

Above the weak nonlinearity: super-nonlinear waves in astrophysical and laboratory plasmas

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Abstract The review summarises recent theoretical achievements and observational manifestations of a new, recently discovered, type of nonlinear oscillations in multi-component plasmas, namely, super-nonlinear periodic waves and super-nonlinear solitary waves (supersolitons). Both are characterised by a non-trivial topology of their phase portraits, highly anharmonic profile shapes, extremely long periods, and large amplitudes. Based upon multi-fluid magnetohydrodynamic plasma models, examples of ion-acoustic and Alfvén super-nonlinear waves are considered. A multi-component nature of the plasma was revealed to be a crucial condition for the existence of these super-nonlinear waves, with the complexity of the system growing with the number of plasma species accounted for in the model. A minimum number of plasma components which allows for the existence of super-nonlinear waves is also discussed. From the observational point of view, typical signatures of periodic super-nonlinear waves are manifested, for example, in the oscillatory processes operating in the magnetised plasma of the solar corona and ground-based plasma machines. Super-nonlinear solitary structures (supersolitons) of an electrostatic origin are recognised in the Earth’s magnetosphere, laboratory experiments with chemically active plasmas, and numerical simulations.

Keywords super-nonlinear wave · supersoliton · multi-component plasma

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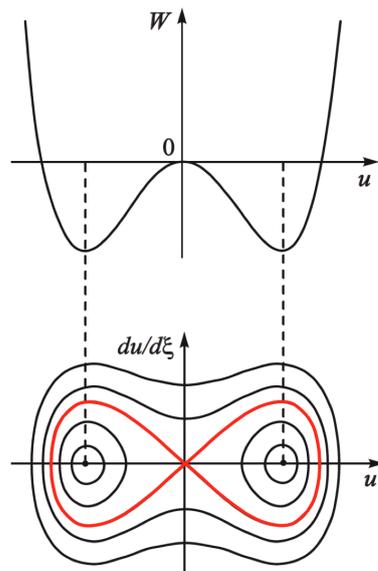


Fig. 1 Effective potential energy, $W(u)$ and the corresponding phase diagram of stationary solutions of the modified Korteweg-de Vries equation (1). A special phase trajectory, separatrix, is indicated by the red line (adapted from [2]).

1 Introduction

The physical quantity u experiencing oscillations of a constant amplitude in a periodic wave is well known to correspond to a closed trajectory without self-intersections in a phase plane, (\dot{u}, u) . A total phase portrait of the wave, characterising the whole dynamical system, is represented by a family of such phase trajectories nested one in another and surrounding the point of a stable equilibrium (also often referred to as a *centre*). Small amplitude trajectories in the phase portrait, concentrated in the vicinity of the equilibrium point, correspond to small amplitude harmonic oscillations of the quantity u . Their oscillation properties, such as a typical period and phase speed, can be determined with a standard linearisation technique and subsequent analysis of the linearised governing equations. On the other hand, the presence of closed trajectories in the phase portrait indicates the existence of an invariant energy in the dynamical system, also referred to as a generalised potential energy, which has a minimum coinciding with the position of the stable equilibrium point. This formalism is applicable for both the conservative and non-conservative systems (see e.g. the closed phase trajectories in [1]).

However, such a trivial topology of the phase portrait of periodic waves is not unique. For example, the phase portrait containing a special phase trajectory, separatrix, is shown in the bottom plot of Fig. 1 [2]. In this portrait, the outermost phase trajectories enveloping the separatrix correspond to highly nonlinear periodic waves, whose total energy is above a certain potential bar-

rier height and the amplitude cannot be smaller than that of the separatrix. Based on these facts, Ref. [2] called these stationary large amplitude waves as super-nonlinear waves (SNWs). They also proposed a particular example of the commonly known modified Korteweg-de Vries (mKdV) equation, which accounts for the effects of a cubic nonlinearity and has the periodic stationary solutions of a super-nonlinear type:

$$u_t + u^2 u_x + \beta u_{xxx} = 0, \quad (1)$$

where β is a positive constant coefficient. The stability of these mKdV waves, including super-nonlinear regimes, was investigated by Ref. [3] on the basis of the *Infeld–Rowlands* method [4]. In particular, the authors found that super-nonlinear mKdV solutions can be stable in a certain range of their oscillation amplitudes. In addition to the mKdV equation (1), other particular examples of classical low-dimensional nonlinear oscillators, whose effective potential energy has two stable equilibria and thus supports super-nonlinear regimes, are the Duffing equation and the derivative nonlinear Schroedinger equation (see e.g. [5, 6], where these equations were employed for the modelling of the 11-year solar cycle and nonlinear Alfvén waves and solitons in astrophysical plasma systems, respectively). According to the definition of SNWs given by Ref. [2], the generalised potential energy of the oscillating system must have at least two minima separated by a single maximum, to support the existence of SNWs (see e.g. Fig. 1). In this configuration of the generalised energy the points of the local minima correspond to the positions of stable equilibria (*centres*), while the maximum point, where the separatrix intersects itself, shows the unstable equilibrium, also known as a *saddle* point. One can conclude that the presence of several maxima and minima in the generalised potential energy most likely indicates the ability of the system to sustain SNWs in a periodic or even solitary form.

Due to their unique properties, such as large amplitudes, long periods, and highly anharmonic profile shapes (see Sect. 2.1 for details), SNWs are certainly among the most intriguing extreme phenomena in real physical systems, and the question of whether they can be detected, in particular, in space and laboratory plasmas attracts a growing interest in the research community. A comprehensive analysis of the previous studies dealing with nonlinear waves of various types in plasmas reveals that there are a number of works where the generalised potential energy (hereafter the *Sagdeev* or *Bernoulli* pseudopotentials) was found to have two or even three local minima. For example, Ref. [7] and [8] obtained the pseudopotential of the ion-acoustic waves in the electron–ion plasma, which may have two minima under certain physical conditions. More specifically, for the existence of a double-well pseudopotential in these models the electron plasma component must have an essentially non-thermal distribution, which allows the electrons to be separated into several groups of different energies. Similar properties of the pseudopotential energy were found for the electrostatic waves propagating in the electron–positron plasma [9], where both plasma components were taken to consist of cold and hot populations. Another interesting example of two minima appearing in the

pseudopotential is of the oblique electrostatic waves in the magnetised four-component plasma with cold and hot electrons and heavy and light ions, as shown in Ref. [10] in the application to the auroral regions of the Earth's magnetosphere. Additionally, ion-acoustic and dust-acoustic modes in dusty plasmas of various models may also have a pseudopotential energy with two minima (see e.g. [11–18] for recent studies). The pseudopotential with two minima also appears in the analyses of electrostatic waves in magnetised electron–positron–ion plasmas [19], and in the magnetised electron–ion plasma with two oppositely charged ion components [20]. Three minima in the pseudopotential energy for nonlinear dust-acoustic waves in an electron–ion plasma with negatively and positively charged dusty grains, were found in Ref. [21]. This particular example implies an even more complicated topology of the phase portrait of the wave, with two separatrices, one of which fully envelops the other. Hence, a broader set of (*super-*) nonlinear solutions can be naturally expected in this case. We also need to mention that in addition to electrostatic waves in plasmas, the magnetohydrodynamic (MHD) waves can have multi-well pseudopotentials too. For example, Ref. [22] and [23] analysed the propagation of Alfvén waves in a dusty plasma addressing magnetospheric and laboratory plasma structures and self-gravitating molecular clouds, and found the corresponding pseudopotentials with two minima. In all the studies listed above periodic solutions of the SNW type are possible. However, none of these works consider waves with amplitudes larger than that of separatrices. It is the purpose of the present review to rectify this omission.

By studying the details of the plasma models in the above examples, which allow the potential energy to contain several minima, we emphasise the importance of a multi-component nature of the plasma. Indeed, an obvious correlation of the number of plasma species taken into account in a model with the complexity of the potential energy topology and the nonlinear wave forms, appearing in such a plasma, most likely exists. The latter in turn seems to be a crucial condition for the identification of SNWs in plasma systems, which indicates that only multi-component plasmas are able to support super-nonlinear periodic solutions. Such multi-species plasmas can be adequately described by the multi-fluid approaches that have been widely used in space physics and aeronomy (see e.g. [24, 25] and all the references mentioned in the above paragraph). In particular, such multi-fluid models of the plasma are intensively developed in the application to lower layers of the Earth's magnetosphere (e.g. [26–28]) and solar wind (e.g. [29, 30]).

On the other hand, the special phase trajectories, separatrices, are known to correspond to essentially nonlinear solutions describing the evolution of shock waves, double layers, and solitons in plasma. Hence, as a natural extension of the basic idea of periodic SNWs, one can assume the case, when there are several separatrices in the phase portrait, and one of them fully envelops the others (see e.g. [21]). Similarly to periodic SNWs, this outermost separatrix corresponds to a new super-nonlinear type of solitary waves in plasma, which can be referred to as a *supersoliton*. According to such a definition, the supersolitons represent a group of solitary SNWs that combines the unique

properties of solitary structures and extreme characteristics of SNWs. So far, the concept of supersolitons became commonly accepted among researchers and is extensively developed in a number of recent works (see e.g. Ref. [31–48] and Sect. 3.3 for details). In the present review we focus on the results obtained in the pioneer studies of periodic SNWs [16,49] and supersolitons [50–52] in multi-component plasmas typical for astrophysical and laboratory conditions. We also demonstrate several observational examples of these super-nonlinear structures, detected in the plasma of the solar atmosphere, Earth’s magnetosphere, laboratory and numerical experiments.

2 Super-nonlinear waves (SNWs)

2.1 Classification and signatures of periodic SNWs

Different oscillatory physical processes have different topologies of their phase portraits, characterised by a certain number of stable equilibrium points (*centres*) and by a number of special phase trajectories, separatrices, which additionally may vary in shape. In particular, Fig. 2 schematically illustrates the examples of the phase portraits with 2, 3, and 4 centres and several layers of separatrices. The complexity of the phase portraits naturally grows with the complexity of the oscillating system, where the discussed super-nonlinear waves (SNWs) always represent the most non-trivial cases.

Following the recipe proposed by Ref. [49], various forms of SNWs could be classified according to the topology of their phase portraits as $\text{SNW}_{m,n}$, where m is a number of centres embedded within the SNW phase trajectory, and n is a number of separatrices enveloped by this trajectory. For example, in a basic case when the oscillating system has only two stable equilibria (see panel (a) in Fig. 2), large amplitude $\text{SNW}_{2,1}$ with the phase trajectories located above a single separatrix, are allowed. In a more complicated scenario when there are three stable equilibria in the system, the phase portrait can have two essentially different configurations (see panels (b) and (c) in Fig. 2), with $\text{SNW}_{3,1}$, and $\text{SNW}_{3,2}$ and $\text{SNW}_{2,1}$, respectively. A variety of topologically different phase diagrams appears in systems with four stable equilibria (panels (d)–(g) in Fig. 2), thus straightforwardly leading to a much richer set of super-nonlinear solutions. Additionally, we need to mention that all the portraits shown in Fig. 2 support the existence of ordinary stationary nonlinear waves, $\text{NW}_{1,0}$ known as cnoidal waves, whose phase trajectories are concentrated around each separate centre, and are restricted in amplitude by the nearest separatrix. However, the aspects of their evolution are out of the scope of the present review and are not considered further.

We now describe the unique signatures of SNWs, allowing for the distinguishing of them among the whole possible oscillating ensemble detected in observations. By definition, these are essentially large amplitude fluctuations, with typical amplitudes which are sufficiently higher than the background level. Their profiles are always anharmonic, of a symmetric triangular shape,

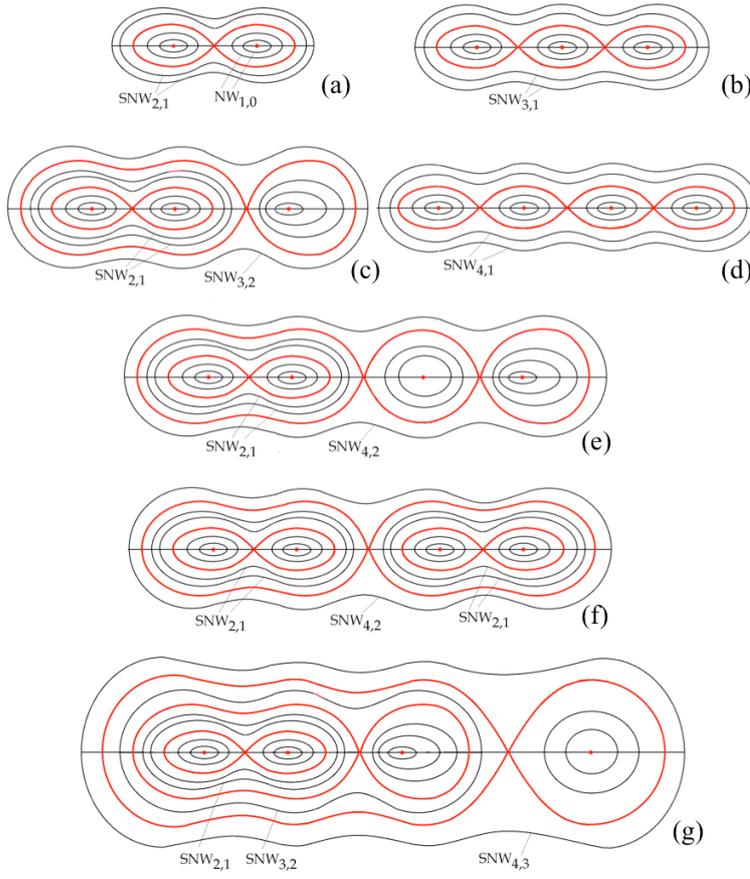


Fig. 2 Sketch showing the classification of supernonlinear waves (SNWs) by the topology of their phase portraits with 2 (a), 3 (b)–(c), and 4 (d)–(g) stable equilibrium points (*centres*). Separatrices are indicated by the red lines in each phase portrait (adapted from [49]).

with at least four points appearing in a single oscillation cycle, where the second derivative is equal to zero. Due to such an anharmonicity and their original super-nonlinear nature, the Fourier spectral analysis of SNWs shows the appearance of well pronounced equidistant higher harmonics in a power spectrum provided the noise level is sufficiently low. However, traditional spectral techniques based upon Fourier transforms and wavelets, are known to use *a priori* assigned harmonic basis functions, and, hence, are obviously limited in the analysis of such highly anharmonic signals, as SNWs. Instead, a novel Hilbert-Huang Transform (HHT) spectral method has recently been developed for the analysis of such nonlinear signals [53, 54]. It uses the empirical mode decomposition (EMD) technique, which expands the signal of interest into a basis derived directly from the data, iteratively searching for the local time scales naturally appearing in the signal. Hence, due to its adaptive nature,

the HHT spectral technique is essentially suitable for the processing of highly nonlinear anharmonic time-series typical for SNWs.

Another interesting property of SNWs is related to their temporal evolution. Namely, in the case where the oscillating system dissipates the energy and SNWs decay, their amplitude decreases gradually until a specific value which corresponds to the amplitude of the nearest separatrix. After that, a very rapid decrease (on the time scale shorter than the oscillation period) of the oscillation amplitude most likely occurs, accompanied by the transformation of the wave type (for example, from SNW_{3,2} to SNW_{2,1}, as illustrated in Fig. 2). Such sudden changes of the oscillation amplitude can be detected in observations. Similarly, in the opposite case of the continuous energy supply or an instability development in the system, the amplitude of SNWs may increase rapidly when it reaches the upper separatrix level, providing the corresponding change of the wave type (for example, from SNW_{2,1} to SNW_{3,2} or from SNW_{3,2} to SNW_{4,3}, according to Fig. 2). In the following sections we consider a number of distinct examples of various multi-fluid magnetohydrodynamic plasma models which lead to the possibility of periodic SNWs.

