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Rosenbluth Separation of the $\pi^0$ Electroproduction Cross Section Off the Neutron


(Jefferson Lab Hall A Collaboration)

1Faculté des Sciences de Monastir, Monastir 5000, Tunisia
2Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York 13244, USA
3Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Kingsville, Texas 78363, USA
4Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139, USA
5California State University, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California 90032, USA
6INFN/Sezione di Catania, 95125 Catania, Italy
7Clermont université, université Blaise Pascal, CNRS/IN2P3, Laboratoire de physique corpusculaire, FR-63000 Clermont-Ferrand, France
8Florida International University, Miami, Florida 33199, USA
9Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility, Newport News, Virginia 23606, USA
10Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia 23529, USA
11Ohio University, Athens, Ohio 45701, USA
12Hampton University, Hampton, Virginia 23668, USA
13Irif, CEA, Université Paris-Saclay, 91191 Gif-sur-Yvette, France
14Università di Bari, 70121 Bari, Italy
15Institut de Physique Nucléaire CNRS-IN2P3, Orsay 91405, France
16Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Piscataway, New Jersey 08854, USA
17Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122, USA
18Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213, USA
19INFN/Sezione Sanitā, 00161 Roma, Italy
20Kharkov Institute of Physics and Technology, Kharkov 61108, Ukraine
21North Carolina Central University, Durham, North Carolina 27701, USA
22Longwood University, Farmville, Virginia 23909, USA
23The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC 20064, USA
24Duke University, Durham, North Carolina 27708, USA
25University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 0A2, Canada
26Seoul National University, Seoul 08826, South Korea
27College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia 23187, USA
28Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv 69978, Israel
29University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia 22904, USA
30Kent State University, Kent, Ohio 44242, USA
31University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts 01003, USA
32Facultad de Física, Universidad de Valencia, Valencia 46100, Spain
33University of Ljubljana, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia
34Los Alamos National Laboratory, Los Alamos, New Mexico 87545, USA
35Northern State University, Norfolk, Virginia 23529, USA
36Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, New York 11794, USA
37Kasetsart University, Chatuchak, Bangkok, 10900, Thailand
38Yerevan Physics Institute, Yerevan 375036, Armenia

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We report the first longitudinal-transverse separation of the deeply virtual exclusive $\pi^0$ electroproduction cross section off the neutron and coherent deuteron. The corresponding four structure functions $d\sigma_L/dt$, $d\sigma_T/dt$, $d\sigma_{T\pi}/d\phi$, and $d\sigma_{T\gamma}/d\phi$ are extracted as a function of the momentum transfer to the recoil system at $Q^2=1.75$ GeV$^2$ and $x_B=0.36$. The $ed\rightarrow ed\pi^0$ cross sections are found compatible with the small values expected from theoretical models. The $en\rightarrow en\pi^0$ cross sections show a dominance from the response to transversely polarized photons, and are in good agreement with calculations based on the transversity generalized parton distributions of the nucleon. By combining these results with previous measurements of $\pi^0$ electroproduction off the proton, we present a flavor decomposition of the $u$ and $d$ quark contributions to the cross section.

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Understanding the internal three-dimensional structure of nucleons in terms of quarks and gluons is a major challenge of modern hadronic physics. Two complementary approaches have been used in the past in order to achieve this goal. On the one hand, nucleon form factors (FFs) measured in elastic electron scattering provide information on the transverse charge and current distributions inside the nucleon [1]. On the other hand, parton distribution functions (PDFs) measured in deeply inelastic scattering (DIS) characterize the longitudinal momentum distribution of the underlying quarks and gluons [2]. Twenty years ago, FFs and PDFs were unified within the formalism of generalized parton distributions (GPDs) [3–5]. GPDs are universal functions encoding a wealth of information about the nucleon internal structure such as the correlation between the transverse position of quarks and gluons (partons) and their longitudinal momenta [6]. GPDs also provide access to the contribution of quark and gluon orbital angular momenta to the nucleon spin [4]. Eight GPDs for each quark flavor $q$ describe nucleon structure at leading order in $1/Q$ (twist-2). They correspond to each combination of nucleon and parton helicities. The four chiral-even GPDs ($H^q$, $E^q$, $\tilde{H}^q$, and $\tilde{E}^q$) conserve the helicity of the parton whereas the four chiral-odd, or transversity GPDs ($H^q_T$, $E^q_T$, $\tilde{H}^q_T$, and $\tilde{E}^q_T$) flip the parton helicity [7,8].

