2000

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Paul Keiter
Earl Scime
Matthew Balkey
Robert Boivin
John Kline

See next page for additional authors

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Keiter, Paul; Scime, Earl; Balkey, Matthew; Boivin, Robert; Kline, John; and Gary, S, "Beta-Dependent Upper Bound On Ion Temperature Anisotropy In A Laboratory Plasma" (2000). Faculty Scholarship. 476.
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Authors
Paul Keiter, Earl Scime, Matthew Balkey, Robert Boivin, John Kline, and S Gary
Beta-dependent upper bound on ion temperature anisotropy in a laboratory plasma

Paul A. Keiter, Earl E. Scime, Matthew M. Balkey, Robert Boivin, and John L. Kline
West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia 26506

S. Peter Gary
Los Alamos National Laboratory, Los Alamos, New Mexico 87544
(Received 25 August 1999; accepted 9 November 1999)

Laser induced fluorescence measurements of ion temperatures, parallel and perpendicular to the local magnetic field, in the Large Experiment on Instabilities and Anisotropies space simulation chamber (a steady-state, high beta, argon plasma) display an inverse correlation between the upper bound on the ion temperature anisotropy and the parallel ion beta (β = 8πnkT/B²). These observations are consistent with in situ spacecraft measurements in the Earth’s magnetosheath and with a theoretical/computational model that predicts that such an upper bound is imposed by scattering from enhanced fluctuations due to growth of the ion cyclotron anisotropy instability (the Alfvén ion cyclotron instability). © 2000 American Institute of Physics.

[S1070-664X(00)05102-8]

In a carefully controlled, fully diagnosed, high beta, plasma, we have carried out the first laboratory demonstration of the existence of an upper bound on the ion temperature anisotropy that scales inversely with the plasma beta (β = 8πnkT/B²). This experiment confirms the predictions of collisionless theory and simulations, as well as validating results of space plasma observations carried out with less comprehensive diagnostics and under natural, rather than controlled conditions.

If the ion velocity distribution is approximately bi-Maxwellian and T_i∥ > T_i⊥, where perpendicular and parallel denote directions relative to the background magnetic field B_0, then two distinct modes may grow. These are the electromagnetic ion cyclotron anisotropy instability (also known as the Alfvén Ion Cyclotron instability) and the mirror instability. The former has a real frequency ω_i which satisfies 0 < ω_i < Ω_i (Ω_i is the ion cyclotron frequency), whereas ω_i = 0 for the mirror mode in a homogeneous plasma. The magnetic fluctuations of the ion cyclotron anisotropy mode are directed primarily perpendicular to B_0. Mirror mode fluctuations are primarily compressive, that is, ∆B||/B_0. The threshold anisotropy for the ion cyclotron anisotropy mode is a function of the ionic constituents of the plasma and typically has the lower threshold when β_i∥ = 8πnkT_i∥/B_0² < 1. The mirror instability is more likely to arise under conditions of higher parallel ion beta.

Linear Vlasov theory indicates that the threshold condition for onset of the ion cyclotron anisotropy instability for a fixed value of the dimensionless maximum growth rate γ/Ω_i in an electron/ion plasma can be written as:

\[(T_i∥/T_i⊥) - 1 = S_p/\beta_i^a\]  

(1)

Here S_p and α_p are fitting parameters. S_p is a dimensionless number of the order of unity and is determined by the choice of maximum growth rate. α_p is relatively independent of γ/Ω_i with typical values of α_p ≈ 0.4.

There is a long-standing general hypothesis that wave-particle scattering by enhanced fluctuations from kinetic plasma instabilities should constrain the anisotropies that drive the unstable modes. A corollary, apparently first advocated by Manheimer and Boris, is that a plasma instability threshold derived from linear theory should correspond to an observable bound on the anisotropy driving the unstable mode. Recent hybrid simulations of ion temperature anisotropy instabilities have provided support for this corollary.