2.2 Ion-acoustic periodic SNW_{2,1} in a plasma with two oppositely charged ions

As the first illustration we show that the periodic solutions of an ion-acoustic SNW_{2,1} type can exist in a three-species plasma with electrons and two oppositely charged ion components. The plasma is assumed to be uniform, collisionless, and unmagnetised.

For the unperturbed initial state of such a plasma the full neutrality condition can be written as $Z_1 en_{0i1} - Z_2 en_{0i2} - en_{0e} = 0$, where $e < 0$ is the electron charge, $(-Z_1 e) > 0$ is the electric charge of the positive ions, and $Z_2 e < 0$ is the electric charge of the negative ions. Hereafter, all variables with the subscript “1” refer to the positively charged ion component, while the subscript “2” corresponds to the negative ions. Introducing the dimensionless parameters of the model: $\alpha = n_{0i2}/n_{0i1}$, $\beta = m_{i2}/m_{i1}$, and $v = \sqrt{m_{i1} V^2 / k T_e}$, where V is the phase speed of the propagating ion-acoustic wave and k is the Boltzmann constant, the initial neutrality condition reduces to $n_{0e} = n_{0i1}(Z_1 - \alpha Z_2)$. We also assume the temperature of both ion components to be sufficiently low, allowing for the neglecting of the ion thermal pressure in the model, while the electrons are taken to be hot and inertialess, governed by the Boltzmann distribution:

$$n_e = n_{0e} \exp\left(-\frac{e\varphi}{kT_e}\right). \quad (2)$$

It should be noted here that the neglect of the electron inertia as used in the Hall plasma approximation is not always valid. Example of oblique travelling wave solutions for whistler **oscillitons**, in which the electron momentum can be of the same order as that of the protons is described in Ref. [55]. However,

the further consideration of such higher-frequency effects is out of the scope of this review, and is not addressed in the following discussion.

The set of hydrodynamic equations, governing the dynamics of the ion components in the wave is

$$\frac{\partial n_{i1,2}}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial(n_{i1,2}v_{i1,2})}{\partial x} = 0, \quad (3)$$

$$\frac{\partial v_{i1,2}}{\partial t} + v_{i1,2} \frac{\partial v_{i1,2}}{\partial x} = \pm \frac{Z_{1,2}e}{m_{i1,2}} \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial x}, \quad (4)$$

$$\frac{\partial^2 \varphi}{\partial x^2} = 4\pi e(Z_1 n_{i1} - Z_2 n_{i2} - n_e), \quad (5)$$

where in the equations of motion (4) plus/minus corresponds to the positive/negative ions, respectively.

Large amplitude stationary ion-acoustic waves in such a formulation are now analysed with the use of the mechanical analogy approach based on the Sagdeev pseudopotential [56]. The wave is assumed to propagate in the positive direction of the x -axis with the phase speed V . Introducing the variable $\xi = x - Vt$ in Eqs. (2)–(5) and assuming all quantities to be functions of ξ only, so that

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial t} = -V \frac{d}{d\xi}, \quad \frac{\partial}{\partial x} = \frac{d}{d\xi}, \quad (6)$$

one changes the frame of reference to that travelling with the phase speed of the perturbation, V . In addition, when transforming to this new frame, the velocity of both ion components in the wave should be also modified according to the Galilean transformation rule,

$$u_{i1,2} = v_{i1,2} - V. \quad (7)$$

In the transformation (7), v_i is the velocity of the ion plasma component in the laboratory frame, where the unperturbed plasma is at rest, and u_i is the corresponding velocity in the frame of reference related to the wave, where the unperturbed plasma moves in the opposite direction of the x -axis, with the speed V . Equations (2)–(5) now reduce to

$$\frac{d(n_{i1,2}u_{i1,2})}{d\xi} = 0, \quad (8)$$

$$u_{i1,2} \frac{d u_{i1,2}}{d\xi} = \pm \frac{Z_{1,2}e}{m_{i1,2}} \frac{d \varphi}{d\xi}, \quad (9)$$

$$\frac{d^2 \varphi}{d\xi^2} = 4\pi e(Z_1 n_{i1} - Z_2 n_{i2} - n_e). \quad (10)$$

Integrating the continuity equations (8) and the equations of motion (9) with the initial conditions $n_{i1,2} = n_{0i1,2}$, $\varphi = 0$, and $u_{i1,2} = -V$, one obtains

the explicit dependence of the ion concentrations $n_{i1,2}$ upon the electrostatic potential φ , as

$$n_{i1,2} = n_{0i1,2} \left(1 \pm \frac{2Z_{1,2}e\varphi}{m_{i1,2}V^2} \right)^{-1/2}. \quad (11)$$

The subsequent substitution of Eqs. (2) and (11) into the Poisson's equation (10) results in

$$\frac{d^2\varphi}{d\xi^2} = 4\pi\rho(\varphi), \quad (12)$$

where

$$\rho(\varphi) = Z_1en_{0i1} \left(1 + \frac{2Z_1e\varphi}{m_{i1}V^2} \right)^{-1/2} - Z_2en_{0i2} \left(1 - \frac{2Z_2e\varphi}{m_{i2}V^2} \right)^{-1/2} - n_{0e} \exp\left(-\frac{e\varphi}{kT_e}\right).$$

Treating φ and ξ as a generalised coordinate and time of a pseudo-particle, second-order ordinary differential equation (12) has a form of the equation of motion of a particle in the force field $4\pi\rho(\varphi)$. Furthermore, in its first integral written as

$$\frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{d\varphi}{d\xi} \right)^2 + U_S(\varphi) = \text{const}, \quad (13)$$

the second term on the left-hand side represents a generalised potential energy of the particle, often referred to as the Sagdeev pseudopotential, $U_S(\varphi)$. In Eq. (13) $U_S(\varphi)$ is given by

$$U_S(\varphi) = -4\pi \int_0^\varphi \rho(\varphi) d\varphi = 4\pi m_{i1} V^2 \left\{ n_{0i1} \left[1 - \left(1 + \frac{2Z_1e\varphi}{m_{i1}V^2} \right)^{1/2} \right] + n_{0i2} \frac{m_{i2}}{m_{i1}} \left[1 - \left(1 - \frac{2Z_2e\varphi}{m_{i2}V^2} \right)^{1/2} \right] + n_{0e} \frac{kT_e}{m_{i1}V^2} \left[1 - \exp\left(-\frac{e\varphi}{kT_e}\right) \right] \right\}, \quad (14)$$

where the constant of integration on the right-hand side of Eq. (13) represents the total energy of the particle and depends only on the initial conditions. The minimum of function (14) corresponds to the initial equilibrium (full electrical neutrality) of the unperturbed plasma with $\varphi = 0$.

We recall that by definition, this plasma model is able to support periodic ion-acoustic solutions of the SNW type when the pseudopotential energy (14) has at least two local minima. Hence, the values of the dimensionless parameters of the model, providing such a configuration of the function U_S , are chosen. Figure 3 shows that the latter is possible for both $V < V_s$ and $V > V_s$ cases, where $V_s = (kT_e/n_{0e})^{1/2} (Z_1^2 n_{0i1}/m_{i1} + Z_2^2 n_{0i2}/m_{i2})^{1/2}$ is the ion-sound speed in the plasma, obtained from the dispersion relation of the linear theory describing the oscillations in the vicinity of $\varphi = 0$ (see e.g. [57]). In other words, both subsonic (left-hand column of Fig. 3) and supersonic (right-hand column of Fig. 3) SNW periodic solutions are possible.

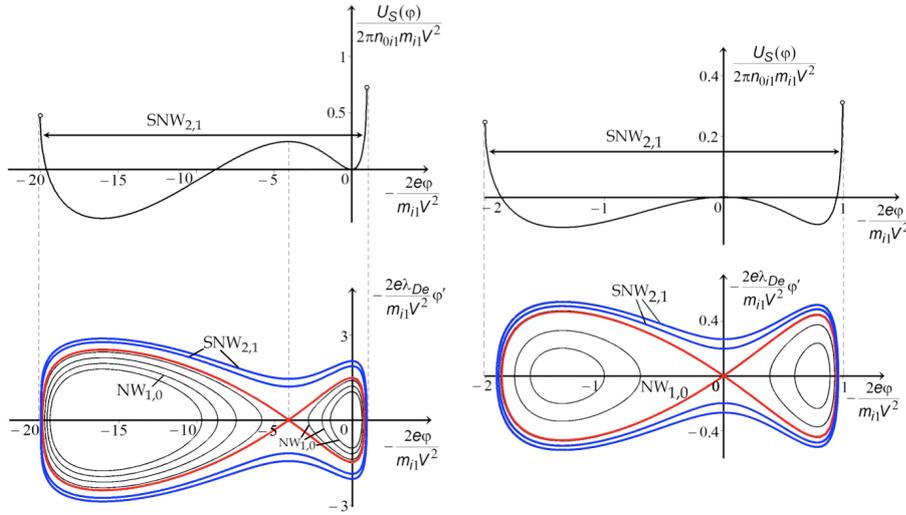


Fig. 3 Left: pseudopotential $U_S(\varphi)$ given by Eq. (14) and the phase portrait of a subsonic ion-acoustic wave in a plasma with two oppositely charged ion components, plotted for $\alpha = 0.1$, $\beta = 20$, $v = 0.7$, $Z_1 = 1$, and $Z_2 = 1$. Right: pseudopotential $U_S(\varphi)$ given by Eq. (14) and the phase portrait of a supersonic ion-acoustic wave in a plasma with two oppositely charged ion components, plotted for $\alpha = 0.3$, $\beta = 2$, $v = 1.6$, $Z_1 = 1$, and $Z_2 = 1$. Separatrices and super-nonlinear phase trajectories of the $\text{SNW}_{2,1}$ type are indicated by the red and blue lines, respectively, in each phase portrait (adapted from [49]).

More specifically, both pseudopotentials U_S shown in Fig. 3 are found to contain two local minima, guaranteeing the existence of a periodic ion-acoustic SNW in the analysed three-species plasma, which can be classified as $\text{SNW}_{2,1}$ according to the scheme described in Sect. 2.1. Their phase trajectories are illustrated in the bottom plots of Fig. 3 among the whole phase portraits of the dynamical system governed by Eq. (12). Highly anharmonic profiles of the normalised electrostatic potential φ , obtained from numerical solutions of Eq. (12) and periodically varying in the revealed subsonic and supersonic $\text{SNW}_{2,1}$, are shown in Fig. 4.

We also need to mention that in addition to the discussed extremely large amplitude $\text{SNW}_{2,1}$, the potential functions and phase portraits shown in Fig. 3 imply the existence of stationary solutions in the form of ordinary smaller amplitude nonlinear waves, $\text{NW}_{1,0}$ known as cnoidal waves. Their phase trajectories in turn envelop each separate *centre* in the phase portraits. However, those $\text{NW}_{1,0}$ solutions whose trajectories do not correspond to the initial equilibrium of the unperturbed plasma with $\varphi = 0$ (namely, the trajectories enveloping the left-hand *centre* in the phase portrait of the subsonic case and all $\text{NW}_{1,0}$ solutions obtained in the supersonic regime) should be disregarded.

This example confirms the possibility for the existence of the $\text{SNW}_{2,1}$ periodic solutions of an ion-acoustic type in a three-species plasma containing the hot Boltzmann electrons and two oppositely charged cold ion components.

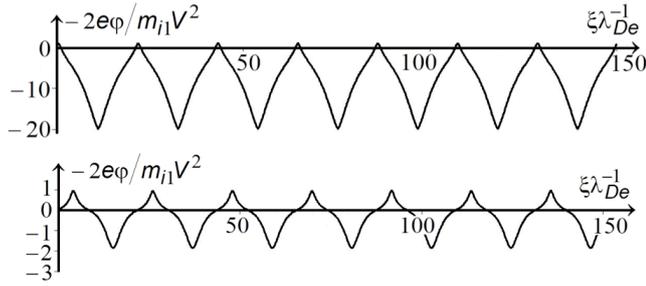


Fig. 4 Top: variations of the electrostatic potential φ in a subsonic ion-acoustic SNW_{2,1} (plotted with the same set of parameters as shown in Fig. 3, left-hand column) in a plasma with two oppositely charged ion components. Bottom: variations of the electrostatic potential φ in a supersonic ion-acoustic SNW_{2,1} (plotted with the same set of parameters as shown in Fig. 3, right-hand column) in a plasma with two oppositely charged ion components (adapted from [49]).

It also allows one to formulate straightforward empirical criteria resulting from the analysis of the pseudopotential function $U_S(\varphi)$, which in turn can be rewritten also in terms of the plasma parameters (e.g. the ratio of the concentrations of different species, their temperatures, and characteristic velocities) and need to be rigorously satisfied for the existence of SNWs in a dynamical system:

- the first derivative of a pseudopotential function $U_S(\varphi)$, which is in fact an effective generalised force governing the dynamics of a pseudo-particle, must have at least two real roots, that results in a double-well form of the pseudopotential;
- the edge points (shown with the blank circles in Fig. 3) of the interval where $U_S(\varphi)$ has real values, must be above the local maximum of the function $U_S(\varphi)$, separating its two local minima.

2.3 Electrostatic periodic SNW_{2,1}, SNW_{3,1}, and SNW_{3,2} in a four-species plasma

Consider a more complex model of the plasma consisting of four components: hot electrons and positrons, and two cold ion species with opposite electric charges. Similarly to the previous section, the initial full electrical neutrality condition for the unperturbed state of such a plasma is $Z_1 n_{0i1} - Z_2 n_{0i2} - n_{0e} + n_{0p} = 0$, where an additional term n_{0p} describing the positron contribution appears. Introducing again the dimensionless parameters of the model, as $\alpha = n_{0i2}/n_{0i1}$, $\beta = m_{i2}/m_{i1}$, $\delta = n_{0p}/n_{0i1}$, $\tau = T_p/T_e$, and $v = \sqrt{m_{i1} V^2 / k T_e}$, where V and k are the phase speed of the electrostatic wave propagating in the plasma and the Boltzmann constant, respectively, the initial neutrality condition can be rewritten as $n_{0e} = n_{0i1}(Z_1 - \alpha Z_2 + \delta)$.

