Confluent Heun functions and the Coulomb problem for spin $\frac{1}{2}$ particle in Minkowski space

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Abstract. The quantum mechanical problem for a spin $\frac{1}{2}$ particle in external Coulomb potential, reduced to a system of two first-order differential equations, is reconsidered from the point of view of solving this system by using the Heun function theory. It is shown that, besides the standard approach of solving the problem in terms of confluent hypergeometric functions, there are several other possibilities, which rely on using the confluent Heun functions. We consider two new methods to construct the solutions of the problem: the first implies that only one component of the pair of relevant functions is expressed in terms of the Heun functions, and in the second approach both functions of the system are expressed in terms of the Heun functions. In this context, certain relations between the two classes of involved functions are established. It is shown that all the considered cases lead to the same energy spectrum, which validates the correctness of the approaches.

M.S.C. 2010: 33E30, 34B30.

Key words: Quantum mechanics; Dirac equation; Coulomb problem; confluent Heun functions; confluent hypergeometric functions.

1 Introduction

The general Heun equation is a second-order linear differential equation which has four regular singularities and takes different confluent forms [28, 64, 67]. This equation and all its confluent forms turn out to be of primary significance in physical applications, for instance, in quantum mechanics and in field theory on the background of curved space-time models, and in optics (see the extensive reference list [1]–[74]). A comprehensive list of references can be found on the Heun Project website [75].

In this paper, the well-known quantum mechanical problem of a spin $\frac{1}{2}$ particle in external Coulomb potential, reduced to a system of two first-order differential equations, is studied using the Heun function theory for solving this system. We show that, besides the standard way [5] of solving the problem in terms of confluent hypergeometric functions, there exist several other possibilities, which rely on applying
confluent Heun functions. We consider two new methods to construct the solutions of the problem: in the first one, only one component of the pair of relevant functions is expressed in terms of the Heun functions, while in the second approach both functions of the system are expressed in terms of the Heun functions. Both approaches lead to a unique energy spectrum, which confirms their correctness.

2 The Coulomb problem: solutions constructed by both hypergeometric and Heun functions

In a spherical space endowed with the metric $dS^2 = dt^2 - dr^2 - r^2(d\theta^2 + \sin^2 \phi d\phi^2)$, a diagonal tetrad has the form \[e^{(0)} = (1, 0, 0, 0), \ e^{(1)} = (0, 0, r^{-1}, 0), \ e^{(2)} = (0, 0, 0, r^{-1} \sin^{-1} \theta), \ e^{(3)} = (0, 1, 0, 0).\]

By using the substitution $\tilde{\Psi} = \frac{1}{r} \Psi$, the covariant Dirac equation can equivalently be written as

\[
\begin{bmatrix}
i\gamma^c (e^{(c)}_\alpha \partial_\alpha + \frac{1}{2} j^{ab} \gamma_{abc}) - m\end{bmatrix} \tilde{\Psi} = 0
\]

can equivalently be written as

\[
\left(i\gamma^0 \frac{\partial}{\partial t} + i\gamma^3 \frac{\partial}{\partial r} + \frac{1}{r} \Sigma_{\theta, \phi} - m\right) \Psi = 0, \quad \text{where} \quad \Sigma_{\theta, \phi} = i\gamma^1 \partial_\theta + \gamma^2 \frac{i\partial_\phi + i\sigma^{12}}{\sin \theta}.
\]

In order to diagonalize the operators $i\partial_t$, $J_2^2$, and $J_3$, one takes the wave function of the form \[\tilde{\Psi} = e^{-iEt} e^{i\frac{1}{2} \mathbf{J}^2} e^{i\frac{1}{2} \mathbf{J}_3},\]

where $D_\sigma = D^2_{\sigma, \theta, \phi}(\phi, \theta, 0)$ are the Wigner functions. The separation of variables leads to four radial equations \[Ef_3 = i\frac{d}{dr} f_3 - i\frac{\nu}{\sin \theta} f_4 - mf_1 = 0, \quad Ef_4 = i\frac{d}{dr} f_4 + i\frac{\nu}{\sin \theta} f_3 - mf_2 = 0,
\]

\[Ef_1 + i\frac{d}{dr} f_1 + i\frac{\nu}{\sin \theta} f_2 - mf_3 = 0, \quad Ef_2 - i\frac{d}{dr} f_2 - i\frac{\nu}{\sin \theta} f_1 - mf_4 = 0.
\]

In a spherical tetrad, the space reflection operator is given by \[\hat{\Pi}_{\text{sph}} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 & 0 & -1 \\ 0 & 0 & -1 & 0 \\ -1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & -1 & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \otimes \hat{P}.
\]

The spectral equations $\hat{\Pi}_{\text{sph}} \Psi_{jm} = \Pi \Psi_{jm}$ lead to \[
\Pi = \delta (-1)^{j+1}, \quad \text{where} \quad \delta = \pm 1; \quad f_4 = \delta f_1, \quad f_3 = \delta f_2,
\]

\[1\text{We further use the terminology and notations from} [61, 53].
\[2\text{We consider here the case} \nu = j + 1/2.\]
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which brings (2.2) to the simplified form

\( \frac{d}{dr} + \frac{\nu}{r} \) \( f + (E + \delta m) g = 0, \quad \frac{d}{dr} - \frac{\nu}{r} \) \( g - (E - \delta m) f = 0, \)

where we performed the change of variables \( \{f_1, f_2\} \to \{f, g\} \) given by

\[ f = (f_1 + f_2)/\sqrt{2}, \quad g = (f_1 - f_2)/i\sqrt{2}. \]

For definiteness, in the particular case when \( \delta = 1 \), the equations (2.3) become

\( \frac{d}{dr} + \frac{\nu}{r} \) \( f + (E + m) g = 0, \quad \frac{d}{dr} - \frac{\nu}{r} \) \( g - (E - m) f = 0, \)

and we note that by performing the replacement \( m \to -m \), we obtain the equations for \( \delta = -1 \).

