14-Qubit Entanglement: Creation and Coherence

Thomas Monz,[1] Philipp Schindler,[1] Julio T. Barreiro,[1] Michael Chwalla,[1] Daniel Nigg,[1] William A. Coish,[2,3]
Maximilian Harlander,[1] Wolfgang Hänsel,[4] Markus Hennrich,[1,*] and Rainer Blatt[1,4]

[1]*Institut für Experimentalphysik, Universität Innsbruck, Technikerstr. 25, A-6020 Innsbruck, Austria*
[2]*Institute for Quantum Computing and Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Waterloo,*
Waterloo, ON, N2L 3G1, Canada
[3]*Department of Physics, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3A 2T8*
[4]*Institut für Quantenoptik und Quanteninformation, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften,*
Otto-Hittmair-Platz 1, A-6020 Innsbruck, Austria
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We report the creation of Greenberger-Horne-Zeilinger states with up to 14 qubits. By investigating the coherence of up to 8 ions over time, we observe a decay proportional to the square of the number of qubits. The observed decay agrees with a theoretical model which assumes a system affected by correlated, Gaussian phase noise. This model holds for the majority of current experimental systems developed towards quantum computation and quantum metrology.

Quantum states can show nonclassical properties; for example, their superposition allows for (classically) counterintuitive situations such as a particle being in two places at the same time. Entanglement can extend this paradox even further; e.g., the state of one subsystem can be affected by a measurement on another subsystem without any apparent interaction [1]. These concepts, although experimentally frequently verified, contrast with our classical perception and lead to several questions. Is there a transition from a quantum to a classical regime? Under which conditions does that transition take place? And why? The creation of large-scale multiparticle entangled quantum states and the investigation of their decay towards classicality may provide a better understanding of this transition [2–5].

Usually, decoherence mechanisms are used to describe the evolution of a quantum system into the classical regime. One prominent example is the spontaneous decay of the excited state of an atom. In a collection of atoms, the decay of each would be expected to be independent of the others. Therefore, the number of decay processes in a fixed time window would intuitively be proportional to the number of excited atoms. This assumption, however, can be inaccurate. Decoherence effects can act collectively and produce "superradiance," a regime in which the rate of spontaneous decay is proportional to the square of the number of excited atoms [6]. Such collective decoherence can also occur in multiqubit registers, an effect known as "superdecoherence" [7]. This particularly applies to most currently used qubits which are encoded in energetically nondegenerate states. In these systems, a phase reference (PR) is required to perform coherent operations on a quantum register. Noise in this PR thus collectively affects the quantum register.

In the following we introduce a model describing a quantum register in the presence of correlated phase noise. More specifically, we investigate N-qubit Greenberger-Horne-Zeilinger (GHZ) states of the form $|\psi(0)\rangle = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}(|0\ldots0\rangle + |1\ldots1\rangle)$. These states are the archetype of multiparticle entanglement and play an important role in the field of quantum metrology [8] for quantum-mechanically enhanced sensors. This special quantum state, however, has only been generated with up to 6 particles so far [9,10]. Employing up to 8 genuinely multi-particle-entangled ion qubits in a GHZ state, we predict and verify the presence of superdecoherence which scales quadratically with the number of qubits N. In general, any system experiencing correlated phase noise is affected by this accelerated GHZ-state decoherence.

We model collective phase fluctuations acting on the quantum register with a Hamiltonian of the form $H_{\text{noise}} = \frac{\Delta E(t)}{2}\sum_{k=1}^{N}\sigma_z^{(k)}$ where $\Delta E(t)$ denotes the strength of the fluctuations, and $\sigma_z^{(k)}$ a phase flip on the kth ion. Under this Hamiltonian, the initial state of the system $|\psi(0)\rangle$ evolves into $|\psi(t)\rangle = \exp(-\frac{i}{\hbar}\int_0^t d\tau H_{\text{noise}}(\tau))|\psi(0)\rangle$. As a measure of state preservation, we use the fidelity $F(t) = \overline{|\langle\psi(0)|\psi(t)\rangle|^2}$, where the bar refers to an average over all realizations of random phase fluctuations. The decay of this fidelity can be conveniently described by

