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<td>Citation</td>
<td>Carvalho, J. C. D. A., Pedri, P., Ducloy, M., &amp; Laliotis, A. (2018). Retardation effects in spectroscopic measurements of the Casimir-Polder interaction. Physical Review A, 97(2), 023806-.</td>
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<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10220/45157">http://hdl.handle.net/10220/45157</a></td>
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Retardation effects in spectroscopic measurements of the Casimir-Polder interaction

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DOI: 10.1103/PhysRevA.97.023806

Spectroscopy is a unique experimental tool for measuring the fundamental Casimir-Polder interaction between excited-state atoms, or other polarizable quantum objects, and a macroscopic surface. Spectroscopic measurements probe atoms at nanometric distances away from the surface where QED retardation is usually negligible and the atom-surface interaction is proportional to the inverse cube of the separation distance, otherwise known as the van der Waals regime. Here we focus on selective reflection, one of the main spectroscopic probes of Casimir-Polder interactions. We calculate selective reflection spectra using the full, distance dependent, Casimir-Polder retardation on selective reflection spectra. In Sec.II we outline the principles of the calculation of selective reflection spectra accounting for a fully retarded Casimir-Polder potential. In Sec. III, we calculate the Casimir-Polder potential of cesium low-lying energy states and we present the theoretically predicted spectra of the corresponding selective reflection experiments. We show that retardation effects have an impact on predicted spectra and experimental measurements of the van der Waals coefficient. Finally, in Sec. IV, we discuss how our analysis is imperative for interpreting spectroscopic measurements with more complex geometries such as metasurfaces that now offer an attractive way for tuning the Casimir-Polder interaction via tuning of surface plasmon or polariton resonances [16]. Our approach allows us to account for a distance dependent shift and linewidth. This can be important in the quest for identifying more delicate effects such as quantum friction [17] in spectroscopic experiments.

Nevertheless retardation effects for excited-state atoms have remained elusive in most spectroscopic experiments, with a notable exception of experiments performed with ions placed extremely far away (on the order of 20 cm) from a surface [14]. These experiments have shown QED oscillations of the Casimir-Polder force, similar to the ones predicted for a classical antenna, due to the influence of spontaneous emission. The intermediate regime of interaction has not been studied with excited-state atoms. In fact, analysis of spectroscopic measurements, in particular selective reflection or thin cell spectroscopy, has only been performed under the prism of a pure van der Waals law [3]. However, recent experimental and theoretical studies [15] suggest that retardation could have measurable effects for spectroscopic experiments with low-lying atomic energy states.

Here we theoretically investigate the effects of Casimir-Polder retardation on selective reflection spectra. In Sec. II we outline the principles of the calculation of selective reflection spectra accounting for a fully retarded Casimir-Polder potential. In Sec. III, we calculate the Casimir-Polder potential of cesium low-lying energy states and we present the theoretically predicted spectra of the corresponding selective reflection experiments. We show that retardation effects have an impact on predicted spectra and experimental measurements of the van der Waals coefficient. Finally, in Sec. IV, we discuss how our analysis is imperative for interpreting spectroscopic measurements with more complex geometries such as metasurfaces that now offer an attractive way for tuning the Casimir-Polder interaction via tuning of surface plasmon or polariton resonances [16]. Our approach allows us to account for a distance dependent shift and linewidth. This can be important in the quest for identifying more delicate effects such as quantum friction [17] in spectroscopic experiments.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Casimir-Polder interaction of polarizable quantum objects, such as atoms or molecules, with a macroscopic surface is a fundamental problem of quantum electrodynamics. Spectroscopic measurement of atomic energy-level shifts has been one of the main experimental methods for probing atom-surface interactions. Spectroscopy of Rydberg atoms flying through metallic cavities was the first precision measurement of the van der Waals law [1], demonstrating that atom-surface interactions are sensitive to atom-surface separation. Selective reflection (SR), a technique used in conventional vapor cells, is also sensitive to atom surface interaction in the nanometric scale, probing atoms at distances on the order of 100 nm away from dielectric windows [2,3]. Selective reflection has been used to demonstrate atom-surface repulsion of excited-state atoms due to resonant coupling with surface polaritons [4], as well as to demonstrate a strong temperature dependence of the Casimir-Polder interaction due to thermal excitation of polariton modes [5,6]. Thin cell transmission and reflection have been used to measure atom-surface interactions [7] and more recently evidence of van der Waals interactions was also observed on thin cell fluorescence spectra [8].