GPDs parametrize the structure of the target independently of the reaction [7]. Chiral-even GPDs can be accessed experimentally via hard exclusive processes such as deeply virtual Compton scattering (DVCS) and deeply virtual meson electroproduction (DVMP) in the Bjorken limit $Q^2\to\infty$ and $t/Q^2\ll1$ at fixed $x_B$. Recent results on DVCS show the validity of this limit at values of $Q^2$ as low as 1.5 GeV$^2$ [9–11]. In the case of DVMP, the longitudinal scattering amplitude factorizes into a hard perturbative contribution and a soft convolution of the nucleon GPDs and the meson distribution amplitude (DA). The transverse virtual photo-production amplitude is proven to be suppressed by a factor of $1/Q^2$ at sufficiently high values of $Q^2$ [12]. In the case of $\pi^0$ electroproduction, it was suggested in Refs. [13,14] that a large contribution to the transverse amplitude could arise from the convolution of the transversity GPDs of the nucleon with a twist-3 quark-helicity flip pion DA. Model calculations including the transversity GPDs have successfully described recent $\pi^0$ electroproduction data on a proton target, measured at Jefferson Lab (JLab) [15–18]. Measurements of $\pi^0$ electroproduction on the neutron are extremely interesting as they provide the exciting possibility to separate the individual contributions of the $u$ and $d$ quarks to the cross sections, when combined with measurements from a proton target at the same kinematics.

The differential cross section of deeply virtual $\pi^0$ production is given by [19]:

$$\frac{d^4\sigma}{dQ^2dx_Bdtd\phi} = \frac{1}{2\pi dQ^2dx_B} \left( \frac{d\sigma_T}{dt} + \epsilon \frac{d\sigma_L}{dt} \right)$$

$$\times \sqrt{2\epsilon(1+\epsilon)} \frac{d\sigma_{T\pi}}{dt} \cos\phi + \epsilon \frac{d\sigma_{T\gamma}}{dt} \cos 2\phi,$$

$$= \frac{d^2\Gamma_A}{dQ^2dx_B} = \alpha \frac{y^2(1-x_B)}{2\pi x_B Q^2} \frac{1}{1-\epsilon},$$

$$\epsilon = \frac{1-y-Q^2/(2E)^2}{1-y+y^2/2+Q^2/(2E)^2}.\quad(1)$$

Figure 1 shows the lowest order Feynman diagram of the reaction and includes definitions of the kinematic variables. The $\phi$ dependence in Eq. (1) allows the extraction of the
interference terms $d\sigma_{TL}/dt$ and $d\sigma_{PR}/dt$ while measurements of the total cross section at two incident beam energies and fixed $Q^2$ and $x_B$ separate $d\sigma_{T}/dt$ and $d\sigma_{LL}/dt$.

In JLab Hall A experiment E08-025, we measured the $D(e, e'\pi^0)X$ reaction, with the primary goal of extracting the $n(e, e'\pi^0)n$ cross section in the quasi-free approximation. We performed a Rosenbluth separation, based on data taken with incident beam energies $E = 4.455 \ (e = 0.65)$ and 5.550 GeV ($e = 0.79$). A 15-cm-long liquid deuterium (LD2) target was used as a quasi-free neutron target. The quasi-free $\pi^0$ electroproduction events off the proton are subtracted using the data from experiment E07-007 [18], similarly to the analysis of DVCS off the deuteron in Ref. [21]. These two experiments ran concurrently with liquid hydrogen (LH2) and LD2 targets interchanged daily to minimize systematic uncertainties. Scattered electrons were detected with $10^{-4}$ momentum resolution in the left high resolution spectrometer (HRS) of Hall A [22], which determined accurately the electron scattering kinematics centered at $x_B = 0.36$ and $Q^2 = 1.75 \text{ GeV}^2$. The two photons from the $\pi^0$ decay were detected in an electromagnetic calorimeter composed of a $13 \times 16$ array of $3 \times 3 \times 18.6 \text{ cm}^3$ PbF2 crystals, resulting in a $[0, 0.2\pi]$ coverage in $\phi$ and $[0, 0.25] \text{ GeV}^2$ range in $t' = t_{\min} - t$. A 3.1% energy resolution at 3.16 GeV and a 0.6 ns $\pi^0$-electron coincidence time resolution was achieved by means of a 1 GHz flash ADC system in each calorimeter channel. The calibration of the calorimeter was performed with elastic $H(e, e'\pi^0)\gamma$ data from dedicated runs in which the scattered electrons were detected in the calorimeter, with energy determined by the kinematics of the elastic recoil proton in the HRS. The calorimeter calibration was monitored continuously a posteriori by tracking the 2-photon invariant mass $m_{T\gamma} = \sqrt{(q_1 + q_2)^2}$ and the $ep \rightarrow e\pi^0X$ missing mass squared $M_X^2 = (q + p - q_1 - q_2)^2$. Exclusive $\pi^0$ electroproduction events are selected for each $(t', \phi)$ bin by applying a bidimensional cut:


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ergies and fixed $Q^2$ and $x_B$ separate $d\sigma_{T}/dt$ and $d\sigma_{LL}/dt$.

