Doppler-Free Saturated Absorption Spectroscopy
Lab Report

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Motivation and Context

The atomic hyperfine structure arises from the interaction of the nuclear and electron magnetic moments. This structure is responsible for many technological achievements, including the development of atomic clocks. In fact, the SI second is defined by counting the number of transitions between two hyperfine states in the cesium 133 atom [1]. Additionally, the famous 21-cm line in astronomy is generated by a hyperfine transition in interstellar hydrogen[2].

The measurement of hyperfine splittings can be performed by using Doppler-Free Saturated Absorption Spectroscopy. We will use this technique to measure the splittings of several hyperfine structures of Rubidium.

Physics and Predictions

Atomic Spectra

Rubidium is a hydrogen-like atom with a single $5s^1$ electron in its outer shell. This electron gives rise to the two term states we will be interested in: $5^2\mathrm{S}_{1/2}$ and $5^2\mathrm{P}_{3/2}$. There are two naturally occurring isotopes of Rubidium: 72% abundant $^{85}\mathrm{Rb}$ with spin number $I = 5/2$ and 28% abundant $^{87}\mathrm{Rb}$ with $I = 3/2$. The Hamiltonian describing the atom is given by

$$H = \frac{p^2}{2m} - \frac{Z_{eff}e^2}{4\pi\epsilon_0 r} + \zeta(r)\vec{L}\cdot\vec{S}$$
$$+ \alpha\vec{J}\cdot\vec{I} + \frac{\beta}{2I(2I-1)J(2J-1)}\left[3(\vec{I}\cdot\vec{J})^2 + \frac{3}{2}(\vec{I}\cdot\vec{J}) - I(I+1)J(J+1)\right] \quad (1)$$

$\frac{p^2}{2m}$ contains the kinetic energy term and $-\frac{Z_{eff}e^2}{4\pi\epsilon_0 r}$ the standard Coulomb attractive potential. $\zeta(r)\vec{L}\cdot\vec{S}$ is the spin orbit coupling term, which gives rise to the broad term states such as $5^2\mathrm{S}_{1/2}$ and $5^2\mathrm{P}_{3/2}$. The transition between these states is $780\,\mathrm{nm}$. The final two terms result from the hyperfine interaction. The former term is the hyperfine interaction between the magnetic dipole of the nucleus and electron, while the latter comes from the nuclear electric quadrupole. These two terms will produce the hyperfine states we will explore in this lab, and we label these states by their quantum number F, the magnitude of the total angular momentum $\vec{F} = \vec{J} + \vec{I}$. The possible quantum numbers vary from $|J - I|$ to $J + I$. These energy levels are shown in figure 1. In this lab, we will look at $^{85}\mathrm{Rb}$ transitions from $5^2\mathrm{S}_{1/2}\,\mathrm{F} = 3$ to $5^2\mathrm{P}_{3/2}\,\mathrm{F'} = 1, 2, 3, 4$ and $^{87}\mathrm{Rb}$ transitions from $5^2\mathrm{S}_{1/2}\,\mathrm{F} = 2$ to $5^2\mathrm{P}_{3/2}\,\mathrm{F'} = 0, 1, 2, 3$.
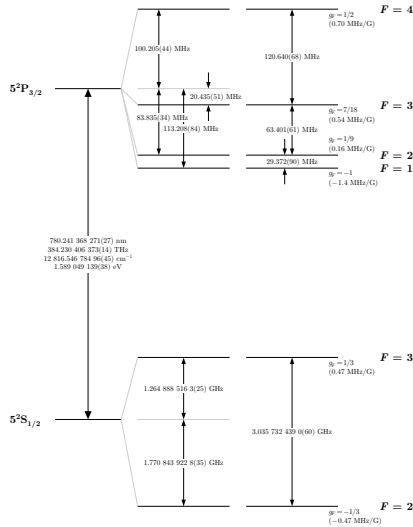
It can be shown that the frequencies