$$F(t) = \frac{1}{2}\{1 + \exp[-2\epsilon(N, t)]\},$$

where the effective error probability for a stationary Gaussian random process is derived to be

$$\epsilon(N, t) = N^2 \frac{1}{2\hbar^2}\int_0^t d\tau(t - \tau)\overline{\Delta E(\tau)\Delta E(0)}. \quad (1)$$

Since bosonic systems have purely Gaussian fluctuations, a similar result is found within the spin-boson model [7]. The intuition of an error probability can be recovered in

the limit of small $\epsilon(N, t)$ since the fidelity decays as $F \approx 1 - \epsilon(N, t)$. For correlated Gaussian phase noise the effective error probability is then always proportional to N^2 [7]. Therefore, initially negligible correlated phase noise can lead to unexpectedly high error probabilities as the size of the quantum register increases.

We can also obtain the Markovian and the static result for short times by considering a correlation function of the form $\overline{\Delta E(\tau) \Delta E(0)} = \overline{\Delta E^2} \exp(-\gamma t)$ in the error probability [Eq. (1)]. Our noise model then leads to a fidelity

$$F(t) = \frac{1}{2}\left(1 + \exp\left[-\frac{1}{T_2 \gamma}\{\exp(-\gamma t) + \gamma t - 1\}\right]\right),$$

where $T_2 = \hbar^2 \gamma/(N^2 \overline{\Delta E^2}) \propto 1/N^2$ corresponds to the decay time in the Markovian limit. For $\gamma t \gg 1$, we recover the Markovian limit $F_{\text{mark}}(t) \cong 1/2(1 + \exp(-t/T_2))$ and for $\gamma t \ll 1$, the static result for short times is $F_{\text{stat}}(t) \cong 1/2\{1 + \exp[-\frac{1}{2}(t/\tau)^2]\}$ with a characteristic time $\tau = \hbar/(N\sqrt{\overline{\Delta E^2}}) \propto 1/N$.

Experimentally, we study correlated noise in an ion-trap quantum processor. Our system consists of a string of $^{40}\text{Ca}^+$ ions confined in a linear Paul trap where each ion represents a qubit [11]. The quantum information is encoded in the $S_{1/2}(m = -1/2) \equiv |1\rangle$ ground state and the metastable $D_{5/2}(m = -1/2) \equiv |0\rangle$ state. Each experimental cycle consists of three stages, (i) initializing the qubits and the center of mass mode in a well defined state, (ii) performing the entangling gate operation, and (iii) characterizing the quantum state. The qubits are initialized by optical pumping into the $S_{1/2}(m = -1/2)$ state while the motion is brought to the ground state by Doppler cooling followed by sideband cooling. Qubit manipulation is realized by a series of laser pulses of equal intensity on all ions. The electronic and vibrational states of the ion string are manipulated by setting the frequency, duration, intensity, and phase of the pulses. Finally, the state of the ion qubits is measured by scattering light at 397 nm on the $S_{1/2} \leftrightarrow P_{1/2}$ transition and detecting the fluorescence with a photomultiplier tube (PMT). The camera detection effectively corresponds to a measurement of each individual qubit in the $\{|0\rangle, |1\rangle\}$ basis, while the PMT only detects the number of ions being in $|0\rangle$ or $|1\rangle$. Sufficient statistics is achieved by repeating each experiment 100 times for each setting.

