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Signatures of Vibrational and Electronic Quantum Beats in Femtosecond Coherence Spectra

Paul C. Arpin
*California State University, Chico*

Daniel B. Turner
*Boise State University*
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ABSTRACT: Femtosecond laser pulses can produce oscillatory signals in transient-absorption spectroscopy measurements. The quantum beats are often studied using femtosecond coherence spectra (FCS), the Fourier domain amplitude, and phase profiles at individual oscillation frequencies. In principle, one can identify the mechanism that gives rise to each quantum-beat signal by comparing its measured FCS to those arising from microscopic models. To date, however, most measured FCS deviate from the ubiquitous harmonic oscillator model. Here, we expand the inventory of models to which the measured spectra can be compared. We develop quantum-mechanical models of the fundamental, overtone, and combination-band FCS arising from harmonic potentials, the FCS of anharmonic potentials, and the FCS of a purely electronic dimer. This work solidifies the use of FCS for identifying electronic coherences that can arise in measurements of molecular aggregates including photosynthetic proteins. Furthermore, future studies can use the derived expressions to fit the measured FCS and thereby extract microscopic parameters of molecular potential-energy surfaces.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of broadband femtosecond laser pulses in the 1980s brought with it the observation of oscillatory signals arising from coherent quantum-beat signals in time-resolved spectroscopy measurements of atomic, semiconductor, and molecular samples.1–6 Many research groups—especially those focused on molecules in the condensed phase—have observed and studied the intriguing amplitude and phase profiles of these oscillations found in transient-absorption spectra. Measurements and analyses of the quantum beats have been conducted on photosynthetic proteins,7–10 heme proteins,11 retinal-based complexes,12–19 phytochrome pigment–protein samples,20–23 conjugated polymers,24,25 molecular aggregates,26 and other molecular samples having intriguing photochemical or photophysical effects.27–36 Additional studies have focused on solid-state samples including carbon nanotubes,37 charge-transfer crystals,38,39 and hybrid perovskites.40 Other researchers have focused on developing theoretical models of the coherent oscillations, in particular the dynamics of a vibrational wavepacket on the excited electronic state. Researchers have used quantum-mechanical Gaussian wavepacket models41,42 an effective linear response approach,43 a multimode phase-space analysis,44 and a basis-truncation method.45 The breadth of samples and phenomena studied using quantum-beat signals in femtosecond spectroscopy reflect the novel insights these methods yield into important physical phenomena including the mechanism of singlet exciton fission,46,47 photoactivity mechanisms of signal-transduction proteins,48 and the notion of nontrivial quantum effects in photosynthetic proteins.49

A common procedure for studying quantum beats is to conduct a conventional, spectrally resolved transient-absorption spectroscopy measurement using pulses that are impulsive, meaning having a duration shorter than the period of the quantum-beat frequency. The coherent oscillations of wavepackets—which arise physically through a difference-frequency mixing process between the various frequencies of the pump pulse—appear across a range of detection frequencies, and the oscillatory signals dephase typically on the order of 1 ps for molecular samples. After the measurement is performed, the quantum-beat signals are isolated and studied by a three-step procedure. First, one can fit and subtract population-decay signals. Second is Fourier transformation of the spectrally resolved signal over the pump–probe time interval. Third, one extracts the amplitude and phase profiles as a function of detection frequency for each oscillation frequency of interest. These profiles are known in the literature by several names, but here we refer to them as femtosecond coherence spectra (FCS). Even when a molecule has numerous normal vibrational modes, each typically has its own FCS, except in the case of accidental degeneracies. Figure 1 displays a simulated FCS for an excited-state vibrational wavepacket to illustrate the typical observations.

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Vibrational Wavepacket Dynamics. Our previous work used a doorway-window method that was based on a classical window function. This method encountered challenges for anharmonic potentials. Therefore, here we use a window function based on energies of the transitions between the vibrational sublevels in each electronic potential and analytic expressions for the Franck–Condon factors to produce fully quantum-mechanical expressions for the FCS of the vibrational models. Specifically, we use a window function $W$ for the excited state $|e\rangle$, which is the stimulated-emission term in this doorway-window picture because in the impulsive, resonant excitation condition relevant to modern measurements using ultrabroadband pump pulses, ground-state wavepacket oscillations are suppressed.

