Medium-modified Casimir forces

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Abstract. We argue that the results for the vacuum forces on a slab and on an atom embedded in a magnetodielectric medium near a mirror, obtained using a recently suggested Lorentz-force approach to the Casimir effect, are equivalent to the corresponding results obtained in a traditional way. We also derive a general expression for the atom-atom force in a medium and extend a few classical results concerning this force in vacuum and dielectrics to magnetodielectric systems. This, for example, reveals that the (repulsive) interaction between atoms of different polarizability type is at small distances unaffected by a (weakly polarizable) medium.

PACS numbers: 12.20.Ds, 34.50.Dy, 34.20.Cf, 42.50.Nn

Although modifications of the Casimir and van der Waals forces due to the presence of a medium between the interacting objects were the subject of interest for a long time, this issue is still of great importance owing to the dominant role of these forces at small distances and to the rapid progress in micro and nanotechnologies. A common way of extending the Lifshitz theory of the Casimir effect to material cavities is to (eventually) employ the Minkovski stress tensor $T_{ij} = \frac{1}{4\pi} \langle D_i E_j + H_i B_j - \frac{1}{2} (D \cdot E + H \cdot B) \delta_{ij} \rangle$ when calculating the force. Recently, however, a Lorentz-force approach to the Casimir effect was suggested in which the relevant stress tensor is of the form $T_{ij}^{(L)} = \frac{1}{4\pi} \langle P_i E_j - M_i B_j - \frac{1}{2} (P \cdot E - M \cdot B) \delta_{ij} \rangle$.

In this work, we reinterpret the results for the vacuum forces on a slab and on an atom embedded in a semi-infinite magnetodielectric cavity as recently obtained using $T_{ij}^{(L)}$. Also, we derive a general expression for the atom-atom force in a medium and extend a few well-known results for this force to magnetodielectric systems.

When calculating $T_{ij}^{(L)}$ for planar geometry, the zero-temperature force on the slab per unit area in the configuration of Figure 1 can be written as

$$f^{(L)}(d) = f(d) + \tilde{f}(d),$$

$$f(d) = \frac{\hbar}{2\pi^2} \int_0^\infty d\xi \int_0^\infty dk k \kappa \sum_{q=p,s} \left[ \frac{1}{(r q R_1 e^{-2\kappa d})^{-1} - 1} \right] (i\xi, k).$$
\[
\tilde{f}(d) = \frac{\hbar}{2\pi^2} \int_0^\infty d\xi \int_0^\infty dk \kappa n \sum_{q=p,s} \left[ \frac{(\varepsilon^{-1} - 1)\delta_{q\parallel} + (\mu - 1)\delta_{q\perp}}{(r^q R_{q\parallel} e^{-2k d})^{-1} - 1} \right] (i\xi, k)
\]

\[
+ \frac{\hbar}{8\pi^2 c^2} \int_0^\infty d\xi \kappa^2 \mu (n^2 - 1) \int_0^\infty \frac{dk}{\kappa} \sum_{q=p,s} \Delta_q \left[ \frac{(1 + r^q)^2 - t^q}{(R_{q\parallel} e^{-2k d})^{-1} - 1} \right] (i\xi, k),
\]

The force on an atom near a mirror can be obtained from (2) by assuming that the slab consists of a thin \((d_s \ll d)\) layer of the cavity medium with a small number of atoms \(A\) embedded in it. Then, from the Lorentz-Lorenz (Clausius-Mossotti)
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relation [14], it follows that

\[ \varepsilon_s = \varepsilon + 4\pi N_A \alpha_e^A, \quad \alpha_e^A = \alpha_e^{A0} \left( \frac{\varepsilon + \frac{2}{3}}{1 + O(N_A \alpha_e^{A0})} \right), \]

(3)

where \( N_A \) is the number density and \( \alpha_e^{A0} \) the electric vacuum polarizability of embedded atoms. Assuming a similar relation between \( \mu_s \), \( \mu \) and the effective atomic magnetic polarizability \( \alpha_m^A \), for the force on an embedded atom at distance \( d \) from the mirror we find (for details, see the derivation of Equation (14) in [12])

\[ f_a^L(d) = f_A(d) + \tilde{f}_A(d), \]

