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Institute for Analysis and Scientific Computing
Vienna University of Technology
Wiedner Hauptstraße 8–10
1040 Wien, Austria

E-Mail: admin@asc.tuwien.ac.at
WWW: <http://www.asc.tuwien.ac.at>
FAX: +43-1-58801-10196

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On the stationary Schrödinger equation in the semi-classical limit: Asymptotic blow-up at a turning point

Kirian Döpfner^{1*} and Anton Arnold^{1,**}

¹ Institute für Analysis und Scientific Computing, TU Wien, Wiedner Hauptstr. 8-10, A-1040 Wien, Austria

We consider a model for the wave function of an electron, injected at a fixed energy E into an electronic device with stationary potential $V(x)$. This wave function is the solution of the stationary 1D Schrödinger equation. The scattering problem is modeled on an interval where the potential varies, and it is assumed constant in the exterior, i.e. in the leads of the device. Here we are interested in including turning points – points \bar{x} where the potential and the energy of the particle coincide, i.e. $E = V(\bar{x})$. We show that including a turning point lets the wave function blow-up asymptotically as the scaled Planck constant $\varepsilon \rightarrow 0$. This is an essential difference to the uniformly bounded wave function if turning points are excluded.

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1 Model

We consider a scattering problem for the stationary Schrödinger equation in 1D, which is a relevant quantum dynamical model for the electron transport in a diode. The diode covers the interval $[x_0, 1]$, having leads to both sides. Electrons are injected from the right lead in the form of a plane wave (of unit amplitude, e.g.).

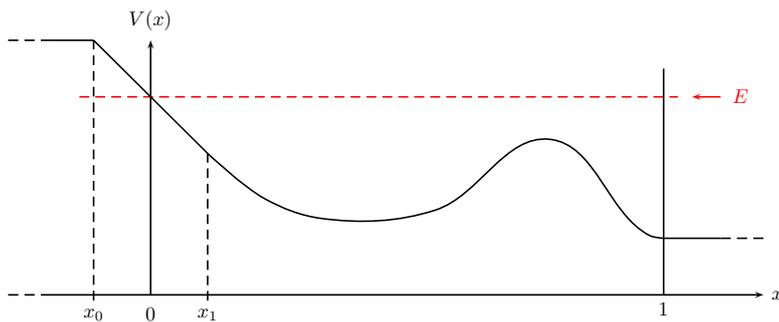


Fig. 1 Sketch of the model with linear potential in the vicinity of the turning point at $x = 0$ and constant continuation of the potential in the leads, i.e. outside $[x_0, 1]$. Electrons are injected from the right boundary $x = 1$.

Problem formulation for the wave function $\psi(x)$, with $a(x) := E - V(x)$ and the scaled Planck constant $\varepsilon := \frac{\hbar}{\sqrt{2m}}$:

$$\begin{cases} \varepsilon^2 \psi''(x) + a(x)\psi(x) = 0, & x \in (x_0, 1), \\ \varepsilon \psi'(x_0) - \sqrt{-x_0} \psi(x_0) = 0, \\ \varepsilon \psi'(1) - i\sqrt{a(1)}\psi(1) = -2i\sqrt{a(1)}, \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

where $0 < \varepsilon \ll 1$, $x_0 < 0 < x_1 < 1$, $a(x) = x$ on $[x_0, x_1]$, and $a(x) \geq \tau_1$ on $[x_1, 1]$ for some $\tau_1 > 0$. The two transparent boundary conditions correspond to constant potentials in the exterior problems, i.e. for $x \leq x_0$ and $x \geq 1$. The model includes a turning point (i.e. a zero of $a(x)$) at $x = 0$.

The goal of this note is to describe the asymptotic behavior of ψ in the semi-classical limit – in particular close to the turning point. This is an important input information for the numerical treatment of (1). In [2] both of these questions were discussed for a very similar scattering problem, but having a linear potential $V(x) = E - x$ in the left lead. Here, we extend this to the more realistic case of constant potentials in both leads.

