



ON THE DIFFUSION OF NEUTRONS IN
MODERATING AND MULTIPLYING MEDIA
WITH A PERIODIC NEUTRON SOURCE

SÔBRE A DIFUSÃO DE NEUTRONS EM MEIOS MODERA-
DORES E MULTIPLICADORES, COM UMA FONTE
PERIÓDICA DE NEUTRONS

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On the Diffusion of Neutrons in Moderating and Multiplying Media with a Periodic Neutron Source

By Gerhard Jacob*

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, Gallone, Orsoni and Salvetti in a series of articles¹⁻⁴ used symbolic calculation methods to study the diffusion and multiplication of neutrons. In particular, they studied the space and time distribution of thermal neutrons in multiplying media with several types of fast neutron source as, for instance, an instantaneous source and a constant source acting for a finite time. In this paper, we consider the case of a point source of fast neutrons with strength varying periodically in time (using Fourier analysis), and explicit calculations are carried out for triangular, half-wave sinusoidal, and rectangular fast neutron bursts in spherical, cylindrical and parallelepipedal, multiplying or moderating media.

Initially, we recall the general method developed by the authors quoted above. They consider a homogeneous multiplying medium where both fission and external source neutrons are monoenergetic. Resonance capture only is taken into account, diffusion and age theory approximations are used and the usual energy-independent boundary conditions (vanishing of neutron density at the extrapolated boundary) are supposed valid. The slowing down time is not taken into account (moderation is considered instantaneous), the mean free path of the emergent source neutrons is neglected and fission neutrons are all considered as instantaneous.

Under these assumptions, the age-diffusion equation for the neutron density in a multiplying medium, with an external fast neutron source $S_0(\mathbf{r}, t)$, assuming $\rho(\mathbf{r}, 0) = 0$, may be written⁴:

$$L^2 \nabla^2 \rho(\mathbf{r}, t) + \{k_\infty \exp[\tau \nabla^2] - 1\} \rho(\mathbf{r}, t) + p l_0 \exp[\tau_0 \nabla^2] S_0(\mathbf{r}, t) = l_0 \frac{\partial \rho(\mathbf{r}, t)}{\partial t}, \quad (1)$$

where L is the diffusion length of thermal neutrons in the medium, $\rho(\mathbf{r}, t)$ the thermal neutron density, k_∞ the infinite multiplication factor, l_0 the mean life of thermal neutrons in the pure moderator, p the resonance escape probability and τ and τ_0 are the ages to thermal of fission and external source neutrons respec-

tively. The resolvent operator $\exp[a \nabla^2]$ is defined as follows: Let $f(\mathbf{r})$ be a function which may be expanded in a series of the complete orthonormal set of eigenfunctions of the equation

$$\nabla^2 \phi_n(\mathbf{r}) + \omega_n^2 \phi_n(\mathbf{r}) = 0$$

relative to the boundary condition

$$[\phi_n(\mathbf{r})]_\sigma = 0,$$

σ being the extrapolated boundary of the medium. Then

$$\begin{aligned} \exp[a \nabla^2] f(\mathbf{r}) &= \exp[a \nabla^2] \left\{ \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} a_n \phi_n(\mathbf{r}) \right\} \\ &= \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} a_n \exp[-a \omega_n^2] \phi_n(\mathbf{r}). \end{aligned}$$

Now, to solve (1) for a medium bounded by σ , the neutron density and the external source are expanded in a series of the above $\phi_n(\mathbf{r})$:

$$\rho(\mathbf{r}, t) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} a_n(t) \phi_n(\mathbf{r}), \quad (2)$$

$$S_0(\mathbf{r}, t) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} b_n(t) \phi_n(\mathbf{r}), \quad (3)$$

where $a_n(t)$ and $b_n(t)$ are the Fourier transforms

$$a_n(t) = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} A_n(\nu) \exp[i\nu t] d\nu, \quad (4)$$

$$b_n(t) = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} B_n(\nu) \exp[i\nu t] d\nu. \quad (5)$$

The solution of (1) is then:

$$\rho(\mathbf{r}, t) = p l_0 \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \frac{B_n(\nu) \exp[-\tau_0 \omega_n^2] \phi_n(\mathbf{r}) \exp[i\nu t]}{\Phi(\omega_n) + i\nu l_0} d\nu \quad (6)$$

where

$$\Phi(\omega_n) = 1 + \omega_n^2 L^2 - k_\infty \exp[-\tau \omega_n^2]. \quad (7)$$

Thus, knowing the external source $S_0(\mathbf{r}, t)$, it is possible to determine the expansion coefficients $b_n(t)$,

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then $B_n(\nu)$ and afterwards the thermal neutron density $\rho(\mathbf{r}, t)$.