However, it is difficult to test this hypothesis and its consequences with space plasma data because particle distributions are often observed to exhibit more than one type of non-Maxwellian feature and scattering may be due to more than one microinstability. In some cases, the Earth’s bow shock provides enough heating to the solar wind ions in the direction perpendicular to B_0 that T_i⊥ > T_i∥ is the predominant proton free energy. The magnetic field becomes compressed as the magnetosheath plasma flows toward the dayside magnetopause and β_i∥ decreases. Under these conditions, a number of observers have demonstrated...
10 results did demonstrate a correlation between thermalization of the ion distribution and sub-cyclotron frequency instability, there is a correlation between perturbations and show that, as would be expected for the ion cyclotron-like fluctuations. Several of these observations include measurements of proton-cyclotron-like fluctuations. The ion cyclotron anisotropy instability has been examined before in laboratory plasmas, most recently in the GAMMA 10 mirror experiment. Although the GAMMA 10 results did demonstrate a correlation between $T_{i\parallel}/T_{i\perp}$, and the presence of Alfvén ion cyclotron instability waves, they did not indicate the existence of an upper bound on the ion temperature anisotropy that is inversely correlated with $\beta_{i\parallel}$. In fact, the reported results show no evidence of an upper bound on the ion temperature anisotropy even though the ion temperature anisotropy exceeded the threshold for instability excitation. Thus, there are significant differences between the previous laboratory experiments, the magnetic-sheath observations, and the linear Vlasov theory results.

In this paper, we present our direct measurements of the perpendicular and parallel ion distribution functions in a homogeneous, marginally collisional plasma and our observations of an inverse correlation between the ion temperature anisotropy upper bound and $\beta_{i\parallel}$. We also present measurements of the spectrum of transverse, electromagnetic fluctuations and show that, as would be expected for the ion cyclotron anisotropy instability, there is a correlation between thermalization of the ion distribution and sub-cyclotron frequency fluctuations.

The experiments were performed in the Large Experiment on Anisotropies and Instabilities (LEIA). LEIA (Fig. 1) consists of a steady state, high density, helicon plasma source coupled to a large (4.4 m long, 1.8 m inner diameter) vacuum chamber. Typical LEIA argon plasma parameters for these experiments were $n=10^{12}$ cm$^{-3}$, $B=17–70$ G, $T_e=4–10$ eV, $T_i=0.1–1.0$ eV, $\beta_{ei}/B_i<0.2$ and $\beta_{i}\parallel<0.02$. Because of the differential pumping scheme, the neutral pressure decreases from 1.4 mTorr in the source where the gas is injected to 0.2 mTorr in LEIA. At these ion temperatures and magnetic fields, the plasma diameter is 16 times the ion gyroradius. The plasma is marginally collisional as $\lambda_{mfp}/\rho i<1$ for the ion–ion collisions ($\lambda_{mfp}$ is the mean free path and $\rho$ is the ion gyroradius) and based on the edge neutral pressure $\rho i<\rho_{mfp}$ for ion-neutral collisions. This is an overestimate for ion-neutral collisions as the neutral pumping effect in helicon plasmas should lead to a significantly reduced neutral pressure on axis in LEIA. The ion–ion collision frequency ranges from 5 to 10 times the ion gyrofrequency.

The parallel and perpendicular ion temperatures in LEIA were determined by laser induced fluorescence (LIF). The ion velocity distribution is bi-Maxwellian with $T_{i\perp}>T_{i\parallel}$ (Fig. 2). Previous LIF measurements have demonstrated that the perpendicular ion temperature is many times the parallel ion temperature in the helicon source and that the level of ion temperature anisotropy can be controlled by adjusting the source magnetic field or by auxiliary ion-heating.