Spectroscopic probing of the Casimir-Polder interaction has been so far seemingly faithful to the $z^{-3}$, van der Waals law, whereas retardation effects, that were famously first predicted by Casimir and Polder [9], have been demonstrated only with ground-state atoms. This was either done by measuring the deflection of ground-state sodium atoms [10], or by using cold atom trapping in the vicinity of surfaces [11–13].

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II. INFLUENCE OF CASIMIR-POLDER INTERACTION ON SELECTIVE REFLECTION SPECTRUM

The Casimir-Polder interaction has been theoretically investigated in numerous studies. Here, we follow the formalism introduced by Wylie and Sipe [18,19], since our emphasis will be on excited-state atoms. The same formalism has been used to analyze a temperature-dependent Casimir-Polder interaction [20] and later to demonstrate that the temperature-dependent Casimir-Polder interaction is equivalent to a shift induced by near-field thermal emission [15].

For a given atomic state |α⟩ the free-energy shift δFα due to the atom-surface interaction can be expressed as the sum of contributions resulting from all dipole allowed couplings, δFα→b (δFα = δFα→b + δFα→b), which can in turn be decomposed in a resonant δFα→b and nonresonant δFα→b contribution. The resonant term of the interaction is reminiscent of a classical interaction between an oscillating dipole and its image [21]. The nonresonant term originates from the QED picture of an atom interacting with the fluctuating vacuum at nonzero temperature [19–21]. It can be viewed as a distance dependent Lamb shift [18–20]. The resonant and nonresonant terms of the Casimir-Polder interaction are given by the following expressions:

\[
\delta F_{\alpha \rightarrow b}^r = -\frac{k_B T}{\hbar} \int_0^{\infty} \sum_{p=0} \mu_{a b}^{\alpha \beta} \mu_{b a}^{\beta \alpha} G_{a b}(z, i \xi_p) - \frac{\omega_{a b}}{\xi_p^2 + \omega_{a b}^2},
\]

\[
\delta F_{\alpha \rightarrow b}^n = n(\omega_{a b}(T)) \mu_{a b}^{\alpha \beta} \mu_{b a}^{\beta \alpha} \text{Re}[G_{a b}(z, |\omega_{a b}|)].
\]

Here, ωab is the transition frequency that can be either positive or negative depending on the coupling, ξp = 2πk_B T / p are the Matsubara frequencies, and n(ωab, T) is the Bose-Einstein factor. The prime symbol signifies that the first term of the sum should be multiplied by 1/2. We use the Einstein notation, implying a summation over the index variables α and β that denote the Cartesian coordinate components. Finally, μαb and μβa are the dipole moment matrix elements and G_{a b}(z, i \xi_p) are the components of the linear susceptibility matrix of the reflected field defined in [18,19]. The linear susceptibility matrix gives the reflected displacement field at a point r due to a dipole \( \vec{\mu}(\omega) \), oscillating at a frequency \( \omega \), positioned at \( \vec{r}' \), via the relation \( \bar{D}(\vec{r}, \vec{r}', \omega) = G(\vec{r}, \vec{r}', \omega) \bar{\mu}(\omega) \). In our case \( \bar{D} \) is evaluated for \( \vec{r} = \vec{r}' \), because we’re interested in dipoles interacting with their own reflected field. Due to the cylindrical symmetry \( \bar{G} \) is only a function of frequency and distance z of the dipole from the reflecting wall. More details on the calculation of the elements of the linear susceptibility matrix are given in [15,18–20].

The distance dependent linewidth, \( \delta \gamma_{a \rightarrow b}(z) \), is also a summation of contributions, \( \delta \gamma_{a \rightarrow b} \), given by

\[
\delta \gamma_{a \rightarrow b} = 2n(\omega_{a b}, T) \mu_{a b}^{\alpha \beta} \mu_{b a}^{\beta \alpha} \text{Im}[G_{a b}(z, |\omega_{a b}|)].
\]

