Anomalous fermion bunching in density-density correlation

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(Dated: March 23, 2022)

We consider theoretically density-density correlation of identical Fermi system by including the finite resolution of a detector and delta-function term omitted in the ordinary method. We find an anomalous fermion bunching effect, which is a quantum effect having no classical analogue. This anomalous fermion bunching is studied for ultracold Fermi gases released from a three-dimensional optical lattices. It is found that this anomalous fermion bunching is supported by a recent experiment (T. Rom et al Nature 444, 733 (2006)).

Demonstrated firstly by Hanbury Brown and Twiss [1], quantum noise correlation is a fundamental problem in identical Bose and Fermi system, and has important application in astronomy, quantum optics, condensed matter physics and subatomic physics [2, 3, 4, 5] etc. In the last ten years, quantum noise correlation was studied experimentally for cold Bose and Fermi gases [6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14] with the remarkable development of cold atom physics. Together with these experimental advances, intensive theoretical studies contribute largely to our understanding of correlation effect for cold atomic system. The theoretical studies about high-order correlation have extended from a single harmonically trapped Bose gas [15] to different matter state such as pair correlations of fermionic superfluid [16, 17] and different trapping potential such as high-order correlation of cold atoms in an optical lattice [18]. The finite-temperature effect [19] and low-dimensional effect [20] about high-order correlation were also studied theoretically.

The theoretical studies for fermionic superfluid [16, 17] and one-dimensional ultracold Fermi gas [21] have shown that quantum noise correlation provides important information about the fundamental quantum features of ultracold Fermi gases. Most recently, there is a clear observation of fermion antibunching in a degenerate Fermi gas released from a three-dimensional optical lattice [13]. The fermion antibunching physically arises from the anticommutation relation of field operators, and thus has no classical analogue. It is a manifestation of Pauli exclusion principle in high-order correlation. Besides the observation of the antibunching effect in density-density correlation for fermionic atoms released from an optical lattice [13], fermion antibunching was also observed for electrons [22, 23, 24] and neutrons [25].

In the present Letter, we find that when the resolution of a detector for the measurement of density distribution is considered, there would be an anomalous fermion bunching effect under appropriate conditions. This anomalous fermion bunching effect originates physically from the delta function in the anticommutation relation of fermion field operators, omitted in the ordinary method in calculating the density-density correlation. The consideration of finite resolution of the detector will avoid the notorious divergence in the delta-function term, and lead to anomalous bunching effect. The observation of obvious anomalous fermion bunching effect requests special conditions and parameters. Fortunately, we notice that there is already an anomalous fermion bunching in the experimental data of Ref. [13].

Because we will give a comparison between our theory and experimental data to support the anomalous fermion bunching, we first introduce briefly the elegant experiment in Ref. [13]. In this experiment, an ultracold Fermi gas of 40K was firstly prepared in the combined potential of an optical trap and a 3D (three-dimensional) optical lattice. After free expansion of 10 ms by suddenly switching off the combined potential, 2D (two-dimensional) density images were recorded with a CCD (charge-coupled device) camera by illuminating a resonant laser along the vertical (z) direction. See Fig. 1(a). The 2D density-density correlation was obtained by dealing with appropriately a set of 2D density images.

The starting point of our theory is the 2D density-density correlation function given by

$$C_2(d, t) = \frac{\int \langle \hat{n}(\mathbf{r} - \mathbf{d}/2, t) \hat{n}(\mathbf{r} + \mathbf{d}/2, t) \rangle d^2\mathbf{r}}{\int \langle \hat{n}(\mathbf{r} - \mathbf{d}/2, t) \rangle \langle \hat{n}(\mathbf{r} + \mathbf{d}/2, t) \rangle d^2\mathbf{r}}$$

(1)