In our system, GHZ states of the form $(|0\ldots0\rangle + |1\ldots1\rangle)/\sqrt{2}$ are created from the state $|1\ldots1\rangle$ through a high-fidelity Mølmer-Sørensen (MS) entangling interaction [12,13]. Assessing the coherence, fidelity, and entanglement of GHZ states is straightforward as the density matrix ideally consists of only four elements: two diagonal elements corresponding to the populations of $|0\ldots0\rangle$ and $|1\ldots1\rangle$ as well as of two off-diagonal elements corresponding to the relative coherence. The diagonal elements of the density matrix ρ are directly measured by fluorescence detection and allow us to infer the GHZ populations $P = \rho_{0\ldots0,0\ldots0} + \rho_{1\ldots1,1\ldots1}$. The off-diagonal elements of the density matrix are accessible via the observation of parity oscillations [9] as follows. After the GHZ state is generated, all qubits are collectively rotated by an operation $\bigotimes_{j=1}^{N} \exp(i\frac{\pi}{4}\sigma_\phi^{(j)})$ where $\sigma_\phi^{(j)} = \sigma_x^{(j)}\cos\phi + \sigma_y^{(j)}\sin\phi$ is defined by the corresponding Pauli operators on the jth qubit. By varying the phase ϕ, we observe oscillations of the parity $\mathcal{P} = \mathcal{P}_{\text{even}} - \mathcal{P}_{\text{odd}}$ with $\mathcal{P}_{\text{even or odd}}$ corresponding to the probability of finding the state with an even or odd number of excitations. The amplitude of these oscillations directly gives the coherence $C = |\rho_{0\ldots0,1\ldots1}| + |\rho_{1\ldots1,0\ldots0}|$ of the state. The fidelity of the GHZ state is then given by $F = (P + C)/2$, where a $F > 50\%$ implies genuine N-particle entanglement [9]. States with a $F < 50\%$ can still be genuinely N-particle entangled if they satisfy other criteria. We apply the criteria defined in Refs. [14,15] which can be used in conjunction with the procedure described above. One criterion tests multipartite distillability (i.e., N-particle entanglement can be distilled from many copies of this state) [14], while a more stringent criterion proves genuine N-particle entanglement [15].

We have experimentally prepared GHZ states of $\{2$–$6, 8, 10, 12, 14\}$ ions and achieved the populations, coherences, and fidelities shown in Table I. The observed parity oscillations are shown in Fig. 1. Although N-particle distillability can be inferred from the criterion in Ref. [14] by many standard deviations, according to the criteria in Ref. [15] the obtained data support genuine N-particle entanglement for 14 qubits with a confidence of 76%. The 12-qubit state is likely not fully entangled. The Poissonian statistics of the PMT fluorescence data is accounted for by a data analysis based on Bayesian inference [16].

TABLE I. Populations, coherence, and fidelity with a N-qubit GHZ state of experimentally prepared states. Entanglement criteria supported by σ standard deviations. All errors in parenthesis, 1 standard deviation.

