

Experimental demonstration of spectral sideband splitting in strongly dispersion oscillating fibers

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By using a highly nonlinear, dispersion oscillating optical fiber operating in the telecom C band, we experimentally demonstrate the splitting experienced by quasi-phase matched gain sidebands in the strongly dispersion managed regime of a dispersion oscillating fiber as the power of a continuous-wave pump laser is increased over a certain threshold value. Very good agreement is found between the theoretical predictions and our experimental measurements. © 2015 Optical Society of America

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Modulation instability (MI) is a ubiquitous nonlinear process that has been widely investigated in various fields of physics and applications including plasmas, hydrodynamics, and optics, to cite a few. In the presence of a high-power continuous wave (CW), MI leads to the emergence and amplification of gain sidebands in the wave spectrum. In nonlinear fiber optics, such a process has been demonstrated in fibers with anomalous, constant group velocity dispersion (GVD) [1], as well as in normal GVD fibers by enabling the fulfillment of the nonlinear phase-matching condition through either fourth-order dispersion [2], birefringence, or a multimodal structure [3]. Fibers with a longitudinal and periodic modulation of their dispersion or birefringence properties can also lead to MI [4,5]. For example, thanks to the periodic dispersion landscape that leads to quasi-phase-matching (QPM) of the nonlinear four-wave mixing (FWM) process, MI sidebands can be observed, even in the regime of normal average GVD of a dispersion-oscillating optical fiber (DOF) [5–7]. Recent experimental studies have indeed confirmed the QPM-induced MI process in the normal GVD regime of a microstructured DOF around 1 μm [8], as well as of conventional highly nonlinear DOFs at telecom wavelengths [9,10].

MI induced by the longitudinal variations of chromatic dispersion has been theoretically investigated earlier for a wide range of configurations, ranging from fibers with a sinusoidal dispersion profile and a spatial period of a few tens of meters [8,9], up to dispersion-managed optical transmission fiber spans with periods of several kilometers [5,11,12]. Whenever the dispersion fluctuations can be considered as a perturbation to nonlinear wave propagation, that is, when their amplitude is smaller or comparable with the value of the average dispersion, QPM-induced MI leads to the emergence of well-separated, and unequally spaced gain sidebands, symmetrically placed around the pump. On the other hand, it has been recently theoretically shown that when the

amplitude of dispersion fluctuation grows much larger than the average GVD (strong dispersion management regime), a spectral splitting process may occur in the sideband spectrum [13,14].

In this Letter, we report the first experimental validation of this prediction by using a highly nonlinear DOF pumped in the telecom C band. As a basis for our discussion, let us first recall the expected evolution of QPM sidebands as the pump power is increased. For that purpose, we consider a continuous wave (CW) pump and make use of both a Floquet linear stability analysis (LSA), as well as of the existing analytical laws. Next, we will describe the implemented experimental setup and the corresponding experimental results which demonstrate the transition from the regime of usual QPM-induced MI to the novel regime of MI which exhibits spectral sideband splitting. Finally, we compare our experimental results with the full numerical simulations of the nonlinear Schrödinger equation (NLSE).

The evolution of the optical field in an optical fiber can be described by the NLSE:

$$i \frac{\partial \psi}{\partial z} - \frac{\beta_2(z)}{2} \frac{\partial^2 \psi}{\partial t^2} + \gamma |\psi|^2 \psi = 0, \quad (1)$$

where ψ is the complex electrical field, z is the propagation distance, and t the retarded time. The NLSE includes both the Kerr nonlinearity γ and the second-order dispersion β_2 , which is supposed to evolve periodically in the longitudinal direction according to the sinusoidal law

$$\beta_2(z) = \beta_{2av} + \beta_{2amp} \sin(2\pi z / \Lambda), \quad (2)$$

where β_{2av} is the average dispersion of the fiber, β_{2amp} is half of the peak-to-peak amplitude of the dispersion variation, and Λ is the spatial period of the fluctuations.

In the presence of relatively weak amplitude sinusoidal longitudinal GVD variations, the QPM of the FWM (or MI)

process leads to the appearance of resonant gain sidebands, whose angular frequency shift relative to the pump can be analytically predicted as follows [5]:

$$\Omega_p = \pm \sqrt{\frac{2\pi p/\Lambda - 2\gamma P}{\beta_{2av}}}, \quad (3)$$

with $p = 1, 2, 3, \dots$. More recently, it has been shown that the gain g_p experienced by the p th sidebands may also be analytically predicted by the formula [15]

$$g_p = 2\gamma P \left| J_p \left(\frac{\beta_{2amp} \Omega_p^2}{2\pi/\Lambda} \right) \right|, \quad (4)$$

where J_p is the Bessel function of order p .