The far-field limit (z ≫ λ/2π) of the free-energy shift δF_{a→b} and linewidth \( \delta \gamma_{a \rightarrow b} \) are given by

\[
\delta F_{a \rightarrow b} = n(\omega_{a b}, T) \mu_{a b}^{\alpha \beta} \mu_{b a}^{\beta \alpha} \left| r(\omega_{a b}) \right| \cos \left( 2k_{a b} z + \phi(\omega_{a b}) \right),
\]

\[
\delta \gamma_{a \rightarrow b} = 2n(\omega_{a b}, T) \mu_{a b}^{\alpha \beta} \mu_{b a}^{\beta \alpha} \frac{k_{a b}^2}{z} |r(\omega_{a b})| \sin \left( 2k_{a b} z + \phi(\omega_{a b}) \right),
\]

where \( \lambda_{a b}, k_{a b} \) are the transition wavelength and wave vector and \( r(\omega_{a b}) = |r(\omega_{a b})| e^{i\phi(\omega_{a b})} \) is the surface reflection coefficient. In the near field (z ≪ \( \lambda/2\pi \)), the free-energy shift follows the well-known van der Waals law that writes \( \delta F_{a \rightarrow b} = -\frac{C_3}{\lambda_{a b}^2} \). In the case of a dissipative surface (nonzero imaginary part of the dielectric constant), the distance dependent linewidth also follows the inverse cube law: \( \delta \gamma_{a \rightarrow b} = -\frac{C_3}{2|\lambda_{a b}|^3} \), where \( C_3 \) is the complex van der Waals coefficient.

Using the above definitions we can proceed to the calculation of the selective reflection spectrum using a fully retarded Casimir-Polder shift and linewidth. Selective reflection is a linear spectroscopic technique that measures the reflection of a laser beam, near resonant with an atomic transition, at the interface of an atomic vapor and a dielectric surface (transparent at the laser frequency). Due to collisions with the dielectric surface the interaction of the atoms with the laser field is interrupted. As such a correct description of selective reflection takes into account the transient regime of atom-laser interaction [3,22]. In its FM (frequency modulation) version selective reflection is linear (with respect to laser power), has a sub-Doppler resolution, and is essentially sensitive to atoms that are at distances on the order of \( \lambda/2\pi \) away from the dielectric surface, where \( \lambda \) is the wavelength of optical excitation. The combination of high-frequency resolution and detection of atoms at nanometric distances from the surface makes selective reflection a major experimental method for probing Casimir-Polder interactions of excited-state atoms. Additionally selective reflection has been used for measuring the collisional broadening (broadening due to interatomic collisions) of atomic transitions [22,23]. The possibility of measuring local-field corrections (Lorentz-Lorenz shift) at high vapor densities with strong laser attenuation inside the atomic vapor has also been considered [24].

In our study we usually consider transitions between the fundamental electronic state of the atom |g⟩ and an excited state |e⟩. The details of the calculation have been outlined in [3]. Here we briefly recall that the calculation considers the transient atomic response to correctly describe the effective linear susceptibility of the atomic vapor. When a frequency modulation (FM) is applied to the laser probe beam the observable signal is in fact the derivative of the reflectivity as a function of laser frequency \( \omega \), which according to [3] is given by the following formula:

\[
S_{FM} = \text{Im} \left[ \int_0^{\infty} dz \int_0^{\infty} dz' \frac{\delta \gamma_{a \rightarrow b} \delta F(a b)}{L(z') - L(z)} \right].
\]
energies between the probed states, which is the relevant quantity in selective reflection spectroscopy. \( \gamma \) is the transition linewidth in the volume (away from the surface), defined as the natural linewidth plus any additional collisional broadening, and \( \delta \gamma(z) = \delta \gamma_s(z) + \delta \gamma_v(z) \) is the distant dependent transition linewidth that essentially contains all surface effects. We can also write Eq. (7) as

\[
L(z) = L_0z - i \xi(z),
\]

where \( L_0 = \frac{\gamma_s}{\gamma} - i(\omega - \omega_0) \). The effects of the surface on the atomic properties are essentially contained in the indefinite integral \( \xi(z) = \int (-\delta F(z) + i \frac{\delta \gamma(z)}{\gamma})dz \). Here the shift \( -\delta F(z) \) and the linewidth \( \frac{\delta \gamma(z)}{\gamma} \) appear as real and imaginary parts of the Casimir-Polder potential, respectively. The integration constant has been omitted as we are only interested in the difference \( L(z') - L(z) \).