(4a)

\[ f_A(d) = \frac{\hbar}{4\pi c^2} \int_0^\infty d\xi \int_0^\infty dk \kappa e^{-2\kappa d} \left\{ \left[ \frac{\alpha_e^A \left( \frac{2\kappa^2 e^2}{\varepsilon \xi^2} - \mu \right)}{\varepsilon \xi^2} \right] R^p \right\} (i\xi, k), \]

(4b)

\[ \tilde{f}_A(d) = \frac{\hbar}{4\pi c^2} \int_0^\infty d\xi \int_0^\infty dk \kappa e^{-2\kappa d} \left\{ \frac{1}{\xi} \left[ \frac{\alpha_e^A \left( \frac{2\kappa^2 e^2}{\varepsilon \xi^2} - \mu \right)}{\varepsilon \xi^2} - \alpha_m^A \mu \right] R^p \right\} (i\xi, k), \]

(4c)

As before, this can be combined to give a medium-screened and a medium-assisted force on the atom [12]. However, according to the interpretation adopted here, the true force on the atom is \( f_A \), whereas \( \tilde{f}_A \) may be regarded as an atom-induced force on the medium (per atom). We note that [14] extends (in different directions) previous results for the atom-mirror force in various circumstances [2, 3, 15, 16, 17] by fully accounting for the magnetic properties of the system.

Equation (14) enables one to calculate the force between two atoms in a magnetodielectric medium. This force can be found by assuming a single-medium mirror consisting of the cavity medium with a small number of, say, type \( A \) atoms embedded in it, so that \( \varepsilon_m = \varepsilon + 4\pi N_B \alpha_e^B \) and \( \mu_m = \mu + 4\pi N_B \alpha_m^B \). In this case, the reflection coefficients of the mirror can be approximated by [12]

\[ R^p(i\xi, k) \approx \frac{\pi N_B \xi^2}{2\varepsilon c^2} \left[ \frac{\alpha_e^B}{\mu^p} \left( \frac{2\kappa^2 e^2}{\varepsilon \xi^2} - 1 \right) - \alpha_m^B \right], \]

(5)

and \( R^s = R^p(\varepsilon \leftrightarrow \mu, \alpha_e^s \leftrightarrow \alpha_m^s) \). Also, the potential energy of the atom \( U_A(d) = -\int_0^d \text{d}l \text{f}_A(l) \) is given by \( U_A(d) = N_B \int_{z \geq d} \text{d}^3r U_{AB}(r) \), where \( r = r_B - r_A \) and \( U_{AB}(r) \) is the interaction energy between the atoms \( A \) and \( B \). Using the identity \( \exp(-2\kappa d) = (2\kappa^2/\pi) \int_{z \geq d} \text{d}^3r \exp(-2\kappa r)/r \) and combining these relations, from [12] and [5] we obtain the extension of the Feinberg and Sucher formula [19] to material systems

\[ U_{AB}(r) = \frac{\hbar}{16\pi r^5} \int_0^\infty d\xi e^{-2n_\xi c/\varepsilon} F\left( \frac{2n_\xi r}{c} \right) \left[ \frac{\alpha_e^A \alpha_e^B}{\varepsilon^2} + \frac{\alpha_m^A \alpha_m^B}{\mu^2} \right] \]

\[ - \frac{\hbar}{4\pi^2 r^4} \int_0^\infty d\xi e^{-2n_\xi c/\varepsilon} G\left( \frac{2n_\xi r}{c} \right) (\alpha_e \alpha_m^B + \alpha_m^A \alpha_e^B), \]

(6)

where \( F(x) = x^4 + 4x^3 + 20x^2 + 48x + 48 \) and \( G(x) = (x + 2)^2 \).  

