Measurement of the Generalized Polarizabilities of the Proton in Virtual Compton Scattering at $Q^2 = 0.92$ and 1.76 GeV^2

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 0031-9007/04/93(12)/122001(5)$22.50

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(Received 23 December 2003; published 14 September 2004)

We report a virtual Compton scattering study of the proton at low c.m. energies. We have determined the structure functions $P_{LL} - P_{TT}/\epsilon$ and P_{LT}, and the electric and magnetic generalized polarizabilities (GPs) $\alpha_E(Q^2)$ and $\beta_M(Q^2)$ at momentum transfer $Q^2 = 0.92$ and 1.76 GeV^2. The electric GP shows a strong falloff with Q^2, and its global behavior does not follow a simple dipole form. The magnetic GP shows a rise and then a falloff; this can be interpreted as the dominance of a long-distance diamagnetic pion cloud at low Q^2, compensated at higher Q^2 by a paramagnetic contribution from πN intermediate states.

DOI: 10.1103/PhysRevLett.93.122001 PACS numbers: 13.60.Fz

The electric and magnetic polarizabilities of the nucleon describe its response to a static electromagnetic field. Contrary to atomic polarizabilities, which are of the size of the atomic volume [1], the proton electric polarizability α_E [2] is much smaller than 1 cubic fm, the volume scale of a nucleon. Such a small polarizability is a natural indication of the intrinsic relativistic character of the nucleon, as illustrated in a harmonic oscillator model [3]. The smallness of the proton magnetic polarizability β_M relative to α_E reflects a strong cancellation of paramagnetism and diamagnetism in the proton.

In virtual Compton scattering (VCS) $\gamma^* p \to \gamma p$ the polarizabilities become dependent on the momentum or the four-momentum transfer Q^2 of the virtual photon, as first introduced by Guichon *et al.* [4]. These generalized polarizabilities (GPs) can be seen as Fourier transforms of local polarization densities (electric, magnetic, and spin) [5]. Therefore they are a new probe of the nucleon dynamics, allowing us, e.g., to study the role of the pion cloud and quark core contributions to the nucleon GPs at various length scales. VCS can be accessed experimentally via exclusive photon electroproduction $ep \to ep\gamma$. After the NE-18 experiment [6] and the pioneering VCS experiment at MAMI [7], we performed the E93-050 H$(e, e'p)\gamma$ experiment [8] at the Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility (JLab). We report low-energy expansion (LEX) analyses of our data up to pion threshold, and dispersion relation (DR) analyses of our data extending into the Δ-resonance region.

To lowest order in the fine structure constant α_{em}, the unpolarized $ep \to ep\gamma$ cross section at small q' is

$$d^5\sigma^{\mathrm{EXP}} = d^5\sigma^{\mathrm{BH+Born}} + q'\phi\Psi_0 + \mathcal{O}(q'^2),$$
$$\Psi_0 = v_1\left(P_{LL} - \frac{1}{\epsilon}P_{TT}\right) + v_2 P_{LT}, \quad (1)$$

where ϕ, v_1, v_2 are kinematical coefficients defined in [9], q' is the final photon energy in the γp c.m. frame, and ϵ is the virtual photon polarization. $d^5\sigma^{\mathrm{BH+Born}}$ corresponds to the coherent sum of the Bethe-Heitler (BH) and the VCS Born amplitudes, and depends only on the elastic form factors G_E^p, G_M^p of the proton. This is a particular case of Low's low-energy theorem [10] for threshold photon production. The structure functions

$$P_{LL} - \frac{1}{\epsilon}P_{TT} = \frac{4M_p}{\alpha_{em}}G_E^p(Q^2)\alpha_E(Q^2) + [\text{spin-flip GPs}],$$
$$P_{LT} = -\frac{2M_p}{\alpha_{em}}\sqrt{\frac{q^2}{Q^2}}G_E^p(Q^2)\beta_M(Q^2) + [\text{spin-flip GPs}] \quad (2)$$

contain five of the six independent GPs [11,12]. These structure functions are defined at fixed q, the c.m. three-momentum of the VCS virtual photon. Equivalently, Q^2 in Eqs. (2) is defined in the $q' \to 0$ limit: $Q^2 = 2M_p(\sqrt{M_p^2 + q^2} - M_p)$.

