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Amplification of Optical Pulse Delays using Weak Measurements

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Abstract: A novel scheme for super-sensitive measurement of optical pulse delays is proposed based on the concept of weak-value amplification. We discuss an experimental implementation of this technique utilizing a Mach-Zehnder interferometer. © 2013 Optical Society of America

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In 1988 Aharonov et al. introduced weak measurement as a procedure to gain information about average properties of an ensemble of quantum states, without perturbing the wavefunction of each one considerably [1]. Unlike strong measurements, the result of a weak measurement, known as a weak value, can be beyond the range of eigenvalues of the observable’s operator [2]. This property of weak values can be exploited in order to achieve very sensitive measurements of different observables. A number of previously performed experiments have resulted in measurement of a small transverse shift, angular deflection, and longitudinal phase shift of an optical beam [3–5].

In all these experiments a small variation in the polarization state of photons is measured through a change in the state of a pointer. The pointer can be either a physically separate system or an extra degree of freedom of the particles involved in the measurement. It is in principle possible, to use the time information of a pulsed field as the pointer in a weak measurement. In this paper, we describe a procedure for performing such an experiment. We show that the weak-value amplification can lead to a drastic enhancement in the accuracy of pulse delay measurements.

Consider the Mach-Zehnder interferometer depicted in Fig. (1). The state of a single photon at the input port can be written as

\[ |\Psi_{in}\rangle = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}(|H\rangle + |V\rangle) \otimes |f(t)\rangle e^{-i\omega_0 t}, \]

where we have assumed a quasi-monochromatic single optical mode with a pulse shape described by \(|f(t)\rangle\). The horizontal and vertical polarization states are shown as \(|H\rangle\) and \(|V\rangle\) respectively. Lets consider a case when the interferometer considered in the experiment is imbalanced. In this situation, the photon state in the output is equal to

\[ |\Psi_{out}\rangle = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}(|H\rangle |f(t-t_0)\rangle + |V\rangle |f(t)\rangle) e^{-i\omega_0 t}. \]
Here we have dropped the common delay time between the two polarization states in order to simplify the notation. Additionally, we have assumed the differential delay $t_0$ to be equal to a multiple of the period $2\pi/\omega_0$ and much smaller than the pulse width. This results in the convenient phase difference of zero in the output. For a more general situation, any phase difference between the two arms can be compensated by a small change in one of the paths, keeping the group delay almost unchanged.

\[
|\Psi_{PS}\rangle \propto \left[ |H\rangle \cos(\theta) + |V\rangle \sin(\theta) \right] \otimes |f(t - A_w t_0)\rangle e^{-i\omega_0 t}.
\]

(3)

Here $A_w$ is the well-known weak value, and $\theta$ is the polarizer’s angle. In this experiment the observable is the which-path information operator $\hat{A} = |H\rangle\langle H|$. The amplification factor $A_w$ can be calculated using

\[
A_w = \frac{\langle \Phi_\theta | \hat{A} | \Psi_{in}\rangle}{\langle \Phi_\theta | \Psi_{in}\rangle},
\]

(4)

where $|\Phi_\theta\rangle$ is the post-selection polarization state. Fig. 2 shows simulation results for two different pos-selection angles. It can be seen that the delay gets drastically amplified as $\theta$ approaches $-45^\circ$. We expect to have experimental results supporting these simulated results soon.

References