Coulomb Dissociation of ^{11}Li

K. Ieki,[a] D. Sackett, A. Galonsky, C. A. Bertulani,[b] J. J. Kruse, W. G. Lynch, D. J. Morrissey, N. A. Orr, H. Schulz, B. M. Sherrill, A. Sustich,[c] and J. A. Winger
National Superconducting Cyclotron Laboratory and Physics Department, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824

F. Deák, Á. Horváth, and Á. Kiss
Department of Atomic Physics, Eötvös University, Puskin utca 5-7, H-1088 Budapest 8, Hungary

Z. Seres
KFKI Research Institute for Particle and Nuclear Physics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, H-1525 Budapest 114, Hungary

J. J. Kolata
Physics Department, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556

R. E. Warner
Physics Department, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio 44074

D. L. Humphrey
Physics Department, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky 42101
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Kinematically complete measurements for Coulomb dissociation of ^{11}Li into ^{9}Li$+2n$ were made at 28 MeV/nucleon. The n-n correlation function suggests a large source size for the two-neutron emission. The electromagnetic excitation spectrum of ^{11}Li has a peak, as anticipated in low-energy dipole resonance models, but a large post-breakup Coulomb acceleration of the ^{9}Li fragment is observed, indicating a very short lifetime of the excited state and favoring direct breakup as the dissociation mechanism.

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The structure of ^{11}Li presents one of the most intriguing questions in nuclear physics. This nucleus has an interaction cross section which is large compared to those of its neighbor nuclei [1]. In its dominant reaction channel, dissociation into ^{9}Li plus two neutrons, both the neutrons and the fragment have been separately found to have sharply forward-peaked angular distributions [2–5]. These results have been interpreted to mean that ^{11}Li should be thought of as having a ^{9}Li core immersed in a halo of two neutrons, perhaps correlated as a dineutron [6]. Furthermore, the large dissociation cross section of ^{11}Li by a high-Z target may then be the result of an electric dipole excitation to a "soft" dipole resonance located at an excitation energy much lower than the universal giant dipole resonance [7,8]. While the giant dipole resonance may be thought of as an oscillation of all the neutrons against all the protons, in the proposed soft dipole the ^{9}Li core slowly oscillates in the diffuse cloud, or halo, of two neutrons. This new collective mode may also occur in other light neutron-rich nuclei, such as ^{6}He, ^{8}He, and ^{14}Be. The fact that ^{10}Li is *unbound* whereas ^{11}Li is *bound* means that the interaction between the two valence neutrons in ^{11}Li is vital to its stability. The nature of the correlation between the two neutrons is not known. This paper is a report on the first measurement of the electromagnetic excitation spectrum of ^{11}Li and of a correlation between the decay neutrons.

For collective motion, such as a soft-dipole resonance, a large electric dipole strength is expected [8]. Since $E2$ strength is much smaller than $E1$ at our beam energy [9], the dipole strength function $dB(E1)/dE$ is related to the Coulomb dissociation cross section $d\sigma/dE$ for two-neutron removal as follows:

$$\frac{d\sigma}{dE}=\frac{16\pi^3}{9\hbar c}\frac{dB(E1)}{dE}N(E)\,.$$

Here, $N(E)$ gives the number of virtual photons and E is the ^{11}Li excitation energy. A thorough discussion is given in Ref. [10]. Using the above formula, the dipole strength function can be determined by measuring the Coulomb dissociation cross section as a function of ^{11}Li excitation energy.

The excitation energy of the ^{11}Li is related to the decay energy E_d by $E=E_d+S_{2n}$, where S_{2n} ($=0.34\pm0.05$ MeV [3]) is the two-neutron separation energy. To calculate the decay energy from the experimental data, we extend the technique used by Heilbronn *et al.* [11] to the case of a three-body problem. Using a relative velocity $\mathbf{V}_{2n\text{-}9}$ between the ^{9}Li and the two-neutron center of mass and a relative velocity $\mathbf{V}_{n\text{-}n}$ between the two neutrons, the decay energy of the ^{11}Li can be expressed as