Number of ions	2	3	4	5	6	8	10	12	14
Populations, %	99.50(7)	97.6(2)	97.5(2)	96.0(4)	91.6(4)	84.7(4)	67.0(8)	53.3(9)	56.2(11)
Coherence, %	97.8(3)	96.5(6)	93.9(5)	92.9(8)	86.8(8)	78.7(7)	58.2(9)	41.6(10)	45.4(13)
Fidelity, %	98.6(2)	97.0(3)	95.7(3)	94.4(5)	89.2(4)	81.7(4)	62.6(6)	47.4(7)	50.8(9)
Distillability criterion [14], σ	283	151	181	100	95	96	40	18	17
Entanglement criterion [15], σ	265	143	167	101	96	92	25	−6	0.7
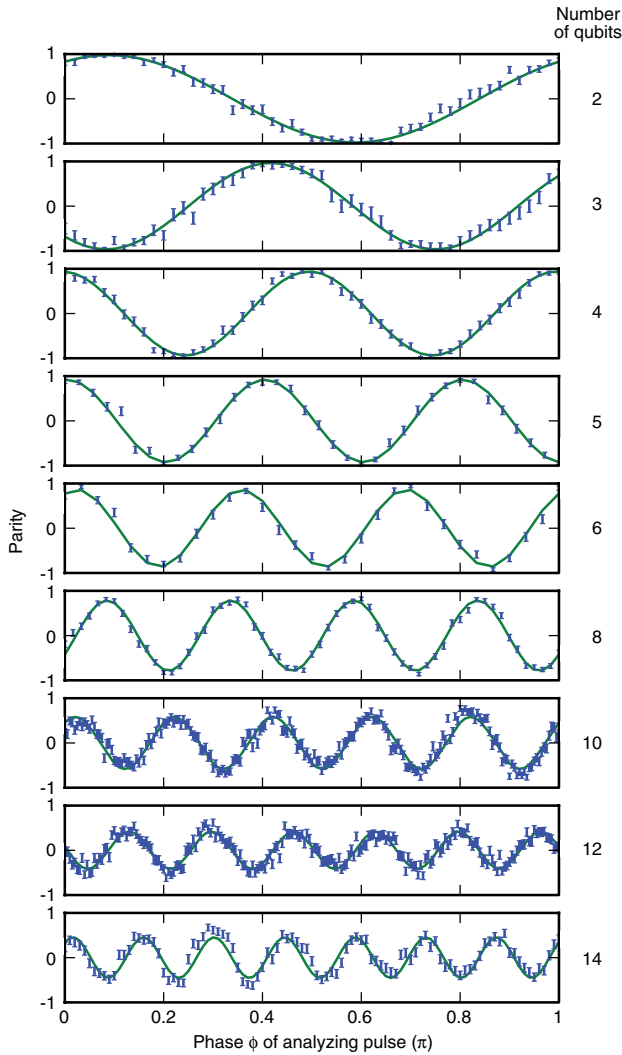
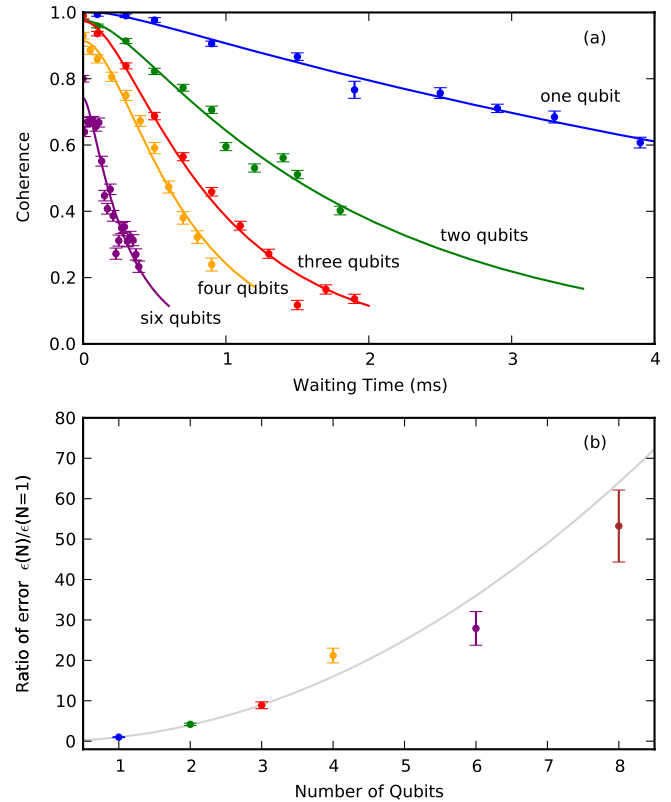FIG. 1 (color online). Parity oscillations observed on {2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14}-qubit GHZ states.

FIG. 2 (color online). Coherence decay and relative error probability $\epsilon(N)$ of GHZ states. (a) Remaining coherence as a function of time for a single qubit (blue) and GHZ states of 2 (green), 3 (red), 4 (orange), and 6 (purple) qubits. (b) The observed relative error probability is consistent with a scaling behavior proportional to N^2 as indicated by the gray line. The coherence of an N-qubit GHZ state then decays by a factor N^2 faster than the coherence of a single qubit.

