Solution of the Initial Boundary Value Problem with the Wave Equation

Report on Research Labworks

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1 Theoretical Background

1.1 General Analytical Solution

The wave equation (WE) for the scalar field $\phi(t, x)$ in one spatial and one time dimension is

$$0 = \frac{\partial^2 \phi}{\partial t^2} - c^2 \frac{\partial^2 \phi}{\partial x^2} = \partial_{tt}\phi - c^2 \partial_{xx}\phi \tag{1}$$

with $c \in \mathbb{R}$. According to the symmetry of second derivatives this can be divided into two factors

$$0 = (\partial_t - c\partial_x)(\partial_t + c\partial_x)\,\phi\ . \tag{2}$$

With introduction of two variables, $\xi = x - ct$ and $\nu = x + ct$, now we can write:

$$0 = \partial_\xi \partial_\nu \phi\ . \tag{3}$$

Therefor the wave equation has the general solution

$$\phi(t, x) = f(\xi) + g(\nu) = f(x - ct) + g(x + ct) \tag{4}$$

which is a composition of a forward and a backward propagating elementary wave. As boundary condition we assume the initial time value and its derivative:

$$\phi_0(x) = \phi(0, x) = f(x) + g(x) =: A(x) \tag{5}$$

$$\Big(\partial_t \phi(0, x)\Big) = cf'(x) - cg'(x) =: B(x)\ . \tag{6}$$

Integrating eq. 6 results in

$$f(x) - g(x) = \int_{x_0}^{x} B(s)\,\mathrm{d}s \tag{7}$$

so that the separated solution is given by (here $x_0 = x(t = 0)$)

$$f(x) = \frac{1}{2}\left(A(x) + \frac{1}{c}\int_{x_0}^{x} B(s)\,\mathrm{d}s\right) \tag{8}$$

$$g(x) = \frac{1}{2}\left(A(x) - \frac{1}{c}\int_{x_0}^{x} B(s)\,\mathrm{d}s\right)\ . \tag{9}$$

Putting these together yields the general solution in dependence of the initial values, the d'Alembert's formula:

$$\phi(t, x) = \frac{1}{2}\left(A(x - ct) + A(x + ct) + \frac{1}{c}\int_{x-ct}^{x+ct} B(s)\,\mathrm{d}s\right) \tag{10}$$

This means, for given initial parameters the wave's evolution in time is clearly defined.

1.2 Rewriting the WE as two differential equations out of one

Now we introduce the time derivative of the field as a new variable: $\Pi(t, x) = \partial_t \phi$. Thereby the initial wave equation eq. 1 can be rewritten as a wave equation including the first-order derivative in time and second-order derivative in space:

$$\partial_t \Pi = \partial_{tt}\phi = c^2 \partial_{xx}\phi\ . \tag{11}$$

Now one can, in accordance to the notation we introduced above, regard the field's derivative at the initial time $\Pi(0, x)$ as $B(x)$. Typical values for this initial velocity $\Pi(0, x)$ are either 0 or a constant.

Example 1: $\Pi(0,x) = 0$ If we consider the field's initial velocity to be zero, $\Pi(0,x) = 0$ almost everywhere, this means the wave roughly is a pulse. Furthermore, if we assume no spatial boundaries the pulse will dominate the shape of the wave as time moves forward.

Example 2: $\Pi(0,x) = \textbf{const.}$ If we consider the initial velocity to be a constant, the wave function is at rest in a suitable inertial frame of reference. Hence, there will be no wave propagation.

1.3 Rewriting the WE as a fully first order system / eigenvalue problem

Similar to the definition of the velocity variable $\Pi(t,x)$ we now introduce the slope variable as the spatial derivative of the field: $\chi = \partial_x \phi$.

With the *state vector* $\vec{u} = \{\phi, \Pi, \chi\}$ and the source term S we can write the wave equation in as an eigenvalue problem in matrix form:

$$\partial_t \vec{u} + \hat{M} \partial_x \vec{u} = \vec{S} \tag{12}$$

Example 1: