$d_{5/2}$ proton hole strength in neutron-rich ⁴³P: shell structure and nuclear shapes near N = 28

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Abstract

We report on the use of the one-proton knockout reaction from ⁴⁴S to determine the location of $d_{5/2}$ proton strength in neutron-rich ⁴³P. The results are used to test two shell-model frameworks with different pictures of the evolution of single-proton energies along the N = 28 isotones near the neutron dripline. We observe a concentration of $d_{5/2}$ proton hole strength near 1 MeV in excitation energy. This result favors the recent shell-model interaction of Utsuno et al. and provides additional evidence for an oblate shape for ⁴²Si.

The nuclei in the vicinity of ⁴²Si have served as both a frontier for our understanding of the evolution of shell structure near the neutron dripline and a proving ground for the experimental techniques that will be used at the next generation of radioactive beam facilities. Whether major shell closures and magic numbers change at the neutron dripline and affect nuclear deformation is an open question that has generated a great deal of activity, and ⁴²Si has both N = 28 - a major shell closure in stable nuclei - and a proton subshell closure (Z = 14) [1–3]. In addition to the N = 28 major shell closure being the lightest caused by the spin-orbit interaction, nuclei in the vicinity of ⁴²Si are among the heaviest isotopes near the neutron dripline that are accessible by the present generation of radioactive beam facilities, making them the best currently available subjects for the study of changing shell structure near the neutron dripline.

With new radioactive beam facilities being planned and constructed, there has been a tremendous effort to develop experimental tools that will allow detailed spectroscopic study of exotic isotopes produced at these new facilities. One of these tools is the onenucleon knockout reaction with intermediate-energy beams. An effort to correlate cross sections measured with this reaction with theoretical cross sections, combining shell-model spectroscopic factors and single-particle cross sections from eikonal theory, is underway [4, 5]. The present reaction and analysis contributes to this effort. In the present communication, we report on the use of the one-proton knockout reaction from ⁴⁴S to locate and quantify proton spectroscopic strength from the $d_{5/2}$ orbit in ⁴³P, which is one proton heavier than ⁴²Si. We find a concentration of $d_{5/2}$ proton hole strength near 1 MeV in excitation energy. This observation is reproduced using shell-model calculations performed with the recently developed interaction of Utsuno et al. [6], which in turn supports an oblate shape for ⁴²Si.

The experiment was performed at the Coupled-Cyclotron Facility of the National Superconducting Cyclotron Laboratory at Michigan State University. The ⁴⁴S beam was produced by fragmentation of a 140 MeV/nucleon ⁴⁸Ca primary beam incident on a 705 mg/cm² ⁹Be fragmentation target. The fragmentation products were separated in the A1900 fragment separator [7]. The secondary ⁴⁴S beam, with a purity of 81 % and primary contaminant ⁴⁵Cl, was incident on a 376 mg/cm² thick ⁹Be reaction target mounted at the target position of the S800 magnetic spectrograph [8]. The mid-target beam energy was 91.7 MeV/nucleon. A total of 9.3×10^8 incoming ⁴⁴S particles were well separated from contaminants by time of flight in scintillators mounted at the extended focal plane of the A1900 and at the object



FIG. 1: Doppler-corrected spectrum of gamma rays measured in coincidence with recoiling ⁴³P particles. The solid curve is the GEANT3 fit described in the text.

of the S800 analysis line. Projectile-like reaction products were identified by time of flight at the focal plane of the S800 and energy loss in the S800 ion chamber. The Segmented Germanium Array (SeGA) [9] of 32-fold segmented high purity germanium detectors was used to detect gamma rays emitted by excited reaction products.

The projectile-frame energy spectrum of gamma rays measured in coincidence with ⁴⁴S beam particles and outgoing ⁴³P particles is shown in Fig. 1. A source velocity of $\beta = 0.405$ was used in the event-by-event Doppler correction of gamma-ray energies measured in the laboratory frame. GEANT3 [10] simulations of the response of SeGA to gamma rays were used to extract total gamma-ray intensities from the measured spectrum. The measured spectrum was fitted with a linear combination of the simulated responses of the observed gamma rays, the measured room background, and two exponential functions using a log-likelihood maximization procedure. The exponential functions were included to account for the empirically-observed prompt component of the background. The resulting fit is shown as a solid curve in Fig. 1. In addition to the known [2, 3] 184(1) keV gamma ray de-exciting the $J^{\pi} = \frac{3}{2}^+$ first excited state, six other gamma rays are prominent in the spectrum at 661(4), 765(6), 825(5), 911(6), 1018(6), and 1851(11) keV. The 825 keV and 911 keV gamma rays likely correspond to the 789(29) keV and 918(26) keV gamma rays seen in the fragmentation study of Ref. [3]. In addition, the fitting process revealed that the peak at 825 keV is a doublet, containing a weak 845(4) keV component.