The presence of the external Coulomb field is taken into account in (2.4) by the formal change \( \tilde{\epsilon} \to \epsilon + e/r \). Thus, the quantum Coulomb problem for a Dirac particle is described by the following radial system

\( \frac{d}{dr} + \frac{\nu}{r} \) \( f + (E + \tilde{\epsilon} + m) g = 0, \quad \frac{d}{dr} - \frac{\nu}{r} \) \( g - (E + \tilde{\epsilon} - m) f = 0. \)

We further perform the following linear transformation\(^3\) of the functions \( \{f(r), g(r)\} \to \{F(r), G(r)\} \)

\( f(r) = aF(r) + cG(r), \quad g(r) = dF(r) + bG(r) \quad \Leftrightarrow \quad F(r) = bf(r) - cg(r), \quad G(r) = -df(r) + ag(r). \)

By linearly combining the equations (2.5) rewritten in terms of \( F \) and \( G \) with the coefficients \( b, -c \) and then with \( -d, a \), we get the system

\[ \begin{align*}
&\frac{d}{dr} - b' + d' + \frac{\nu}{r} (ba + cd) + \left( E + \frac{\nu}{r} + m \right) bd + \left( E + \frac{\nu}{r} - m \right) ca \\
&\left[ b'c - bc' - \frac{\nu}{2}bc - \left( E + \frac{\nu}{r} + m \right)b^2 - \left( E + \frac{\nu}{r} - m \right)c^2 \right] G \\
&\frac{d}{dr} + d'c - a'b - \frac{\nu}{2}(dc + ab) - \left( E + \frac{\nu}{r} + m \right) bd - \left( E + \frac{\nu}{r} - m \right) ca \\
&\left[ -d'a + da' + \frac{\nu}{2}2ad + \left( E + \frac{\nu}{r} + m \right)d^2 + \left( E + \frac{\nu}{r} - m \right)a^2 \right] F.
\end{align*} \]

To simplify their form, let us assume that the transformation (2.6) does not depend on \( r \), and that it is orthogonal, i.e., the coefficients of the linear combinations have the particular form:

\[ S := \begin{pmatrix} a & c \\ d & b \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} \cos A/2 & \sin A/2 \\ -\sin A/2 & \cos A/2 \end{pmatrix}. \]

Then (2.7) become

\[ \begin{align*}
&\left( \frac{d}{dr} + \frac{\nu}{r} \cos A - m \sin A \right) F = (-\frac{\nu}{r} \sin A - \frac{\nu}{r} - E - m \cos A) G, \\
&\left( \frac{d}{dr} - \frac{\nu}{r} \cos A + m \sin A \right) G = (-\frac{\nu}{r} \sin A + \frac{\nu}{r} + E - m \cos A) F.
\end{align*} \]

\(^3\)The coefficients of this transformation may depend on the radial variable; we assume that its determinant satisfies the identity \( a(r)b(r) - c(r)d(r) = 1 \).
There exist four possibilities (of which only two are distinct):

1) \(- \frac{x}{r} \sin A + \frac{e}{r} = 0 \Rightarrow \begin{cases}
\sin A = \frac{e}{x} \cos A = \sqrt{1 - \frac{e^2}{v^2}}, \\
\cos \frac{2}{4} = \sqrt{\frac{v + \sqrt{v^2 - e^2}}{2v}}, \sin \frac{2}{4} = \sqrt{\frac{v - \sqrt{v^2 - e^2}}{2v}}.
\end{cases}
\)

1') \(- \frac{x}{r} \sin A - \frac{e}{r} = 0 \Rightarrow \begin{cases}
\sin A = -\frac{e}{x} \cos A = \sqrt{1 - \frac{e^2}{v^2}}, \\
\cos \frac{2}{4} = \sqrt{\frac{v - \sqrt{v^2 - e^2}}{2v}}, \sin \frac{2}{4} = \sqrt{\frac{v + \sqrt{v^2 - e^2}}{2v}}.
\end{cases}
\)

2) \(E - m \cos A = 0 \Rightarrow \begin{cases}
\cos A = \frac{E}{m}, \sin A = \sqrt{1 - \frac{E^2}{m^2}}, \\
\cos \frac{2}{4} = \sqrt{\frac{m + E}{2m}}, \sin \frac{2}{4} = \sqrt{\frac{m - E}{2m}}.
\end{cases}
\)

2') \(-E - m \cos A = 0 \Rightarrow \begin{cases}
\cos A = -\frac{E}{m}, \sin A = \sqrt{1 - \frac{E^2}{m^2}}, \\
\cos \frac{2}{4} = \sqrt{\frac{m - E}{2m}}, \sin \frac{2}{4} = \sqrt{\frac{m + E}{2m}}.
\end{cases}
\)