Away from the turning point, an efficient numerical treatment of the highly oscillatory problem (1) can be based on first eliminating analytically the dominant oscillations (using a WKB-asymptotics of the solution). Then, the resulting smoother problem can be solved numerically on a coarse grid [1, 2], with an error that is uniform in ε . Since this approach is not valid near a turning point, we assumed here and in [2], as a simplification, that the potential is linear in the vicinity of the turning point. ψ can then be obtained as the numerical solution of (1) on $[x_1, 1]$, coupled to the explicit solution on $[x_0, x_1]$:

$$\psi_\varepsilon(x) = \alpha_\varepsilon \hat{\psi}_\varepsilon(x), \quad \hat{\psi}_\varepsilon(x) = \varepsilon^{-\frac{1}{6}} \left[\text{Ai}(y(x)) - \frac{A_\varepsilon}{B_\varepsilon} \text{Bi}(y(x)) \right], \quad (2)$$

* e-mail kirian.doepfner@tuwien.ac.at, phone +43 (1) 58801 10151,

** Corresponding author: e-mail anton.arnold@tuwien.ac.at, phone +43 (1) 58801 10181,

with some normalization constant α_ε , and $y(x) := -\frac{x}{\varepsilon^{2/3}}$, where

$$A_\varepsilon := \text{Ai}'\left(\frac{y(x_0)}{\varepsilon^{2/3}} + \sqrt{y(x_0)} \text{Ai}(y(x_0))\right), \quad B_\varepsilon := \text{Bi}'\left(\frac{y(x_0)}{\varepsilon^{2/3}} + \sqrt{y(x_0)} \text{Bi}(y(x_0))\right).$$

Here Ai and Bi are the fundamental solutions to the Airy equation, i.e. Airy functions.

2 Asymptotic blow-up at a turning point

Example 2.1 Consider (1) with $x_0 = -0.3$ and $a(x) = x$ for $x \in [x_0, 1]$ and $0 < \varepsilon < 1$. Then the explicit solution is given by (2), and the normalization is chosen as to satisfy the right boundary condition:

$$\alpha_\varepsilon(\hat{\psi}(1), \hat{\psi}'(1)) := \frac{2\sqrt{a(1)}}{\hat{\psi}(1)\sqrt{a(1)} + i\varepsilon\hat{\psi}'(1)}. \quad (3)$$

