DISCOVERY OF A SECOND L SUBDWARF IN THE TWO MICRON ALL SKY SURVEY

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Received 2004 July 28; accepted 2004 August 30; published 2004 September 8

ABSTRACT

I report the discovery of the second L subdwarf identified in the Two Micron All Sky Survey, 2MASS J16262034+3925190. This high proper motion object ($\mu = 1'277 \pm 0'03$ yr$^{-1}$) exhibits near-infrared spectral features indicative of a subsolar metallicity L dwarf, including strong metal hydride and H$_2$O absorption bands, pressure-broadened alkali lines, and blue near-infrared colors caused by enhanced collision-induced H$_2$ absorption. This object is of later type than any of the known M subdwarfs but does not appear to be as cool as the apparently late-type sdL, 2MASS 0532+8246. The radial velocity ($V_{rad} = -260 \pm 35$ km s$^{-1}$) and estimated tangential velocity ($V_{tan} \approx 90$–210 km s$^{-1}$) of 2MASS 1626+3925 indicate membership in the Galactic halo, and this source is likely near or below the hydrogen-burning minimum mass for a metal-poor star. L subdwarfs such as 2MASS 1626+3925 are useful probes of gas and condensate chemistry in low-temperature stellar and brown dwarf atmospheres, but more examples are needed to study these objects as a population as well as to define a rigorous classification scheme.

Subject headings: solar neighborhood — stars: chemically peculiar — stars: individual (2MASS J16262034+3925190) — stars: low-mass, brown dwarfs — subdwarfs

1. INTRODUCTION

M dwarfs dominate the Galactic stellar population both in number and mass. As long-lived sources, they are important tracers of Galactic star formation history and chemical evolution as well as the initial mass function. Most M dwarfs identified in the vicinity of the Sun are Population I “field” stars, with kinematics consistent with Galactic disk orbits and near-solar metallicities. However, a small fraction (~0.3%; Digby et al. 2003) are metal-poor. These so-called subdwarfs (sd) typically exhibit halo kinematics ($V = -202$ km s$^{-1}$; Gizis 1997) and were likely formed early in the Galaxy’s history. Until recently, the latest type subdwarfs known were M stars, identified primarily as high proper motion sources in multiepoch photographic plate surveys (e.g., Luyten 1979). In contrast, hundreds of field dwarfs cooler than type M—the L dwarfs (Kirkpatrick et al. 1999; Martín et al. 1999)—have been identified in wide-field, near-infrared (NIR) surveys such as the Two Micron All Sky Survey (2MASS; Cutri et al. 2003), the Deep Near-Infrared Survey of the Southern Sky (DENIS; Epchtein et al. 1997), and the Sloan Digital Sky Survey (York et al. 2000). The majority of these low-mass stars and brown dwarfs are too faint at optical wavelengths to have been detected on earlier photographic plates.

The first L-type subdwarf was recently identified in the 2MASS database (Burgasser et al. 2003b, hereafter B03). This object, 2MASS 0532+8246, exhibits many spectral features similar to late-type L field dwarfs, including a steep red optical slope, strong alkali lines and metal hydride bands, deep H$_2$O absorption in the NIR, and pressure-broadened Na I and K I at optical wavelengths. The metal hydride bands in the spectrum of 2MASS 0532+8246 are far stronger than those observed in any field L dwarf, however. This source also has blue NIR colors, $J-K_s \approx 0.3$, in contrast to $J-K_s \approx 1.5$–2.5 typical of field L dwarfs (Kirkpatrick et al. 2000). The spectral and photometric properties of 2MASS 0532+8246, in addition to its high space motion, indicate that it is an L-type halo subdwarf. A second, apparently earlier type, L subdwarf has also been identified by Lepine et al. (2003b) as part of a proper-motion survey using red optical photographic plates (Lepine et al. 2002, 2003a). These discoveries have extended our census of metal-poor halo objects into the substellar regime (B03).

In this Letter, I present the discovery of a second L subdwarf identified in the 2MASS Point Source Catalog, 2MASS J16262034+3925190 (hereafter 2MASS 1626+3925). The identification and subsequent imaging observations of this object are described in § 2, and its NIR spectrum is presented and analyzed in § 3. The importance of this and future L subdwarf discoveries is addressed in § 4.