We first consider the case 1); then the system (2.8) takes the form

\begin{equation}
\begin{cases}
\left( \frac{d}{dr} + \frac{e}{m} \cos A - m \sin A \right) F = \left( -\frac{2e}{r} - E - m \cos A \right) G, \\
\left( \frac{d}{dr} - \frac{e}{m} \cos A + m \sin A \right) G = \left( E - m \cos A \right) F.
\end{cases}
\end{equation}

(2.9)

After eliminating the function \(F\), we get the following second order equation for \(G\)

\[
\left( \frac{d^2}{dr^2} + E^2 - m^2 + \frac{\nu \cos A - \nu^2 \cos^2 A}{r^2} + \frac{2eE - 2em \cos A + 2m \nu \sin A \cos A}{r} \right) G = 0.
\]

By using the identity \(\sin A = e/\nu\), this equation reduces to

\[
\left( \frac{d^2}{dx^2} + E^2 - m^2 + \frac{\nu \cos A - \nu^2 \cos^2 A}{x^2} + \frac{2eE}{x} \right) G = 0,
\]

and after changing the variable, \(r = \sqrt{m^2 - E^2} r\), it becomes

\[
\frac{d^2 G}{dx^2} + \left( \frac{1}{4} - \frac{\nu \cos A (\nu \cos A - 1)}{x^2} \right) + \frac{eE}{\sqrt{m^2 - E^2} x} \right) G = 0.
\]

Further, by the use of the substitution \(G(x) = x^\sigma e^{bx} \tilde{G}(x)\), for \(\tilde{G}\) we get

\[
x \frac{d^2 \tilde{G}}{dx^2} + \left( 2a + 2b x \right) \frac{d \tilde{G}}{dx} + \left[ \left( b^2 - \frac{1}{4} \right) x + \sigma + 2ab + \frac{eE}{\sqrt{m^2 - E^2}} \right] \tilde{G} = 0.
\]

where \(\sigma = \frac{a^2 - \nu \cos A (\nu \cos A - 1)}{x}\). For \(a = +\nu \cos A = \sqrt{\nu^2 - e^2}\) and \(b = \frac{1}{2}\), this equation reduces to

\[
x \frac{d^2 \tilde{G}}{dx^2} + \left( 2a - x \right) \frac{d \tilde{G}}{dx} - \left( a - \frac{eE}{\sqrt{m^2 - E^2}} \right) \tilde{G} = 0,
\]

which is a confluent hypergeometric equation of the form

\[
x F''(x) + (\gamma - x) F'(x) - \alpha F(x) = 0, \quad \text{where } \alpha = a - \frac{eE}{\sqrt{m^2 - E^2}}, \quad \gamma = 2a.
\]

The known condition for (2.11) to have polynomial solutions, \(\alpha = -n\) with \(n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots\), gives the energy quantization rule

\[
E = \frac{m}{\sqrt{1 + e^2/(n + \sqrt{\nu^2 - e^2})^2}}.
\]
Moreover, from (2.9) it follows a second-order equation for $F$
\[
\left[\frac{d^2}{dr^2} + \left(\frac{1}{r} - \frac{1}{r-R}\right) \frac{d}{dr} + E^2 - m^2 + \frac{2eE}{r} + \frac{e^2 - \nu^2}{r^2} + \frac{mR \sin \alpha - \nu \cos \alpha}{r (r-R)}\right] F = 0,
\]
where we denoted $-\frac{2e}{E + m \cos A} = R$. After changing the variable $r \rightarrow y = r/R$, the equation reads
\[
\frac{d^2 F}{dy^2} + \left(\frac{1}{y} - \frac{1}{y-1}\right) \frac{d F}{dy} + \left((E^2 - m^2)R^2 - \frac{e^2 - \nu^2}{y^2} + \frac{a+b+R^2(E^2-m^2)}{y-1}\right)F = 0.
\]
We further search for solutions of the form $F = y^n e^{by} \tilde{F}(y)$. Then the function $\tilde{F}$ obeys
\[
\frac{d^2 \tilde{F}}{dy^2} + \left(\frac{2n+2}{y} + 2b - \frac{1}{y-1}\right) \frac{d \tilde{F}}{dy} + \left[b^2 + (E^2 - m^2)R^2 + \frac{e^2 - \nu^2}{y^2} - \frac{a+b+2R(E^2-m^2)}{y-1}\right] \tilde{F} = 0.
\]
For $a, b$ chosen \(^4\) as: \(a \in \{+\sqrt{\nu^2 - e^2}, -\sqrt{\nu^2 - e^2}\}, b \in \{+\sqrt{m^2 - E^2} R, -\sqrt{m^2 - E^2} R\}\), the above equation becomes simpler,
\[
\frac{d^2 \tilde{F}}{dy^2} + \left(2b + \frac{2a+2}{y} - \frac{1}{y-1}\right) \frac{d \tilde{F}}{dy} + \left(\frac{a+b+2R(E^2-m^2)}{y-1}\right) \tilde{F} = 0.
\]
This can be easily recognized as a confluent Heun equation for $H(\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta, \eta, z)$,
\[
H'' + \left(\alpha + \frac{1+\beta}{y} + \frac{1+\gamma}{y-1}\right) H' + \left(\frac{1}{2} \frac{\alpha+\beta-\gamma-2}{y-1}\right) H = 0
\]
with the parameters
\[
\alpha = 2b, \quad \beta = 2a, \quad \gamma = -2, \quad \delta = 2 eER, \quad \eta = 1 + mR \sin A - 2 eER - \nu \cos A.
\]
We note that the known condition [64] determining the so called transcendental confluent Heun functions:
\[
\delta = -\left(n + \frac{\beta + \gamma + 2}{2}\right) \alpha, \quad n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots,
\]
leads to the energy quantization rule
\[
a = +\sqrt{\nu^2 - e^2}, \quad b = -\sqrt{m^2 - E^2} R, \quad eER = (n + \sqrt{\nu^2 - e^2}) \sqrt{m^2 - E^2} R,
\]
whence we infer
\[
E = \frac{m}{\sqrt{1 + e^2/(n + \sqrt{\nu^2 - e^2})^2}},
\]
which coincides with the known formula for energy levels (2.12).