Based on the multi-fluid description of the plasma, the dynamics of the cold ion components in the ion-acoustic wave is governed by Eqs. (3)–(4) with the Poisson’s law having the form

$$\frac{\partial^2 \varphi}{\partial x^2} = 4\pi e(Z_1 n_{i1} - Z_2 n_{i2} - n_e + n_p). \quad (15)$$

The set of equations (3)–(4) and (15) is complemented by the Boltzmann law for the electron concentration (2) and the following Boltzmann distribution for positrons, which, in the spirit of the previously discussed model, are assumed to be hot and inertialess:

$$n_p = n_{0p} \exp\left(\frac{e\varphi}{kT_p}\right). \quad (16)$$

Performing the calculations, which are identical to those described in detail in Eqs. (6)–(13) of Sect. 2.2, one can derive the pseudopotential U_S as a function of the electrostatic potential φ , as

$$\begin{aligned} U_S(\varphi) = & -4\pi \int_0^\varphi \rho(\varphi) d\varphi = 4\pi m_{i1} V^2 \left\{ n_{0i1} \left[1 - \left(1 + \frac{2Z_1 e\varphi}{m_{i1} V^2} \right)^{1/2} \right] \right. \\ & + n_{0i2} \frac{m_{i2}}{m_{i1}} \left[1 - \left(1 - \frac{2Z_2 e\varphi}{m_{i2} V^2} \right)^{1/2} \right] + n_{0e} \frac{kT_e}{m_{i1} V^2} \left[1 - \exp\left(-\frac{e\varphi}{kT_e}\right) \right] \\ & \left. + n_{0p} \frac{kT_p}{m_{i1} V^2} \left[1 - \exp\left(\frac{e\varphi}{kT_p}\right) \right] \right\}, \quad (17) \end{aligned}$$

where

$$\begin{aligned} \rho(\varphi) = & Z_1 e n_{0i1} \left(1 + \frac{2Z_1 e\varphi}{m_{i1} V^2} \right)^{-1/2} - n_{0e} \exp\left(-\frac{e\varphi}{kT_e}\right) \\ & - Z_2 e n_{0i2} \left(1 - \frac{2Z_2 e\varphi}{m_{i2} V^2} \right)^{-1/2} + n_{0p} \exp\left(\frac{e\varphi}{kT_p}\right). \end{aligned}$$

Figures 5 and 6 show the pseudopotential $U_S(\varphi)$ (17) and the phase portraits of the ion-acoustic wave propagating in a four-species plasma, plotted for various sets of the dimensionless parameters of the model. The pseudopotential U_S is clearly seen to have three local minima, which indicates the ability of this plasma model to support periodic ion-acoustic waves of the SNW_{2,1}, SNW_{3,2} (Fig. 5), and SNW_{3,1} (Fig. 6) types. In the obtained configurations of $U_S(\varphi)$, the position of the initial equilibrium and full electrical neutrality of the plasma corresponds to either its central local minimum in the subsonic regime (Fig. 5, left-hand column) or to the right-hand local maximum in the supersonic regimes shown in the right-hand column of Fig. 5 and in Fig. 6.

Variations of the electrostatic potential φ in the revealed ion-acoustic SNW_{2,1}, SNW_{3,1}, and SNW_{3,2} propagating in a four-species plasma, are shown in Fig. 7. Their profiles are essentially anharmonic of a symmetric triangular shape with large amplitudes. In contrast to the previous case (see Sect. 2.2), where only SNW_{2,1} was detected in a three-species plasma model, the present

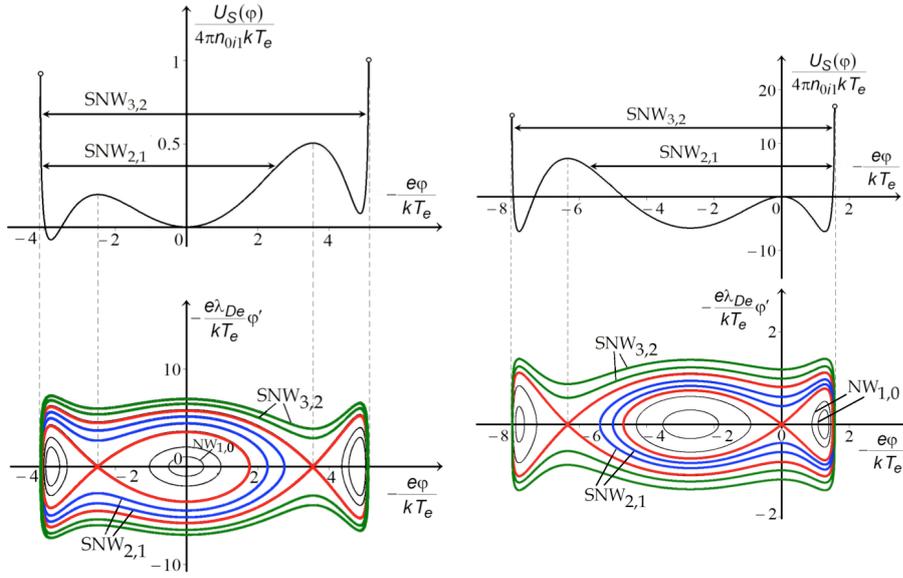


Fig. 5 Left: pseudopotential $U_S(\varphi)$ given by Eq. (17) and the phase portrait of a subsonic ion-acoustic wave in a four-species plasma, plotted for $\alpha = 0.52$, $\beta = 1.6$, $v = 3.2$, $\delta = 0.07$, $\tau = 1$, $Z_1 = 1$, and $Z_2 = 2$. Right: pseudopotential $U_S(\varphi)$ given by Eq. (17) and the phase portrait of a supersonic ion-acoustic wave in a four-species plasma, plotted for $\alpha = 4.9$, $\beta = 0.495$, $v = 11.36$, $\delta = 0.044$, $\tau = 1$, $Z_1 = 41$, and $Z_2 = 4$. In each phase portrait, separatrices are shown by the red lines; phase trajectories of periodic SNW_{2,1} and SNW_{3,2} are shown by the blue and green lines, respectively (adapted from [49]).

example shows a broader selection of SNWs. The latter clearly illustrates an obvious correlation between the number of plasma components in the model and the variety of super-nonlinear solutions which can be expected to exist in such a plasma.

2.4 Shear Alfvén SNW_{2,1} in a four-species magnetised plasma

In addition to the electrostatic nature (see Sects. 2.2 and 2.3), SNWs may be of an electromagnetic origin too, and it is worth searching for them, for example, among plasma magnetohydrodynamic waves. For illustration, in this section the relevant model of super-nonlinear large amplitude and high frequency shear Alfvén waves propagating in a multi-component magnetised plasma, is considered. The developed model can be attributed to the class of models investigating the contribution of high frequency oscillatory phenomena in the solar atmosphere (with typical periods shorter than one second) to the heating of the solar corona and acceleration of the solar wind. They may be driven, for example, by various micro-turbulences and spontaneous magnetic recon-

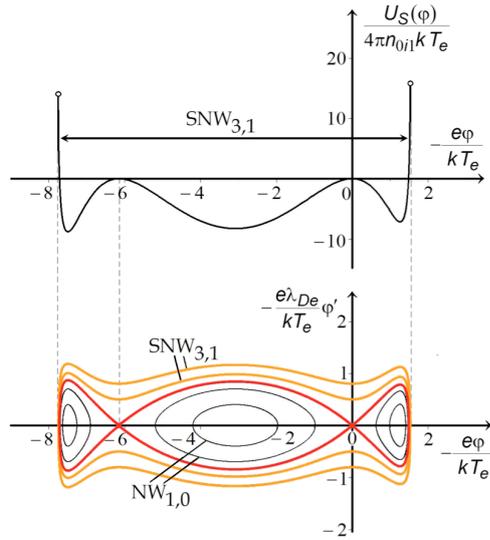


Fig. 6 Pseudopotential $U_S(\varphi)$ given by Eq. (17) and the phase portrait of a supersonic ion-acoustic wave in a four-species plasma, plotted for $\alpha = 4.7$, $\beta = 0.48$, $v = 11.36$, $\delta = 0.0485$, $\tau = 1$, $Z_1 = 412$, and $Z_2 = 4$. Separatrix and phase trajectories of periodic $\text{SNW}_{3,1}$ are shown by the red and yellow lines, respectively (adapted from [49]).

nection occurring in the photospheric–chromospheric magnetic network [58, 59], or by nonlinear cascading from lower frequencies in the corona [60, 61].

In the model the plasma is assumed to be of an identical composition as considered in the previous Sect. 2.3, with hot and inertialess electrons and positrons, and two sorts of cold massive ion components. The external magnetic field \mathbf{B}_0 is directed along the z -axis. The plasma is taken to be sufficiently magnetised with the plasma parameter $\beta \ll 1$, that allows one to neglect the ion thermal pressure and the ion velocity components parallel to \mathbf{B}_0 . Perturbing the plasma in the x -direction, consider a 2.5D shear Alfvén wave propagating in the xoz -plane. The schematic sketch illustrating the geometry of the problem is shown in Fig. 8. Following the assumption of a low β plasma, the electromagnetic field in the wave is determined according to the two potentials formalism (see e.g. [62, 22]), with $E_x = -\partial\varphi/\partial x$, and $E_z = -\partial\psi/\partial z \equiv -\partial\varphi/\partial z - c^{-1}\partial A_z/\partial t$, where A_z is a magnetic vector potential directed along the external magnetic field \mathbf{B}_0 , and c is the speed of light.

Under the simplifying assumptions described above, the transverse dynamics of the ion plasma components in the wave is governed by the following set of magnetohydrodynamic equations:

$$\frac{\partial n_{i1,2}}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial(n_{i1,2}v_{i1,2x})}{\partial x} = 0, \quad (18)$$

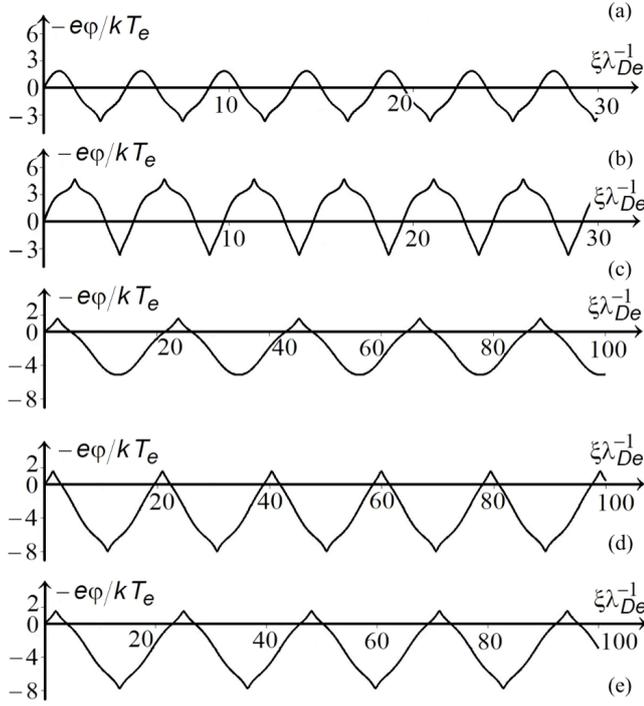


Fig. 7 Panels (a)–(b): variations of the electrostatic potential φ in a subsonic ion-acoustic SNW_{2,1} (a) and SNW_{3,2} (b) (plotted with the same set of parameters as shown in Fig. 5, left-hand column) in a four-species plasma. Panels (c)–(d): variations of the electrostatic potential φ in a supersonic ion-acoustic SNW_{2,1} (c) and SNW_{3,2} (d) (plotted with the same set of parameters as shown in Fig. 5, right-hand column) in a four-species plasma. Panel (e): variations of the electrostatic potential φ in a supersonic ion-acoustic SNW_{3,1} (plotted with the same set of parameters as shown in Fig. 6) in a four-species plasma (adapted from [49]).

$$\frac{\partial v_{i1,2x}}{\partial t} + v_{i1,2x} \frac{\partial v_{i1,2x}}{\partial x} = \pm \left[-\Omega_{i1,2} v_{i1,2y} + \frac{e}{m_{i1,2}} E_x \right], \quad (19)$$

$$\frac{\partial v_{i1,2y}}{\partial t} + v_{i1,2x} \frac{\partial v_{i1,2y}}{\partial x} = \pm \Omega_{i1,2} v_{i1,2x}, \quad (20)$$

where $\Omega_{i1,2} = eB_0/m_{i1,2}c$ are the cyclotron frequencies of the ion plasma components, the plus/minus signs in Eqs. (19) and (20) refer to the negative/positive ions, respectively, and the ion charge numbers $Z_1 = Z_2 = 1$.

Electrons and positrons in turn are assumed to be hot and inertialess, and hence are distributed in the wave according to the Boltzmann law written with respect to the scalar potential ψ :

$$n_e = n_{0e} \exp\left(-\frac{e\psi}{kT_e}\right), \quad (21)$$

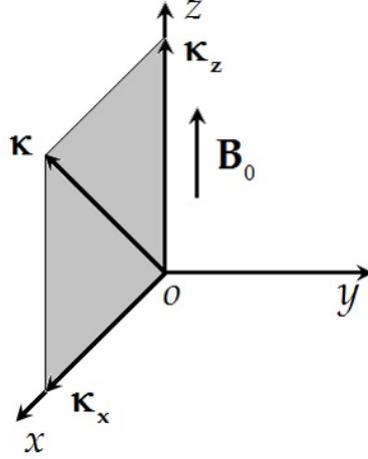


Fig. 8 Schematic sketch illustrating the geometry of a 2.5D shear Alfvén wave in a low β plasma.

$$n_p = n_{0p} \exp\left(\frac{e\psi}{kT_p}\right) = n_{0p} n_{0e}^\tau n_e^{-\tau}, \quad (22)$$

where the dimensionless parameter $\tau = T_p/T_e$.

Additionally, the quasi-neutrality assumption is applied to the plasma:

$$n_{i1} + n_p - n_{i2} - n_e = 0, \quad (23)$$

which reduces to $n_{0e} = n_{0i1}(1 - \alpha + \delta)$, where $\alpha = n_{0i2}/n_{0i1}$ and $\delta = n_{0p}/n_{0i1}$ are the dimensionless parameters of the initial unperturbed state of the plasma.

From equations of motion (19) and (20) one can derive the ion polarisation drift velocities, as

$$v_{i1,2x} = \pm \frac{m_{i1,2} c^2}{e B_0^2} \frac{\partial E_x}{\partial t}, \quad (24)$$

where plus/minus corresponds to the negative/positive ions, respectively.

