Neutrino properties from experiments

Gustav Wikström

DPNC, University of Geneva, 24 Quai Ernest-Ansermet, 1211 Geneva, Switzerland

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.3204/DESY-PROC-2010-03/wikstrom

The neutrino field has recently received much attention and several new experiments are ready to take or analyze data which have a potentially large impact on the standard model of particle physics. An overview of current neutrino physics is here followed by a summary of the latest results, and finally a list of important results anticipated in the near future is given.

1 Open issues

It is by now well established that neutrinos oscillate between the three weak states $\nu_e, \nu_\mu, \nu_\tau$. That flavor changes are possible over time shows that neutrinos have non-equal masses, and that the interaction states are not equal to the mass states $\nu_1, \nu_2, \nu_3$. The relation between interaction state $i$ and mass state $j$ is written with a mixing matrix $U$ as $\nu_i = \sum_j (U_{ij} \nu_j)$.

The matrix $U$ is characterized by three mixing angles $\theta_{12}, \theta_{13}, \theta_{23}$ relating the mass states, a CP-violation phase $\delta_{CP}$, and two Majorana phases $\alpha, \beta$.

The probability of passing from a weak state to another is a function of the squared mass difference and the mixing angle (and the distance to energy ratio $L/E$), and these are therefore the quantities that experiments have measured. Current best values are $\Delta m_{21}^2 \sim +8 \cdot 10^{-5} eV^2$, $\Delta m_{32}^2 \sim 2 \cdot 10^{-3} eV^2$, $\theta_{12} \sim 32^\circ$, $\theta_{23} \sim 45^\circ$, $\theta_{13} < 7^\circ$.

These five values represent what we currently know about neutrinos, and thus the pieces missing and sought after are the following: the sign on $\Delta m_{32}^2$ (Mass hierarchy), the value of $\delta_{CP}$ (CP-violation), values of $\alpha, \beta$ (Dirac/Majorana), absolute values of $m_1, m_2, m_3$ (Absolute mass scale), the value of $\theta_{13}$ (Non-zero $\theta_{13}$). To this list of open issues we can add the existence of sterile neutrinos, and the asymptotic form of the mixing matrix. Apart from these unknowns, the parameters $\Delta m_{23}^2, \theta_{23}$ and the $\nu N$ cross-sections also need to be better understood.

2 Methods of measurement

The study of oscillation parameters needs powerful neutrino sources, which apart from extraterrestrial natural sources can be either nuclear reactors ($\bar{\nu}_e$) or neutrino beams ($\nu_\mu$ or $\bar{\nu}_\mu$). Reactor neutrinos are produced at MeV scale and are emitted isotropically, whereas neutrino beams (from protons on target $p + N \rightarrow \pi^+ \rightarrow \mu^+ + \nu_\mu$) are directed and can be produced at GeV energies.

Studying a neutrino beam over long distances, the probability that a $\nu_\mu$ disappears from the beam depends mainly on $\Delta m_{23}^2, \theta_{23}$ (disappearance search) and the probability that a $\nu_\tau$ appears mainly depends on $\Delta m_{23}^2, \theta_{23}, \theta_{13}$ (appearance search), meaning that both oscillations can be
studied. The presence of CP-violations would imply that the probabilities for the transitions $\nu_\mu \rightarrow \nu_e$ and $\bar{\nu}_\mu \rightarrow \bar{\nu}_e$ are different. Measuring appearances with $\nu_\mu$ and $\bar{\nu}_\mu$ beams thus gives a handle on $\delta_{CP}$.

Looking instead at reactor neutrinos over much shorter distances, the probability that a $\bar{\nu}_e$ disappears depends mainly on $\Delta m^2_{32}, \theta_{13}$. The lower neutrino energy makes $L/E$ comparable to beam neutrinos, near oscillation maximum, while still exploiting the high flux near the reactors.

The search for the absolute scale of neutrino masses can be addressed by the study of $\beta$-decay spectra, where the endpoint of the observed electron spectrum, studied in a sensitive spectrometer, depends on the value of $m_{\nu_e}$.

Whether neutrinos are Majorana particles can be tested by searching for $\nu$-less double $\beta$-decay events. In this process, a $\beta$-decay in a nucleus is followed by an inverse $\beta$-decay in the same nucleus. For this to be possible the $\bar{\nu}_e$ from the first reaction must act as a $\nu_e$ in the second, requiring $\bar{\nu}_R = \nu_R$ and the Lorentz transition $\nu_R \rightarrow \nu_L$, of which the former is only possible for Majorana particles. The process is commonly studied in Ge-detectors, where the detector acts at once as source and target.

## 3 Recent results

Several interesting oscillation results have recently been presented.