It should be emphasized that, as follows from (2.9), the function $F$ (being constructed in terms of the confluent Heun functions) can be related to the function $G$ (which is determined in terms of confluent hypergeometric functions) by means of the following differential operators:
\[
G = \left(-\frac{2e}{r} - E - m \cos A\right)^{-1} \left(\frac{d}{dr} + \frac{\nu}{r} \cos A - m \sin A\right) F,
\]
\(^4\)We shall select and further use the underlined values.
and
\[ F = \frac{1}{(E - m \cos A)} \left( \frac{d}{dr} - \frac{\nu}{r} \cos A + m \sin A \right) G. \]
Let us examine now the case 2) described on page 12. The equations (2.8) take the form
\[
(2.13) \quad \begin{cases}
(\frac{d}{dr} + \frac{\nu}{r} \cos A - m \sin A) F = (-\frac{\nu \sin A + x}{r} - 2m \cos A) G, \\
(\frac{d}{dr} - \frac{\nu}{r} \cos A + m \sin A) G = (-\frac{\nu \sin A}{r} F).
\end{cases}
\]
Taking into account the identity \( \cos A = E/m \), we obtain the following second-order equation for \( G(r) \):
\[
\left( \frac{d^2}{dr^2} + \frac{1}{r} \frac{d}{dr} + E^2 - m^2 + \frac{\nu^2 - \nu^2}{r^2} + \frac{2E}{r} + \frac{\sqrt{m^2 - E^2}}{r} \right) G = 0. 
\]
and after performing the change of variables \( r \to x = 2 \sqrt{m^2 - E^2} r \), we get
\[
\frac{d^2G}{dx^2} + \frac{1}{x} \frac{dG}{dx} + \left( -\frac{1}{4} \nu^2 - \nu^2 + \frac{1}{2} m^2 - E^2 + 2E \sqrt{m^2 - E^2} \right) x \frac{dG}{dx} = 0.
\]
Let \( G(x) = x^a e^{bx} \tilde{G}(x) \); then the function \( \tilde{G} \) satisfies
\[
x \frac{d^2\tilde{G}}{dx^2} + (2a + 1 + 2bx) \frac{d\tilde{G}}{dx} + \left( \left( b^2 - \frac{1}{4} \right) x + \frac{a^2 - \nu^2 + \nu^2}{x} + 2ab + b + \frac{1}{2} \frac{m^2 - E^2 + 2E \sqrt{m^2 - E^2}}{m^2 - E^2} \right) \tilde{G} = 0.
\]
For \( a = \sqrt{\nu^2 - \nu^2} \) and \( b = -\frac{1}{2} \), we get
\[
x \frac{d^2\varphi}{dx^2} + (2a + 1 + 2x) \frac{d\varphi}{dx} - \left( a - \frac{Ee}{\sqrt{m^2 - E^2}} \right) \varphi = 0,
\]
which is a confluent hypergeometric equation
\[
(2.14) \quad x F'' + (\gamma - x) F' - \alpha F = 0, \quad \text{with} \quad \alpha = a - \frac{Ee}{\sqrt{m^2 - E^2}}, \quad \gamma = 2a + 1.
\]
The equation admits polynomial solutions if \( \alpha = -n, \) \( n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots; \) this provides the energy spectrum (2.12). Moreover, (2.13) leads to a second-order equation for \( F(r) \),
\[
\left[ \frac{d^2}{dr^2} + \left( \frac{1}{r} - \frac{1}{r-D} \right) \frac{d}{dr} + \frac{m \sin A}{r-D} - \frac{\nu \cos A}{D} \left( \frac{1}{r-D} - \frac{1}{r} \right) + E^2 - m^2 + \frac{\nu^2 - \nu^2}{r^2} + \frac{2E}{r} - \frac{m \sin A}{r-D} \right] F = 0,
\]
where \( D = -\frac{e + \nu \sin A}{2m \cos A} \). Relative to the variable \( y = r/D \), the equation looks simpler,
\[
\frac{d^2F}{dy^2} + \left[ \frac{1}{y} - \frac{1}{y-1} \right] \frac{dF}{dy} + \left[ \left( E^2 - m^2 \right) D^2 - \frac{\nu^2 - \nu^2}{y^2} \right.
\]
\[
+ \frac{-\nu \cos A + m D \sin A}{y-1} + \frac{D \left( 2E - m \sin A \right) \nu \cos A}{y-1} \right] F = 0.
\]
Let \( F = y^n e^{by} \tilde{F}(y) \); the function \( \tilde{F} \) satisfies
\[
\frac{d^2\tilde{F}}{dy^2} + \left( \frac{2a + 1 + 2b - \frac{1}{y-1}}{y} \right) \frac{d\tilde{F}}{dy} + \left[ b^2 + \left( E^2 - m^2 \right) D^2 + \frac{\nu^2 - \nu^2}{y^2} - \frac{a + b + \nu \cos A - m D \sin A}{y-1} \right. \]
\[
+ \frac{a + b + 2a + D \left( 2E - m \sin A \right) \nu \cos A}{y-1} \right] \tilde{F} = 0.
\]
For $a, b$ chosen as $a \in \{+\sqrt{\nu^2-e^2}, -\sqrt{\nu^2-e^2}\}$, $b \in \{+\sqrt{m^2-E^2 D}, -\sqrt{m^2-E^2 D}\}$, the equation becomes
\[
\frac{d^2 F}{dy^2} + \left(2b + \frac{2n+1}{y} - \frac{1}{y^2-1}\right) \frac{dF}{dy} + \left(\frac{a+b+2nb+1}{y D(2eE-m \sin A)+\nu \cos A} - \frac{a+b+\nu \cos A - mD \sin A}{y^2-1}\right) F = 0,
\]
which is a confluent Heun equation for $H(\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta, \eta, y)$
\[
H^\prime\prime + \left(\alpha + \frac{1+\beta}{y} + \frac{1+\gamma}{y^2-1}\right) H^\prime + \left(2 - \frac{1+\alpha-\beta-\gamma-2\eta}{y} + 2\frac{1+\alpha+\beta+\gamma+2\delta+2\eta}{y^2-1}\right) G = 0,
\]
with the parameters
\[
\alpha = 2b, \quad \beta = 2a, \quad \gamma = -2, \quad \delta = 2eED, \quad \eta = 1 + mD \sin A - 2eED - \nu \cos A.
\]
By imposing restriction [64] defining the transcendental confluent Heun functions: $\delta = -(n + \frac{2\alpha+2}{2})$, for $n = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$, we produce the energy quantization rule
\[
a = +\sqrt{\nu^2-e^2}, \quad b = -\sqrt{m^2-E^2 D}, \quad eED = (n + \sqrt{\nu^2-e^2}) \sqrt{m^2-E^2 D},
\]
whence the energy $E$ given by (2.12) is immediately inferred.

