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Simple Low Energy Gamma Ray Spectral Analysis Using Large NaI(Tl) Scintillation Spectrometers*

BY

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A simple method of conversion of pulse-height distributions measured with a large NaI(Tl) scintillator to energy spectra of gamma rays is described. This method is quite adequate for a low energy region where the peak-to-total ratio is large and for the application of approximate analysis in the outside field of the strict gamma ray spectroscopy. In practical application of this method one needs to know only the peak-to-total ratio and efficiency of the scintillation counter as a function of photon energy. Simulation by a calculation was carried out for the purpose of demonstrating the utility of this method.

Introduction

The need for a simple method of a conversion of the pulse height distribution measured by a NaI(Tl) scintillator to an energy spectrum of gamma rays become evident during the course of an investigation on the penetration and scattering of gamma rays.

The inverse matrix method^{1,2)}, strip-off method¹⁾ and least-squares method³⁾ has been used for unfolding a scintillation pulse height distribution to the gamma ray energy spectrum. The strip-off method consists of successively subtracting the photopeaks with the corresponding tails step by step. The analysis using the least-squares method has been applied as the progress of electronic computers in spite of the graphical strip-off. In most applications of the strip-off method and the least squares method, the response functions obtained by experiment or calculation with monochromatic gamma rays were used, and in a few works the photopeaks were approximated by delta functions or triangles having similar width of photopeaks^{1,3-6)}. A large number of response functions of the scintillator for monochromatic gamma rays are necessary as input data to compose a response function matrix.

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Experimental determination of the response functions with desired monochromatic gamma rays is not easy, because a limited number of monochromatic gamma source is available and scattered gamma rays are incident to the scintillator. Calculations of response functions carried out with ideal conditions often disagreed with experimental values in low energy region.

Recently, large NaI(Tl) scintillators having very good characteristics are easily obtainable. The scintillators such as 8-in. diameter by 8-in. long have very large photofraction. The determination of the photofraction and pulse-height distribution for desired energy gamma rays is not easy; however, interpolation is easier for the photofraction than for the pulse-height distribution, if we can get them at several energies of gamma rays. Taking advantage of these facts, the simpler method of converting the pulse-height distributions to the gamma ray energy spectra, has been developed. It promises to be useful for the approximate spectral analysis of gamma rays in the outside field of strict gamma ray spectroscopy.

This paper describes a simple unfolding method* and a simulation by computation which demonstrates the utility of the method and several examples of application with a 8-in. diameter by 4-in. long NaI(Tl) scintillator.

Simplification of Unfolding

The simple unfolding method described in this paper is illustrated schematically in Fig. 1. Each unfolding strip has two parts. Part A, namely "peak", and part B, "tail", correspond to the photopeak and the Compton electron distribution in the usual strip-off method, respectively. The ratio, ("peak" area)/("peak" area + "tail" area), is made equal to the photofraction at the energy corresponding to the "peak" for the first approximation. The width of the "peak" is decided somewhat arbitrarily, keeping free from the pulse-height distribution or widths of photopeaks. It has to be determined considering the energy of the gamma rays, type of measuring instrument, and capacity of calculating machine. In most cases, it is smaller than that of photopeak and has a constant value in all energy regions. In the usual strip-off method, on the contrary, the width of the photopeak is not arbitrary; it depends on the gamma ray energy and, worse, on the characteristics of the individual instrument.

A pulse-height distribution $P(\epsilon)$ is sliced up first into pulse-height intervals which are made equal to the width of the "peak" of the unfolding strip and get the one-column matrix $\langle P(\epsilon) \rangle$, where ϵ denotes pulse height. Starting from the

* The similar method was used independently by Nakata and described shortly in: M. Nakata, T. Fuse and K. Takeuchi, *Unken Hokoku* **11**, 561-568 (1961) (in Japanese)

