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Comment on Weakly dissipative dust-ion acoustic wave modulation [J. Plasma Phys. 82, 905820104 (2016)]

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In a recent article [J. Plasma Phys. 82, 905820104 (2009)], weakly dissipative dust-ion acoustic wave modulation in dusty plasmas was considered. It is shown in this Comment that the analysis thereof involved severe fallacies, and is in fact based on an erroneous plasma fluid model, which fails to satisfy an equilibrium conditions, among other shortcomings. The subsequent analysis therefore is dubious and of limited scientific value.

In a recent article (Alinejad et al 2016) (henceforth to be referred to as Paper 1) an investigation was undertaken of the mechanism of weakly dissipative dust-ion acoustic wave modulation in dusty plasmas. It will be shown in the following that the analysis therein involved severe fallacies, and is in fact based on an erroneous plasma fluid model, which fails to satisfy an equilibrium conditions, among other shortcomings. The subsequent analysis therefore is dubious and of limited scientific value.

The authors of Paper 1 consider the following fluid model:

\[ \frac{\partial n_i}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial}{\partial x}(n_i u_i) = -\nu_e n_i + \nu_i n_e, \]

\[ \frac{\partial n_i}{\partial t} + u_i \frac{\partial n_i}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial \phi}{\partial x} = -\sigma \frac{\partial n_i}{\partial x} - \nu_e^{\text{eff}} u_i, \]

\[ \frac{\partial^2 \phi}{\partial x^2} = n_e - n_i + 1 - \mu; \] (1)

see Eqs. (2.1-3) in Paper 1. According to their formulation, the variables \( n_i, u_i \) and \( \phi \) denote the ion number density, the ion fluid speed and the “electrostatic wave potential” (sic), respectively, while the electrons are taken to be Maxwellian, viz. their density reads \( n_e = \mu e^\phi \). Note that the right-hand side (RHS) of the first (continuity) equation involves the parameters \( \nu_e \) and \( \nu_i \), which allegedly represent the “frequency of ion recombination on dust particles” and the “plasma ionization frequency”, respectively, while the RHS in the second (momentum) equation involves the parameter \( \nu_e^{\text{eff}} \) which denotes “the effective frequency characterizing a loss in the ion momentum due to recombination on dust particles and Coulomb elastic collisions between ions and dust grains” (quoting the authors in Paper 1). The dust component is explicitly assumed to be “stationary” (i.e., implied to be characterized by constant charge state \( Z_d \) and fixed number density \( n_d \)), and contributes to the model via the parameter \( \mu = n_{a0}/n_{i0} = 1 - Z_d n_{a0}/n_{i0} \).

A number of remarks and comments are in order.

Comment 1. Clearly, the total number of the ions is not conserved within the aforementioned model: this is reflected by the non-zero RHS in the first (ion continuity) equation. Physically speaking, it is implied that both ions and electrons populate the dust grains dynamically, as suggested by the charging rates \( \nu_e \) and \( \nu_i \) (defined above). However, if this was true, the charge state \( Z_d \) would -obviously- not remain constant, as implied in the model, nor would the total electron density (implicitly assumed to be equal to \( n_e = \mu, \) i.e. constant).

It is evident that the model (along with the accompanying parameter definitions) has been inspired from a number of previous works (Goree et al. 1999; Vladimirov, Ostrikov & Yu 1999; Cramer & Vladimirov 2001; Popel et al. 2003), which are explicitly cited in Paper 1. However, it must be emphasized that the models proposed in those articles consider a variable dust charge and dust density, and are thus consistent (in contrast with Paper 1), both physically and mathematically. In particular, the model employed by Vladimirov, Ostrikov & Yu (1999) involves variable electron and ion number density [see eqs. (1) and (3) in the latter reference], but this is done in conjunction with variable dust number density and dust charge dynamics [note eqs. (4-5) in the same reference]. That model may not be applied gratuitously, if one considers a constant dust charge, stationary dust grains and inertialess electrons, as it the case in Paper 1.

From a fundamental point of view, it appears that Alinejad et al (Alinejad et al 2016) have taken into account the effects of ion recombination on the dust particles, and that of ion momentum loss due to recombination on the dust particles and also due to electrostatic collisions between ions and dust grains, but they have neglected the effect of dust charging. The frequency scales characterizing these effects are typically of the same order of magnitude (Mamun & Shukla, 2002), and therefore these should have been considered on equal footing in the model. This assumption can therefore not be justified physically, nor mathematically.

Concluding our first observation, the ion-fluid model introduced in Paper 1 is of limited validity and of questionable physical value, as it fails to preserve the ion number density, entailing a dubious and unclear physical interpretation of the associated results. Although dust charging implies precisely a variation of the electron and ion population density, this is not taking into account properly through the specific fluid model considered in Paper 1 (Alinejad et al 2016).
Comment 2. The authors of Paper 1 consider an equilibrium state, namely \( S^{(0)} \) in their eq. (3.1), which is later defined as the triad (vector) \( S^{(0)} = (n^{(0)}, u^{(0)}, \phi^{(0)}) = (1, 0, 0) \). This equilibrium state is then used as reference state, around which the state variables are expanded in a polynomial series in \( \epsilon \) (\( \ll 1 \)): cf. Eq. (3.1) in Paper 1.

