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Unveiling the intruder deformed $0^+_2$ state in $^{34}\text{Si}$

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The $0^+_2$ state in $^{34}\text{Si}$ has been populated at the GANIL/LISE3 facility through the $\beta$-decay of a newly discovered $1^+$ isomer in $^{34}\text{Al}$ of 26(1) ms half-life. The simultaneous detection of $e^+e^-$ pairs allowed the determination of the excitation energy $E(0^+_1) = 2719(3)$ keV and the half-life $T_{1/2} = 19.4(7)$ ns, from which an electric monopole strength of $\rho^2(E0) = 13.0(9) \times 10^{-3}$ was deduced. The $2^+_1$ state is observed to decay both to the $0^+_1$ ground state and to the newly observed $0^+_2$ state (via a 607(2) keV transition) with a ratio $R(2^+_1 \rightarrow 0^+_1/2^+_1 \rightarrow 0^+_2) = 1380(717)$. Gathering all information, a weak mixing with the $0^+_1$ and a large deformation parameter of $\beta = 0.29(4)$ are found for the $0^+_2$ state, in good agreement with shell model calculations using a new sdpf-u-mix interaction allowing np-nh excitations across the $N = 20$ shell gap.

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In 1949 Mayer, Haxel, Suess and Jensen [1, 2] independently gave a description of the observed shell gaps at nucleon numbers 2, 8, 20, 28, 50, 82 and 126 in terms of mean field potential including the spin-orbit interaction. With this model, these special numbers - renamed 'magic numbers'-, as well as the properties of the related nuclei observed at that time such as spin, magnetic moments, discontinuities in binding energies, and $\beta$-decay systematics could be explained. Later, other remarkable properties of magic nuclei have been found: they have a high energy $2^+$ state and a weak transition probability $B(E2;0^+\rightarrow 2^+)$. The picture of immutable shell gaps persisted until the ground breaking experiments performed between 1975 and 1984 in very neutron rich nuclei close to the neutron magic number $N = 20$. Although it was known since long that the ground state parity of $^{11}\text{Be}$ was at odds with the naive shell model picture [3], this fact was overlooked until much later. Studies of charge radii, atomic masses and nuclear spectra in the $^{12}\text{Mg}$ and $^{11}\text{Na}$ isotopic chains have shown that a region of deformation exists at $N = 20$ below $^{11}\text{Be}$ [4]. More recently it has been found that the $B(E2)$ of $^{32}\text{Mg}$ [5] is about 4 times larger than the one of $^{34}\text{Si}$ [6], hereby confirming the onset of the regime of quadrupole collectivity in the region. In the framework of the shell model, the deformation in $^{32}\text{Mg}$ was soon associated with two-particle-two-hole $(2p2h)$ excitations across the $N = 20$ shell gap [7]. These $2p2h$ configurations were referred to as intruders since they lie outside the normal model space description of the sd shell nuclei. The region of those nuclei, the ground state of which is dominantly an intruder configuration while their normal configuration ground state is found as an excited state, is called an “island of inversion”. Nuclei around $^{32}\text{Mg}$ were proposed first to form such an island of inversion [8–10]. It has been demonstrated in a recent evaluation of the experimental data of $^{31}\text{Mg}$ and $^{33}\text{Mg}$ [11] that their ground state wave function is indeed dominated by two neutrons excitations into the pf orbits. Recent theoretical works [12, 13] go a bit further and propose the mixing of the normal and the intruder states for $^{32}\text{Mg}$ allowing even for a normal configuration dominated ground state [12]. The major pillars to understand the inversion mechanism are the $0^+_1/2^+_2$ states in $^{30,32}\text{Mg}$ and $^{34}\text{Si}$. Adding two neutrons to $^{30}\text{Mg}$ may provoke the inversion of the normal and intruder configurations. The latter are expected to be shifted by nearly 3 MeV to become the ground state of $^{32}\text{Mg}$. Along the isotonic chain we anticipate that the transition is even more abrupt: by removing two protons from $^{30}\text{Si}$, the intruder state has to be shifted down by about 4 MeV with respect to the spherical one to become the ground state of $^{32}\text{Mg}$.