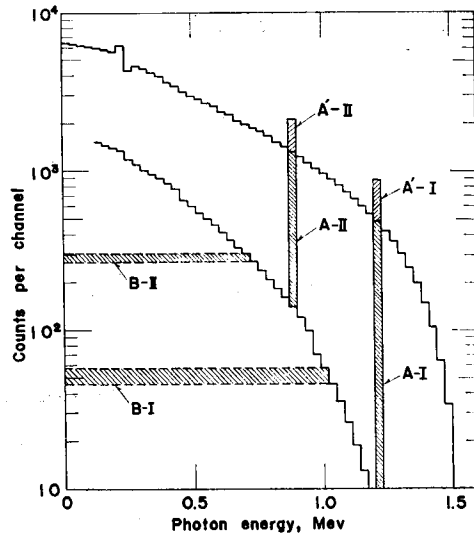


Fig. 1. A schematic illustration of the simple unfolding method. A pulse-height distribution $P(\epsilon)$ is shown by the dark line. The areas A-I and A-II show examples of the "peaks". The areas B-I and B-II are the "tails" corresponding to A-I and A-II, respectively. The tails are subtracted from the pulse-height distribution. The area [(A-I) + (A'-I)] and that of [(A-II) + (A'-II)] are elements of $Q(E)$, where the area of A'-I and A'-II are equal to that of B-I and B-II, respectively.

highest pulse-height element of $\langle P(\epsilon) \rangle$, the "tails" are subtracted from the pulse-height distribution and added to the corresponding "peak". This process is carried out in successive steps and a spectrum $\langle Q(E) \rangle$ is obtained as shown schematically in Fig. 1, where E denotes the energy of gamma rays.

For the purpose of mathematical explanation of this method, we have an array numbers a_{ij} in a matrix form. Each column of the matrix represents the unfolding strip, and its "peak" is located on a diagonal element of the matrix. Thus the elements of the $n \times n$ matrix A , a_{ij} , are given in the first approximation as,

$$\begin{aligned}
 a_{ij} &= \tau(E_j) && \text{for } i = j \\
 &= [1 - \tau(E_j)]/f(E_j) && \text{for } i \leq f(E_j) \\
 &= 0 && \text{for } i > f(E_j) \text{ and } i \neq j
 \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where $f(E_j)$ refers to the location of the pulse height interval containing the edge of the Compton electron distribution in the usual meaning, and $\tau(E_j)$, the photo-fraction of the scintillator.

The application of the unfolding method to the conversion of a pulse height distribution $P(\epsilon)$ to a energy spectrum $Q(E)$ is written as,

$$a_{ij}q_i = p_j - \sum_{k=i+1}^n a_{ik}q_k. \quad (2)$$

where p_i and q_i represent the elements of $P(\epsilon)$ and $Q(E)$, respectively. Considering the matrix A is triangular as shown in Eqs. (1),

$$\langle P(\epsilon) \rangle = A \langle Q(E) \rangle \quad (3)$$

then

$$\langle Q(E) \rangle = A^{-1} \langle P(\epsilon) \rangle \quad (4)$$

Thus we know that this simple unfolding method is also the simplification of inverse matrix method.

Simulation of Utility by Calculation

A series of numerical calculations has been carried out for the purpose of demonstrating the utility of this method.

Figure 2a shows the "ideal" case of measurement of gamma rays by a scintillation spectrometer and an "ideal" conversion method is applied to pulse-height distribution and resultant spectrum may be identical to the spectrum of the incident gamma rays, $N(E)$. It is difficult to know that the incident gamma ray spectrum strictly, because there is no "ideal" conversion method. A very similar spectrum to that of the incident gamma rays may be obtainable only when geometrical arrangement is free from scattered radiation and incident gamma ray spectrum are very simple. Figure 2b shows the case of the usual unfolding method.

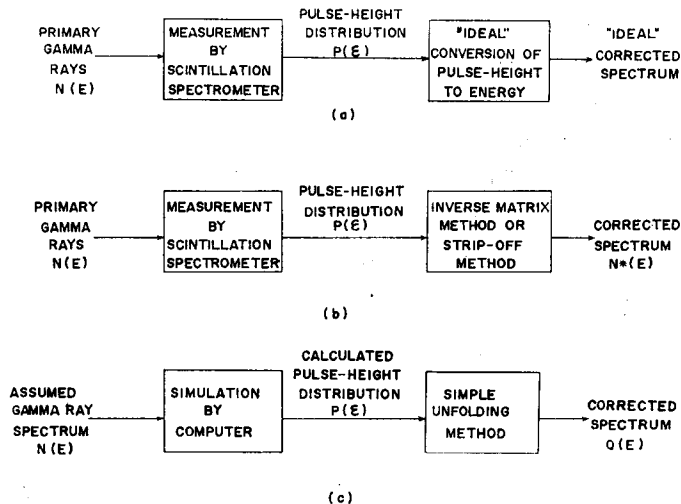


Fig. 2. Schematic illustrations of (a) measurement of gamma rays and "ideal unfolding"; (b) measurement of gamma rays and unfolding; (c) simulating calculation and application of the simple unfolding method.

