Improved Limits on Scalar Weak Couplings

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(Received 12 January 1993)

I point out that β -delayed proton spectroscopy is a powerful probe of possible scalar contributions to nuclear β decay, and use Schardt and Riisager's data on the shape of the beta-delayed proton peaks from the superallowed decays of ^{32}Ar and ^{33}Ar to set improved upper limits on such couplings. Implications of these limits for leptoquark masses are mentioned.

PACS numbers: 23.40.Bw, 27.30.+t

Although there is much experimental evidence for the $V - A$ form of the charged weak current, the constraints on scalar couplings (which would occur if a charged scalar boson or a leptoquark [1] were exchanged instead of the $W^\pm$) are relatively poor [2, 3]. This state of affairs arises, in part, because the scalar couplings must be inferred from observables (particularly the e - ν correlation) in which they enter quadratically, unless one makes restrictive hypotheses about their parity properties or assumes that they violate time-reversal invariance [4]. The classic e - ν correlation data were obtained by observing the lepton recoil effect on the energy distribution of stable daughter nuclei from ^6He , ^{19}Ne , ^{23}Ne , and ^{35}Ar decays (see Ref. [5]). Such experiments are very difficult because the recoil energies are only a few hundred eV, and high-precision results are today available in just a few cases (notably ^6He [6] and n decay [7]). None of these is a pure Fermi transition and therefore particularly sensitive to scalar couplings.

Schardt and Riisager [8] recently completed a beautiful study of ^{32}Ar decay in which they measured with high precision the shape of the beta-delayed proton peak following the superallowed decay of ^{32}Ar to its isospin analog 0^+ state in ^{32}Cl . In this case the lepton recoil is delivered to a decaying state, and the c.m.s.-to-lab transformation gives the decay proton an energy spread which exceeds the energy imparted to the beta-decay daughter by a factor of $4mv/MV \approx 60$, where m and v refer to the proton and M and V to the recoiling ^{32}Cl . Because its particle decays are isospin-forbidden, the natural width of the ^{32}Cl daughter level is so small [9] that the shape of the proton peak is dominated by the e - ν - p triple-correlation asymmetry parameter, A , defined, for example, in Refs. [8, 10]. Schardt and Riisager extract

$$A = 1.00 \pm 0.08, \quad (1)$$

where the error is quoted at 2σ . When the decay protons are emitted isotropically in the rest frame of the daughter nucleus (this must be the case in ^{32}Ar decay because the daughter has $J = 0$), A is identical to the more familiar quantity a , which describes the e - ν angular correlation,

$$W(\theta_{e\nu}) \propto 1 + a \frac{p}{E} \cos(\theta_{e\nu}). \quad (2)$$

Here p and E refer to the momentum and energy of the beta particle, and the neutrino is taken to be massless. For a pure Fermi transition a is given by [4]

$$a = \frac{|C_V|^2 + |C'_V|^2 - |C_S|^2 - |C'_S|^2}{|C_V|^2 + |C'_V|^2 + |C_S|^2 + |C'_S|^2}, \quad (3)$$

where the subscripts S and V refer to scalar and vector couplings, and the ratio C'_i/C_i determines the lepton helicities: e.g., $C'_V = C_V$ or $C'_S = -C_S$ imply left-handed electrons and right-handed positrons. A time-reversal-violating (TRV) scalar $\times$ vector interference term of order $\alpha Z \langle m_e/p \rangle \approx 0.028$ has been neglected as it is not significant at the current level of experimental precision. [Equation (3) follows because in a vector interaction the helicities of the e^+ and the ν_e are opposite, while in a scalar interaction they are the same.] The Schardt and Riisager result, therefore, sets a 95%-confidence-level upper limit on scalar couplings of

$$\epsilon_S = \frac{|C_S|^2 + |C'_S|^2}{|C_V|^2 + |C'_V|^2} \leq 4.2 \times 10^{-2}. \quad (4)$$

It should be noted that this limit is conservative in the sense that if any Gamow-Teller peak had fallen within the ≈ 25 keV width of Schardt and Riisager's superallowed peak it would have reduced their value of A and therefore could not mask a scalar interaction that would necessarily also reduce the value of A .