The apparatus, running conditions, and analyses of the JLab experiment are detailed elsewhere [13–18]. An electron beam of 4.030 GeV energy was directed onto a 15 cm liquid hydrogen target. The two Hall A spectrometers were used to detect the scattered electron and the outgoing proton in coincidence, allowing the identification of the exclusive reaction $ep \to ep\gamma$ by the missing-mass technique. This experiment makes use of the full capabilities of the accelerator and the Hall A instrumentation [19]: 100% duty cycle, high resolution spectrometers, and high luminosities. We summarize our kinematics in Table I. Variables such as q', or the c.m. polar and azimuthal angles θ and φ of the outgoing photon with respect to $\vec{q}$, are obtained by reconstructing

TABLE I. Kinematics of $ep \to ep\gamma$. We used data sets I-a and II for the LEX analyses and all data sets for the DR analyses.

Data set	Q^2-Range (GeV^2)	W-Range
I-a	[0.85, 1.15]	Mostly $<\pi N$ threshold
I-b	[0.85, 1.15]	Mostly $\Delta(1232)$ resonance
II	[1.60, 2.10]	Mostly $<\pi N$ threshold

the missing particle. The acceptance calculation is provided by a dedicated Monte Carlo simulation [20] including a model cross section, resolution effects, and radiative corrections [21]. A number of cuts are applied in event analysis, especially to obtain a well-defined acceptance and to eliminate protons punching through the spectrometer entrance collimator.

We performed LEX analyses of the data sets I-a and II. The photon electroproduction cross section is determined as a function of q', θ, and φ at a fixed value of q (1.080 and 1.625 GeV/c) and ϵ (0.95 and 0.88, respectively). The effect of the GPs on the cross section is small, reaching at maximum 10%–15% below pion threshold. The method to extract the structure functions is deduced from Eq. (1), in which the (BH + Born) cross section is calculated using a recent parametrization of the proton form factors [22]. For each bin in (θ, φ), we measure $d^5\sigma^{\rm EXP}$ in several bins in q', and extrapolate the quantity $\Delta\mathcal{M} = (d^5\sigma^{\rm EXP} - d^5\sigma^{\rm BH+Born})/(\phi q')$ to $q' = 0$, yielding the value of Ψ_0. In our data, $\Delta\mathcal{M}$ does not exhibit any significant q' dependence, so the extrapolation to $q' = 0$ is done in each bin in (θ, φ) by averaging $\Delta\mathcal{M}$ over q'. The resulting Ψ_0 term is then fitted as a linear combination of two free parameters, which are the structure functions $P_{LL} - P_{TT}/\epsilon$ and P_{LT} (Fig. 1).

The systematic errors are calculated from four sources added quadratically: (1) ± 2 MeV uncertainty in beam energy, (2) ± 0.5 mrad uncertainty in horizontal angles, (3) $\pm 2.3\%$ uncertainty in overall absolute cross-section normalization, and (4) $\pm 2\%$ uncertainty due to possible cross-section shape distortions. The value of the reduced χ^2 of the fit (Fig. 1) is one measure of the validity of the LEX in our kinematics. The LEX results for the structure functions are summarized in Table II.

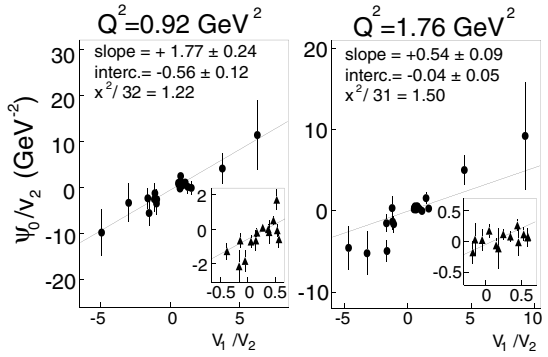

FIG. 1. A graphical representation of the LEX fit (straight line) for data sets I-a and II. Circles correspond to out-of-plane data, and the inner plot is a zoom on the lepton plane data (triangles). Ψ_0, ν_1, and ν_2 are defined in the text.