Figure 2: Rubidium 85 D$_2$ transition hyperfine structure, with frequency splittings between the hyperfine energy levels. The excited-state values are taken from [11, 26], and the ground-state values are from [26]. The relative hyperfine shifts are shown to scale within each hyperfine manifold (but visual spacings should not be compared between manifolds or to the optical splitting). The approximate Landé g_F-factors for each level are also given, with the corresponding Zeeman splittings between adjacent magnetic sublevels.
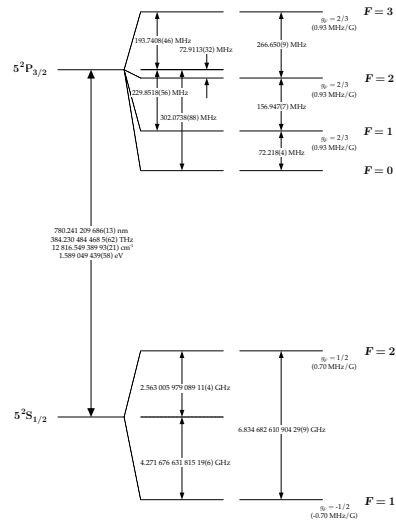
Figure 2: ^{87}Rb D$_2$ transition hyperfine structure, with frequency splittings between the hyperfine energy levels. The excited-state values are taken from [6], and the ground-state values are from [16]. The approximate Landé g_F-factors for each level are also given, with the corresponding Zeeman splittings between adjacent magnetic sublevels.

(a) ^{85}Rb[3]

(b) ^{87}Rb[4]

Figure 1: Rubidium Energy Levels

Doppler Broadening

The spectra given in the previous section are obtained from a description of nature in the atom's frame of reference with no external effects. However, real Rubidium atoms are subject to thermal motion, and as such these spectral lines will undergo broadening owing to the motion of the atoms relative to the laser. Atoms moving toward the laser will 'see' radiation blueshifted, and so absorption will only occur if the incoming photons are of a lower frequency than predicted by the spectra in figure 1. Similarly, atoms moving away from the laser will absorb photons of higher frequency. Because the velocity of these atoms follows the Maxwell distribution, it can be expected that the spectral lines will similarly follow such a distribution. It can be shown that the half width of these distributions is given by

$$\Delta \nu_{1/2} = 2 \frac{\nu_0}{c} \sqrt{\frac{2kT}{M} \ln(2)} \tag{2}$$

where ν_0 is the rest frame atomic resonance, M is the mass of the atom and T is the temperature of the sample.

We can use this to predict the expected half width of the D2 lines. Using figures from Steck[3][4],

$^{85}\text{Rb}\,\text{D}_2$

$$\Delta \nu_{1/2} = \frac{2}{\lambda_0} \sqrt{\frac{2kT}{M_{85}} \ln(2)}$$

$$= \frac{2}{780.241\,\text{nm}} \sqrt{\frac{2 \left(1.381 \times 10^{-23}\,\frac{\text{J}}{\text{K}}\right) (293\,\text{K})}{1.410 \times 10^{-25}\,\text{kg}} \ln(2)}$$

$$\approx 511\text{MHz}$$

$^{87}\text{Rb}\,\text{D}_2$

$$\Delta \nu_{1/2} = \frac{2}{\lambda_0} \sqrt{\frac{2kT}{M_{87}} \ln(2)}$$

$$= \frac{2}{780.241\,\text{nm}} \sqrt{\frac{2 \left(1.381 \times 10^{-23}\,\frac{\text{J}}{\text{K}}\right) (293\,\text{K})}{1.443 \times 10^{-25}\,\text{kg}} \ln(2)}$$

$$\approx 505\text{MHz}$$

These broadened spectra mask the hyperfine structure of the atoms, and so we must use Doppler-Free Saturated Absorption Spectroscopy to tease out these individual spectra.

