POINT INTERACTIONS FROM FLUX CONSERVATION

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Abstract

We show that the physical requirement of flux conservation can substitute for the usual matching conditions in point interactions. The study covers an arbitrary superposition of δ and δ’ potentials on the real line and can be easily applied to higher dimensions. Our procedure can be seen as a physical interpretation of the deficiency index of some symmetric, but not self-adjoint operators.

(1.) Point interactions of the delta type have a long history in quantum physics [1]. In this note we show that the conventional matching conditions for these potentials can be obtained easily by enforcing the conservation of the flux across the discontinuity.

For one-dimensional quantum system with a point interaction at \( x = 0 \), the continuity equation for the current \( \vec{j} \) and the density \( \rho \), namely \( \dot{\rho} + \text{div} \vec{j} = 0 \) becomes

\[
\vec{j}^- \equiv j(x < 0) = j^+ \equiv j(x > 0)
\]  

in a stationary state; the current is

\[
\vec{j} = \frac{\hbar}{2im} (\psi^* \nabla \psi - \psi \nabla \psi^*) \rightarrow \frac{i}{2} \begin{vmatrix} \psi & \psi^* \\ \psi' & \psi'^* \end{vmatrix}.
\]

There are essentially four types of solutions to (1) and (2). If the flux is zero, we can consider the point \( x = 0 \) as an infinite wall, and we have two families of total-reflection solutions,
labeled by a (constant) phase shift, namely

\[
\psi^I_\alpha(x) = \begin{cases} e^{ikx} + e^{i\alpha} e^{-ikx} & x < 0 \\ 0 & x > 0 \end{cases}
\]

\[
\psi^H_\beta(x) = \begin{cases} 0 & x < 0 \\ e^{-ikx} + e^{i\beta} e^{ikx} & x > 0 \end{cases}
\]

(3)

Notice that for generic \(\alpha, \beta\), neither \(\psi(x)\) nor \(\psi'(x)\) vanish at \(x = 0\), but the flux does.

(2.) For non-zero flux, we have another two-parameter family. Let us assume first

\[
\psi(0-) = \psi(0+)
\]

with perhaps discontinuous \(\psi'\) from (1) and (2)

\[
\psi(0) \text{ disc } \psi'(0) - \psi^\ast(0) \text{ disc } \psi'(0) \Rightarrow \frac{\text{disc } \psi'(0)}{\psi(0)} = \text{real const.} = g
\]

(5)

where disc \(f(0) \equiv f(0+) - f(0-)\).

Eq. (5) characterizes a \(\delta(x)-\) potential of strength \(g\). In fact, for the scattering situation

\[
\psi(x < 0) = e^{ikx} + b(k) e^{-ikx}, \quad \psi(x > 0) = (1 + f(k)) e^{ikx},
\]

\[
\hat{\psi}(x < 0) = (1 + \hat{f}(k)) e^{-ikx}, \quad \hat{\psi}(x > 0) = e^{-ikx} + \hat{b}(k) e^{ikx}
\]

(6)

we obtain from (4) and (5) the well known [2] S-matrix

\[
S(k) \equiv \begin{pmatrix} 1 + f(k) & \hat{b}(k) \\ b(k) & 1 + f(k) \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 2ik & g \\ g & 2ik \end{pmatrix} \frac{1}{2ik - g}.
\]

(7)

The pole at \(k = -ig/2\) represents a bound state (for \(g < 0\)) or an antibound state (for \(g > 0\)).

