A Proposal to Produce Velocity-selected and State-selected Molecular Beams Using the Ballistic Effect

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Reprinted from The Journal of Chemical Physics, Volume 97, Number 1, 1 July 1992

Approved for public release; Distribution unlimited

A method for producing molecular beams containing molecules in the desired internal (rotational, vibrational, electronic, etc.) state and traveling with the desired velocity is proposed. The method is illustrated by describing the circumstances that would lead to a state-selected and velocity-selected \( \text{N}_2 \) beam resulting from collisions of \( \text{Li}^+ \) with \( \text{N}_2 \).
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pp. 737-738

Published by the

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF PHYSICS

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(Received 3 February 1992; accepted 12 March 1992)

The study of chemical reactions and energy transfer processes using molecular beams has revolutionized our understanding of the mechanisms underlying these processes. Still, except for a few fortunate instances, most of the processes studied involve reactants with low internal excitation or with Boltzmann distributions at the oven temperature. In this letter we propose a method for producing molecule beams in a desired internal state and traveling with a desired velocity. The rates of chemical reactions are known to depend, sometimes strongly, upon the initial state of the reactants. One should expect greatly improved understanding of the chemical reactions and the possibility of studying many more reactions using the ideas presented here. We illustrate the method by describing the circumstances leading to the production of a desired N2 beam resulting from collisions of N2 with Li+ in crossed beams—a system studied extensively by Toennies and co-workers.

The method is based upon the ballistic effect discovered about 19 years ago. Hersbach and co-workers studied the collisions between an alkali halide molecule and an Ar atom at about 1 eV relative translational energy by crossing two beams and measuring the laboratory recoil velocity of the alkali halide molecule as a function of the laboratory scattering angle. In addition to a peak centered at the recoil velocity of elastically scattered alkali halide molecules (pseudoelastic peak, formerly called elastic peak), another equally strong peak centered at the recoil velocity corresponding to the motion of the center of mass (ballistic peak) was observed. Obviously, the ballistic peak is contributed to only by those alkali halide molecules which are almost stationary in the center-of-mass (c.m.) frame and have nearly all of the collision (relative translational) energy converted into the internal (vibrational and/or rotational) energy.

A theory of ballistic collisions gives excellent agreement with the measured results for the CsF–Ar system at the laboratory scattering angles of 30° and 60°. According to this theory, when the differential cross section for the scattering of alkali halide molecules is measured along the direction of the c.m. velocity, only a few transitions contribute to the ballistic peak. This is in contrast to several hundred inelastic transitions making up the pseudoelastic peak. Further, when the relative translational energy equals the energy of one of the rotation–vibration transitions [resonant T-(V,R) process], this transition may have a differential cross section which is larger than that of any other neighboring transition by as much as an order of magnitude. This gives us a state-selected beam traveling at the speed of the c.m. It should be pointed out that the differential cross section of the resonant transitions in the c.m. frame is nearly equal to the nearby nonresonant transitions. The resonant transition has a much larger differential cross section in the laboratory frame because of a greater Jacobian of transformation from the c.m. to the laboratory coordinates. Physically it means that, for the correct viewing geometry, the signal from the entire 4π steradian solid angle in the c.m. frame may be collected by a small solid angle in the laboratory frame.

The differential cross sections are calculated using an exact formulation of a three-dimensional quantum-mechanical impulse approach (IA) calculation described earlier. Physically, one may use the impulse calculation when the time duration of the collision is much shorter than the periods of vibrational and rotational motion of the diatom. The nuclei constituting the diatom may then be considered stationary during the collision and the intramolecular potential is the generator of the momentum distribution of the constituent nuclei. The atom–molecule potential, in the IA, is written as the sum of the atom–atom potentials and the atom–atom scattering amplitudes are added to obtain the atom–molecule scattering amplitudes. The atom–atom potential, in the present study, is described by a hard core interaction. Following the previous study, the hard core radius for the Li+–N transition is taken to be 1.62 Å.

Figure 1 is a plot of the calculated laboratory differential cross section for the excitation of N2 (v=0, j=0) during a collision with Li+, with a relative translational energy of 0.8825 eV, as a function of the laboratory recoil velocity at the laboratory scattering angle of 48.0° (±0.125°). A beam of N2 molecules in the state v=3, j=10 traveling at 1440 m/s may be obtained by filtering out velocities lower than 1350 and higher than 1550 m/s. The character of ballistic scattering in this calculation is qualitatively different from that in the previous work where, when the scattering is viewed along the c.m. velocity, several ballistic transitions are calculated although one transition is still dominant. For the Li+–N2 system there is only one ballistic transition. Because of the small rotational constant and low frequency of the vibration of the diatomic molecules studied in the earlier work, several rotation–vibration transitions could be nearly resonant (∆E/E ~ 1) and appear ballistic. Because of the large rotational con-
The velocity of the beam is equal to the c.m. velocity of the collision partners. The possibilities are limitless.

Part of this research was done while R.D.S. was visiting the Theoretical Institute for Atomic and Molecular Physics in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The research was in part funded by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research.

7. Elastic peak was so named because it has the maximum intensity where one would detect the elastically scattered alkali halide molecules. This peak was later shown (Ref. 8) to consist mainly of inelastically scattered alkali halide molecules. This was causing some confusion. At the suggestion of Dudley Herschbach the elastic peak was renamed pseudelastic peak. The new name is very appropriate because it describes the location of the peak and carries the warning label.