Subluminal and superluminal light pulse propagation under an external magnetic field in a vee-type three-level atomic medium

Thai Doan Thanh, 1 Nguyen Tuan Anh, 1 Nguyen Thi Thu Hien, 1 Hoang Minh Dong, 1, 2, 3 Nguyen Xuan Hao, 2, 3
Dinh Xuan Khoa, 3 Nguyen Huy Bang 3

1 Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam,
2 Thu Dau Mot University, Thu Dau Mot City, Vietnam,
3 Vinh University, 182 Le Duan Street, Vinh City, Vietnam

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Abstract—In this work, we investigate subluminal and superluminal light propagation in a vee-type three-level atomic medium under an external magnetic field. The dispersion and absorption behaviors are studied for the cases of absence and presence of a magnetic field. It is found that under an electromagnetically induced transparency condition, the light pulse can be switched between subluminal and superluminal propagation by ON-OFF switching of the magnetic field. Finally, the transient response of the medium is discussed, which shows that the considered scheme has potential applications in magneto-optic switching devices.

In recent years, the phenomenon of electromagnetically induced transparency (EIT) [1÷2], which is generated by quantum interference between two different displacement channels and an opaque optical medium can become transparent in a probe field by applying a strong control laser field at a different frequency. The EIT effect not only reduces absorption but also enhances linear and nonlinear dispersions in the vicinity of atomic resonant frequency. One of the interesting applications of the EIT medium is that it modifies light pulse propagation through the dispersion of a medium, such as controlling and slowing down the group velocity of light, even stopping, storing, and then it retrieves light pulses [3÷5], enhances Kerr nonlinearity [6÷7], optical bistability (OB) and all-optical switching (AOS) [8÷10], formation and optical solitons propagation [11÷13], and so on.

In addition to intensity-controllable absorption and dispersion properties of an EIT medium, recent studies show that the optical properties of an EIT medium are also controlled by external magnetic field and polarization of laser fields [14÷17]. In this work, we use an external magnetic field to switch from electromagnetically induced transparency to electromagnetically induced absorption (EIA), which corresponds with the propagation of light from subluminal to superluminal velocity. We investigate the influence of an external magnetic field on the absorptive and dispersive properties as well as the group index and transient behavior of the probe field, which demonstrates that the medium can be used for optical switches at a low light intensity.

* E-mail: donghmhufi@gmail.com

The vee-type degenerated the atomic system under the interaction of an external magnetic field as shown in Fig.1. In this scheme, the transition |1⟩ to |3⟩ is applied by a weak probe laser field E_p (have angular frequency ω_p) with the right-circularly polarized component σ^+.

Simultaneously, a strong coupling laser field E_c with the left-circularly polarized component σ^- (have angular frequency ω_c) is introduced to couple the transition |1⟩ to |2⟩. The medium is likely to be affected by an applied longitudinal magnetic field B removing the degeneracy of the states |2⟩ and |3⟩, whose Zeeman shift is determined by Δ_B = μ_B m_F g_F B / h, where μ_B is the Bohr magneton, g_F is the Lande factor, and m_F = ±1 is the magnetic quantum number of the corresponding state. The decay rates from the states |3⟩ and |2⟩ to |1⟩ are given by γ_31 and γ_21, respectively. Utilizing the rotating-wave and the electric dipole approximations, the interaction Hamiltonian of the system in the interaction picture can be written as (with the assumption of h=1):

\[ H_{int} = -(Δ_x + Δ_y)|2⟩⟨2| + (Δ_x - Δ_y)|3⟩⟨3| + H.c. \]

where Δ_x = ω_21 - ω_c and Δ_y = ω_31 - ω_p are the frequency detunings of the coupling and probe fields and from the atomic transition frequencies, respectively. Δ_B is the

![Fig.1. Schematic diagram of a vee-type degenerated atomic system under a static magnetic field and two coupling and probe laser fields.](http://www.photonics.pl/PLP)
Zeeman shift of the levels [2] and [3] in the presence of the magnetic field (see Fig. 1) and $\Delta g$ is taken to zero for zero magnetic field. Under electric-dipole and rotating-wave approximations, the evolution of the system is described as follows:

$$\frac{\partial \rho_{11}}{\partial t} = \gamma_{2} \rho_{22} + \gamma_{3} \rho_{33} + i \Omega_{1} \rho_{12},$$

$$\frac{\partial \rho_{12}}{\partial t} = -\gamma_{3} \rho_{11} + i \Omega_{2} \rho_{12} - i \Omega_{1} \rho_{11} - \Omega_{2} \rho_{22},$$

$$\frac{\partial \rho_{13}}{\partial t} = -\gamma_{3} \rho_{11} + i \Omega_{3} \rho_{13},$$

$$\frac{\partial \rho_{21}}{\partial t} = -\gamma_{2} \rho_{22} - i \Omega_{1} \rho_{21},$$

$$\frac{\partial \rho_{22}}{\partial t} = -\gamma_{2} \rho_{22} - i \Omega_{2} \rho_{22},$$

$$\frac{\partial \rho_{23}}{\partial t} = -\gamma_{2} \rho_{22} - i \Omega_{3} \rho_{23} - i \Omega_{2} \rho_{22},$$