A more restrictive limit on scalar couplings can be inferred from Schardt and Riisager's data on the broadening of the delayed proton peak following the superallowed $1/2^+ \rightarrow 1/2^+$ decay of ^{33}Ar , for which they obtain

$$A = 1.02 \pm 0.04, \quad (5)$$

where the error is again quoted at 2σ . Because the delayed protons were observed with polarization-insensitive detectors, the decays of the $J = 1/2$ daughter state are effectively isotropic (any parity violation in the nuclear states is completely negligible in this context) so that a is again identical to A . The ^{33}Ar decay is a mixed Fermi/Gamow-Teller transition so the expression for the e - ν asymmetry becomes [4]

$$a = \frac{(|C_V|^2 + |C'_V|^2 - |C_S|^2 - |C'_S|^2) + (|C_T|^2 + |C'_T|^2 - |C_A|^2 - |C'_A|^2)/(3y^2)}{(|C_V|^2 + |C'_V|^2 + |C_S|^2 + |C'_S|^2) + (|C_T|^2 + |C'_T|^2 + |C_A|^2 + |C'_A|^2)/(3y^2)}, \quad (6)$$

where the subscripts A and T refer to axial and tensor weak couplings and $y^2 = |M_F|^2/|M_{GT}|^2$ is the Fermi/Gamow-Teller mixing ratio. A small TRV tensor $\times$ axial-vector interference term of order $\alpha Z(m_e/p)/(3y^2)$ has been neglected along with the corresponding TRV scalar $\times$ vector interference term mentioned above. The parameter y^2 could be obtained from the ft value for the transition, but it is not known in this case as only *relative* ^{33}Ar β^+ branching ratios were measured [11]. Nevertheless, a lower bound on y^2 can be obtained from a itself because $|C_T|^2, |C'_T|^2 \ll 3y^2|C_V|^2, 3y^2|C'_V|^2$ (this condition will turn out to be consistent with existing [2] constraints on $|C_T|^2$ and $|C'_T|^2$). In this case one finds $y^2 \geq 33$.

The ^{33}Ar result sets a 95%-confidence-level upper limit on the sum of the scalar and axial contributions of

$$\frac{|C_S|^2 + |C'_S|^2 + (|C_A|^2 + |C'_A|^2)/3y^2}{|C_V|^2 + |C'_V|^2 + (|C_T|^2 + |C'_T|^2)/3y^2} \leq 1.4 \times 10^{-2}, \quad (7)$$

where I have followed the prescription [12] of the Particle Data Group for renormalizing the likelihood function in cases where the central value of a measured parameter (A) lies outside the physical region ($-1 \leq A \leq 1$). Using again the relations $|C_T|^2, |C'_T|^2 \ll 3y^2|C_V|^2, 3y^2|C'_V|^2$, I obtain the 2σ constraint

$$\epsilon_S \leq 1.4 \times 10^{-2}. \quad (8)$$

I now place these results in the context of other work and examine what constraints the combined data place on scalar and tensor interactions. First, consider the question of time-reversal violation, i.e., the relative phases of the C_i coefficients. Precise values for the D coefficient in n [13] and ^{19}Ne [14] decay have shown that the vector and axial-vector terms are relatively real to within 0.3° . Constraints on TRV scalar interactions are much poorer. The best previous constraint on TRV scalar interactions was derived from the R coefficient in ^{19}Ne decay [15]. Under the assumptions that $C_V = C'_V$ and $C_A = C'_A$, and that C_T and C'_T are negligible, the observed R sets the 2σ constraint [15] $\text{Im}[(C_S + C'_S)C_A^*]/|C_V|^2 = +0.38 \pm 0.51$ where for simplicity I have followed Ref. [15] and assumed that $|C_S/C_V|^2 \ll 1, |C'_S/C_V|^2 \ll 1$ even though it is not necessarily consistent with their result. Taking $C_A^* = g_A/g_V C_V^*$, this constraint can be reexpressed as

$$\text{Im} \frac{C_S + C'_S}{C_V} = (+0.38 \pm 0.51) \frac{g_V}{g_A} = -0.30 \pm 0.41. \quad (9)$$