Excited $0^+$ states were searched for in $^{30}\text{Mg}$, $^{32}\text{Mg}$ and $^{34}\text{Si}$ for a better understanding of the inversion mechanism. Despite many experimental efforts, this quest was vain for about 30 years until the recent discovery of the $0^+_2$ states in $^{30}\text{Mg}$ at 1789 keV [14] and in $^{32}\text{Mg}$ at 1508 keV [15]. While the excited $0^+$ state in $^{30}\text{Mg}$ could be assigned to the intruder configuration [14], the assignment of the ground state to the intruder and the
excited $0^+$ state to the normal configuration in $^{32}\text{Mg}$ has been recently questioned [16]. Detailed spectroscopy of $^{34}\text{Si}$ resulting in the discovery of a $0^+_2$ intruder state is an important step towards understanding the coexistence of the normal and intruder configurations [10]. A candidate for the $0^+_2$ state in $^{34}\text{Si}$ has been proposed at $2133$ keV in Ref. [17] but experiments which followed were not able to confirm this result [18–20]. In [20], a new candidate has been tentatively proposed at $1846$ keV, but not confirmed by later works [18, 19, 21].

In the present work we propose to use the $\beta$-decay of $^{34}\text{Al}$ to populate the $0^+_2$ state in $^{34}\text{Si}$. As $^{33}\text{Al}$ lies at the boundary of the island of inversion, it should exhibit normal and intruder configurations at similar excitation energies. Indeed, in the shell model calculations of [22], its ground state ($J^\pi=4^-$) has a mixed configuration $\pi d_{5/2} \otimes \nu f_{7/2}$ and $\pi d_{5/2} \otimes \nu (d_{3/2})^{-2}(f_{7/2})^{3}$ while an excited state at $\sim 200$ keV ($J^\pi=1^+$) has an intruder $2p2h$ configuration $\pi d_{5/2} \otimes \nu (f_{7/2})^2(d_{3/2})^{-1}$ leaving a hole in the neutron $d_{3/2}$ orbit. Following this prediction the $J^\pi=1^+$ state would be a $\beta$-decay isomer. Its decay would mainly proceed through a Gamow-Teller transition $\nu d_{3/2} \rightarrow \pi d_{5/2}$, leading mostly to the $2^+_2$ state in $^{34}\text{Si}$. If the $0^+_2$ state is located below the $2^+_1$ state at $3.326$ MeV in $^{34}\text{Si}$, it would decay by an E0 transition through internal electron conversion (IC) and/or internal pair creation (IPF) processes. Thus, electron spectroscopy coupled to $\beta$-decay spectroscopy was used to search for the $0^+_2$ state in $^{34}\text{Si}$.

The experiment was carried out at the Grand Accélérateur National d’Ions Lourds (GANIL) facility. The $^{34}\text{Al}$ nuclei were produced in the fragmentation of a $77.5$ A-MeV $^{36}\text{S}$ primary beam of $2$ $\mu$A mean intensity on a $240$ mg/cm$^2$ Be target. The Lise3 spectrometer [23] was used to select and transport the $^{34}\text{Al}$ nuclei, produced at a rate of $600$ pps with a purity of $93\%$ and a momentum dispersion of $1.48\%$. The produced nuclei were identified on an event by event basis by means of their energy-loss in a stack of Si detectors (labeled $\text{Si}_{\text{stack}}$) and time-of-flight values referenced to the radiofrequency of the cyclotrons. The transversal alignment of the $^{34}\text{Al}$ nuclei was controlled by means of a double-sided Si strip detector located downstream to a $20$ degrees-tilted kapton foil of $50$ $\mu$m, in which the $^{34}\text{Al}$ nuclei were implanted. Once the alignment was performed, the implantation depth of the nuclei was adjusted by tilting the $\text{Si}_{\text{stack}}$ with respect to the beam direction. Four telescopes (labeled as $\text{Si}_{\text{tel}}$), each composed of a $1$ mm-thick Si detector of $50\times50$ $\mu$m$^2$ followed by a $4.5$ mm-thick Si(Li) detector of $45\times45$ $\mu$m$^2$, located $24$ mm above and below the beam axis were used to detect electrons and positrons with a geometrical efficiency of $\sim 40\%$. In addition two Ge clover detectors of the EXOGAM array, located at $35$ mm on the left and right hand sides of the beam axis, were used to detect $\gamma$-rays with an efficiency of $1.6\%$ at $1$ MeV, and $0.8\%$ at $3.3$ MeV. The experiment ran in sequences of beam-on (120 ms) during which nuclei were collected and beam-off (300 ms) during which the $\text{Si}_{\text{tel}}$ detected the $\gamma$-rays (from the $\beta$-decay) as well as $e^+e^-$ (from IPF). Note that the detection of these particles was also considered in the beam-on mode in anti-coincidence with an ion detected in $\text{Si}_{\text{stack}}$. The $0^+_2$ state would decay mainly through IPF if located at a high energy $E_{\gamma}$ below the $2^+_1$ state at $3.326$ MeV. In this hypothesis, the electron and positron would share a total energy $E_{e^-}+E_{e^+}=-E_{\gamma}-1022$ keV. The search for these events was achieved by requiring a delayed coincidence between three $\text{Si}_{\text{tel}}$ telescopes. Fig. 1a shows the total energy in one telescope versus the total energy in another. The oblique line corresponds to events in which the detected energy sum in two telescopes equals to $1688$ (2) keV (as shown in Fig. 1c). Taking into account the energy losses of the $e^+e^-$ pair in the kapton foil as well as their energy-angle correlations [24] with GEANT4 simulations [25], we deduce that the total energy of the emitted pair ($E_{e^-}+E_{e^+}$) was $(91)$ keV higher, establishing a $0^+_2$ state at $E_{\gamma}=2719(3)$ keV in $^{34}\text{Si}$.

