Investigating Plasma Waves and Turbulence in Space Plasma Using Langmuir Probes*

Cundiff Felicity
University of Washington, Seattle WA, 98103, USA
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This project is dedicated to investigating space plasma by conducting a thorough examination of plasma waves and turbulence through the utilization of Langmuir probes. The central goal is to gain a profound understanding of the fundamental physical processes at play and their direct relevance to space weather phenomena. The study encompasses the entire research lifecycle, from the development of specialized instruments and meticulous mission planning to comprehensive data collection, rigorous analysis, and theoretical modeling. By delving into the intricate interactions within space plasma, this investigation not only contributes to advancing our knowledge of fundamental plasma physics but also holds significant implications for enhancing our capabilities in monitoring and predicting space weather events.

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In the vast expanse of space, charged particles and magnetic fields govern deep space, giving rise to intricate subjects such as plasma waves and turbulence. Understanding these phenomena not only provides a fundamental grasp of plasma dynamics but also offers crucial insights for practical applications in space weather monitoring. Plasma, the fourth state of matter composed of ions and electrons, forms the basis for magnetospheres and ionospheres, making it a key player in deep space.

A. Langmuir Probes:

Langmuir probes, named after Nobel laureate Irving Langmuir, pioneered the unraveling of space plasma mysteries [Bla14]. These diagnostic instruments measure vital plasma parameters, specifically electron temperature and density. Deployed on spacecraft or sounding rockets, Langmuir probes strategically extend booms into surrounding plasma, generating current-voltage characteristics that hold the key to understanding space plasma dynamics, as referenced in [Dav15]. Below, we can see a diagram of the probe. These probes have been employing electric probes in plasma chambers for nearly a century.

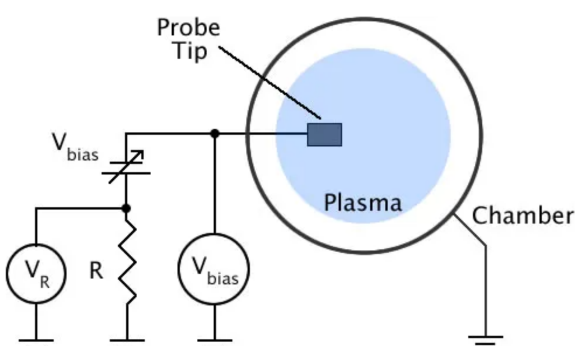

FIG. 1: Diagram of the Langmuir probe setup.

The operation of Langmuir probes involves inserting a conductive object into the plasma, creating a small electrically biased system. Langmuir probes provide data on the properties and behavior of space plasma, conducting in-situ measurements of crucial parameters like electron density (n_e), temperature (T_e), and ion density (n_i), serving as an indicator for spacecraft charging [Bla14]. The probes obtain a complete I-V curve for deriving plasma parameters, and the continuously biased Langmuir probe provides high-cadence measurements for spatial resolution of relative plasma density. This interaction yields current-voltage characteristics, offering valuable insights into electron temperature and density [Bla14].

Positioned on extending spacecraft booms, these probes strategically interact with the surrounding plasma, deployed in regions such as the magnetosphere, ionosphere, or areas influenced by the solar wind. In complex plasma environments, the probe current could be a sum of various currents, such as thermal currents, photoelectron current, secondary electron current, backscatter electron current, etc. In simpler environments, like the nighttime ionosphere with no active aurora, the predominant current is the thermal current [Bla14].

B. Plasma Waves and Turbulence:

In space, plasma consists of charged particles and magnetic fields, representing the dynamic fourth state of matter that forms magnetospheres and ionospheres. Within this plasma, waves and turbulence, fundamental components of space plasma dynamics, orchestrate intricate interactions. These waves, such as whistler waves and Langmuir waves, manifest as rhythmic oscillations in the density of charged particles. Turbulence arises from irregular fluctuations in electron density, significantly influencing the overall behavior of space plasma.

This phenomenon becomes particularly pronounced in the presence of solar winds, which are constant streams

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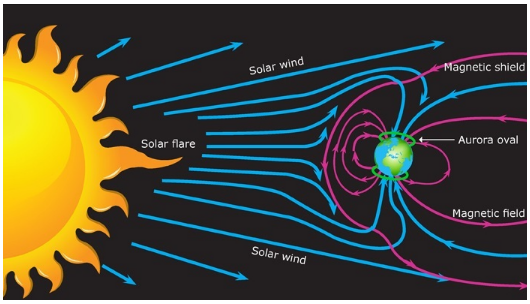

FIG. 2: Diagram of the solar wind plasma and plasma waves and turbulence.

of charged particles emanating from the Sun. The varying intensity and composition of the solar wind serve as drivers of space plasma dynamics, shaping the relationship between plasma waves and turbulence. below is a diagram of solar wind plasma waves and turbulence.

II. EXPERIMENTAL METHODS

Across space, the interplay of charged particles and magnetic fields governs the celestial realm, giving rise to phenomena such as plasma waves and turbulence. Examining these events provides essential insights for practical applications in monitoring space weather. Plasma, recognized as the fourth state of matter consisting of ions and electrons, serves as the foundational element for magnetospheres and ionospheres, making it a crucial entity in the vast expanse of deep space.