$$E_d=\tfrac{1}{2}\mu_1V_{2n\text{-}9}^2+\tfrac{1}{2}\mu_2V_{n\text{-}n}^2$$

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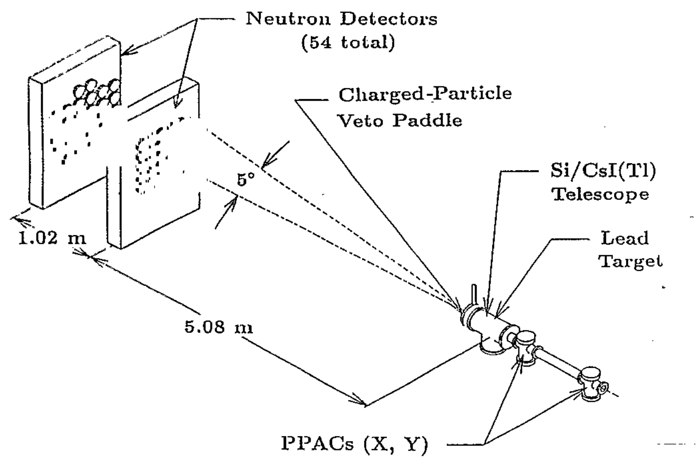

FIG. 1. Schematic drawing of the experimental setup.

with

$$\mu_1 = \frac{m_9(2m_n)}{m_9 + (2m_n)}, \quad \mu_2 = \frac{m_n}{2}.$$

Here, m_9 is the ^{9}Li mass and m_n is the neutron mass. Thus, the excitation energy of ^{11}Li can be determined by measuring the three velocities—of ^{9}Li and of two neutrons.

A ^{11}Li beam was produced by projectile fragmentation of ^{18}O from the K1200 cyclotron and analyzed by the A1200 fragment separator at Michigan State University. The main elements of the experiment are shown in Fig. 1. A detailed description will be given in Ref. [12]. The energy at the center of the Pb target was 28 MeV/nucleon. At this energy, Coulomb dissociation on Pb is known to dominate over nuclear dissociation due to the large number of low-energy virtual photons [3,13,14]. Also, the coincidence requirement of two neutrons at small angles diminishes the nuclear contribution [12]. The ^{9}Li momenta were measured with a Si double-strip and CsI(Tl) telescope, which also served as the Faraday cup for the beam of about 400 ^{11}Li/sec. Dissociation of ^{11}Li in the silicon and CsI(Tl) detectors accounts for $\sim$50% of the coincidence events. Since most of these events are indistinguishable from true events, they were measured separately with the target removed and the beam energy reduced by the 4 MeV/nucleon target thickness. Neutron velocities were measured via the time-of-flight method using the fragment signal in the Si detector as the stop.

The geometry was chosen to permit the detection of events with small relative momenta between the neutrons. Cross-talk events, events in which one neutron makes a false coincidence signal by scattering from one detector into another detector, were identified by their scattering kinematics and rejected event by event.

First we deduced the correlation function [15]

$$C(q) \propto \frac{\sum \sigma(q)}{\sum \sigma(p_1)\sigma(p_2)}, \text{ with } q = \tfrac{1}{2}|\mathbf{p}_1 - \mathbf{p}_2|,$$

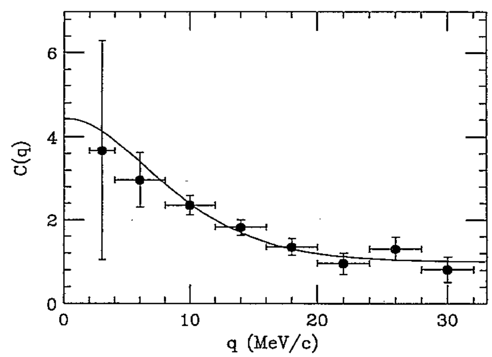

FIG. 2. Correlation function between the two neutrons. The curve represents a calculation based on a spherical Gaussian source with radius parameter 5.3 fm.

from the relative momentum spectrum between two neutrons in coincidence with a ^{9}Li fragment. This quantity is sensitive to the spatial extent of the source emitting the neutrons. The correlation function is displayed in Fig. 2. The correlation function is normalized at large relative momentum ($q > 20$ MeV/c) and exhibits a peak at small relative momentum. The curve in Fig. 2 results from a simple model calculation [16] which assumes that each of the two neutrons is distributed independently within the source. The source distribution is assumed to have a Gaussian radial shape with a radius parameter of 5.3 fm, corresponding to rms radius of 9.2 fm. Although a possible correlation in the initial state for the two neutrons, such as a bound dineutron state, is neglected in the model, the curve agrees well with the data, suggesting a large size of the excited ^{11}Li. More sophisticated calculations which consider initial-state correlations and realistic density distributions for the two neutrons are needed to clarify the structure of the halo.

