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*Published in:*  
Physical Review Letters

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
1990

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Morgenstern, R., van der Straten, P., & Niehaus, A. (1990). Interference of Autoionizing Transitions into Different Final States? *Physical Review Letters*, 64(21), 2589-2589.

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## Interference of Autoionizing Transitions into Different Final States?

Recently, Danjo and Koike reported<sup>1</sup> about quantum beats in autoionizing electron spectra. Oscillations in energy spectra of electrons from  $\text{Na}^+$ -Ne collisions were ascribed to an interference of autoionizing transitions from *one initial*  $\text{Ne}^{**}$  excited state to the *two final*  $\text{Ne}^+$  states. This interpretation is at variance with basic principles of quantum mechanics.<sup>2,3</sup>

By measuring the electron energy, the unobserved system comprising the heavy-collision partners is prepared with a well-defined total energy. Dependent on the final  $\text{Ne}^+$  state, either  $^2P_{3/2}$  or  $^2P_{1/2}$ , this energy is divided into electronic and kinetic energy in two different ways. Therefore the final state of the system has to be written as a superposition of these states [Eq. (14-4) of Ref. 2]. However, at any time after the electron emission, a measurement of either the kinetic energy of the collision partners, or the final  $\text{Ne}^+$  electronic state (e.g., using photoionization), can reveal which of the final states was chosen by the system (it cannot switch between these states after the electron has been emitted). In the words of Ref. 2 this means that the final states of  $\text{Ne}^+$  may be regarded as "the pointer of the measuring apparatus," which, as a "macroscopic object," cannot occupy different positions at the same time. The superposition of final states therefore becomes a statistical mixture with no defined phase relation between the various components. This argumentation is the basis for the well-known rule that contributions to different final states

have to be added incoherently, and interferences of the corresponding transitions do not occur. It may be pointed out that sometimes (e.g., in Ref. 4) the term "final-state coherence" is used in a misleading way, when final states of an excitation process are meant, which is followed by a spontaneous decay. These "final" states cannot be identified by a measurement when fluorescence beats of their decay are observed and therefore the term "intermediate-state coherence" is more appropriate.

Also in case of the data of Danjo and Koike an interpretation of the oscillations is possible by the well-known<sup>5-10</sup> interference of contributions from different *intermediate* states. Figure 1 shows the similarity of features reported in Ref. 1 with those reported earlier.<sup>8</sup> In the latter and in all other cases of ion- or electron-atom collisions<sup>5-10</sup> intermediate states could be identified with the proper energies yielding the characteristic oscillations as observed in Fig. 1. In conclusion, there is no reason to question basic principles of quantum mechanics.

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Received 24 March 1989

PACS numbers: 34.50.Fa, 32.80.Dz, 33.80.Eh

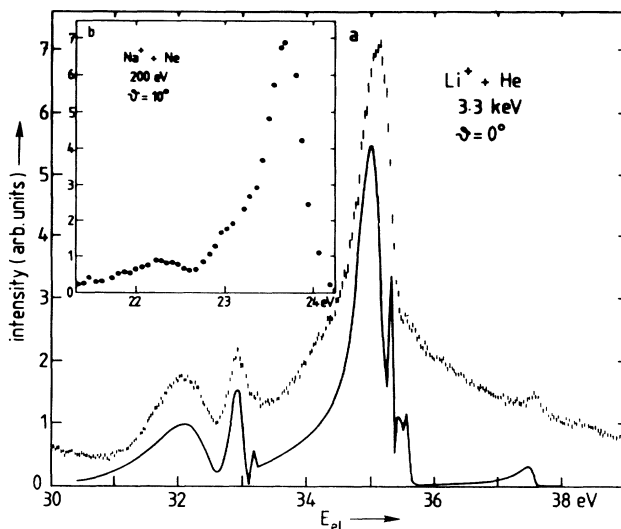


FIG. 1. Energy spectra of autoionization electrons (a) from  $\text{He}^{**}$  excited by  $\text{Li}^+$  impact (Ref. 8), the solid line represents a calculation; (b) from  $\text{Ne}^{**}$  excited by  $\text{Na}^+$  impact (part of the  $10^\circ$  spectrum of Ref. 1).

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<sup>9</sup>A. Niehaus, in *Atomic Inner Shell Physics*, edited by B. Crasemann (Plenum, New York, 1985), p. 377.

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