For the sake of completeness, we list below the normalized eigenfunctions and eigenvalues for the three more common geometries:

(a) Sphere of radius R and geometrical center at the origin of the coordinate system:

$$\phi_n(\mathbf{r}) = (2\pi R)^{-1} \frac{\sin \omega_n \mathbf{r}}{\mathbf{r}}, \quad \omega_n = \frac{n\pi}{R}.$$

(b) Circular cylinder of radius R and height $2H$ and geometrical center at the origin of the coordinate system:

$$\begin{aligned} \phi_{mn}(\mathbf{r}, z) &= [R J_1(\omega_n R)]^{-1} (\pi H)^{-1} J_0(\omega_n \mathbf{r}) \cos \omega_m z, \\ \omega_n &= R^{-1} j_0^{(n)}, \quad \omega_m = (2H)^{-1} \pi (2m + 1), \\ \omega_{mn}^2 &= \omega_m^2 + \omega_n^2, \end{aligned}$$

where $J_i(x)$ is the Bessel function of first kind and order i and $j_0^{(n)}$ is the n th root of $J_0(x) = 0$.

(c) Rectangular parallelepiped with dimensions $2a$, $2b$, $2c$, and geometrical center at the origin of the coordinate system:

$$\begin{aligned} \phi_{lmn}(x, y, z) &= (abc)^{-1/2} \cos \omega_l x \cos \omega_m y \cos \omega_n z, \\ \omega_l &= (2l + 1)(2a)^{-1} \pi, \quad \omega_m = (2m + 1)(2b)^{-1} \pi, \\ \omega_n &= (2n + 1)(2c)^{-1} \pi, \quad \omega_{lmn}^2 = \omega_l^2 + \omega_m^2 + \omega_n^2. \end{aligned}$$

2. POINT SOURCE WITH STRENGTH OSCILLATING IN TIME

We are interested in solving (6) for an external point source of strength S_0 oscillating in time with frequency ω and starting at $t = 0$, i.e.,

$$S_0(\mathbf{r}, t) = S_0 \delta(\mathbf{r}) \exp[i\omega t] H(t) \tag{8}$$

where $\delta(\mathbf{r})$ is the three-dimensional delta (Dirac) function and $H(t)$ is the unit step (Heaviside) function as defined in Ref. 5. This case is a simple one and is useful to exemplify the method of calculation that will be followed in the more realistic cases considered later. Substituting (8) in (3), it follows, by the usual method of determination of coefficients and by the definition of the $\delta(\mathbf{r})$:

$$b_n(t) = S_0 \phi_n(0) \exp[i\omega t] H(t)$$

(we recall that $\phi_n(\mathbf{r})$ is a real function in the usual cases). Therefore, taking the inverse transform of (5) with the result obtained for $b_n(t)$ we have

$$B_n(\nu) = (2\pi)^{-1} S_0 \phi_n(0) \int_0^\infty \exp[i(\omega - \nu)t'] dt'.$$

Substituting in (6):

$$\begin{aligned} \rho(\mathbf{r}, t) &= (2\pi)^{-1} p l_0 S_0 \sum_{n=0}^\infty \phi_n(0) \phi_n(\mathbf{r}) \exp[-\tau_0 \omega_n^2] \\ &\times \int_{-\infty}^\infty \left\{ \frac{\exp[i\nu t]}{(\Phi(\omega_n) + i\nu l_0)} \int_0^\infty \exp[i(\omega - \nu)t'] dt' \right\} d\nu. \end{aligned}$$

Changing the order of integration and recalling the definition of the unit step function, we have

$$\begin{aligned} \rho(\mathbf{r}, t) &= p S_0 \sum_{n=0}^\infty \phi_n(0) \phi_n(\mathbf{r}) \exp[-\tau_0 \omega_n^2] \exp[i\omega t] \\ &\times \int_{-\infty}^t \exp\left[-\left\{i\omega + \frac{\Phi(\omega_n)}{l_0}\right\}y\right] H(y) dy \end{aligned}$$

where $y = t - t'$. Thus, integrating:

$$\begin{aligned} \rho(\mathbf{r}, t) &= p l_0 S_0 \sum_{n=0}^\infty \phi_n(0) \phi_n(\mathbf{r}) \frac{\exp[-\tau_0 \omega_n^2]}{\Phi(\omega_n) + i\omega l_0} \\ &\times \left\{ \exp[i\omega t] - \exp\left[-\frac{\Phi(\omega_n)}{l_0} t\right] \right\}. \tag{9} \end{aligned}$$

Equation (9) constitutes the complete solution of our problem.