![Figure 1: Tau event from a $\nu_\mu$ beam observed in OPERA [1] viewed in the transverse plane of the neutrino direction. Track 4 is identified as a $\tau$ decaying to a $\mu$ (track 8).](image)

OPERA [1], using a $\nu_\mu$ beam from CERN to Gran Sasso (730 km), has presented one observed $\tau$ event (see Fig refopera) appearing in the detector, consisting of lead plates interlayered with emulsion plates. While disappearance has long been studied, this result is the very first evidence of neutrino flavour appearance. The result is reported as a $2.1\sigma$ effect, and is thus not enough to firmly exclude neutrino decay or decoherence models, but certainly strengthens the oscillation case.

MINOS [2] has new disappearance results using $\nu_\mu$ and $\bar{\nu}_\mu$ beams from Fermilab to the Soudan mine (735 km). A near detector, made of steel and scintillator plates) close to the start of the beam measures the neutrino flux, which then is compared to the flux observed in the far detector, a larger version of the near detector. The derived parameters for $\nu_\mu$ (see Fig 2) nicely match earlier measurements using atmospheric neutrinos by Super-K, but a comparison with the parameters derived from the $\bar{\nu}_\mu$ beam (see Fig 2) shows only a small overlap of confidence regions. The uncertainty is dominated by statistics and precision is therefore expected to
Figure 2: MINOS 90% confidence regions for $\nu_\mu$ (left) and $\bar{\nu}_\mu$ (right) disappearance [2].

improve in the near future. It is worth to note here that a non-agreement of $\nu_\mu$ and $\bar{\nu}_\mu$ parameters implies CPT-violation, a much unexpected scenario.

Figure 3: MiniBooNE confidence regions for $\bar{\nu}_\mu \rightarrow \bar{\nu}_e$ appearance [3]. The black dot shows the best fit and shaded areas show the LSND allowed regions [4].

MiniBooNE [3] has studied a $\bar{\nu}_\mu$ beam at 0.5 km and has found an excess in the search for appearing $\bar{\nu}_e$, see Fig 3 with low significance. The fit of appearance parameters agrees with the previous LSND excess [4]. An excess is not observed using a $\nu_\mu$ beam. The derived oscillation parameters are not consistent with the other three oscillations and would therefore require new transitions to one or more sterile neutrinos. MiniBooNE has no near detector and has therefore
Neutrino Properties from Experiments

a lesser control of systematic effects compared to e.g. MINOS.

4 Anticipated results

Several important experimental quests, aimed at answering the fundamental questions listed above, are in a start-up phase.

The T2K experiment, using a $\nu_\mu$ beam from J-PARC to Kamioka (295 km), [5] has started taking data early 2010. Its near and far detectors, ND280 and Super-K, respectively, are placed 2.5$^\circ$ off-axis to allow an optimal neutrino energy distribution. ND280 is a composite tracking detector expected to give a precise flux prediction and also measure background rates and $\nu N$ cross-sections for Super-K. T2K is designed to measure $\Delta m^2_{32}$, $\theta_{23}$ with high precision, and $\theta_{13}$ for which the expected 5$\sigma$ sensitivity from $\nu_e$ appearance is $\sin 2\theta_{13} < 0.02$.

Double Chooz [6], using $\bar{\nu}_e$ from the two Chooz reactors, will consist of two identical water-Cherenkov detectors at 400 m and 1.05 km. Measurements in the far detector has started in 2010, and the near detector is planned to start in 2012. The expected 90% sensitivity after three years of full detector running is $\sin 2\theta_{13} < 0.03$.

Precise $\nu N$ cross-sections is being studied at GeV-scale by Minerva, which is placed on the MINOS $\nu_\mu$ beamline. Muon information from MINOS will be used in Minerva to reconstruct events. The results from Minerva will be an important input for oscillation experiments, e.g. T2K.

EXO has started a search for $\nu$-less double $\beta$-decay, using a liquid Xe TPC, in 2010. The detector is equipped with $Ba^{2+}$-tagging, making it able to count the resulting nuclei. In two years time the sensitivity to Majorana masses is expected to reach down to the level of 0.1 eV.

The large electron spectrometer KATRIN studies tritium $\beta$-decay in the search for the absolute neutrino mass. After five years running, starting in 2012, the expected 90% sensitivity is $m_\nu < 0.2 eV$.

5 Summary

Over the last few years neutrino physics has evolved into a test bench for various exciting physics scenarios (CP-violation, CPT-violation, lepton number violation, sterile particles) that now come in reach of experimenters. The oscillation model is now firmly established and the neutrino community enter a region of precision measurements. In parallel to this detailed knowledge, several essential parameters are waiting to be measured for the first time.

References