Gamma-ray spectra measured in coincidence with the 184 keV and 825 keV gamma rays



FIG. 2: Gamma-ray spectra measured in coincidence with the 184 keV (top panel) and 825 keV (bottom panel) gamma rays.



FIG. 3: Proposed level scheme of ⁴³P based on the present work. Gamma-ray intensities from the fitting process, relative to that of the 184 keV transition, appear in italics.

are shown in the top and bottom panels of Fig. 2. The 661, 825, 911, and 1851 keV gamma rays appear in the 184 keV gate spectrum. We observe no coincidences between these gamma rays, so we place them directly atop the 184 keV $J^{\pi} = \frac{3}{2}^{+}$ first excited state in the proposed level scheme in Fig. 3. While the apparent photopeak at 1018 keV in the 825 keV gate spectrum is not statistically significant, we tentatively place the 1018 keV transition above the 1009 keV state based on the energy difference between the 1009 keV and 2035 keV levels.

An inclusive single-proton knockout cross section $\sigma_{\rm inc} = 9.6(8)$ mb to bound final states of ⁴³P was determined from the number of outgoing ⁴³P reaction products relative to the number of incoming ⁴⁴S beam particles and the particle density of the reaction target. The

$E_{\text{level}} [\text{keV}]$	J^{π} $[\hbar]$	nlj	BR [%]	$\sigma \; [{ m mb}]$	$\sigma_{\rm sp} \ [{\rm mb}]$
0	$1/2^{+}$	$2s_{1/2}$	24(4)	2.3(4)	8.37
184	$3/2^{+}$	$1d_{3/2}$	33(2)	3.1(3)	7.00
845	$(5/2^+)$	$(1d_{5/2})$	4(1)	0.37(7)	7.73
1009	$(5/2^+)$	$1d_{(5/2)}$	8(2)	0.8(2)	7.70
1095	$(5/2^+)$	$1d_{(5/2)}$	20(1)	1.9(2)	7.68
1774	$(5/2^+)$	$(1d_{5/2})$	4(1)	0.4(1)	7.55
2035	$(5/2^+)$	$(1d_{5/2})$	7(2)	0.7(2)	7.50

TABLE I: Excitation energies, spins and parities J^{π} , single-particle configurations nlj, measured knockout branching ratios BR, measured partial cross sections σ , and single-particle cross sections σ_{sp} from reaction theory.

uncertainty in the inclusive cross section includes the stability of the incoming beam (8%), the correction for the momentum acceptance of the S800 (3%), and the software gates used to select the reaction of interest (1%). Partial knockout cross sections to each level and the corresponding branching ratios appear in Table I. We discuss the consistency of these measured cross sections with theoretical predictions below. The inclusive cross section from the present experiment is in agreement with that obtained in the earlier one-proton knockout measurement of Fridmann et al. [2]. The prior measurement was made with a reaction target of the same thickness but with a factor of 85 fewer beam particles. In the prior work, only the 184 keV transition was observed at a level of 75(15)% of the inclusive cross section. If we do not correct for feeding from higher-lying states, the knockout branching ratio of the 184 keV level from the present work is 73(4)%, in excellent agreement with the earlier result.

Parallel momentum distributions of ⁴³P reaction residues in the ground state and the strongly populated excited states at 184, 1009, and 1095 keV are shown in Fig. 4. The excited-state distributions were obtained by gating on the de-excitation gamma rays identified at the upper right in each panel in the figure. The distribution of the first excited state was corrected for feeding by the 825 keV and 911 keV transitions based on the measured gamma-ray intensities. The ground state distribution was obtained with a linear combination of distributions measured in coincidence and in anticoincidence with gamma rays as described in Ref. [11].



FIG. 4: Parallel momentum distributions of states of 43 P populated in one proton knockout from 44 S. The curves are theoretical distributions, described in the text, for l = 0 (dashed) and l = 2 (solid).

The curves in Fig. 4 are eikonal-model calculations produced using the method described in Ref. [5]. The incoming beam was not monoenergetic, so the measured momentum distribution of the unreacted ⁴⁴S beam has been folded into the theoretical distributions. In addition, the incoming ⁴⁴S beam particles lose more energy per unit target thickness than the ⁴³P reaction products. In our measurement, the different energy losses of incoming and outgoing particles contributed $\frac{\Delta p}{p} = 0.8\%$ to the momentum spread of the ⁴³P particles. A rectangular distribution of this width has also been folded into the theoretical distributions.