As shown in the Fig. 1b, a half-life of $T_{1/2}(E0)=19.4\pm0.7$ ns has been obtained for the $0^+_2$ state from the time difference between a $\beta$-ray in one of the $\text{Si}_{\text{tel}}$ and a pair detected in another. A consistent value of $19.2\pm0.8$ ns was found from the time difference between a $\beta$-ray and a $\gamma$-ray of $511$ keV, arising from the annihilation of the positron at rest, detected in EXOGAM. Therefore, the transition electric monopole strength $\rho^2(0^+_2\rightarrow0^-_1)=13.0(0.9)\times10^{-3}$ is calculated using the internal conversion $\Omega_{IC}=1.331\times10^7$ s$^{-1}$ and internal pair creation $\Omega_{IPF}=2.733\times10^4$ s$^{-1}$ transition rates. These values have been obtained from the one of ref. [26] extrapolated to $A=34$ and corrected to take into account the atomic screening. The detailed procedure can be found in [27].

The existence of two $\beta$-decaying states in $^{34}\text{Al}$ is proven in the present work by the fact that half-lives obtained when $\gamma$-is followed by $926$ keV or $511$ keV $\gamma$-rays differ significantly as shown in Fig. 2. The transition at $926$ keV is due to the $4^-\rightarrow3^-$ $\gamma$-decay; as shown in [17]. Its half-life of $54.4\,(5)$ ns agrees well with the value of $56.3\,(5)$ ns obtained in [17]. Conversely, the transition of $511$ keV corresponding to the $1^+\rightarrow0^+_2$ $\beta$-decay has a significantly shorter half-life of $26(1)$ ms. The half-lives of the $4^−$ and $1^+$ states in $^{34}\text{Al}$ compare well with the values of $59$ and $30$ ms predicted by shell model calculations, a direct feeding of the $0^+_2$ state of $17\%$ being predicted from the $J^\pi=1^-$. As no $\gamma$-ray (except a large number of $511$ keV due to positrons annihilation) was observed in coincidence with the $\sim 2\times10^4$ $e^+e^-$ events selected in Fig. 1 (a,c) we surmise that the $0^+_2$ state is fed directly by the $\beta$-decay of the $1^+$ isomer of $^{34}\text{Al}$. However, an absolute direct decay-branch to the $0^+_2$ state is hard to obtain as the ratio of isomeric feeding in $^{34}\text{Al}$ could not be determined. As for the direct feeding of the $2^+_1$ state in $^{34}\text{Si}$ through the decay of the $J=1^+$ isomer, the situation is more complex since all states populated in the decay of the $4^−$ state transit through it.
decay lifetime in coincidence with the $2^+_1 \rightarrow 0^+_1$ transition (49.8(2) ms) is shorter than the one obtained in [17], it is concluded that the $2^+_1$ state is also fed (directly and/or indirectly) from $\beta$-decay of the isomer in $^{34}$Al. A $J^\pi=1^+$ value is assigned to the $\beta$-decaying isomer in $^{34}$Al by virtue of comparison to shell model calculations and $\beta$-decay selection rules.

Energy wise the $2^+_1$ state in $^{34}$Si could decay both to the $0^+_1$ state (located 607 keV below) and to the $0^+_2$ state from the time difference between a $\beta$-trigger and a $e^+e^-$ pair, as shown in b).

