$\mu \rightarrow e\gamma$ Search with Polarized Muons

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Abstract

A search for the lepton-flavor violating $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\gamma$ decay using polarized muons is proposed. By measuring the angular distribution of $e^+$s with respect to the muon spin direction, in particular antiparallel $e^+$s, the serious physics background from $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\nu\bar{\nu}\gamma$ as well as accidental background from normal muon decay accompanied by a high-energy photon can be suppressed significantly. In addition to the enhancement of the sensitivity, the angular distribution would discriminate among different extensions to the Standard Model, once the signal is observed.

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Lepton flavor violation (LFV) has been attracting much attention recently, since several extensions to the Standard Model predict large LFV rates. Among the various theoretical models with LFV, models of supersymmetric grand unification (GUT) in particular predict a branching ratio only one or two order magnitudes lower than the current experimental limits [1,2]. A search for LFV in low energy processes would have the potential to test unification at very high energy. Compared to other LFV processes of interest such as $\mu^+ \rightarrow 3e$, $\mu^- - e^-$ conversion in a nucleus, $\tau \rightarrow \mu \gamma$, etc. $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\gamma$ is known to have a higher sensitivity to supersymmetric unification [2].

The previous experiments searching for $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\gamma$ have been done with a surface muon beam of low-energy (4 MeV) positive muons from pions stopped in the pion production target. Due to their production mechanism, surface muons are originally 100% polarized, antiparallel to their flight direction. However, none of the past experiments used the polarization, but rather depolarized the muons by using, for instance, a polystyrene muon-stopping target [3]. Here, the importance of the muon polarization to search for $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\gamma$ will be presented. For instance, the measurement of the angular distribution of $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\gamma$ with respect to the muon-polarization direction would give information to discriminate among various models, since different theoretical models predict a different helicity of $e^+$ in $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\gamma$, as shown below.

Supersymmetric unified theories predict large rates for LFV processes such as $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\gamma$ as a consequence of the large top-quark Yukawa coupling. The SU(5) supersymmetric (SUSY) GUT model predicts a branching ratio between $10^{-15}$ to $10^{-13}$ for the singlet selectron mass of $m_{\tilde{e}_R}$ of 100 to 300 GeV, and the SO(10) SUSY-GUT models give an even larger value of $10^{-13}$ to $10^{-11}$ [4]. In these supersymmetric unified models, interactions at the GUT energy scale could induce lepton flavor mixing in the left-handed and/or right-handed slepton sectors. As a consequence, LFV processes such as $\mu \rightarrow e \gamma$ occur at a low energy, and they therefore carry information on the interactions at the GUT energy scale. The helicity of $e^+$ in $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\gamma$ is subject to the mechanism of flavor mixing in the slepton sectors. For instance, the minimal SU(5) SUSY-GUT model introduces a lepton flavor mixing only
on the right-handed slepton sector, $\tilde{e}_R$, and therefore, only $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+_L \gamma$ occurs, where $e^+_L$ is a left-handed positron. On the other hand, the SO(10) SUSY-GUT models have a lepton flavor mixing on the $\tilde{e}_L$ sector as well as the $\tilde{e}_R$ sector, giving rise to $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+_R \gamma$ as well as $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+_L \gamma$. Furthermore, some non-unified supersymmetric extensions to the Standard Model with heavy right-handed neutrinos also expect a large branching ratio of orders of $10^{-13}$ to $10^{-11}$ \[4\] and $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+_R \gamma$ is predicted. Some non-supersymmetric extensions to the Standard Model, such as left-right symmetric models and extra Higgs models, also predict a sizeable branching ratio of $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \gamma$ \[5\].

However, to improve sensitivity and measure angular distribution, major background decays to a search for $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \gamma$, in particular their angular distribution with respect to the muon-polarization direction, have to be investigated. Those backgrounds are a physics background from the radiative muon decay $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \nu \nu \gamma$, and an accidental background of the normal muon decay $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \nu \nu$ accompanied by a high energy photon. In this letter, we propose the use of polarized muons to search for $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \gamma$ to improve sensitivity against those backgrounds, and especially emphasize the importance of the selective measurement of $e^+$s going opposite to the muon-polarization direction, which would reduce the backgrounds significantly and allow the measurement with a higher sensitivity in future experiments.