2. IDENTIFICATION AND IMAGING OBSERVATIONS

2MASS 1626+3925 was initially selected from the 2MASS database in a search for T dwarfs, brown dwarfs cooler than spectral class L (Burgasser et al. 2002, 2003a). Like most T dwarfs, this object has blue NIR colors ($J-K_s = -0.03 \pm 0.08$; Table 1) and no optical counterpart in the USNO-A2.0 catalog (Monet et al. 1998). However, inspection of red ($R$) and infrared ($I_s$) photographic plates from the Second Palomar Sky Survey (POSS II; Reid et al. 1991) reveal an offset, moving optical counterpart (Fig. 1) with $R = 19.84$ and $I_s = 16.68$ (Monet et al. 2003, USNO-B1.0). This counterpart was confirmed by J-band IRCam (Murphy et al. 1995) and R-band CCD imaging observations, both conducted at the Palomar 60 inch Meyer Telescope on 2000 April 14 and July 1 (UT), respectively. The offset between the POSS II $R$ plate (epoch 1993.3) and the 2MASS detection (epoch 1998.3) implies a high proper motion, measured to be $\mu = 1'277 \pm 0'03$ yr$^{-1}$ at position angle $\theta = 282^\circ \pm 1^\circ$. Despite being an interesting, late-type source,

1 Spitzer Fellow.
TABLE 1
Observational Properties of the L Subdwarf 2MASS 1626+3925

| Parameter | Value |
|-----------|-------|
| α         | 16°26′20″34 |
| δ         | +39°25′19″70 |
| R         | 19.84 |
| I₀        | 16.68 |
| 2MASS J   | 14.44 ± 0.03 |
| 2MASS J − H | −0.10 ± 0.06 |
| 2MASS H − K | 0.07 ± 0.09 |
| μ         | 1127 ± 0.03 yr⁻¹ |
| θ         | 282°6′ ± 14′ |
| d         | ∼15–35 pc |
| Vₜₙ       | ∼90–210 km s⁻¹ |
| Vₜₙ        | −260 ± 35 km s⁻¹ |

* 2MASS coordinates, equinox J2000.0 and epoch 1998 April 29 (UT).
* Photographic R (IIIaF) and I₀ (IV-N) magnitudes from USNO-B1.0 (Monet et al. 2003).
* Assuming M ≈ 11.5–13.5 J.

2MASS 1626+3925 was initially rejected as being too optically bright for a T dwarf. However, following the identification of 2MASS 0532+8246 in the same search sample, this source was reexamined to determine if it too is a late-type subdwarf.

3. NEAR-INFRARED SPECTROSCOPY

NIR spectroscopic observations of 2MASS 1626+3925 were obtained during 2004 July 23–24 (UT) using the SpeX instrument (Rayner et al. 2003) mounted on the NASA 3.0 m Infrared Telescope Facility (IRTF). Observing conditions were excellent, with clear skies and 0′.5–0′.7 seeing. Spectral data were obtained in both prism and cross-dispersed modes, with complete 0.7–2.5 μm coverage at spectral resolutions λ/Δλ ≈ 150 and 1200, respectively, for the employed 0′.5 slit. Additional observations of the A0 V stars HD 153345 and HD 158261 were obtained for flux and telluric absorption calibration. All spectral data were reduced using the SpeXtool package (Cushing et al. 2004). Further details on the experimental design and data reduction are given in Burgasser et al. (2004).

