

On the origin and implications of electron non-thermal distributions in the solar wind

Pablo Moya

University Of Chile, Santiago, Chile

There is wide evidence that in many space environments as the solar wind, the Velocity Distribution Function (VDF) of electrons presents interesting non-thermal behaviors as heavy tails (power-law behavior at large energies) and skewness in the direction of background magnetic field. By separate, the origin of both properties (power-law tails and skewness), and the consequences that they produce on space plasmas have been addressed in several observational and theoretical studies. However, a complete understanding on the origin of distributions exhibiting power-law tails and skewness has already to be done. Recently, a new model for solar wind electrons, called the "Core-Strahlo model", has been proposed. This model describes the electron VDF as the superposition of a quasi-thermal core, plus a Skew-Kappa distribution (the strahlo), representing both, halo and strahl. In this work we present the results about our two complementary studies, which aim to answer the following questions: (1) how can we model the microscopic dynamics of a magnetized, turbulent and non-collisional space plasma so that the distribution has power-law tails and skewness at the same time? For this, we show an alternative Langevin type force equation to model the first principles dynamics of electrons in a space plasma, exploring how the microscales relates to the macroscales, and we focus on quantifying the heavy tails and skewness throughout the moments of the VDF in the steady state; and (2), what is the role of these Skew-Kappa functions on the regulation of the electron heat-flux? For this, we analyze the effect of these skewed electrons on the excitation of the whistler heat-flux instability (WHFI). Our results show that the WHFI can develop in this system, and we provide stability thresholds for this instability, as a function of the electron beta and the parallel electron heat-flux, to be compared with observational data. However, since different plasma states, with different stability level to the WHFI, can have the same moment heat-flux value, it is the skewness (i.e. the asymmetry of the distribution along the magnetic field), and not the heat-flux, the best indicator of instabilities. Thus, systems with high heat-flux can be stable enough to WHFI, so that it is not clear if the instability can effectively regulate the heat-flux values through wave-particle interactions.