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\begin{align}
Q^2 &= -(k - k')^2 \\
x_B &= Q^2/(2q \cdot p) \\
W^2 &= (q + p)^2 \\
y &= (q \cdot p)/(k \cdot p) \\
t &= (q - q')^2 \\
t' &= t_{\min} - t
\end{align}

FIG. 1. Diagram of the coherent $\pi^0$ electroproduction reaction on the nucleon ($M = M_N, \ x_B = 0.36$) or deuteron ($M = M_d, \ x_B = 0.18$) with the dominant $\pi^0 \to \gamma \gamma$ decay mode. The minimal $|t|$ value is $t_{\min} = (Q^2 + m_{\pi^0}^2)/4W^2 - (|q^2_{\pi^0}| - |q^2_{\gamma\gamma}|)^2$, where $m_{\pi^0}$ is the $\pi^0$ mass, $q' = q_1 + q_2$, and the c.m. superscript refers to the target $-\pi^0$ center-of-mass frame.

\begin{align}
Invariants \\
Q^2 &= -(k - k')^2 \\
x_B &= Q^2/(2q \cdot p) \\
W^2 &= (q + p)^2 \\
y &= (q \cdot p)/(k \cdot p) \\
t &= (q - q')^2 \\
t' &= t_{\min} - t
\end{align}

\begin{align}
\text{FIG. 2. Corrected missing mass squared } M_X^2 \text{ for } D(e, e'\pi^0)X \text{ (solid circles) and normalized Fermi-smeread } H(e, e'\pi^0)X \text{ events (open circles). Bars show statistical uncertainties. The difference between the two distributions (squares) is scaled by a factor 10 for clarity. The blue and magenta bands (both scaled } \times 10_1 \text{ show the simulated } n(e, e'\pi^0)n \text{ and } d(e, e'\pi^0)d \text{ yields, respectively, fit to the data by minimizing Eq. (6). These bands include the statistical uncertainty of the fit. The total fit to the open squares distribution is shown by the solid (red) histogram.}

\begin{align}
|m_{\gamma\gamma} - m_{\pi^0}| &< 4\sigma_{m_{\gamma\gamma}}; \\
M_X^2 &= M_X^2 + C(m_{\gamma\gamma} - m_{\pi^0}) < 0.95 \text{ GeV}^2, \\
0.5 \text{ GeV}^2 &< M_X^2,
\end{align}

where $\sigma_{m_{\gamma\gamma}}$ is the resolution of the reconstructed $\pi^0$ invariant mass, and the empirical factor $C = 13 \text{ GeV}$ takes into account the natural correlation between the invariant mass and missing mass originating from energy fluctuations in the calorimeter. Figure 2 shows the corrected missing mass squared $M_X^2$ obtained at $E = 4.455 \text{ GeV}$ for LH2 and LD2 data sets where $M_X^2$ is calculated with a target 4-vector $p$ corresponding to a nucleon at rest. Accidentals were subtracted from these spectra and the LH2 data were normalized to the same integrated luminosity as the LD2 data.

The average momentum transfer to the target $|\Delta\lambda| = \langle |\vec{q} - \vec{q}'| \rangle$ in the kinematics of this experiment is much larger than the average $np$ relative momentum in the deuteron wave function $\langle |\vec{p}_{\gamma\gamma}| \rangle$. Below the threshold for the production of a second pion, the impulse approximation is expected to accurately describe the exclusive $D(e, e'\pi^0)X$ yield, with $X = np \oplus d$. Thus, we write the cross section as the sum of the coherent elastic channel $d(e, e'\pi^0)d$ and two incoherent quasielastic contributions:

\begin{align}
D(e, e'\pi^0)X &= d(e, e'\pi^0)d + n(e, e'\pi^0)n + p(e, e'\pi^0)p.
\end{align}