It should be noted that though the confluent Heun equations from the cases 1) and 2) formally coincide, their parameters still essentially differ, namely:

1) $a = 2b, \quad \beta = 2a, \quad \gamma = -2, \quad \delta = 2eER, \quad \eta = 1 + mR \sin A - 2eER - \nu \cos A$;

2) $a = 2b, \quad \beta = 2a, \quad \gamma = -2, \quad \delta = 2eED, \quad \eta = 1 + mD \sin A - 2eED - \nu \cos A$,

where

1) $R = -\frac{2e}{E\nu+m \cos A}$, \quad $\sin A = \frac{\nu}{E}$, \quad $\cos A = \sqrt{1 - \frac{\nu^2}{E^2}}$;

2) $D = -\frac{e+\nu \sin A}{2\nu}$, \quad $\cos A = \frac{E}{m}$, \quad $\sin A = \sqrt{1 - \frac{E^2}{m^2}}$.

3 The standard approach to the Coulomb problem

It should be emphasized that the two proposed approaches to the Coulomb problem for the Dirac equation differ from the well known, established one. We briefly recall this standard approach. To this end, in the original radial system (2.5)
\[
\begin{align*}
\left(\frac{d}{dr} + \frac{\tilde{\nu}}{r}\right) f + (E + \frac{\tilde{\nu}}{r} + m) g &= 0, \\
\left(\frac{d}{dr} - \frac{\tilde{\nu}}{r}\right) g - (E + \frac{\tilde{\nu}}{r} - m) f &= 0.
\end{align*}
\]

one should introduce the new functions $(f, g) \sim (F_1, F_2)$, via
\[
f = \sqrt{m+\tilde{E}} (F_1 + F_2), \quad g = \sqrt{m-\tilde{E}} (F_1 - F_2).
\]
This change leads to the equivalent system
\[
\begin{align*}
\left(r \left(\frac{d}{dr} + \frac{\tilde{\nu}}{r}\right) (F_1 + F_2) + r \sqrt{m^2-E^2} (F_1 - F_2) + e \sqrt{m^2-E^2} \sqrt{m^2-E^2} (F_1 - F_2) = 0, \\
r \left(\frac{d}{dr} - \frac{\tilde{\nu}}{r}\right) (F_1 - F_2) + r \sqrt{m^2-E^2} (F_1 + F_2) - e \sqrt{m^2+E^2} \sqrt{m^2-E^2} (F_1 + F_2) = 0.
\end{align*}
\]

\(^5\)We shall use below the underlined values.