In general, the Lagrangian for $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \gamma$ decay can be given \[6\] with an explicit helicity expression by

$$ \mathcal{L} = A_R \bar{\mu}_R \sigma^{\mu \nu} e_L F_{\mu \nu} + A_L \bar{\mu}_L \sigma^{\mu \nu} e_R F_{\mu \nu} + h.c. $$

where $\mu_L(\mu_R)$ is a left-handed (right-handed) muon and $e_L(e_R)$ is a left-handed (right-handed) electron. $A_R$ and $A_L$ are coupling constants. $F_{\mu \nu}$ is $\partial_\mu A_\nu - \partial_\nu A_\mu$ and $A_\mu$ is an electromagnetic field. For polarized muons, from Eq.(1), the angular distribution of $e^+$ in $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \gamma$ with respect to the direction of $\mu^+$ spin direction can be given by

$$ d\Gamma(\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \gamma) = \frac{1}{8\pi} (1 - \frac{m_\mu^2}{m_\mu^2})^3 m_e^3 d(\cos \theta) \times \left[ |A_R|^2 (1 - P_\mu \cos \theta) + |A_L|^2 (1 + P_\mu \cos \theta) \right] $$

where $\theta$ is the angle between the muon spin and the $e^+$ direction. $P_\mu$ is the muon spin polarization, which for surface muons is almost 100%. $m_\mu$ and $m_e$ are the muon mass and
the positron mass, respectively. The minimal SU(5) SUSY-GUT model predicts a non-zero $A_L$ and a vanishing $A_R$, yielding a $(1 + P_\mu \cos \theta)$ distribution. On the other hand, the simplest version of the SO(10) SUSY-GUT models predict approximately-equal helicity amplitudes for right-handed and left-handed $e^+$s ($A_L \approx A_R$) [4], resulting in an almost uniform angular distribution. For some non-unified supersymmetric models [4], $A_L$ is vanishing but $A_R$ is non-zero, giving a $(1 - P_\mu \cos \theta)$ distribution. Therefore, the measurement of the angular distribution of $e^+$ with respect to the direction of muon polarization would provide a means to discriminate among these models clearly when the signals are observed.

The event signature of $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\gamma$ is that the energies of both $e^+$ and photon are equal to a half of the muon mass ($m_\mu/2 = 52.8$ MeV) and they are collinear back to back. The current experimental upper limit is $4.9 \times 10^{-11}$ at 90% confidence level [3].

The major physics backgrounds to the search for $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\gamma$ decay is radiative muon decay, $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\nu\nu\gamma$ (branching ratio = 1.4% for $E_\gamma > 10$ MeV). When the $e^+$ and photon are emitted back-to-back with two neutrinos carrying off little energy, it becomes a serious physics background to $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\gamma$. The differential decay width of this radiative decay was calculated as a function of $e^+$ energy ($E_e$) and photon energy ($E_\gamma$) normalized to their maximum energies (of $m_\mu/2$), namely $x = 2E_e/m_\mu$ and $y = 2E_\gamma/m_\mu$, where $x$ and $y$ range from 0 to 1 [7,8]. As a background to $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\gamma$, the kinematic case when $x \approx 1$ and $y \approx 1$ is important. Its angular distribution has to be examined especially. In an approximation of the limit of $x \approx 1$ and $y \approx 1$ with an angle between $e^+$ and photon ($\theta_{e\gamma}$) of almost 180°, the differential decay width of $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\nu\nu\gamma$ decay is given by

$$d\Gamma(\mu \rightarrow e\nu\nu\gamma) \approx \frac{G_F^2 m_\mu^5 \alpha}{3 \times 2^{8/3} \pi^4} \times \left[ (1 - x)^2 (1 - P_\mu \cos \theta) + 4(1 - x)(1 - y) - \frac{1}{2} z^2 \right] (1 + P_\mu \cos \theta) dxdydzdzd(\cos \theta) \quad (3)$$

where $G_F$ is the Fermi coupling constant, $\alpha$ is the fine-structure constant, $z = \pi - \theta_{e\gamma}$, and $\cos z$ is expanded in a polynomial of $z$ since $z$ is small. In Eq.(3), only the terms of up to the second order of a combination of $(1 - x)$, $(1 - y)$ and $z$ are kept. At $x \approx 1$ and $y \approx 1$, the effect of the positron mass is found to be very small, of order $(m_e/m_\mu)^2$, and therefore
neglected in Eq. (3). The first term in Eq. (3) represents the $e^+$ being emitted preferentially opposite to the muon spin direction, whereas in the second term the $e^+$ is emitted along the muon-spin direction. When $x = 1$ and $y = 1$ exactly, this differential decay width vanishes. But in a real experiment, finite detector resolutions introduce background events which would ultimately limit the sensitivity of a search for $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\gamma$.