We subtract the $p(e, e'\pi^0)p$ yield from the deuterium data by normalizing our $H(e, e'\pi^0)X$ data to the luminosity of
the LD2 data. The Fermi-momentum $\vec{p}_F$ of bound protons inside the deuteron is statistically added to the LH2 data following the distribution given in Ref. [23] since this effect is intrinsically present in the $M_X^2$ spectrum of the LD2 data. The Fermi-momentum smearing increases the width of the missing mass distribution by less than 1%. The result of the subtraction of the $H(e,e'X)X$ data from the $D(e,e'X)X$ yield is shown in Fig. 2. The $d(e,e'X)d$ and $n(e,e'X)n$ channels are, in principle, kinematically separated by $\Delta M_X^2 = t(1 - M/M_d) \approx t/2$, where $M_d$ is the deuteron mass. This kinematic shift, due to the calculation of $M_X^2$ using $p(M_N,0)$, is exploited in the procedure described below to separate the contributions of the quasi-free neutron and coherent deuteron channels in the total $\pi^0$ electroproduction cross section.

Figure 2 illustrates that the exclusive $\pi^0$ electroproduction events are primarily localized below the production threshold for a second pion: $M_X^2 < (M + m_{\pi^0})^2 \approx 1.15$ GeV$^2$. However, we apply a nominal cut of $M_X^2 < 0.95$ GeV$^2$ to minimize any contamination of inclusive events that might arise from resolution effects (see Fig. 2 in Ref. [18] for more details). The resulting events below this $M_X^2$ cut are divided into 12 $\times$ 2 $\times$ 5 $\times$ 30 bins in $\phi$, $E$, $t'$, and $M_X^2$, respectively. The first two variables allow the independent extraction of the four structure functions of the $\pi^0$ electroproduction cross section while the binning in $M_X^2$ enables the separation of the $d(e,e'X)d$ and $n(e,e'X)n$ contributions.

A Monte Carlo simulation of the experimental setup is based on the GEANT4 toolkit [24]. It includes both external and real internal radiative effects based on calculations described in Ref. [25]. A comparison with the radiative calculations of Ref. [26] at our central kinematics showed agreement within 2%. The virtual internal effects are applied as a global correction factor to the extracted cross sections. The HRS acceptance is modeled by an $R$ function [27] defining correlated multidimensional boundaries. Only the overlapping ($Q^2,x_B$) phase space between the two beam energy settings is considered. The calorimeter energy resolution in the $p(e,e'X)p$ simulation is smeared to match the $M_X^2$ distribution in each $(E, t', \phi)$ bin of the LH2 data. These bin-by-bin resolution smearing factors are also applied to the $n(e,e'X)n$ and $d(e,e'X)d$ simulated data. The Fermi smearing described above is also applied to the simulated $n(e,e'X)n$ yields. The systematic uncertainty of this smearing procedure as well the asymmetric systematic uncertainty originated from the inclusive yield under the $M_X^2$ cut are evaluated by varying the cut applied around its nominal value. They are found to be bin dependent and were added quadratically to the 3.1% normalization uncertainty listed in Ref. [18].

We fit the simulated yield to the experimental distributions for all bins in $\phi$, $E$, $t'$, and $M_X^2$. To wit, we minimize the $\chi^2$:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{3600} \left( \frac{N^\text{exp}_i - N^\text{sim}_i}{\delta^\text{exp}_i} \right)^2,$$

where $N^\text{exp}_i$ ($N^\text{sim}_i$) is the number of experimental (simulated) events in bin $i$ and $\delta^\text{exp}_i$ is the corresponding uncertainty. The kinematic factors appearing in Eq. (1) are convoluted with the experimental acceptance and resolution in the computation of $N^\text{sim}_i$. The eight cross-section structure functions $d\sigma/dt(\phi')/dt$ ($\Lambda = T, L, LT, TT$) that define $N^\text{sim}_i$ are the free parameters of the fit for each $t'$ bin. The minimization of Eq. (6) yields a value of $\chi^2/ndf = 0.98$.

Figure 3 shows the measured $\phi$-dependent photoabsorption cross section for both beam energies and for the lowest $t'$ bin. The $d^2\sigma/dtd\phi$ cross section is almost independent of the beam energy, indicating a dominance of the transverse response. The $d^2\sigma/dtd\phi$ cross section is found negligible within uncertainties for all $\phi$ bins. The fit to the $M_X^2$ distribution is shown in Fig. 2, which also illustrates that the LD2–LH2 yield is dominated by the neutron contribution in the exclusive region. In Fig. 4, we display the $\phi$-independent cross section $d\sigma_T + c d\sigma_L$ for the two beam energies, separated into the fitted quasi-free neutron and coherent deuteron channels. The highest $t'$ bin is used in the analysis to treat bin migration effects and is not shown herein. The figure again shows the clear separation of the neutron signal. The coherent deuteron cross sections are found to be very small and compatible with theoretical calculations based on chiral-even deuteron GPDs, which predict cross-section values smaller than 1 nb/GeV$^2$ in similar kinematics [28].

