hats on the variables while holding the canonical commutation relationship []= in mind. However, the mathematics is far more in depth and beyond the scope of this paper.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2.1.11) |

The typical approach is to solve this as a second order ordinary differential equation which will yield the following wavefunction:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2.1.12) |

Need some sort of explanation about states:

However, if we consider a small redefinition of the variables, i.e

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2.1.13) |
|  |  | ( 2.1.14) |

These are called the ladder operators and represent the action of lower or raising the state. As an example, the raising operator can act on the ground state to given us the first excited state:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2.1.15) |

Similarly, the lowering operator can take this excited state and lower it as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2.1.16) |

One can take these operators and rewrite the Hamiltonian as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2.1.17) |

Wherein the product of the ladder operators can be recast as , the number operator. This counts the number of excitations. For example, if the number operator were to act on the first excited state, it would count a single excitation:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2.1.18) |

2.1.3 Quantum Optics

Of the multiple proposed modes for computation, one of the first and most popular is the photon. Information is encoded into the photon in multiple possible modes: frequency, spatial mode, polarisation, and time of arrival. This is a natural choice for candidacy due to the photon’s high durability (weak interactions with the environment) and high mobility. In this thesis, we will pay particular attention to the frequency mode of encoding. The harmonic oscillator framework is a natural fit for describing photon interactions such as excitation, absorption, and photon counting.

* + - 1. Quantization of an Electromagnetic Field (Check these solutions)

However, we can not employ the harmonic oscillator convention as is. First, I must demonstrate that it is indeed a natural photon. To do this first consider the classical electromagnetic fields governed by Maxwell equations (in a vacuum):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2..19) |
|  |  | ( 2..20) |
|  |  | ( 2..21) |
|  |  | ( 2..22) |

Wherein:

* is the nabla/del operator
* is the electric field
* is the magnetic field
* is the speed of light within a vacuum

We can take the curl of the last two equations, and when we do we find the following second order differential equations:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2..23) |
|  |  | ( 2..24) |

The solutions for the electric field have the following form:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2..25) |

Wherein:

* is a vector that denotes an arbitrary direction
* is the wave vector in the direction of wave propagation
* denotes the polarization of the vector, perpendicular the direction of propagation
* is the frequency of the wave, such that

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2..26) |

* are spatial plane wave solutions of the form (also called mode functions):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2..27) |

* + With representing the electric field component with respect to polarization
  + representing the unit volume
* and representing the complex amplitudes associated to each temporal mode

As these solutions are found with the assumption that the wave is propagating in a vacuum, there are no free charges. As such this implies that the polarization is orthogonal to the direction propagation.

Now to consider the magnetic field, which can be found using equation (2.1.21)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2..28) |

Wherein:

* are spatial plane wave solutions of the form (also called temporal modes):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2..29) |

* + With representing the magnetic field component with respect to polarization

Given the electric and magnetic field equations define above, we can now determine the energy of a classical electromagnetic field as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2.1.30) |
|  |  | ( 2..31) |

These look like quantum harmonic oscillator solutions however there are some considerations before we can call them similar. As with the quantum harmonic oscillator, we must quantize the complex amplitudes. Again, this is more complex than what it seems (simply putting hats atop the operators and changing the star to a dagger); however, suffice it to consider that these operators obey bosonic commutation relations, ie:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2..32) |

Our Hamiltonian then becomes:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2.1.33) |

We can safely conclude that the photon indeed follows a harmonic oscillator framework, with the careful consideration that ladder operators follow a bosonic commutation relationship.

2.1.3.1 Temporal Mode Functions

The electromagnetic wave solutions are found with consideration to its polarization, but as I mentioned before the photon can encode in multiple modes. In this thesis we pay particular consideration to the frequency mode of encoding. As such, I can not simply use the polarization mode functions, but rather use a mode function associated to frequency.

Mode functions were first characterized by Glauber and Titulær in 1966, it seeks to solve the real-world problem that photon emissions are never exactly monochromatic, but instead a wave packets that hold multiple frequencies. The spectral width, i.e the spectrum of frequencies contained by this photon, is roughly the inverse of the duration of the wave packet, thus giving rise to the idea of a spatio-temporal wave packet. Given this, they decided to characterize the electromagnetic field on degrees of freedom available to it: polarization, 2 spatial, and one temporal.

We shall pay particular attention to defining temporal mode functions. Much like equation 2.1.25 we will assume a general form for the equation of an electric field in the frequency domain as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2..34) |

We seek to create new creation and annihilation operators that will generate discrete photons with a collection of frequencies. Thus, we can define a linear superposition of these and which are modified by a set of complete and orthogonal weight functions . This looks as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2..35) |
|  |  | ( 2..36) |

These operators obey the bosonic commutation relationships:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2..37) |

As mentioned above, these orthogonal weight functions, , are also complete. This means that they obey the following relationship:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2..38) |

We can now define inverse relationships of the following form:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2..39) |
|  |  | ( 2..40) |

Finally we can now define the temporal modes using equations (2.1.34, 2.1.39, and 2.1.40) as:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | ( 2..41) |
|  |  | ( 2..41) |

These temporal mode functions are key to the set up of the quantum beat problem, as they play the role of defining the ‘shape’ of the photon.