From Maxwell's equations one obtains an expression for the parallel current density, j_z

$$\frac{\partial^4}{\partial x^2 \partial z^2} (\varphi - \psi) = \frac{4\pi}{c^2} \frac{\partial^2 j_z}{\partial t \partial z}. \quad (25)$$

Taking into account the continuity equations (18) and the quasi-neutrality condition (23), Eq. (25) can be rewritten as

$$\frac{\partial^4}{\partial x^2 \partial z^2} (\varphi - \psi) = -\frac{4\pi e}{c^2} \frac{\partial^2 (n_e - n_p)}{\partial t^2}. \quad (26)$$

Combining Eqs. (18) and (24) results in

$$\frac{\partial n_{i1,2}}{\partial t} = \pm \frac{\partial}{\partial x} \left(\frac{n_{i1,2} m_{i1,2} c^2}{e B_0^2} \frac{\partial^2 \varphi}{\partial x \partial t} \right), \quad (27)$$

where plus/minus corresponds to the negative/positive ions, respectively. Introducing a new variable

$$\xi = x + z - Vt, \quad \frac{\partial}{\partial x} = \frac{\partial}{\partial z} = \frac{d}{d\xi}, \quad \frac{\partial}{\partial t} = -V \frac{d}{d\xi}, \quad (28)$$

where V is the phase speed of the propagating wave, Eq. (27) reduces to

$$\frac{dn_{i1,2}}{d\xi} = \pm \frac{d}{d\xi} \left(\frac{n_{i1,2} m_{i1,2} c^2}{e B_0^2} \frac{d^2 \varphi}{d\xi^2} \right). \quad (29)$$

Integrating Eqs. (29) with the initial conditions $\xi = 0$, $n_{i1,2} = n_{0i1,2}$, and $\varphi = 0$, one can derive an explicit relation between the ion concentrations in the wave, n_{i1} and n_{i2} :

$$n_{i2} = n_{0i2} \frac{n_{i1}}{n_{i1}(1 + \gamma) - \gamma n_{0i1}}, \quad (30)$$

where $\gamma = m_{i2}/m_{i1}$. Substituting Eq. (30) into the quasi-neutrality condition (23), rewrite it with respect to n_{i1} :

$$n_{i1} = \frac{1}{2(1 + \gamma)} \left[n_{0i2} + \gamma n_{0i1} - (1 + \gamma)(n_p - n_e) + \sqrt{D} \right], \quad (31)$$

where $D = [(1 + \gamma)(n_p - n_e) - n_{0i2} - \gamma n_{0i1}]^2 + 4\gamma(1 + \gamma)n_{0i1}(n_p - n_e)$. Then substituting n_{i1} (31) into the once integrated Eq. (29) and accounting for Eq. (22), one can obtain an explicit dependence of the second derivative $d^2\varphi/d\xi^2$ upon the electron concentration n_e , which is used in further calculations:

$$\frac{d^2\varphi}{d\xi^2} = \frac{2n_{0i1}(1 + \gamma) e B_0^2 (m_{i1} c^2)^{-1}}{n_{0i2} + \gamma n_{0i1} - (1 + \gamma)(n_p - n_e) + \sqrt{D}} - 1. \quad (32)$$

Writing the variable (28) in Eq. (26), the latter takes the form

$$\frac{d^4}{d\xi^4}(\varphi - \psi) = -4\pi e \left(\frac{V}{c} \right)^2 \frac{d^2(n_e - n_p)}{d\xi^2}, \quad (33)$$

which can be twice integrated with the initial conditions $\xi = 0$, $\varphi = 0$, $\psi = 0$, and $n_{e,p} = n_{0e,p}$, to give

$$\frac{d^2\varphi}{d\xi^2} - \frac{d^2\psi}{d\xi^2} = -4\pi e \left(\frac{V}{c} \right)^2 (n_e - n_p + n_{0p} - n_{0e}). \quad (34)$$

Condition (21) allows one to obtain an explicit dependence $\psi(n_e)$, written as

$$\psi = -\frac{kT_e}{e} \ln \left(\frac{n_e}{n_{0e}} \right). \quad (35)$$

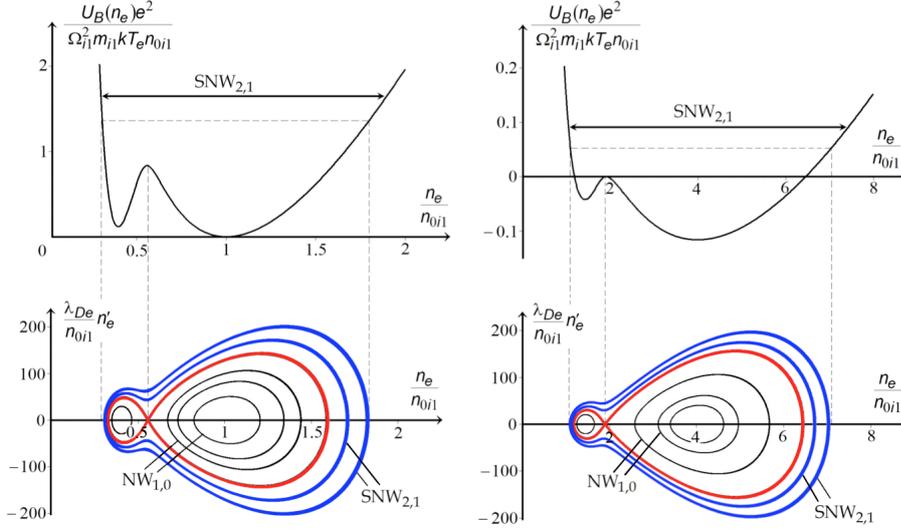


Fig. 9 Pseudopotential $U_B(n_e)$ given by Eq. (39) and the phase portrait of a shear Alfvén wave in a four-species plasma, plotted for $\alpha = 0.1$, $\gamma = 0.07$, $\sqrt{m_{i1}V^2/kT_e} = 2500$, $\delta = 0.1$, $\tau = 3$, $\omega_{i1}/\Omega_{i1} = 0.01$, and $kT_e/m_{i1}c^2 = 0.01$ (left-hand column); and for $\alpha = 0.1$, $\gamma = 2$, $\sqrt{m_{i1}V^2/kT_e} = 500$, $\delta = 1$, $\tau = 3$, $\omega_{i1}/\Omega_{i1} = 0.01$, and $kT_e/m_{i1}c^2 = 0.01$ (right-hand column). The colour scheme is identical to that used in Fig. 3 (adapted from [49]).

Finally, substituting Eqs. (22), (32), and (35) into Eq. (34), we obtain the following second-order ordinary differential equation with respect to the function $n_e(\xi)$:

$$f(n_e) \frac{d^2 n_e}{d\xi^2} + \frac{df(n_e)}{dn_e} \left(\frac{dn_e}{d\xi} \right)^2 = g(n_e), \quad (36)$$

where the functions $f(n_e)$ and $g(n_e)$ are determined as

$$f(n_e) = \frac{d\psi(n_e)}{dn_e} = -\frac{kT_e}{e} \frac{1}{n_e}, \quad (37)$$

$$g(n_e) = \frac{eB_0^2}{m_{i1}c^2} \left[\frac{2n_{0i1}(1+\gamma)}{n_{0i2} + \gamma n_{0i1} - (1+\gamma)(n_p - n_e) + \sqrt{D}} - 1 \right] + 4\pi e \left(\frac{V}{c} \right)^2 (n_e - n_p + n_{0p} - n_{0e}), \quad (38)$$

with the function D given in Eq. (31).

Using a standard reduction of order technique, one can reduce the second-order Eq. (36) to a first-order Bernoulli differential equation with respect to the function $P(n_e) = dn_e/d\xi$, whose integral has the form of Eq. (13) with

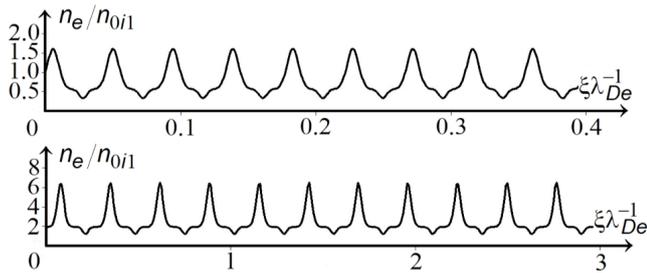


Fig. 10 Variations of the electron concentration n_e in a shear Alfvén SNW_{2,1} in a four-species plasma, plotted for the same set of parameters as shown in Fig. 9, left-hand column (top plot) and in Fig. 9, right-hand column (bottom plot) (adapted from [49]).

the generalised potential energy function referred to as the Bernoulli pseudopotential, $U_B(n_e)$:

$$U_B = - \int_{n_{0e}}^{n_e} f(n_e)g(n_e) dn_e. \quad (39)$$

More details about the analysis of nonlinear waves in multi-component plasmas with the Bernoulli pseudopotential technique can be found in Ref. [63–65, 16], and in references therein. Theory of highly nonlinear oscillations of current sheets generated by coalescing plasmoids has recently been developed in Ref. [66], with the use of the Bernoulli pseudopotential. Additionally, the Bernoulli pseudopotential method was used for the analysis of nonlinear oscillations in self-gravitating quantum plasmas and in two- and three-dimensional graphenelike fluids [67, 68].

Figure 9 shows the pseudopotentials $U_B(n_e)$ (39) and the phase portraits of a shear Alfvén wave propagating in a low beta four-species plasma, plotted for various sets of the dimensionless parameters of the model. The present configurations of U_B exhibit two local minima, which indicate the ability of the plasma to support the propagation of periodic Alfvén SNW_{2,1}. The initial neutrality of the unperturbed plasma in the examples shown in Fig. 9 may correspond to the local minimum of U_B (left-hand column of Fig. 9) or to its local maximum (right-hand column of Fig. 9). Stationary variations of the electron concentration n_e in the detected periodic Alfvén SNW_{2,1} are illustrated in Fig. 10. We would like to point out that in contrast to the linear small amplitude case, in the discussed super-nonlinear regime the Alfvén mode is essentially compressive, with extremely large amplitudes (typically comparable to the initial unperturbed background value or even higher) and anharmonic triangular profiles.

Although there are a few indirect observational evidences of the presence of a non-negligible positron fraction in the solar corona (see e.g. [69–71]), one should admit that the developed model is still sufficiently far from the actual coronal conditions. Nevertheless, its findings suggest the need for a similar analysis of a pure coronal case. For example, a background thermal plasma

penetrated by the energetic electron, proton and alpha particle beams could be considered.

3 Solitary SNW in plasma: supersolitons

As a natural extension of the original idea of periodic supernonlinear waves, proposed in Ref. [16,49] and described in detail in Sect. 2, whose phase trajectories envelop at least one separatrix loop, one can imagine the case, where there are several separatrix layers in the phase portrait, and one of them fully envelops the others (see e.g. schematic examples shown in panels (c) and (e)–(g) of Fig. 2). In that case the outermost separatrix represents a new form of a large amplitude solitary wave in a system, which may be referred to as a *supersoliton*. Similarly to periodic SNWs, for the existence of supersolitons in a dynamical system its generalised potential energy must contain several (at least three) local minima separated by two local maxima. For the latter condition to be fulfilled in the electrically active medium, such as a plasma, its multi-component nature is of a crucial importance. In the following sections we demonstrate a few analytical examples of electrostatic waves in the form of supersolitons, propagating in multi-component plasmas of various hydrodynamic models. Clear agreement between theoretical solutions and observational records obtained in laboratory experiments, indicating the possibility of the existence of supersolitons in real plasmas, is also achieved.

3.1 Supersolitons in *epii*-plasma

As a first example, the most trivial model of an unmagnetised, collisionless, and uniform plasma supporting the existence of supersolitons and consisting of four charged species: namely, hot and inertialess electrons “*e*” and positrons “*p*”, and cold and massive positively “1” and negatively “2” charged ion components, is considered. Such a composition of the plasma is identical to that discussed in Sect. 2.3, where the periodic SNW_{2,1}, SNW_{3,1}, and SNW_{3,2} of an electrostatic origin were studied. Similarly to the analysis performed in Sect. 2.3, we write the initial full electrical neutrality condition for the unperturbed state of such a four-species plasma, as $Z_1 en_{0i1} - Z_2 en_{0i2} - en_{0e} + en_{0p} = 0$, where the subscript “0” refers to the parameters of the initial equilibrium of the plasma, $e < 0$ is the electron charge, $(-e) > 0$ is the positron charge, and $(-Z_1 e) > 0$ and $Z_2 e < 0$ are the electric charges of the positive and negative ions, respectively.

The dynamics of the cold and massive ion components in the ion-acoustic wave is governed by the set of hydrodynamic equations (3)–(4) and (15), while the hot and inertialess electrons and positrons are distributed in the wave according to the Boltzmann laws (2) and (16), respectively. Repeating the calculations performed in Eqs. (6)–(11), one can obtain a second-order ordinary

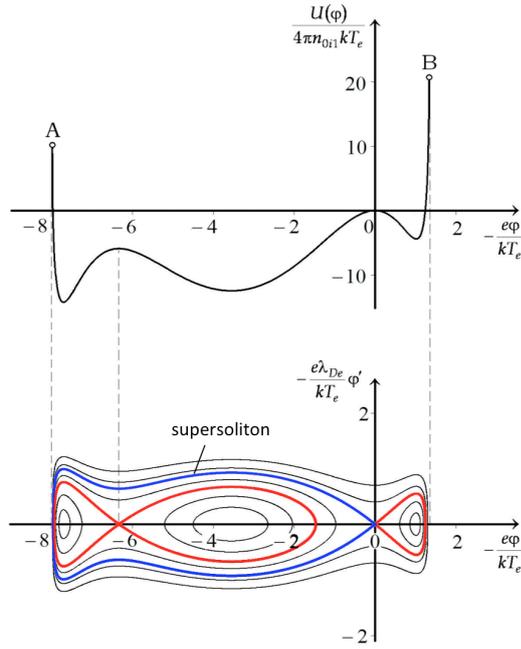


Fig. 11 Sagdeev pseudopotential $U(\varphi)$ (17) (top) and the phase portrait (bottom) of an ion-acoustic wave in *epii*-plasma, plotted for $n_{0i2}/n_{0i1} = 4.8$, $n_{0p}/n_{0i1} = 0.045$, $m_2/m_1 = 0.495$, $T_p/T_e = 1.02$, $\sqrt{m_1 V^2/kT_e} = 11.35$, $Z_1 = 48$, and $Z_2 = 4$. Separatrices of ordinary (KdV-like) solitons are shown by the red lines; a supersolitary separatrix is indicated by the blue line (adapted from [51]).

differential equation with respect to the function $\varphi(\xi)$ where φ is an electrostatic potential in the wave, and $\xi \equiv x - Vt$ with V being a phase speed of the wave, which has a form of Eq. (12).

By definition, supersolitons are essentially large amplitude structures, hence, for their analysis the perturbation theory approach based on the introduction of a small parameter into the model and reducing the initial set of equations to a single governing evolutionary equation of the Korteweg-de Vries (KdV) type, is no longer applicable. Instead, supersolitary solutions determined by Eq. (12) can be successfully analysed with the use of the mechanical analogy approach, which uses the generalised potential energy function, also known as the *Sagdeev pseudopotential*, allowing for the studying of arbitrarily large amplitude fluctuations. We recall, that according to the Sagdeev pseudopotential technique, Eq. (12) has a form of the equation of motion of a pseudoparticle, where φ and ξ play the role of the generalised coordinate and time, respectively, and the right-hand side of Eq. (12) can be treated as an effective force field governing the dynamics of a particle. Following this approach, Eq. (12) has an integral of motion written in the form of Eq. (13), with the Sagdeev pseudopotential function $U(\varphi)$ determined by Eq. (17).

The Sagdeev pseudopotential $U(\varphi)$ (17) allowing for the existence of supersolitons in *epii*-plasma and the corresponding phase portrait of the whole dynamical system (stationary ion-acoustic wave), are shown in Fig. 11. For certain values of the dimensionless parameters of the model, the function $U(\varphi)$ is found to have three local minima separated by two local maxima, with the most right maximum showing the so-called *saddle* point, where the initial equilibrium of an oscillating particle is unstable, and corresponding to the unperturbed state of the plasma. Such a configuration of the pseudopotential $U(\varphi)$ implies the existence of two separatrix layers in the phase portrait of the wave (see bottom plot of Fig. 11), with a certain separatrix enveloping the other in the region of negative values of the electrostatic potential φ , and thus corresponding to a supersolitary solution. We need to mention that Ref. [21] also showed the Sagdeev pseudopotential of nonlinear dust-acoustic waves in a four-species *eidd*-plasma consisting of electrons, ions, and two dusty components of opposite electric charges, which could have three local minima and two maxima. However, in that example, the values of the dimensionless parameters of the model were adjusted to provide equal heights of the local maxima of the function $U(\varphi)$ (see Fig. 9 in [21]). The latter geometry of $U(\varphi)$ represents a limiting case, which supports the propagation of double layers in the plasma and prevents the existence of supersolitons. Hence, supersolitary solutions were not studied earlier by Ref. [21].

Figure 12 allows one to compare stationary profiles of the electrostatic potential $\varphi(\xi)$ varying in a supersoliton (b) and in an ordinary soliton (a) of an ion-acoustic type in *epii*-plasma, obtained from numerical solutions of the governing Eq. (12). As supersolitons cannot be described by the KdV equation, their profiles highly differ from the ordinary bell-shaped soliton solutions, determined by the $\text{sech}^2(x - Vt)$ function in a weakly nonlinear theory. In particular, variation of the electrostatic potential φ in the ion-acoustic supersolitary regime, shown in Fig. 12, has at least four points where its second derivative is zero. Additionally, amplitudes and widths of these supersolitary structures are always sufficiently larger compared to the ordinary KdV-solitons.