Given the detector resolutions, the sensitivity limitation from $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\nu\bar{\nu}\gamma$ background decay can be evaluated by integrating the differential decay width in Eq. (3) over the resolutions, or more precisely, over the kinematic box region of the signal which is determined by the detector resolutions [9]. Take $\delta x$, $\delta y$ and $\delta z$ to be the kinematic range of the signal region for $e^+$ energy ($1 - \delta x \leq x \leq 1$), that for photon energy ($1 - \delta y \leq y \leq 1$) and that for the angle of $z = \pi - \theta_{e\gamma} (0 \leq z \leq \delta z)$, respectively. The integration was done with consideration of the kinematics constraints among $x$, $y$ and $z$. Namely, if $\delta x$ and $\delta y$ are small, the allowed range of $z$ is determined to be $0 \leq z \leq 2\sqrt{(1-x)(1-y)}$, instead of $\delta z$. The partial branching ratio after the integration is given by

$$dB(\mu \rightarrow e\nu\bar{\nu}\gamma) = \frac{1}{\Gamma(\mu \rightarrow e\nu\bar{\nu})} \int_{1-\delta x}^{1} dx \int_{1-\delta y}^{1} dy \int_{0}^{\min(\delta z, 2\sqrt{(1-x)(1-y)})} dz \frac{d\Gamma(\mu \rightarrow e\nu\bar{\nu}\gamma)}{dxdydz}$$

$$= \frac{\alpha}{16\pi} \left[ J_1(1 - P_{\mu}\cos\theta) + J_2(1 + P_{\mu}\cos\theta) \right] d(\cos\theta), \quad (4)$$

where $\Gamma(\mu \rightarrow e\nu\bar{\nu})$ is the total muon decay width. For the case of $\delta z > 2\sqrt{\delta x\delta y}$, $J_1$ and $J_2$ are given by

$$J_1 = (\delta x)^4(\delta y)^2 \quad \text{and} \quad J_2 = \frac{8}{3}(\delta x)^3(\delta y)^3, \quad (5)$$

i.e., they can be reduced as the sixth power of a combination of $\delta x$ and $\delta y$. In Fig.1, the sensitivity limit imposed by the $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\nu\bar{\nu}\gamma$ decay with unpolarized muons is shown. From Fig.1, it can be seen that to achieve an sensitivity limit of a level of $10^{-15}$, both $\delta x$ and $\delta y$ of an order of 0.01 are needed.

Experimentally, improvement of the photon-energy resolution could be more difficult than that of the $e^+$ energy resolution. For instance, in the MEGA experiment which aims to measure the branching ratio sensitive to a level of $6 \times 10^{-13}$ [10], the proposed numbers
of the detector resolutions are $\Delta E_e = 0.4$ MeV (FWHM) but $\Delta E_\gamma = 1.4$ MeV (FWHM). It is likely that the improvement of photon energy resolution is limited. Assuming that $\delta y$ is worse than $\delta x$ by a factor of several, together with the factor of $8/3$, $J_2$ in Eq.(4) could be an order magnitude larger than $J_1$. Therefore, the distribution follows mostly $(1+P_\mu \cos \theta)$ as long as $\delta y > \delta x$. Fig.2 shows the angular distribution of $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \nu \gamma$ with for instance $\delta y/\delta x = 4$. It implies that if we measure selectively $e^+$s in $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \gamma$ going opposite to the muon-polarization direction, the background from $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \nu \gamma$ will be reduced significantly. Furthermore, by varying $\delta x$ and $\delta y$, the angular distribution of the $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \nu \gamma$ background can be changed according to Eq.(4), thus providing another means to discriminate the signal from the backgrounds.

