ION-AcouSTIC INSTABILITY AND ANOMALOUS THERMAL CONDUCTIVITY IN THE SOLAR TRANSITION REGION

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Abstract. Within the framework of model calculations the possibility of the ion-acoustic oscillation instability in the plasma without current and particle fluxes, but with the anisotropic distribution function, which corresponds to heat flux is shown. The model distribution function taking into account the medium conditions was selected. The increment of ion-acoustic oscillation is investigated as functional of the distribution function parameters. As a result, the threshold condition for the anisotropic part of the distribution function, under which begins the build-up of ion-acoustic oscillation with the wave vector opposite to the heat flux is studied. The critical heat flux, which corresponds to the threshold of ion-acoustic instability, is determined. For the solar conditions, the critical heat flux proved close to the heat flux from the corona into the chromosphere on the boundary of the transition region. The estimations show that out of the active regions and even in the active regions not with the strongest magnetic fields ion-acoustic turbulence can be responsible for forming of the sharp temperature jump.

The generalized Wiedemann-Franz law for the non-isothermic quasi-neutral plasma with developed ion-acoustic turbulence is discussed. This law determines the relationship between electrical and thermal conductivities in a plasma with well-developed ion-acoustic turbulence. The anomalously low thermal conductivity responsible to the formation of high temperature gradients in the zone of the temperature jump is explained. Results are used to explain some properties of the stellar atmosphere transition region.

Key words: star, Sun, chromosphere, corona, transition region, turbulence, thermal conductivity
1. Introduction

A fundamental problem is an explanation of the temperature jump between the chromosphere and the corona in late-type stars (Jordan, 1996). Actually the temperature jump formation depends on many factors. For example, we must take into account the medium cooling during the ultraviolet radiation, the medium composition changing along altitude, and the unsteady magnetic structures. In our opinion, primary meaning has the low thermal conductivity of turbulent plasma. As the natural reason for turbulence serves a heat flux from the corona into the chromosphere.

At the present time the space plasma physics accumulated many results about the wave instabilities (Zhelezniakov, 1996). We will show additionally that the instability of ion-acoustic oscillations can be realized in the absence of ordinary particle fluxes for a supercritical heat flux through the medium. Naturally, when heat flux is present, there is the specific heterogeneity of the medium. We will consider that the wavelength of the ion-acoustic oscillations (it is compared with Debye's radius) is small in comparison with a scale of the medium heterogeneity. Therefore during the instability increment calculation we will use the local homogeneous medium approximation.

We will give special attention to the study of the conditions, which correspond to the threshold of the ion-acoustic instability and to the estimation of the maximum heat flux, which can pass through the medium in the weak turbulence regime. Let us recall that the plasma nonisothermicity is the necessary condition for existence of ion-acoustic oscillations. We do not have data about the degree of the nonisothermicity in the transition region plasma, but observations showed that in the solar atmosphere the hydrogen temperature even at somewhat high altitudes grows relatively slowly in comparison with the electron temperature (Marsch et al., 2000). This gives reasons to assume that the ion temperature in the transition region is substantially lower than the electron temperature.

In the space plasma with the essential heat flux the significant level of ion-acoustic turbulence can be established. This turbulence provides reason for formation the anomalous collision frequency and comparatively low the plasma thermal conductivity. The obtained expressions for the plasma thermal conductivity give the possibility to explain processes governing the formation of the temperature jump between the chromosphere and the corona in late-type stars.
2. Heat Flux as a Reason Ion-Acoustic Instability in Space Plasma

Let the model distribution function \( f(x, v) \) be the sum of the isotropic \( F(v) \) and the anisotropic \( \Phi(x, v) \) part:

\[
\begin{align*}
    f &= F + \Phi, \\
    F &= f_0(v) + \left| f_1(v) + \frac{v}{4} \frac{\partial f_1}{\partial v} \right|, \\
    \Phi &= \left[ f_1(v) + \frac{v}{4} \frac{\partial f_1}{\partial v} \right] x.
\end{align*}
\]  

(1)

Here \( F(v) = (1/2) \int_{-1}^{1} f(x) \, dx \), \( x = v_z/v \), axis \( z \) is directed along the heat flux, \( f_0(v) \) is the non-negative function, \( f_1(v) \) is the differentiated function. We showed in the paper by Bespalov and Savina (2009) that possible the distribution function in form (1) corresponds to the situation, when in the plasma there is no electron beam but there is heat flux.