The design of Langmuir probes plays a pivotal role in measuring electron temperature and density within plasma. Positioned on spacecraft exteriors, these probes utilize Langmuir oscillations to generate comprehensive current-voltage characteristics of the surrounding plasma.

Plasma waves, essential for energy and momentum transfer, are oscillations within the plasma. Langmuir waves, intricately associated with the collective motion of electrons, play a significant role. Simultaneously, turbulence introduces complexity with chaotic fluctuations in plasma properties.

A. Measuring Plasma Waves and Turbulence with Langmuir Probes

The overarching objective of the project is to conduct an investigation into plasma waves and turbulence in regions of space, leveraging Langmuir probes. Langmuir probes possess the capability to detect and identify various plasma waves, including Langmuir waves and whistler waves. Systematic analysis of voltage-current characteristics enables detailed information on the presence, frequency, and amplitude of these waves. The measurement of fluctuations in electron density, a crucial aspect in capture by Langmuir probes, serves as a potent indicator of turbulence in the plasma. These fluctuations provide insight into turbulence in the surrounding space plasma.

B. Research

The aim of this project is to conduct an exploration of plasma waves and turbulence in space, utilizing Langmuir probes. Additionally, it seeks to observe the correlation between plasma waves and turbulence with significant space weather events, such as solar flares. The investigation aims to observe the correlation within the plasma environment by scrutinizing fluctuations in electron density. Applying turbulence analysis techniques, the research aims to unravel the nature, scales, and relationships of turbulence to other plasma parameters, such as space weather events and solar flares.

To systematically analyze and characterize plasma waves and turbulence in the space environment using Langmuir probes, the research will follow a well-defined experimental plan:

- Develop or acquire a Langmuir probe system designed for deployment on a spacecraft or sounding rocket, ensuring high precision in measuring electron temperature and density.

- Collect data on electron temperature and density using the Langmuir probes, simultaneously integrating information from other onboard instruments or external sources, such as magnetic field data and solar wind conditions.

- Analyze the collected data to identify and characterize various types of plasma waves, including whistler waves, Langmuir waves, and other instabilities. The analysis will explore the frequency, amplitude, and spatial distribution of these waves.

C. Conducting the Experiment

Below are the detailed steps for the experimental plan:

a. Probe Deployment: Obtain a Langmuir probe, either intricately designed for this experiment or one that will be tailored for it. Either way, it will be strategically deployed on the spacecraft's outer surfaces. Depending on when the launch will happen, the deployment locations will be chosen, taking into consideration the plasma conditions such as the magnetosphere, ionosphere, and regions affected by the solar wind. This strategic positioning ensures maximum exposure to varying plasma environments, allowing us to obtain comprehensive data for analysis.

b. Voltage Sweeping: We will be employing the sweeping Langmuir probe technique, which involves applying varying voltages to the deployed probes. This process will provide us with comprehensive current-voltage (I-V) curves, offering detailed insights into the electrical characteristics of the plasma. The obtained curves assist in deriving essential plasma parameters, including electron temperature (T_e) and density (n_e). This technique is also referenced in [Bla14]. Furthermore, the technique is instrumental in identifying specific plasma waves, such as Langmuir waves and whistler waves, providing a nuanced understanding of the intricate plasma dynamics at play.

c. Continuous Biasing: Another method we can investigate while in space is the Continuous Biased Langmuir Probe mode. This mode will be used for high-cadence measurements, providing a constant stream of data for the spatial resolution of relative plasma density. By continuously measuring changes in plasma density over time, we can gather information for turbulence studies. Fluctuations in electron density, a key parameter measured by Langmuir probes, will be examined to study turbulence within the plasma. Turbulence analysis techniques will be applied, looking into the relationships of turbulence with other plasma parameters.

III. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

A. Expected Outcomes

The research project envisions a spectrum of outcomes that promise to deepen our understanding of space plasma dynamics and fundamental plasma physics.

a. Advancements in Fundamental Plasma Physics: The project's outcomes delve into an attempt to understand the fundamental plasma physics in space, encompassing observational data, theoretical modeling, and simulations derived from every experiment. By investigating the interaction between charged particles and magnetic fields, which gives rise to plasma waves and turbulence, the research aims to enhance our knowledge of space environments and phenomena. This approach is crucial for practical applications in space weather since plasma, recognized as the fourth state of matter composed of ions and electrons, forms the fundamental element for magnetospheres and ionospheres, playing a vital role in deep space. The anticipated advancements resulting from this comprehensive investigation will have far-reaching implications for future space exploration and our comprehension of the fundamental principles governing plasma physics.

b. Comprehensive Characterization: The design of Langmuir probes is pivotal for measuring electron temperature and density within plasma. Positioned on the exteriors of spacecraft, these probes employ Langmuir oscillations to generate comprehensive current-voltage characteristics of the surrounding plasma. The experimental plan aims to provide detailed data for characterizing plasma waves and turbulence in specific space environments. By strategically deploying Langmuir probes and employing advanced measurement techniques, the experiment offers a comprehensive overview of regions of space, including measurements of electron temperature, electron density, and identification of various plasma waves.