The fact mentioned above is the reason that the demonstration of the utility of a new method is not easy. For the purpose of taking away this difficulty, the measurement in Fig. 2b is replaced by the simulating calculation.

The response functions of a scintillator are postulated first for many monochromatic gamma rays. These functions compose a response function matrix M . Multiplying this matrix to the postulated gamma ray spectrum $N(E)$, and the calculated pulse-height distribution $P(\epsilon)$ is obtained. Then

$$\langle P(\epsilon) \rangle = M \langle N(E) \rangle \quad (5)$$

where $\langle P(\epsilon) \rangle$ and $\langle N(E) \rangle$ are one-column matrices.

This spectrum $\langle P(\epsilon) \rangle$ is converted to the corrected gamma ray spectrum $\langle Q(E) \rangle$ by the method described previous paragraph. The utility of this method may be understood by comparing $N(E)$ with $Q(E)$.

The postulated response function matrix M is shown in Table I. It is composed of fifty pulse-height distributions of monochromatic gamma rays with energies from 15 keV to 1485 keV. Each pulse-height distribution has a photopeak being assumed as the Gaussian distribution and a flat Compton electron distribution. The photofractions used in this simulating calculating are shown in Fig. 3 as a function of energy. Curve I shows the photofraction for 8-in. diameter by 4-in. long NaI(Tl) scintillator obtained by experiment and Curve II shows photofraction of scintillator as large as or larger than 8-in. diameter by 8-in. long postulated from the data obtained by Kreger and Brown⁶⁾ and Love and Chapman⁷⁾. The half-width of the scintillators are shown in Fig. 4. For the sake of simplicity, the

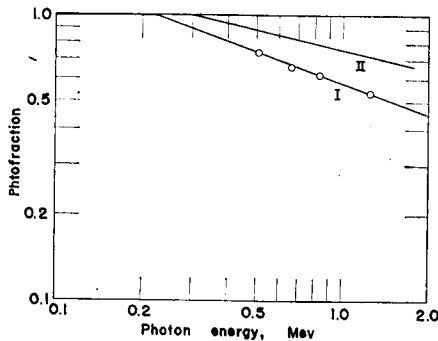


Fig. 3. The photofractions used in the simulating calculations. The Curve I is the photofraction obtained with 8-in. diameter by 4-in. long NaI(Tl) scintillator and the Curve II is the postulated photofraction for a NaI (Tl) scintillator larger than 8-in. diameter by 8-in. long.

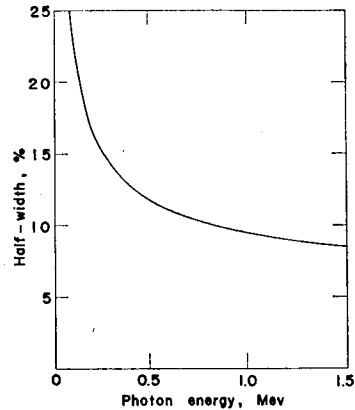


Fig. 4. The postulated half-width used in this calculation.

efficiency of the scintillator was postulated to be equal to unity throughout the region of gamma ray energies involved. The matrix A which is used in this calculation is shown in Table II. The photofraction shown in Fig. 3 was also used for the calculation of the element of Matrix A .

Several typical gamma ray spectra $N(E)$ were assumed. The pulse-height distributions $P(\epsilon)$ and the corrected spectra $Q(E)$ corresponding to the assumed spectra $N(E)$ were calculated and given in Table III a to c.

These spectra are not corrected for the Gaussian broadening of the photopeak. The correction for this broadening is not simple. For the application to analysis of discrete gamma rays, the determination of incident gamma ray energy and intensity is not as difficult the same usual strip off method.

Example of Application to the Analysis of Gamma Rays

This unfolding method was applied to the analysis of pulse height distributions obtained by an 8-in. in diameter by 4-in. long NaI(Tl) scintillator placed in a

