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The Rotation-Vibration Structure of $^{12}$C

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Abstract. The newly measured high spin $J^\pi = 5^-$ state at 22.4(2) MeV in $^{12}$C reported in this conference, fits very well to the predicted (ground state) rotational band of an oblate equilateral triangular spinning top with a $D_{3h}$ symmetry characterized by the sequence of states: $0^+, 2^+, 3^-, 4^\pm, 5^-$. Such a $D_{3h}$ symmetry was observed in triatomic molecules, and it is observed here for the first time in nuclear physics. We discuss a classification of other rotation-vibration bands in $^{12}$C, such as the $(0^+)$ Hoyle band and the $(1^-)$ bending mode band, and suggest measurements in search of the predicted ("missing") states that may shed new light on clustering in $^{12}$C and light nuclei.

In particular, the observation (or non-observation) of the predicted ("missing") states in the Hoyle band will allow us to conclude the geometrical arrangement of the three alpha particles composing the Hoyle state at 7.654 MeV in $^{12}$C.

1. Introduction

The recent observation of the $2^+$ Hoyle rotational excitation in $^{12}$C [1] allows for the first time the study of the Rotation-Vibration Structure of $^{12}$C. These new data and the recently discovered $4^-$ [2, 3] and $4^+$ [4] states in $^{12}$C are in agreement with the predicted spectrum of an oblate spinning top with a $D_{3h}$ symmetry [5, 6]. It was predicted [5, 6] that the three alpha-particle system of $^{12}$C leads to the ground state rotational band including the most unusual sequence of states: $0^+, 2^+, 3^-, 4^\pm, 5^-$. The new high spin $5^-$ state reported by the Birmingham group in this conference [7] as well the previously published $4^-$ state [2, 3] lead to a $J(J+1)$ trajectory as predicted by this U(7) model [8, 9] including the nearly degenerated $4^-$ and $4^+$ states as shown in Fig. 1.

2. The Algebraic Cluster Model

The spectrum of $^{12}$C predicted by the Algebraic Cluster Model (ACM) [5, 6] is shown in Fig. 2 where it is also compared to the measured spectrum of $^{12}$C [8]. In addition to the ground state rotational band this U(7) model [5, 6] predicts the Hoyle state at 7.65 MeV in $^{12}$C to be the first vibrational breathing mode of the three alpha-particle equilateral configuration leading to the same rotational structure albeit with a larger moment of inertia (by a factor of 2). Recent measurements revealed the $2^+$ [1] and $4^+$ [4] members of the predicted Hoyle rotational band and we are currently searching [10] for the $4^-$ predicted by the ACM to be nearly degenerated.
Figure 1. Rotational band structure of the: ground-state band, the Hoyle band and the bending vibration band in $^{12}$C.

Figure 2. Comparison between the low-lying experimental spectrum of $^{12}$C and the energies of the oblate symmetric top. The levels are organized in columns corresponding to the ground state band and the vibrational bands with $A$ and $E$ symmetry [5, 6] of an oblate top with triangular symmetry. The last column on the left-hand side, shows the lowest observed non-cluster ($1^+$) levels.

with the $4^+$ state and the $3^-$ (broad) state that was suggested to lie between 11 and 14 MeV [2]. The observation (or lack there) of these “missing” states will allow us to determine whether the Hoyle state is composed of three alpha-particles in an equilateral triangle arrangement [8, 11, 12] or an obtuse triangle [13] or whether it is better described as vibrational excitation of a “diffuse gas” of three alpha-particles [14].

The U(7) model also predicts the $1^-$ state at 10.84 MeV to be the vibrational bending mode with a rotational band including the $1^-$ and a degenerate $2^\pm$ states. We are searching [10] for the third $2^+$ of $^{12}$C that is predicted by the U(7) model to lie near the observed $2^-$ state at 11.8 MeV.
In conclusion the ACM appears to open a new chapter in cluster physics of light nuclei and it presents an opportunity for further experimental investigation of light nuclei.

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References