When the angular resolution of $\delta z$ is better than the kinematically-allowed angle of $2\sqrt{\delta x \delta y}$, the distribution is given in Eq.(4) by

$$J_1 = \frac{8}{3}(\delta x)^3(\delta y)(\frac{\delta z}{2})^2 - 2(\delta x)^2(\frac{\delta z}{2})^4 + \frac{1}{3}(\delta y)^2(\frac{\delta z}{2})^8$$

$$J_2 = 8(\delta x)^2(\delta y)^2(\frac{\delta z}{2})^2 - 8(\delta x)(\delta y)(\frac{\delta z}{2})^4 + \frac{8}{3}(\frac{\delta z}{2})^6$$

Similarly to Eq.(5), $J_2$ is larger than $J_1$ by roughly a factor of $\delta y/\delta x$. The above argument is also valid in this case.

Another serious background to $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \gamma$ is an accidental coincidence of a high-energy $e^+$ in the normal muon decay, $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \nu \gamma$, with a high-energy photon, likely from $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \nu \gamma \gamma$. This accidental background can be reduced in principle by an improved timing resolution of the experimental apparatus. However, at a high event rate, it is desirable to reduce this background by some additional means, and the use of polarized muons turns out to be very effective. The high-energy $e^+$ in the normal muon decay ($x \approx 1$) is known to be emitted preferentially along the muon spin direction, following an angular distribution of $(1+P_\mu \cos \theta)$. When $e^+$s going opposite to the muon-spin direction are selected, this background is also reduced.

Thus, all the serious backgrounds to $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \gamma$ decay are expected to follow a $(1+P_\mu \cos \theta)$ angular distribution of for $e^+$s. The detection of $e^+$s emitted opposite to the
muon-spin direction would eliminate backgrounds, whereas the acceptance of the signals for \( \mu^+ \rightarrow e^+_R \gamma \) decay, which follows a \((1 - P_\mu \cos \theta)\) distribution, is kept high. However, the sensitivity to \( \mu^+ \rightarrow e^+_L \gamma \) will be the same as the case with unpolarized muons. The angular distributions of \( \mu^+ \rightarrow e^+_R \gamma \) and \( \mu^+ \rightarrow e^+_L \gamma \) are also shown in Fig.2. In the design of future experiments, the solid-angle acceptance must be optimized with consideration of the required background rejection and the available muon beam intensity. For instance, taking a solid angle coverage of the detection of 45° (60°) in polar angle with respect to the direction antiparallel to the muon polarization would give an improvement in a signal-to-background ratio of about 12 (about 7), with a reasonable acceptance. Given a future increase in muon-beam intensity, a next-generation experiment measuring the branching ratio sensitive to a level of \(10^{-14} - 10^{-15}\) without any backgrounds could be possible with polarized muons.

Since a surface muon beam is already polarized to 100%, the measurement with polarized muons will require a suitable material as a muon-stopping target which preserves the muon spin. Further, since the direction of muon polarization is antiparallel to its flight direction, the installation of a muon-spin rotator \([1]\) which rotates the muon-spin direction perpendicular to the beam direction can be considered for more convenient detector arrangement.

In conclusion, a search for \( \mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \gamma \) decay with polarized muons has the potential for improved sensitivity. The selective measurement of \( e^+\)'s going antiparallel to the muon-spin direction would reduce the physics backgrounds from \( \mu^+ \rightarrow e^+ \nu \pi \gamma \) decay as well as from the accidental background of the normal muon decay accompanied by a high-energy photon. In addition, when the signal is observed, its angular distribution would give a clear discrimination of models and a significant test of supersymmetric unification.

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FIGURES

FIG. 1. Sensitivity limitation of the branching ratio of $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\gamma$ imposed by $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\nu\bar{\nu}\gamma$ decay for the case of unpolarized muons as a function of $\delta x$ and $\delta y$.

FIG. 2. Angular distribution of $e^+$ in $\mu^+ \rightarrow e^+\nu\bar{\nu}\gamma$ decay with $\delta y/\delta x = 4$ as a function of angle from the muon-polarization direction in a solid line. A dot line and dash line show that of $\mu^+ \rightarrow e_L^+\gamma$ and $\mu^+ \rightarrow e_R^+\gamma$ decay, respectively. A vertical scale is arbitrary.