To illustrate the process of spectral splitting, in this work we consider the same optical fiber that was previously employed in Refs. [9,10]. This 400 m long highly nonlinear fiber has a nonlinear coefficient of $10 \text{ W}^{-1} \text{ km}^{-1}$. The amplitude of dispersion fluctuations β_{2amp} is estimated to be $2 \text{ ps}^2/\text{km}$, with a spatial period $\Lambda = 20 \text{ m}$. By changing the pumping wavelength, it is possible to access different values of the average dispersion β_{2av} . Therefore, we have compared spectra which are obtained for the pumping wavelengths of 1536 and 1554 nm. The corresponding average dispersion values β_{2av} are $0.7 \text{ ps}^2/\text{km}$ and $0.13 \text{ ps}^2/\text{km}$, respectively, so that the ratio β_{2amp}/β_{2av} is equal to 2.8 and 15.4 in the two cases. Let us consider the resulting MI gain spectra for a CW pump power ranging in the interval between 0 and 11 W.

Equations (3) and (4) provide accurate predictions of the value of the sideband gain which is expected at the resonant frequencies Ω_p [13,15]. However, these equations do not give us an insight on the details of the actual shape of the gain sideband around those frequencies [7]. Using the LSA of the CW pump by means of the Floquet approach has been shown to be a very powerful method to calculate the details of MI gain sidebands for optical fibers with spatially periodic parameters [7,12,16]. In particular, the Floquet LSA makes it possible to correctly describe the spectral sideband splitting effect [13,14].

Therefore, we may take advantage of this method to plot the theoretically expected sideband gain for the two previously mentioned pumping wavelengths. The corresponding results, showing the impact of the pump power on the MI gain spectrum, are summarized in Fig. 1. For the pump wavelength of 1536 nm (panel a), the two main sidebands are provided by the first and second QPM conditions. They experience a continuous growth and their position is in fairly good agreement with Eq. (3).

The behavior of the MI spectrum is radically different for a high ratio $\beta_{2amp}/\beta_{2av} \gg 1$, as illustrated by panel b of Fig. 1. Indeed, in this configuration the MI gain which is predicted by Eq. (4) exhibits a nonmonotonic evolution with pump power. More importantly, for some values of pump power, the gain g_p vanishes. Consequently, several branches of the first QPM sideband can be distinguished (four in our case, with frequency offsets around 6.8, 5.8, 4.7, and 3 THz, respectively) in panel b of Fig. 1: hence the spectral splitting phenomenon is observed. By

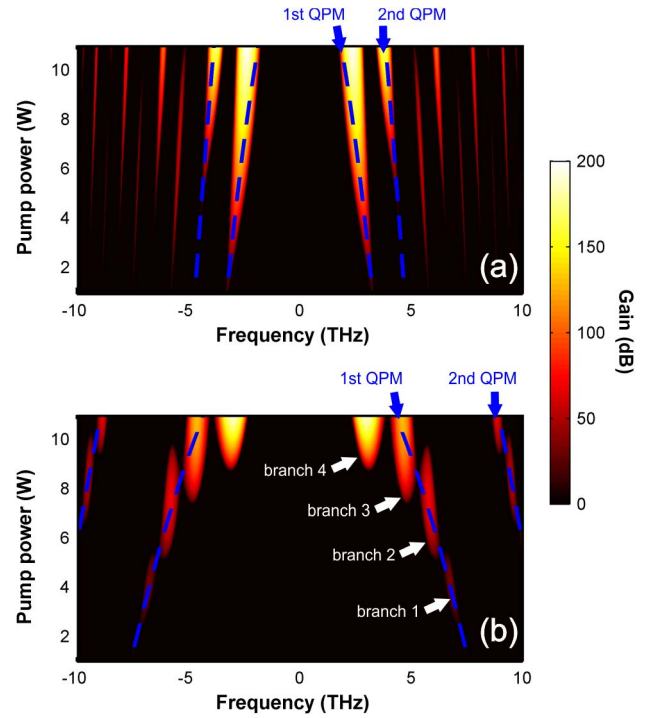


Fig. 1. Evolution of the output gain spectrum according to the input power for an average dispersion of (a) $0.7 \text{ ps}^2/\text{km}$ and (b) $0.13 \text{ ps}^2/\text{km}$. The corresponding pumping wavelengths are 1536 and 1554 nm. Results are obtained from the linear stability analysis based on the Floquet theory. The predictions from Eq. (3) are plotted with blue lines.

comparing panels a and b of Fig. 1, we note that the observation of relatively high sideband gains (i.e., above 150 dBs) requires higher pump power values in the strongly dispersion oscillating regime.