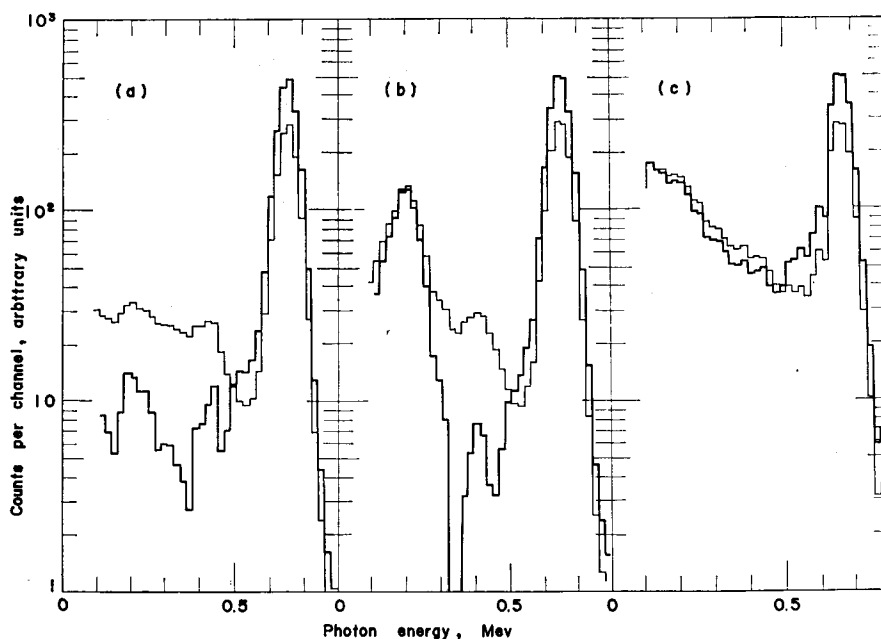


Fig. 5. Shows Examples of application of the simple unfolding method for scintillation spectra obtained with 8-in. diameter by 4-in. long NaI(Tl) scintillator. Gamma ray spectra from a ^{137}Cs point isotropic source are shown: (a) from a point source placed 4 cm from the surface of the scintillator; (b) from a point source placed on a 1 cm thick iron plate placed at a distance 50 cm from the surface of the scintillator; (c) from ^{137}Cs solution in a phantom with the capacity of 10.86 l.

Table III (a). The results of a series of simulating calculations. $N(E)$ are assumed to be incident gamma ray spectra, $P(\epsilon)$ are calculated pulse height distribution, $Q(E)$ are response corrected spectra.

Medium energy of interval (keV)	$N(E)$	$8''\phi \times 4''$		Larger than $8''\phi \times 8''$	
		$P(\epsilon)$	$Q(E)$	$P(\epsilon)$	$Q(E)$
15	0	68	0	40	0
45	0	68	0	40	0
75	0	68	0	40	0
105	0	68	0	40	0
135	0	68	0	40	0
165	0	68	0	40	0
195	0	68	0	40	0
225	0	68	0	40	0
255	0	68	0	40	0
285	0	68	0	40	0
315	0	68	0	40	0
345	0	68	0	40	0
375	0	68	0	40	0
405	0	68	0	40	0
435	0	68	0	40	0
465	0	68	0	40	0
495	0	68	0	40	0
525	0	68	0	40	0
555	0	68	0	40	0
585	0	68	0	40	0
615	0	68	0	40	0
645	0	68	0	40	0
675	0	68	0	40	0
705	0	68	0	40	0
735	0	68	0	40	0
765	0	68	0	40	0
y95	0	68	0	40	0
825	0	68	1	40	0
855	0	68	0	40	0
885	0	68	0	40	0
915	0	68	0	40	2
945	0	68	5	40	8
975	0	68	43	40	20
1005	0	0	-43	0	2
1035	0	4	-12	5	-7
1065	0	25	38	33	4
1095	0	108	192	144	190
1125	0	308	549	492	546
1155	0	575	1054	768	1031
1185	5000	709	1288	946	1279
1215	0	575	1065	768	1046
1245	0	308	569	492	564
1275	0	108	204	144	200
1305	0	25	47	33	48
1335	0	4	8	5	7
1365	0	0	0	0	0
1395	0	0	0	0	0
1425	0	0	0	0	0
1455	0	0	0	0	0
1485	0	0	0	0	0

Table III (b)