A crucial point needs to be made at this stage. It is straightforward to see that the above reference state does not satisfy the system of fluid equations (1)! To see this, one may simply substitute for \( (n^{(0)}, u^{(0)}, \phi^{(0)}) = (1, 0, 0) \) into (1), to find that the first of Eqs. (1) yields a non-zero RHS in this case. This is essentially an algebraic manifestation of the physical fact that (as mentioned above) ion continuity is not preserved through this model.

Interestingly, Alinejad et al overcome the latter issue (i.e., the lack of equilibrium state in their model) by inventing an analytical trick, namely by scaling down the (fictitious) ion and electron annihilation mechanisms to order \( \epsilon^2 \). It turns out that the linear dispersion characteristics of the model, expressed at first and second order in this perturbation method (Kourakis and Shukla, 2005) are thus left unaffected by the erroneous physical mechanism introduced (i.e., ion and electron number variation). As a consequence, expressions (3.3-5) in Paper 1, providing the dispersion relation, the first-order amplitude corrections and the group velocity, coincide with earlier results Kourakis & Shukla (2003, 2004), as the authors of Paper 1 correctly point out, in corroboration of their question of the validity of the results in Paper 1. It may be argued that, focusing on the formal structure of the dissipative NLSE (2) above, and ignoring for a minute the definitions of the coefficients in it, that the analysis of modulational instability presented in Section 4 of Paper 1 is interesting and valuable per se. A twofold approach may be adopted here. First of all, a crucial point in Section 4 of Paper 1 is the derivation of the expression

\[ \Delta(\tau) = -Q\phi^2\exp(-2R\tau) \]  

for the nonlinear frequency shift [see the discussion following (4.1) in Paper 1], assuming an unperturbed amplitude (argument, in the polar representation) \( \phi_0 = \text{Arg}(\phi) \) (recall that \( \phi \) is complex). Formally, this is tantamount to a transformation of the form \( Q \to Q\exp(-2R\tau) \), which naturally entails an exponential decay of the critical wavenumber \( K_c = (2Q/P)^{1/2} \), viz.

\[ K_c = (2Q/P)^{1/2} \rightarrow (2Q/P)^{1/2}\exp(-2R\tau). \]  

The authors admit that this procedure is adapted from Xue (2003), who described dust-acoustic wave modulation taking into account dust-charge fluctuations [a different physical problem, nonetheless leading to an equation formally identical to (2) above]. It can be pointed
out that the above result, as expressed, say, in relations (3) and (4) above, is rather trivial, as it follows directly from a simple transformation of the form
\[ \phi \rightarrow \phi' \exp(-R\tau). \]  
(5)

In other words, it may be shown upon simple substitution of (5) into (2), that (2) becomes:
\[ i\partial_{\tau}\phi' + P \frac{\partial^2 \phi'}{\partial \xi^2} + Q' |\phi'|^2 \phi' = 0, \]  
(6)

where \( Q' = Q \exp(-2R\tau) \). The analytical findings in the first part of Sec. 4 in Paper 1, relying on equations in the form of our Eqs. (3) and (4) above in particular (for the exponentially decaying nonlinear frequency shift \( \Delta \) and for the wavenumber threshold \( K_c \)), thus simply follow from the above considerations, combined into the standard definitions for these quantities; see e.g. in Kourakis & Shukla (2003, 2004, 2005). For instance, the monochromatic wave solution of the “standard” form of the NLSE (6) reads \( \phi' = |\phi'| \exp(-Q'|\phi'|^2\tau) \), which immediately yields the frequency shift \( \Delta = -Q'|\phi'|^2 = -Qe^{-2R\tau}|\phi'|^2 \), i.e. precisely Eq. (3) above (upon a trivial change in notation).

It follows that the plots presented in Figs. 2 and 3 in Paper 1 are founded on the above rationale, while depending on the actual definition of \( R \) - which is dubious, as discussed earlier. Regrettably, the graphical results presented in Paper 1 are therefore of doubtful value, as they rely on the (questionable) physical assumptions of the model, as discussed above.

The above suggests that the modulational instability related results in (Alinejad et al 2016) (namely, the instability growth and associated critical wavenumber) are not erroneous, but could have been obtained via a simpler analysis, than the one adopted – in turn based on Xue (2003).

In conclusion, we have shown that the fluid model presented in (Alinejad et al 2016) is intrinsically flawed, as it involves insurmountable errors in its physical interpretation, but also algebraic errors in the perturbative analysis presented therein. The results are therefore of no physical value. Admittedly, the modulational stability obtained in that article, based on a generic form of the dissipative NLS equation, is legitimate and perhaps interesting, but the outcome is rather trivial (as it can be recovered upon a simple phase-transformation from the original equation). Still, one is led to questionable results, once the so called ion-dust and electron-dust collisions are taken into account.


