Light Propagation in a Velocity-Dependent Conformal Spacetime: Effective Medium Analogy, Relativistic Kinetic Energy, and Nonlinear Imaginary Refractive Index

Azzam Almosallami
Independent Researcher
Zurich, Switzerland
Email: a.almosallami71@gmail.com

***Abstract*—We present a novel interpretation of light propagation under velocity-dependent conformal Lorentz transformations (CLT). The conformal factor introduces a coordinate-dependent ”medium” through which light propagates, while preserving the physical invariance of the speed of light. The properties of this medium are directly linked to relativistic kinetic energy, resulting in a velocity-dependent effective refractive index. Furthermore, the inverse transformation for observers in the moving frame gives rise to an imaginary refractive index, reflecting coordinate contraction and phase-like distortions. Nonlinear effects are also considered, where the refractive index varies nonlinearly with velocity or energy. This framework offers a unified view connecting relativistic energy, spacetime scaling, and observer-dependent optical phenomena.**

***Index Terms*—Conformal Lorentz Transformation, Effective Medium, Relativistic Kinetic Energy, Nonlinear Refractive Index, Imaginary Refractive Index, Special Relativity**

I. Introduction

Special relativity asserts that the speed of light c is invariant in all inertial frames. However, the coordinate representation of light can differ between frames due to spacetime transformations.

We explore velocity-dependent conformal Lorentz transformations (CLT), where spacetime coordinates are scaled by a velocity-dependent factor. This scaling can be interpreted as a fictitious medium affecting light propagation relative to different observers. By connecting the conformal factor to relativistic kinetic energy, we obtain an effective refractive index for spacetime itself. Applying the inverse transformation produces an imaginary refractive index, representing coordinate distortions without violating the physical invariance of c. Nonlinear effects are included to model stronger distortions at high velocities.

II. Conformal Lorentz Transformations

Along the x-axis, the CLT is defined as:

$$x' = \Omega(v)(x - vt), \tag{1}$$

$$t' = \Omega(v)\left(t - \frac{v}{c^2}x\right), \tag{2}$$

$$y' = \Omega_\perp(v)y, \quad z' = \Omega_\perp(v)z \tag{3}$$

where $\Omega(v)$ and $\Omega_\perp(v)$ are velocity-dependent scaling factors. A simple choice consistent with relativity is:

$$\Omega(v) = \gamma^2(v), \quad \Omega_\perp(v) = \gamma(v), \tag{4}$$

$$\gamma(v) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{1 - v^2/c^2}}. \tag{5}$$

The spacetime interval transforms as:

$$ds'^2 = \Omega^2(v)ds^2 \tag{6}$$

preserving null paths: $ds^2 = 0 \implies ds'^2 = 0$.

III. Light Propagation in the Effective Medium

A. Forward Transformation (Stationary Observer)

For a light beam along the x-axis ($dx = cdt$):

$$v'_x = \frac{dx'}{dt'} = \frac{\Omega(v)(dx - vdt)}{\Omega(v)(dt - \frac{v}{c^2}dx)} = c \tag{7}$$

The physical speed remains c, but the coordinates scale as if light moves through a medium with effective refractive index:

$$n_{\text{eff}} \sim \Omega(v) \tag{8}$$

B. Inverse Transformation (Moving Observer)

For the moving observer:

$$x = \frac{x'}{\Omega(v)} + vt', \tag{9}$$

$$t = \frac{t'}{\Omega(v)} + \frac{vx'}{c^2\Omega(v)} \tag{10}$$

Substituting a light signal from the stationary frame ($dx'/dt' = c$):

$$v_x = \frac{dx}{dt} = \frac{c/\Omega(v) + v}{1 + \frac{v}{c\Omega(v)}} \tag{11}$$

If $\Omega(v) > 1$, the coordinate speed may appear larger than c, a coordinate artifact interpreted as an imaginary refractive index:

$$n_{\text{eff}}^{\text{inv}} = \frac{c}{v_x} = i\frac{c}{\sqrt{v_x^2 - c^2}} \tag{12}$$

IV. Connection to Relativistic Kinetic Energy and Nonlinear Refractive Index

Relativistic kinetic energy is given by

$$K = (\gamma - 1)mc^2. \tag{13}$$

We propose that the effective refractive index depends on the total energy, which can lead to a nonlinear relationship:

$$n_{\text{eff}} = f(\gamma) \sim \gamma^{\alpha}(v) \tag{14}$$

where $\alpha > 0$ determines the degree of nonlinearity. - For $\alpha = 1$, the index is linear with γ. - For $\alpha \neq 1$, the index varies nonlinearly with velocity v, modeling stronger "medium" effects at high speeds.

Similarly, the inverse transformation yields a nonlinear imaginary refractive index:

$$n_{\text{eff}}^{\text{inv}} = if(\gamma) = i\gamma^{\alpha}(v) \tag{15}$$

V. Observational Consequences

- **Coordinate Light Delay:** Light appears delayed along the motion direction in the stationary frame, with delay enhanced by nonlinear scaling of n_{eff} at high velocities.
- **Nonlinear Medium Effects:** The effective refractive index grows nonlinearly at high velocities, analogous to nonlinear optics, leading to stronger coordinate distortions.
- **Imaginary Nonlinear Index:** The inverse frame sees an imaginary refractive index $n_{\text{eff}}^{\text{inv}} = i\gamma^{\alpha}(v)$, modeling phase contraction or evanescent-like propagation.
- **Energy-Optics Coupling:** The nonlinear dependence highlights the link between relativistic kinetic energy and the coordinate medium.

VI. Discussion

The CLT preserves the physical invariance of c while producing coordinate-dependent optical phenomena. The "medium" analogy provides intuition: spacetime behaves as an energy-dependent medium. Imaginary and nonlinear refractive indices reflect inverse-frame contraction effects, not physical superluminal motion. This framework may impact understanding of time contraction, relativistic energy propagation, and quantum nonlocality.

VII. Conclusion

Velocity-dependent conformal Lorentz transformations induce a coordinate representation of light propagation equivalent to a fictitious medium. The effective refractive index is linked to relativistic kinetic energy, with nonlinear scaling at high speeds. Inverse-frame transformations yield an imaginary refractive index encoding coordinate contraction. This framework unifies relativistic energy, spacetime scaling, and observer-dependent optical phenomena, while maintaining the physical constancy of c.

References

References

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