Figure 2 shows the reduced, low-resolution NIR spectrum of 2MASS 1626+3925, along with those of three late-type M subdwarfs—LHS 377 (Gizis 1997), LSR 2036+5059 (Lepine et al. 2003a), and SSSPM 1013−3956 (Scholz et al. 2004)—all obtained with the SpeX spectrograph (A. J. Burgasser et al. 2004, in preparation). These subdwarfs are optically classified sdM7, sdM7.5, and sdM9.5, respectively, according to the scheme of Gizis (1997). All four NIR spectra exhibit signatures typical of late-type dwarfs, with steep red optical spectral slopes, TiO absorption at 0.84 μm, strong alkali lines of Na i and K i (particu-
ularly between 1.1 and 1.3 \( \mu\)m), and stellar H\(_2\)O absorption at 1.4 and 1.8 \( \mu\)m. They also exhibit features characteristic of metal-poor stars, including enhanced metal hydride bands (FeH, CrH), weak metal oxide bands (note the weak or absent CO band at 2.3 \( \mu\)m), and blue NIR spectral energy distributions. The blue NIR colors are due to collision-induced, H\(_2\) 1–0 quadrupole absorption centered near 2.5 \( \mu\)m, which is enhanced in the higher pressure photospheres of metal-poor cool subdwarfs\(^4\) (Saumon et al. 1994; Borysow et al. 1997; Leggett et al. 2000).

In 2MASS 1626+3956, these low-temperature, metal-poor spectral features become even more pronounced. CrH and FeH bands at 0.86 and 0.87 \( \mu\)m are seen distinctly in the moderate resolution cross-dispersed data, while the 0.99 \( \mu\)m FeH Wing-Ford band is deeper than those of any field M or L dwarf observed to date (Kirkpatrick et al. 1999, 2000). FeH absorption is also strong in the 1.2–1.3 \( \mu\)m region. We detect a weak signature of the \( \Lambda^4\Phi-X^1\Gamma\) band of TiH at 0.94 \( \mu\)m (Andersson et al. 2003; M. Cushing 2004, private communication) in the moderate resolution data, a feature that can also be seen in the red optical spectrum of 2MASS 0532+8246 (B03; labeled as H\(_2\)O in their Fig. 2). This band is not responsible for an as yet unidentified feature centered at 0.96 \( \mu\)m, however, present in the spectra of both 2MASS 1626+3925 and 2MASS 0532+8246. Beyond 1.3 \( \mu\)m, the NIR spectrum of 2MASS 1626+3925 is generally featureless, with the exception of strong H\(_2\)O absorption at 1.4 and possibly 1.8 \( \mu\)m. Indeed, the 2.3 \( \mu\)m CO band is completely absent, and K-band flux is highly suppressed by H\(_2\) absorption.

Figure 3 displays the moderate resolution 1.15–1.35 \( \mu\)m spectrum of 2MASS 1626+3925, along with those of 2MASS 0532+8246 and the L2 field dwarf Kelu 1 (Ruiz et al. 1997), both measured with the Keck NIRSPEC instrument (McLean et al. 2003; B03). Significant FeH absorption is present in the spectra of all three objects, with strong bands at 1.20, 1.22, and 1.24 \( \mu\)m, and fine features throughout the displayed spectral region (Cushing et al. 2003). Fe i lines may also be present in the spectrum of 2MASS 1626+3925, albeit quite weak. The K i doublet lines at 1.17/1.18 and 1.24/1.25 \( \mu\)m are notably broadened in the subdwarf spectra. A measurement of the FWHM of the shorter wavelength pair yields 16.3 and 19.4 \( \AA\) at 1.17 and 1.18 \( \mu\)m, respectively, 20% broader than measured for the rapidly rotating Kelu 1 (\( v \sin i = 60 \pm 5 \) km s\(^{-1}\); Basri et al. 2000).\(^5\) This is indicative of pressure broadening, consistent with the high photospheric pressures implied from enhanced H\(_2\) absorption at the K band.

The spectra in Figure 2 show a natural progression of deepening FeH and H\(_2\)O bands, strengthening H\(_2\) absorption, and increasingly red optical slopes; 2MASS 1626+3925 is clearly the latest type source of the four, apparently cooler than the sdM9.5 SSSPM 1013–1356. Furthermore, the depth of the 1.4 \( \mu\)m H\(_2\)O band is similar to those of early- and mid-type L dwarfs observed with the same instrumental setup (Burgasser et al. 2004), although it is somewhat weaker than that of 2MASS 0532+8246 (Fig. 3). We therefore conclude that 2MASS 1626+3925 is a bona fide L subdwarf but of earlier type than 2MASS 0532+8246.