Here $\hat{n}$ is a 2D density operator, $\mathbf{r} \equiv \{x, y\}$ and $\mathbf{d} \equiv \{d_x, d_y\}$. To deal with appropriately the layered distribution of fermionic atoms in 3D optical lattice and absorption imaging along z direction, the 2D density operator takes the form $\hat{n}(\mathbf{r}, t) = \hat{g} \hat{\Psi}^\dagger(\mathbf{r}, t) \hat{\Psi}(\mathbf{r}, t)$. The operator $\hat{g}$ has the property that $\langle \hat{f}(\hat{g}) \hat{a}_{ij} \hat{a}_{ij} \rangle = f(g_{ij})$. $g_{ij} = \sum k_z f_{ijkz}$, with $f_{ijkz}$ being the occupation number in the lattice site indexed by $\{i, j, k_z\}$. The summation is about the lattice site along z direction. $g_{ij}$ represents the

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overall particle number in a string of lattice sites along 
z direction. $a_{ij}$ is an annihilation operator for the atom 
in an equivalent 2D lattice site indexed by $\{i, j\}$. The 
2D density-density correlation function is dependent on 
d. $C_2(d, t) < 1$ corresponds to the fermion antibunching 
effect, while $C_2(d, t) > 1$ corresponds an anomalous 
fermion bunching effect.

We give here a brief introduction about the reason for 
the above rules in the transformation from 3D system to 
2D density-density correlation measured by a CCD. Be-
cause the density images were recorded in Ref. [13] with 
a CCD camera by illuminating a resonant laser along z 
direction, special consideration should be given about the 
2D density-density correlation for a 3D system. The 2D 
density distribution is

\[
n(r, t) = \int dz \left\langle \hat{\Psi}(r, z, t) \hat{\Psi}(r, z, t) \right\rangle = \sum_{ij} [\phi_{ij}(r, t)]^2.
\]

(2)

Here $\phi_{ij}(r, t)$ is the wave function of the atom initially 
in the lattice site $\{i, j\}$. Because in 2D density-density 
correlation, the coordinate $z$ has been integrated, it is 
convenient to define the 2D density operator as

\[
\hat{n}(r, t) = \hat{\Psi}^\dagger(r, t) \hat{\Psi}(r, t).
\]

(3)

With the above rules about $\hat{a}_0$, $(\hat{n}(r, t))$ is the same as 
the result given by equation (2). With this definition of 2D 
density operator and $\hat{g}$, it is straightforward to get the 
final result of the 2D density-density correlation function.

From Eq. (1), it is easy to get

\[
\left\langle \hat{n}(r - d/2, t) \hat{n}(r + d/2, t) \right\rangle = \left\langle \hat{g} \hat{\Psi}^\dagger(r - d/2, t) \hat{\Psi}(r + d/2, t) \right\rangle \delta(d)
+ \left\langle \hat{n}(r - d/2, t) \right\rangle \left\langle \hat{n}(r + d/2, t) \right\rangle
- \left\langle \hat{g} \hat{\Psi}^\dagger(r - d/2, t) \hat{\Psi}(r + d/2, t) \right\rangle^2.
\]

(4)

The delta-function term in the above formula is ordi-

narily omitted [13, 24] because the divergent prop-

erty and $\delta(d) = 0$ for $d \neq 0$. This term originates 
from the delta function in the anticommutation relation 
$\{ \hat{\Psi}(r + d/2, t), \hat{\Psi}^\dagger(r - d/2, t) \} = \delta(d)$, and thus 
accounts for a pure quantum effect.

Bunching (antibunching) corresponds to a peak (dip) 
in density-density correlation. For $d \to 0$, the delta-
function term in equation (4) means a divergent bunching 
behavior. When the finite width $\Delta_d$ of spatial resolution 
is considered, it is understandable that there would be 
an effect of increasing the width and decreasing the height 
(depth) in the peak (dip) of the bunching (antibunching) behavior. Roughly speaking, $\delta(d)$ may be replaced 
by a function with height $1/\Delta_d^2$ in the region 
$-\Delta_d/2 < d_x < \Delta_d/2$ and $-\Delta_d/2 < d_y < \Delta_d/2$, and 
with zero value outside this region. When both the delta-
function term and spatial resolution are considered, more 
accurate results are obtained by calculating

\[
\left\langle \hat{n}(r - d/2, t) \hat{n}(r + d/2, t) \right\rangle_d
= \int d^2s_1 \int d^2s_2 \left\langle \hat{n}(r - d/2 + s_1, t) \hat{n}(r + d/2 + s_2, t) \right\rangle.
\]