The expression for the density matrix of a time-dependent wavepacket in an excited state is given by

$$
\rho(\tau) = \sum_{n,n'} \tilde{c}_{n,m}^* \tilde{c}_{n',m} e^{-i(\omega_n - \omega_{n'}) \tau / \hbar} \langle e, n | \langle e', n' | (1)
$$

where $n$ and $n'$ are both vibrational eigenstates of the excited electronic state and where the coefficients $\tilde{c}_{n,m}$ are Franck–Condon factors, values that indicate the degree of overlap between two vibrational eigenstates from distinct electronic states displaced along the internuclear separation variable, $q$, by an amount $\Delta$. They can be written as

$$
\tilde{c}_{n,m} = FC_{n,m} = \int dq \tilde{\psi}_{e,n}(q - \Delta) \tilde{\psi}_{e',m}(q)
$$

Equation 1 allows for an arbitrary set of energy levels. To compute the signal that arises in transient absorption spectroscopy, we will also need the window operator

$$
W(\omega) = \sum_{n,n'} \tilde{c}_{n,m}^* \tilde{c}_{n',m} \left[ \frac{1}{\omega - \omega_{n,m} + i\gamma/2} - \frac{1}{\omega - \omega_{n,m} - i\gamma/2} \right]
$$

where $m$ indexes the vibrational eigenstate of the ground electronic state, $\omega_{n,m} = (E_E - E_n)/\hbar$, and $\gamma$ is the dephasing of the emitted optical coherence signal. The transient-absorption signal as a function of detection frequency variable, $\omega$, and time delay variable, $\tau$, is given by

$$
S(\omega, \tau) \propto \text{Tr}[W(\omega)\rho(\tau)]
$$

where the trace is evaluated on the basis of the vibrational eigenstates on the excited electronic state, $\text{Tr}[\hat{O}] = \sum_n \langle e_n | n | \hat{O} | e_n \rangle$. Inserting the expressions—using distinct indices for the sums in $\rho$ and $W$—and further simplification yields
\[ S(\omega, \tau) \propto \sum_{n, n', m} \frac{2}{\omega - \omega_{n', m} + i\eta/2} \exp(-i(E_n - E_m)\tau/\hbar) \]
\[ M(\omega, \omega_2) = \mathcal{F}[S(\omega, \tau)] \]
\[ = \left( \frac{1}{\omega - \omega_{n', m} + i\eta/2} - \frac{1}{\omega - \omega_{n, m} - i\eta/2} \right) \times 2\pi\delta(\omega_2 - (E_n - E_m)/\hbar). \]

where \( \omega \) is the detection frequency variable and \( \omega_2 \) is the oscillation frequency variable. This expression provides an analytic route to the FCS without numeric computation of the quantum-beat signals followed by Fourier transformation. Further progress can be made only after choosing a model for potential-energy surfaces and selecting a particular oscillation frequency, \( \omega_2 \), of interest.

The approximations made to derive the doorway-window expressions are appropriate for many transient-absorption measurements on condensed phase samples but do limit the range of validity of the results herein. In particular, the doorway-window approach is valid for well-separated pump and probe pulses and will not characterize dynamics occurring during pulse overlap. In addition, the specific form of the density matrix and window function chosen give the "bare spectrum", which is the signal due to the response of the molecule independent of the details of the laser pulse. This is valid in the limit that the laser pulse is short compared to the nuclear dynamics of the sample but long compared to the dephasing of the electronic transition. The FCS can be calculated for laser pulses that deviate from these approximations by performing a convolution between the laser pulse and the bare spectrum as a temporal convolution along the delay time axis for a long pulse or as a spectral convolution along the probe frequency axis for a short pulse. A long pulse would uniformly suppress the amplitude of high-frequency oscillations. A short pulse would broaden the lines of the individual transitions in the probe frequency resolved spectrum.