\(^6\)This was firstly given by G. Darvin and W. Gordon (1928), cf. [5].
By summing and subtracting the equations, we obtain, respectively
\[
\begin{align*}
    &\left\{ \begin{array}{l}
    r \frac{d}{dr} F_1 + \nu F_2 + r \sqrt{m^2 - E^2} F_1 - \frac{eE}{\sqrt{m^2 - E^2}} F_1 - \frac{eE}{\sqrt{m^2 - E^2}} F_2 = 0, \\
    r \frac{d}{dr} F_2 + \nu F_1 - r \sqrt{m^2 - E^2} F_2 + \frac{eE}{\sqrt{m^2 - E^2}} F_1 + \frac{eE}{\sqrt{m^2 - E^2}} F_2 = 0.
    \end{array} \right.
\end{align*}
\]

By changing the variable \( r \sim x = \lambda r \), where \( \lambda = \sqrt{m^2 - E^2} \) and using the notations \( \frac{eE}{\lambda} = \mu, \frac{E}{\lambda} = \varepsilon \), these equations considerably simplify,
\[
\begin{align*}
    &\left( x \frac{d}{dx} + x - \varepsilon \right) F_1 + (\nu - \mu) F_2 = 0, \quad \left( x \frac{d}{dx} - x + \varepsilon \right) F_2 + (\nu + \mu) F_1 = 0.
\end{align*}
\]

The system (3.1) can be solved in terms of hypergeometric functions [5]. To detail this technique, we write (3.1) in terms of the new variable \( y = 2x \):
\[
\begin{align*}
    &\left( y \frac{d}{dy} - \frac{y}{2} - \varepsilon \right) F_1 + (\nu - \mu) F_2 = 0, \quad \left( y \frac{d}{dy} - \frac{y}{2} + \varepsilon \right) F_2 + (\nu + \mu) F_1 = 0.
\end{align*}
\]

This leads to the second-order differential equations for \( F_1 \) and \( F_2 \):
\[
\begin{align*}
    &\left( y \frac{d^2}{dy^2} + \frac{d}{dy} + \varepsilon + \frac{1}{2} - \frac{y}{4} + \frac{\mu^2 - \nu^2 - \varepsilon^2}{y} \right) F_1 = 0, \\
    &\left( y \frac{d^2}{dy^2} + \frac{d}{dy} + \varepsilon - \frac{1}{2} - \frac{y}{4} + \frac{\mu^2 - \nu^2 - \varepsilon^2}{y} \right) F_2 = 0.
\end{align*}
\]

Let us study the first equation (3.2). The substitution \( F_1 = y^a e^{by} f_1 \) gives
\[
\begin{align*}
    &\left[ y \frac{d^2}{dy^2} + (2A + 1 + 2By) \frac{d}{dy} + \varepsilon + \frac{1}{2} + B (1 + 2A) \right] f_1 = 0.
\end{align*}
\]

The choice of parameters \( A = \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} \sqrt{\varepsilon^2 - \mu^2 + \nu^2} \), and \( B = -\frac{1}{4} \), allows us to write (3.4) as a confluent hypergeometric type ODE
\[
\begin{align*}
    &\left[ y \frac{d^2}{dy^2} + (2A + 1 - y) \frac{d}{dy} + \varepsilon - A \right] f_1 = 0
\end{align*}
\]

with the parameters \( \alpha_1 = A - \varepsilon \), and \( \gamma_1 = 2A + 1 \). By imposing the polynomial condition \( \alpha_1 = -n_1 \), we obtain for \( \varepsilon \) the quantization rule: \( n_1 = -\varepsilon + \frac{1}{2} \sqrt{\varepsilon^2 - \mu^2 + \nu^2} \), and taking into account that \( \lambda = \sqrt{m^2 - E^2} \), \( \frac{eE}{\lambda} = \mu, \frac{E}{\lambda} = \varepsilon \), and \( \sqrt{\varepsilon^2 - \mu^2 + \nu^2} = \sqrt{\nu^2 - \varepsilon^2} \), we further derive a formula for the energy levels,
\[
\begin{align*}
    &\frac{eE}{\sqrt{m^2 - E^2}} = \sqrt{\nu^2 - \varepsilon^2} + n_1 \equiv N_1 \quad \Rightarrow \quad E = \frac{m}{\sqrt{1 + e^2/N_1^2}},
\end{align*}
\]

which coincides with (2.12).

Now, let us consider the second equation (3.3). With the use of the substitution \( F_2 = y^a e^{by} f_2 \), this becomes:
\[
\begin{align*}
    &\left[ y \frac{d^2}{dy^2} + (2a + 1 + 2by) \frac{d}{dy} + \varepsilon - \frac{1}{2} + b (1 + 2a) \right] f_2 = 0.
\end{align*}
\]