The dashed curves in Fig. 4 correspond to removal of a proton with orbital angular momentum l = 0 and separation energy 22.2 MeV, while the solid curves correspond to l = 2. The measured distributions show a small asymmetry, having low momentum "tails." This phenomenon has been observed in several cases [11–14]. Except for very weakly bound systems [15], it is not well understood, but it is thought to arise from a dissipative mechanism not accounted for by eikonal theory [13]. To avoid bias due to the low momentum tails, we have fitted the theoretical distributions in Fig. 4 to the measured cross sections above 17.4 GeV/c. Above this value, the momentum distributions of the three excited states are compatible with l = 2 and the ground state with l = 0 distributions. These l assignments suggest a $\pi s_{1/2}$ configuration in the ground state and $\pi d_{3/2}$ configuration for the first excited state, compatible with prior J^{π} assignments of $1/2^+$ and $3/2^+$ to these states. The assignment of l = 2 to the excited states at 1009 keV and 1095 keV, along with energies significantly above the first excited state, is consistent with their interpretation as arising from the removal of a proton from the more deeply-bound $d_{5/2}$ proton orbital in ⁴⁴S.

As described in Ref [16], the theoretical cross section for populating a final state identified by nJ^{π} is calculated by combining the single-particle cross section $\sigma_{\rm sp}(nJ^{\pi})$ from eikonalmodel calculations with the shell-model spectroscopic factor C^2S

$$\sigma_{\rm th}(nJ^{\pi}) = \left(\frac{A}{A-1}\right)^N C^2 S \ \sigma_{\rm sp}(l, B_n),\tag{1}$$

where N is the oscillator quantum number, l is the angular momentum, and B_n is the binding energy of the orbital from which the nucleon is removed.

Our understanding of single-particle occupancies has evolved over the last decade through (e, e'p) measurements on stable nuclei and single-nucleon knockout reactions on exotic isotopes. These experiments demonstrate that the classical single-particle model picture of fully occupied deeply-bound single-particle states requires modification because of several correlation effects. These correlation effects are quantified with a "reduction factor" R_s obtained from experimental and theoretical inclusive knockout cross sections via [4]

$$R_s = \frac{\sigma_{\exp}^{\rm inc}}{\sum_{nJ^{\pi}} \sigma_{\rm th}(nJ^{\pi})}$$
(2)

where the sum includes all shell-model states below the nucleon separation energy. Singlenucleon knockout studies have mapped the systematics of the dependence of the required reduction on the difference between the energies of the neutron and proton Fermi surfaces. In a recent article, Gade et al. [17] present a plot of reduction factors from several singlenucleon knockout studies vs. the difference ΔS in proton and neutron separation energies which shows a well-defined systematic dependence. In short, the reduction factor is small (with observed values as low as 0.25) when the knocked-out nucleon is tightly bound, and large (approaching 1.0) when the knocked-out nucleon is loosely bound. For ⁴⁴S, the incident exotic nucleus in the present study, ΔS is 17(1) MeV. A weighted least squares fit to the reduction factor plot in [17] and this difference in binding energies gives $R_s = 0.33(3)$ for the present proton knockout reaction. This is identical to the result reported below, which we obtain from Eq. 2.



FIG. 5: Measured partial knockout cross sections to $J^{\pi} = 5/2^+$ states below the neutron separation energy (top left panel) in 250 keV bins compared with theoretical cross sections (two bottom right panels) described in the text. The numerical values in the two bottom left panels are the shellmodel spectroscopic factors C^2S . The plots on the left show spectroscopic factors summed as a function of excitation energy up to 6 MeV for each spin.