Let us take known expressions for the dispersion equation and the increment of ion-acoustic oscillations (Kadomtsev, 1975). For relatively small phase speeds, when \( v_i^2 T_i \ll (\omega/k)^2 \ll \langle v^2 \rangle \), the increment for an isotropic ion distribution function and the selected electron distribution function (1) is written down in the form:

\[
\begin{align*}
    \gamma(y, k) &= \omega \left( \frac{\omega}{k} \right)^3 \frac{m_i \pi^2}{m} \left\{ -F \left( \frac{\omega}{k} \right) - \frac{m}{m_i} F_i \left( \frac{\omega}{k} \right) + \\
    &+ \frac{ky}{\pi \omega} \int_{-1}^{1} \int_{0}^{\infty} \left[ f_1(v) + \frac{v}{4} \frac{\partial f_1}{\partial v} \right] \times \Re \left\{ 1 - x^2 - y^2 \right\}^{-1/2} \, dx \, dv \right\}, \quad (2)
\end{align*}
\]

where \( y = k_z/k \), \( m \) and \( m_i \) are the electron and ion mass, \( n \) is the electron plasma density.

We assume that the ion distribution function is Maxwellian with the temperature \( T_i \). The isotropic part of the electron distribution function in the region of comparatively low velocities is also assumed to be Maxwellian but with the considerably higher temperature \( T \). We will carry out in the expression for the increment integration for \( x \) and for the velocity value \( v \). Then we will consider that maximum on the angular coordinate \( y \) is equal to \( \gamma(k) = \max |y \gamma(y, k)| \) and corresponds to \( y = 1 \), if \( \int_{0}^{\infty} f_1 \, dv > 0 \), and \( y = -1 \),
if $\int_0^\infty f_1 dv < 0$. Then the dimensionless increment $\gamma(k)/\omega_i$, as function from
the dimensionless phase velocity $\xi = \omega/kv_T$ has the following form:

$$\frac{\gamma(k)}{\omega_{pi}} = \xi^2 \left(1 - \pi^{-1/2}B^{2/3}C^{1/3}\xi^2\right)^{1/2} \times \left[A - B\xi - C\xi \exp\left(-\xi^2\right)\right].$$

(3)

Here,

$$A = \frac{9\pi^2 m^{1/2}T_i|q_z|}{2^{5/2}n\kappa m^{3/2}T^{5/2}}, \quad B = \left(\pi \frac{m}{m_i}\right)^{1/2} \left(\frac{T_i}{T}\right)^{3/2}, \quad C = \pi^{1/2} \frac{m_i}{m},$$

$q_z$ is the heat flux density which is transferred by electrons with this distribution function (1). We considered during the increment (3) evolution that $m\omega^2/2\kappa T k^2 < m/m_i$ and therefore $\exp(-m\omega^2/2\kappa T k^2) \simeq 1$. The dependence of the ion-acoustic oscillations increment on the phase velocity for several values of heat flux is shown in Fig. 1: $A = 0$ is the solid line (there is no heat flux), $A = 0.005$ is the broken line, $A = 0.025$ is the dotted line, $A = 0.045$ is the prime dotted line. The function $\gamma(k)/\omega_{pi}$ has maximum value for $\sqrt{\ln(C/\sqrt{2}A)} \leq \xi$. The increment maximum value grows with an
increase in the parameter $A$. The threshold of instability is achieved by satisfaction of the conditions $\gamma/\omega_{pi} = 0$, $\partial/\partial \xi (\gamma/\omega_{pi}) = 0$ and the critical heat flux is determined:

$$|q_z| = \delta \frac{n (\kappa T)^{3/2}}{m_i^{1/2}} ,$$

where $\delta = (2^{5/2} T_i^{1/2} \xi_{th})/(9\pi^{3/2} T^{1/2}) \approx 1$. This result practically coincides with the expression, obtained by us in the paper (Bespalov and Savina, 2008) by another method. If in the heterogeneous plasma heat flux is constant, then the maximum increment is realized in a certain intermediate region, where is minimal the production $n T^{3/2}$.

Well known the experimental data about the altitude distributions of the plasma density and electron temperature in the solar atmosphere (Aschwanden, 2004). As a result of the analysis of these data it is clear, that the increment can become positive first of all in the transition region, where for $q_z \approx 5 \cdot 10^5 \text{ erg} \cdot \text{cm}^{-2} \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$ the electron plasma density $n \approx 10^{10} \text{cm}^{-3}$ is much less than in the chromosphere, and the temperature $T \approx 10^5 \text{K}$ is much less than in the corona.