(5)

Here $\Xi$ denotes the region $-\Delta_d/2 < s_x < \Delta_d/2$ 
and $-\Delta_d/2 < s_y < \Delta_d/2$. In the above formula, $\langle \hat{g} \rangle_d$ represents the average due to the finite resolution of the detector. This average has been considered in the starting point $\Xi$.

From equation (1), we get the following approximate 
result

\[
C_2(d, t) \approx 1 - \frac{\left| \sum_{ij} g_{ip} e^{-i2\pi (d_{ij} + d_{ip})/l} \right|^2}{S^2 \sum_{ij} g_{ij}^2},
\]

(6)

Here $l = 2\pi \hbar \tilde{m} l_p$ with $m$ being the atomic mass 
and $l_p$ being the spatial period of the optical lattice. $S$ is 
the area of the overlapping region between $\Xi_1$ (determined 
by $-\Delta_d/2 < x < \Delta_d/2$ and $-\Delta_d/2 < y < \Delta_d/2$) 
and $\Xi_2$ (determined by $-\Delta_d/2 < x - d_x < \Delta_d/2$ 
and $-\Delta_d/2 < y - d_y < \Delta_d/2$). $N$ is the total particle number. In equation (6), the second term represents the 
antibunching behavior. This term is obtained by omit-
ning the effect of spatial resolution and under the con-
deration $l/\sigma > L_0/l_p$ and $l \gg \Delta d_p/\sigma$. Here $L_0$ and $\sigma$ represent respectively the overall width of the Fermi gas 
and wavepacket width of an atom in a lattice site before 
switching off the combined potential. The last term in 
equation (6) physically originates from the delta-function 
term in the anticommutation relation of field operators.

This term is obtained by considering the spatial resolu-
tion and under the condition $l/\sigma > L_0/l_p$.

Using the experimental parameters in Ref. [13] and 
equation (6), Fig.1b gives $C_2(d, t)$ for flight time of 10 
ms. Besides eight dark dots representing antibunching, 
at the center location we notice a bright dot representing 
bunching. Fig.1c gives further one of the dark dot, while 
Fig.1d gives further the bright dot. Eight dark dots are 
due to the second term in equation (6). This term is $-1$ 
for $d_{z, l} = i$ and $d_{l} = j$ with $i$ and $j$ being integers. At 
the locations of these dark dots, the last term in equation 
(6) is zero. The bright dot at the center is due to 
the last term in equation (6), which is larger than 1 close 
to $d_x = 0$ and $d_y = 0$. If the last term in equation (6) 
is not included, there should be a dark dot at the center 
(see Fig.1e). In Ref. [13], the theoretical model with-
out the last term is used to interpret their experimental 
data. It is quite interesting to note that eight dark dots 
(rather than nine dark dots without the consideration of 
the last term) were observed in Ref. [13] (see Fig.2c and its figure caption in this reference)! In
In fact, this property is an essential property of quantum
the modes occupied by particles before a measurement.

\[ \hat{\Psi}(x, t) \text{ and } \hat{\Psi}(y, t) \]

Simple calculations give

\[ \delta^2 n(x, t) = \lim_{y \to x} \left( \hat{\Psi}^\dagger(x, t) \hat{\Psi}(y, t) \right) \delta(x - y) - \langle \hat{n}(x, t) \rangle^2. \]  