We would like to emphasise that electrostatic supersolitons exist in unmagnetised plasmas consisting of at least four electrically active components. Indeed, in simpler models of two- and three-species plasmas, the Sagdeev pseudopotential was empirically found to have up to two or three local extrema, respectively (see e.g. Sect. 2.2). Hence, the required scenario when the external separatrix envelops the internal one cannot occur, and supersolitons are impossible. There are a few additional conditions for the existence of supersolitons in a dynamical system, resulting from the analysis of the generalised potential energy function, $U(\varphi)$. Namely, the second maximum of the function $U(\varphi)$ must be always lower than its first maximum corresponding to the initial neutrality of the plasma (cf. [21]), while the point of the reflection of ions from the potential barrier in the wave (i.e. the point “A” in Fig. 11) must be always above it.

The contrast between super- and ordinary solitons becomes even more pronounced if one looks at the first derivative of the signal, that can be used to

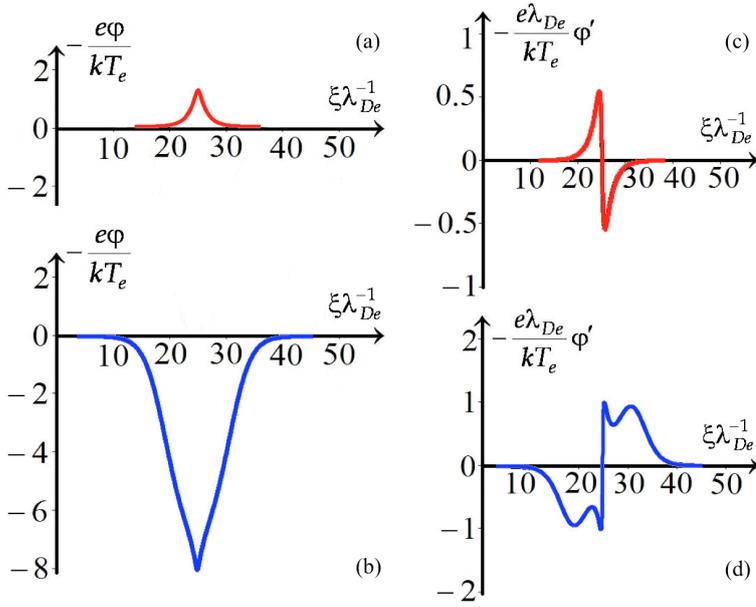


Fig. 12 Profiles of an ordinary ion-acoustic soliton (a) and supersoliton (b), propagating in *epii*-plasma and plotted for the same values of the dimensionless parameters of the model as shown in Fig. 11. Profiles of the first derivative of an ordinary ion-acoustic soliton (c) and supersoliton (d) in *epii*-plasma. Colours are consistent with those used in Fig. 11 (adapted from [51]).

distinguish them in laboratory experiments and astrophysical observations. In particular, Fig. 12 shows that the first derivative of the electrostatic potential φ , which is in fact the electric field magnitude, varying in the ordinary ion-acoustic soliton (c) has only a single extremum on a half-period of the structure, while the supersolitary regime is characterised by the appearance of additional side extrema on the electric field profile (d). Moreover, the number of the equilibrium points in the phase portrait, enveloped by the corresponding separatrix, is unambiguously determined by the number of extrema in the first derivative of the supersoliton.

3.2 Supersolitons in a warm dusty *epiid*-plasma

In this section we demonstrate the possibility for the existence of ion-acoustic supersolitons in a more complicated multi-species plasma model, which accounts for the effect of a non-zero ion temperature and includes an additional negatively charged plasma component, for example static dusty grains. Similarly to the previous section, the plasma is assumed to be uniform, collisionless, and unmagnetised. The initial full electrical neutrality condition for the unperturbed state of such a five-species plasma takes the form $Z_1en_{0i1} - Z_2en_{0i2} -$

$en_{0e} + en_{0p} - q_d n_d = 0$, where an additional term ($-q_d n_d$) describes the contribution of the dusty component, with $q_d < 0$ and n_d being its electric charge and concentration, respectively. The amount of the spatial electric charge of the dusty fraction, relative to other plasma components is characterised by the dimensionless parameter $\alpha = q_d n_d / en_{0i1}$, which in turn allows one to rewrite the above neutrality condition as $n_{0e} = n_{0i1}(Z_1 - \gamma Z_2 + \delta - \alpha)$, where additional dimensionless parameters $\gamma = n_{0i2} / n_{0i1}$ and $\delta = n_{0p} / n_{0i1}$ are introduced.

The dynamics of the warm ion components in the wave is governed by the following set of hydrodynamic equations, which in contrast to the previous sections takes into account an additional restoring force produced by the ion thermal pressure gradients, $\partial P_{i1,2} / \partial x$:

$$\frac{\partial n_{i1,2}}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial(n_{i1,2} v_{i1,2})}{\partial x} = 0, \quad (40)$$

$$\frac{\partial v_{i1,2}}{\partial t} + v_{i1,2} \frac{\partial v_{i1,2}}{\partial x} = \pm \frac{Z_{1,2} e}{m_{i1,2}} \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial x} - \frac{1}{m_{i1,2} n_{i1,2}} \frac{\partial P_{i1,2}}{\partial x}, \quad (41)$$

$$\frac{\partial^2 \varphi}{\partial x^2} = 4\pi e (Z_1 n_{i1} - Z_2 n_{i2} - n_e + n_p - \alpha n_{0i1}), \quad (42)$$

where in Eqs. (41) the plus/minus sign refers to the positive/negative ions, respectively.

For simplicity, both ion components are assumed to be of the Maxwellian distribution in the wave, with the isothermal equations of state:

$$P_{i1,2} = n_{i1,2} k T_{i1,2}, \quad (43)$$

where the temperatures of different species are constant but in general different. The hot and inertialess electrons and positrons are still governed by the Boltzmann laws (2) and (16).

Introducing again the variable $\xi = x - Vt$ into set (40)–(43) and transforming it to a new frame of reference travelling with the phase speed of the wave, V as $u_{i1,2} = v_{i1,2} - V$, one can integrate the continuity equations (40) and the equations of motion (41) with the initial conditions $u_{i1,2} = -V$, $n_{i1,2} = n_{0i1,2}$, and $\varphi = 0$, and obtain explicit dependences of the ion concentrations $n_{i1,2}$ upon the electrostatic potential φ , as

$$\frac{n_{i1}(\varphi)}{n_{0i1}} = \left\{ -\frac{m_{i1} V^2}{k T_{i1}} \right\}^{1/2} \left\{ W_{0,-1} \left[-\frac{m_{i1} V^2}{k T_{i1}} \exp \left(-\frac{m_{i1} V^2}{k T_{i1}} - \frac{2Z_1 e \varphi}{k T_{i1}} \right) \right] \right\}^{-1/2} \quad (44)$$

$$\frac{n_{i2}(\varphi)}{n_{0i2}} = \left\{ -\frac{m_{i2} V^2}{k T_{i2}} \right\}^{1/2} \left\{ W_{0,-1} \left[-\frac{m_{i2} V^2}{k T_{i2}} \exp \left(-\frac{m_{i2} V^2}{k T_{i2}} + \frac{2Z_2 e \varphi}{k T_{i2}} \right) \right] \right\}^{-1/2} \quad (45)$$

with the Lambert W -function, that has principal (main) “0” and lower “-1” real branches [72–75].

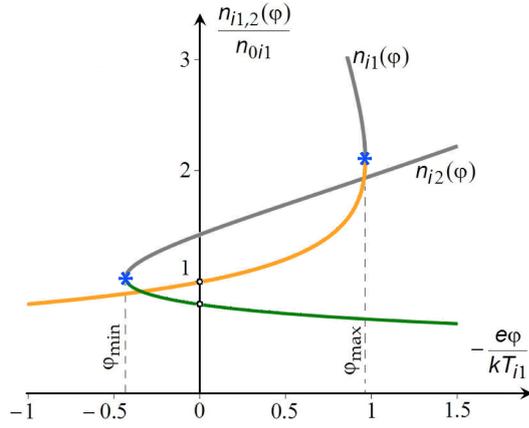


Fig. 13 Dependences (44) and (45) shown for $m_{i1}V^2 > kT_{i1}$ and $m_{i2}V^2 > kT_{i2}$, determined by the lower branch $W_{-1}(\cdot)$ of the Lambert W -function (yellow and green lines, respectively). Blank circles correspond to the initial neutrality condition of the plasma, $n_{i1,2} = n_{0i1,2}$ and $\varphi = 0$. Gray lines show the principal branch $W_0(\cdot)$ of the Lambert W -function in dependences (44) and (45), not corresponding to the initial neutrality of the plasma. Blue asterisks show the conjugation points of real branches of dependences (44) and (45), determined by the Lambert W -function (adapted from [50]).

In fact, dependences (44) and (45) are of great importance in the discussed model, carrying the information about the ion momentum and ion number conservations in the wave. They are clearly seen to be multivalued functions, and those their branches which do not correspond to the initial neutrality of the plasma, should be disregarded. On the other hand, the branches passing through the plasma equilibrium point with the coordinates $n_{i1,2} = n_{0i1,2}$ and $\varphi = 0$ should be selected for further calculations. Analysis shows that in Eq. (44) the lower branch $W_{-1}(\cdot)$ of the Lambert W -function should be taken for $m_{i1}V^2 > kT_{i1}$, while in the opposite case when $m_{i1}V^2 < kT_{i1}$ the principal branch $W_0(\cdot)$ needs to be used. Similarly, in Eq. (45) one should choose the lower $W_{-1}(\cdot)$ or principal $W_0(\cdot)$ branch of the Lambert W -function, when $m_{i2}V^2 > kT_{i2}$ or $m_{i2}V^2 < kT_{i2}$, respectively.

Figure 13 shows dependences (44) and (45) plotted for the case when both lower branches $W_{-1}(\cdot)$ satisfy the initial neutrality condition with $n_{i1,2} = n_{0i1,2}$ and $\varphi = 0$, while both principal branches $W_0(\cdot)$ are physically meaningless and, hence, are disregarded. Furthermore, using coordinates of the conjugation point of the Lambert W -function real branches (we recall, that by its definition in the conjugation point the argument of the Lambert W -function is equal to $-\exp[-1]$), one can straightforwardly obtain the maximum and minimum values of the electrostatic potential φ , allowed in the wave (see Fig. 13):

$$\varphi_{\min} = -\frac{kT_{i2}}{2Z_2e} \left[\ln \left(\frac{m_{i2}V^2}{kT_{i2}} \right) - \frac{m_{i2}V^2}{kT_{i2}} + 1 \right], \quad (46)$$

$$\varphi_{\max} = \frac{kT_{i1}}{2Z_1 e} \left[\ln \left(\frac{m_{i1} V^2}{kT_{i1}} \right) - \frac{m_{i1} V^2}{kT_{i1}} + 1 \right]. \quad (47)$$

Then substituting Eqs. (2), (16), (44), and (45) into Poisson's law (42), one obtains the following second-order ordinary differential equation governing the dynamics of a stationary ion-acoustic wave in the warm dusty *epiid*-plasma:

$$\frac{d^2 \varphi}{d\xi^2} = 4\pi \rho(\varphi), \quad (48)$$

where

$$\begin{aligned} \rho(\varphi) = & Z_1 e n_{0i1} \left\{ -\frac{kT_{i1}}{m_{i1} V^2} W_{0,-1} \left[-\frac{m_{i1} V^2}{kT_{i1}} \times \exp \left(-\frac{m_{i1} V^2}{kT_{i1}} - \frac{2Z_1 e \varphi}{kT_{i1}} \right) \right] \right\}^{-1/2} \\ & - Z_2 e n_{0i2} \left\{ -\frac{kT_{i2}}{m_{i2} V^2} W_{0,-1} \left[-\frac{m_{i2} V^2}{kT_{i2}} \exp \left(-\frac{m_{i2} V^2}{kT_{i2}} + \frac{2Z_2 e \varphi}{kT_{i2}} \right) \right] \right\}^{-1/2} \\ & - n_{0e} e \exp \left(-\frac{e\varphi}{kT_e} \right) + n_{0p} e \exp \left(\frac{e\varphi}{kT_p} \right) - \alpha e n_{0i1}. \end{aligned}$$

Following the mechanical analogy formalism, Eq. (48) has the Sagdeev pseudopotential, $U(\varphi) = -4\pi \int_0^\varphi \rho(\varphi) d\varphi$ written in the explicit form as

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{U(\varphi)}{4\pi kT_{i1}} = & n_{0i1} \left[\mathcal{R}_1(\zeta_{01}) - \mathcal{R}_1(\zeta_1) \right] + n_{0i2} \left[\mathcal{R}_2(\zeta_{02}) - \mathcal{R}_2(\zeta_2) \right] \quad (49) \\ & + n_{0e} \frac{T_e}{T_{i1}} \left[1 - \exp \left(-\frac{e\varphi}{kT_e} \right) \right] + n_{0p} \frac{T_p}{T_{i1}} \left[1 - \exp \left(\frac{e\varphi}{kT_p} \right) \right] + \alpha n_{0i1} \frac{e\varphi}{kT_{i1}}, \end{aligned}$$

where

$$\begin{aligned} \zeta_{1,2} = & -\frac{m_{i1,2} V^2}{kT_{i1,2}} \mp \frac{2Z_{1,2} e \varphi}{kT_{i1,2}}, \quad \zeta_{01,2} \equiv \zeta_{1,2}(\varphi = 0), \quad \text{and} \\ \mathcal{R}_{1,2}(\zeta_{1,2}) = & \frac{(T_{i1,2}/T_{i1}) W_{-1}[\zeta_{01,2} \exp(\zeta_{1,2})] + 1}{\{\zeta_{01,2} W_{-1}[\zeta_{01,2} \exp(\zeta_{1,2})]\}^{1/2}}. \end{aligned}$$

Figure 14 shows the Sagdeev pseudopotential $U(\varphi)$ determined by Eq. (49) and the corresponding phase portrait of nonlinear stationary ion-acoustic waves propagating in the warm dusty *epiid*-plasma, plotted for certain values of the dimensionless parameters of the model. Similarly to previous Sect. 3.1, the geometry of the generalised potential energy $U(\varphi)$ is clearly seen to correspond to the existence of supersolitary solutions in the discussed five-species plasma model, i.e. there are three local minima in the potential energy function $U(\varphi)$ and there is an external separatrix, which fully envelops the internal one, in the phase portrait. For comparison, Fig. 15 illustrates variations of the normalised electrostatic potential φ and its first derivative (that is an effective electric field in the wave) in the ordinary and supersolitary regimes, obtained from numerical solutions of the governing equation (48).

