# Letters to the Editor

## Transport Eigenvalues

The Note by Ronen et al.[1] discussing different eigenvalue forms of the Boltzmann neutron transport equation was welcome. It contains, however, an implication that I think bears further consideration, that $1/v$ absorption hardens the energy spectrum. The authors quote Bell and Glasstone[2]; a similar remark has often been made (e.g., Ref. 3).

Surely a more precise exposition is as follows. Absorption removes neutrons. If the absorption cross section is '$1/v$,' this removal is at a local rate

$$(\Sigma_0^a/v)\,\phi(\boldsymbol{r},E) = (\Sigma_0^a/v)vn(\boldsymbol{r},E) = \Sigma_0^a n(\boldsymbol{r},E) \quad ,$$

where $\Sigma_0^a$ is a constant. Then the rate of removal is everywhere proportional to the existing neutron density in position and energy. As a consequence, the neutron density and flux both tend to decrease in time, but with no change in spectrum or, indeed, in shape.

If, of course, one is bold enough to *replace* these lost neutrons, to maintain a steady state perhaps, the spectrum may well change because of the energy distribution of the source neutrons so introduced. In many cases, these are high-energy neutrons, compared with the partially thermalized spectrum that we know the Boltzmann operator would lead to in the absence of losses, so the spectrum is hardened. But if $1/v$ absorption were compensated by neutrons from a cold thermal column, for example, the spectrum would be softened.

I suggest, therefore, that we avoid saying that $1/v$ absorption hardens the spectrum; it is too compressed and could be fallacious. Naturally, the situation with non-$1/v$ absorption is different again and, dependent on the departure of the cross section from this ideal, might of itself soften or harden the spectrum.

In their calculations (which are for a practical rather than a theoretical case of spectrum-independent '$B$' operator in Ref. 1), Ronen et al. do find a hardening in the $\alpha$-eigenvalue formulation. It would be interesting to learn whether this is the immediate consequence of the additional source neutrons or of the leakage term, which is clearly not $1/v$.

*Jeffery Lewins*

University of London
Hughes Parry Hall
Cartwright Gardens
London, WC1, England

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[1]Y. RONEN, D. SHVARTS, and J. J. WAGSCHAL, *Nucl Sci Eng.*, **60**, 97 (1976).
[2]G. I. BELL and S. GLASSTONE, *Nuclear Reactor Theory*, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, New York (1970).
[3]D. J. BENNETT, *Elements of Nuclear Power*, p. 49, Longmans, London (1972).

## The Reactivity Dependence of Neutron Energy Spectra

The communication by Lewins,[1] which was prompted by a Note[2] on different eigenvalue formulations of the transport equation, gives us an appropriate opportunity to clarify and elaborate on the observation in that Note, that the higher the $\alpha$-reactivity, the harder the spectrum. More precisely, the meaning of this statement is that, considering a series of homogeneous multiplying assemblies of a given composition, their $\alpha$-spectra, i.e., the energy spectra obtained by solving the equation

$$\boldsymbol{\Omega}\cdot\nabla\psi + (\Sigma + \alpha/v)\psi = \int c(E')\Sigma(E')f(\boldsymbol{v}'\rightarrow\boldsymbol{v})\psi(\boldsymbol{v}')d^3v' \quad , \quad (1)$$

become harder with (algebraically) increasing $\alpha$. The number of secondary neutrons per collision is $c(E')$, and their normalized distribution is $f(\boldsymbol{v}'\rightarrow\boldsymbol{v})$. Since the term $\alpha/v$ in Eq. (1) is equivalent to varying the concentration of a $1/v$ absorber, this observation is sometimes misinterpreted or misphrased.[2,3] This effect was demonstrated in the Note[2] for unreflected $^{239}$Pu spheres of constant density and increasing radii. But it is just as true for any geometry and for other changes affecting the reactivity, for instance, varying the density or varying both density and size. The increase in reactivity, which is accompanied by a hardening of the neutron spectrum, is compensated in Eq. (1) by adding extra fictitious $1/v$ adsorption. As was correctly pointed out by Lewins,[1] the change in $1/v$ absorption alone does not modify the neutron spectrum.

As a matter of fact, we would first like to discuss Lewins' argument about pure $1/v$ absorption and present it in a more formal way. Let us then express the full (nonstationary) linear transport equation as

$$1/v\,\dot{\psi} + O\psi = 0 \quad , \quad (2)$$

where the operator $O$ represents all time-independent terms. If we now homogeneously add an $\alpha/v$ absorber to the given assembly, the modified flux, $\psi^*$, will satisfy the equation

$$1/v\,\psi^* + (O + \alpha/v)\psi^* = 0 \quad . \quad (3)$$

The immediate solution of this equation, in terms of $\psi$, is

$$\psi^* = \psi\exp(-\alpha t) \quad , \quad (4)$$

which explicitly demonstrates that the neutron energy spectrum is not affected by adding the $1/v$ absorber to the original assembly. We further observe that the $\alpha$ spectrum of a noncritical assembly is the true (physical) unmodified asymptotic spectrum of the assembly.

