Interaction-Induced ac Stark Shift of Exciton-Polaron Resonances

T. Uto⁽¹⁾, ^{1,*} B. Evrard⁽⁰⁾, ^{1,*} K. Watanabe⁽⁰⁾, ³ T. Taniguchi, ³ M. Kroner, ¹ and A. İmamoğlu⁽⁰⁾

¹Institute for Quantum Electronics, ETH Zürich, CH-8093 Zürich, Switzerland

²Institute of Industrial Science, The University of Tokyo, 4-6-1 Komaba, Meguro-ku, Tokyo 153-8505, Japan ³Research Center for Electronic and Optical Materials, NIMS, 1-1 Namiki, Tsukuba 305-0044, Japan

(Received 30 May 2023; revised 20 December 2023; accepted 4 January 2024; published 29 January 2024)

Laser-induced shift of atomic states due to the ac Stark effect has played a central role in cold-atom physics and facilitated their emergence as analog quantum simulators. Here, we explore this phenomenon in an atomically thin layer of semiconductor MoSe₂, which we embedded in a heterostructure enabling charge tunability. Shining an intense pump laser with a small detuning from the material resonances, we generate a large population of virtual collective excitations and achieve a regime where interactions with this background population are the leading contribution to the ac Stark shift. Using this technique we study how itinerant charges modify—and dramatically enhance—the interactions between optical excitations. In particular, our experiments show that the interaction between attractive polarons could be more than an order of magnitude stronger than those between bare excitons.

DOI: 10.1103/PhysRevLett.132.056901

Introduction.-Atomically thin transition metal dichalcogenides (TMDs) and their Van der Waals heterostructures constitute a versatile platform for exploration of phenomena at the frontier of many-body physics and quantum optics [1–3]. Arguably, the most significant feature of this new platform is the weak dielectric screening and relatively heavy band mass of electrons and holes, leading to strong Coulomb interactions and appearance of tightly bound excitons as elementary optical excitations. On the one hand, the small Bohr radius $(a_{ex} \sim 1 \text{ nm})$ of excitons implies strong coupling to light, which ensures that a pristine monolayer TMD realizes an atomically thin mirror in the absence of a cavity [4,5] and exhibits large normal-mode splitting between exciton-polariton modes when embedded inside a cavity [6,7]. On the other hand, electron- or holeexchange-based interaction between two tightly bound excitons is drastically reduced, leading to a predominantly linear optical response [5,8,9]. Therefore, strong excitonphoton coupling is fundamentally linked to weak excitonexciton interactions in TMDs, which in turn constitutes a major challenge to the prospect of engineering nonlinear optical devices [10–13].

Different approaches that could meet this challenge by enhancing exciton-exciton interactions without sacrificing strong light-matter coupling have been explored. While promising results are reported [9,14–16], the large uncertainty in the determination of the underlying excitonexciton interaction strength has been a major hindrance in assessing and comparing these approaches. Measurement of the interaction-induced blueshift under direct resonant excitation leads to generation of a sizable dark exciton population, rendering the extracted interaction strength unreliable. A partial remedy is provided by studying nonlinear response of exciton polaritons; however, recent theoretical work showed that interactions between exciton polaritons can be drastically different from those between bare excitons [17].

In this Letter, we introduce a novel method to reliably measure exciton-exciton interactions, based on the light shift of the excitonic resonances in response to an intense red-detuned femtosecond laser pulse. Previously, the ac Stark shift of excitons in TMDs was studied for large pump detuning [18,19], in a regime well captured by the simple picture of a dressed two-level system, similar to that of a single atom in an off-resonant light field. For very large detunings, comparable to the band gap, the Bloch-Siegert shift becomes significant and has been observed in [20]. Here, we are interested in the opposite limit, where the pump detuning from the excitonic resonances is much smaller than the exciton binding energy: in this limit, the pump pulse generates a large population of virtual excitations that exist only during the pump-pulse duration. The interactions between this background of pump-generated virtual excitations and a test excitation produced by the probe pulse provide the dominant contribution to the light shift [21–26].