**Harmonic Potential.** We first choose to use the harmonic oscillator, whose potential-energy function is written as \( V(q) = 1/2m\omega_0^2q^2 \), where \( \omega_0 = \sqrt{k/m} \) is the angular frequency for a mass \( m \) and force constant \( k \). This expression assumes that the equilibrium position of the oscillator is \( q_0 = 0 \). A parameter used below is the curvature, \( \alpha \), given by \( \alpha = \sqrt{\omega_0^2/\hbar} \), which has units of inverse length. In fact, \( \alpha = 1/x_0 \) where \( x_0 \) is the classical turning point for the \( n = 0 \) evenfunction. The well-known energy levels are \( E_n = (n + 1/2)\hbar\omega_0 \). To make the notation explicit, we state the eigenfunctions, \( \psi_n(q) = N_n \exp(-\alpha q^2/2) H_n(\alpha q) \), where the normalization constant is given by \( N_n = \sqrt{\frac{\alpha^n}{(2\pi)^{1/4}} \frac{\Gamma(n + 1)}{\Gamma(n - 1/2)}} \) and the \( H_n(\alpha q) \) is a Hermite polynomial of order \( n \).

**Morse Potential.** The potential-energy function for the Morse oscillator is given by \( V(x) = D_e(1 - e^{-\alpha(x-x_0)^2})^2 \), where \( x_0 \) is the equilibrium bond distance, \( D_e \) is the well depth (the dissociation energy plus the zero-point energy), and \( \alpha \) is inversely related to the width of the potential well. We define a key unitless parameter, \( \lambda = \sqrt{2mD_e/(\hbar\omega_0)} \), and an effective frequency of the oscillator at the equilibrium position, \( \omega_0^{\text{eff}} = \sqrt{\frac{2\lambda^2D_e}{m}} \). The finite number of bound eigenstates of the Morse oscillator is \( n \in \{0, 1, 2, ..., \lfloor \lambda + 1/2 \rfloor \} \), where the square brackets, \( [k] \), indicate a floor function such that this value is the largest integer smaller than \( k \). The energy levels of the Morse oscillator are

\[ E_n = \left( n + \frac{1}{2} \right) \hbar\omega_0^{\text{eff}} - \frac{\left( n + \frac{1}{2} \right) \hbar\omega_0^{\text{eff}}}{4D_e} \]

The classical turning points of the \( n = 0 \) eigenfunction for the Morse oscillator are given by \( x_0 = x_e - \frac{1}{2}\ln(1 \pm \sqrt{E_0/D_e}) \), where \( E_0 \) is the energy of the \( n = 0 \) eigenfunction given by eq 7 and where we will use \( x_0 = 0 \). Due to the asymmetry of the Morse potential, there will be two distinct solutions, in contrast to the harmonic oscillator potential wherein the turning points were simply ±\( x_0 \). Therefore, when normalizing the displacement, we will use \( x_0 \), which represents the mean of the two \( x_0 \) values for the Morse oscillator.

The eigenfunctions of the Morse oscillator can be written as

\[ \psi_n(x) = \sqrt{\alpha} M_{n,j}(2\lambda x) \exp(-\alpha(x-x_0)^2) L_n(\alpha)(x) \]

where \( \omega = e^{-\alpha(x-x_0)} \), \( L_n(\alpha)(x) \) is a generalized Laguerre polynomial, and the normalization constant is given by

\[ M_{n,j} = \left( \sum_{j=0}^{n} \frac{\Gamma(2\lambda - 2n - 1 + j)}{j!} \right)^{-1/2} \]

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Fundamental Oscillations of a Harmonic Oscillator.** Numerous authors have provided analytic solutions for Franck–Condon factors for a pair of harmonic oscillators. We choose to use the result from Iachello and Ibrahim. The full expression for the Franck–Condon factors—their eq 2.9—is not reproduced here. We adjusted their notation such that \( m \) and \( n \) indicate vibrational sublevels of the ground and excited electronic states, respectively, and then we simplified for the case of identical curvatures, \( \alpha = \alpha' \). The expression for each Franck–Condon factor simplifies tremendously to

\[ FC_{\alpha, \alpha'}^{\text{HO}} = (-1)^m e^{-\Delta^2/4} \sum_{l=0}^{\min(m,n)} \frac{1}{l!} \frac{\Gamma(n - l)!}{(m - l)!} \]