The ^{33}Ar result in Eq. (8) yields the corresponding 2σ constraints (assuming $|C_V| = |C'_V|$)

$$\left| \frac{C_S}{C_V} \right|^2 + \left| \frac{C'_S}{C_V} \right|^2 \leq 0.028, \quad (10)$$

$$\left| \frac{C_S}{C_V} \right| \leq 0.167, \quad \left| \frac{C'_S}{C_V} \right| \leq 0.167, \quad (11)$$

which place the tightest experimental bound on TRV scalar interactions [16]. (Note that at this level of precision the TRV scalar $\times$ vector interference term in a induced by the Coulomb interaction can indeed be neglected.) The constraints on $\text{Im}(C_S/C_V)$ and $\text{Im}(C'_S/C_V)$ given in Eqs. (10) and (9) are displayed in Fig. 1.

Now consider the constraints on time-reversal-invariant (TRI) interactions. Rather than follow the lead of Boothroyd, Markey, and Vogel [2] who made a comprehensive analysis of all relevant data, I simply consider a set of distinct observables and use the best available results for each type of observable. The “pure Fermi” a coefficient with its 1σ error,

$$a_F = 1.016 \pm 0.018, \quad (12)$$

obtained by combining the ^{32}Ar and ^{33}Ar results in Eqs. (1) and (5), complements the precise Gamow-Teller a coefficient, a_{GT} , measured in ^6He decay. In addition one has the precisely measured Fierz interference terms b_F and b_{GT} from the superallowed $0^+ \rightarrow 0^+$ transitions [17] and ^{22}Na decay, respectively, and the β helicities

FIG. 1. 2σ constraints on TRV scalar interactions from $a(^{33}\text{Ar})$ and $R(^{19}\text{Ne})$ (Ref. [15]). It is assumed that $C_V = C'_V$. The region between the sloping straight lines is consistent with $R(^{19}\text{Ne})$, and the region inside the circle with $a(^{33}\text{Ar})$.

TABLE I. 2σ constraints on TRI scalar and tensor weak interactions.

Quantity	a_F included	a_F omitted
C_S/C_V	0.00 ± 0.12	0.00 ± 0.18
C'_S/C_V	0.00 ± 0.10	0.00 ± 0.15
C_T/C_V	-0.01 ± 0.11	-0.02 ± 0.13
C'_T/C_V	-0.01 ± 0.12	-0.01 ± 0.13

measured in pure Fermi (^{26}Al) and pure Gamow-Teller (^{60}Co) decays. I adopt Boothroyd, Markey, and Vogel's weighted average values for all these quantities except a_F and b_F . Finally, I include data for the mixed Fermi/Gamow-Teller decay of the neutron—adopting the recommended values in the latest Review of Particle Properties [18] for a_n , A_n (the beta asymmetry with respect to the neutron spin), B_n (the ν asymmetry with respect to the n spin), and for the ratio of the ft_n value to the $\mathcal{F}t = 3073.3 \pm 3.5$ s value [19] inferred from the $0^+ \rightarrow 0^+$ transitions.

First I make no assumptions except that the S , V , A , and T interactions are TRI (this is equivalent to Boothroyd, Markey, and Vogel's case I). Then the 10 observables mentioned above are fitted in terms of 7 real parameters, C'_V/C_V , C_A/C_V , C'_A/C_V , C_S/C_V , C'_S/C_V , C_T/C_V , and C'_T/C_V . The individual constraints on the 7 parameters, shown in Table I, were obtained by stepping one parameter at a time and adjusting the remaining 6 parameters so as to minimize χ^2 . The 2σ limits correspond to the values of the stepped parameter that yielded $\chi^2 = \chi_0^2 + 4$ where χ_0^2 is the minimum value of χ^2 . Figure 2 shows the constraints on $\text{Re}(C_S)$ and

TABLE II. 2σ constraints on TRI scalar and tensor weak interactions assuming exact $V - A$ for the vector and axial components.