We see that there is a divergent \( \delta \)-function term in \( \delta^2 n(x, t) \). It is obvious that the omission of the \( \delta \)-function term will lead to absurd result of negative density fluctuations. The divergent \( \delta \)-function term is a pure quantum effect by noting that it comes from the anticommutation relation between field operators. There is another origin for this \( \delta \)-function term that the field operators \( \hat{\Psi}(x, t) \)

\[ \text{and } \hat{\Psi}^\dagger(x, t) \text{ comprise infinite modes, rather than only} \]

the modes occupied by particles before a measurement. In fact, this property is an essential property of quantum field theory. The analyses about \( \delta^2 n(x, t) \) show clearly that the \( \delta \)-function term can not be omitted simply. Similarly to our studies of the density-density correlation, the divergence in the \( \delta \)-function term can be avoided because the resolution of a detector always has a width. This is equivalent to the presentation that creation or annihilation of a particle at an infinitesimal point is impossible because this would mean an infinite energy exchange.

Note that the anomalous fermion bunching does not violate in any sense the Pauli exclusion principle for identical fermions. The anomalous fermion bunching originates from the delta-function term in the anticommutation relation of field operators. Of course, the Pauli exclusion principle will try to destroy the anomalous bunching effect. The second term in \( \delta \)-function term can not be omitted simply. Similarly to our studies of the density-density correlation, the divergence in the \( \delta \)-function term can be avoided because the resolution of a detector always has a width. This is equivalent to the presentation that creation or annihilation of a particle at an infinitesimal point is impossible because this would mean an infinite energy exchange.

In summary, our studies give an anomalous fermion bunching, and we have given a strong evidence by analyzing a recent experimental data in Ref. [13]. The condition to observe the anomalous fermion bunching is in fact quite rigorous. It is not surprising that this unique quantum effect is found accidentally in Ref. [13] with highly developed experimental technique. The experimental technique in Ref. [13] gives us chance to test further our theory. (i) The last term in equation (6) increases with the increasing of flight time. Thus, we expect a transition process from the antibunching to bunching at the center of \( C_2(d, t) \), with the increasing of the flight time. (ii) The distribution of fermionic atoms in the lattice sites \( \{i, j, k\} \) is determined by \( \delta + j^2 + \alpha^2 k_x^2 \leq R^2 \) at zero temperature. Here \( \alpha \) is determined by the harmonic potential due to the optical trap. Simple calculations give \( \Sigma g_{ij}^2 \delta^2 \) \( \approx 0.93(\alpha N)^{-2/3} \). We see that decreasing \( \alpha \) has an effect of enhancing the anomalous fermion bunching effect for identical particle number. This dependence on \( \alpha \) would give us further chance to test our theory. We believe further experimental studies would deep largely our understanding of the indistinguishability of identical particles, wave packet localization in quantum measurement process and high-order correlation. High resolution of a detector is required to reveal anomalous fermion bunching effect. The astonishing resolution of STM (scanning tunneling microscope) and AFM (atomic force microscope) etc suggests that the experimental and theoretical studies about electrons in an atom or molecule may lead to a new regime about the studies of high-order correlation, quantum noise and quantum measurement etc.

The \( \delta \)-function term in the anticommutation relation is the direct reason for the anomalous fermion bunching effect. For Bose system, the inclusion of the \( \delta \)-function term in the commutation relation of field operators may also play important role in density-density correlation. It is easy to understand that the inclusion of the \( \delta \)-function term will lead to an enhanced boson bunching effect at
\( \mathbf{d} = 0 \). In fact, in a recent experiment about the density-density correlation of ultracold bosonic atoms released from an optical lattice, there is a clear enhanced boson bunching effect at \( \mathbf{d} = 0 \) in \( C_2(\mathbf{d},t) \) (see Fig. 2(c) in [3], where the brightness in the center dot is much higher than other eight bright dots, and this can not be explained without the consideration of the \( \delta \)-function term.). This sort of enhanced boson bunching effect is also implied strongly in [12]. These analyses show that anomalous fermion bunching effect and enhanced boson bunching effect have common physical origin—the indistinguishability of identical particles and the \( \delta \)-function term in the anticommutation (commutation) relation of field operators.

This work is supported by NSFC under Grant Nos. 10634060, 10474117 and NBRPC under Grant Nos. 2006CB921406, 2005CB724508 and also funds from Chinese Academy of Sciences.

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