The coherence of GHZ states as a function of time is investigated by adding waiting times between creation and coherence investigation. The observed coherence decay, equivalent to an error probability, is directly compared with that of a single qubit, ideally yielding a relative error probability $\epsilon(N) = \epsilon(N, t)/\epsilon(1, t) = N^2$. The obtained data (Fig. 2) are consistent with an $N^{2.0(1)}$ scaling law, in full agreement with predictions for correlated Gaussian noise. In other words, the coherence of an N-qubit GHZ state decays by a factor N^2 faster than for a single qubit. The scaling is here explored with up to 8 qubits because for more qubits the entangling gate is currently too sensitive to slow drifts in the experimental apparatus.

As several systems experience correlated noise, this superdecoherence will eventually limit the overall performance of large-scale quantum registers (unless qubits are encoded in noise-insensitive subspaces [17,18]). In our experiment, the noise affecting the quantum register is mainly caused by fluctuations of the homogeneous

magnetic field due to a varying current in the field generating coils. By decreasing this noise, the single-qubit coherence time improved tenfold from 8(1) ms to 95(7) ms. Such coherence time is approximately a factor of 1000 longer than the gate time of the MS interaction of approximately 100 μs. This long coherence time would, in principle, enable the implementation of algorithms with 10 and more qubits. In the presence of correlated noise, however, this N^2 scaling can potentially be the main limitation for several experiments. A correlated phase-noise environment with a single-qubit characteristic error probability of only 0.01 leads to a 10-qubit GHZ-state relative error probability $\epsilon(N = 10) = 0.01 \times 10^2 \approx 1$; most of the state's phase information is then lost.

We verify that correlated phase noise is dominant in our experiment by preparing a state which is insensitive to this noise. We create the state $|00001111\rangle + |11110000\rangle)/\sqrt{2}$, which is locally equivalent to an 8-qubit GHZ state. This state is realized by an MS interaction starting from the state $|00001111\rangle$. Its coherence properties are investigated as above using a local transformation into a GHZ state. The

state shows a coherence time of 324(42) ms. This result is consistent with a lifetime-limited quantum state with an effective lifetime of one fourth that of a single qubit of 1.17 s. In our apparatus, this extension of the coherence time relative to the GHZ state (or even the single-qubit case) can only be explained by correlated noise affecting the entire quantum register. Employing such insensitive states will therefore be crucial for large-scale quantum information processing affected by correlated phase noise.

Being able to efficiently generate entangled quantum states involving 10 and more qubits opens a new range of applications. Our system represents the basic building block for quantum simulation experiments [19] to investigate a complex mechanism such as the magnetic sense of birds [20], to perform exponentially compressed spin-chain simulations [21], and to better understand cosmology and space-time [22]. It may serve as a very well-controlled test bed for fundamental questions in quantum physics such as the investigation of the crossover from superpositions in quantum systems to defined states in macroscopic systems with GHZ states [2].

In conclusion, we have analyzed the decay of GHZ states in an ion-trap based quantum computer. We find a dependency that scales quadratically with the number of qubits and thus shows superdecoherence. This mechanism is present in every other experiment that relies on a phase reference for performing quantum information processing with energetically nondegenerate qubits. Superdecoherence may especially affect quantum metrology based on GHZ states. We achieve coherence times of about 100 ms on an optical qubit which is a factor of 1000 longer than an entangling gate operation in the same system. Using a single-step entangling gate based on the ideas of Mølmer and Sørensen, we generate genuine multiparticle entangled states with up to 14 qubits. The employed techniques represent an encouraging building block for upcoming realizations of advanced quantum computation and quantum simulations with more than 10 qubits.

*Markus.Hennrich@uibk.ac.at

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