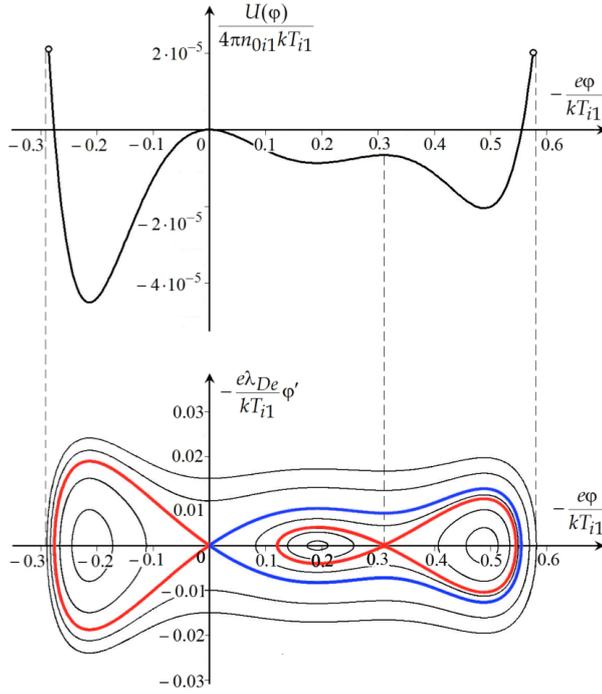


Fig. 14 Pseudopotential $U(\varphi)$ (49) (top) and the phase portrait (bottom) of an ion-acoustic wave in a warm dusty *epiid*-plasma, plotted for $\alpha = 0.1852$, $\gamma = 0.8$, $\delta = 0.13$, $T_p/T_e = 0.87$, $T_{i1}/T_e = 1.76$, $T_{i2}/T_e = 9.2$, $\sqrt{m_{i1}V^2/kT_e} = 2.1$, $m_{i2}/m_{i1} = 2$, and $Z_1 = Z_2 = 1$. Blank circles correspond to the reflection of ions from the potential barrier in the wave. λ_{De} is the electron plasma Debye length. The colour scheme is identical to that used in Fig. 11 (adapted from [50]).

3.3 Further development of the concept of supersolitons in plasma

The idea of supersolitons, originally proposed by Ref. [50–52] has opened a new actively developing research area in the field of nonlinear waves in plasma. Since the discovery of this type of waves in plasma in 2012, tens of follow up and original studies were published, indicating the possibility of their existence in various plasma models and analysing their physical properties. The Sagdeev pseudopotential technique was used in all these works as a conventional instrument for analysis. In this paragraph we briefly outline state-of-the-art achievements obtained in the theory of supersolitons in plasma during these five years.

Reference [34] shows that electrostatic supersolitons are not a feature of exotic, complicated plasma models, but can exist even in a three-species non-thermal plasma and are likely to occur in space plasmas. A methodology is given to derive their existence domains in a systematic manner by determining the specific limiting factors. A model of plasma with two groups of kappa-

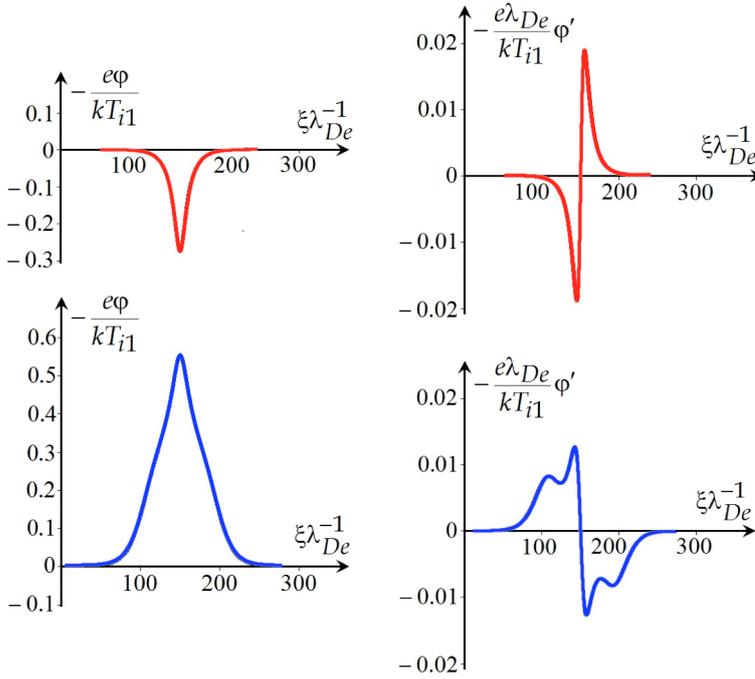


Fig. 15 Profiles of an ordinary ion-acoustic soliton (top left) and supersoliton (bottom left) propagating in a warm dusty *epiid*-plasma. Profiles of the first derivative of an ordinary ion-acoustic soliton (top right) and supersoliton (bottom right) in a warm dusty *epiid*-plasma. Colours are consistent with those used in Fig. 14 (adapted from [50]).

distributed electrons is considered in Ref. [35], where the ion-acoustic supersolitons are shown to exist too. Properties of ion-acoustic supersolitons in a plasma with two-temperature electrons, positrons, and ions (treating all the light plasma components as non-thermal) are studied in Ref. [36]. Authors of Ref. [76] explore a transition of an ordinary ion-acoustic soliton into a supersoliton in a four-species plasma with two groups of electrons and two sorts of ions, delineating the parametric ranges of the existence of supersolitons. Ion-acoustic solitary waves with a W-shaped profile are found in a four-component plasma in Ref. [77]. Such type of solitons may be also referred to as supersolitons.

A series of publications [39, 43, 44, 48, 78] investigate the details of oblique (with respect to the magnetic field) propagation of ion-acoustic supersolitons in a magnetised auroral plasma. Ion-beam plasmas with stationary dust grains are also found to support ion-acoustic supersolitons [79]. It turns out that not only ion-acoustic waves in multi-component plasmas can have a form of supersolitons. For example, a possibility for the existence of dust-acoustic supersolitons in a four-component dusty plasma is shown in Ref. [80].

An important step forward in the theory of supersolitons in plasma has been made by Ref. [81], where the mathematical formalism based on the Taylor expansion of the Sagdeev pseudopotential $U(\varphi, M)$ in the vicinity of the acoustic speed M and the equilibrium electrostatic potential φ is developed for a description of low amplitude supersolitons in a general fluid model consisting of an arbitrary number of species. The authors derive a simplified form of the Sagdeev pseudopotential as a fifth order polynomial (cf. Eqs. (17) and (49)), which is able to support supersolitons

$$U(\varphi, M) = A\delta M\varphi^2 + B\varphi^3 + C\varphi^4 + D\varphi^5, \quad (50)$$

where δM is the incremental velocity and the constant coefficients A , B , C , and D are always non-zero and determined by the equilibrium parameters of the plasma.

3.4 Minimum number of plasma species needed for the existence of electrostatic supersolitons

Section 3.1 and Ref. [51] conclude with an important fact that parallel electrostatic supersolitons can exist in plasmas with at least four electrically charged components. For example, it was previously found that for simpler two- and three-species plasma models the Sagdeev pseudopotential can have up to two or three local extrema, respectively (see e.g. Sect. 2.2). In these cases, it is impossible for the external separatrix to envelop the internal one, and thus a supersoliton cannot exist. This simple empirical rule has been recently independently confirmed by Ref. [40], where the authors rigorously proved the absence of electrostatic supersolitons in two-species plasmas. On the other hand, in the work by Ref. [34] a three-species *iii*-plasma model supporting supersolitary solutions was developed, thus contradicting the above conclusions. However, the latter discrepancy can be easily resolved by a closer view at the electron distribution functions used in the models. More specifically, in Ref. [50–52] light and hot particles were assumed to be distributed by the Boltzmann law having the form of Eq. (2), which cannot be separated into individual energetic groups. In contrast, Ref. [34] and [40] used the following non-thermal distribution function for the electron plasma component (given in the normalised form),

$$n_e(\varphi) = (1 - \beta\varphi + \beta\varphi^2) \exp(\varphi), \quad (51)$$

where φ is the normalised electrostatic potential in the wave, and β is the parameter of the electron non-thermality. Distribution (51) reduces to the traditional Boltzmann distribution (2) only in the limiting case $\beta = 0$, i.e. when all the non-thermal effects are suppressed, while for $\beta \neq 0$ it describes the evolution of three separate electron populations (one thermal and two non-thermal). Essentially, each separate electron in the plasma is able to contribute to only a single population among those three on the right-hand side of

Eq. (51), which in turn appear as three individual terms in Poisson's equation. For example, if one considers a plasma consisting of the electrons distributed by Eq. (51) and ions, it could be treated as a two-species plasma according to the formulation used in Ref. [34]. On the other hand, it is in fact a four-species plasma, as there are four terms (corresponding to one ion and three electron populations) on the right-hand side of Poisson's equation. Moreover, this formulation is also applicable to an example of dust-acoustic waves in a plasma with non-thermal positively charged ionic components distributed by

$$n_i(\varphi) = (1 + \beta\varphi + \beta\varphi^2) \exp(-\varphi), \quad (52)$$

which was considered by Ref. [82] in the application to space and astrophysical dusty plasma situations.

Another illustrative example is given by Ref. [43], where the analytical model of the magnetised plasma consisting of a cold ion fluid and cool Boltzmann and hot kappa-distributed electrons was developed. Again according to Ref. [34], it represents a two-species plasma, where the obliquely propagating ion-acoustic supersolitons were successfully detected (cf. [40]). Hence, the correct accounting of the light component populations, included in the multi-species plasma model, is essential when analysing the possibility for the existence of supersolitary solutions. We would like to finalise the current discussion pointing out that unjustified partitioning of plasma electrons into several species of different energies sometimes may lead to erroneous results [83].

4 Periodic SNW and supersolitons in space, laboratory, and numerical experiments

4.1 Signatures of SNW and supersolitons, detected in earlier records

Nonlinear oscillatory phenomena in astrophysical and laboratory plasmas are regularly observed with the imaging and spectral instruments, throughout the whole electromagnetic spectrum. More specifically, electrostatic waves in plasma are usually measured in experiments as the variations of electrostatic potential or concentration of a certain plasma component. Also, the time variability of a local electric field recorded at the location of a measuring detector, is often of interest in plasma experiments. According to the theory developed above, a physical quantity experiencing oscillations in a periodic SNW or supersoliton, would have an oscillation profile with characteristic wiggles (see e.g. Figs. 4, 7, 10, and the bottom left panels in Figs. 12 and 15) and non-monotonic patterns (see e.g. the bottom right panels in Figs. 12 and 15), which enable the discussed waves to be identified in experimental records. The latter behaviour is determined by a number of separatrices enveloped by a phase trajectory of the wave (see Sect. 2.1). A comprehensive literature survey shows that there is a great number of earlier works reporting on the experimental detection of periodic and solitary waves in laboratory plasma machines and

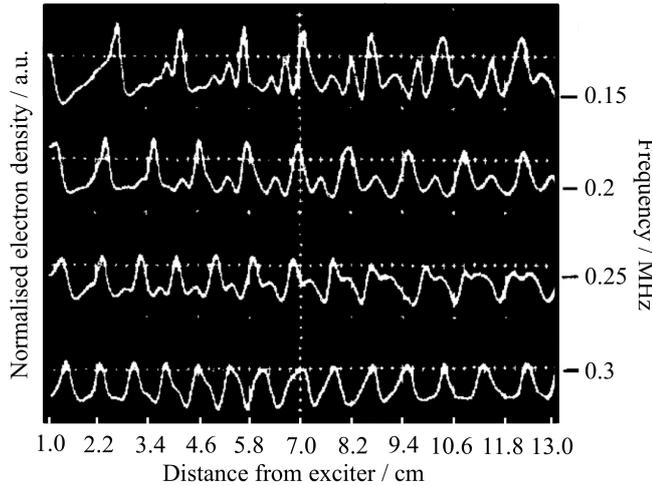


Fig. 16 Variations of the electron density in the propagating ion-acoustic wave excited at various frequencies in a large double plasma device (adapted from [84]).

space missions, which have very straightforward signatures of SNW and supersolitons. However, the presence of those wiggling and non-monotonic patterns in the observational signals was usually ignored by the authors. In this section we summarise several most illustrative observational examples obtained in space, laboratory and numerical plasma experiments, which can be considered as potential candidates for SNW and supersolitons.

Reference [84] shows profiles of periodic ion-acoustic waves excited at various frequencies in a large double plasma device [85]. Behaviour of the electron concentration in the observed propagating wave is reproduced in Fig. 16. These wiggling and non-monotonic profiles are clearly different from a cnoidal form of usual nonlinear ion-acoustic waves in a two-component electron-ion plasma [63] and may be possibly referred to as one of the earliest observational evidences of periodic ion-acoustic SNW.

More recent examples clearly illustrating typical signatures of periodic SNW were detected in the magnetised plasma of the solar atmosphere, a natural laboratory for studying fundamental plasma processes including nonlinear waves and oscillations [86,87]. In particular, Ref. [88] detected so-called quasi-periodic pulsations (QPP) in the electromagnetic emission of a powerful X1.2 class solar flare which occurred on 29 May 2003. The oscillations were found in two independent observations made with the Nobeyama Radio Polarimeters and with the ACS instrument on-board the INTEGRAL satellite in the radio and hard X-ray band, respectively. Spectral analysis of the observational signals, performed with the use of the empirical mode decomposition technique (EMD), revealed that the oscillations shown in the bottom panels of Fig. 17 have an anharmonic profile of a symmetric triangular shape with several points on a single oscillation cycle, where its second derivative equals zero, which are

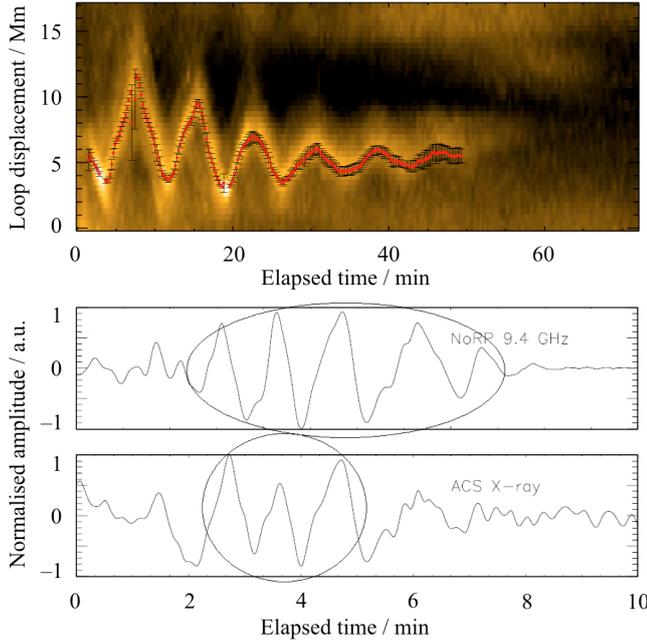
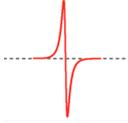
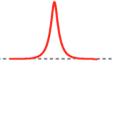
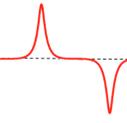
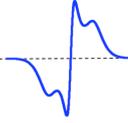
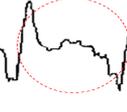


Fig. 17 Time-distance map showing an anharmonic profile of a standing fast magnetoacoustic mode of a coronal loop, detected with the Atmospheric Imaging Assembly on-board the Solar Dynamics Observatory mission, in the extreme ultraviolet band. The elapsed time starts at 20:41:48.34 UT, 26 May 2012 (top, adapted from [91]). Anharmonic quasi-periodic pulsations of a symmetric triangular shape in an X1.2 class solar flare on 29 May 2003, observed in the radio band at 9.4 GHz with the Nobeyama Radio Polarimeters (middle) and in the hard x-ray band (bottom), measured with the ACS instrument on-board the INTEGRAL satellite. The elapsed time starts at 01:00 UT (adapted from [88]).

typical signatures of the discussed SNWs. Furthermore, the following temporal evolution of the oscillation profile shows a well pronounced rapid decrease of the oscillation amplitude, which may look similar to the transformation of the wave type from SNW to NW through a separatrix, as proposed in Sect. 2.1. Similar anharmonic and non-stationary QPPs are often seen in other flaring events and most likely require involvement of the discussed higher-order non-linear effects for the interpretation (see e.g. [89,90], for recent reviews).