In most spectroscopic experiments one fits the experimental data with a theoretical model to extract information about the Casimir-Polder interaction \([1,2,4-8]\). Here, however, \( \xi(z) \) is a numerically calculated function that uses the theoretically estimated Casimir-Polder potential, without accounting for any adjustable parameters. For this purpose we rewrite Eq. (8) using a dimensionless multiplicative constant, \( \eta \), that is applied equally to both the free-energy shift and linewidth:

\[
L(z) = L_0z - i \eta \xi(z),
\]

\( \eta \) changes the strength of the potential and provides an adjustable parameter that can be used to fit the theoretical model to experimental data. For the purposes of this manuscript, selective reflection spectra are calculated using strictly the theoretical predictions for atom-surface potential (i.e., \( \eta = 1 \)).

After a change of variables and some tedious algebra the selective reflection integral is written as

\[
I = \frac{2}{(1 - i \Delta)\gamma_s \hbar^2} \left[ \frac{1}{(-i + \omega)^2} + \frac{1}{(1 - i \Delta)\gamma_s \hbar^2} \right] \int_0^\infty ds e^{i s} e^{-as} \int_0^\infty dt \frac{i A \Xi(s,t)}{(1 - i \Delta) - i A \Xi(s,t)},
\]

\( \Xi(s,t) \) are given in Appendix [see Eq. (A3)]. Here we define the normalized frequency (detuning parameter) \( \Delta = \frac{2\omega - \omega_0}{\gamma} \) and the parameter \( A = \frac{2\delta \gamma}{\gamma} \). The parameter \( \alpha \) is the attenuation coefficient due to the exponential laser absorption inside the resonant vapor (see also [3,24]). In normalized frequency units the shape of the spectrum depends exclusively on the parameter \( \Delta \), which is essentially the ratio of the strength of the potential \( \eta \) over \( \gamma \), that defines the resolution of the experiment.

The result of Eq. (10) displays many similarities with the selective reflection spectrum assuming a pure van der Waals potential \([3]\). However, here the curves are not universal, since the distance dependence of the potential depends on the probed transition. Additionally, the calculation of the integrals is significantly more difficult.

It is also worth mentioning that, while in the near field the distance dependent linewidth is usually significantly smaller than the atomic energy shift and in most cases can be safely ignored; this is not the case when one considers the complete Casimir Polder potential. It can be seen from Eqs. (4) and (5) that, in the far field, linewidth \( (\delta \gamma/2) \) and shift \( (\delta F) \) oscillate with the same amplitude and frequency and a phase shift of \( \pi/2 \). As such, ignoring the distance dependent linewidth in a fully retarded calculation has no realistic justification and can lead to erroneous results or even, in some cases, to divergent selective reflection integrals.

### III. RESULTS

We now turn our attention to some specific cases, focusing mainly on cesium, which is widely used in spectroscopic SR experiments (see \([5,6,16,25]\) and references therein). In particular we examine the low-lying excited states where dipole moment fluctuations remain relatively small and comparable to those of the ground state. Here we also take into account the modification of the spontaneous emission rate near the surface \([26]\) due to the reflection of the emitted field on the surface or due to emission in the forbidden cone of the dielectric \([27]\) and in evanescent plasmon-polariton modes. Within the near-field approximation the transition linewidth can be written as \( \delta \gamma_{s-b} \propto \frac{1}{\hbar} |\text{Im} \left[ \epsilon(\omega_{ab})^{-1} \right]| \), which diverges close to the surface, if the surface dissipation is nonzero at the transition frequency \( (\text{Im} \left[ \epsilon(\omega_{ab}) \right] \neq 0) \). This represents an increase in the spontaneous emission rate of the atom due to the existence of evanescent, plasmon-polariton type, modes \([28]\). In the cases considered here this contribution is small for experimentally meaningful distances. Therefore, we consider the surface dissipation equal to zero \( (\text{Im} \left[ \epsilon(\omega_{ab}) \right] = 0) \), thus avoiding any divergence of the atomic linewidth very close to the surface (see also relevant discussion in \([18]\)).

In Fig. 1(a) we show the energy-level shifts for the cesium levels \( 6S_{1/2, 6}P_{1/2, 6}P_{3/2, 6}D_{5/2} \) against a sapphire surface, multiplied by the cube of the atom-surface distance \( z \). The difference of the effective van der Waals coefficients for the \( 6S_{1/2, 6}P_{1/2, 6}P_{3/2, 6}D_{5/2} \) against a sapphire surface, multiplied by the cube of the atom-surface distance \( z \cdot \left| -\delta F(z) z^3 \right| \). For simplicity, we call the quantity \( -\delta F(z) z^3 \) an effective van der Waals coefficient \( C_{\text{eff}}^3 \). Our calculation is performed for a sapphire surface whose dielectric constant is given in \([29,30]\). From Fig. 1(a) we can see that, for the excited states of cesium, the \( C_{\text{eff}}^3(z) \) is practically constant within a few hundred of nanometers from the surface, whereas the ground state of cesium \( 6S_{1/2} \) decays much more rapidly, towards an asymptotic \( z^{-4} \) regime. This is partly because excited states present many dipole couplings at near and mid-infrared wavelengths but also because these couplings are both in absorption (positive transition frequencies) as well as in emission (negative transition frequencies). As such, excited states are sensitive to the distance dependence of the resonant term of the Casimir-Polder interaction whose distance dependence is very different from that of the nonresonant term.

We will examine here in more detail the spectra of selective reflection at the \( 6S_{1/2} \rightarrow 6P_{1/2} \) and \( 6S_{1/2} \rightarrow 5D_{5/2} \) transitions. The difference of the effective van der Waals coefficients for these experiments, representing the spectroscopically relevant quantity, is shown as an inset of Fig. 1(a). The first transition, the \( D_1 \) line of cesium, was already investigated experimentally, albeit with a cell containing significant quantities of buffer gas impurities \([31]\). The \( D_2 \) line of cesium \( 6S_{1/2} \rightarrow 6P_{3/2} \), experimentally investigated in \([2,23]\), exhibits a very similar behavior to the \( D_1 \) line.

In the case of the \( 6S_{1/2} \rightarrow 5D_{5/2} \) transition SR is almost exclusively sensitive to retardation mostly because the van
The effective van der Waals coefficients for the $6S_{1/2}$ to $5D_{5/2}$ transition are very similar in magnitude. The $6S_{1/2} \rightarrow 5D_{5/2}$ transition is an electric quadrupole coupling, with small transition probability. Nevertheless, it has been experimentally probed by reflection spectroscopy of evanescent waves [32] and more lately with high resolution pump-probe spectroscopy [33]. Additionally, the $5D_{5/2}$ level can be reached with a two-photon or Raman-type transition using two excitation lasers and appropriately large detuning to minimize the influence of the intermediate state. Therefore, the analysis that we will present here is much more than a simple theoretical curiosity. In Fig. 1(b) we show the distance dependent linewidths for the $6P_{1/2}$ and $5D_{5/2}$ transitions (starting from the cesium ground state). The analysis of the effective van der Waals coefficients for the cesium levels $6S_{1/2}$ and $5D_{5/2}$ transitions, as well as $5P_{1/2}$ (black solid line) against a sapphire surface. The inset shows the difference of the effective van der Waals coefficients for the $6S_{1/2} \rightarrow 5D_{5/2}$ (black solid line) and the $6S_{1/2} \rightarrow 6P_{1/2}$ (red solid line) transitions. (b) Distance dependent linewidth for three principal transitions $6S_{1/2} \rightarrow 6P_{1/2}$ (black dashed-dotted line), $6S_{1/2} \rightarrow 6P_{3/2}$ (black solid line), and $6S_{1/2} \rightarrow 5D_{5/2}$ (black solid line in the main figure and the inset).
FIG. 2. (a) Black lines represent the simulated selective reflection spectra (SR) on the $6S_{1/2} \rightarrow 5D_{5/2}$ transition, using a fully retarded Casimir-Polder potential (exact SR line shapes) with a transition linewidth of $\gamma = 120$ kHz (natural linewidth), as well as $\gamma = 1$ MHz and $\gamma = 10$ MHz (assuming a collisional broadening). The spectra are given as a function of the normalized frequency $\Delta_1$, as defined in the text. The gray lines represent the expected SR line shapes assuming a pure van der Waals atom-surface potential (i.e., using the theoretical prediction of $C_3 = 0.15$ kHz $\mu$m$^3$). The dashed curves are the best fits of the exact SR line shapes using an ad hoc van der Waals coefficient $C_3^{\text{fit}}$. (b) The ad hoc van der Waals coefficient $C_3^{\text{fit}}$ as a function of the transition linewidth. As the transition linewidth increases SR is more sensitive to atoms that are close to the surface and the values of $C_3^{\text{fit}}$ approach the theoretical estimate of the van der Waals coefficient (Fig. 1). The inset shows the amplitude ratio between the fully retarded SR spectra and the corresponding fits.