where \( \Delta \equiv \Delta/x_0 \) is a normalized displacement parameter. This expression allowed us to derive the complete expression for the FCS for the fundamental oscillations. Because \( \hbar\omega_0 = E_{n+1} - E_n \), we choose \( n' = n + 1 \) and \( \omega_2 = \omega_0 \) and find that

\[ \omega_2^{\text{eff}} = \sqrt{\frac{2\lambda^2D}{m}} \]
\[ M(\omega; \omega_0) = e^{-\frac{\Delta^2}{2}} \sum_{n,m} A_{n,m}(\Delta)A_{n+1,m}(\Delta) \]

where the auxiliary functions are given by

\[ A_{n,m}(\Delta) = \frac{1}{\sum_{l=0}^{[\min(n,m)]} \left(-\frac{\Delta}{\Delta_i}\right)^l \frac{1}{l!(n-l)!(m-l)!} \]

The expression yields several physical insights. First, the factor of \( m! \) indicates that there will be more nonzero coefficients in \( m \) than \( n \) for a set value of \( \Delta \). Second, higher values of \( n \) and \( m \) become non-negligible as \( \Delta \) increases, which matches the intuition that as the displacement is increased, higher-lying vibrational states should have non-negligible coefficients. Third, negative-valued Franck–Condon factors must arise from the \((-1)^l\) component in the auxiliary functions. Fourth, the two Lorentzian terms produce sequences of peaks that will overlap and interfere when the summations over \( m \) and \( n \) are performed. Fifth, the displacement enters this expression everywhere as \( \Delta^2 \); thus negative and positive displacement values will produce identical FCS.

Our simulations begin with an analysis of how the coefficients and frequencies vary as \( \Delta \) changes for the FCS at the fundamental vibrational frequency for the harmonic oscillator model. Each peak in an FCS is created by a sum of, potentially, many terms arising from both Lorentzian functions that have distinct frequencies for a given \((n,m)\) combination. For our chosen set of simulation parameters, \( m = 0.5, h = 1, \omega_0 = 400, \) and \( \omega_0 = 9 \), we show the frequency matrices as well as the matrix representing the product of Franck–Condon factors for two values of \( \Delta \), in Figure 2. The matrices representing different cases of the product of Franck–Condon factors indeed confirm that the values are non-negligible for more values of \( m \) than \( n \).

We analyze the case of \( \Delta = 0.1 \) in more detail. The matrices reveal that there will be four non-negligible terms. The first term contributes a positive-amplitude coefficient applied to the Lorentzian at \( \omega_{n=0,m=0} = \omega_{eg} = 400 \), and the second is a negative-amplitude coefficient applied to the Lorentzian at \( \omega_{n=1,m=0} = \omega_{eg} - \omega_0 = 391 \). The third and fourth are, respectively, positive- and negative-amplitude coefficients applied to the Lorentzian at \( \omega_{n=1,m=0} = \omega_{eg} + \omega_0 = 409 \) and \( \omega_{n=1,m=0} = \omega_{eg} = 409 \).

These matrices reveal the number, location, and amplitude of each Lorentzian peak that will compose a full FCS for the fundamental oscillations of the harmonic oscillator. The peaks in the FCS are distinct when \( \gamma \ll \omega_0 \), see top panels of Figure 3. The vertical axes are normalized in all instances except for the phase, which is in radians. The Lorentzian terms each produce two non-negligible peaks for \( \Delta = 0.1 \). The total spectrum is the sum, and because two of the four peaks overlap, there are three distinct peaks in the total spectrum. At larger displacements, more peaks appear. For example, we plot the FCS in the upper right panel of Figure 3 for \( \Delta = 1.0 \), where now six distinct peaks are visible. The fundamental transition at \( \omega_{eg} \) is not the strongest peak due to destructive interference among the contributing terms. These data reveal that as the displacement increases, more vibronic transitions become non-negligible, an explanation familiar from steady-state spectroscopy methods.