We performed DR analyses of the data sets I-a and II, and also I-b including data from πN threshold through the Δ resonance. In the DR formalism of Pasquini *et al.* [23], the VCS amplitude is determined by unitarity from the MAID $\gamma^{(*)}p \to N\pi$ multipoles [24], plus asymptotic terms $\Delta\alpha$, $\Delta\beta$ which are unconstrained phenomenological contributions to the GPs $\alpha_E(Q^2)$ and $\beta_M(Q^2)$. $\Delta\alpha$, $\Delta\beta$ are parametrized as follows:

$$\Delta\alpha(Q^2) = \alpha_E(Q^2) - \alpha_E^{\pi N}(Q^2) = \frac{[\alpha_E^{\rm exp} - \alpha_E^{\pi N}]_{Q^2=0}}{(1 + Q^2/\Lambda_\alpha^2)^2} \quad (3)$$

(same relation for $\Delta\beta$ with parameter Λ_β) where $\alpha_E^{\pi N}$ ($\beta_M^{\pi N}$) is the πN dispersive contribution evaluated from MAID, $\alpha_E^{\rm exp}$ ($\beta_M^{\rm exp}$) is the experimental value at $Q^2 = 0$ [2], and the mass coefficients Λ_α and Λ_β are free parameters. Theoretically, the choice of the dipole form in Eq. (3) is not compulsory. More fundamentally, the DR model provides a rigorous treatment of the higher order terms in the VCS amplitude up to the $N\pi\pi$ threshold, by including resonances in the πN channel. In the region of the $\Delta(1232)$ resonance, these higher order terms become dominant over the lowest order GPs given by the LEX.

The DR analysis consists in fitting the free parameters Λ_α and Λ_β to our cross-section data. This yields the value of the GPs $\alpha_E(Q^2)$ and $\beta_M(Q^2)$ using Eq. (3). This also yields the value of the structure functions of Eqs. (2) since the DR model predicts all the spin-flip GPs [23]. Our DR results are presented in Tables II and III. The systematic uncertainties are calculated from the same sources as in the LEX analyses. The error bars differ from one data set

TABLE II. Compilation of the VCS structure functions. In all cases the first error is statistical, and the second one is the total systematic error.

	Q^2 (GeV^2)	ϵ	$P_{LL} - P_{TT}/\epsilon$ (GeV^{-2})	P_{LT} (GeV^{-2})
Ref.			Previous experiments	
[2]	0		$81.3 \pm 2.0 \pm 3.4$	$-5.4 \pm 1.3 \pm 1.9$
[7]	0.33	0.62	$23.7 \pm 2.2 \pm 4.3$	$-5.0 \pm 0.8 \pm 1.8$
Set			This experiment, LEX Analyses	
I-a	0.92	0.95	$\mathbf{1.77} \pm 0.24 \pm 0.70$	$\mathbf{-0.56} \pm 0.12 \pm 0.17$
II	1.76	0.88	$\mathbf{0.54} \pm 0.09 \pm 0.20$	$\mathbf{-0.04} \pm 0.05 \pm 0.06$
Set			This experiment, DR Analyses	
I-a	0.92	0.95	$\mathbf{1.70} \pm 0.21 \pm 0.89$	$\mathbf{-0.36} \pm 0.10 \pm 0.27$
I-b	0.92	0.95	$\mathbf{1.50} \pm 0.18 \pm 0.19$	$\mathbf{-0.71} \pm 0.07 \pm 0.05$
II	1.76	0.88	$\mathbf{0.40} \pm 0.05 \pm 0.16$	$\mathbf{-0.09} \pm 0.02 \pm 0.03$

TABLE III. The dipole mass parameters Λ_α and Λ_β obtained by fitting the three data sets independently, and the electric and magnetic GPs evaluated at $Q^2 = 0.92$ GeV^2 (data sets I-a, I-b) and 1.76 GeV^2 (data set II). The first and second errors are statistical and total systematic errors, respectively.

Data set	Λ_α (GeV)	Λ_β (GeV)
I-a	$0.741 \pm 0.040 \pm 0.175$	$0.788 \pm 0.041 \pm 0.114$
I-b	$0.702 \pm 0.035 \pm 0.037$	$0.632 \pm 0.036 \pm 0.023$
II	$0.774 \pm 0.050 \pm 0.149$	$0.698 \pm 0.042 \pm 0.077$
Data set	$\alpha_E(Q^2)$ (10^{-4} fm^3)	$\beta_M(Q^2)$ (10^{-4} fm^3)
I-a	$1.02 \pm 0.18 \pm 0.77$	$0.13 \pm 0.15 \pm 0.42$
I-b	$0.85 \pm 0.15 \pm 0.16$	$0.66 \pm 0.11 \pm 0.07$
II	$0.52 \pm 0.12 \pm 0.35$	$0.10 \pm 0.07 \pm 0.12$

to another, due to differences in phase space coverage and in sensitivity to both the physics and the sources of systematic errors. The reasonably good χ^2 of the DR fits (1.3 to 1.5) indicates that the DR model allows a reliable extraction of GPs in our kinematics, both below and above pion threshold.