FIG. 3. (a) Same as in Fig. 2 but for the $6S_{1/2} \rightarrow 6P_{1/2}$ transition. Black lines are the exact SR spectra, gray lines are SR spectra with a pure van der Waals potential, and dashed lines are fits of the exact SR spectra using an ad hoc $C_3^{\text{fit}}$ coefficient. The linewidths investigated are $\gamma = 4.6$ MHz (natural linewidth) as well as $\gamma = 10$ MHz and $\gamma = 20$ MHz, giving a $C_3^{\text{fit}}$ of $1.7$ kHz $\mu$m$^3$, $1.5$ kHz $\mu$m$^3$, and $1.2$ kHz $\mu$m$^3$, respectively. The theoretical value of the van der Waals coefficient is $C_3 = 1.1$ kHz $\mu$m$^3$. (b) $C_3^{\text{fit}}$ coefficient as a function of linewidth. As in Fig. 2, the inset shows the amplitude ratio between the exact SR spectra and the corresponding fits.

Contrary to the $6S_{1/2} \rightarrow 5D_{5/2}$ transition, the $D_1$ line of cesium is a particularly strong line with a well-separated hyperfine structure, but the predicted retardation effects are smaller. Previous experiments [31], conducted for large linewidths ($\gamma > 20$ MHz), give a value of $1.4$ kHz $\mu$m$^3$, with error bars of about 15%. These results are in good agreement with the predictions of Fig. 3(b). A more conclusive experimental demonstration of retardation requires measurements at small linewidths and probably an improvement of the experimental error bars. This regime was not attained in the experiment presented in [31] mainly due to the existence of impurities in the Casimir-Polder shift [see the inset in Fig. 1(a)]. In this case, in order to account for the observed dependence of $C_3^{\text{fit}}$ as a function of linewidth one has to consider both the distance dependent shift and linewidth. This is corroborated by the fact that the fitting process gives an ad hoc linewidth $\gamma^{\text{fit}}$ which is slightly larger than the real values (by about 0.5 MHz), an effect also linked to the distance dependent linewidth close to the surface [see Fig. 1(b)]. Small variations of the amplitude of the fitted curves are also observed and shown in the inset of Fig. 3(b).
the cesium cell that limited the minimum observable linewidth. When comparing experiment to theory it’s also worth keeping in mind that the theoretical estimates of the Casimir-Polder potential are sensitive to the exact knowledge of the transition probabilities of all the relative dipole couplings as well as the dielectric constant of sapphire (see [5] for a discussion on the error bars of the theoretical predictions).

Our analysis also gives the possibility to fit experimental data with a fully retarded library of curves (values of \( J \)), which would depend on the specific transition and the specific dielectric investigated. In this case the fitting process would adjust for the transition linewidth (\( \gamma \)) and the dimensionless parameter (\( \eta \)) which measures the strength of the Casimir-Polder potential (both shift and linewidth) with respect to its theoretical values, assuming that distance dependence is fixed.

**IV. CONCLUSIONS**

Here we have focused our analysis in spectroscopic experiments performed with atoms in front of infinite plane surfaces. However, our methodology can be easily extended to composite surfaces, assuming that the Casimir-Polder potentials and propagation optics can be correctly evaluated [34]. The simplest example of a composite surface is the case where alkali-metal adsorbants are deposited on or even react with the surface. This is a common phenomenon in vapor cells filled with alkali-metal atoms that can strongly depend on the nature of the surface [35]. In this respect sapphire windows seem to be more favorable, with an additional benefit of allowing much higher temperatures than glass or calcium fluoride windows [6]. Although a theoretical analysis of the problem is challenging it is probable that a simple van der Waals approximation is not sufficient to analyze these effects.