The small dephasing values are related to gas-phase spectroscopy measurements. However, FCS are generally used to study condensed-phase systems. Therefore, we evaluate larger dephasing values where the distinct peaks can overlap and further interfere. The bottom two panels in Figure 3 reveal that the overlap among the peaks leads to FCS that nearly reproduce the classical-window spectra in which the amplitude node is sharp, the peaks on either side of the node are exactly equal in amplitude, and the abrupt \( \pi \) phase shift occurs for all values of \( \Delta \). These features are reproduced in the \( \Delta = 0.1 \) case in Figure 3, but the \( \Delta = 1.0 \) spectrum has an unanticipated asymmetry between the two peak amplitudes as well as smoother variation in the phase profile.

We studied this asymmetry further by evaluating the relative peak heights across a range of displacements, \( 0.05 \leq \Delta \leq 2.5 \) for \( \gamma = 2\omega_0 \) and \( \gamma = 10\omega_0 \). Smaller dephasing values led to spectra that contained multiple distinct peaks, complicating this analysis. The data presented in Figure 4 reveal that the relative peak heights vary at most by about 20%, which occurs at \( \Delta = 1.0 \).

We attempted to derive an analytic expression for the relative peak heights as a function of \( \Delta, \gamma, \) and \( \omega_0 \). However, due to the complications arising from the multiple summations in eq 11, we were unable to find a general solution. We anticipate that under certain approximations, an analytic expression might be achieved; however, we did not pursue the analytic solution further and proceeded to a numeric evaluation of limiting cases. We found that the FCS converge to the classical result when \( \gamma / \omega_0 \approx 10 \Delta \). The explanation is that the dephasing sets the range of possible emission energies between each vibrational level of the excited and ground electronic states. When \( \gamma \ll \omega_0 \) the transitions are discrete and therefore the quantum-window approach applies. When \( \gamma \) is large, all transition frequencies are allowed, which is the classical interpretation. To support that assessment, Figure 5 displays the vibrational FCS for \( \Delta = 1.0 \) when \( \gamma = 10\omega_0 \). The interference among essentially all of the contributing terms makes the abrupt phase shift return and produces peaks that now have symmetric heights.

**Overtone Oscillations of a Harmonic Oscillator.**

Sensitive TA measurements can reveal signals arising from overtones, and therefore we derive the FCS for the first overtone of the harmonic oscillator by choosing \( n' = n + 2 \) and selecting \( \omega_n = 2\omega_0 \). The result is
There are three differences between the FCS expressions of the harmonic oscillator fundamental and its first overtone: the exponent on the \( (\Delta^{1/2}) \) term is slightly different, the auxiliary function involves \( n + 2 \) rather than \( n + 1 \), and the one Lorentzian term will shift all the peaks by an extra factor of \( \omega_0 \). The final aspect significantly affects the interference among peaks.

Figure 6 contains the Franck–Condon coefficient product matrix for \( \Delta = 0.1 \) and the frequency matrices for each \((n, m)\) combination of the \( 2\omega_0 \) overtone.

The same displacement value had a total of four non-negligible terms producing a total of three peaks centered at \( \omega_{eg} \). We display example FCS for the overtone in Figure 7 for both narrow and wide peaks widths at \( \Delta = 0.1 \) and \( \Delta = 1.0 \) as representative examples. The narrow peak spectrum for \( \Delta = 0.1 \) shows that indeed the Lorentzian with \( \omega_{n+2,m} \) shifts to higher frequencies relative to that of \( \omega_{n+1,m} \) for the fundamental frequency case. This shift causes interference effects that are distinct from those of the fundamental frequency. The \( \gamma = 2\omega_0 \) FCS show that some peak structure and phase dependence develop. These simulations demonstrate that overtones can be distinguished from fundamental frequencies by the distinctive pattern of dual nodes and phase shifts and, furthermore, the presence of an overtone can be confirmed by the presence of the fundamental peak having the correct phase and amplitude profiles at half the frequency of the overtone. This analysis is straightforward to extend to higher overtones.

Combination Band Oscillations of a Harmonic Oscillator. Like overtones, some TA measurements can reveal peaks.
arising from combination bands. These oscillations require a potentially complicated two-dimensional simulation. We made three simplifications. The first is that the ground and excited states will have the same pair of distinct curvatures: $\alpha_1$ and $\alpha_2$. The second is that there is no Duschinsky rotation so that the full Franck-Condon factor can be written as the product of the two 1D Franck-Condon factors. Third, we ignore "accidental" degeneracies that are possible but unlikely. The primary combination band of interest is the sum of the two fundamental oscillation frequencies and therefore we select $\omega_2 = \omega_01 + \omega_02$.