Furthermore, the kinematics of 2MASS 1626+3925 appear to be consistent with membership in the Galactic halo. The radial velocity of this source was measured by cross-correlating its moderate resolution J-band spectrum with NIRSPEC spectra of eight L dwarfs with known radial velocities (Basri et al. 2000; Reid et al. 2002; McLean et al. 2003; Bailer-Jones 2004; see B03). The resulting heliocentric value, \( V_{\text{hel}} = -260 \pm 35 \) km s\(^{-1}\), is much too high for a nearby disk star. Likewise, assuming that 2MASS 1626+3925 has an absolute J-band magnitude similar to that of an early- to mid-type L dwarf, \( M_J \approx 11.5–13.5 \) (Vrba et al. 2004), its estimated spectro-photometric distance of 15–35 pc implies \( V_{\text{sun}} \approx 90–210 \) km s\(^{-1}\), characteristic of thick-disk or halo stars. A more accurate determination of this object’s kinematics will require a parallax measurement.

Finally, if 2MASS 1626+3925 has the same effective temperature as an early- or mid-type L dwarf, 1800 K \( \lesssim T_{\text{eff}} \lesssim 2300 \) K (Golimowski et al. 2004), then it straddles the hydrogen-
burning minimum mass for \( Z \sim 0.1 Z_{\odot} \) and is substellar for lower metallicities (see Fig. 3 of B03). Again, parallax and bolometric luminosity measurements are needed to verify this possibility.

4. DISCUSSION

The identification of L subdwarfs such as 2MASS 1626+3925 enables a new approach to studying the atmospheric physics of cool stars and brown dwarfs. The chemistry and band strengths of molecular species in the atmospheres of late M and L dwarfs are highly sensitive to the total metal abundance. Metal-poor environments can therefore produce emergent spectra with very different dominant species (i.e., metal hydrides) or enable the detection of species that are otherwise suppressed (i.e., TiH). It remains unclear as to what extent condensate clouds can form in cool metal-poor atmospheres (B03), the suppression of which would have a significant impact on NIR spectral energy distributions and the retention of atmospheric chemical species such as atomic alkalis (Lodders 1999; Burrows et al. 2001). The higher photospheric pressures of cool subdwarfs also make them excellent laboratories for studying the pressure-broadened wings of the \( K_1 \) and \( Na_1 \) fundamental transitions at optical wavelengths (Burrows et al. 2000) as well as pressure-sensitive \( H_2 \) absorption in the NIR. The latter is a key absorber in the spectra of cool white dwarfs (Saumon et al. 1994; Hansen 1998).

The unique spectra of L subdwarfs imply that existing classification schemes are inappropriate to characterize these objects. A revised scheme, preferably based on red optical and/or \( J \)-band spectral features, should be matched closely to established L field dwarf schemes (e.g., Kirkpatrick et al. 1999) to enable the straightforward assessment of metallicity effects. However, the definition of a rigorous classification scheme, as well as more general studies of the L subdwarf population as a whole, requires a systematic search for these objects. This may best be accomplished by a wide-field NIR proper-motion survey, in analogy to the successful photographic plate surveys of the past.

The author thanks telescope operator P. Sears and instrument specialist J. Rayner for their assistance during the IRTF observations, M. Cushing for pointing out the TiH band identification and for useful discussions, G. Björn for logistical support during the preparation of the manuscript, and the anonymous referee for her/his helpful critique of the original manuscript. Support for this work was provided by NASA through the SIRTF Fellowship Program. POSS II images were obtained from the Digitized Sky Survey image server maintained by the Canadian Astronomy Data Centre, which is operated by the Herzberg Institute of Astrophysics, National Research Council of Canada. The Digitized Sky Survey was produced at the Space Telescope Science Institute under US government grant NAG W-2166. This publication makes use of data from 2MASS, which is a joint project of the University of Massachusetts and the Infrared Processing and Analysis Center and funded by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the National Science Foundation. 2MASS data were obtained from the NASA/IPAC Infrared Science Archive, which is operated by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, under contract with NASA. The author wishes to extend special thanks to those of Hawaiian ancestry on whose sacred mountain we are privileged to be guests.

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