A standing fast magnetoacoustic mode of a coronal loop can also manifest typical SNW signatures [91], as shown in the top panel of Fig. 17. The oscillation profile was obtained from a high-resolution time-distance map created with the Atmospheric Imaging Assembly on-board the Solar Dynamics Observatory, AIA/SDO in the extreme ultraviolet band. Before the loop displacement gets sufficiently damped, the first few oscillation cycles clearly represent highly anharmonic behaviour with a symmetric triangular shape and well distinguished wiggles.

Table 1 Expected theoretical profiles of the parallel electric field in an ordinary (KdV-type) ion-acoustic soliton, ion double layer, ion phase hole, and ion-acoustic supersoliton and their experimental analogies with corresponding references.

| Localised electrostatic ion structures | Ion-acoustic soliton | Ion double layer | Ion phase hole | Ion-acoustic supersoliton |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| Theoretical profiles of E_z |  |  |  |  |
| Recorded profiles of E_z |  |  |  |  |
| References | Fragment of Fig. 3 [92] | Fragment of Fig. 1p [93] | Fragment of Fig. 7 [94] | Fragment of Fig. 7b [95] |

In addition to typical signatures of periodic SNW, space plasma observations often show intensive bursts of the electric field, occurring in the form of electrostatic supersolitons. For example, the space missions S3-3 (6000–8000 km, [96]), Viking (817–13527 km, [92]), Polar (up to 10000 km, [97]), and FAST (350–4175 km, [98]) were used for registration of electrostatic solitary structures in the magnetospheric plasma, such as ion-acoustic solitons, double layers, and phase holes. Their records are widely available in the literature and often contain certain patterns which can be interpreted as supersolitons. The difference between the electric field profiles in an ordinary (KdV-type) ion-acoustic soliton, ion double layer, ion phase hole, and ion-acoustic supersoliton is illustrated in Table 1. More specifically, parallel component of the electric field in a conventional ion-acoustic soliton/ion double layer has a localised symmetric bipolar/unipolar structure, respectively; in an ion phase hole it is always constrained by two double layers of opposite polarities; while the electric field profile associated with an ion-acoustic supersoliton is inherently different from that in traditional solitary structures, having additional extrema on the wings. The latter can be used for distinguishing of these localised electrostatic ion structures and detection of supersolitons in observations. For example, Fig. 18 shows potential candidates for electrostatic supersolitons detected in the Earth’s auroral plasma and chosen on the basis of the unique properties given in Table 1. The top panel of Fig. 18 illustrates a single bidirectional structure of the electric field, observed near Southern auroral oval simultaneously by three out of four Cluster satellites, on 23 January 2001 [99]. The structure is clearly seen to be embroidered with subsidiary local extrema (wiggles) on its both wings, coinciding with the expected behaviour of the electric field in electrostatic supersolitons. The bottom panel of Fig. 18 shows a 20 ms portion of observations of a parallel electric field measured in the high-altitude polar magnetosphere by the Polar Plasma Wave Instrument (PWI)

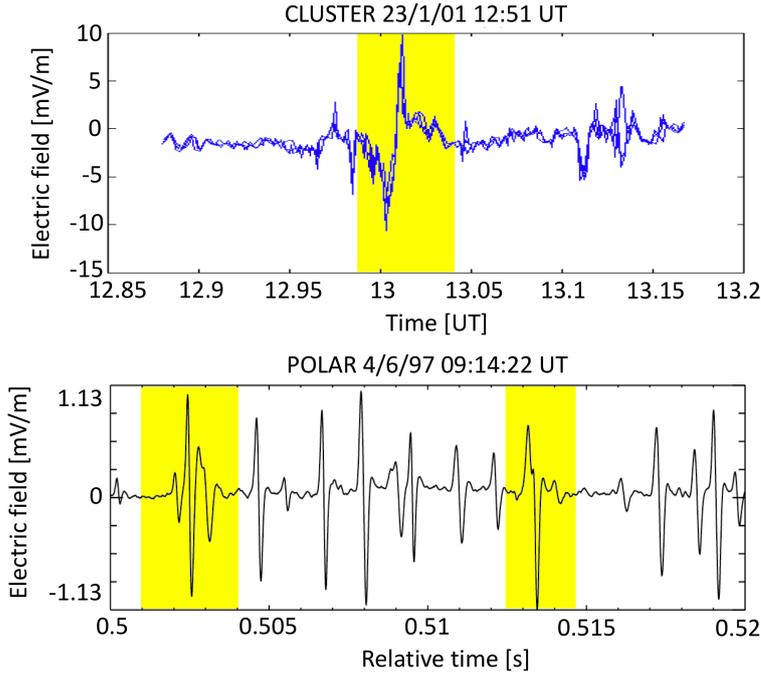


Fig. 18 Possible candidates for supersolitons (highlighted by yellow) detected in the high-altitude Earth's auroral plasma. Top: A coherent solitary bidirectional electric field structure observed by the Cluster Electric Field and Wave (EFW) instrument. The time is given in hours and decimal of hours (adapted from [99]). Bottom: 20 ms measurements of the parallel electric field observed by the Polar Plasma Wave Instrument (PWI) in the high-altitude polar magnetosphere (adapted from [100]).

on 4 June 1997 [100]. Although the authors were searching for phase holes in the observational data, at least two distinct pulses (delineated in Fig. 18) behave rather like supersolitons than phase holes or ordinary solitary waves (cf. Table 1).

Consider another type of experiments, numerical simulations, where possible candidates for supersolitary solutions were detected too. Earlier works [95] and [101] show 1D electrostatic particle-in-cell simulations of nonlinear evolution of electrostatic solitary waves in space plasmas, particularly focusing on the Earth's auroral regions. The electric fields detected in simulations are shown in Fig. 19 and have a localised bipolar structure with well distinguished non-monotonic patterns and wiggles, which is consistent with the form of electrostatic supersolitons predicted by theory (see Table 1).

Reference [102] shows 1D modelling of the dynamics of a Gaussian perturbation of plasma density in a three-species plasma with cold ions and two groups of kappa-distributed electrons, performed within the hydrodynamic numerical scheme developed by Ref. [103]. The initial perturbation was found to rapidly transform into an ion-acoustic supersoliton propagating further with a

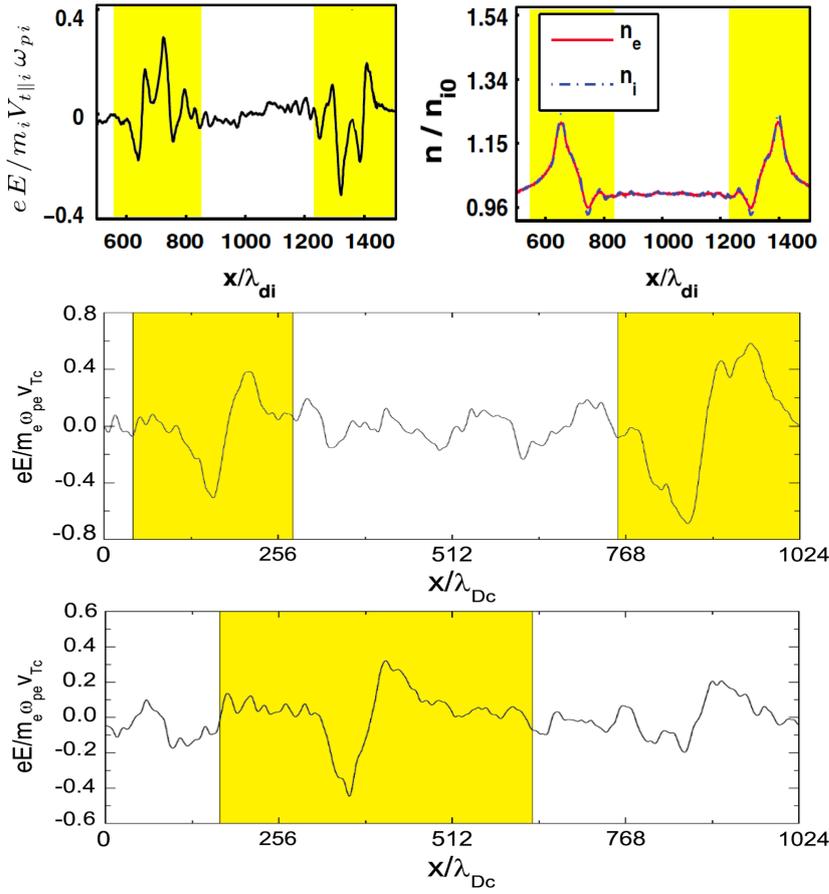


Fig. 19 Possible candidates for supersolitons (highlighted by yellow) detected in earlier particle-in-cell simulations of electrostatic solitary structures in the Earth's magnetospheric plasma. Top panels: Spatial distribution of the electron and ion concentrations (right) and electric field (left) simulated in an electron-ion plasma perturbed by a Gaussian pulse (adapted from [101]). Middle and bottom panels: Spatial profiles of electrostatic field detected in a three-component plasma excited by the electron beam. The profiles were obtained in two numerical realisations with different equilibrium parameters of the plasma (adapted from [95]).

distinctly wiggling shape and constant speed. The results of these simulations obtained at two different instants of the computational time are illustrated in Fig. 20. We would like to emphasise the importance of this work, which is in fact the first-ever dedicated numerical simulation of ion-acoustic supersolitons in plasma.

The question of the detection of supersolitons in laboratory experiments with chemically active plasmas is addressed in detail in the next Sect. 4.2 and references therein.

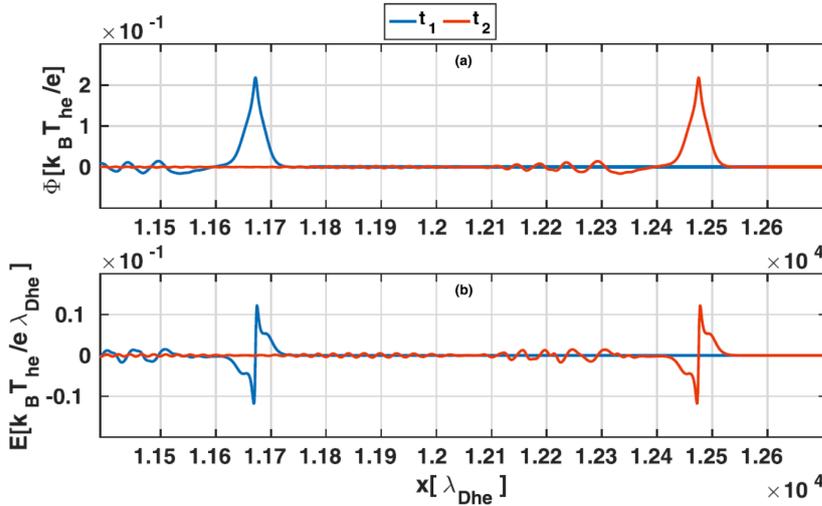


Fig. 20 First dedicated numerical modelling of the ion-acoustic supersoliton in plasma, formed from the initial density perturbation of a Gaussian shape. Top and bottom panels show the behaviour of the electrostatic potential (a) and electric field (b) in the observed supersoliton. Red and blue curves are obtained at two different instants of the computational time (taken from [102]).

4.2 Supersolitons detected in laboratory experiments with SF₆-Ar-plasma with negative ions

Ion-acoustic solitary structures have been actively studied in laboratory experiments with a chemically active plasma representing a mixture of the ionised sulfur hexafluoride, SF₆ and argon, Ar gases (see e.g. [104–109], and references therein). In addition to the electron population and tiny fractions of other components, the positive Ar⁺, SF₆⁺ and negative F⁻, SF₆⁻ ions are believed to be the most abundant species in such a plasma (according to [105]). The interest in these experiments has been stimulated by a number of *in situ* and remote observations reporting an important role of negative ions in the processes operating in the lower ionosphere and atmosphere, for example such as nightglows (see e.g. detailed studies [110,111]) and ball lightnings (see e.g. [112], for a comprehensive review). Additionally, the presence of negatively charged dusty grains can strongly affect physical processes, for example, in the plasma of cometary comas, planetary ring systems, accretion discs, and the transient atmospheres near the Moon and Mercury surfaces (see e.g. [113], and references therein). Other interesting phenomena (such as formations of ion-acoustic shocks, discontinuities, and negative ion density fronts) appearing in plasmas with negative ions are described in Ref. [114–116]. In almost all the laboratory experiments described in the above publications, large amplitude ion-acoustic solitons of unusual form were detected. More specifically, they were found to be highly different from a traditional bell-shaped KdV-soliton,

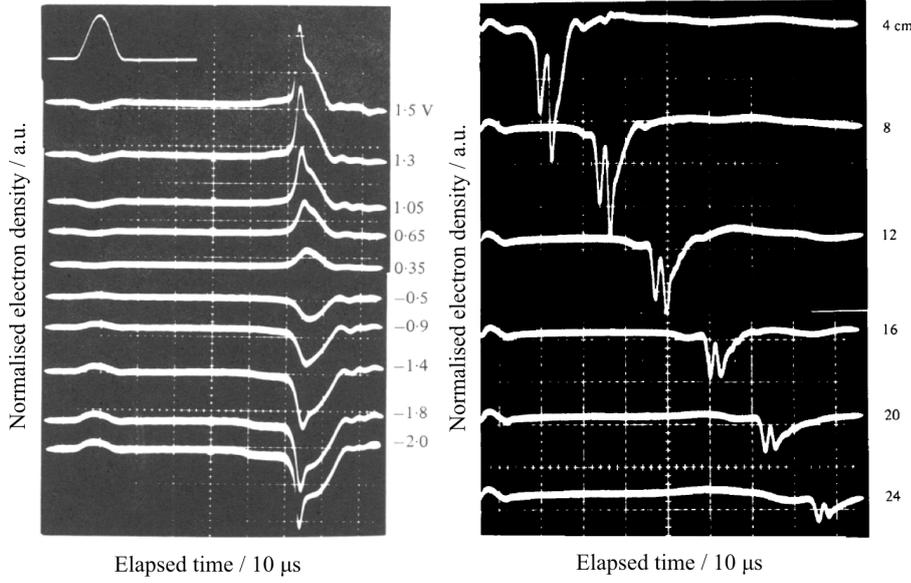


Fig. 21 Left: Oscilloscope traces showing relative variations of the electron concentration in the ion-acoustic solitons propagating through SF₆-Ar-plasma. Different curves correspond to different amplitudes of the initial excitation, which are given on the right-hand side. Profile of the initial excitation is illustrated in the top left corner. Three top and three bottom curves have a clear anharmonic (wiggling) shape, typical for supersolitons (adapted from [107]). Right: Oscilloscope traces showing the electron concentration in the ion-acoustic rarefaction solitons in SF₆-Ar-plasma, measured at different distances (shown on the right-hand side) from the initial excitation site. All curves clearly show a non-monotonic behaviour with a few extrema (adapted from [106]).

with a distinctly wiggling profile containing a few points where its second derivative equals zero. In some cases, the solitary structures were recorded to have non-monotonic slopes with a few clearly distinguished extrema. Examples of these “unusual” and “non-monotonic” ion-acoustic solitons observed in SF₆-Ar-plasma are illustrated in Fig. 21. Interestingly, these observational facts are inconsistent with previous analytical theories dealing with solitary waves in plasma systems, and these anomalies were not addressed in the studies listed above. On the other hand, these detected unusual properties (wiggling and non-monotonic profiles) of the ion-acoustic solitary structures shown in Fig. 21, are clearly seen to be similar to the typical signatures of supersolitons and their first derivatives (see e.g. Figs. 12 and 15). In this section, the concept of supersolitons is employed for the interpretation of these unusual forms of ion-acoustic solitons shown in Fig. 21, and a theoretical possibility for the existence of supersolitary solutions in a chemically active SF₆-Ar-plasma is demonstrated.