Figure 5 shows the four extracted structure functions for the neutron and the deuteron as functions of $t'$. The neutron
cross sections are dominated by \( \frac{d\sigma_T}{dt} \) and \( \frac{d\sigma_{T\pi}}{dt} \), while the terms involving a longitudinal response are compatible with zero within uncertainties and are in good agreement with previous results off a proton target at the same kinematics [18]. The neutron measurements are compared to a calculation based on both quark helicity-conserving GPDs and quark helicity-flip (transversity) GPDs [14], and show good agreement for all structure functions, with a slight overestimation of \( |d\sigma_{T\pi}/dt| \). The experimental \( \frac{d\sigma_T}{dt} \) term is also compatible with the VGG model [29] based on chiral-even GPDs, which predicts \( \frac{d\sigma_T}{dt} < 4 \) nb/GeV\(^2\) for all \( t' \) bins. Together with previous measurements of \( d\sigma_T/dt \) and \( d\sigma_{T\pi}/dt \) on the proton [18] and extensive unseparated measurements before [15–17], these new results provide strong support to the exciting idea that transversity GPDs can be accessed via neutral pion electroproduction in the high \( Q^2 \) regime.

Within the modified factorization approach of [14], \( d\sigma_T/dt \) and \( d\sigma_{T\pi}/dt \) are functions of \( \langle H_T \rangle \) and \( \langle \bar{E}_T \rangle \), which are convolutions of the elementary \( \gamma^*q \to q'\pi^0 \) amplitude with the transversity GPDs \( H_T \) and \( \bar{E}_T = 2\bar{H}_T + E_T \):

\[
\frac{d\sigma_T}{dt} = \Lambda \left[ (1 - \xi^2) |\langle H_T \rangle|^2 - \frac{t'}{8M^2} |\langle \bar{E}_T \rangle|^2 \right].
\]

\[
\frac{d\sigma_{T\pi}}{dt} = \Lambda \left( -\frac{t'}{8M^2} |\langle \bar{E}_T \rangle|^2 \right).
\]

In these equations \( \Lambda(Q^2, x_B) \) is a phase space factor [17] and \( \xi = x_B / (2 - x_B) \) is the skewness variable. For a proton and a neutron target, the quark-flavor structures of \( |\langle H_T \rangle|^2 \) (neglecting strange quarks) are

\[
|\langle H_T^{p,n} \rangle|^2 = \frac{1}{2} \left( \frac{2}{3} |\langle H_T^{ud} \rangle|^2 + \frac{1}{3} |\langle H_T^{uu} \rangle|^2 \right).
\]
production off the deuteron at data. Solid (dashed) lines are calculations from the Goloskokov-quadratic sum of the statistical and systematic uncertainties of the when their relative phase varies between 0 and π. Bars show the quadratic sum of the statistical and systematic uncertainties of the data. Solid (dashed) lines are calculations from the Goloskokov-Kroll model [14] for u (d) quark.

for $\vec{E}_T$. The constraints on $\vec{E}_T$ are mainly taken from lattice QCD calculations [31].

In conclusion, we have separated the four unpolarized structure functions of $\pi^0$ electroproduction off the neutron at $Q^2 = 1.75$ GeV$^2$ and $x_B = 0.36$ in the $t'$ range $[0, 0.2] \text{ GeV}^2$. Similar measurements are obtained for coherent $\pi^0$ electroproduction off the deuteron at $x_B = 0.18$. The latter are found to be very small and according to theoretical expectations. Neutron results show a dominance of the transverse response confirming the transversity GPD approach for the description of this process. By combining neutron and proton results, we have performed the first flavor decomposition of the $u$ and $d$ quark contributions to the cross section. Additional information from $\eta$ meson electroproduction will soon help constrain the relative phase between the $u$ and $d$ quark contributions.

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FIG. 6. Magnitude of the nucleon helicity-flip $\langle H_T \rangle$ (top) and nonflip $\langle \vec{E}_T \rangle$ (bottom) transversity terms for $u$ (squares) and $d$ (circles) quarks assuming no relative phase between them. The boxes around the points represent the variation of the results when their relative phase varies between 0 and π. Bars show the quadratic sum of the statistical and systematic uncertainties of the data. Solid (dashed) lines are calculations from the Goloskokov-Kroll model [14] for $u$ ($d$) quark.

References