Extrapolating from the analysis above, we can write the general expression for the 2D FCS as

$$M(\omega; \omega_0 + \omega_02) = e^{-\Delta_1^2} e^{-\Delta_2^2} \sum_{n_1,n_2,m_1} \sum_{n_1,n_2,m_2} \sum_{n_11,n_22,0} \sum_{n_11,n_22,0} m_1! m_2! \left( \frac{\Delta_1}{2} \right)^{2n_1+n_11+m_1} \left( \frac{\Delta_2}{2} \right)^{2n_2+n_22+m_2+1}$$

$$\times A_{n_1,m_1}^{n_11,m_1}(\Delta_1) A_{n_2,m_2}^{n_22,m_2}(\Delta_2)$$

$$\times \frac{1}{\omega - \omega_{n_1,n_2,m_1,m_2} + i\gamma/2}$$

$$\times \frac{1}{\omega - \omega_{n_1,n_2,m_1,m_2} - i\gamma/2}$$

$$\times 2\pi\delta(\omega_2 - (E_{n_1,n_2} - E_{n_11,n_22})/\hbar)$$

(14)

where $\Delta_1$ and $\Delta_2$ are the normalized displacements along the 1 and 2 dimensions, respectively.

We then performed simulations under distinct sets of displacements and dephasing parameters. Figure 8 presents some results. The peak patterns of the combination-band FCS somewhat resemble those of the overtone FCS. The similarity arises most clearly when the dephasing approaches that of the classical window function, here $\gamma = 10\omega_0$, which have the dual node and phase shift structure similar to the overtone FCS.

This set of simulations seems to indicate that the combination-band FCS are always fairly symmetric. However, intermediate dephasing produced FCS having extremely asymmetric and disordered profiles. We present in Figure 9 a simulated harmonic oscillator combination-band FCS with
The structure of the amplitude profile has one primary node and numerous other minima. The phase profile is extremely structured, and we do not attempt to interpret all of the features. Despite the potentially very complicated FCS that can arise for combination bands, they are likely to be distinguished because a combination band will appear at an oscillation frequency that is the sum of two fundamental frequencies. For small values of $\Delta$, this frequency arises from the two lowest energy eigenstates, $\omega_{0,1}$, and therefore,

$$M^\alpha(\omega; \omega_2) = \sum_{n',n,m} c_{n,n'}^* c_{n,m}^* \left[ \frac{1}{\omega - \omega_{n,m} + i\gamma/2} \right] \text{for} \quad \omega = \omega_{0,1} + \omega_2,$$

where $\gamma$ sets the width of each peak as a function of $\omega_2$ and each $c_{ij}$ is given by eq 16. We select only $n' > n$ because we are not interested in negative-frequency or zero-frequency oscillations. Then, we select the $\omega_2$ value that corresponds to the most intense oscillations. For small values of $\Delta$, these frequencies arise from the two lowest energy eigenstates, $\omega_{0,1}$, and therefore, $M(\omega,\omega_{0,1}) = M^\alpha(\omega,\omega_2)|_{\omega_{0,1}}$.

Performing the FCS simulations for the Morse oscillator requires a bit of care because the $\Gamma(\eta)$ term in eq 16 becomes numerically unstable at high values of $\lambda$. Recall that $\lambda$ is effectively the number of bound eigenfunctions in each potential. This tends to make the initial values of the $\{n', n, m\}$ indices reliable, which produces reasonable spectra when $\Delta$ is small enough such that the higher-lying eigenfunctions have negligible Franck–Condon factors. Larger values can also produce reliable spectra after examination and selection of each term.

