Chapter 3: Angular Momentum

Yuquan Chen

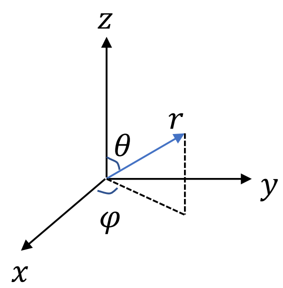
2019/04/16

We have discussed position and momentum operator before, now let's consider the rotation of a system, which leads to angular position and angular momentum. Before we dive in, there's some prerequisites we should know.

1 Some prerequisites

In a 3D system, we use $\vec{r} = (x, y, z)$ to represent the coordinate, and the momentum is $\vec{p} = (p_x, p_y, p_z)$. In position representation, we have $p_x \leftrightarrow -i\hbar\frac{\partial}{\partial x}$, $p_y \leftrightarrow -i\hbar\frac{\partial}{\partial y}$, and $p_z \leftrightarrow -i\hbar\frac{\partial}{\partial z}$, together we get $\vec{p} = (-i\hbar\frac{\partial}{\partial x}, -i\hbar\frac{\partial}{\partial y}, -i\hbar\frac{\partial}{\partial z}) = -i\hbar\vec{\nabla}$.

Now let's switch to spherical coordinate (r, θ, φ).



For a point in space, we use a ket $|\psi\rangle$ to represent it,

$$\begin{cases} x = r\sin\theta\cos\varphi \\ y = r\sin\theta\sin\varphi \\ z = r\cos\theta \end{cases} \Rightarrow r = \sqrt{x^2 + y^2 + z^2}$$

now let's consider a rotation along $\hat{z}$ direction. Here φ becomes $\varphi + d\varphi$, and r, θ remain the same. We have

$$|x, y, z\rangle \xrightarrow{\text{rotation}} |x', y', z'\rangle \tag{1}$$

and the corresponding

$$(r, \theta, \varphi) \xrightarrow{\text{rotation}} (r, \theta, \varphi + d\varphi) \tag{2}$$

then we try to find out the expression of x', y', z' in terms of $r, \theta, \varphi, d\varphi$

$$\begin{cases} x' = r\sin\theta\cos(\varphi + d\varphi) \simeq r\sin\theta\cos\varphi - r\sin\theta\sin\varphi d\varphi \\ y' = r\sin\theta\sin(\varphi + d\varphi) \simeq r\sin\theta\sin\varphi + r\sin\theta\cos\varphi d\varphi \\ z' = r\cos\theta = z \end{cases} \Rightarrow \begin{cases} x' = x - yd\varphi \\ y' = y + xd\varphi \\ z' = z \end{cases} \tag{3}$$

On a spin-$\frac{1}{2}$ system, we have Pauli operators $\sigma_x, \sigma_y, \sigma_z$. In the σ_z basis, we have

$$\sigma_x = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix}, \sigma_y = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & -i \\ i & 0 \end{pmatrix}, \sigma_z = \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 \end{pmatrix} \tag{4}$$

and

$$[\sigma_k, \sigma_l] = 2i\varepsilon_{klm}\sigma_m, \quad \varepsilon_{klm} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } k, l, m \text{ in order} \\ -1 & \text{if out of order} \end{cases} \tag{5}$$

define the spin operator,

$$\begin{cases} \vec{S} = \frac{\hbar}{2}\vec{\sigma}, \ S_z = \frac{\hbar}{2}\sigma_z \\ \vec{\sigma} = (\sigma_x, \sigma_y, \sigma_z) \end{cases} \tag{6}$$

here we should mention that $[S_k, S_l] = i\hbar\varepsilon_{klm}S_m$ is generally true for angular momentum operators, including spin-$\frac{1}{2}$ operators.

$$\vec{S}^2 = S_x^2 + S_y^2 + S_z^2 = \frac{\hbar^2}{4}\left(\sigma_x^2 + \sigma_y^2 + \sigma_z^2\right) = \frac{3}{4}\hbar^2 I \tag{7}$$