(3.) The fourth family of solutions is obtained by imposing the alternative conditions

\[
\text{disc } \psi(0) = g_1 \psi'(0), \quad \text{disc } \psi'(0) = 0,
\]

(8)

in which case the S-matrix becomes

\[
S(k) = \begin{pmatrix} 2 & -g_1 i k \\ -g_1 i k & 2 \end{pmatrix} \frac{1}{2 - ig_1 k}
\]

(9)

which is the scattering conventionally ascribed to a \(\delta'(x)-\) potential [3]; it also supports a single bound state (for \(g_1 < 0\)) or antibound state (for \(g_1 > 0\)).
Notice that the $\delta(x)$—potential is blind to the odd wave, $f(k) = b(k) \Rightarrow \delta_-(k) = 0$, and that the $\delta'(x)$—potential proceeds exclusively in odd wave, $f(k) = -b(k) \Rightarrow \delta_+(k) = 0$. Here, $\delta_{\pm}(k)$ are the even/odd-phase shifts of the one-dimensional partial waves [4].

(4.) Our analysis allows logically for a superposition of $\delta(x)$— and $\delta'(x)$—potentials which seem to have been so far overlooked in the literature. Namely, define $\Phi(x)$ and $\Psi(x)$ by

$$\begin{align*}
\Phi(x) &= \cos \alpha \psi(x) + \frac{1}{m} \sin \alpha \psi'(x) \\
\Psi(x) &= -m \sin \alpha \psi(x) + \cos \alpha \psi'(x)
\end{align*}$$

(10)

where $m$ is a quantity with the dimensions of an inverse length. Then $\Phi$ and $\Psi$ can substitute by $\psi$ and $\psi'$ in (2) provided they are real since

$$\det \begin{pmatrix} \cos \alpha & + \sin \alpha/m \\ -m \sin \alpha & \cos \alpha \end{pmatrix} = 1.$$  \hspace{1cm} (11)

Now we define the general problem by

$$\text{disc } \Phi(0) = 0 \quad \text{disc } \Psi(0) = g \Phi(0)$$

(12)

and solve for $b, f, \hat{b}$ and $\hat{f}$ of eq. (6); the calculation is straightforward, yielding

$$S(k) = \left( \frac{2ik}{g(m \cos \alpha - ik \sin \alpha)^2} \frac{g(\cos \alpha - \frac{ik}{m} \sin \alpha)}{2ik} \right) \frac{1}{2ik - g \left( \cos^2 \alpha + \frac{k^2}{m^2} \right) \sin^2 \alpha}.$$  \hspace{1cm} (13)

which interpolates naturally between the $\delta(x)$—potential, $\cos \alpha = 1$, $\sin \alpha = 0$ eq. (7); and the, $\delta'(x)$—potential, $\cos \alpha = 0$, $\sin \alpha = 1$ eq. (9) with $g = -g_1$.

(5.) Some features of formula (13) are worth comment.

1. $f(k) = \hat{f}(k)$, as demanded by time-reversal invariance[5]; however, $b(k) \neq \hat{b}(k)$ except in the extreme cases $\delta$ or $\delta'$.

2. $\psi_{R=0}(x) = 0$ except in the $\delta'(x)$ case, when $\psi_{R=0}(x) = 1$.

3. $S$ is, of course, unitary; its spectrum determines the eigenphase shifts

$$\exp 2i\delta_1 = \frac{2ik + g(\cos \alpha + \frac{k^2}{m^2} \sin^2 \alpha)}{2ik - g(\cos^2 \alpha + \frac{k^2}{m^2} \sin^2 \alpha)}, \quad \exp 2\delta_2 = 1.$$  \hspace{1cm} (14)
This result is worth stressing: *our family of interactions proceeds in a single partial wave, the “orthogonal” one is not affected by the potential.* This is in consonance with the simplicity of the S-matrix, eq. (13): potentials which produce single-mode interaction have particularly simple pole structure in the S-matrix\[6\]. This includes the delta potential (only even wave), the delta prime (only odd waves), the “solitonic” potential \( V(x) = -\ell(\ell + 1) \text{sech}^2 x, \ell = 0, 1, 2, \ldots \) (only forward scattering) and the one-dimensional Coulomb potential (only odd-wave interaction).