In the upper-left panel of Fig. 5, measured cross sections for the states in ⁴³P observed here, and believed to have $J^{\pi} = 5/2^+$, are shown in bins corresponding to 250 keV intervals in excitation energy. Two sets of shell-model calculations [18] were combined with the eikonal single-particle cross sections via Eq. 1 to calculate the theoretical cross sections shown in the two lower-right panels of the figure. The first set, labeled Nowacki-01 (lower panel), is performed with the interaction used in [19] in which the effective spin-orbit $\pi d_{3/2} - \pi d_{5/2}$ splitting is 5.9 MeV in ⁴⁸Ca and 6.6 MeV in ⁴²Si. In the second set, labeled Utsuno-08 (center panel), we show results based on a new effective interaction for this mass region, described in [20] and [6], that takes into account some empirical trends observed for the effective central and tensor components of the interactions for the sd [21] and pf [22, 23] shells. For Utsuno-08 the effective $\pi d_{3/2} - \pi d_{5/2}$ spin-orbit splitting is 5.2 MeV in ⁴⁸Ca and 6.5 MeV in ⁴²Si. The numerical values in the two lower-left panels of Fig. 5 are the shell-model spectroscopic factors. The theoretical cross sections in Figure 5 have been scaled by the reduction factor $R_s = 0.33(3)$ obtained using Eq. 2 when using the theoretical cross sections based on the shell-model calculations with the Utsuno-08 interaction. The error bars on the theoretical cross sections in the figure reflect the uncertainty in the reduction factor. The main difference between the calculations based on the two shell-model interactions is that the Utsuno-08 gives more $d_{5/2}$ strength near 1.1 MeV in better agreement with experiment. The strength near 2 MeV is too large with both interactions. This shows the sensitivity of these measurements to the interactions. The right side of the figure shows the shell-model spectroscopic factors summed as a function of excitation energy up to 6 MeV for each spin (this requires about 50 states for each spin). The present experiment is sensitive to the strength below 3 MeV which contains 51% (45%) of the total sd-shell sum-rule strength of 8 with the Nowacki-01 (Utsuno-08) interaction. The fraction of the sum rule up to 6 MeV is 82% (76%). These results nicely show the large fractionation of spectroscopic strength that occurs in mid-shell nuclei and how its distribution reflects both the single-particle and collective properties of the nucleus.

The shape of ⁴²Si has been the subject of considerable discussion during the last several years. At first, it was expected that this nucleus would be spherical because of its neutron number, 28, which is magic along the line of stability, and its Z = 14 subshell closure. However, shell structure is much less certain near the neutron dripline, and the shape of ⁴²Si has been the topic of debate. Much of the discussion has been centered on the role of the neutron orbits in determining the shape of ⁴²Si and its neighbors. It was predicted [24, 25] that the spin-orbit force affecting neutron orbits weakens close to the neutron dripline both because of the weak binding of neutrons and the role of the continuum. More specifically, a number of authors have predicted that the N = 28 shell closure narrows or even collapses as protons are removed from the doubly-magic nucleus ⁴⁸Ca [26–33], causing the deformation of ⁴²Si. In contrast, it was argued in Ref. [34] that the proton-subshell closure at Z = 14 would be a strong stabilizing influence, hindering deformation and maintaining a spherical shape.

The accumulating experimental evidence on 42 Si has not yet fully clarified the situation. A measurement of the β -decay of 42 Si was used to argue for a deformed shape for this nucleus [1], as was the observation that 43 Si is bound [35]. The measurement of a small cross section for two-proton knockout from 44 S was interpreted as evidence for the persistence of the Z = 14 subshell closure in 42 Si, which would favor a spherical shape [2]. Mass measurements of Cl, S, and P isotopes in the region [36] indicate a weakening of the N = 28 shell for Z > 14, while the mass measurement of 42 Si [37] is inconclusive, the result being consistent with either a spherical or deformed shape. Most recently, the fragmentation study of Bastin et al. [3] revealed a low-lying excited state of ⁴²Si (presumed to have $J^{\pi} = 2^+$) at 770(19) keV, and inverse kinematics proton scattering from ⁴⁰Si [38] showed a low 2_1^+ energy and enhanced collectivity relative to mid-shell, both strongly suggestive of a reduced N = 28 shell gap and a deformed shape at Z = 14. The lowering of $\pi d_{5/2}$ strength is correlated with a lowering of the 2^+ energy in ⁴²Si from 1.49 MeV with Nowacki-01 to 0.87 MeV with Utsuno-08, to be compared with the recent experimental value of 0.77 MeV [3]. The result reported here for the distribution of $d_{5/2}$ proton hole strength in ⁴³P, with its agreement with the shell model calculation of Ref. [6], adds to the supporting evidence for an oblate shape in ⁴²Si.

In summary, we have reported on the use of the one-proton knockout reaction from ⁴⁴S to identify $d_{5/2}$ proton hole strength in neutron-rich ⁴³P. The results have been used to test two shell model interactions, of which only one - that of Ref. [6] - can reproduce the concentration of $d_{5/2}$ strength near 1 MeV. This lends support to the growing evidence that ⁴²Si has an oblate shape.

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