### 3. Self-Consistent Model for Temperature Jump in the Transition Region of Stellar Atmosphere

We will consider that on the boundaries of transition region there are no regular velocities of electrons and ions $\vec{u} = \vec{u}_i = 0$, electric current and macroscopic electric field is absent. Naturally, in this case the density of electrons and ions at each point must be equal ($n = n_i$). We will limit ourselves to the examination of one-dimensional temperature jump in the co-ordinate space. Let us select axis $z$ in the direction of a temperature jump from the corona to the chromosphere, and reference point is in the centre of temperature jump.

Out of the heat source the structure of the stationary temperature jump in the nonisothermic plasma is described by the sufficiently complex system of quasilinear set of equations (see [3,8-9]). For determining the general properties of processes in the temperature jump region it is convenient for each thin layer of the medium to introduce into consideration more well studied experimentally and theoretically the task about the anomalous electrical conductivity in the plasma with the same base parameters. In the paper by...
Bespalov and Savina (2007) introduced the conversion, which to every solution of the anomalous electrical conductivity problem places in the correspondence solution of the anomalous thermal conductivity problem. Practical use of this conversion gave us possibility to formulate the generalized Wiedemann-Franz law, which connects the thermal conductivity of the turbulent plasma \( \chi_\Sigma \) with the anomalous electrical conductivity \( \sigma_\Sigma = \sigma + \sigma_{eff} \) by means of the following relationship:

\[
\chi_\Sigma = \frac{\kappa^2}{e^2} T \delta \sigma_\Sigma, \tag{5}
\]

where \( \kappa \) is Boltzmann constant, \( e \) is the electron charge value, \( T \) is the temperature, \( \sigma \) is the electrical conductivity due to Coulomb collisions, \( \sigma_{eff}(E_z) \) is the anomalous electrical conductivity, depending on the electric field \( E_z \).

Calculations showed that for the correct determination of the thermal conductivity \( \chi_\Sigma \), including the coefficient of usual and anomalous thermal conductivity, it is necessary in formula (5) the electric field \( E_z \) replace by the expression: \(- (3\kappa/2e) \partial T/\partial z \). Let us note that, if the distribution function is close to Maxwell’s function, then calculations give the possibility to define concretely the numerical coefficient \( \delta = 5/3 \).

Fourier’s formula determines heat flow in the medium

\[
q_z = -\chi_\Sigma \frac{\partial T}{\partial z}. \tag{6}
\]

We will use the generalised Wiedemann-Franz law (5) and well-known expressions for the anomalous electrical conductivity for the record of explicit expression for the heat flux in the plasma with developed ion-acoustic turbulence [5,11]. Thus, we obtain the dependence of heat flux on the temperature and its gradient:

\[
\frac{q_z}{T} = \frac{8.4 \cdot 10^{-2} \delta (\kappa T)^{3/2}}{e^2 m^{1/2}} \left| \frac{\partial T}{\partial z} \right|, \quad \text{if} \quad q < q_{cr}; \tag{7a}
\]

\[
\frac{q_z}{T} = 1.7 \delta \kappa n \left( \frac{\kappa T}{m_i} \right)^{1/2}, \quad \text{if} \quad q \simeq q_{cr}; \tag{7b}
\]

\[
\frac{q_z}{T} = 1.7 \delta \kappa \left( \frac{\kappa T}{m} \right)^{1/2} \left( \frac{\kappa^{1/2}}{e^{1/2} (8\pi \kappa T)^{1/4}} \right)^{1/2} \left| \frac{\partial T}{\partial z} \right|^{1/2}, \quad \text{if} \quad q > q_{cr}. \tag{7c}
\]
Here $\partial T/\partial z|_{cr} = -(2em/3km_i)(8\pi n_T)^{1/2}$, $q_{cr} = 1.7\delta n(\kappa T)^{3/2}m_i^{-1/2}$ is the critical heat flux, which can pass through plasma in the regime of small temperature gradients. Critical heat flux corresponds to the passage of medium to the state with developed ion-acoustic turbulence.