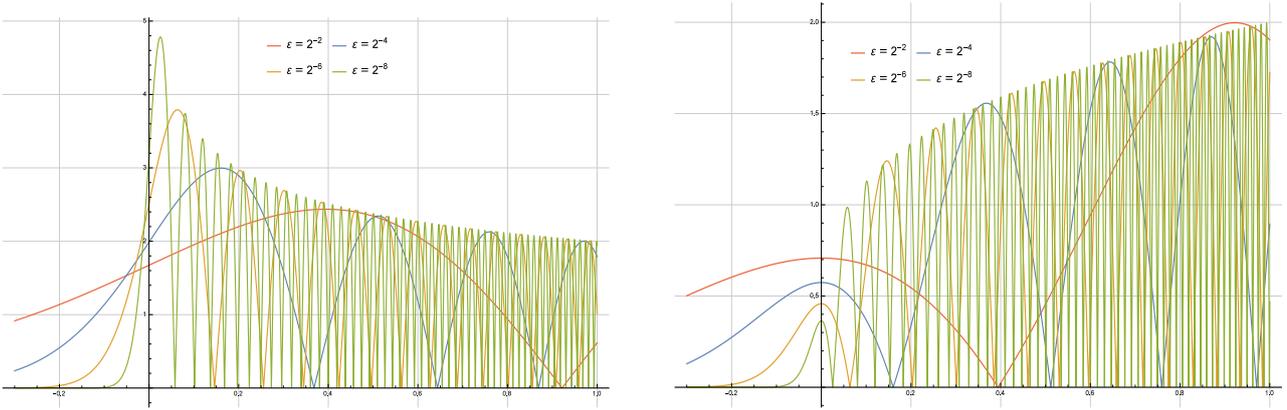


Fig. 2: $|\psi_\varepsilon(x)|$ (left) and $\varepsilon|\psi'_\varepsilon(x)|$ (right) for various values of ε . This example illustrates that $\varepsilon\|\psi'_\varepsilon\|_{L^\infty(x_0,1)}$ is uniformly bounded w.r.t. $0 < \varepsilon < 1$, but $\|\psi_\varepsilon\|_{L^\infty(x_0,1)}$ is *not* since $\{|\psi_\varepsilon(0)|\}$ becomes unbounded as $\varepsilon \rightarrow 0$.

In Figure 2, one can see that in the classically forbidden region (i.e. $a(x) = x < 0$) there is (approximately) exponential decay, but in the classically allowed region (i.e. $a(x) > 0$) the solution is highly oscillatory with varying frequency of order $\mathcal{O}(\sqrt{a(x)}/\varepsilon)$.

This blow-up and, resp., boundedness behavior of the solution extends to all potentials covered by the problem from (1):

Proposition 2.2 Let $0 < \varepsilon \ll 1$, and $x_0 < 0 < x_1 < 1$. Further let $a \in C^2$ on $[x_0, 1]$ with $a(x) = x$ on $[x_0, x_1]$, and $a(x) \geq \tau_1 > 0$ on $[x_1, 1]$. Then, the family of solutions $\{\psi_\varepsilon(x)\}$ to the boundary value problem (1) satisfies:

- $\|\psi_\varepsilon\|_{L^\infty(x_0,1)}$ is of the (sharp) order $\Theta(\varepsilon^{-\frac{1}{6}})$ for $\varepsilon \rightarrow 0$.
- $\varepsilon\|\psi'_\varepsilon\|_{L^\infty(x_0,1)}$ is uniformly bounded with respect to $\varepsilon \rightarrow 0$.

Proof-idea. The blow-up of $|\psi(0)|$ stems essentially from the $x^{-1/4}$ -decay of the flipped Airy functions $\text{Ai}(-x)$, $\text{Bi}(-x)$ as $x \rightarrow \infty$. Moreover, since $A_\varepsilon/B_\varepsilon \xrightarrow{\varepsilon \rightarrow 0} 0$, ψ from (2) behaves like the scaled Airy function $\varepsilon^{-1/6} \text{Ai}(-x\varepsilon^{-2/3})$ close to the turning point. This ε -scaling of the x variable compresses the Airy function decay to the (small) interval $[0, x_1]$. At the fixed point x_1 , $\text{Ai}(-x_1\varepsilon^{-2/3})$ is proportional to $\varepsilon^{1/6}$. This decay is compensated by the scaling factor $\varepsilon^{-1/6}$ of $\hat{\psi}_\varepsilon$ in (2). Since the resulting ε -uniformity of $|\psi(x_1)|$ is not changed any more on the subsequent interval $[x_1, 1]$, this allows the solution to be matched at $x = 1$ to the incoming plane wave with amplitude 1 (independently of ε).

For the detailed proof see [3]; it is an adaption of the proof for Proposition 4.2 in [2]. \square

With this information at hand, a hybrid analytical-numerical solution scheme for (1) can be formulated as in [2]. Since the analytical solution is scaled by (3), it inherits an error from the numerical solution. For obtaining an overall error that is uniform in ε , it is crucial that the numerical error on $[x_1, 1]$ decays faster than $\varepsilon^{1/6}$ (and this is possible with the WKB-based method from [1]). This way it can compensate the (inherited) error of the analytical, asymptotically unbounded solution ψ_ε on $[x_0, x_1]$.

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