

光学学报

基于里德堡原子外差传感器的宽带高灵敏探测

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摘要 里德堡原子外差技术通过引入辅助本振场可以极大地提升探测灵敏度,在雷达、电子侦察和通信方面具有广阔的应用潜力。本文在一个 2 cm 长的室温铯原子气室中,利用相向传输的探测光(852 nm)和耦合光(509 nm)将铯原子激发至里德堡态,用于实现里德堡原子光学探测。实验中分别用喇叭天线和平行板波导作为谐振区和非谐振区的微波发射装置,利用里德堡原子外差技术,实现了谐振区 2.63 GHz 处最小场强为 220.94 nV/cm 和非谐振区 300 MHz 处最小场强为 19 μ V/cm 的微波电场测量,测量灵敏度分别为 -131.9 (dBm/cm²)/Hz 和 -93.2 (dBm/cm²)/Hz。原则上,通过调谐激光频率激发碱金属原子至不同的里德堡态,并结合谐振区和非谐振区里德堡原子对电场的不同响应,可以在宽带连续频谱范围内实现对微波电场的高灵敏度探测。

关键词 遥感与传感器; 里德堡原子; 外差技术; 宽带; 电场强度测量

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1 引言

里德堡原子是指主量子数(n)很大的高激发态原子,拥有极大的极化率(n^7)和微波跃迁偶极矩(n^2),对外部电磁场非常敏感,极易受外场调控。利用电磁诱导透明(EIT)效应可以将外部电磁场对里德堡原子能级的扰动转换为光谱的变化,实现宽带电磁频段的全光无损探测。里德堡原子作为一种新型的量子微波测量手段,相比于传统电子学测量方法,有许多独特的优势:1)可溯源、自校准。里德堡原子的测量结果可以追溯至基本物理常数(普朗克常数)^[1],此外,原子的能级间隔不随外部环境的变化而改变,因此,里德堡原子具有自校准的优势;2)可实现超宽带、无扰测量。传统电子学传感器利用金属结构中电子在外部电磁场作用下的受激运动实现对待测微波场的测量,其物理尺寸受限于 Chu^[2]极限,需要根据待测微波场的波长而改变。而里德堡原子的能级间隔处于微波波段,利用一个填充碱金属原子的厘米量级的玻璃气室,就可以实现千赫兹至太赫兹的超宽带频率范围内的全光无损探测;3)对调制信号的自动解调能力。不同于传统电子学接收机,里德堡原子可以将待测调制场中的基带信号直接解调出来,而无需复杂的解调电路^[3-4];4)有望突破电子学接收机的灵敏度极限。在常温下,利用低熵激光探测外部电磁场对里德堡能级的扰动可以免受电子

热噪声的困扰,有望实现更高的测量灵敏度。

自 2012 年 Shaffer 团队^[5]利用微波耦合相邻里德堡能级产生的 Autler-Townes (AT)分裂效应在实验上实现微波电场强度测量以来,各研究团队相继报道了多种方法提高里德堡原子的电场测量灵敏度。例如,利用再泵浦激光提高基态可作用原子数^[6],利用三光子激发手段克服原子运动引起的多普勒失配^[7-8],通过外加辅助微波场来缀饰相邻里德堡原子能级^[9-11],以及利用谐振增强结构提高原子作用处场强^[12-14]等。上述方法大都基于里德堡原子谐振区的 AT 分裂效应和非谐振区的 ac Stark 偏移效应对电场强度进行直接测量,侧重于通过压窄 EIT 线宽以获得更高的光谱分辨率的方式提高电场测量灵敏度。而在常温下,受原子热运动的影响,EIT 的线宽很难压窄至 3 MHz 以下,这限制了里德堡原子电场测量灵敏度的进一步提升。

2019 年,研究者们开发了一种里德堡原子外差方法来提升电场测量灵敏度^[15-16]。通过添加一个频率与待测微波电场频率相差千赫兹量级的强本振微波场来提升里德堡原子对微弱信号的感知能力,在本振微波场的作用下,EIT 光谱呈现正弦调制,调制频率为本振微波信号与待测微波信号的差频频率。相比于 AT 分裂法和 ac Stark 偏移法等直接测量手段,里德堡原子外差方法可以将电场测量灵敏度提升 2~3 个数量级^[17-18],极大地提升了里德堡原子的探测能力。然而,

