

Spin direction vector

Expectation of spin operators is a projection of spin state $|s\rangle$ onto Euclidean space.

$$\langle x \rangle = \langle s | \sigma_x | s \rangle, \quad \langle y \rangle = \langle s | \sigma_y | s \rangle, \quad \langle z \rangle = \langle s | \sigma_z | s \rangle$$

Hence the spin direction vector is

$$\mathbf{u} = \begin{pmatrix} \langle x \rangle \\ \langle y \rangle \\ \langle z \rangle \end{pmatrix} = \langle s | \boldsymbol{\sigma} | s \rangle, \quad \boldsymbol{\sigma} = \begin{pmatrix} \sigma_x \\ \sigma_y \\ \sigma_z \end{pmatrix}$$

Let θ and ϕ be polar and azimuth angles such that

$$\mathbf{u} = \begin{pmatrix} \sin \theta \cos \phi \\ \sin \theta \sin \phi \\ \cos \theta \end{pmatrix}$$

Then

$$|s\rangle = \begin{pmatrix} \cos \frac{\theta}{2} \\ \sin \frac{\theta}{2} \exp(i\phi) \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} c_+ \\ c_- \end{pmatrix}$$

where

$$c_+ = \sqrt{\frac{\langle z \rangle + 1}{2}}, \quad c_- = \sqrt{\frac{1 - \langle z \rangle}{2}} \frac{\langle x \rangle + i\langle y \rangle}{\sqrt{\langle x \rangle^2 + \langle y \rangle^2}}$$

Example. Let

$$|s\rangle = \begin{pmatrix} \frac{1}{3} - \frac{2}{3}i \\ \frac{2}{3} \end{pmatrix}$$

Then

$$\mathbf{u} = \begin{pmatrix} \langle x \rangle \\ \langle y \rangle \\ \langle z \rangle \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} \frac{4}{9} \\ \frac{8}{9} \\ \frac{1}{9} \end{pmatrix}$$

and

$$c_+ = \sqrt{\frac{\langle z \rangle + 1}{2}} = \frac{\sqrt{5}}{3}, \quad c_- = \sqrt{\frac{1 - \langle z \rangle}{2}} \frac{\langle x \rangle + i\langle y \rangle}{\sqrt{\langle x \rangle^2 + \langle y \rangle^2}} = \frac{2 + 4i}{3\sqrt{5}}$$

The results c_+ and c_- differ from the original $|s\rangle$ but they do represent the same state.