Despite a weak signal to noise ratio obtained for the 607 keV peak, a ratio $R(2^+_1\rightarrow0^+_1/2^+_1\rightarrow0^+_2)=1380(717)$ has been extracted for the decay of the $2^+_1$ state to the $0^+_1$ and $0^+_2$ states taking into account the $\gamma$ efficiencies at 607 keV and 3.326 MeV and the Si detector efficiencies with the related uncertainties. A value of $B(E2;2^+_1\rightarrow0^+_1)=61(40)\ e^2fm^4$ is deduced using the measured value of $B(E2;2^+_1\rightarrow0^+_2)=17(7)\ e^2fm^4$ [28] determined via Coulomb excitation.

Information on the mixing and deformation of the $0^+_{1,2}$ states in $^{34}$Si can be obtained using a two level mixing model assuming spherical $\beta_S$ and deformed $\beta_D$ configurations, as it has been done for example in [29]. Using the relation $B(E2;2^+_1\rightarrow0^+_1)/B(E2;2^+_1\rightarrow0^+_2)\sim\tan^2\theta$ [30], a weak mixing ratio of $\cos^2\theta=0.78(9)$ is deduced from the experimental $B(E2)$ values. We remind here that the maximum mixing ratio would lead to $\cos^2\theta=0.5$. The magnitude of the electric monopole matrix element can be written as a function of the mixing ratio and the differ-

FIG. 1: a) Total energy in one telescope ($E_{Si}+E_{SiLi}$) versus total energy in another one for events with a telescope multiplicity $\geq 3$ and a delay of 16 ns between the $\beta$-trigger and the detected $e^+e^-$ and/or $e^-e^-$. The oblique line corresponds to a constant energy sum of $e^+e^-$ pairs emitted in the $\beta$0 decay of the $0^+_1$ state in $^{34}$Si. c) Sum of the energies in both telescopes showing a peak at 1688(2) keV. A half-life of 19.4(7) ms is deduced for the $0^+_1$ state from the time difference between a $\beta$-trigger and a $e^+e^-$ pair, as shown in b).

FIG. 2: $\beta$-decay time spectra obtained in coincidence with the 926 keV (in black) and 511 keV (in red) $\gamma$-rays of $^{34}$Si giving different half-lives corresponding to the 4$^+$ ground state [54.4(5) ms] and the 1$^+$ isomeric state [26(1) ms] in $^{34}$Al.

FIG. 3: Part of the gamma energy spectrum following the implantation of $^{34}$Si nuclei. The main peak corresponds to the known 591 keV transition in $^{34}$Si. Peaks at 607 keV and 596 keV correspond to the $2^+_1\rightarrow0^+_1$ decay and the (n,n'$'g) reactions on the $^{74}$Ge nuclei of EXOGAM detectors, respectively.
TABLE I: Comparison between the experimental and shell model energies (in keV) and reduced transition probabilities (in e²fm⁴) for ³⁴Si, ³²Mg and ³⁰Mg.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>³⁴Si</th>
<th>³²Mg</th>
<th>³⁰Mg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E(0⁺ᵣ)</td>
<td>2719(3)</td>
<td>2570</td>
<td>1658(2)ᵃ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E(2¹⁾ᵣ</td>
<td>3326(1)ᵇ</td>
<td>3510</td>
<td>885.3(1)ᵇ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B(E2;2¹⁾ᵣ→0₀⁺)</td>
<td>17(7)ᵇ</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>91(16)ᵇ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B(2E2;2¹⁾ᵣ→0₀⁺)</td>
<td>61(40)ᵇ</td>
<td>67&lt;10⁶ᵇ</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ᵃ: [15];ᵇ: [17, 20];ᶜ: [28];ᵈ: [5];ᵉ: [32];ᶠ: [14]

ence of shapes, βₛ and β_D, of the two configurations before mixing [31], ρ²(E0)=3(32e²/4π²)²sin²θcos⁵θ(β₃D-β₄D)².

Using the experimental value of the mixing ratio, the experimental electric monopole strength is reproduced when deformation parameters of β_D=0.29(4) and βₘ=0 are taken.