A possible avenue to enhance exciton-exciton interactions is to embed them in a two-dimensional degenerate electron system (2DES). Following seminal studies on III-V quantum wells [27–29], recent work established that dynamical screening of excitons in a doped TMD by the 2DES modifies the nature of elementary optical excitations, leading to the formation of attractive and repulsive exciton polarons (AP and RP) [30–32]. Arguably, the principal result of our work is the use of the ac Stark effect to measure the bare AP interactions as a function of n_e , where



FIG. 1. (a) Sketch of the pump-probe setup and the Van der Walls heterostructure. (b) Reflection spectrum of the measured device as a function of the electron density n_e . To enhance visibility, the signal is multiplied by 10 for E < 1.64 eV. (c) Schematic of the energy levels showing the usual ac Stark shift for the first two levels and the interaction-induced shift which increases with the exciton density. (d) Reflection spectrum at charge neutrality, as a function of the delay between the cocircularly polarized pump and probe pulses. From a fit (dashed line) we extract the amplitude of the light shift. The latter is shown in (e) as a function of the pump detuning from the exciton resonance (δ_{ex}), and well fitted by $\Delta_{ex} = B/\delta_{ex}^2$ (solid line). Throughout the Letter, error bars show the statistical error corresponding to two standard deviations obtained from a set of a few repetitions of the experiment.

we demonstrate a dramatic enhancement of the polaronpolaron interaction, up to a factor ~35 as compared to interactions between bare excitons, for $n_e \leq 2 \times 10^{11}$ cm⁻². This behavior was theoretically predicted in [9], but was not experimentally observed.

Our experiments are performed on a monolayer $MoSe_2$ encapsulated in *h*-BN, at cryogenic temperature $(T \leq 10 \text{ K})$. Our setup is sketched in Fig. 1(a). A mode-locked laser delivers ~100 fs pulses. With a pulse shaper we narrow the bandwidth of the pump (increasing the duration by a factor ≤ 2), while a nonlinear crystal fiber

generates a white-light continuum to probe the exciton and AP transition. Both pulses are focused near the diffraction limit onto the sample [more details about the sample and experimental setup are in the Supplemental Material (SM) [33]].

The reflection spectrum as a function of the density n_e is shown in Fig. 1(b), the exciton line smoothly evolves into the RP, and a redshifted AP resonance emerges [30–32].

Exciton light shift.—To benchmark our method, we first focus on the excitonic light shift at charge neutrality, for red-detuned pump laser, cocircularly polarized with the probe. For zero delay between the two pulses ($\tau = 0$) we observe a blueshift and a broadening of the exciton line [Fig. 1(c)]. The latter stems from the averaging over a spatial and time dependent light shift, since the pump and probe lasers have comparable spot size and duration. For $\tau \leq 0$ we also observe the emergence of weak sidebands, a common artifact of pump-probe experiments, which can be understood as the free induction decay of probe-generated excitons perturbed by the pump (for more details see, e.g., [26,41] or the SM [33])

For detunings $\delta_{\text{ex}} = E_{\text{ex}} - E_{\text{pump}}$ large compared to the Rabi frequency of the pump laser (Ω_{max}), the light shift can be expanded as [23]

$$\Delta_{\rm ex} \approx \frac{A}{\delta_{\rm ex}} + \frac{B}{\delta_{\rm ex}^2}.$$
 (1)

Here, the first term corresponds to the usual ac Stark shift of a two-level system [42]. The second term arises from manybody effects, namely Coulomb interaction and Pauli blocking, due to the pump-laser-generated population of virtual excitons. These interaction effects are usually described within a Hatree-Fock approximation [24-26], in which case we can write $B/\delta_{ex}^2 = U_{ex}n_{ex}$, where $n_{ex} \propto \delta_{ex}^{-2}$ is the exciton density and U_{ex} is an effective exciton-exciton interaction strength. In a regime of intermediate detunings, $\hbar\Gamma_{\rm ex}, \Omega_{\rm max} \ll |\delta_{\rm ex}| \ll E_x$, where $\Gamma_{\rm ex}$ is the exciton radiative decay and E_x the exciton binding energy, the interactioninduced light shift is expected to dominate over the singleparticle response. This is the regime explored throughout this Letter. Figure 1(d) shows that the exciton light shift is indeed well captured by a $1/\delta_{ex}^2$ dependence. From this measurement we extract $U_{\rm ex} \approx 0.09 \pm 0.03 \ \mu {\rm eV} \ \mu {\rm m}^2$ (for details on the calibration of $n_{\rm ex}$, see the SM [33]). Our estimate is consistent with previous measurements [5,8,9], albeit an order of magnitude lower than the theoretical expectation, $\sim 3E_x a_{ex}^2 \sim 1 \ \mu eV \ \mu m^2 \ [43,44].$