\[ \dagger \text{Owing to a lapse, the replacements } \alpha_e \rightarrow \alpha_e/\varepsilon \text{ and } \alpha_m \rightarrow \alpha_m/\mu \text{ must be made in the last term of this equation.} \]
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At small distances between the atoms, \( r \ll c/\Omega \) (\( \Omega \) is an effective upper limit in the integration over \( \xi \)), we may let \( \exp(-2n\xi r/c) \approx 1 \), \( F(2n\xi r/c) \approx 48 \) and \( G(2n\xi r/c) \approx 4 \) in (6). This gives for the atom-atom force \( f_{AB} = -dU_{AB}/dr \) at small distances

\[
f_{AB}(r) = \frac{18\hbar}{\pi r^7} \int_0^\infty d\xi \left( \frac{\alpha^A\alpha^B}{\varepsilon^2} + \frac{\alpha^A_m\alpha^B_m}{\mu^2} \right) - \frac{4\hbar}{\pi c^2 r^5} \int_0^\infty d\xi \xi^2 \left( \alpha^A\alpha^B_m + \alpha^A_m\alpha^B \right) \varepsilon\mu_0, \tag{7}
\]

which generalizes the well-known results for the van der Waals-London force \([1, 18, 19]\). We observe that, whereas the force between the atoms of the same polarizability type is strongly affected by the surrounding medium, the (repulsive) force between the atoms of different polarizability type (in weakly-polarizable media) remains the same as in vacuum. At large distances between the atoms, the main contribution to the integral in (6) comes from the \( \xi \approx 0 \) region. Approximating the \( \xi \)-dependent quantities by their static values (denoted by the subscript 0) and then performing the integration, we arrive at

\[
f_{AB}(r) = \frac{7\hbar c}{4\pi n_0^{3/8}} \left[ 23 \left( \alpha^A\alpha^B_m \mu^2 + \alpha^A_m\alpha^B \right) - 7 \left( \alpha^A\alpha^B_m + \alpha^A_m\alpha^B \right) \varepsilon\mu_0 \right], \tag{8}
\]

which gives the medium corrections to the retarded atom-atom force \([15, 19]\) and extends the previous considerations of these corrections \([1, 4]\) to magnetodielectric systems. As seen, the repulsive component of the force is in a (weakly-polarizable) medium simply scaled by \( n_0^{-3} \), whereas the modification of its attractive part is more complex.

We end this short discussion by noting that the symmetry of (11) under the transformation: \( \alpha_e \leftrightarrow \alpha_m, \varepsilon \leftrightarrow \mu \) and \( R^p \leftrightarrow R^s \) [and consequently that of (6)-(8) with respect to the replacements \( \alpha_e \leftrightarrow \alpha_m \) and \( \varepsilon \leftrightarrow \mu \)] is a consequence of the invariance of the Minkowski stress tensor \( T_{ij} \) with respect to a duality transformation, e.g. \( D \to B, E \to H, B \to -D \) and \( H \to -E \) \([16]\). This symmetry is lost in the second term of \( T_{ij}^{(L)} \), so that the force \( \tilde{f}_A \) is not invariant under the replacement of the electric and magnetic quantities. Since the medium-screened atom-mirror and atom-atom forces are combinations of the corresponding \( f \)'s and \( \tilde{f} \)'s, this explains the unusual (asymmetric) medium effects on these forces found in \([12]\).

In conclusion, when properly interpreted, the result for the vacuum force on an object (a slab or an atom) embedded in a medium near a mirror obtained using the Lorentz-force approach to the Casimir effect agrees with that obtained in a traditional way. Extensions of the well-known results for the atom-atom force to magnetodielectric systems reveals that the (repulsive) interaction between atoms of different polarizability type remains (in weakly-polarizable media) the same as in vacuum at small and is scaled by \( n_0^{-3} \) at large distances. Medium corrections to the force between atoms of the same polarizability type are more complex and depend on the polarizability type of atoms.

The author thanks to C. Raabe and anonymous referees for constructive criticism and suggestions. This work was supported in part by the Ministry of Science and Technology of the Republic of Croatia under contract No. 0098001.

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