In the limiting case of infinite period ($\omega = 0$), which is equivalent to considering a source of constant strength acting during an infinite time, our expression (9) agrees with the result quoted in Ref. 4 for $\Delta t \rightarrow \infty$ and $t < \Delta t$.

Now, if the medium is critical, we have $\Phi(\omega_0) = 0$ and $\Phi(\omega_n) > 0$ for $n \neq 0$ (ω_0 being the lowest non-zero eigenvalue) so that all terms of our solution (9) except the first decrease exponentially in time. Thus, after a time large enough for the higher harmonics to die out, only the first harmonic remains; and $\rho(\mathbf{r}, t)$ is given by:

$$\begin{aligned} \rho(\mathbf{r}, t) &= (i\omega)^{-1} p S_0 \phi_0(0) \phi_0(\mathbf{r}) \exp[-\tau_0 \omega_0^2] \\ &\times \{ \exp[i\omega t] - 1 \} \quad \text{for } t \geq 0. \tag{10} \end{aligned}$$

Of course, only the real parts or the coefficients of the imaginary parts of expressions (8), (9) and (10) have physical meaning.

3. POINT SOURCE OF ARBITRARY TIME PERIODICAL SHAPE

Now, we are interested in solving (6) in the case of an external point source, which is periodical in time and starts at $t = 0$.

Quite generally, we shall consider a source of the form

$$S_0(\mathbf{r}, t) = S_0 \delta(\mathbf{r}) f(t) H(t) \tag{11}$$

where $f(t)$ is any periodic function of time which can be expanded in a Fourier series. Specifically, we want to take the case of a periodic source with period T , which is "on" during a time αT ($0 \leq \alpha \leq 1$) and is "off" during the remainder of the period $(1 - \alpha)T$. Thus

$$f(t) = \frac{1}{2} c_0 + \sum_{n=1}^\infty [c_n \cos m\omega t + d_n \sin m\omega t]. \tag{12}$$

In the usual way, it can be shown that, for those cases which are more important in practice (because of their easier experimental realization), the coefficients have the following values:

(a) Triangular bursts (as shown in Fig. 1a for $\alpha = \frac{1}{2}$)

$$c_0 = \alpha$$

$$c_m = (m^2 \pi^2 \alpha)^{-1} [2 \cos m\alpha\pi - \cos 2m\alpha\pi - 1] \quad (13)$$

$$d_m = (m^2 \pi^2 \alpha)^{-1} [2 \sin m\alpha\pi - \sin 2m\alpha\pi].$$

(b) Half-wave sinusoidal bursts (as shown in Fig. 1b for $\alpha = \frac{1}{2}$)

$$c_0 = 4\alpha\pi^{-1}$$

$$c_m = 2\alpha[\pi(1 - 4m^2\alpha^2)^{-1} \cos 2m\alpha\pi + 1] \quad (14)$$

$$d_m = 2\alpha[\pi(1 - 4m^2\alpha^2)^{-1} \sin 2m\alpha\pi].$$

(c) Rectangular bursts (as shown in Fig. 1c for $\alpha = \frac{1}{2}$)

$$c_0 = 2\alpha$$

$$c_m = (m\pi)^{-1} \sin 2m\alpha\pi \quad (15)$$

$$d_m = (m\pi)^{-1} [1 - \cos 2m\alpha\pi]$$

Now, substituting the expression (11) for the source $S_0(\mathbf{r}, t)$ in (3) we have, by the usual method:

$$b_0(t) = S_0 H(t) f(t) \phi_n(0)$$

and thus, reversing the Fourier transform (5),

$$B_n(\nu) = (2\pi)^{-1} S_0 \phi_n(0) \int_0^\infty f(t') \exp[-i\nu t'] dt'.$$

Substituting the expression (12) for $f(t)$ we have:

$$B_n(\nu) = (2\pi)^{-1} S_0 \phi_n(0) \left\{ \frac{c_0}{2} \int_0^\infty \exp[-i\nu t'] dt' + \sum_{m=1}^\infty \left(c_m \int_0^\infty \cos m\omega t' \exp[-i\nu t'] dt' + d_m \int_0^\infty \sin m\omega t' \exp[-i\nu t'] dt' \right) \right\}.$$