The measured decay energy spectrum $d\sigma_M/dE_d$ is shown in Fig. 3 (solid circles). The contribution from reactions in the telescope has been subtracted. $d\sigma_M/dE_d$ is

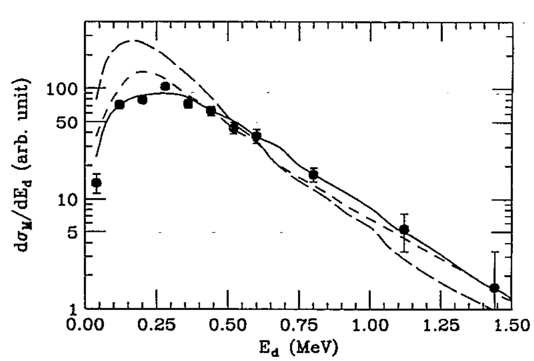

FIG. 3. The measured decay energy spectrum $d\sigma_M/dE_d$ for $^{11}\text{Li} \rightarrow {}^9\text{Li} + n + n$. The curves are results of Monte Carlo simulations for Breit-Wigner-type photonuclear cross sections (solid, $E_0 = 0.70$ MeV, $\Gamma_0 = 0.80$ MeV), a correlated-state model [17] (dashed), and a dineutron-cluster model [18] (long dashed).

related to the true spectrum $d\sigma/dE_d$ by

$$\frac{d\sigma_M}{dE_d}(E_d)=\int \frac{d\sigma}{dE_d'}(E_d')\epsilon(E_d',E_d)dE_d' .$$

For a given value of E_d', the efficiency response function $\epsilon(E_d',E_d)$ is a peaked function of E_d. The amplitude of this function has a strong dependence on E_d'. Also, due to the finite size of the neutron detectors, its shape is asymmetric, especially for low values of E_d'. The overall width of this asymmetric function also depends on E_d'. For these reasons, it is not feasible to perform the inverse transform and obtain $d\sigma/dE_d$. Instead, we start with a model dipole strength function and make Monte Carlo calculations that simulate the detection system and produce $d\sigma_M/dE_d$ for comparison with the data. Two such comparisons are shown in Fig. 3.

The dashed and long-dashed curves in Fig. 3 show results of the Monte Carlo simulations with $dB(E1)/dE$ predictions of a correlated-state model [17] and of a dineutron-cluster model [18]. The absolute $dB(E1)/dE$ values were used for these models, i.e., no normalization is applied relative to the data. Although these models reproduce the overall features of the spectrum, they overestimate the yield at low decay energy. This is partly because of the low peak positions of their dipole strength functions. It should be noted that the parameters in the correlated-state model were chosen with $S_{2n}=0.2$ MeV, rather than 0.34 MeV [3].

As an alternative model, we introduced an empirical soft-dipole resonance model, in which the Coulomb-dissociation cross section is related to a Breit-Wigner-type photonuclear cross section $\sigma_{E1}(E)$ by

$$\frac{d\sigma}{dE}=\sigma_{E1}(E)\frac{N(E)}{E} .$$

The width parameter of the Breit-Wigner function has the energy dependence of s-wave neutron transmission. The solid curve in Fig. 3 displays the best-fit result of the simulations; it has resonance decay energy $E_0=0.70$ MeV and width $\Gamma_0=0.80$ MeV at E_0. With these parameters the Coulomb dissociation cross section is 3.6 ± 0.4 b and $B(E1)$ is 1.00 ± 0.11 $e^2\text{fm}^2$. (A possible hadronic component at the few percent level in Fig. 3 has been disregarded.) It is important to note that the narrow width of the ^{9}Li momentum distribution [4] and the forward peaking of the neutron angular distribution [5], both in agreement with our data [12], are also reproduced by the values of E_0 and Γ_0 with the assumption that the decay energy is shared by ^{9}Li and the neutrons according to three-body phase space.