Quantity	a_F included	a_F omitted
C_S/C_V	$+0.001 \pm 0.086$	$+0.001 \pm 0.114$
C'_S/C_V	$+0.001 \pm 0.086$	$+0.001 \pm 0.114$
C_T/C_V	0.000 ± 0.096	0.000 ± 0.105
C'_T/C_V	0.000 ± 0.096	0.000 ± 0.105
g_A/g_V	-1.263 ± 0.004	-1.263 ± 0.004

$\text{Re}(C'_S)$ due solely to a_F and b_F . The main improvements in the scalar constraints over those given by Boothroyd, Markey, and Vogel [2] (2σ limits of $|C_S/C_V| < 0.23$ and $|C'_S/C_V| < 0.19$) come from the ^{32}Ar and ^{33}Ar results.

In the second, more restrictive, scenario I assume that the vector and axial-vector interactions are given by $V - A$ theory (i.e., $C'_V = C_V = g_V$ and $C'_A = C_A = g_A$) but make no assumptions other than time-reversal invariance about the scalar and tensor interactions. Now the 10 experimental values are fitted in terms of only 5 real parameters, C_S/C_V , C'_S/C_V , C_T/C_V , C'_T/C_V , and g_A/g_V . The individual constraints for this scenario are shown in Table II. The central values of all quantities listed in Tables I and II are very close to zero simply because the observables are basically quadratic functions of these quantities and pure $V - A$ theory with $g_A/g_V = -1.262$ already provides a good account of the data ($\chi^2 = 7.7$ for $\nu = 9$).

The utility of these results is illustrated by their implications for leptoquark masses. Leptoquark exchange would influence both the $e\nu$ correlation in β decay and the rate for $\pi \rightarrow e\nu$ decay. In principle, six of the leptoquarks discussed in Ref. [1] participate in these decays, but the amplitudes for the six leptoquark exchanges interfere differently in the two processes [3, 20]. To simplify the constraints involving many parameters, consider a scenario where the three participating scalar leptoquarks S_1 , $R_2(T_z = -1/2)$, and $\tilde{R}_2(T_z = +1/2)$ have the same mass M_S , the three vector participating leptoquarks U_1 , $V_2(T_z = -1/2)$, and $\tilde{V}_2(T_z = +1/2)$ have the same mass M_V , and all coupling constants have the gauge value determined by G_F . Then the Fermi $e\nu$ correlation combined with the $\pi \rightarrow \nu e$ rate leads to 90%-confidence lower limits of $M_S > 350$ GeV and $M_V > 700$ GeV.

It is clear that isospin-forbidden β -delayed proton spectroscopy provides a powerful probe of scalar couplings in weak processes, and that the limits on a_F obtained here could be substantially improved by an experiment designed for that purpose. The utility of the delayed-proton method is due to a fortunate combination of circumstances: the substantial amplification of the recoil effect, the small value of the isospin-forbidden proton decay width ($\Gamma_p \approx 100$ eV) compared to the recoil broadening, and the short time scale for proton decay $t = \hbar/\Gamma_p$ compared to the slowing-down time of the nuclear recoils

FIG. 2. 2σ constraints on TRI scalar interactions from a_F and b_F (Ref. [17]). It is assumed that $C_V = C'_V$. The region between the straight lines is consistent with b_F , and the region inside the circle with a_F .

(e.g., the recoiling ^{33}Cl travels only 270 fm before it decays).

I am grateful to Dieter Schardt and Karsten Riisager for informing me of their beautiful results, and to Peter Herczeg and Daniel Wyler for help in understanding the physics of leptoquark exchange. Jules Deutsch, Torleif Ericson, and Jurek Sromicki also contributed helpful remarks.

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