Medium energy of interval (keV)	$N(E)$	$8''\phi \times 4''$		Larger than $8''\phi \times 8''$	
		$P(\epsilon)$	$Q(E)$	$P(\epsilon)$	$Q(E)$
15	5000	8402	5074	6577	5028
45	5000	8402	5074	6577	5028
75	5000	8402	5074	7005	5456
105	5000	8402	5074	6261	4720
135	5000	8402	5074	6575	5026
165	5000	8351	5065	6582	5032
195	5000	8276	5049	6555	5050
225	5000	9079	5937	6535	5064
255	5000	6905	4171	6494	5062
285	5000	6432	3887	6433	5062
315	5000	7179	4987	6333	5077
315	5000	7179	4987	6333	5077
345	5000	6932	4995	6217	5076
375	5000	6722	4988	6116	5083
405	5000	6516	4983	6008	5086
435	5000	6322	4992	5912	5045
465	5000	6014	4983	5800	5033
495	5000	5813	4982	5696	5027
525	5000	5632	5006	5596	5034
555	5000	5740	5028	5496	5031
585	5000	5318	5015	5405	5038
615	5000	5158	5060	5311	5041
645	5000	4999	5031	5208	5035
675	5000	4866	5039	5132	5037
705	5000	4744	5055	5058	5047
735	5000	4610	5053	4971	5038
765	5000	4475	5048	4881	5025
795	5000	4347	5052	4792	5020
825	5000	4233	5074	4708	5022
855	5000	4125	5023	4627	5025
885	5000	4013	5040	4546	5028
915	4000	3903	5062	4465	5020
945	5000	3794	5086	4386	5024
975	5000	3621	5033	4281	4989
1005	5000	3526	5075	4237	5034
1035	5000	3434	5034	4117	5046
1065	5000	3338	5069	4091	5042
1095	5000	3239	5101	4013	5034
1125	5000	3145	5048	3946	5035
1155	5000	3064	5106	3882	5047
1185	5000	2975	5055	3814	5041
1215	5000	2881	5082	3748	5040
1245	5000	2805	5043	3681	5030
1275	5000	2721	5067	3616	5020
1305	5000	2640	4980	3650	5000
1335	5000	2600	4999	3530	5000
1365	5000	2584	4969	3485	4978
1395	5000	2511	4828	3382	4860
1425	5000	2304	4589	3154	4563
1455	5000	2011	3942	2713	3950
1485	5000	1521	3042	2054	3012

Table III (c)

Medium energy of interval (keV)	N(E)	8"φ × 4"		Larger than 9"φ × 8"	
		P(ε)	Q(E)	P(ε)	Q(E)
15	4900	6418	4894	5499	4910
45	4800	6318	4794	5399	4801
75	4700	6218	4694	5693	4501
105	4600	6118	4594	4897	4301
135	4500	6018	4494	5092	4498
165	4400	5817	4327	4997	4413
195	4300	5717	4286	4889	4327
225	4200	6279	4914	4762	4224
255	4100	4391	3352	4632	4121
285	4000	4686	3911	4486	4020
315	3900	4478	3897	4313	3930
345	3800	4212	3805	4130	3827
375	3700	3980	3699	3963	3731
405	3600	3757	3597	3794	3631
435	3500	3548	3502	3637	3506
465	3400	3277	3395	3472	3397
495	3300	3078	3280	3316	3293
525	3200	2897	3208	3166	3197
555	3100	2733	3092	3019	3094
585	3000	2579	2984	2880	2998
615	2900	2425	2909	2743	2899
645	2800	2275	2792	2604	2795
675	2700	2144	2694	2481	2696
705	2600	2021	2602	2363	2601
735	2500	1896	2500	2239	2501
765	2400	1774	2396	2117	2394
795	2300	1659	2296	1998	2292
825	2200	1554	2204	1884	2192
855	2100	1454	2097	1774	2093
885	2000	1355	1989	1666	1994
915	1900	1259	1896	1561	1891
945	1800	1167	1803	1459	1793
975	1700	1065	1683	1354	1694
1005	1600	984	1595	1263	1595
1035	1500	906	1482	1170	1497
1065	1400	829	1392	1078	1396
1095	1300	755	1300	987	1293
1125	1200	683	1185	900	1193
1155	1100	617	1098	816	1096
1185	1000	547	979	734	994
1215	900	487	893	653	894
1245	800	429	788	574	793
1275	700	369	695	497	693
1305	600	313	590	422	593
1335	600	258	496	348	493
1365	400	205	394	276	394
1395	300	153	294	206	296
1425	200	105	206	142	205
1455	100	64	99	87	126
1485	0	34	68	46	67

steel iron box lined by 3-mm thick lead plate*. The photofraction of the scintillator is shown in Fig. 3 as Curve I. Figure 5 shows spectra of gamma rays from ^{137}Cs point source placed at a distance 4-cm from the face of the scintillator without scatterer and from the source placed on a 1-cm thick iron plate placed at a distance 50-cm from the face of the scintillator, and ^{137}Cs solution in a phantom⁹ with the capacity of 10.86l. They might be considered response corrected spectra.

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