Experiment and Data

Experimental Setup

We designed the experimental setup on the optical table to accommodate both portions of the lab in tandem, the Doppler-Free Saturated Absorption Spectroscopy and the Michelson
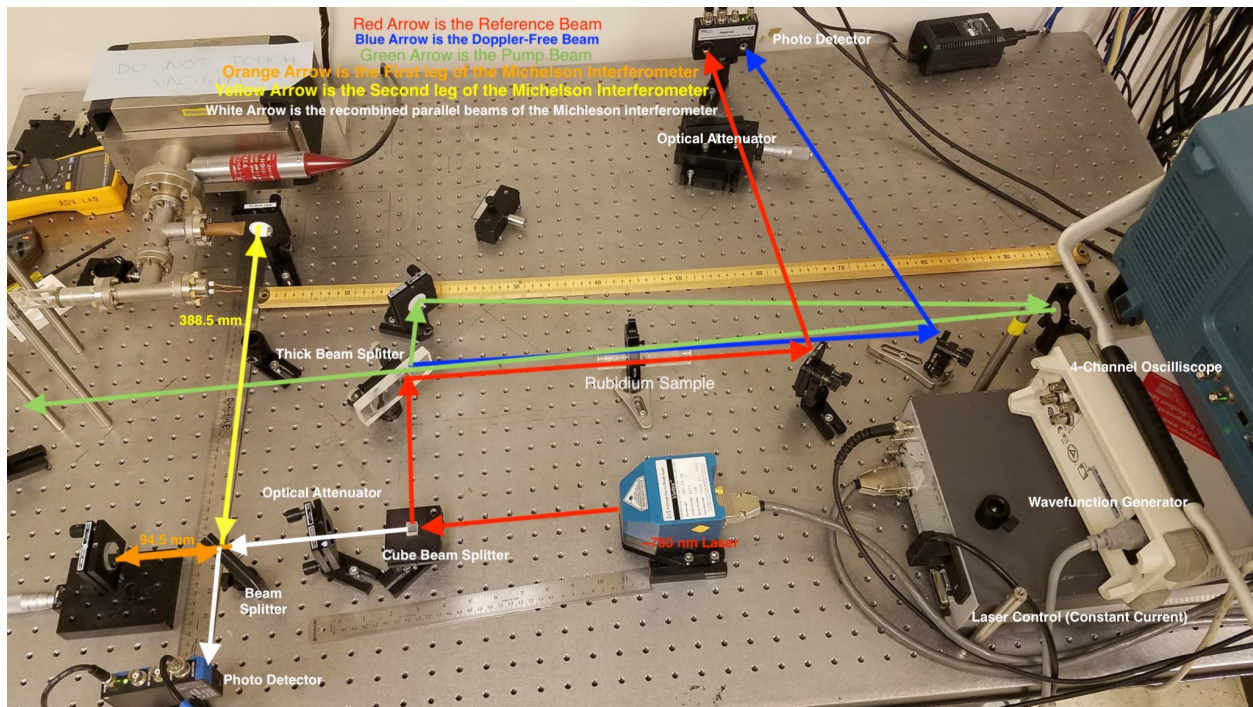
Figure 2: Experiment Layout

Interferometer. The tedious process of finding and aligning the 780 nm external cavity diode laser took a long while. Using the Infrared-Viewing camera and the handheld cardviewer allowed us to trace the paths of Laser beam. The Laser beam was directed through a cube beam-splitter with the straight path continuing towards the Michelson Interferometer setup, and the perpendicular spit path towards a thick beam splitter. The thickness of the beam spitter allows for a precisely spaced set of parallel beams directly through the Rubidium vapor sample. These two weak beams are called the reference probe beam and the overlapping probe beam. The main portion of the laser continued straight through the thick beam splitter, becoming the start of the pump beam. The strong pump beam was angled with a mirror towards the opposite end of the table and was then angled with a separate mirror to align an overlap of the pump and the overlapping probe beam. These two beams are propagating in opposite directions.

Results

Error Analysis

Conclusions

References

[1] National Institute of Standards and Technology. *"Definitions of the SI base units"*, 2015.

[2] Green Bank Observatory. *"Prediction of 21cm line radiation"*.

[3] Daniel A. Steck. Rubidium 85 data. 2003.

[4] Daniel A. Steck. Rubidium 87 data. 2003.