For cross-circularly polarized pump and probe lasers, producing excitons in opposite valleys, the exchange interaction is suppressed, leaving a negligible direct interaction shift [43,44]. On the other hand, two opposite-valley excitons can bind into a biexciton. The pump drives the transition from a "probe exciton" to the biexciton, resulting in an additional contribution to the light shift, previously



FIG. 2. ac Stark shift of the attractive polaron (AP) resonance for cocircularly polarized pump and probe lasers. In (a)–(c), we show the AP resonance as a function of the pump-probe delay τ for increasing pump-laser intensity ($I_{\rm pk} \approx 0.7, 1.3, 2 \text{ GW/cm}^2$). The shift at $\tau = 0$ is plotted in (d) as a function of the intensity, showing deviation from a linear dependence in $I_{\rm pk}$ (dashed line). Here the pump-laser detuning from AP is $\delta_{\rm AP} \approx 13$ meV and the electron density is $n_e \approx 1.7 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$. In (e), we show the $\delta_{\rm AP}$ dependence of the shift, which is well fitted by $B/\delta_{\rm AP}^2$, shown as a blue line. Here, $n_e \approx 0.17 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ and $I_{\rm pk} \approx 0.4 \text{ GW cm}^{-2}$ so that the $I_{\rm pk}$ dependence is within the linear regime.

investigated in [45,46]. We report similar results in the SM [33], although we point out that we obtain a biexciton binding energy $E_{\text{binding}} = 29 \pm 1.5$ meV slightly larger than the values reported in [45,47] while being in good agreement with another recent measurement [48] (the discrepancy could stem from residual charges in ungated devices).

Attractive polaron light shift.-Having established our approach to measure interactions between excitons, we now turn to the main results of our Letter, where we investigate the interactions between APs in an electron doped TMD. Figures 2(a)-2(c) show the AP light shift for cocircularly polarized pump and probe lasers: despite its relatively low oscillator strength (f_{AP}) , the large blueshift of the AP well exceeds its linewidth. We remark that the AP resonance is symmetric around $\tau = 0$, indicating that the pump laser does not generate incoherent AP population or quench the 2DES. This observation should be contrasted with resonant pump-probe experiments carried out using AP polaritons [9]. However, for increasing pump intensity I_{pk} we observe in Figs. 2(a)-2(c) an overall reduction of $f_{\rm AP}$ together with a small redshift (≈ 0.8 meV at most), both independent of τ . This latter observation suggests that part of the pump-pulse energy is absorbed by the TMD, which then relaxes on a timescale much longer than the pulse repetition rate. Thereby, depending on the pump intensity, we effectively change the steady state of the TMD, presumably its temperature and/or charge density—both of which potentially leading to a reduction of f_{AP} . As a consequence, we observe a sublinear increase of the light shift with increasing I_{pk} [Fig. 2(d)]. We point out that the regime of linear dependence of Δ_{AP} with I_{pk} increases with increasing detuning, and we are able to observe the onset of a saturation in Fig. 2(d) only because the system is driven close to resonance ($\delta_{AP} \approx 13$ meV). In the following we focus on a range of pump-laser detunings and intensities where the reduction of f_{AP} is negligible and $\Delta_{AP} \propto I_{pk}$.