The good Breit-Wigner fit might be thought to reinforce the idea of the soft-dipole resonance mode in the excitation of ^{11}Li. However, a collective resonance with an excitation energy $\hbar\omega$ of only 1 MeV would have an oscillation period $T=1240$ fm/c, whereas the lifetime τ of the resonance deduced from the width parameter of 0.80 MeV is 250 fm/c, only $\frac{1}{5}$ of an oscillation. If the lifetime is this short, one may question the appropriateness of describing the phenomenon as a collective resonance.

However, quite a different constraint on lifetime was deduced from some velocity comparisons. In Fig. 4(a), the spectrum of the longitudinal component of the center-of-mass velocity of the three-body system $^9\text{Li}+2n$ is shown in the frame of the incident ^{11}Li. This figure, from its near-zero centroid, demonstrates the conservation of total momentum of the three-body system and, from its width, gives us the experimental velocity resolution—about $0.008c$ (FWHM). However, the distribution of the longitudinal component of relative velocity $\mathbf{V}_9-\mathbf{V}_{2n}$ [Fig. 4(b)] is clearly not centered on zero; in general, ^{9}Li has a larger velocity than the neutrons. A Monte Carlo simulation (histogram) shows that the asymmetry does not stem from the detection efficiency. The velocity difference is understood by considering that the ^{9}Li is accelerated by the Coulomb field of the Pb target after the breakup, whereas the neutrons are not. As the absorption of a virtual photon occurs close to the Pb nucleus, a large Coulomb acceleration will result if the breakup also occurs close to the Pb nucleus, i.e., if the lifetime of the excited ^{11}Li is short. The observed velocity difference indicates that breakup occurs within a 30 fm distance of the lead nucleus. (Coulomb acceleration of the ^{9}Li makes E_d appear too large. The values of E_d in the Fig. 3 have a correction whose average value is 0.1 MeV [12].) This distance limits the lifetime of the soft dipole state of ^{11}Li to less than about 85 fm/c, only $\frac{1}{15}$ of an oscillation period, far too little for the picture of a collective resonance to be meaningful. It would seem that only a direct breakup process, perhaps a variant of the dineutron-cluster model, could satisfy the large Coulomb

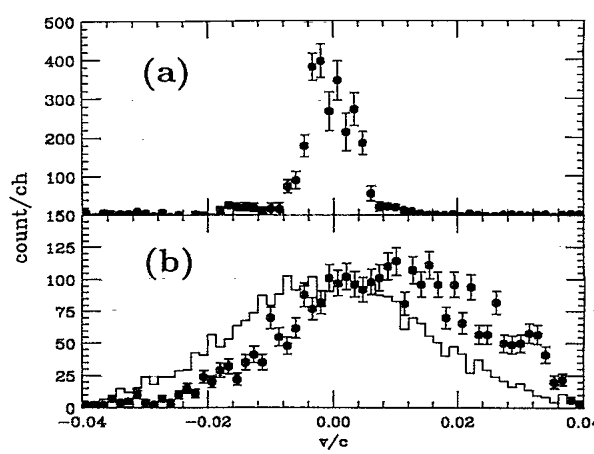

FIG. 4. (a) Spectrum of the longitudinal component of the center-of-mass velocity of ^{9}Li and two neutrons in the frame of the incident ^{11}Li. (b) Spectrum of the longitudinal component of the relative velocity $\mathbf{V}_9-\mathbf{V}_{2n}$. The histogram shows the result of a Monte Carlo simulation assuming no Coulomb acceleration effects.

acceleration [19].

In summary, we have measured the electromagnetic excitation of ^{11}Li. The two-neutron correlation function has a peak at small relative momentum. A simple model calculation suggests that size of the neutron source of excited ^{11}Li is very large. A correlated-state model and a dineutron-cluster model both overpredict the peak yield of the decay energy spectrum. The evaluated photonuclear cross section shows a peak as expected in soft-dipole resonance models [3,7,8]. However, an observed ^{9}Li-$2n$ velocity difference implies a large post-breakup Coulomb acceleration, which means a very short lifetime of the excited state. This fact indicates that the "soft-dipole resonance" is not suitable for the description of the electromagnetic excitation of ^{11}Li and suggests a direct breakup process.

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(a)On leave from Department of Physics, Rikkyo University, 3 Nishi-Ikebukuro, Toshima, Tokyo 171, Japan.

(b)On leave from Instituto de Física, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 21945 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

(c)Present address: Department of Computer Science, Mathematics and Physics, Arkansas State University, P.O. Box 70, State University, AR 72467-0070.

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