By changing the variable \( r \sim x = \lambda r \), where \( \lambda = \sqrt{m^2 - E^2} \) and using the notations \( \frac{eE}{\lambda} = \mu, \frac{E}{\lambda} = \varepsilon \), these equations considerably simplify,
For $a = \pm \sqrt{\nu^2 - \mu^2 + \nu^2}$ and $b = -\frac{1}{2}$, we obtain an equation of the confluent hypergeometric type,

$$\left[ y \frac{d^2}{dy^2} + (2a + 1 - y) \frac{d}{dy} + \varepsilon - a - 1 \right] f_2 = 0$$

with the parameters $\alpha_2 = a + 1 - \varepsilon$ and $\gamma_2 = 2a + 1$. By imposing the polynomial restriction $\alpha_2 = -n_2$, we get for $\varepsilon$ the quantization rule: $-n_2 = -\varepsilon + 1 + \sqrt{\nu^2 - \mu^2 + \nu^2}$, and so we get the formula for energy levels:

$$\frac{eE}{\sqrt{m^2 - E^2}} = 1 + \sqrt{\nu^2 - \varepsilon^2} + n_2 \equiv N_2 \quad \Rightarrow \quad E = \frac{m}{\sqrt{1 + \varepsilon^2/N_2^2}}.$$  

We further find the relative coefficient between two solutions of the system

$$(3.6) \quad \left( y \frac{d}{dy} + \frac{y}{2} - \varepsilon \right) F_1 + (\nu - \mu) F_2 = 0, \quad \left( y \frac{d}{dy} - \frac{y}{2} + \varepsilon \right) F_2 + (\nu + \mu) F_1 = 0.$$  

by considering the relations

$$(3.7) \quad F_1 = C_1 y^\mu e^{-y/2} F(-n_1, \gamma, y), \quad F_2 = C_2 y^\mu e^{-y/2} F(-n_2, \gamma, y),$$

where $A = +\sqrt{\nu^2 - \mu^2 + \nu^2}$, $\gamma = 2A = 1$, and $-n_2 = -n_1 + 1$. We substitute the expressions for the functions $F_1$, $F_2$ into the first equation of the system (3.6),

$$y C_1 \frac{d}{dy} F(-n_1, \gamma, y) + C_1 (A - \varepsilon) F(-n_1, \gamma, y) + (\nu - \mu) C_2 F(-n_1 + 1, \gamma, y) = 0,$$

and by applying the rule of differentiation of the confluent hypergeometric function

$$\frac{d}{dy} F(-n_1, \gamma, y) = -\frac{n_1}{y} F(-n_1 + 1, \gamma, y) + \frac{n_1}{y} F(-n_1, \gamma, y),$$

we get the relation

$$-C_1 n_1 F(-n_1 + 1, \gamma, y) + C_1 n_1 F(-n_1, \gamma, y) + C_1 (A - \varepsilon) F(-n_1, \gamma, y) + (\nu - \mu) C_2 F(-n_1 + 1, \gamma, y) = 0.$$  

Taking into account the relation $-n_1 = A - \varepsilon$, we obtain

$$(3.8) \quad \frac{C_1}{C_2} = \frac{\nu - \mu}{n_1} = -\frac{\nu - \mu}{A - \varepsilon}.$$  

Now, we substitute the expressions for the functions $F_1$, $F_2$ from (3.7) into the second equation of the system (3.6), and infer

$$y C_2 \frac{d}{dy} F(-n_1 + 1, \gamma, y) + C_2 (A + \varepsilon) F(-n_1 + 1, \gamma, y) -$$

$$-y C_2 F(-n_1 + 1, \gamma, y) + (\nu + \mu) C_1 F(-n_1, \gamma, y) = 0.$$  

Then, we apply the rule of differentiation of the confluent hypergeometric functions

$$\frac{d}{dy} F(-n_1 + 1, \gamma, y) = \left( -\frac{n_1 + 1}{\gamma} - 1 \right) F(-n_1 + 1, \gamma + 1, y) + F(-n_1 + 1, \gamma, y),$$

and use the formula for contiguous confluent hypergeometric functions

$$y F(-n_1 + 1, \gamma + 1, y) = \gamma F(-n_1 + 1, \gamma, y) - \gamma F(-n_1, \gamma, y),$$

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which finally yields
\[
C_2 \left(-n_1 + 1 - \gamma\right) F(-n_1 + 1, \gamma, y) + C_2 (A + \varepsilon) F(-n_1 + 1, \gamma, y) - \\
C_2 \left(-n_1 + 1 - \gamma\right) F(-n_1, \gamma, y) + (\nu + \mu) C_1 F(-n_1, \gamma, y) = 0.
\]

Taking into account that \(-n_1 = A - \varepsilon\), we obtain
\[
(3.9) \quad \frac{C_1}{C_2} = \frac{-n_1 - 2A}{\nu + \mu} = -\frac{A + \varepsilon}{\nu + \mu}.
\]

Then the two expressions for relative coefficients, (3.8) and (3.9), coincide\(^7\).

4 The spin 1/2 particle in Coulomb field. Solutions completely constructed by using Heun functions

The promising idea of constructing spectra within the framework of Heun equation theory can be accomplished by considering the known problem of a spin 1/2 particle in the presence of an external Coulomb field. To this end, we turn back to the equations (2.5) which assume the presence of the Coulomb potential, for \(\delta = +1\):
\[
\left(\frac{d}{dr} + \frac{\nu}{r}\right) f + \left(E + \frac{\varepsilon}{r} + m\right) g = 0, \quad \left(\frac{d}{dr} - \frac{\nu}{r}\right) g - \left(E + \frac{\varepsilon}{r} - m\right) f = 0.
\]