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现有关于里德堡原子外差的文献大多针对谐振区探测^[15-18], 由于原子能级的量子化特性, 谐振区外差只能实现离散频点的高灵敏探测, 并不能满足宽带频谱的连续测量。

本文以一个 2 cm 长的室温铯原子气室作为传感器, 利用里德堡原子外差法分别实验测量了谐振区 2.63 GHz 处最小场强为 220.94 nV/cm 和非谐振区 300 MHz 处最小场强为 19 μ V/cm 的微波弱信号, 电场测量灵敏度分别达到 -131.9 (dBm/cm²)/Hz 和 -93.2 (dBm/cm²)/Hz。实验验证了里德堡原子在宽带连续范围内的高灵敏电场测量能力, 以及里德堡原子在电场感知小型化方面的应用潜力。

2 里德堡原子谐振区与非谐振区的电场响应

当外加微波电场的频率等于两个里德堡能级的跃迁频率时, 原子的能级和光谱会发生分裂, 称为谐振区响应; 当外加微波电场的频率不满足两个里德堡能级的跃迁频率时, 原子的能级和光谱会发生移动, 称为非谐振区响应。

2.1 谐振区响应

在谐振区, 外加的微波电场通过耦合相邻里德堡能级使得原子光谱发生 EIT-AT 分裂现象, 电场强度 E 与 AT 分裂间隔 Δ_{AT} 之间存在线性对应关系^[19]:

$$E = 2\pi \frac{\hbar}{\mu} \Delta_{\text{AT}}, \quad (1)$$

式中: \hbar 为约化普朗克常数; μ 为两个里德堡能级之间的跃迁偶极矩。从式(1)可以看出, 通过测量 AT 分裂间隔就可以得到待测电场的强度, 且测量结果可以追溯至普朗克常数。

在里德堡原子外差条件下, 待测信号场和强本振场可以分别表示为 $E_s \cos[(\omega + \delta)t]$ 和 $E_{\text{LO}} \cos(\omega t - \varphi_{\text{LO}})$, 其中, ω 为微波信号载波频率, δ 为二者的差频频率, 且有 $\delta \ll \omega$ 。假设 $E_s \ll E_{\text{LO}}$, 取时间平均, 则二者的叠加场 E_{tot} ^[20] 可以表示为

$$E_{\text{tot}} \approx \frac{E_{\text{LO}}}{2} + \frac{E_s}{2} \cos(\delta t + \varphi_{\text{LO}}). \quad (2)$$

结合式(1)可以看到, 在谐振区里德堡原子外差条件下, 光谱不仅会发生分裂, 并且会经历频率为差频频率的正弦调制。其中, 本振场强度决定分裂宽度, 信号场强度决定调制深度。

2.2 非谐振区响应

在非谐振区, 里德堡原子的能级和光谱会在外加微波电场的作用下发生 ac Stark 偏移, 电场强度 E 与光谱偏移量 Δ_{Stark} 之间呈二次方对应关系^[21]:

$$\Delta_{\text{Stark}} = -\frac{1}{2} \alpha E^2, \quad (3)$$

式中, α 为里德堡原子的动态标量极化率。

在非谐振区, 里德堡原子变为一种二次方传感器。

在里德堡原子外差条件下, 由于 $\delta \ll \omega$, 取时间平均, 叠加场的平方 E_{tot}^2 ^[20] 可以表示为

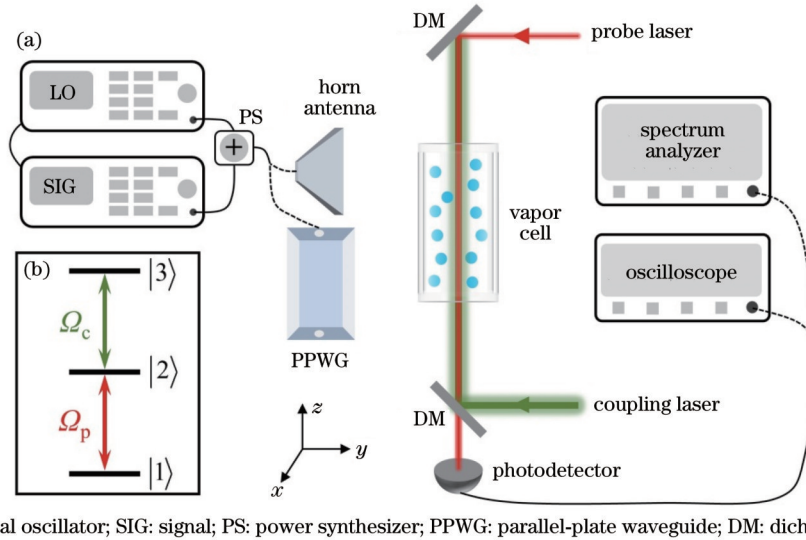
$$E_{\text{tot}}^2 \approx \frac{E_s^2}{2} + \frac{E_{\text{LO}}^2}{2} + E_s E_{\text{LO}} \cos(\delta t + \varphi_{\text{LO}}). \quad (4)$$

结合式(3)可以看到, 与谐振区的响应类似, 在里德堡原子外差条件下, 非谐振区光谱不仅会发生偏移, 同样会经历频率为差频频率的正弦调制。与谐振区响应不同的是, 光谱偏移量及调制深度受本振场及信号场共同决定。特别地, 在非谐振区里德堡原子外差条件下, 本振场 E_{LO} 可以作为增益, 进一步放大里德堡原子对微弱信号的探测能力。不过, 由于射频场的不均匀性会展宽光谱, 本振场的幅度不能无限制增加。

3 实验装置

里德堡原子外差法测电场的实验装置及相应的双光子跃迁阶梯 EIT 能级如图 1(a) 和 1(b) 所示。室温下, 一束波长为 852 nm 的弱探测光及一束波长为 509 nm 左右的强耦合光共线反向作用于一个直径为 1 cm、长为 2 cm 的圆柱形铯原子气室。其中, 探测光 $1/e^2$ 光束直径为 214.6 μ m, 功率为 79 μ W, 探测光频率通过调制转移光谱技术锁定在铯原子基态 $|1\rangle(6S_{1/2}, F=4)$ 至中间态 $|2\rangle(6P_{3/2}, F'=5)$ 的共振跃迁上^[22-23]; 耦合光 $1/e^2$ 光束直径为 190.3 μ m, 功率为 42 mW, 耦合光频率通过调制 EIT 光谱技术^[24] 锁定在中间态 $|2\rangle$ 到所需的里德堡态 $|3\rangle(nD_{5/2})$, 谐振区 $n=64$, 非谐振区 $n=70$ 的共振跃迁上。里德堡原子对外部微波电场的响应可以通过探测光强度的变化直接反映在光电探测器的输出电流上, 这可以通过示波器或者频谱仪进行后续分析。

本振场及信号场通过相位同步的两个微波信号源产生, 并通过一个功率合成器输送给不同的微波发射装置。对于谐振区探测, 2.63 GHz 的本振信号和 (2.63 GHz + 10 kHz) 的待测信号共同馈入喇叭天线, 天线口面距离原子气室 7 cm, 辐射方向与激光传播方向垂直且微波极化方向与激光偏振方向一致。对于非谐振区探测, 将本振信号和待测信号分别调谐至 300 MHz 和 (300 MHz + 10 kHz), 用平行板波导^[25] 作为微波辐射装置, 平行板波导实物及非谐振区实验场景如图 2(a) 所示。平行板波导有两个端口, 一个作为射频信号输入端口通过同轴馈线连接至功率合成器的输出端, 另一个作为匹配端口连接匹配负载吸收多余的电磁能量以保障平行板波导内电场的均匀性。实验时将原子气室放置在平行板波导上下极板的中心位置。平行板波导为铝制, 上下极板间距 3 cm, 且侧壁开有通光孔供激光穿过。平行板波导的 S 参数测试曲线如图 2(b) 所示, 在 300 MHz 处的插损仅为 0.3 dB, 且在 DC~850 MHz 的频率范围内, 平行板波导的输入端口反射系数 (S_{11}) 都在 -20 dB 以下, 显示了良好的端口匹配性能。



LO: local oscillator; SIG: signal; PS: power synthesizer; PPWG: parallel-plate waveguide; DM: dichroic mirror

图 1 实验装置与能级示意图。(a)实验装置图;(b)双光子跃迁阶梯里德堡 EIT 能级示意图。 Ω_p 和 Ω_c 分别表示探测光和耦合光的拉比频率

Fig. 1 Experimental setup and energy-level diagram. (a) Diagram of experimental setup; (b) diagram of two-photon transition ladder Rydberg EIT energy levels, where Ω_p and Ω_c are probe and coupling Rabi frequencies, respectively

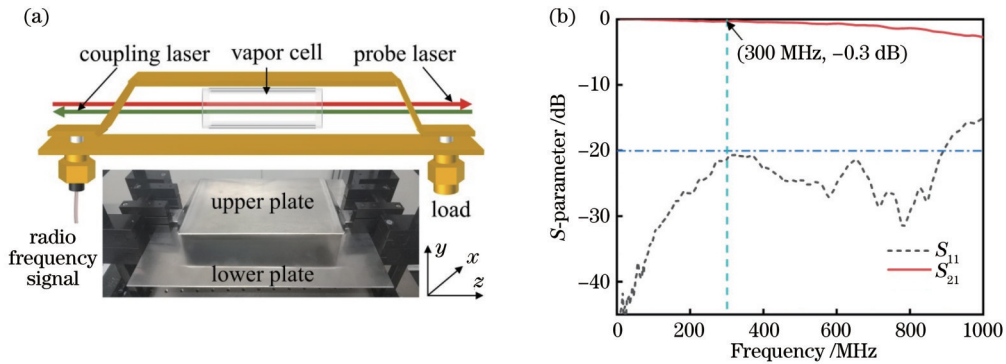


图 2 平行板波导及其 S 参数测试曲线。(a)平行板波导实物及非谐振区实验示意图。原子气室放置于平行板波导上下极板中间,激光从通光孔照射进原子气室;(b)平行板波导 S 参数测试曲线。300 MHz 处的插入损耗为 0.3 dB

Fig. 2 Parallel-plate waveguide and its S-parameter test curve. (a) Parallel-plate waveguide physical object and its experimental sketch in off-resonant region. Vapor cell is placed in center between upper and lower plates of parallel-plate waveguide, and lasers are incident into vapor cell through optical apertures; (b) parallel-plate waveguide S-parameter test curve. Insertion loss is 0.3 dB at 300 MHz

4 实验结果与讨论

4.1 谐振区测量

为了获得准确的里德堡原子电场测量灵敏度,首先需要空间辐射电场进行校准。利用里德堡原子自校准的优势可以获得不同发射功率下原子作用位置处的准确电场值。校准时,只开启本振信号源。2.63 GHz 的微波信号会引起 $64D_{5/2}$ 态和 $65P_{3/2}$ 态之间的共振跃迁,造成 EIT 光谱的分裂,根据式(1)可知,信号源输出功率越大,AT 分裂间距越宽,且信号源输出功率的开方值与 AT 分裂间距之间存在线性对应关系。

以 AT 分裂间距为媒介,实验测量了不同信号源输出功率的开方值与所对应的原子作用处电场强度的

关系如图 3 所示。可以看出,在 AT 分裂的线性区^[26],信号源输出功率的开方值与原子作用处电场强度之间存在良好的线性对应关系。实验过程中,天线增益、线缆损耗、空间衰减等因素都可以看作是一个定值。因此,原子作用处电场强度 E_a 与信号源输出功率 P_{RF} 的关系可以表示为 $E_a = \beta \sqrt{P_{RF}}$, β 表示信号传播的路径增益。在图 3 校准过程中,由实测数据拟合可得 $\beta = 3.929 \text{ (mV} \cdot \text{cm}^{-1})/\text{mW}^{1/2}$ 。在后续里德堡原子外差实验中,微弱信号的电场强度可由拟合参数推导获得^[17]。

在谐振区里德堡原子外差实验中,最佳本振场幅度选择为使得 EIT 峰刚刚开始分裂为两个可以分辨的 AT 峰时的信号强度^[27]。在确定好本振信号的幅度及差

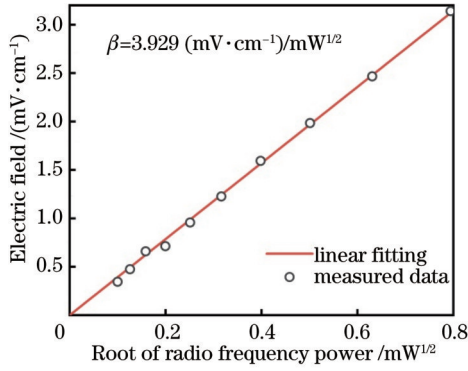


图 3 通过 EIT-AT 光谱测量的射频电场(空心圆点)与待测信号源输出功率平方根的关系, 以及其与 3.929 (mV·cm⁻¹)/mW^{1/2}梯度的线性拟合(实线)

Fig. 3 Measurements of radio frequency electric field (hollow dots) by EIT-AT spectra versus square root of signal generator output power, and its linear fit (solid line) with gradient of 3.929 (mV·cm⁻¹)/mW^{1/2}

频率之后, 逐步减小待测信号源输出功率, 在示波器上可以看到正弦信号的峰峰值逐渐减小, 在频谱仪上表现为差频信号谱线高度逐渐降低^[17]。图 4 记录了谐振区里德堡原子外差条件下, 不同待测信号源输出功率所得到的差频信号强度测试数据(频谱仪分辨率带宽为 1 Hz)。可以看出, 随着待测信号源输出功率的降低, 差频信号强度随之线性减小, 原子响应的线性动态范围超过 45 dB。在频谱仪噪底的限制下, 最小可观测到差频信号谱线所对应的待测信号源输出功率为 -85 dBm。由于 EIT 信号的非线性, 在小信号强度情况下, AT 分裂间距与外部空间电场强度之间不再满足线性对应关系。通过图 3 中的线性拟合参数, 可以得到谐振区里德堡原子外差条件下的最小可探测场强为 $E_{\min-on} = \beta \sqrt{P_{RF}} = 3.929 \text{ (mV}\cdot\text{cm}^{-1})/\text{mW}^{1/2} \times \sqrt{10^{-85/10} \text{ mW}} = 220.94 \text{ nV/cm}$ 。里德堡原子作为一种不同于传统偶极天线的各向同性传感器, 可以等效为无方向性增益的空间全向天线^[28-29], 由此对应的测量灵敏度为 $\frac{1}{2 \times 377 \Omega} \left(220.94 \frac{\text{nV}}{\text{cm}} \right)^2 = -131.9 \text{ (dBm/cm}^2\text{)}/\text{Hz}$ 。

4.2 非谐振区测量

非谐振区测量与谐振区类似, 在获得最佳本振信号强度之后, 保持频谱仪分辨率带宽不变, 逐步减小待测信号源输出功率, 直至差频信号谱线与频谱仪噪底持平。此时待测信号源的输出功率为 -70 dBm, 使用矢量网络分析仪测量的传输路径损耗(功率合成器插损、传输线损耗、平行板波导插损)合计为 5 dB, 因此, 实验测得的最小待测信号注入功率为 -75 dBm。平行板波导内微波信号功率 P_{RF} 与上下极板电压 U 之间的关系可以表示为 $P_{RF} = U^2/2R$, R 表示平行板波导的特征阻抗, 而平行板波导内原子作用处的电场强度 E_a 和两电极板间电压 U 之间的关系可以表示为 $E_a =$

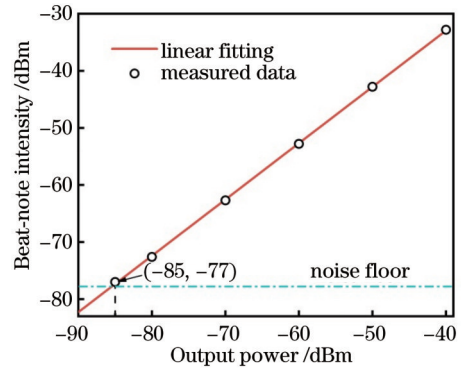


图 4 差频信号强度随待测信号源输出功率的变化关系
Fig. 4 Beat-note intensity as a function of signal generator output power

U/d , d 为两电极板间距。由此, 可以得到原子气室内的电场强度 E_a 与波导内微波信号功率 P_{RF} 之间的对应关系为 $E_a = \sqrt{2RP_{RF}}/d$ 。在本实验中, $R = 50 \Omega$, $d = 3 \text{ cm}$, 代入上式, 可以得到非谐振区里德堡原子外差条件下的最小可探测场强为 $E_{\min-off} = \sqrt{2RP_{RF}}/d = \sqrt{2 \times 50 \Omega \times 0.001 \times 10^{-75/10} \text{ mW}}/3 \text{ cm} = 19 \mu\text{V/cm}$, 等效的测量灵敏度为 $\frac{1}{2 \times 377 \Omega} \left(19 \frac{\mu\text{V}}{\text{cm}} \right)^2 = -93.2 \text{ (dBm/cm}^2\text{)}/\text{Hz}$ 。

除了电场测量灵敏度之外, 通过固定待测信号源输出功率至 -30 dBm, 调谐差频频率, 实验测量了非谐振区里德堡原子外差传感器的瞬时带宽, 如图 5 所示。可以看出, 随着差频频率的增大, 待测信号强度逐渐降低, 本实验中里德堡原子外差接收机的单边 3 dB 瞬时带宽达到 90 kHz。里德堡原子的瞬时带宽主要受限于中间态原子的退相干时间和 EIT 线宽^[20]。并且与传统电子学接收机不同的是, 里德堡原子接收机的瞬时带宽与所探测信号载波频率无关。

在非谐振区, 原子气室的物理尺寸只有所探测射频信号波长的 1/50, 体现了里德堡原子在射频传感器

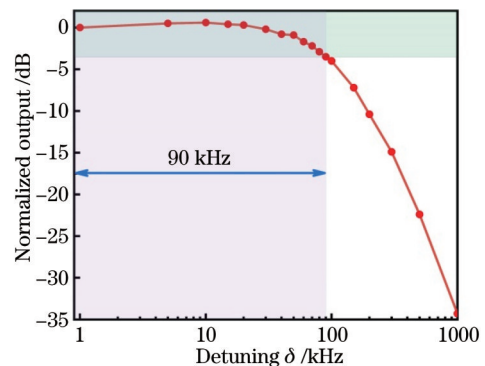


图 5 归一化待测信号幅度随差频频率的变化曲线
Fig. 5 Variation curve of normalized signal amplitude under test with difference frequency

小型化方面的巨大应用潜力。与谐振区相比,虽然非谐振区的电场测量灵敏度明显降低,但是在低频信号探测方面具有相对带宽及探测器小型化方面的优势。在实际应用中,需要根据所探测目标的频段及灵敏度要求,选用合适的里德堡原子作用区域进行探测。

5 结 论

本文利用室温铯原子气室,选取谐振区和非谐振区两个典型频点,分别用喇叭天线及平行板波导作为微波发射装置,实验验证了里德堡原子的宽带高灵敏探测能力。利用里德堡原子外差技术,实现了谐振区 2.63 GHz 处最小场强为 220.94 nV/cm 和非谐振区 300 MHz 处最小场强为 19 μ V/cm 的弱场探测,测量灵敏度分别达到 -131.9 (dBm/cm²)/Hz 和 -93.2 (dBm/cm²)/Hz。通过调节激光参数,综合利用谐振区和非谐振区里德堡原子特性,可以实现用一个厘米量级的原子气室对宽带、连续频谱进行高灵敏测量。里德堡原子在雷达、通信、导航等电子信息领域具有广阔的应用前景,有望支持新一代电子信息系统的颠覆式、跨越式发展。

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Broadband and Highly Sensitive Measurement Based on Rydberg Atomic Heterodyne Sensor

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Abstract

Objective Rydberg atoms became increasingly crucial in the last decade because of their fascinating characteristics that distinguish them from conventional radio frequency (RF) sensors. First, the Rydberg atoms are self-calibrating thanks to the invariance of the atomic parameters, and their response is linked to Plank's constant. Second, atomic sensing systems break a key assumption behind the Chu limit of traditional electronic sensors by allowing a small vapor cell to operate over multiple octaves of frequencies from DC to THz. Third, instead of demodulated circuitry, Rydberg atoms can naturally extract the baseband signals from the carrier frequency. Fourth, Rydberg atoms may avoid internal thermal (Johnson) noise, even at room temperature. In recent years, the amazing introduction of the local oscillator (LO) RF field has assisted us in controlling ensembles of Rydberg atoms. However, most current reports on Rydberg atomic heterodyne sensors focus on measurements in the resonant region, which can only achieve highly sensitive detection at discrete frequencies due to the quantum nature of the atomic energy level. In this work, by extending the Rydberg atomic heterodyne technique from the resonant region to the off-resonant region, we experimentally validated the continuous broadband and high sensing sensitivity of Rydberg atoms.

Methods When a strong LO field and a weak signal (SIG) field with frequency detuning on the order of kHz are irradiated to the atoms, the energy level will be modulated by the intermediate frequency (IF) in the resonant and off-resonant regions, which can be directly detected by optical electromagnetically induced transparency (EIT). At room temperature, a probe laser of 852 nm and a coupling laser of 509 nm propagate in opposite directions and overlap inside a 2 cm-long vapor cell containing cesium atoms, exciting the atoms to the Rydberg state for atomic sensing. In the resonant region, the LO frequency is set to 2.63 GHz, and the SIG frequency is set to 2.63 GHz+10 kHz. Both fields are illuminated into the vapor cell by a horn antenna 7 cm away from the optical path, and the polarization of the two RF fields is the same as that of the probe and coupling beams and propagates in a vertical direction to the laser beams. While in the off-resonant region, the frequencies of the LO and SIG fields are tuned to 300 MHz and 300 MHz+10 kHz, respectively. An aluminum parallel-plate waveguide serves as the microwave transmitter in the off-resonant region. The reflection coefficient (S_{11}) of the input port is below -20 dB from DC to 850 MHz (Fig. 2), indicating the excellent port matching performance of the parallel-plate waveguide.

Results and Discussions In the resonant region, we calibrated the electric (E) field strength of the RF field using the Autler-Townes (AT) splitting effect. By adjusting the output power of the signal generator to satisfy the linear relationship between AT-splitting and RF field amplitude, we obtained the relationship between the square root of the signal generator output power and the E-field intensity calculated by AT-splitting (Fig. 3). The results show excellent linearity, and the weak RF E-field strength can be inferred from the fit line. Then, a spectrum analyzer was used to measure the intensity of the beat-note signal under Rydberg atomic heterodyne conditions. We measured a series of data points of the beat-note signal strength versus the applied SIG power (Fig. 4). The intensity of the received beat-note signal is approximately proportional to the strength of the applied SIG field with a linear dynamic range of over 45 dB. The minimum SIG output power is -85 dBm, which is limited by the background noise of the spectrum analyzer. By leveraging the gradient of the fit line, we can obtain the minimal detectable E-field of 220.94 nV/cm, with the corresponding sensing sensitivity of

-131.9 (dBm/cm²)/Hz. Similarly, in the off-resonant region, through the relationship between the power injected in the parallel-plate waveguide and the E-field strength, we measured the minimum E-field strength of $19 \mu\text{V}/\text{cm}$ in the off-resonant region at 300 MHz, with a sensitivity of -93.2 (dBm/cm²)/Hz. Besides, we also measured the instantaneous bandwidth of the system in the off-resonant region (Fig. 5). By taking into account the negative detuning of the SIG and LO fields, the instantaneous bandwidth of 3 dB of the system reaches 90 kHz.

Conclusions In the present study, two typical frequency points in the resonant and off-resonant regions were selected to experimentally verify the broadband and high sensitivity detection capability of Rydberg atomic sensors. During the measurement, a horn antenna and a parallel-plate waveguide were used as microwave transmitters in the resonant and off-resonant regions, respectively. Using the Rydberg atomic heterodyne technique, we successfully measured a minimum E-field strength of 220.94 nV/cm with a sensitivity of -131.9 (dBm/cm²)/Hz in the resonant region at 2.63 GHz and a minimum E-field strength of $19 \mu\text{V}/\text{cm}$ with a sensitivity of -93.2 (dBm/cm²)/Hz in the off-resonant region at 300 MHz, respectively. In principle, by adjusting the laser frequency to excite the alkali metal atoms to various Rydberg states and incorporating the distinct responses of Rydberg atoms to E-fields in the resonant and off-resonant regions, highly sensitive sensing of microwave E-fields can be achieved in the broadband continuous spectral range.

Key words remote sensing and sensors; Rydberg atoms; heterodyne technique; broadband; electric field strength measurement