(2a)

where the matrix elements obey conjugated and normalized conditions, namely $\rho_{ij} = \rho_{ij}^\dagger$ ($i \neq j$), and $\rho_{11} + \rho_{22} + \rho_{33} = 1$, respectively.

The relationship of the refraction index of medium $n_g$ and the susceptibility $\chi_{31}$ is expressed as [5]:

$$n_g = 1 + \frac{1}{2} \text{Re} \left[ \chi_{31} \right] + \frac{1}{2} \omega_p \frac{\partial \text{Re} \left[ \chi_{31} \right]}{\partial \omega_p}.$$  

(3)

where $\chi_{31} = 2N [\hbar d_{31}^* \rho_{31}/\hbar c \Omega_p]$. In accordance with the definition of the group velocity $v_g = c/n_g$, with $c$ being the light speed in a vacuum, it can be found that the group velocity is related with the coherence term $\rho_{31}$ from Eq. (3). If $n_g > 1$ then the group velocity is lower than the vacuum velocity, leads to subluminal propagation. Otherwise, $n_g < 1$, and the field has a superluminal propagation.

With a view to illustrating applications of the model, the cold atomic medium of $^{87}$Rb were applied on the 5S-5P transitions as a realistic candidate. The designated states and the decay rates can be chosen as follows: [1] = [5S1/2, F = 1, m_F = 0], [2] = [5P1/2, F = 1, m_F = -1], [3] = [5P3/2, F = 1, m_F = 1], and $\gamma_{31} = \gamma_{31} = 2\pi \times 5.3$ MHz, and wavelength of the probe coupling, $\lambda_{sc} = \lambda_c = 795$ nm.

Landé factor $g_F = -1/2$ and the Bohr magneton $\mu_B = 9.27401 \times 10^{-23} \text{JT}^{-1}$, [16, 18], respectively. It is noted that the system parameters used in this paper are scaled by $\gamma_{31}$, thus when the Zeeman shift $\Delta g$ is scaled by $\gamma_{31}$, then the magnetic field strength $B$ should be in units of the combined constant $\gamma_{31} = \hbar \mu_B^{-1} g_F^{-1} \gamma_{31}$.

First, the influence of the magnetic field on the absorption-dispersion behaviors of the probe field is considered by numerically solving the above density matrix equations (2a)+(2f) in the steady-state and the

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Now, we consider the dependence of sub- and superluminal behavior on the strengths of control and magnetic fields as shown Fig. 4. A variation of $n_\text{g}$ versus control Rabi frequency is presented by using Eq. (3). When the magnetic field is absent (Fig. 4a), the group index for EIT first increases to a maximum and then decreases with increasing of the control field but always corresponds to subluminal propagation. However, when the magnetic field is turned on (Fig. 4b), the large positive $n_\text{g}$ becomes negative, which is the condition for EIA. Therefore, a valley of negative $n_\text{g}$ in the region of enhanced absorption is obtained. Thus an atomic medium can be turned from sub- to superluminal propagation by using a three-level vee-type configuration under the external magnetic field.

Finally, we discuss the transient properties of the three-level vee-type scheme. The consideration of the transient behavior of an atomic system is important due to its potential applications such as absorptive optical switching [10], in which the transmission of a highly absorptive medium is controlled by a microwave field. We show the time evolution of probe absorption Im($\rho_{31}$) in Fig. 5. In the absence of a switching field (solid curve), the damped oscillations become steady and probe absorption reduces to zero [10]. In the case when the magnetic field is turned on the strength equal to B = 3.5$\gamma_\text{c}$, the enhanced probe absorption is observed (dashed curve). Thus, a transparent atomic medium can be switched to enhanced absorption by turning on or off the magnetic field.

We have studied the dispersion and absorption properties a vee-type three-level atomic medium in an external magnetic field. It is shown that when the magnetic field is turned on, the medium can be switched from EIT to EIA. The variation of group index with control and magnetic fields showed a valley of negative group index that indicates large superluminality. Therefore, the atomic system consisting of a static magnetic field can be tuned from subluminal to superluminal propagation, which is performed by magnetooptic switches.

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