Figure 2(d) shows the dependence of the AP light shift on the detuning from the AP resonance ($\delta_{AP} = E_{AP}$ - E_{pump}) for $n_e \approx 0.17 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$. It is well reproduced by a $\Delta_{AP} \propto 1/\delta_{AP}^2$ law, which demonstrates that it originates predominantly from AP-AP interactions. We point out that considering the small $f_{\rm AP}$ as compared to that of the RP oscillator strength, particularly for low n_e , one could expect that the pump generates more RP than AP (despite a smaller detuning to the latter). However, a light shift dominated by the RP population would scale as $\Delta_{\rm AP} \propto n_{\rm RP} \propto 1/\delta_{\rm RP}^2$. Even at the lowest electron densities $(n_e \approx 0.17 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2})$ we measured, we do not observe such a detuning dependence and the deviation from $\Delta_{AP} \propto$ $1/\delta_{AP}^2$ law remains negligible [33]. This observation suggests that the AP-RP interactions are much weaker than the AP-AP interaction, especially for low n_{e} , which is consistent with the fact that the RP has a dominant exciton content in that regime.

Since f_{AP} increases linearly with n_e , we would normally expect Δ_{AP} to also increase linearly with n_e —indeed, $\Delta_{AP} = U_{AP}n_{AP}$ and $n_{AP} \propto f_{AP} \propto n_e$. At first glance, this is indeed what we observe in Fig. 3(a). However, we also find that unlike f_{AP} , a linear n_e fit to Δ_{AP} yields a finite value for $n_e = 0$: this striking observation can be explained



FIG. 3. (a) Electron density dependence of the attractive polaron light shift for cocircularly polarized pump and probe beam. From these data and a measurement of the AP oscillator strength [33], the AP-AP interaction strength $U_{\rm AP}$ is extracted and compared to the exciton-exciton interaction strength $U_{\rm ex}$ in (b). Here, $\delta_{\rm AP} \approx 25$ meV and $I_{\rm pk} \approx 1.7$ GWcm⁻².



FIG. 4. Light shift of the attractive polaron for cross-circularly polarized pump and probe beam. (a) Detuning δ_{AP} dependence of the light shift at an electron density of $n_e \approx 1.0 \times 10^{12}$ cm⁻². For large δ_{AP} (open symbols) we use the full bandwidth of the pump and $I_{pk} \approx 5.3$ GW/cm⁻². To approach the AP resonance, we reduce the bandwidth and consequently I_{pk} by a factor of ≈ 0.4 . We then rescale the data (full symbols), ensuring that the two measurements match at intermediate detunings ($\delta_{AP} \approx 25, 30$ meV). The data are well fitted by a B/δ_{AP}^2 law, shown as a blue line. (b) Time dependence of the line shift for various n_e at $\delta_{AP} \approx 25$ meV. The red line is a fit, from which we extract the shift at $\tau = 0$. The latter is shown in (c) as a function of n_e . (d) The ratio of the interaction between opposite-valley APs and that of same-valley excitons for $I_{pk} \approx 1.7$ GW/cm⁻².

as an increase of the interaction strength U_{AP} with decreasing n_e that becomes prominent for $n_e \leq 2 \times 10^{11}$ cm⁻², where it counteracts the effect of decreasing n_{AP} or f_{AP} . To highlight this feature, we compare the renormalized AP light shift Δ_{AP}/f_{AP} with that of the exciton Δ_{ex}/f_{ex} , for the same pump intensity and at a wavelength such that $\delta_{ex} = \delta_{AP}$. In this way, we obtain the interaction ratio $U_{AP}/U_{ex} = \Delta_{AP}/f_{AP} \times f_{ex}/\Delta_{ex}$ which we plot in Fig. 3(b). We observe a dramatic enhancement of the AP-AP interactions—up to a factor 35—as n_e is lowered.