We now return to the main point of this Letter, the point

[1]J. LEWINS, *Nucl Sci Eng.*, **62**, 180 (1977).
[2]Y. RONEN, D. SHVARTS, and J. J. WAGSCHAL, *Nucl. Sci. Eng.*, **60**, 97 (1976).
[3]G. I. BELL and S. GLASSTONE, *Nuclear Reactor Theory*, p. 47, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, New York (1970).

raised by Lewins,[1] namely to analyze the neutron-energy-spectrum modification resulting from a physical change in a given assembly. Given a multiplying assembly, we consider a second one, geometrically identical to the first, but of slightly different density and therefore of slightly different reactivity. If the flux in the first assembly, $\psi$, satisfies Eq. (1), then the flux in the second assembly, $\psi + \delta\psi$, satisfies

$$[\boldsymbol{\Omega}\cdot\nabla + (1+\epsilon)\Sigma + (\alpha+\delta\alpha)/v](\psi+\delta\psi) = (1+\epsilon)\int c(E')\Sigma(E')f(\boldsymbol{v}'\to\boldsymbol{v})[\psi(\boldsymbol{v}')+\delta\psi(\boldsymbol{v}')]d^3v' \quad , \quad (5)$$

where $\epsilon$ is the relative density difference of the two assemblies ($\epsilon \ll 1$). If we now keep only first-order terms, we obtain for $\delta\psi$ the equation

$$(\boldsymbol{\Omega}\cdot\nabla + \Sigma + \alpha/v)\,\delta\psi = \int c(E')\Sigma(E')f(\boldsymbol{v}'\to\boldsymbol{v})\,\delta\psi(\boldsymbol{v}')d^3v' + S \quad , \quad (6)$$

where the "external" source is

$$S = \left(\epsilon\boldsymbol{\Omega}\cdot\nabla + \frac{\epsilon\alpha - \delta\alpha}{v}\right)\psi \quad . \quad (7)$$

The modification of the flux, $\delta\psi$, is thus caused by the simultaneous application of two external source terms. The term $(\epsilon\alpha - \delta\alpha)\psi/v$ is proportional (at every point in phase-space) to the neutron density satisfying Eq. (1), which is equivalent to the homogeneous part of Eq. (6). This source term therefore does not modify the neutron spectrum. The introduction of the "leakage source term," $\epsilon\boldsymbol{\Omega}\nabla\psi$, stemming from the density change, will in general modify the neutron spectrum. Let us briefly analyze this source term, and define the local leakage cross section $\Sigma_l$,

$$\epsilon\boldsymbol{\Omega}\cdot\nabla\psi = \epsilon v\boldsymbol{\Omega}\cdot\nabla\eta(\boldsymbol{r},\boldsymbol{\Omega},E) \equiv \epsilon\Sigma_l(\boldsymbol{r},\boldsymbol{\Omega},E)v\eta \quad . \quad (8)$$

As long as $\Sigma_l v$ is an increasing function of $v$, the local source term is harder than the original neutron density. [This is analogous to diffusion cooling, where $\Sigma_l$ is given by $DB^2$ (Ref. 4)]. If the total cross section is constant and the normalized distribution $f(\boldsymbol{v}'\to\boldsymbol{v})$ is separable,[5] it can easily be seen that in a critical assembly $\Sigma_l$ is energy independent, and $\Sigma_l v$ therefore is an increasing function of $v$. A positive relative density difference, $\epsilon$, which is followed by a higher $\alpha$ reactivity, introduces a positive harder external source in Eq. (6) and is thus accompanied by a hardening of the neutron spectrum. For a negative $\epsilon$, a negative harder source is introduced and the neutron spectrum is softened.

To conclude, we have analyzed the shift in the neutron energy spectrum due to a reactivity change in a particular case. A change in a system (but not a change caused by the distribution of a *real* $1/v$ absorber) changes its reactivity and induces a change in the neutron spectrum. The *calculation* of the $\alpha$ reactivity introduces a *fictitious* $1/v$ absorber. The shift in the spectrum is the result of the reactivity change and is *not* related to any change in the *fictitious* $1/v$ absorber, as it is sometimes erroneously understood or mispresented. Similar analyses of many other cases lead to similar results.

*Y. Ronen*

Ben-Gurion University
Department of Nuclear Engineering
Beer Sheva, Israel

*D. Shalitin*

Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Racah Institute of Physics
Jerusalem 91109, Israel

*D. Shvarts*

Israel Atomic Energy Commission
Nuclear Research Center-Negev
Box 9001
Beer Sheva, Israel

*J. J. Wagschal*
*Y. Yeivin*

Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Racah Institute of Physics
Jerusalem 91109, Israel

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[4] J. R. LAMARSH, *Introduction to Nuclear Reactor Theory*, p. 249, Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., Inc., Reading, Massachusetts (1966).

[5] D. SHALITIN, Y. YEIVIN, and J. J. WAGSCHAL, *Trans Am Nucl Soc*, **23**, 539 (1976).