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The two Josephson junction flux qubit with large tunneling amplitude

V.I. Shnyrkov

B. Verkin Institute for Low Temperature Physics and Engineering of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine
47 Lenin Ave., Kharkov 61103, Ukraine
E-mail: shnyrkov@ilt.kharkov.ua

A.A. Soroka

National Science Center «Kharkov Institute of Physics and Technology», Akhiezer Institute for Theoretical Physics
1 Akademicheskaya Str., Kharkov 61108, Ukraine

S.I. Melnyk

M.K. Yankel Kharkov National University of Radio Electronics, Ministry of Education of Ukraine
4 Lenin Ave., Kharkov 61161, Ukraine

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In this paper we discuss solid-state nanoelectronic realizations of Josephson flux qubits with large tunneling amplitude between the two macroscopic states. The latter can be controlled via the height and form of the potential barrier, which is determined by quantum-state engineering of the flux qubit circuit. The simplest circuit of the flux qubit is a superconducting loop interrupted by a Josephson nanoscale tunnel junction. The tunneling amplitude between two macroscopically different states can be essentially increased, by engineering of the qubit circuit, if tunnel junction is replaced by a ScS contact. However, only Josephson tunnel junctions are particularly suitable for large-scale integration circuits and quantum detectors with preset-day technology. To overcome this difficulty we consider here the flux qubit with high-level energy separation between «ground» and «excited» states, which consists of a superconducting loop with two low-capacitance Josephson tunnel junctions in series. We demonstrate that for real parameters of resonant superposition between the two macroscopic states the tunneling amplitude can reach values greater than 1 K. Analytical results for the tunneling amplitude obtained within semiclassical approximation by instanton technique show good correlation with a numerical solution.

PACS: 03.75.Lm Tunneling, Josephson effect, Bose–Einstein condensates in periodic potentials, solitons, vortices, and topological excitations;
74.50.+r Tunneling phenomena; point contacts, weak links, Josephson effects;
85.25.Cp Josephson devices.

Keywords: Josephson flux qubits, coherent superposition of the macroscopic states, the tunneling amplitude.

1. Introduction

Since successful demonstration of Rabi oscillations and Landau–Zener coherent effects [1–5], the superconducting qubits (quantum bits) based on mesoscopic Josephson junctions became the subject of consideration as possible candidates to be the basic elements of a quantum computer hardware [6,7], including detectors to measure the state of an individual qubit [8–12]. The Josephson junction (JJ) qubits have two energy scales which are the Josephson coupling energy E_J and the charging energy E_C of the JJ, and they are subdivided into flux qubits, charge qubits, as well as charge-phase qubits. In principle, all circuits of a quantum computer can be fabricated by modern techniques using these superconducting qubits. However, it is but poor quality [6,13] of the experimentally tested elements that is the limiting factor on the way of implementation of quantum registers. For example, an important but still unsolved problem in the physics of a qubit working in the charge regime with $E_C / E_J >> 1$ is an essential decrease of high spectral density of the noise associated with the motion of charge in traps. In its turn, the phase qubit ($E_J / E_C >> 1$), which utilizes the phase of the superconducting order parameter as a dynamic variable, is much less sensitive to the charge fluctuations but is subject to the influence of the noise in critical current of JJ, spin fluctuations and Nyquist noise currents generated by excess ambient temperature. The tunnel splitting of the energy levels arising from the coherent superposition of the macroscopic states is small usually, $\Delta E_{01} \sim 150$–250 mK. Taking into account the effective noise temperature, which can reach $T_{\text{eff}} \sim$ ~ 50–100 mK in experimental studies of the qubit dynamics, leads to a dramatic fall of the decoherence times τ_φ and relaxation times τ_ε [14–16]. This means that, in order to enhance considerably the qubit quality [6] (the number of one-bit operations during the coherence timespan), the system with large ($\Delta E_{01} \gtrsim 1$ K) tunnel splitting of the energy levels should be created.

Undoubtedly, the problem of creation of a quantum register based on Josephson qubits brings up many issues but presently the invention of a high-quality qubit is the most important one among them. It is easy to show that the rate of the energy exchange between two macroscopic states in a flux qubit is bounded by the «cosine» shape of the potential barrier and cannot be increased owing to decreasing the barrier height since the latter determines the characteristic rate of thermal decay of the current-flow states. A similar limitation associated with the lowering of the effective barrier height can appear also when highly increasing the pre-exponential factor. It is absolutely obvious that the ideal case for a flux qubit is when the tunnel barrier in the phase space looks like Π-shaped function having sufficiently large height and small action. It was this issue that motivated the authors of the Ref. 13 for analyzing the phase-slip qubit, whose creation required developing a new non-Josephson technology. In this paper we search for an improved barrier design for the JJ flux qubit.

The recent Ref. 11 demonstrated how the level splitting can be increased at low temperatures ($T \to 0$) by an order of magnitude with the potential barrier height kept unchanged by modifying the qubit's potential barrier shape due to using the clean-limit ScS junction in the superconducting ring. However, the fabrication difficulties of obtaining pure and reproducible ScS junctions are the serious hindrance in the way of designing large-scale integrated qubit circuits.

To solve this problem, the analysis is carried out in the present paper of the two-Josephson-junction flux qubit (2JJ flux qubit), which can be considered as a superconducting ring of inductance L interrupted by two almost

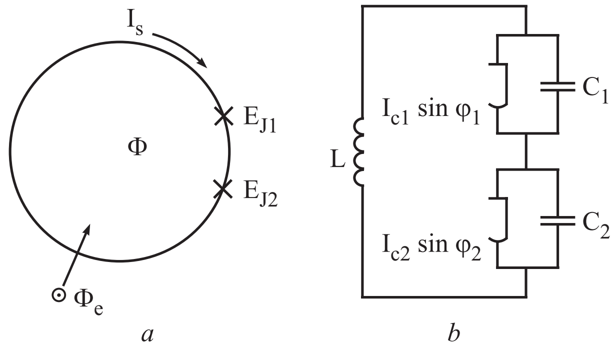

Fig. 1. Schematic picture of the proposed 2JJ flux qubit with a SQUID configuration (*a*) and its circuit diagram (*b*). The loop carrying supercurrent I_s is pierced by an externally applied magnetic flux Φ_e (towards an observer). The individual SIS Josephson junctions are characterized by coupling energies E_{J1},E_{J2}, critical currents I_{c1}, I_{c2} and capacitances C_1, C_2 which do not differ significantly. The loop inductance L is small enough so that the 2JJ SQUID has only two metastable flux states. The parameter $g_0^{\min} = E_J(\pi) / E_C >> 1$ (see below).

equivalent tunnel SIS junctions with the Josephson energies E_{J1}, E_{J2}, the critical currents I_{c1}, I_{c2} and the capacitances C_1, C_2, respectively (see Fig. 1,*a*,*b*). The difference between the two SIS mesoscopic junctions will be characterized by the asymmetry parameter $\lambda = I_{c2} / I_{c1} = E_{J2} / E_{J1} = C_2 / C_1 \le 1$ so that the «junction 1» would have greater or equal values of the Josephson energy, the critical current and the capacitance as compared to the «junction 2». The external magnetic flux Φ_e can be coupled to the qubit by a separate coil located in close proximity to the qubit's loop. It is well known that in classical limit the circulating current I_s as a function of external magnetic flux for dc SQUIDs with $I_{c1} = I_{c2}$ has the singularity in the points of $\Phi_e = \Phi_0(n + 1/2)$ (Φ_0 is the flux quantum) so that the two-junction interferometer can be considered as a «single-junction» one, with the potential energy shape in the phase space being modified. Below we indicate conditions for the proposed 2JJ flux qubit under which the classical Josephson relationship between phase differences on JJ contacts is retained in the quantum regime, phase (flux) is a good quantum variable and the charging effect on the island between JJ contacts is negligible.

The problem lies in determining and analyzing the tunnel splitting $\Delta E_{01} = E_1 - E_0$ of the degenerate zero energy level in the double-well symmetric potential of a 2JJ flux qubit (at corresponding external conditions) resulted from the coherent quantum tunneling of the magnetic flux between the wells. In the proposed mesoscopic system in the quantum regime, the two lower energy levels E_0 and E_1 arising from coherent superposition of the macroscopically distinct flux or persistent-current states form a qubit. It turns out that, because of the change in the form of the potential energy of the 2JJ flux qubit as compared to the 1JJ qubit, the tunnel splitting ΔE_{01} can multiply rise reaching the values $\gtrsim$ 1 K (in temperature units) and substantially enhance the properties of the qubit as a basic element for quantum computations. The sensitivity of the ΔE_{01} magnitude to λ as well as to the junction parameters can limit applications based on the 2JJ flux qubit both for quantum computation and quantum detectors.

2. Theoretical model and results

We will discuss the 2JJ flux qubit in the approximation of the Hamiltonian of an isolated system in the zero temperature limit. All the dissipative processes associated with the own and the external, regarding the system, degrees of freedom (the quasiparticles, the magnetic flux fluctuations in the qubit and in the outer measuring circuit, etc.) are neglected in this approximation. In the framework of this approximation, only the supercurrent component flows in the qubit ring which in the classical regime, according to the Josephson relation, is equal to

$$I_s = I_{c1} \sin \varphi_1 = I_{c2} \sin \varphi_2, \tag{1}$$

where φ_1, φ_2 are the order parameter phase differences at corresponding tunnel junctions. It is convenient to count the values of the supercurrent I_s and the phase differences at the junctions clockwise, the applied magnetic flux Φ_e, the total magnetic flux in the ring Φ and the supercurrent I_s being tied by the relation $\Phi = \Phi_e - LI_s(\Phi)$. The classic Hamiltonian of the 2JJ flux qubit in the approximation of the isolated system contains the contributions of the electrostatic energy of the charges in the junction capacitances, the junction Josephson energies and the magnetic energy of the supercurrent in the ring, and has the form:

$$H = \frac{(2eN_0)^2}{2}\left(\frac{1}{C_1} + \frac{1}{C_2}\right) - $$
$$- (E_{J1} \cos \varphi_1 + E_{J2} \cos \varphi_2) + \frac{(\Phi - \Phi_e)^2}{2L} + E_0 , \tag{2}$$

where N_0 is the number of the excess (deficient) Cooper pairs in the banks of the SIS Josephson junctions, E_0 is the constant fixing the reference level for the potential energy. Using relation (1), we will reduce expression for the Josephson energy in classic Hamiltonian (2) to the form

$$U_J^0(\phi) = -E_J(\phi) = -(E_{J1} \cos \varphi_1 + E_{J2} \cos \varphi_2) =$$
$$= -E_{J1}\sqrt{(1-\lambda)^2 + 4\lambda \cos^2(\phi/2)},$$

where a new variable of the overall phase $\phi = \varphi_1 + \varphi_2$ is introduced.

The proposed 2JJ qubit system is topologically analogous to the charge-phase qubit [8,17], representing a single-Cooper-pair tunneling transistor (SCPT-transistor consists of two Josephson junction contacts with the voltage gate next to the island between them) inserted in a superconducting ring. Therefore the structure of the Josephson energy in the Hamiltonian (2) of the 2JJ qubit is similar to that of the charge-phase qubit. The main difference, affecting the Josephson energy form, lies in that: (i) in the 2JJ qubit there is no charge gate and no polarization charge Q_0 is induced through it on the island; (ii) the charge-phase qubit is designed to work in the charge mode, whereas the 2JJ qubit is designed to work in the flux mode, that is in an opposite extreme dynamic regime. In the preceding Ref. 9, devoted to a quantum detector based on the SCPT-transistor, its working regimes were investigated that depend on the form of the Josephson energy of the system (formulae (1),(2) in Ref. 9: $U_J(\phi,\varphi) = -(E_{J1} \cos \varphi_1 + E_{J2} \cos \varphi_2) = -E_J(\phi) \cos(\varphi + \gamma(\phi)) = -E_J(\phi) \cos \chi$, $\varphi = (\varphi_1 - \varphi_2)/2$, $\tan \gamma(\phi) = (\lambda - 1)/(\lambda + 1) \times \tan(\phi/2)$), and can be characterized by the parameter $g_0 = E_J(\phi)/E_C$, where $E_C = e^2/2C$ is the characteristic charging energy of the island between JJ contacts, $C = C_1 + C_2 + C_g$ being the total capacitance of the island regarding the rest of the system ($C = C_1 + C_2$ for the 2JJ qubit as $C_g = 0$). The parameter g_0 crucially determines the mutually conditioned quantum-averaged supercurrent (current-phase dependence) $I_s(\phi)$ and effective Josephson energy $U_J(\phi)$ of the SCPT-transistor and based on it charge-phase qubit respectively [8]. At solving the Schrödinger equation, the supercurrent $I_s(\phi) = I_s^0(\phi) \times \langle \cos \chi \rangle$ is represented as appropriate supercurrent in the classical limit $I_s^0(\phi)$, multiplied by the function $\langle \cos \chi \rangle$ that describes an effective influence of charge fluctuations on the island between JJ contacts (formulae (4),(5) and Fig. 2,*a* with a family of dependencies $\langle \cos \chi \rangle (Q_0)$ on the parameter g_0 in Ref. 9). This result of Ref. 9 reflects a physically clear conclusion: (i) the effect of fluctuations of Cooper-pair number ($\hat{n} = -id/d\varphi$) on the island that affects $I_s(\phi)$ and $U_J(\phi)$ is well apparent in the charge mode of system dynamics ($g_0 \lesssim 1$), at that the function $\langle \cos \chi \rangle (Q_0)$ being strongly reduced and modulated; (ii) in the opposite limit $g_0 >> 1$ the function $\langle \cos \chi \rangle$ becomes a constant close to unity, and at $g_0 \to \infty$, $\langle \cos \chi \rangle \equiv 1$ so that in this limit the current-phase dependence $I_s(\phi) = I_s^0(\phi)$ and the effective Josephson energy $U_J(\phi) = U_J^0(\phi) = -E_J(\phi)$ are described by classical expressions. It is interesting to note that experimental investigation of the charge-phase qubit with the parameter $g_0 \sim 1 (E_J(\phi) \sim E_C$, i.e. $E_J(\phi)$ rather large for a charge-phase qubit) at low temperatures (20 mK) demonstrated [18] the influence of gate quasicharge Q_0 of the order of noise, and characteristic form of the current-phase dependence qualitatively conforming to an appropriate classical dependence (see Eq. (5) below).

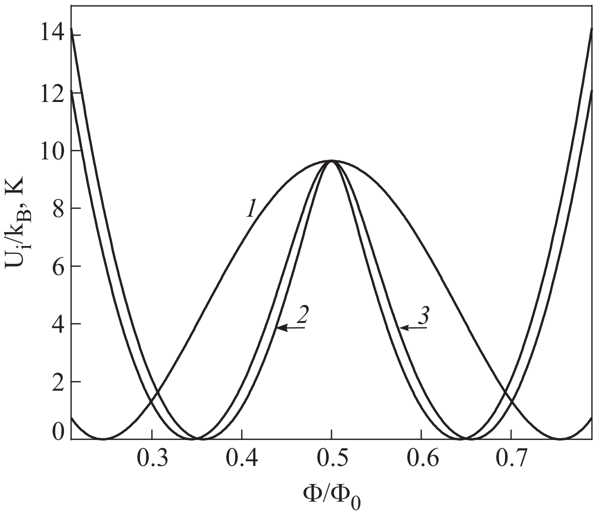

Fig. 2. Potential $U(\Phi/\Phi_0)/k_B$ in temperature units for 1JJ qubit with $\beta_L = 1.602$ — *1* and for 2JJ qubit for such parameter couples (λ,β_L): (0.9, 1.058) — *2*, (0.8, 1.276) — *3* at external magnetic flux $\Phi_e = \Phi_0/2$. The geometric ring inductance is $L = 3.0\cdot10^{-10}$ H for both qubits; the potential barrier heights U_0 in curves *1–3* are equal, $U_0/k_B = 9.64$ K.

We consider the extreme case $g_0 >> 1$ to realize the 2JJ qubit to work in the flux mode, where the effect of charge fluctuations due to the variable φ is negligible (so that φ falls out from the Hamiltonian). In this extreme case the classical expressions for the Josephson energy of the two-junction interferometer and for the supercurrent through its loop apply to the quantum regime of system dynamics, and the relationship (1) between variables φ_1,φ_2 holds.

Note that for 1JJ flux qubit the usual condition of phase being a good quantum variable is defined by the parameter $g = E_{J1}/E_{C1} >> 1$, where $E_{C1} = e^2/2C_1$ is characteristic electrostatic energy of the JJ contact. Then the minimum value of the parameter g_0 of the 2JJ flux qubit as a system and the parameter g being characteristic of a single JJ contact of the qubit are connected by the relation $g_0^{\min} = E_J(\pi)/E_C = E_{J1}(1-\lambda)/[e^2/2C_1(1+\lambda)] = (1-\lambda^2)g$. Thus, the 2JJ flux qubit have to satisfy the condition $g_0^{\min} = (1-\lambda^2)g >> 1$, and the parameter λ is bounded from above by this condition.

Due to the single-valuedness of the superconducting order parameter the variable ϕ satisfies the condition

$$\phi = \varphi_1 + \varphi_2 = 2\pi\frac{\Phi}{\Phi_0} + 2\pi n, \Phi = n\Phi_0 + \frac{\phi}{2\pi}\Phi_0 ,$$
$$\Phi_0 = \pi\hbar/e, \qquad (3)$$

where n is the integer number of the flux quanta Φ_0 in the total magnetic flux Φ (below, we will consider the qubit to work in the $n = 0$ mode). Owing to the relationships (1), (3) there is the only independent phase variable from φ_1,φ_2,ϕ, and in the quantum regime the physical fluctuating quantum variable is the total phase difference ϕ at the both junctions which equals, to within 2π factor, to the total magnetic flux in the ring in the units of flux quantum ($\phi/2\pi = \Phi/\Phi_0$).

The transition to the quantum description of the flux qubit consists in associating the value N_0 of the Cooper pairs tunneling through the junctions with the operator $\hat{N}_0 = -i\partial/\partial\phi$, conjugated to the phase operator $\hat{\phi}$ ($[\hat{N}_0,\hat{\phi}] = -i$), and solving the Schrödinger equation with the obtained quantum Hamiltonian in ϕ-representation [19]. By applying the quantization procedure to the Hamiltonian (2) and writing down the energy contributions via the variable ϕ, we will come to a canonical form of the Hamiltonian of the 2JJ flux qubit in the quantum case:

$$\hat{H} = \frac{\hat{P}^2}{2M} + \hat{U}(\phi) = -\frac{\hbar^2}{2M}\frac{\partial^2}{\partial\phi^2} +$$
$$+ E_{J1}\left[\varepsilon_0 - \sqrt{(1-\lambda)^2 + 4\lambda\cos^2\frac{\phi}{2}} + \frac{(\phi-\phi_e)^2}{2\beta_L}\right], \qquad (4)$$

which can be considered as the Hamiltonian of a quantum particle with the mass M moving in the potential $U(\phi)$. Here $\hat{P} = \hbar\hat{N}_0 = -i\hbar\partial/\partial\phi$ ($[\hat{P},\hat{\phi}] = -i\hbar$) corresponds to the particle momentum operator,

$$M = \left(\frac{\Phi_0}{2\pi}\right)^2 \frac{\lambda C_1}{(\lambda+1)}$$

is its mass,

$$\beta_L = \frac{2\pi}{\Phi_0} L I_{c1} = \left(\frac{2\pi}{\Phi_0}\right)^2 L E_{J1}$$

is the potential parameter, $\phi_e = 2\pi\,\Phi_e/\Phi_0$ is the external magnetic flux parameter (the constant ε_0 is chosen further from the condition for the symmetric potential of equalling to zero in the minima points). The 2JJ flux qubit parameter

$$g_0^{\min} = (1-\lambda^2)\frac{\beta_L}{L}\left(\frac{\Phi_0}{2\pi}\right)^2\frac{2C_1}{e^2} = (1-\lambda^2)\beta_L\frac{C_1}{L}\frac{\hbar^2}{2e^4} >> 1 .$$

The potential $U(\phi)$ shape depends on the parameters λ,β_L,ϕ_e. We are interested in the case of symmetric potential which, according to (4), is realized at $\phi_e = \pi$ ($\Phi_e = \Phi_0/2$). It should be noticed that formally in the extreme case of identical junctions, at $\lambda = 1$ (though really the value of $\lambda \approx 1$ should be such that to satisfy the condition $g_0^{\min} >> 1$), the potential $U(\phi)$ coincides with the potential of the flux qubit based on the clean ScS contact studied in Ref. 11 (Eq. (3)):

$$U_{ScS}(\phi) = E_J\left[-2\left|\cos(\phi/2)\right| + \frac{(\phi-\phi_e)^2}{2\beta_L}\right].$$

At the same time, owing to renormalization of the mass M for the 2JJ flux qubit by the factor $\lambda/(\lambda+1)$ in respect to the corresponding mass for the ScS flux qubit (provided that the capacitances of SIS and ScS junctions are equal, $C_1 = C$), for $\lambda \approx 1$, the relation for masses is $M_{2JJ} \approx M_{ScS}/2$. Hence, at $\lambda \approx 1$ the splitting ΔE_{01} in 2JJ qubit is expected yet more than in the ScS qubit. The parameter β_L determines the height of the potential barrier of the double-well potential, so that the barrier height goes down while reducing β_L. Like in the case of ScS qubit, the 2JJ qubit potential has two local minima even at $\beta < 1$ (unlike the SIS qubit where the double-well potential exists at $\beta > 1$ only), which gives a possibility of considerable scaling down the geometric dimension (inductance) of the system with the mesoscopic junctions.

Figure 2 shows the potential $U(\Phi/\Phi_0)/k_B$ of 2JJ flux qubit for two parameters couples (λ, β_L) and also, for the comparison sake, the well-known potential $U_{SIS}(\Phi/\Phi_0)/k_B$ of 1JJ flux qubit at external magnetic flux $\Phi_e = \Phi_0/2$. The inductances L for both types of the qubits can be supposed equal (to specify the magnetic flux fluctuation level) while the parameter β_L (i.e. the critical currents I_{c1}, I_c of the corresponding SIS junctions) in all the dependences is chosen in such a way so that the potential barriers in all the potentials were of the same height U_0. The latter requirement implies roughly equal decay rates for the metastable states due to thermal fluctuations, taking them into account being beyond our consideration. Apparently, to realize the quantum regime in a physical experiment, the value U_0/k_B must highly exceed the system temperature. As seen from Fig. 2, the potentials $U(\Phi/\Phi_0)/k_B$ for a 2JJ qubit have lesser width (between the potential minima points) as compared to the corresponding potentials for a 1JJ qubit while the area under the potential curve between the points of its minima for the 2JJ qubit shrinks greatly against the corresponding area for the 1JJ qubit. Additionally, if the corresponding capacitances of the SIS junctions in both 2JJ and 1JJ qubits are equal ($C_1 = C$) then the ratio of the effective masses for these qubits is $\lambda/(\lambda+1)$. As it will be shown below, it is the change in the potential shape and the decrease of the effective mass in 2JJ qubit that lead to multiple rise in the amplitude of its tunnel splitting.

The current-phase relation for 2JJ qubit, directly related to the Josephson potential energy $U_J(\phi)$, is derived from (1), (3):

$$\frac{I_s(\phi)}{I_{c1}} = \sin\varphi_1 = \lambda\sin\varphi_2 = \frac{\lambda\sin\phi}{\sqrt{(1-\lambda)^2 + 4\lambda\cos^2(\phi/2)}}\,. \tag{5}$$

The current-phase relation $I_s(\phi)$ extrema (which are equal by their absolute values) are located in the points $\phi_m = \arccos(-\lambda)$ (maximum; $\pi/2 \le \phi_m \le \pi$) and $\phi_{m1} = 2\pi - \arccos(-\lambda)$ (minimum) symmetrically around the point $\phi = \pi$, where the supercurrent vanishes to zero ($I_s = 0$) alternating its direction. Thus, at λ being near the unity, in the interval (ϕ_m, ϕ_{m1}), the supercurrent I_s changes dramatically from its maximum to minimum value with alternating the current direction in the point $\phi = \pi$. Figure 3,*a* displays the integral current-phase dependence $I_s(\phi/2\pi)/I_{c1}$ for 2JJ qubit for several parameters λ. The interval (ϕ_m, ϕ_{m1}) shrinks as the parameter λ increases and the maximum-to-minimum by-current transition becomes more sharp (the extreme case $\lambda = 1$ being valid in classical SQUID dynamics corresponds to $\phi_m = \phi_{m1} = \pi$ with the infinite derivative of the current-phase relation in the point π). Let us also consider the order parameter phase differences $\varphi_1(\phi)$, $\varphi_2(\phi)$, derived directly from (5). The analysis of formula (5) shows that the function $\varphi_1(\phi)$ for a junction with high critical current has extrema in the points ϕ_m, ϕ_{m1}. The transition from the maximum positive value $\varphi_1(\phi_m) = \arcsin\lambda$ $(0 \le \varphi_1(\phi_m) \le \pi)$ to the minimum negative value $\varphi_1(\phi_{m1}) = -\arcsin\lambda$ with alternating the

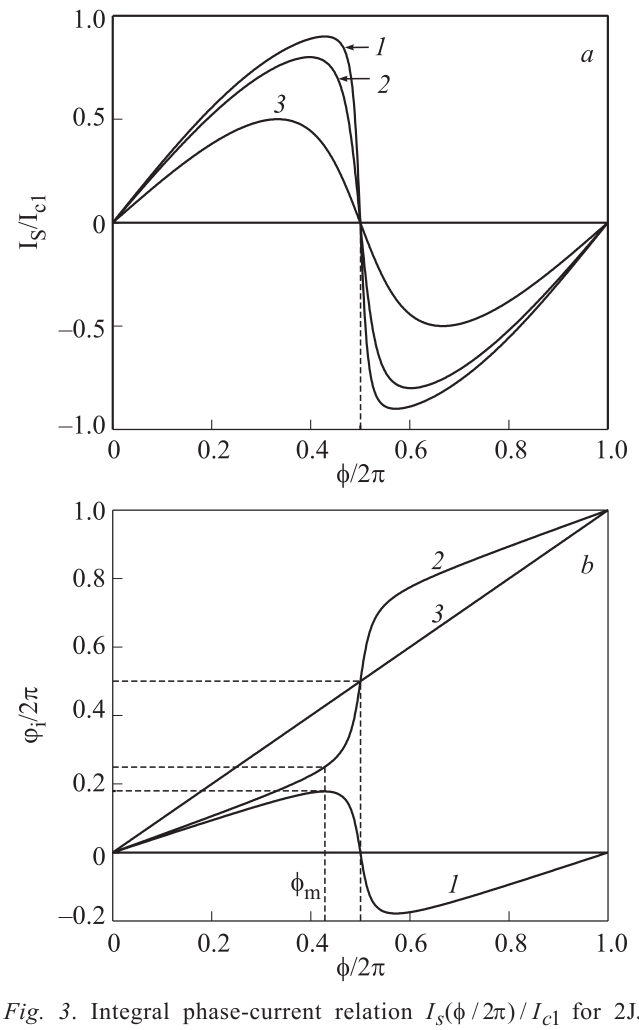

Fig. 3. Integral phase-current relation $I_s(\phi/2\pi)/I_{c1}$ for 2JJ qubit at various λ: 0.9 (*1*), 0.8 (*2*), 0.5 (*3*) (*a*); Functions $(\varphi_1/2\pi)[\phi/2\pi]$ — *1*, $(\varphi_2/2\pi)[\phi/2\pi]$ — *2* for 2JJ qubit at $\lambda = 0.9$. The straight line $\varphi_1(\phi) + \varphi_2(\phi) = \phi$ — 3 corresponds to the ϕ definition. The values of $\varphi_1/2\pi = \arcsin(\lambda)/2\pi \approx 0.18$ and $\varphi_2/2\pi = 0.25$ (the latter being λ-independent) correspond to $\phi_m/2\pi = \arccos(-0.9)/2\pi \approx 0.43$ (*b*).

phase difference sign in the point π ($\varphi_1(\pi)=0$) takes place in the interval (ϕ_m, ϕ_{m1}), and $\varphi_1(0)=\varphi_1(2\pi)=0$. The function $\varphi_2(\phi)$ for a junction with lower critical current is a monotonically increasing one from $\varphi_2(0)=0$ to $\varphi_2(2\pi)=2\pi$, which is symmetrical with respect to the line $y=\phi$; $\varphi_2(\pi)=\pi$, and $\varphi_2(\phi_m)\equiv\pi/2$, $\varphi_2(\phi_{m1})\equiv 3\pi/2$. For the classical 2JJ SQUID, in the extreme case of $\lambda=1$ the functions $\varphi_1(\phi)$, $\varphi_2(\phi)$ behave as follows: $\varphi_1=\varphi_2=\phi/2$ at $0\le\phi<\pi$; at the point π a jump appears in the function $\varphi_1(\phi)$ between the values $\pi/2$, $-\pi/2$ with further linear rise up to $\varphi_1(2\pi)=0$, while the function $\varphi_2(\phi)$ demonstrates a jump between the values $\pi/2$, $3\pi/2$ with further linear increase up to $\varphi_2(2\pi)=2\pi$. Figure 3,*b* exhibits dependences $(\varphi_1/2\pi)[\phi/2\pi]$, $(\varphi_2/2\pi)[\phi/2\pi]$ for a certain λ, with their distinctive appearance. The straight line $\varphi_1(\phi)+\varphi_2(\phi)=\phi$ corresponds to the ϕ definition showing the expansion of the total phase difference over the both junctions into the component phase differences of the order parameter over each of them.

We will find the tunnel splitting ΔE_{01} of the degenerate zero level in the symmetrical (at $\phi_e=\pi$) double-well potential $U(\phi)$ in the 2JJ flux qubit by numerical solution of the Schrödinger equation and analytically by using instanton technique in the semiclassical approximation. To find a numeric solution of the Schrödinger stationary equation

$$\hat{H}\Psi(\phi)=E\Psi(\phi) \tag{6}$$

with Hamiltonian (4), a kind of the finite elements method is used with approximation of the potential $U(\phi)$ by a piecewise constant function. Zero boundary conditions are used for the wave function $\Psi(\phi)$, the domain width and the element quantity being set so that provide good accuracy of the calculation.

In the semiclassical approximation the problem of a tunneling quantum particle can be solved using the instanton technique [20,21]. For a particle of the mass M, moving at zero temperature in symmetric double-well potential $V(x)$, referenced from its minimum level ($V(\pm a)=0$, $\pm a$ are the minimum points), the expressions for the energy levels $E_{1,0}$ and the tunnel splitting ΔE_{01} read like

$$\begin{aligned} &E_{1,0}=E_0\pm\frac{\Delta E_{01}}{2}=\frac{\hbar\omega_0}{2}\pm\hbar K\exp\left(-\frac{S_0}{\hbar}\right),\\ &S_0=\int_{-a}^{a}dx\sqrt{2MV(x)},\\ &K=A\omega_0\sqrt{\frac{M\omega_0a^2}{\pi\hbar}},\qquad \omega_0^2=\frac{V''(\pm a)}{M},\\ &\Delta E_{01}=2A\,\hbar\omega_0\sqrt{\frac{M\omega_0a^2}{\pi\hbar}}\exp\left(-\frac{S_0}{\hbar}\right). \end{aligned} \tag{7}$$

Here ω_0 is the frequency of the particle zero oscillations in each of the wells, S_0 is the particle action on the instanton trajectory, the dimensionless constant A is found from the equation for the instanton's function $t(x)$ in the asymptotic limit:

$$\begin{aligned} &t(x)|_{x\to a}=\int_0^{x\to a}\frac{dx}{\sqrt{2V(x)/M}}=-\frac{1}{\omega_0}\ln\frac{a-x}{Aa},\\ &A=\lim_{x\to a}\frac{(a-x)}{a}\exp\left(\int_0^x dx\sqrt{\frac{M\omega_0^2}{2V(x)}}\right). \end{aligned} \tag{8}$$