We present the full FCS as a function of $\omega_2$ and $\omega$ when $\Delta = 0.1$ and $\Delta = 0.4$ in Figure 10. The main oscillations occur at $\omega_1 = \omega_{0,1}$, which is the frequency that corresponds to a wavepacket composed of the $n = 0$ and $n = 1$ eigenstates on the excited electronic potential. For the $\Delta = 0.4$ case, a minor oscillation occurs at $\omega_2 \approx \omega_{0,1}/0.6$, which corresponds to the parameters of a wavepacket composed of the $n = 1$ and $n = 2$ eigenstates. At larger displacements, oscillations occur at other frequencies lower than $\omega_{0,1}$ that correspond to wavepackets of other eigenstate combinations. For example, there are oscillations at $\omega_2 \approx 0.6\omega_{0,1}$ in the case of $\Delta = 0.4$. These peaks are not the main focus of this work but could be of interest in future studies.

In principle, we could compute each $(n', n)$ combination that will lead to oscillations at a selected $\omega_2$ frequency. In practice, however, some distinct peaks could appear near the selected $\omega_2$ frequency and, due to nonzero peak widths, affect its FCS. Therefore, we perform the full calculation and then select the primary oscillation frequency, $\omega_2 = \omega_{0,1}^\alpha$, and display the conventional FCS in Figure 11 for $\gamma = 2\omega_{0,1}^{\text{eff}}$. The amplitude and phase profiles are essentially vertical lineouts from Figure 10, and they resemble those of the harmonic oscillator simulations, with the key distinction that the asymmetry between peak heights become dramatic for what seem to be modest values of $\Delta$. Simulations with the dephasing increased to $\gamma = 10\omega_{0,1}^{\text{eff}}$, Figure 12, recovered the sharp amplitude node and abrupt $\pi$ phase shift for $\Delta = 0.1$; in fact the spectrum is indistinguishable from that of the harmonic oscillator. This fits the intuition that at small displacements, the wavepacket is composed of only the two lowest energy eigenstates in both models. In all cases, however, even modest displacements reveal sharply asymmetric peak heights and complicated phase profiles. These results show that
asymmetric peak heights readily arise from anharmonicity of the potentials in contrast to the negligible or minimal asymmetry that arises from harmonic potentials.

Quantum Beats from an Electronic Dimer. One purpose of this work is to develop an understanding of the phase and amplitude profiles in FCS so that researchers can distinguish the underlying physical origin of the measured quantum beats. Therefore, we study a purely electronic dimer. Previous authors have detailed the nonlinear response arising from this system.5,58,59

Briefly, the system is composed of two potentially distinct electronic two-level systems, |a⟩ and |b⟩. The system Hamiltonian is given by

$$H = \hbar \omega_a |e_1⟩⟨e_1| + \hbar \omega_b |e_2⟩⟨e_2| + J(\hat{\sigma}_a^+ \hat{\sigma}_b^- + \text{H.c.})$$

(21)

where \(\hbar \omega_a\) and \(\hbar \omega_b\) are the excited-state energies of the two systems, \(J\) is the coupling energy, \(\hat{\sigma}_i^+ = |e_i⟩⟨g_i|\) and \(\hat{\sigma}_i^- = |g_i⟩⟨e_i|\), \(i = \{a, b\}\), and H.c. stands for Hermitian conjugate. For the important case of a homodimer, one sets \(\omega_a = \omega_b\). On this basis, the transition-dipole moment operator is given by

$$\hat{\mu}_i = \mu_i |g_1⟩⟨e_1| + \text{H.c.}$$

(22)

The \(\{a, b\}\) basis is typically known as the site basis, in contrast to the eigenbasis of the Hamiltonian, which is typically known as the exciton basis, given here as \(\{|\alpha⟩, |\beta⟩\}\). The exciton basis is written as

$$\hat{H}_e = \hbar \omega_a |a⟩⟨a| + \hbar \omega_b |\beta⟩⟨\beta| + \hbar \omega_{\beta a} |\beta⟩⟨a| + \hbar \omega_{a\beta} |a⟩⟨\beta|$$

(23)
Here, we have set the composite ground-state energy to zero and the doubly excited state as the sum, \( \hbar \omega_f = \omega_a + \omega_b \). The exciton energies are given by

\[
a_{\alpha/\beta} = \frac{1}{2}[\left(\omega_a + \omega_b\right) \pm (\omega_a - \omega_b)] \sec(\arctan(J/\hbar(\omega_a - \omega_b)/2)) \tag{24}
\]