Thus, expression (6) for the neutron density becomes:

$$\rho(\mathbf{r}, t) = (2\pi)^{-1} \beta l_0 S_0 \sum_{n=0}^\infty \phi_n(0) \phi_n(\mathbf{r}) \exp[-\tau_0 \omega_n^2] \times \left\{ \frac{c_0}{2} u(\omega_n, t) + \sum_{m=1}^\infty [c_m v_m(\omega_n, t) + d_m w_m(\omega_n, t)] \right\} \text{ for } t \geq 0$$

where

$$u(\omega_n, t) = \int_{-\infty}^\infty \left\{ \frac{\exp[i\nu t]}{\Phi(\omega_n) + i\nu l_0} \int_0^\infty \exp[-i\nu t'] dt' \right\} d\nu, \quad (17)$$

$$v_m(\omega_n, t) = \int_{-\infty}^\infty \left\{ \frac{\exp[i\nu t]}{\Phi(\omega_n) + i\nu l_0} \times \int_0^\infty \exp[-i\nu t'] \cos m\omega t' dt' \right\} d\nu, \quad (18)$$

$$w_m(\omega_n, t) = \int_{-\infty}^\infty \left\{ \frac{\exp[i\nu t]}{\Phi(\omega_n) + i\nu l_0} \times \int_0^\infty \exp[-i\nu t'] \sin m\omega t' dt' \right\} d\nu. \quad (19)$$

The integrations (17), (18) and (19) may be performed in the same way as indicated before, i.e., changing the order of integration and using the definition of the unit step function; we just quote the results:

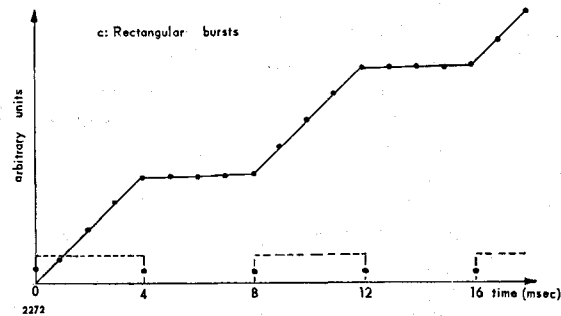
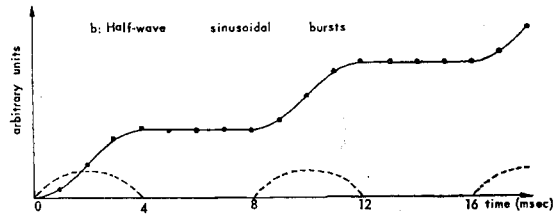
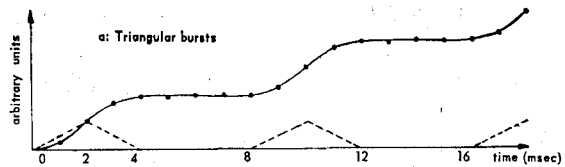


Figure 1. Time behavior of source-term $S_0(t)$ and neutron density $\rho(t)$ for critical media: $S_0(t)$, ---, $\rho(t)$, —

$$u(\omega_n, t) = 2\pi [\Phi(\omega_n)]^{-1} \left\{ 1 - \exp \left[-\frac{\Phi(\omega_n)}{l_0} t \right] \right\}, \quad (20)$$

$$v_m(\omega_n, t) = 2\pi [\Phi^2(\omega_n) + m^2 \omega^2 l_0^2]^{-1} \left\{ \cos(m\omega t - \theta_{mn}) - \exp \left[-\frac{\Phi(\omega_n)}{l_0} t \right] \cos \theta_{mn} \right\}, \quad (21)$$

$$w_m(\omega_n, t) = 2\pi [\Phi^2(\omega_n) + m^2 \omega^2 l_0^2]^{-1} \times \left\{ \sin(m\omega t - \theta_{mn}) + \exp \left[-\frac{\Phi(\omega_n)}{l_0} t \right] \sin \theta_{mn} \right\} \quad (22)$$

where

$$\cos \theta_{mn} = \Phi(\omega_n) [\Phi^2(\omega_n) + m^2 \omega^2 l_0^2]^{-1/2} \quad (23)$$

and

$$\sin \theta_{mn} = m\omega l_0 [\Phi^2(\omega_n) + m^2 \omega^2 l_0^2]^{-1/2}. \quad (24)$$

Equation (16), together with Eqs. (20), (21), (22), (23), (24), constitutes the complete solution of the problem.