The ion temperature anisotropy, $A=T_{i\perp}/T_{i\parallel}$, versus $\beta_{i\parallel}$ (open circles) measured at the upstream position. These data were obtained over a wide range of operating magnetic fields but at fixed rf power and neutral pressure. Also shown are averaged values of anisotropy and for similar operating conditions (solid circles) investigated on different days with standard deviation error bars and extrapolations of the fits from the magnetospheric observations (Refs. 11 and 12).

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and $A = T_{il}/T_{ii}$. For typical LEIA parameters,
\[
\nu = 4\sqrt{\pi e^4 n/(km(T_i))^{3/2}A^{0.9}}.
\] (4)

Rewriting $\beta_{\|}$ in terms of Eq. (4),
\[
\beta_{\|} = \nu(kT_i)^{5/2}A^{0.9}/4\sqrt{\pi m_e e^4}B^2.
\] (5)

Thus, varying the magnetic field and the ion temperatures can yield a wide range of $\beta_{\|}$ for a fixed isotropization frequency, $\nu$, due to ion–ion collisions.

Figure 4(a) shows a subset of the data shown in Fig. 3. For these data, the isotropization frequency described by Eq. (3) varies by less than 11%. Note that $\beta_{\|}$ spans more than order of magnitude and the temperature anisotropy changes by a factor of 3. In addition to ion–ion collisions, ion-neutral collisions can also reduce temperature anisotropy through velocity space diffusion. Assuming a constant cross section (a reasonable approximation over the limited energy range of interest), the ion-neutral collision frequency is proportional to $\sqrt{T_{ii}}$, where $T_{ii} = (2T_{ii}^2 + T_{ij}^2)/3$. Figure 4(b) shows a subset of the data shown in Fig. 4(a). For these data, both the ionization and ion-neutral collision frequencies vary by less than 11%. Although the range of $\beta_{\|}$ is reduced, the inverse correlation of ion temperature anisotropy with $\beta_{\|}$ apparent in Fig. 3 is still apparent. A fit of Eq. (1) to the data yields $S_p = 0.15$ and $\alpha_p = 0.5$. The fact that the full data set shown in Fig. 3 falls off more steeply at higher $\beta_{\|}$ is likely due to the increasingly more important effects of ion–ion collisions at lower values of plasma density which result in larger values of $\beta_{\|}$.

Also shown in Fig. 4 is a linear Vlasov theory curve for the onset of the ion cyclotron anisotropy instability at a maximum growth rate of $\gamma/\Omega_i = 10^{-4}$. The scaling of the laboratory data with parallel ion beta, $\alpha_p \sim 0.5$, is consistent with both the spacecraft measurements and the theory. In a serendipitous way, this laboratory experiment reproduces the evolution of ion distributions in the terrestrial magnetosheath. At some distant location, a temperature anisotropy is created. The plasma is then examined at a different spatial location in the magnetosheath and the temperature anisotropy is observed to be limited in a way that depends on the plasma parameters at the point of measurement. The linear Vlasov models suggest that overall magnitude of the anisotropy is limited in a way that depends on the location in the magnetosheath and the temperature anisotropy.

The linear Vlasov model assumes a collisionless plasma and that wave-particle interactions provide the anisotropy limiting velocity space diffusion typically provided by Coulomb collisions in a collisional plasma. Because these experiments were performed in a marginally collisional plasma, it is important to determine if collisions are responsible for the observed scaling of anisotropy with $\beta_{\|}$. Ignoring the much smaller velocity space diffusion arising from ion-electron collisions, the rates of change for the perpendicular and parallel ion temperatures are

\[
dT_{il}/dt = -\frac{1}{2}dT_{ii}/dt = -\nu(T_{il} - T_{ii}),
\] (2)