This thesis will use two types of temporal mode functions for photons

* The Gaussian:
* Wherein
* The Gaussian mode function defines an idealized wave packet. Called this as it is a ‘packet’ of waves (i.e different wave numbers) clustered about a single value.
* Ideal monochromatic emission
* Include Picture
* The Lorentzian:
* Wherein
* This shape arises, when there is homogenous broadening
* In general, photon emissions is due to the excitation and the subsequent de-excitation of a quantum system
* Each energy level of the system has a different excitation and emission profile from one another which is proportional to the emitted photon
* The natural lifetime of an excited state can be a factor that influences the energy of the quantum system in question
* As all particles do have the same lifetime, but exist on a distribution about an average life time, this also implies that the energy of the system is also on a distribution, and as such are broadened
* The contribution of these effects are called broadening and are better accommodated by a Lorentzian curve rather than a Gaussian.

2.2 Hong, Ou, and Mandel

Demonstrated by Chung Ki Hong (홍정기), Zheyu Ou (区泽宇), and Leonard Mandel in 1987 at the University of Rochester, this is a landmark experiment in quantum optics as it is a uniquely quantum phenomenon

2.2.1 Experimental Set Up

* Use of beam splitter
  + What is a beam splitter and how it works
    - A beam splitter is an optical device that splits a beam
    - In most experiments, a beam splitter splits the beam into halves that run into two separate “arms.” and thus is called a half beam splitter. However, there are also 1/3 beam splitters which will split the beam into 1/3 in one arm and 2/3 in the other.
    - Generally, a cube of glass, which is made up of two glass prisms.
  + How it works in this experiment
    - As two photons are incident upon a beam splitter, there are 4 possible outcomes
      * Both photons are reflected
      * Both photons are transmitted
      * One photon is transmitted and the other reflected (Multiplicity of 2)
        + If photons are purely indistinguishable then it would be impossible to determine if the upper or lower photon gets transmitted
* Mathematical Framework

2.2.2 Results

* Hallmark effect of quantum mechanics
  + Two photodetectors are placed in the output modes of the beam splitter
  + A coincidence count is measured as a photon is incident upon both photodetectors
  + As time passes and the photons overlap interfere perfectly, i.e. there is no mode in which they are distinguishable from one another, the coincidence counts drop to 0
  + When this occurs, this is considered the experimental signature, and is shown as a dip in the coincidence counts as shown below.
* Mathematical result

This experiment provides us with the experimental setup to measure the quantum beat.

2.3 Hanbury-Brown Twiss Experiment

* Rather than quantum optics, we are going to take a slight detour to astronomy, taking note of the work of Hanbury Brown and Twiss
* Developed an interferometer that was an improvement on the Michelson stellar interferometer
* Given a Michelson interferometer, light from a star is collected by two mirrors which are separated by a distance
* If the light from the source has the same frequency, then an interference pattern forms on the focal plane, however this is not the case, the intensities will simply add.
* Upon multiple variations in d, and thus in the interference patterns, one can use this information to determine the angular size of the star to be measured.
* The mirrors used in this interferometer are relatively small and as the distance between them becomes too large, the angular resolution becomes compromised
* Instead of two mirrors, Hanbury- Brown and Twiss instead used a beam splitter. In order to eliminate the issue of losing angular resolution due to large distances
* This beam splitter will act to split the light incident upon into two output ports.
* The number of pulses output on the photodetectors are recorded along with temporal separation between outputs upon the photodetectors
* Having this, what do we do with this?

Correlation Function

* Consider a beam that is incident upon a beam splitter
* At the transmitted and reflected arms of the beam splitter, there is a photo multiplier at the end
  + Serves to amplify the current to a measurable electrical signal
* The signals were connected with a unit that multiplied and averaged the signals
* As such, the result was proportional to, the time average of the two signals
* The output time average of these signals are proportional to the light intensities prior to being incident upon the photomultipliers
* In order to glean information from these results, we now consider the second order correlation function:
* Counts are proportional to number of photons incident upon the photomultiplier, therefore instead we can rewrite the second order correlation function can be rewritten as:

This is the last piece of the puzzle, the mode of analysis used to analyse the results of the experiment.

Now that I’ve established my building blocks, in the next session I wish to use them in such a way that I can put them together to measure the quantum beat.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

Legero, Wilk, Kuhn, and Rempe demonstrated the mathematical background for the two-photon effect and demonstrated the quantum beat by graphing the two-photon coincidence probability against the detection time. In this thesis I seek to demonstrate the same effect via the second order correlation function.

Consider again the Hong-Ou-Mandel experiment with two photons in put on a beam splitter, the second order correlation function associated to the two output photons are as follows:

Wherein the number operators can be recast as the product of adag and a, this then becomes:

This uses the normal ordering convention that keeps the creation operators to the left and the annihilation operators to the left.

The initial state of the system corresponds to the following quantum state:

Wherein the the creation operators of photon one and two are applied on some ground state. Thus, the output creation operators can be written as a normalized linear combination of the input creation operators. By doing this we can rewrite equation () with respect to the creation and annihilation operators of the first and second photon, which are as follows:

Having this we can test different input photons to and determine their correlation functions. We will do this by first considering two idealized Gaussian photons, then a more realistic Lorentzian photon, and finally a stream of Lorentzian photons.

Case 1: The Gaussian Photon

Consider a Gaussian photon which has the following form:

Its correlation function is then:

Suppose we consider the simple case where there is no difference in frequency, ie delta=0 and. We then find the experimental signature of the HOM experiment. That is to say that if there is no delay between the photons (ie. Delta tau=0), then our second order cross correlation function suggesting that the light is antibunched.

We can also appropriately change the delay between photons and we still find that no our second order cross correlation function still suggests that the light is antibunched. This also suggests that any interference is quantum in nature (as antibunching is a uniquely quantum phenomenon).

Suppose instead we include a frequency difference, which makes these photons distinguishable. We see that there are still no coincident detections (tau=0), however, the second order correlation function oscillates with respect to detection time difference tau.

It’s the final brain cell