For study effects, connected exclusively with the anomalous thermal conductivity, let us make the simplifying assumption about the absence of a significant energy input and radiation losses in the lower corona and the transition region. Then heat flux from the solar corona into the chromosphere is constant and equal to (Gibson, 1973)

$$q = 5 \cdot 10^5 \text{erg} \cdot \text{cm}^{-2} \cdot \text{s}^{-1}. \quad (8)$$

As the boundary condition for the equation of thermal conductivity in the solar corona we take for the temperature $z = z_1$ and the electron density $n_1 = 10^8 \text{cm}^{-3}$. These boundary conditions correspond to the heat flux lower than critical. Therefore for study the coordinate temperature dependence it is necessary to use the equation (7a), which corresponds to the heat flux transferred by electrons during Coulomb collisions

$$\frac{\partial T}{\partial z} = -\frac{1.2 \cdot e^4 m_1^{1/2} q}{\delta \kappa^{7/2} T_1^{5/2}}. \quad (9)$$

Integrating equation (9), we obtain the following space dependence of the temperature

$$\frac{T(z)}{T_1} = \left[1 - \frac{(z - z_1)}{\Delta z_1}\right]^{2/7}, \quad (10)$$

where $\Delta(z) = 5\delta \kappa^{7/2} T_1^{7/2} / 21e^4 m_1^{1/2} q$ does not depend on plasma density. A temperature decrease according to the formula (10) will be continuous to the locally critical heat flux, that corresponds to the developed ion-acoustic turbulence. According to the formulas (7a) and (10) when in the lower corona the condition $n T = \text{const}$ is satisfied, we obtain, that the heat flux (8) will become critical for $z_2 - z_1 = 4.95 \cdot 10^{10} \text{cm}$ and $T = T_2 = 5.5 \cdot 10^5 K$. Note that according to experimental data, temperature on the boundary of temperature jump actually is equal to $T_2 = 5 \cdot 10^5 K$. During calculations the mass of ions was equal to the proton mass and the plasma density on the boundary of the temperature jump $n_2 = (2.3 \div 6.3) \cdot 10^8 \text{cm}^{-3}$ (Gallagher et al., 1999).
In the region of the temperature jump for \( z_2 < z \) developed ion-acoustic turbulence is realized. Therefore as the dependence of heat flux on the temperature and its gradient it is necessary to use formula (7c), according to which exist the almost exponential temperature jump

\[
\frac{\partial T}{\partial z} = -q^2 \frac{(2\pi)^{1/2} me}{\delta^2 \kappa^{7/2} n_2^{3/2} T_2^{15/4}} T^{5/4}. \tag{11}
\]

Solution of the equation (11) gives the temperature distribution in the transition region:

\[
\frac{T(z)}{T_2} = \left[ 1 + \frac{(z - z_2)}{(\Delta z)_2} \right]^{-4}, \tag{12}
\]

where \((\Delta z)_2 = 4.4(m^{1/2}/n_2^{1/2})/(\kappa T_2/m)^{7/2}(n_2 m/q)^2 \geq 10^3 cm\). Lower than transition region determined by the formula (12) the temperature trend by the recombination processes is limited. As a result we obtain the height
dependence of temperature shown in Fig. 2. In this figure the height $h$ is counted off upward from the convective zone of solar photosphere.

The obtained results remain in the sufficiently weak magnetic field, when $B < (4\pi nmc^2)^{1/2} \min[(m_i/m)^{1/2}, 0.1(T/T_i)^{1/2}]$. These inequalities will be deliberately carried out, if $B < (4\pi nmc^2)^{1/2} \approx 100\text{G}$ and $n \approx 10^9\text{cm}^{-3}$ because the typical value of magnetic field in the transition region of the solar atmosphere (out of the active regions) is not more than several Gauss.

4. Conclusion

We examined the new model of the formation of stationary turbulent temperature jump in the transition region in the late-type star atmosphere. The regime of developed ion-acoustic turbulence is realized for the significant local heat flux from the corona into the chromosphere. As a result of this the thermal conductivity of medium falls and grows the temperature gradient. The results of study showed that there is the critical heat flux, which can pass through the plasma of lower corona in the regime of comparatively small temperature gradients. The temperature jump is formed near to the local critical heat flux.

In our opinion experimental diagnostics of ion-acoustic oscillations in the transition region is important independent task. Probably, for this purpose it is possible to use data of X-ray and millimeter observations. The direct measurements of local electric field based on Stark effect are especially interesting.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to V.V. Zheleznyakov for attention to our work. This work was supported in part by RFBR (project no. 11-02-00209-a), Program NSh-4588.2006.2, and Program no. 16 of RAS.
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