Consider a uniform, collisionless, and unmagnetised multi-species plasma consisting of the singly-charged positive Ar⁺, SF₆⁵⁺ and negative F⁻, SF₆⁵⁻

ions, and electrons. The initial neutrality condition for the equilibrium state of such a plasma has a form $en_{0\text{Ar}^+} - en_{0\text{F}^-} + en_{0\text{SF}^{5+}} - en_{0\text{SF}^{5-}} - en_{0e} = 0$, where $e < 0$ is the electric charge of the electron and negative ion components, $(-e) > 0$ is the electric charge of the positive ions, and the subscript “0” hereafter refers to the unperturbed values of the plasma parameters. Introducing the dimensionless parameters of the model, $\alpha = n_{0\text{F}^-}/n_{0\text{Ar}^+}$, $\beta = n_{0\text{SF}^{5-}}/n_{0\text{Ar}^+}$, and $\gamma = n_{0\text{SF}^{5+}}/n_{0\text{Ar}^+}$, the above neutrality condition can be rewritten as $n_{0e} = n_{0\text{Ar}^+}(1 - \alpha - \beta + \gamma)$. Absolute values of these parameters can be estimated from the actual experimental conditions used in Ref. [105], where the partial pressure of the primary SF_6 molecular gas in the discharge chamber was taken to be low, hence $n_{0\text{SF}_6} \ll n_{0e}$. In this case, under a constant discharge current the initial concentration of the F^- ion gas is naturally lower than that of the SF^{5-} ion gas, resulting to $\alpha \ll \beta$. Moreover, Ref. [105] established additional empirical relations for the relative concentrations of the ion components in the performed experiment: $0.65 < n_{0\text{SF}^{5-}}/(n_{0\text{SF}^{5-}} + n_{0\text{F}^-}) < 0.95$ and $0.11 < n_{0\text{SF}^{5+}}/(n_{0\text{SF}^{5+}} + n_{0\text{Ar}^+}) < 0.77$, allowing one to obtain that $0.027 < \alpha < 0.28$ and $0.12 < \gamma < 3.35$ for a certain value of $\beta = 0.52$. Hence, the following values of the parameters $\alpha = 0.035$, $\beta = 0.52$, and $\gamma = 0.2$ were chosen for further analysis.

In the model, the electrons are assumed to be inertialess and hot with a constant temperature, and are therefore distributed by the Boltzmann law (2) in the wave. The massive ion gases are taken to be of a sufficiently low temperature allowing for the neglecting of the effect of the ion thermal pressure on the ion wave dynamics, which is governed by the following set of hydrodynamic equations:

$$\frac{\partial n_l}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial(n_l v_l)}{\partial x} = 0, \quad (53)$$

$$\frac{\partial v_l}{\partial t} + v_l \frac{\partial v_l}{\partial x} = \pm \frac{e}{m_l} \frac{\partial \varphi}{\partial x}, \quad (54)$$

$$\frac{\partial^2 \varphi}{\partial x^2} = 4\pi e(n_{\text{Ar}^+} - n_{\text{F}^-} + n_{\text{SF}^{5+}} - n_{\text{SF}^{5-}} - n_e), \quad (55)$$

where $l = \text{Ar}^+, \text{F}^-, \text{SF}^{5+}, \text{SF}^{5-}$, and the plus/minus sign in the equations of motion (54) refers to the positive/negative ions, respectively.

Similarly to the previous models, one can introduce the variable $\xi = x - Vt$ into the set (53)–(55), transfer it to a new frame of reference, travelling with the phase speed of the wave, V , and afterwards derive the Sagdeev pseudopotential $U_S(\varphi)$ of the whole dynamical system, depending upon the electrostatic potential φ in the wave, as

$$U_S(\varphi) = -4\pi \int_0^\varphi \rho(\varphi) d\varphi = 4\pi m_{\text{Ar}^+} V^2 \left\{ n_{0\text{Ar}^+} \left[1 - \left(1 + \frac{2e\varphi}{m_{\text{Ar}^+} V^2} \right)^{1/2} \right] \right. \quad (56)$$

$$\left. + n_{0\text{F}^-} \frac{m_{\text{F}^-}}{m_{\text{Ar}^+}} \left[1 - \left(1 - \frac{2e\varphi}{m_{\text{F}^-} V^2} \right)^{1/2} \right] + n_{0\text{SF}^{5-}} \frac{m_{\text{SF}^{5-}}}{m_{\text{Ar}^+}} \left[1 - \left(1 - \frac{2e\varphi}{m_{\text{SF}^{5-}} V^2} \right)^{1/2} \right] \right\}$$

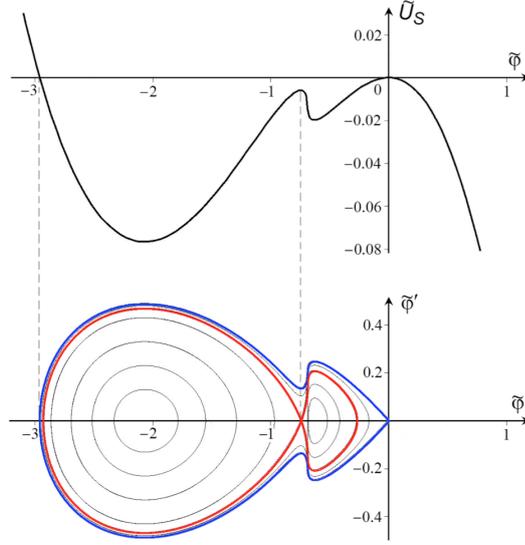


Fig. 22 Dependence of the Sagdeev pseudopotential $U_S(\varphi)$ (56) (top) upon the electrostatic potential φ , and the phase portrait (bottom) of an ion-acoustic wave in SF₆-Ar-plasma, normalised as following: $\tilde{U}_S = U_S/4\pi n_0 \text{Ar}^+ kT_e$, $\tilde{\varphi} = -e\varphi/kT_e$, $\tilde{\varphi}' = -e\lambda_{De}(kT_e)^{-1}(d\varphi/d\xi)$, where λ_{De} is the electron plasma Debye length. The colour scheme is identical to that used in Fig. 11 (adapted from [52]).

$$+n_{0\text{SF}^{5+}} \frac{m_{\text{SF}^{5+}}}{m_{\text{Ar}^+}} \left[1 - \left(1 + \frac{2e\varphi}{m_{\text{SF}^{5+}} V^2} \right)^{1/2} \right] + n_{0e} \frac{kT_e}{m_{\text{Ar}^+} V^2} \left[1 - \exp\left(-\frac{e\varphi}{kT_e}\right) \right] \Bigg\},$$

where

$$\rho(\varphi) = en_{0\text{Ar}^+} \left(1 + \frac{2e\varphi}{m_{\text{Ar}^+} V^2} \right)^{-1/2} - en_{0\text{F}^-} \left(1 - \frac{e\varphi}{m_{\text{F}^-} V^2} \right)^{-1/2} - en_{0\text{SF}^{5-}} \left(1 - \frac{e\varphi}{m_{\text{SF}^{5-}} V^2} \right)^{-1/2} + en_{0\text{SF}^{5+}} \left(1 + \frac{e\varphi}{m_{\text{SF}^{5+}} V^2} \right)^{-1/2} - en_{0e} \exp\left(-\frac{e\varphi}{kT_e}\right).$$

Figure 22 shows the pseudopotential $U_S(\varphi)$ determined by Eq. (56) of an oscillating pseudoparticle, i.e. of the stationary ion-acoustic wave, and the corresponding phase portrait of the whole dynamical system, plotted for $\sqrt{m_{\text{Ar}^+} V^2/kT_e} = 1.7$, that provides the phase speed of the wave, V to be certainly supersonic, and for $m_{\text{SF}^{5+}}/m_{\text{Ar}^+} = 3.18$, $m_{\text{SF}^{5-}}/m_{\text{Ar}^+} = 3.18$, and $m_{\text{F}^-}/m_{\text{Ar}^+} = 0.476$. This analysis indicates that indeed a large amplitude supersolitary solution is possible in the developed SF₆-Ar-plasma model, whose phase trajectory, the external separatrix in the phase portrait, is of a guitar-like form and envelops the internal separatrices. Variations of the electrostatic potential φ , electron and Ar⁺ ion concentrations, n_e and n_{Ar^+} , and their first derivatives in the detected supersoliton are illustrated in Fig. 23. They are clearly seen to have a wiggling profile shape (left-hand column of Fig. 23) and

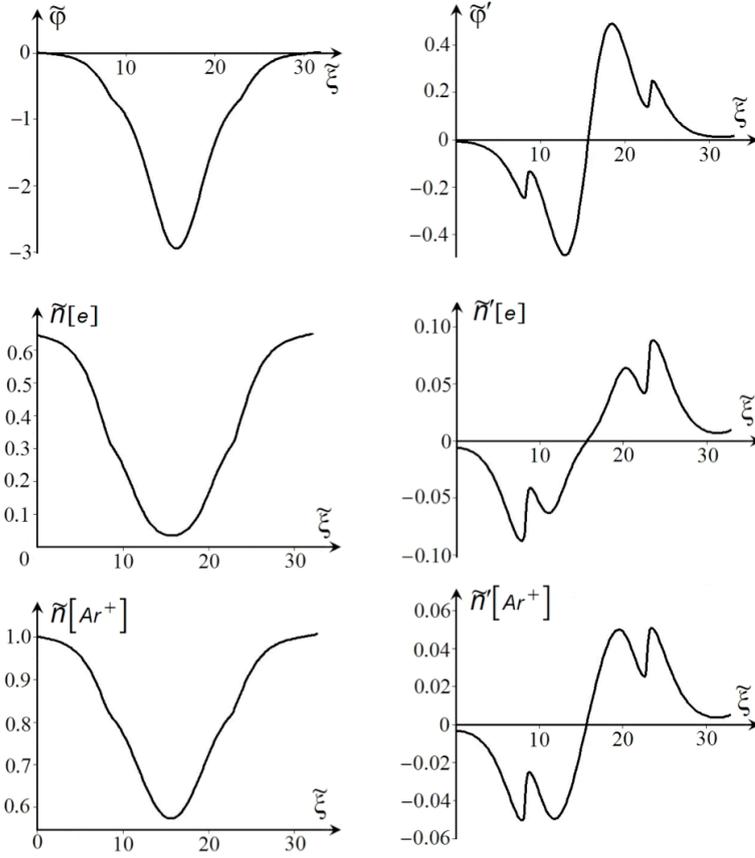


Fig. 23 Profiles of the physical quantities (left) and their first derivatives (right) in the ion-acoustic supersoliton propagating in SF₆-Ar-plasma: electrostatic potential φ (top), electron concentration n_e (middle), and Ar⁺ ion concentration n_{Ar^+} (bottom). The quantities are normalised as $\tilde{\varphi} = -e\varphi/kT_e$, $\tilde{n}_e = n_e/n_{0Ar^+}$, $\tilde{n}_{Ar^+} = n_{Ar^+}/n_{0Ar^+}$, $\tilde{\xi} = \xi\lambda_{De}^{-1}$, where λ_{De} is the electron plasma Debye length (adapted from [52]).

a non-monotonic behaviour with a few extrema (right-hand column of Fig. 23), typical for the solitary structures observed in the experiments (see Fig. 21).

Such an excellent agreement between the experimental results and their independent theoretical interpretation presented in the current section strongly supports the idea that the ion-acoustic solitary structures of unusual form, detected, in particular, by Ref. [106] and [107] in a laboratory four-ion SF₆-Ar-plasma, could be supersolitons with a non-trivial topology of their phase portraits, and a comprehensive search for these structures in multi-component space and astrophysical plasmas is needed.

5 Conclusions

The review addresses current trends in the analysis of a new type of stationary nonlinear waves in multi-species plasmas, periodic super-nonlinear waves (SNW) and solitary super-nonlinear waves (supersolitons), characterised by a non-trivial topology of their phase portraits, long periods, and large amplitudes. The scheme allowing for the classification of these super-nonlinear solutions and their convenient notation is proposed. Using the multi-fluid plasma models, SNWs are shown to have both electrostatic and magnetohydrodynamic nature. The presence of at least three electrically active components in the plasma (e.g. thermal and non-thermal electrons, ions, charged dusty grains, positrons, etc.) is found to be among the essential criteria for the existence of SNWs. In the space plasma context the nearest candidates are an electron–proton plasma penetrated by alpha particles (e.g. typical for the physical conditions of the solar corona and solar wind) and dusty electron–ion plasmas represented in the vast majority of the astrophysical and space objects, which can be expected to support SNW. The increase of the number of plasma species results to a more complicated topology of the SNW’s phase portraits, providing a broader set of topologically different SNW types. Alternatively, non-neutral plasma systems with intense beams are also known to support solitary waves (see e.g. Ref. [117], where the first experimental observation of a KdV-type soliton wave train in electron beams is reported), and thus should be also included into the list of natural plasmas which are expected to sustain supersolitons. First results in this direction have been achieved by Ref. [79], who showed the possibility for the existence of ion-acoustic supersolitons in ion-beam plasmas with stationary dust grains.

So far, periodic SNW and supersolitons have been analytically studied by the mean of the mechanical analogy method based on the Sagdeev pseudopotential representation. One should admit that the application of the perturbation reductive procedures introducing a small parameter into the model, for the analysis of these highly-nonlinear structures is compromised by their naturally large amplitudes. For instance, neither KdV-equation (with the second-order nonlinearity) nor modified KdV-equation (third-order nonlinearity) is able to describe supersolitons. In contrast, the Sagdeev pseudopotential technique allows for studying arbitrarily large amplitude fluctuations, which justifies the choice of it as a conventional tool for the analysis of SNW and supersolitons in *all* considered works. Following its importance in the discussed problem of super-nonlinear waves in plasma, we would like to briefly outline some more aspects behind this approximation. Namely, the role of the momentum and energy integrals of the governing equations and the role of different sonic Mach numbers in a fully nonlinear analysis is emphasised by Ref. [118]. This approach should be treated as an alternative to the Sagdeev potential technique, and can be useful in describing spiky wave forms associated with choked flows at the sonic points. The aspects of a Hamiltonian description of the travelling waves in plasma are discussed by Ref. [119, 120]. The role of generalised vorticities and Bernoulli integrals in the formulation of travelling waves in multi-fluid

plasmas is studied by Ref. [121]. References [122, 123] show that there are two different Hamiltonian formulations for the travelling waves, which use the x -momentum integral and the energy integral of the system. The momentum integral can be thought of as the Hamiltonian of the system, in which the variables are constrained by the energy integral. An alternative Hamiltonian formulation also results from using the energy integral as the Hamiltonian in which the momentum integral is a constraint. These formulations are related to the multi-symplectic view of the equations, as developed by e.g. Ref. [124–127].

Typical signatures of SNWs allowing for the detection of them in astrophysical observations and under laboratory conditions are given. More specifically, their oscillation amplitudes are always large (typically greater than or comparable to a non-oscillating background level) and scale with the oscillation periods, while the oscillation profiles are highly anharmonic of a symmetric triangular shape. Furthermore, several observational signals clearly manifesting such a super-nonlinear behaviour and observed in the magnetised plasma of the solar atmosphere, Earth’s magnetosphere, in laboratory and numerical experiments, are demonstrated. Despite a significant progress in the field, a further comprehensive search for observational evidences of these super-nonlinear structures using modern ground-based and space-borne instruments and experimental plasma machines, and the developing of corresponding analytical models, is of the great interest and importance.

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