Figure 2 shows our DR extraction of the GPs $\alpha_E(Q^2)$ and $\beta_M(Q^2)$, together with the point at $Q^2 = 0$ [2] and the points derived from LEX analyses. The latter are obtained by subtracting the spin-flip polarizability predictions [23] to the structure functions of Eqs. (2). This involves some model dependence, which is not presently taken into account in the error bars.

The solid curves in Fig. 2 are the full DR calculations, split into their dispersive πN contributions (dashed line) and the remaining asymptotic contributions of Eq. (3) (dash-dotted line) for $\Lambda_\alpha = 0.70$ GeV and $\Lambda_\beta = 0.63$ GeV, as fitted to the JLab data set I-b. The πN contribution to the magnetic polarizability in Fig. 2(b) is strongly paramagnetic, predominantly arising from the $\Delta(1232)$ resonance. In the DR formalism, this is canceled by a strong diamagnetic term $\Delta\beta$ originating from the σ-meson t-channel exchange. The interpretation of $\Delta\beta$ as the contribution of a long-distance pion cloud is further supported by the fact that the fitted scale parameter $\Lambda_\beta = 0.63$ GeV is smaller than the elastic form factor dipole parameter $\Lambda = 0.84$ GeV. The dotted curves in Fig. 2 result from the full DR calculation, evaluated with $\Lambda_\alpha = 1.79$ GeV and $\Lambda_\beta = 0.51$ GeV, which reproduces the MAMI LEX data. The data for $\alpha_E(Q^2)$ disagree strongly with the simple dipole ansatz for the contribution $\Delta\alpha$. It should be noted that our DR analysis is basically insensitive to the particular choice of form of $\Delta\alpha$ and $\Delta\beta$, since our fits are performed independently in two small ranges of Q^2. Finally, we point out that the ηN and $\pi\pi N$ channels, which must contribute to $\Delta\alpha$, have resonances [$S_{11}(1535)$ and $D_{13}(1520)$, respectively] with transition form factors that do not follow a simple dipole Q^2 dependence [25,26].

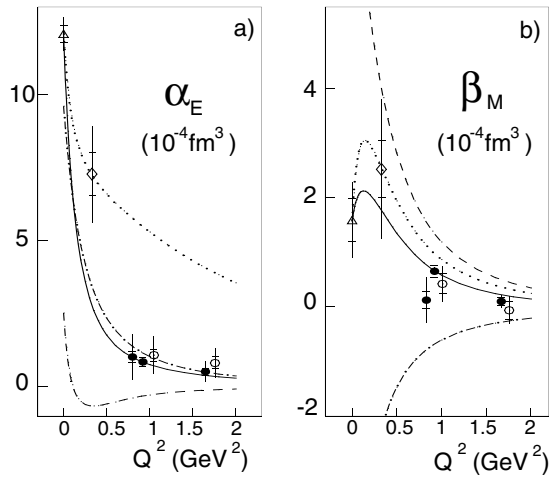

FIG. 2. Compilation of the data on electric (a) and magnetic (b) GPs. Data points are from Ref. [2] (△), the LEX analysis of MAMI [7] (◇), and the present LEX (○) and DR (●) analyses of JLab. Some JLab points are shifted in abscissa for better visibility. The inner error bar is statistical; the outer one is the total error (statistical plus systematic). The curves show calculations in the DR model (see text).

In summary, we studied the process $ep \to ep\gamma$ at JLab. With data below pion threshold we applied the LEX, and for data extending through the Δ resonance we applied the DR formalism to extract the generalized polarizabilities. The different analyses are consistent, and the results give new insight into the correlations between spatial and dynamical variables in the proton. Other experiments at low energy will measure the VCS structure functions at low Q^2 [27,28] and separate the six GPs via double polarization measurements [28,29].

We thank the JLab accelerator staff and the Hall A technical staff for their dedication. This work was supported by DOE Contract No. DE-AC05-84ER40150 under which the Southeastern Universities Research Association (SURA) operates the Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility. We acknowledge additional grants from the U.S. DOE and NSF, the French CNRS and CEA, the Conseil Régional d'Auvergne, the FWO-Flanders (Belgium), and the BOF-Gent University. We thank the INT (Seattle) and ECT* (Trento) for the organization of VCS workshops.

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