Starting from the Hamiltonian (4) and using formulae (7),(8), we obtain the tunnel splitting ΔE_{01} for the 2JJ flux qubit in the case of symmetric double-well potential:

$$\Delta E_{01}=4A\,\hbar\omega_0\sqrt{\frac{M\omega_0\alpha_0^2}{\pi\hbar}}\exp\left(-\frac{S_0}{\hbar}\right), \tag{9a}$$

$$\frac{S_0}{\hbar}=\frac{2\hbar}{e^2}\sqrt{\frac{\lambda C_1}{(\lambda+1)L}}\int_0^{\alpha_0}d\alpha\sqrt{\beta_L\left(\sqrt{(1-\lambda)^2/4+\lambda\sin^2\alpha_0}-\sqrt{(1-\lambda)^2/4+\lambda\sin^2\alpha}\right)+\alpha^2-\alpha_0^2}, \tag{9b}$$

$$\omega_0=\sqrt{\frac{(\lambda+1)}{\lambda C_1L}\left(1-\frac{\beta_L}{2}\frac{d^2}{d\alpha^2}\sqrt{(1-\lambda)^2/4+\lambda\sin^2\alpha}\bigg|_{\alpha_0}\right)},\qquad M=\left(\frac{\Phi_0}{2\pi}\right)^2\frac{\lambda C_1}{(\lambda+1)}, \tag{9c}$$

$$A=\lim_{\alpha\to\alpha_0}\frac{(\alpha_0-\alpha)}{\alpha_0}\exp\left(\sqrt{\frac{M\omega_0^2}{E_{J1}}}\int_0^{\alpha}\frac{d\alpha}{\sqrt{\sqrt{(1-\lambda)^2/4+\lambda\sin^2\alpha_0}-\sqrt{(1-\lambda)^2/4+\lambda\sin^2\alpha}+(\alpha^2-\alpha_0^2)/\beta_L}}\right), \tag{9d}$$

$$2\alpha_0\sqrt{(1-\lambda)^2/4+\lambda\sin^2\alpha_0}-\beta_L\lambda\sin\alpha_0\cos\alpha_0=0. \tag{9e}$$

A variable $\alpha = (\phi - \pi)/2$ is introduced in formulae (9) (due to the potential symmetry condition $\phi_e = \pi$), the minima point of $\alpha_0 > 0$ of the potential $U(\alpha)$ satisfying equation (9e). The accuracy of the semiclassical approximation is high provided that $S_0/\hbar >> 1$, the method accuracy degrades as the dimensionless variable $S_0/\hbar$ diminishes approaching the unity. The results of a numerical analysis is of great importance in this region.

Figure 4,*a*,*b* presents the β_L-dependences of the tunnel splitting $\Delta E_{01}(\beta_L)/k_B$ for 2JJ, ScS and SIS flux qubits at the equal capacitances of the corresponding junctions $C_1 = C = 2.7$ fF and at the inductance $L = 0.3$ nH of the qubits loop. In both plots the curves calculated numerically are pointed by hollow circles while the ones obtained analytically using the instanton technique are plotted by solid lines. The formulae (9) were used for 2JJ qubit while similar formulae were taken for ScS and SIS qubits based on the forms of their potentials. The change in the parameter β_L means the variation of the critical currents I_{c1}, I_c of the corresponding junctions at a fixed inductance L. The double-well potential height decreases with lowering the parameter β_L, the energy level E_1 being equalized to the potential barrier height U_0 at a certain β_{L0} ($E_1 = U_0$) and exceeding it with further β_L lowering. Then, the wave function corresponding to the level E_1 is no further a superposition of the states localized in the left and right wells. The boundary values β_{L0} for the curves in the figure are indicated by dash lines. In the vicinity of β_{L0}, at $(U_0 - E_1) \sim k_B T$, the quantum coherence will be destroyed due to thermal fluctuations causing the over-barrier transitions. One can see from Fig. 4 that the numerically and the analytically obtained curves almost coincide at large β_L and begin to diverge at lower β_L. This is because of the condition of semiclassicity $S_0/\hbar >> 1$ starts to fail when diminishing β_L. This, in its turn, is caused by decreasing of the barrier height U_0 and therefore the action S_0. The analysis of the dependences $S_0(\beta_L)/\hbar$ reveals that $S_0/\hbar \sim 1$ at $\beta \sim \beta_{L0}$ and the relative divergence between the numerical and the analytical results for ScS and 2JJ qubits is within 2 to 10 percent. For a SIS qubit a fit of the numerical and analytical results requires the more accurate fulfilment of the semiclassicity condition. However, it is follows even from this analysis that obtaining the tunnel splitting $\Delta E_{01} \gtrsim 1$ K in the flux qubit based on a single SIS junction is impossible under condition of weak $(U_0 - E_1 >> k_B T)$ influence of thermal fluctuations on the metastable states decay. The dependences $S_0(\beta_L)/\hbar$ for 2JJ, ScS and SIS qubits are close to linear ones, whose slope (the action S_0 from β_L rate of increase) being higher in the indicated order. The value of tunnel splitting in the region of its exponential smallness $S_0(\beta_L)/\hbar >> 1$ diminishes in the same sequence.

The points in the numerical curves corresponding to the equal heights of the potential barriers ($U_0 = 9.64$ K) are indicated by arrows in Fig. 4,*a*. The corresponding values of the parameter couples $(\beta_L, E_{01}(\beta_L)/k_B)$ for 2JJ ($\lambda = 0.9$), ScS and SIS flux qubits are: (1.06, 3.45 K), (0.88, 1.79 K), (1.60, 0.16 K). It is seen that, under this condition, the tunnel splitting in a 2JJ qubit is about twice the splitting in a ScS qubit and more than 20 times higher

