Palacký University Olomouc
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MASTER THESIS

Development of a spectrometric chain for the detection of low-energy gamma radiation using semiconductors.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I elaborated this bachelor thesis independently under the supervision of Mgr. Aleš Stejskal Ph.D., using only information sources referred in the Literature chapter.

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Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1

Gamma rays properties and matter interaction

1.1 Gamma emission

1.2 Passage of radiation and particles through matter

Interaction of a particle (radiation) with another particle (atom, nuclei, free electron) or with continuous matter can result into many types of reactions and effects - scattering of a particle from incident direction, creation of new particles and nuclei, annihilation of incident particle etc. It mainly depends on particle's energy, electric charge, spin and mass, but also on the properties of target particle or matter. The physical quantity describing the probability of a specific interaction of particle with single point target is known as the cross section. Normalized to the unit solid angle - differential cross section:

$$\frac{d\sigma}{d\Omega} = \frac{1}{F}\frac{dN_{\mathrm{s}}}{d\Omega} \tag{1.1}$$

Where F is a particle flux, Ω is a solid angle and N_{s} is the average number of scattered particles per unit time. And the total cross section is given by integration:

$$\sigma = \int \frac{d\sigma}{d\Omega} d\Omega \tag{1.2}$$

However, to characterize the interaction probability of particle with continuous matter, which contains many interaction centres (defined by their density), other assumptions have to be made. The average number of scattered particles is given by:

$$N(\Omega) = FAN\delta x \frac{d\sigma}{d\Omega} \tag{1.3}$$

and integrated:

$$N_{tot} = FAN\sigma\delta x \tag{1.4}$$

The A is a total area perpendicular to the flux, δx is the material thickness and N is the density of interaction centres.

Depending on the type of particle

Heavy charged particles (such as alpha particles, protons, muons, pions) lose their energy mainly due to the atomic electrons collisions. Due to their mass which is much higher than the mass of electrons ($M >> m_{\mathrm{e}}$) they collide with, the direction of their path is left unchanged. The loses of energy per unit path is defined as stopping power $\frac{dE}{dx}$. The stopping power for the heavy charged particles is given by Bethe-Bloch formula which relates stopping power and particle's energy. However the Bethe-Bloch formula doesn't apply on low energies (Lindhard-Sharf nuclear loses) and on higher energies (bremsstrahlung radiation). The change of their path direction is possible by the second process with lesser probability - by the elastic scattering from nuclei.

Electrons and positrons have much smaller mass than the heavy charged particles, and thus the direction of their path is changed due to the movement in an electric field of nucleus. The bremsstrahlung radiation loses are mayor yet at low energies. However, the energy lost due to the collisions also comes to play - it is guided by special Bethe-Bloch formula, which takes the path direction change into account.

Other interaction effects are also possible (Cherenkov radiation emission, nuclear reactions), but they are rare or does not affect the particle's energy as those previously mentioned.

The interaction of neutrons is totally different due to the lack of charge.

This thesis, which is described more detail in following chapter.

1.2.1 Gamma matter interaction

1.3 Photoelectric effect

1.4 Compton scattering

1.5 Pair production

Chapter 2

Gamma rays detection

2.1 Properties and parameters of detectors

2.1.1 Gaseous detectors

2.1.2 Scintillation Detectors

2.1.3 Detectors based on semiconductors

Chapter 3

Semiconductor Detectors

3.1 Principle and parameters

3.2 Construction scheme of Instruments for gamma detection based on semiconductors

3.2.1 XR-100CdTe X-Ray and Gamma Ray Detector

3.2.2 MIMOS 2

3.3 Available semiconductor sensors

3.4 Hamamatsu detectors

3.5 OPF420 PIN diode

Chapter 4

Detector pulse analysis

Chapter 5

Mössbauer effect and spectroscopy

Mössbauer effect is a physical effect, which can under certain circumstances occur on atomic nuclei. It consists of recoilless resonance emission/absorption of gamma photons by nuclei of source/absorber with discrete nuclear energy levels. This effect has a wide field of application - mainly the Mössbauer spectroscopy, which is a nuclear experimental technique and a special type of gamma spectroscopy, which uses the appropriate nuclei in studied sample as sonds of local electric and magnetic fields.

This technique is capable of providing many unique information in material research, geology, chemistry and biology - study of phase and chemical composition of solid materials such as steel, study of local magnetic fields and spin states, in-situ measurements of phase transitions. The main disadvantage of this technique is the fact that there is not an appropriate radiation source for many isotopes. The mayor significance has iron and its isotope ^{57}Fe with possible radiation source ^{57}Co (which decays into an excited state of ^{57}Fe), which allows Mössbauer spectroscopy to be employed on many fields, including the steel industry.

5.1 Physical concept

5.1.1 Resonace emission and absorption

In previous chapters was mentioned, that the atomic nuclei are quantum systems with discrete energy levels (analogous to the energy levels of electron shell), thus upon deexcitation or excitation they emit/absorb gamma photon with energy E_0 equal to the difference between the levels. For the free, stationary nucleus, the emitted/absorbed energy spectra follow the shape of Lorentzian curve.

However, this energy may be altered - due to the momentum conservation law, some part of the gamma photon energy is transferred to the kinetic energy of nucleus, crystal as whole body or is transformed into lattice vibrations (phonons). Due to this fact, the emission and absorption energy spectra may be different and without any overlaps, which prevents the resonance effects from happening.