In the particular case in which $f(t) = \exp[i\omega t]$, i.e., in the case discussed in Section 2, an easy calculation shows that we obtain expression (9), as it had to be.

If, in the case of rectangular bursts, we let the period go to infinity ($\omega \rightarrow 0$), and take $\alpha = 1$, we arrive again at the results quoted in Ref. 4.

Finally, in the limiting case of criticality, we have,

as in Section 2, $\Phi(\omega_0) = 0$ and $\Phi(\omega_n) > 0$ for $n \neq 0$ and so, after a time large enough for the higher harmonics to die out, the first harmonic of our solution (16) may be written:

$$\rho(\mathbf{r}, t) = p S_0 \phi_0(0) \phi_0(\mathbf{r}) \exp[-\tau_0 \omega_0^2] \times \left\{ \frac{C_0}{2} t + \sum_{m=1}^{\infty} (m\omega)^{-1} [c_m \sin m\omega t + d_m (1 - \cos m\omega t)] \right\} \text{ for } t \geq 0. \quad (25)$$

Figure 1 shows the time behavior of the neutron density in a critical medium, with the source term given by triangular bursts (a), half-wave sinusoidal bursts (b) and rectangular bursts (c) respectively, and $c = \frac{1}{2}$. The period was taken as 8 milliseconds and the points indicate calculated values taking into account terms up to $m = 8$ in the Fourier series.

Of course, the results obtained are also applicable to pure moderating media, taking $p = 1$ and $k_{\infty} = 0$.

4. INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

It is of interest to analyze in some detail the time dependence of the neutron density in the expressions obtained above.

To start with, let us take the case of a critical medium with the source term given, for instance, by triangular bursts (Fig. 1a).

We see that the neutron density rises between $t = 0$ and $t = \frac{1}{2}T$ (in general, between $t = 0$ and $t = aT$), i.e., while the source is "on", and remains constant in the remainder of the period, i.e., while the source is "off". Besides this, the curve shows an inflection point at $t = \frac{1}{2}T$ (in general, at $t = \frac{1}{2}aT$), which arises because the source term has a maximum at this point.

The conclusions arrived at may also be drawn from the fact that, for a critical medium, we must have

$$\rho(t) = \int_0^t S_0(t') dt'$$

for each instant of time t .

Alternatively, in the case of a subcritical medium (and in particular, of a pure moderating medium), we have $\rho(t) < \int_0^t S_0(t') dt'$, so that the rise of the neutron density will be slower, there will be a maximum at the left of $t = aT$ (this maximum being lower than the constant value in the previous case, and arising earlier

because for subcritical media the neutron leakage will not be compensated by source plus fission neutrons) and afterwards, instead of remaining constant, the neutron density will decrease to a minimum (negligible for periods T large compared with the neutron lifetime l_0).

Now let us analyze, at least qualitatively, the influence of the delayed neutrons in the case of a critical and a subcritical medium with the external source considered above.

In the case of a critical medium, because there is an equilibrium at each instant of time between the neutrons which leak out of the medium and those which are produced by both fissions and external source if all neutrons are considered instantaneous, the effect of the delay of a small part of the fission neutrons will be to destroy this instantaneous equilibrium. Thus, the rise of the neutron density will be a little slower between $t = 0$ and $t = aT$ and from $t = aT$ on, the neutron density will continue to rise instead of remaining constant, going asymptotically to the constant value shown in Fig. 1a if the period is large compared with the mean life of the longer-lived delayed neutron group.

In the case of a subcritical medium, by similar considerations, we can see that because of the delayed neutrons the increase of the neutron density will be slower, its maximum displaced to the right (eventually to the right of the point $t = aT$) and the decrease of the neutron density will also be slower. And if the period is sufficiently large compared with the mean life of the longer-lived delayed neutron group, the neutron density will go asymptotically to zero. The quantitative analysis of the effect of the delayed neutrons will be the subject of a further paper.

Finally, we want to remark that the expressions obtained will be useful in the experimental study of the properties of moderating and multiplying media using periodic neutron sources instead of the impulse method used up to now.⁶⁻⁹

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