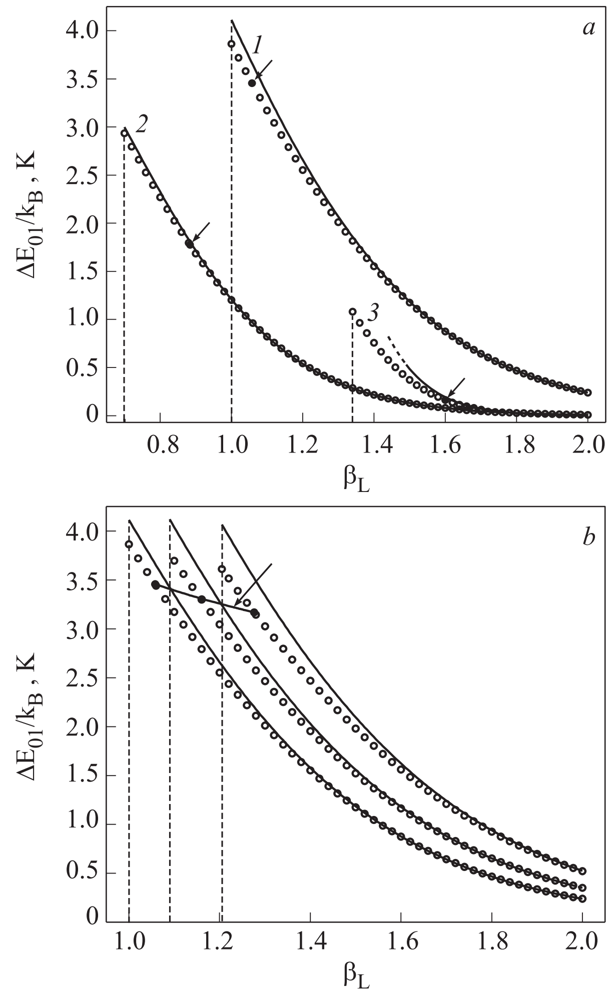

Fig. 4. Function $\Delta E_{01}(\beta_L)/k_B$ for 2JJ qubit at $\lambda = 0.9$ (*1*), ScS qubit (*2*), 1JJ qubit (*3*); the points in the numerical curves corresponding to equal height (9.64 K) of the potential barrier for all the qubits are indicated by arrows (*a*); Function $\Delta E_{01}(\beta_L)/k_B$ for 2JJ qubit and various λ: 0.9 (*1*), 0.85 (*2*), 0.8 (*3*) and «level line» of equal heights (9.64 K) of the potential barriers at varying λ (*4*) (*b*). The numerically obtained results are pointed by hollow circles, the analytically obtained ones are plotted by solid lines in the graphs (*a*) and (*b*). Dashed lines show the lowest boundary β_L, at which the level height E_1 becomes equal to the potential barrier height U_0. For 1JJ and ScS qubits, the capacitance of corresponding (SIS and ScS) junctions is $C = 2.7 \cdot 10^{-15}$ F while for 2JJ qubit the capacitance of the larger SIS junction is $C_1 = 2.7 \cdot 10^{-15}$ F. The geometric ring inductance is $L = 3.0 \cdot 10^{-10}$ H, the parameter $g \approx 76\beta_L$ for all the qubits. For 2JJ flux qubit the parameter $g_0^{\min} \approx 76\beta_L(1-\lambda^2) \gtrsim$ $\gtrsim 10$ at $\lambda \lesssim 0.93$.

than that of a SIS qubit. The curve for the tunnel splitting in 2JJ lies completely above the curves for ScS and SIS qubits, and the tunnel splitting for a 2JJ qubit reaches the value of 3.45K at $\beta_L \simeq 1 > \beta_{L0}$. The advantages of a ScS qubit if compared to a SIS qubit was thoroughly analyzed in Ref. 11. Note that yet more increase of the tunnel splitting in a 2JJ qubit in comparison with a ScS qubit with the matched parameters mentioned above results from the fact that their potentials (at $\lambda \simeq 1$) practically coincide while the effective mass M in 2JJ qubit is less by a factor of about two. Figure 4,*b* shows the dependence $\Delta E_{01}(\beta_L)/k_B$ for the 2JJ qubit at several λ, and also a «level line», the line $\Delta E_{01}(\beta_L)/k_B$ corresponding to equal height (9.64 K) of the potential barriers in 2JJ qubit with varying λ. The curve $\Delta E_{01}(\beta_L)/k_B$ shifts right when decreasing λ, and the smaller being the value of λ, the higher the tunnel splitting at a fixed β_L. This, however, is due to the lowering of the barrier height U_0 when decreasing λ that leads to the exponential rise of the thermal decay rate. Note that when desymmetrizing the junctions a fit between the numerical and the analytical curves gets worse because $S_0(\beta_L)/\hbar$ decreases. As seen from the plot, the value of the tunnel splitting gradually diminishes while moving along the level line with the equal height of the potential barriers towards the lower values of the junction symmetry parameter λ (and the higher β_L).

3. Conclusions

It should be emphasized that the principal requirements to 2JJ flux qubits, namely: $\lambda \simeq 0.9$; $C \lesssim 50$ fF/μm^2; $j_c \sim 10^3$ A/cm^2; $I_c \sim 1$ μA at the JJ area $S_J \sim 0.1$ μm^2; $L \sim 0.3$ nH, $\beta_L \sim 1$ can be met with the present-day technology based on Nb, NbN, MoRe materials with superconductivity gap $\Delta(0) \simeq 10$ K (see, e.g., Ref. 22). One can notice in conclusion that 2JJ flux qubit with large amplitude of tunnel splitting potentially has some strong advantages: (i) weak sensitivity to the motion of charge in traps; (ii) extremely fast excitation (pumping frequency) in qubit-based readout as well as in computer circuits due to considerable increasing of the quantum tunneling rate $\nu \sim \Delta E_{01}$; (iii) macroscopically large energy relaxation times τ_ε (see, e.g., Ref. 10 and Refs. therein); (iv) further improvement of qubit coherence characteristics [16].

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