where

\[
\nu \approx 2\sqrt{\pi e^4 n}/\sqrt{m(kT_i)^{3/2}A^2} - 3 + (A + 3)\tan^{-1}(\sqrt{A})/\sqrt{A}
\] (3)
LEIA, while the higher frequency peaks (around 6 kHz in Fig. 5) depend strongly on source parameters. Preliminary measurements suggest that the higher frequency waves may play a role in creating the ion temperature anisotropy in the expanding field region between LEIA and the source. Note that the ion cyclotron frequency identified in Fig. 5 is based on the magnetic field strength at the magnetic probe. Towards the source, the magnetic field increases sharply. AIC waves excited upstream at a fraction of the upstream cyclotron frequency could appear at a larger fraction of the cyclotron frequency at the probe location, i.e., waves excited at $\omega \sim 0.25\Omega_i$ upstream might appear at $\omega \sim 0.75\Omega_i$ downstream. For AIC waves, however, waves generated upstream at frequencies above the local ion cyclotron frequency should not reach the probe.

Near the ion cyclotron frequency, the transverse wave amplitude ($B_t$), is more than 10 times the parallel, compressional ($B_h$) wave amplitude. After background subtraction, integration of the measured transverse fluctuation wave amplitude from $0.5\Omega_i$ to $1\Omega_i$ yields a sub-cyclotron fluctuation amplitude between 0.5 to 1% of the background magnetic field. Additional simulations are needed to determine if the larger driving anisotropies in this $\beta_{||} \approx 0.001$ experimental case can explain magnetic fluctuation amplitudes on the order of 1%.

To investigate the correlation of the sub-cyclotron wave activity with relaxation of the ion temperature anisotropy, LIF measurements were performed at two axial locations in LEIA (shown in Fig. 1). While keeping the isotropization and ion-neutral collision frequencies as constant as possible, the RF and ion heating powers were manipulated to vary the upstream ion temperature anisotropy and amplitude of the sub-cyclotron wave activity. The neutral pressure, helicon source magnetic field, and LEIA magnetic field were held constant. When the ion heating circuit was engaged, the sub-cyclotron wave power decreased from roughly 1% of the background field (the strong wave activity case shown in Fig. 5) to the noise level (the weak wave activity case shown in Fig. 5). The physics behind the suppression of the low frequency wave activity is not understood at this time. The ratio of upstream anisotropy to downstream anisotropy decreased from $A_{\text{up}}/A_{\text{down}} = 19/2 = 9.5$ in the case of strong wave activity and from $A_{\text{up}}/A_{\text{down}} = 17/3 = 5.7$ in the case of weak wave activity. Thus, stronger sub-cyclotron wave activity appears to be correlated with more effective thermalization of the ion distribution, i.e., a larger change in the upstream and downstream anisotropies.

This work demonstrates that Eq. (1) with $\alpha_i \approx 0.5$ constitutes an observable constraint on $T_{\text{ii}}/T_{\text{jj}} \approx 1$ and that the observed sub-cyclotron magnetic field fluctuations are correlated with isotropization of the ions. The observed fluctuations are electromagnetic, transverse, and the measured wave numbers are consistent with predictions for ion cyclotron anisotropy waves. These results suggest that the ion cyclotron anisotropy instability is indeed the process that imposes this bound in both magnetosheath and high $\beta_{||}$ laboratory plasmas. These results also suggest that this constraint is a fundamental property of all high beta plasmas bearing such an anisotropy, including other laboratory plasmas as well as space and astrophysical domains not yet subject to in situ observations. Thus, the basic concept of short wavelength instabilities imposing anisotropy constraints offers an alternative to the long-standing approach of using analogues of collision-dominated transport coefficients to express the consequences of small-scale, collective processes in the collisionless plasmas of space. For example, the Manheimer and Boris limitation on field-aligned currents may prove more useful than the various approaches to anomalous resistivity, and the heat flux constraint imposed by heat flux instabilities may have greater application than the Spitzer–Harm thermal conductivity derived from collision-dominated theory.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This work supported by NSF under Grant No. ATM-9616467 and the U.S. Department of Energy under Grant No. DE-FG02-97ER54420.

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