In the case of free, stationary nuclei, momentum and energy transfers are so high, that the emission and absorption spectra are shifted to different directions by large energetic values, which makes the resonance absorption impossible to observe. However, the nucleus bounded into the crystal lattice is a different case - the crystal as whole body will absorb the momentum. If we consider, that the entire crystal has much larger mass than the nucleus, the energy transfer into crystal's kinetic energy will be very small - the gamma photon energy remains nearly unaltered. Thus this can be considered as recoilless emission/absorption and the energy spectra have overlap, which makes the resonance absorption (Mössbauer effect) observable.

It also worth mentioning, that there is also a third case - the free nuclei in thermal motion. The velocity of nuclei is guided by Maxwell's statistics and the spectra become widened by Gaussian shape. At higher temperatures, this effect may result into spectra overlap and makes the resonance absorption observable. However, this technique is not much developed yet and has only a small field of application.

5.1.2 Interaction of nuclei with local fields

The nucleus bound inside the lattice surrounded by electrons arranged according to the chemical bonds has perturbed energy levels, which is due to the interaction of nucleus with local electric and magnetic fields - what results into the fact, that every phase or chemical constitution has its own nuclear emission/absorption spectrum - Mössbauer spectrum. The quantum physics has very-well known computation techniques to describe these variations in energy spectra - the perturbation theory,

The main properties of nucleus which induces the interactions with local electric and magnetic fields are: atomic number Z, quadrupole momentum Q and its spin I along with its projections. For spectroscopy there are three main interaction:

- Electric monopole interaction - the interaction between the protons of nucleus and the s-electrons (which have non-zero probability of being found inside nucleus). It results into isomer shift of energy levels $\delta = E_M - E_0$. The δ has to be defined with respect to some fixed energy level, for example to the level of the used source.

- Electric quadrupole interaction - the inhomogeneous electric field inside nucleus interacts the quadrupole momentum Q of the nuclei. It results into energy variations with respect to the square of magnetic quantum number $E_Q \sim m^2$- the states which allows different values of $|m|$ are splitted into sub-states.

- Magnetic dipole interaction - the spin I is tied up with magnetic momentum via relation $\mu = \gamma I$, where γ is a gyromagnetic ratio. This magnetic momentum interacts with magnetic fields inside nucleus and results into nuclear Zeeman effects - the splitting of the states with respect to possible values of magnetic quantum number m. The main difference from the quadrupole interaction is that the spin orientation also matters. The magnetic dipole interaction has a significant role when it comes to study the magnetic properties of materials.

Each of these effects can occur separately or simultaneously with the others.

5.2 Mössbauer spectroscopy

There are several techniques how to obtain the spectra. In laboratories there are dominant the setups employing transmission or backscattering geometry with sample as an absorber and with the doppler modulation of the gamma photons energy. The transmitted photons or other products developed upon deexcitation are detected by appropriate detector with electronics to accumulate the energetic spectra. The energy of gamma photons is varied by the doppler effect - the source is attached to the doppler modulator (transducer), and by the relative velocity of source and absorber the energy of gamma photons is slightly changed.

For transmission geometry the key concept of measurement is that if we irradiate the sample as an absorber gradually by continuous spectrum of gamma rays with energy around the resonance energy E_0 ("energy scanning" by the doppler modulator), the gamma photons with energy equal to one of the possible transitions (resonant energies) are absorbed with certain probability. Gamma photons with different energies are due to the low cross section of previously discussed matter interactions mostly transmitted. The detector is situated behind the absorber and simultaneously measures the number of gamma counts at defined energy step. The minimal counts are measured around the resonant energy. The transmission geometry Mössbauer spectra can be seen on picture **??**.

The concept of backscattering geometry is similar in many ways, but the main difference is the detection of the deexcitation products. The sample's nuclei are excited by appropriate gamma photons and in short time, they decay back into the original state with some effects following - reemission of the "original" gamma photons in random direction, emission of electrons from the shell (ejected by deexcitation energy quanta, also called conversion electrons) followed by characteristic RTG or possibly by auger electrons. The detection of electrons and RTG instead of gamma photons have many advantages and disadvantages and for certain application, the usage of backscattering geometry could be more appropriate. For example, the detection of conversion electrons could handle the in-depth characterization of the sample due to the lesser transmittance of electrons when comparing to gamma photons.

There are also different setups - irradiation by synchrotron radiation (which can produce continuous gamma spectra with high iluminance), using the sample as an source etc.

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5.3 ^{57}Fe spectroscopy

One of the isotopes, on which we are capable to observe a Mössbauer effect is ^{57}Fe. However, this thesis is mainly devoted to the application of semiconductor detectors for detection of the 14.4 keV gamma photons in transmission geometry.

- Source of 14.4 keV gamma - ^{57}Co radioctive nuclei built-in crystal lattice (mostly in a rhodium matrice).
- Transducer for doppler modulation with PID regulation for precise velocity and energy control.
- detector of transmitted/backscattered gamma radiation, conversion electrons or RTG along with readout and evaluation electronics including amplifiers, MCA's etc.

It is also necessary to consider, that the ^{57}Fe isotope have relative abundance only 2.21% [**compounds**]. Although this fact, the spectra are still measured with very respectable precision and efficiency, which makes the Mössbauer spectroscopy very sensitive measurement method.

Conclusion

The work on thesis was both very hard and experiencing, and thus it can be compared to have to chug a bottle of 50% vodka - get sick, get experienced.