After eliminating the function \(g\), one gets the second order ODE
\[
(4.1) \quad \frac{d^2f}{dr^2} + \frac{e}{r(E+\varepsilon+m)r} \frac{df}{dr} + \left[\frac{e(e^2-\nu^2)}{r^2(E+\varepsilon+m)r} + \frac{E(e^2-\nu^2)-\nu(m+E)+m(e^2-\nu^2)}{r(E+\varepsilon+m)r} + \frac{e(E+m)(3E-m)}{E+\varepsilon+m} + \frac{\nu(E-m)(E+m)^2}{E+\varepsilon+m} \right] f = 0.
\]

After changing the variable \(r \rightarrow x = \frac{(E+m)r}{E}\), this equation takes the form
\[
x \frac{d^2f}{dx^2} - \frac{1}{x-1} \frac{df}{dx} + \left[\frac{e^2(Ex - mx - 2E)}{E + m} + \frac{e^2 - \nu^2}{x - 1} - \frac{\nu}{x - 1}\right] f = 0.
\]

We separate the two factors by means of the replacement \(f(x) = x^A e^{C x} F(x)\), and derive for \(F\) the ODE
\[
(4.2) \quad \frac{d^2F}{dx^2} + \left(2C + \frac{2A+1}{x} - \frac{1}{x-1}\right) \frac{dF}{dx} + \left[C^2 + \frac{e^2(E-m)}{E+m}\right. \\
\left. + \frac{A^2 + e^2 - \nu^2}{x} + \frac{A+C+2AC-2Ee^2/(E+m)+C}{x-1}\right] F = 0.
\]

Since the bound states are of primary interest, we fix \(A, C\) as follows:
\[
C^2 + \frac{e^2(E-m)}{E+m} = 0 \quad \Rightarrow \quad C = \mp \sqrt{\frac{m-E}{m+E}}, \\
A^2 + e^2 - \nu^2 = 0 \quad \Rightarrow \quad A = \mp \sqrt{\nu^2 - e^2},
\]

and then equation (4.2) becomes simpler,
\[
\frac{d^2F}{dx^2} + \left(2C + \frac{2A+1}{x} - \frac{1}{x-1}\right) \frac{dF}{dx} + \left[\frac{A+C+\nu + 2AC-2Ee^2/(E+m)}{x} - \frac{A+C+\nu}{x-1}\right] F = 0,
\]

\(^7\)Indeed, one can easily check that \(\frac{C_1}{C_2} = -\frac{\nu + \mu}{\nu - \mu} = -\frac{A + \varepsilon}{\nu + \mu} \Leftrightarrow \nu^2 - \mu^2 = A^2 - e^2\), which infers the identity \(e^2 \equiv e^2\).
which is a confluent Heun equation for \( F(\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta; \eta; x) \)

\[
\frac{d^2}{dx^2} F + \left( \alpha + \frac{\beta+1}{x} + \frac{\gamma+2}{x+1} \right) \frac{dF}{dx} + \left( \frac{1}{2} \frac{\alpha+\alpha+\beta+\beta+\gamma+\gamma+2\delta+2\eta}{x} + \frac{1}{2} \frac{a+b-a-b-\gamma-\gamma-2\eta}{x} \right) F = 0,
\]

with the parameters \( a = 2C = +2e \sqrt{\frac{m-E}{E+m}}, \beta = 2A = +2 \sqrt{\nu^2 - e^2}, \gamma = -2, \delta = -\frac{2Ke^2}{E+m}, \) and \( \eta = 1 - \nu + \frac{2Ke^2}{E+m} \). The known quantization condition (which determines the transcendental confluent Heun functions) is \( \delta = -a \left( n + \frac{n+1}{2} \right) \), which can be written as \( \frac{E_n}{\sqrt{m^2 - E^2}} = N \), where \( N = n + \sqrt{\nu^2 - e^2} \), which lead to \( E = \frac{m}{\sqrt{1 + n/N^2}} \), the exact energy spectrum for the hydrogen atom in Dirac theory.

Due to the symmetry between the functions \( f(r) \) and \( g(r) \), the second function \( g(r) \) will be expressed in terms of confluent Heun functions as well.

5 Conclusions

In the paper, the well-known quantum mechanical problem of a spin 1/2 particle in external Coulomb potential, reduced to a system of two first-order differential equations, is studied by using the Heun function theory to solve the system. It is shown that, in addition to the standard approach which solves the problem in terms of confluent hypergeometric functions, there exist several other opportunities, which rely on applying confluent Heun functions. Namely, in the paper there are elaborated two combined possibilities to construct solutions: the first applies when one equation of the pair of relevant functions is expressed through hypergeometric functions, and the other function is constructed in terms of confluent Heun functions. In the second case, both functions of the system may be expressed in terms of confluent Heun functions only. All the applied methods lead to a single energy spectrum, which validates their correctness.

6 Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Fund for Basic Researches of Belarus (Grant No. F14ARM-021) and by the Armenian State Committee of Science (Grant No. 13RB-052), within the cooperation framework between Belarus and Armenia. The research has been partially conducted within the scope of the International Associated Laboratory (CNRS-France & SCS-Armenia) IRMAS. The work by A. Manukyan has received funding from the European Union Seventh Framework Programme, grant No. 295025-IPERA). The present work was developed under the auspices of the project AR-FRBCF 2565 - F14RA-006-2014, part of the cooperation framework between Romanian Academy and Belarusian Republican Foundation for Fundamental Research.

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