The third-order response functions \(^{5,59,60}\) that contain quantum-beat signals are

\[
R_1^{(3)}(\tau_1, \tau_2, \tau_3) \propto e^{-i\omega_1 \tau_1} e^{-i\omega_2 \tau_2} e^{-i\omega_3 \tau_3} \tag{25a}
\]
\[
R_2^{(3)}(\tau_1, \tau_2, \tau_3) \propto e^{i\omega_1 \tau_1} e^{i\omega_2 \tau_2} e^{i\omega_3 \tau_3} \tag{25b}
\]
\[
R_3^{(3)}(\tau_1, \tau_2, \tau_3) \propto e^{i\omega_1 \tau_1} e^{-i\omega_2 \tau_2} e^{i\omega_3 \tau_3} \tag{25c}
\]
\[
R_4^{(3)}(\tau_1, \tau_2, \tau_3) \propto e^{i\omega_1 \tau_1} e^{i\omega_2 \tau_2} e^{-i\omega_3 \tau_3} \tag{25d}
\]

The total transient-absorption signal under spectrally resolved detection is the sum of these terms for \( \tau_3 = 0 \) followed by Fourier transformation over \( \tau_3 \) to yield the detection frequency variable \( \omega_a \)

\[
M(\omega_1, \tau_2) = \mathcal{F}_{\tau_3} \left[ \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} R_k^{(3)}(\tau_1 = 0, \tau_2, \tau_3) \right]^{\omega_a} \propto \frac{1}{(\omega_2 - \omega_3)^2 - \gamma} + \frac{1}{(\omega_2 - \omega_3)^2 - \gamma} \tag{26}
\]

Therefore, the coherence spectrum at frequency \( \omega_{a/\beta} \) resulting from Fourier transformation over time interval \( \tau_2 \) and taking the real part of the complex-valued function is given by

\[
M(\omega; \omega_{a/\beta}) = \text{Re} \left[ \mathcal{F}_{\tau_3} [M(\omega_1, \tau_2)]_{\omega_{a/\beta}} \right] \propto \frac{1}{(\omega_2 - \omega_3)^2 - \gamma} + \frac{1}{(\omega_2 - \omega_3)^2 - \gamma} \tag{27}
\]

where \( \omega_{a/\beta} = (E_f - E_0)/\hbar \), the electronic coherence frequency.

The key distinction between this expression and those of the vibrational models is that here the two Lorentzian terms are summed rather than subtracted. This leads to constructive interference of the peaks, and therefore there is no relative phase shift. In Figure 13, we present FCS for an electronic homodimer under three indicated levels of electronic coupling, \( J \), for \( \omega_a = \omega_b = 400 \) and \( \gamma = 5 \). There is no amplitude node or phase shift between the two peaks.

![Figure 13. Femtosecond coherence spectrum for an electronic homodimer under three indicated levels of electronic coupling, \( J \), for \( \omega_a = \omega_b = 400 \) and \( \gamma = 5 \). There is no amplitude node or phase shift between the two peaks.](https://pubs.acs.org/10.1021/acs.jpca.0c10807)

**CONCLUSIONS**

We have derived and presented the analytic expression for the FCS arising from models including harmonic and anharmonic oscillators as well as an electronic dimer. These models will be useful for assigning the microscopic origins of quantum-beat signals in transient-absorption spectroscopy measurements conducted with femtosecond laser pulses. We envision that, after performing measurements and accounting for pulse chirp, researchers will be able to fit the measured FCS to the expressions and extract values for the microscopic parameters of the molecular potential-energy surfaces. Future theoretical work could evaluate niche cases that we have neglected. One key example is a vibrational dimer having electronic coupling; such systems indeed are of prime importance for molecular excitonic applications.

**AUTHOR INFORMATION**

**Corresponding Author**

Daniel B. Turner – Micron School for Materials Science and Engineering, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho 83725, United States; orcid.org/0000-0002-3148-5317; Email: danielturner926@boisestate.edu

**Author**

Paul C. Arpin – Department of Physics, California State University, Chico, Chico, California 95929, United States

Complete contact information is available at: https://pubs.acs.org/10.1021/acs.jpca.0c10807

**Notes**

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