In a simple but far-reaching ansatz, the AP wave function is described as a superposition of a zero-momentum bare exciton plus an unperturbed 2DES, and an exciton scattered into a finite momentum state while generating a single particle-hole excitation in the 2DES of the conduction band of the opposite valley [27-30,49]. The latter contribution could also be considered as a superposition of trion-hole pairs. For low n_e , the probability of finding a bare exciton (quasiparticle weight) in an AP excitation is small. Consequently, an AP excitation predominantly generates a collective excitation of tightly bound trions with radius $a_T \sim 2$ nm, each surrounded by a Fermi sea hole of extent on the order of the inverse Fermi wave vector k_F^{-1} . The depletion of the 2DES around the trion leads to an effective repulsive interaction between two APs, through a partial suppression of hybridization of the bare exciton and collective trion-hole excitations. The expansion of the depleted region $\propto k_F^{-1} \propto n_e^{-1/2}$ as n_e decreases can thus partially compensate for the reduction of $f_{\rm AP}$ and consequently $n_{\rm AP}$, ensuring the persistence of a significant AP light shift for low n_e .

The mechanism outlined above takes place only for same-valley APs [9,50]. In cross-polarized configuration, we also observed an AP light shift $\Delta_{AP,\perp}$, albeit much smaller in magnitude and of the opposite sign. Figure 4(a)

shows the detuning dependence of $\Delta_{AP,\perp}$, which is consistent with a $\Delta_{AP,\perp} \propto -1/\delta_{AP}^2$ law, pointing again to an interaction between the probe and pump laser-induced APs. More importantly, we emphasize that our light shift data cannot be fitted with $\Delta_{AP,\perp} \propto 1/(\delta_{AP} - E_0)$, which could have emerged from coupling to a putative charged biexciton resonance [33,47,50]. Figure 4(b) shows the time dependence of the AP light shift at various densities. For $\tau > 0$ (pump before probe), we observe a continuous redshift of the AP line, which increases together with the density n_e , possibly due to residual pump-induced high momentum APs. We emphasize that this shift also exists in cocircularly polarized pump-probe measurements but remains negligible as compared to the ac Stark shift at $\tau = 0$. To fit the data and extract the coherent response, we use a sum of a Gaussian and a piecewise linear function. Contrary to the cocircularly polarized case, the amplitude of the Gaussian term (coherent response) increases approximately linearly with the electron density n_e as shown in Fig. 4(c); here, we discarded low density $n_e < 8 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ data for which the fit was unreliable. After proper normalization by f_{AP} , we extract the interaction strength between opposite-valley APs, $U_{AP,\perp}$, which we compare to the same-valley exciton interaction $U_{\rm ex}$ in Fig. 4(d): we observe almost no dependence of $U_{\rm AP,\perp}$, which remains comparable (in absolute value) to U_{ex} for all n_{e} .

To explain this observation, we consider a σ_{-} -polarized pump laser producing APs in the K' valley. Polaron formation promotes K-valley electron to high momentum states with $k \sim 1/a_T$, thereby reducing the phase-space filling (at low k) for a probe-generated K-valley AP. For low n_E , where $k_F a_T \ll 1$, this mechanism could explain the attractive interactions between opposite-valley APs. However, further investigations are needed to confirm this hypothesis.

Conclusion and outlook.—Our work establishes the ac Stark effect as a novel approach to measure the interaction

between optical excitations in TMD monolayers. An extension of this technique to assess the modification of interactions due to the formation of moiré heterostructures in (twisted) heterobilayers presents no difficulties. By using a detuned pump laser, we generate a large virtual exciton or AP population and thereby almost fully suppress darkexciton generation, which plagued previous studies [9]. An exciting application of the technique we developed would rely on a Laguerre-Gauss pump beam to shift away the AP resonance, except in a small region around the beam's vortex. Increasing the pump intensity to reduce this region to a size $\sim 1/k_F$, one could use strong AP-AP interactions to generate sub-Poissonian light. For that purpose, low electron densities (small k_F) are preferable, and our finding of a persistent AP light shift in that regime is thus of paramount importance.

The data that support the findings of this Letter are available in the ETH Research Collection [51].

We are grateful to Andrea Bergschneider, Alperen Tugen, and Francesco Colangelo for their contribution to the design and fabrication of the optical setup and of the device. We also thank Feng Wang for insightful discussions. This work was supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) under Grant No. 200020_207520. B. E. acknowledges funding from an ETH postdoctorate fellowship.

^{*}These authors contributed equally to this work.

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