We compare now the experimental results with the shell model calculations performed with the code ANTOINE [33] using the effective interaction sdpf-u-mix which is an extension of sdpf-u-si [34]. The sdpf-u-si interaction was designed for 0kω calculations of very neutron rich sd nuclei around N=28 in a valence space comprising the full sd(pf)-shell for the protons(neutrons), i.e. this interaction was defined with a core of 2⁸O. Its single particle energies (SPE’s) and monopoles (neutron-proton sd-pf and neutron-neutron pf-pf) were fixed by the spectra of ³⁵Si, ⁴¹Ca, ⁴⁷K and ⁴⁹Ca. In order to allow for the mixing among different np-nh neutron configurations across N=20, it is necessary to add to sdpf-u-si the following new ingredients: a) The off-diagonal cross shell sd-pf matrix elements, which are taken from the Lee-Kahana-Scott G-matrix [35] scaled as in ref. [36]; b) The neutron SPE’s on a core of 2⁸O: For the sd-shell orbits we use always the USD values [37], while for the pf-shell orbits we have no experimental guidance at all. Nonetheless, for any particular set of pf-shell SPE’s, the neutron-neutron sd-pf monopoles must be chosen such as to reproduce the spectrum of ³⁵Si and the N=20 gap. We have anchored our choice to the energy of the first excited 0⁺ state in ³⁰Mg, because this guarantees that in our isotopic course toward N=20 the descent of the intruder states proceeds with the correct slope. Indeed, at 0kω sdpf-u-mix and sdpf-u-si produce identical results.

The results of the calculations performed with this new sdpf-u-mix interaction are gathered in Table I. There is a very nice agreement for the excitation energies and B(E2)'s in ³⁴Si using the standard sd-shell effective charges e_s=1.35e and e_p=0.55e. The 0⁺₁ ground state has 89% of neutron closed shell configuration whereas the excited 0⁺₂ and 2⁺₁ are built on 2p₂h excitations at 86%. Thus the image of coexistence between a closed-shell 0⁺₁ and a strongly correlated 0⁺₂ state stands for ³⁴Si. It is worthwhile to mention that, as illustrated in Table I, the results obtained with this new interaction for the ³⁰,³²Mg agree also very well with the experimental data. The ground state of ³⁰Mg is built on normal configurations at 77% and its first 0⁺ excited state is an intruder with the same proportion (77%). The situation is more complex in ³²Mg, with the ground state being dominated by intruder configurations at 88% whereas the first excited 0⁺ is an even mixture of normal and intruder components. With these mixing ratios, the dramatic shift observed for the intruder configuration in ³²Mg with respect to both ³⁰Mg and ³⁴Si is well reproduced.

Concerning ³⁴Al, the calculation produces the right ground state spin 4⁻, a first excited 5⁻ at 0.25 MeV and a 1⁺ isomer at 0.55 MeV. The lifetimes of the ground state (59 ms) and the isomer (30 ms) agree nicely with the experimental data (54.4(5) and 26(1), respectively). The multipolet of negative parity states is dominated by the neutron 1p0h configuration (f⁷/₂)⁺ with a proton hole in d₅/₂ consistent with the doubly magic picture of ³⁴Si. The mixing in the 4⁻ ground state, discussed in [22], is calculated to be around 22%. The structure of the isomeric 1⁺ state is, as expected, dominated (92%) by the neutron 2p₁h configuration (d₃/₂⁻)(f⁷/₂)². To summarize, the β-decay of a newly discovered 1⁺ isomer in ³⁴Al (T₁/₂=26(1) ms) has been used to populate and study for the first time the 0⁺ state at 2719(3) keV in ³⁴Si. From the spectroscopic information – ρ²(E0;0⁺₁→0⁺₂)=13.0(0.9)×10⁻³ and B(2E2;0⁺₁→0⁺₂)=61.4(4) e²fm⁴ – a weak mixing ratio of 0.78(9) with the 0⁺₁ state and a large deformation parameter β=0.29(4) are extracted. Therefore the spherical ground state 0⁺₁ and the deformed 0⁺₂ state coexist in ³⁴Si. State of the art shell model calculations using the new sdpf-u-mix interaction accounting for the mixing of normal states with np-nh excitations across the N=20 shell gap has been performed, the results of which are in very good agreement with the experimental data. These calculations show a 12 – 22% mixing of the intruder component to the normal one in the ground states of ³⁰Mg and ³⁴Si, respectively, while a similar admixture of the normal configurations to the intruder ones is calculated in the ground state of ³²Mg as well as in the 0⁺ states of ³⁰Mg and ³⁴Si. Thus the basic idea of the island is confirmed in the framework of the shell model, although the picture became a more refined via allowing for configuration mixing.

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