4. For \( \sin \alpha \neq 0 \) (i.e., excluding the \( \delta(x) \) case), the two poles of \( S \) are given by

\[
    k = \imath m^2 \left( 1 \pm \sqrt{1 + \left( \frac{g^2}{m^2} \right) \cos^2 \alpha \sin^2 \alpha} \right) / \sin^2 \alpha \tag{15}
\]

so there is always a bound state and an antibound state, for any sign of \( g \), in the mixed case \( 0 \neq \alpha \neq \pi/2 \). We already remarked that in the pure cases (\( \alpha = 0 \) or \( \alpha = \pi/2 \)) there is only one pole, meaning either a bound or antibound state.

5. The eigenvector of the zero-phase shift is readily seen to be

\[
    V = \left( \begin{array}{c} \imath k/m \sin \alpha + \cos \alpha \\ \imath k \sin \alpha - m \cos \alpha \end{array} \right) \tag{16}
\]

and depends only on \( \tan \alpha \), say, not on \( g \); in particular at low energies \( V \simeq \left( \begin{array}{c} 1 \\ -1 \end{array} \right) \), that is, the odd wave is not affected, corresponding to the pure \( \delta \) case; at high energies \( V \simeq \left( \begin{array}{c} 1 \\ 1 \end{array} \right) \), characteristic of the \( \delta' \) potential, with no force in the even channel. This is a sensible result, because the scale dimension of the \( \delta(x) \) is 1, but that of our \( \delta' \) is 3 (when \( \dim \text{[momentum]} = +1 \)). Note that the naive dimension of the \( \delta' \) would be 2, not 3!

6. The reasons to call the matching conditions (8) a \( \delta'(x) \) potential are obscure; in fact, for the \( \delta \) case one can derive conditions (4) and (5) by integrating the Schrödinger equation across the discontinuity; this is not so for the \( \delta'(x) \).
Also, it is easy to show that a “regularized” $\delta'(x)$ potential

$$g \lim_{a \to 0} \frac{1}{a} \left\{ \delta(x + a) = \delta(x) \right\}$$

(17)

with renormalized coupling $g$, leads to the conventional $\delta(x)$ (not $\delta'(x)$!) potential.[7]

The rationale to call conditions (8) a $\delta'(x)$ is that, writing the Schrödinger equation

$$\psi'' + \epsilon \psi = g \delta'(x) \psi, \quad \psi'' \text{ is proportional to } \delta', \text{ hence } \psi' \text{ to } \delta \text{ and } \psi \text{ to the step function.}$$

Hence, heuristically, $\psi''$ and $\psi'$ are “continuous” at the singularity, but $\psi$ makes a jump, i.e., conditions (8). Notice that the naive $\delta'(x)$ would have dimension +2 so it would potentially be scale invariant, whereas the $\delta'$ we are using has dimension three; in fact, no trace of scale invariance remains in the $\delta'$ S-matrix, eq. (9).

7. It is not difficult to extend these results to higher dimensions; we state only the $d = 3$ result.[1] The analogue of eq. (5) is now

$$u'/u|_0 = \text{const.} \equiv -\frac{1}{a},$$

(18)

where $\psi(r) = u(r)/r$ and $u_0(0) = 0$; as

$$\psi(r) = \frac{1}{r} u(r);$$

(19)

Since $u = A \sin(r + \delta_0)$, the “coupling constant” determines the phase shift by

$$k \cot \delta_0 = -1/a.$$  

(20)

In this case, $a$ is called the scattering length. The $d = 2$ case has been the subject of some recent papers[8] and we refer the reader to them.

8. The rigorous treatment of the contact potentials entails the theory of extensions of symmetric, non-self-adjoint operators, which started with a paper of Fadeev and Berezin.[9] But self-adjointness of the Hamiltonian implies unitarity of the evolution operators, and
also of the S-matrix, which, in turn, is guaranteed by flux conservation; so there is not much surprise that the families of extensions of the kinetic energy operator $D = -d^2/dx^2$ acting on $\mathbb{R}^n - \{0\}$ would coincide with the families of matching conditions, which we have worked out in detail for the $d = 1$ case.[10]

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