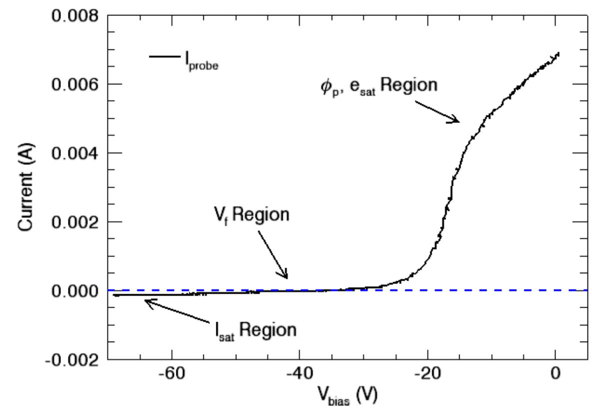

FIG. 3: Diagram of the Langmuir probe current (I) versus applied probe bias (V_b)

c. Insights into Space Weather Dynamics: The correlation of observational data with space weather events is expected to yield invaluable insights into the influence of plasma waves and turbulence on charged particles and magnetic fields in space. Through a detailed assessment of the implications of observed plasma phenomena on space weather phenomena, the project aims to deepen our understanding of the dynamic interplay between space weather and plasma dynamics. Plasma waves, essential for energy and momentum transfer, represent oscillations within the plasma, with Langmuir waves intricately linked to the collective motion of electrons, holding significant importance. Concurrently, turbulence introduces complexity with chaotic fluctuations in plasma properties.

The figure refers to data from [Dav15], explaining the electron temperature regions of Langmuir probe data, depicting the electron tail distribution. In general, this is how our data should appear as we gain more knowledge about plasma and solar winds, understanding their behavior. However, the primary observation should be the tail distribution, which is significantly hotter than the bulk plasma electrons. An additional consideration addresses the potential presence of a hot electron distribution in the plasma. This involves recognizing different electron populations and distinguishing between plasma electrons and beam electrons. A separate linear region in the logarithmic plot is analyzed to determine the temperature of the hot electron tail [Dav15]. This analysis is depicted in the data for 3 and **??**.

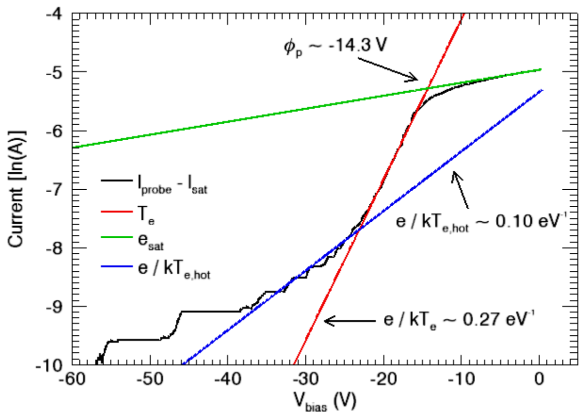

FIG. 4: Chart depicting the electron temperature based on Langmuir probe data, illustrating the distribution of electron tails

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploration of space plasma dynamics, with a focus on Langmuir probes and their interaction with plasma waves and turbulence, is essential. The intricate relationship between charged particles and magnetic fields not only strengthens our knowledge of fundamental plasma physics but also has practical implications for space weather monitoring.

Plasma waves and turbulence, fundamental components of space plasma dynamics, further contribute to the complexity of deep space. The project's objective to measure and analyze plasma waves and turbulence using Langmuir probes represents a commendable effort to bridge theoretical understanding with practical observations. The anticipated outcomes, ranging from advancements in fundamental plasma physics to comprehensive characterizations of specific space environments, hold promise for enhancing our knowledge of space weather dynamics. Langmuir probes are valuable tools that play a pivotal role in exploring the world of space plasma. By strategically deploying these probes on spacecraft or rockets, we gain unprecedented insights into more plasma parameters such as electron density and temperature.

The project's systematic approach, outlined in the experimental plan, involves deploying Langmuir probes in strategic locations, employing voltage sweeping techniques, and continuous biasing for high-cadence measurements. As we delve into the intricacies of plasma behavior, as depicted in figures such as the Langmuir probe current-voltage characteristics and electron temperature distribution, we anticipate gaining a more nuanced understanding of the behavior of plasma and solar winds. This knowledge will not only deepen our appreciation for the beauty of celestial phenomena but will also have practical implications for future space missions and space weather prediction. The expected outcomes, including advancements in fundamental plasma physics, comprehensive characterizations, and insights into space weather dynamics, help us contribute to our broader comprehension of the fundamental principles governing plasma physics.

With all that said, the exploration of space plasma dynamics and the role of Langmuir probes in this endeavor represent a commendable scientific pursuit with far-reaching implications. The project's contribution to our understanding of plasma waves, turbulence, and their correlation with space weather events is a testament to the relentless pursuit of knowledge in deep space.

REFERENCES

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