A more interesting scenario includes the controlled deposition of bidimensional materials such as graphene on a dielectric surface. Already, Casimir force measurements have been performed on a composite dielectric-graphene surface [36] and theoretical proposals exist for extending such measurements to the Casimir-Polder domain (see for example [37,38]). Casimir and Casimir-Polder type measurements allow us to get useful information on the dielectric properties of bidimensional materials. More importantly, stacking bidimensional layers may eventually allow engineering an effective dielectric constant and the plasmon-polariton modes of the surface. Finally, nontrivial geometries, without cylindrical symmetry, such as gratings [39] or metamaterials [40], have already been experimentally explored. In the case of the atom-metamaterial interaction, initial selective reflection measurements indicate that retardation effects are important for a correct interpretation of the experiment.

In conclusion, we have presented the theoretical background that allows us to take into account the effects of Casimir-Polder retardation in spectroscopic experiments of the atom-surface interaction. We have proposed specific experiments, where retardation can have observable effects. Unlike previous retardation measurements [10,11] the experiments investigated here are sensitive to the difference of energy shifts between ground- and excited-state atoms, and therefore sensitive to both nonresonant and resonant components of the atom-surface potential. Our analysis shows that although experimental measurements can in most cases be fitted with a simple van der Waals model, such an analysis will yield a linewidth dependent van der Waals coefficient. This is because the probing depth of the experiments increases with decreasing linewidth. Finally, we show that our analysis will be useful when dealing with composite, nontrivial surfaces.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

J.C.d.A.C. thanks the Brazilian program Ciência Sem Fronteiras for financial support of his Ph.D. thesis. A.L. and J.C.d.A.C. acknowledge discussions with Daniel Bloch that led to an improvement of the manuscript. A.L. and M.D. acknowledge discussions with David Wilkowski.

**APPENDIX**

By applying the transformation \( s = k(z + z') \) and \( t = k(z - z') \) Eq. (6) can be written as

\[
I = \frac{1}{k^2} \int_0^\infty ds \int_0^t dt \frac{e^{is}}{L(z + z') - L(z - z')}. \tag{A1}
\]

After some algebra the integral \( I \) can be written as

\[
I = \frac{2}{\gamma k^2} \int_0^\infty ds e^{is} e^{-as} \int_0^t dt \frac{1}{(1 - i\Delta) - i\mathcal{A}(s,t)}. \tag{A2}
\]

where \( \mathcal{A}(s,t) \) is defined as

\[
\mathcal{A}(s,t) = \left[ \frac{\xi(z + z') - \xi(z - z')}{t} \right], \tag{A3}
\]

whereas \( \mathcal{A} = \frac{2\alpha}{\gamma} \), \( \Delta = \frac{3\omega-\omega_0}{\gamma} \), and \( \alpha \) is an attenuation coefficient already defined in the main text. Further algebra leads to the following:

\[
I = \frac{2}{(1 - i\Delta)\gamma k^2} \left[ \int_0^\infty s e^{is} e^{-as} ds \right] + \frac{2}{(1 - i\Delta)\gamma k^2} \times \left[ \int_0^\infty ds e^{is} e^{-as} \int_0^t dt \frac{i\mathcal{A}(s,t)}{(1 - i\Delta) - i\mathcal{A}(s,t)} \right]. \tag{A4}
\]

The first integration can be performed analytically giving the final expression:

\[
I = \frac{2}{(1 - i\Delta)\gamma k^2} \left[ \frac{1}{(-i + \alpha)^2} \right] + \frac{2}{(1 - i\Delta)\gamma k^2} \times \left[ \int_0^\infty ds e^{is} e^{-as} \int_0^t dt \frac{i\mathcal{A}(s,t)}{(1 - i\Delta) - i\mathcal{A}(s,t)} \right]. \tag{A5}
\]

Solving Eq. (A5) numerically can be challenging. We find that introducing the laser field attenuation parameter helps convergence of the integrals without significantly influencing the final results, so long as \( \alpha < 1 \) (typically \( \alpha < 0.1 \) is sufficient). Also, for large values of \( s (s \to \infty) \) the last integral in Eq. (A5) converges to

\[
\int_0^t dt \frac{i\mathcal{A}(s,t)}{(1 - i\Delta) - i\mathcal{A}(s,t)} \to \frac{A_0}{\sqrt{s}} + \frac{B_0}{s} \cos(s + \phi) + i \sin(s + \phi) + \frac{B_1 + iB_2}{s}, \tag{A6}
\]
where $A_\alpha$, $B_\alpha$, $R_1$, $B_2$ are constants that depend on the specific problem in question. The approximation of Eq. (A6) greatly simplifies calculation of the SR integral in the limiting case $\alpha \to 0$.