Our experimental setup for the observation of MI sideband splitting is depicted in Fig. 2(a). A CW pump delivered by a wavelength tunable external cavity laser is phase modulated at a low frequency (typically 100 MHz), to avoid any detrimental Brillouin backscattering upon propagation in the fiber. Next an intensity modulator is used to temporally slice into the CW pump.

This modulator is driven by a deterministic nonreturn-to-zero sequence of a single one followed by 31 zeros repeating at a frequency of 4 GHz. This makes it possible to achieve, for a given average power, a more than 20-fold increase of the peak power of the resulting long pulse. The pulses repeat every 8 ns, and have a 250 ps duration and an intensity profile close to a super-Gaussian shape as outlined in Fig. 2(b). A high-power erbium-doped fiber amplifier (EDFA) is then used to obtain an average power up to 33 dBm. A narrow optical bandpass filter (OBPF) is inserted to limit the build-up of amplified spontaneous emission (ASE), and to adjust the power level at the DOF input.

The highly nonlinear DOF under test was designed and fabricated to have a zero dispersion wavelength (ZDW) in the telecom C band (ZDW = 1556 nm). The fiber preform was prepared by the MCVD process using mixtures of GeCl_4 , SiCl_4 , and SiF_4 to obtain the necessary refractive index profile. Figure 2(c) shows the measured values of the average dispersion of the fiber as a function of

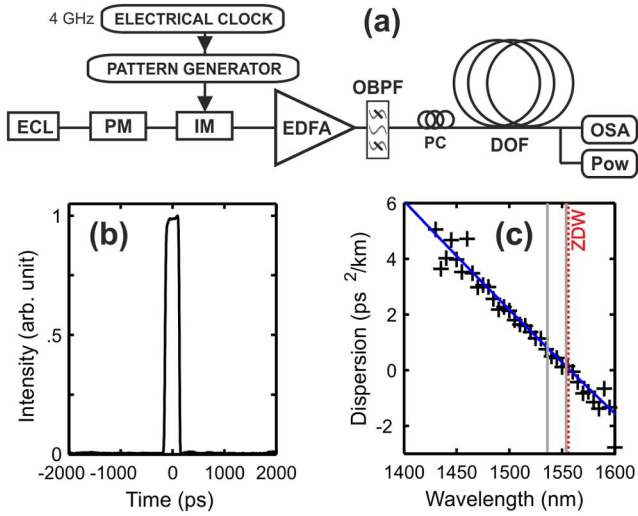


Fig. 2. (a) Experimental setup. (b) Details of the pump pulse and (c) details of the fiber dispersive properties. The vertical gray lines stand for the wavelengths used in the experiment.

wavelength. The values estimated at wavelengths 1536 and 1554 nm correspond to the values used in the numerical simulations of Figs. 1(a)–1(b), respectively. At the output of the fiber, a 90/10 coupler is used to simultaneously monitor the output spectrum on an optical spectrum analyzer (OSA) and the output power on a power meter (Pow).

Let us first consider the MI which is induced by a pump centered at 1536 nm. The corresponding results are plotted in Fig. 3(a) for two different power levels. For a power of 3.5 W, we clearly observe the emergence of the first QPM sideband (gray curve). The small side lobe in the vicinity of the pump at lower frequencies is because of residual ASE. For relatively high pump powers (i.e., 7 W, see the black solid curve), the intensity of the first QPM sideband is largely increased, and its central frequency is shifted toward lower frequencies, in agreement with Eq. (3). In this case, we also observe in Fig. 3(a) the emergence of the second QPM sideband, as well as the generation of a set of equally spaced, widely shifted sidebands that originate from the cascaded or multiple four wave mixing (MFWM) process involving the pump and the first QPM sideband [9].

A more systematic study of the influence of the input pump power on the output MI spectrum is presented in Fig. 4(a).

The experimental results obtained by the combination of 36 measurements confirm the generation and growth of the first and second QPM sidebands. Their evolution as a function of pump power is in qualitative agreement with the Floquet LSA results presented in Fig. 1(a), except for the emergence of MFWM sidebands. For pump powers higher than 10 W, the different sidebands merge and a continuum is formed, with a noticeable spectral asymmetry owing to the Raman effect. The overall spectral behavior is consistent with our previous measurements carried out with an ns Q-switched laser emitting at 1534 nm [9].

The picture is very different when dealing with a pump whose wavelength is close to the ZDW [see Fig. 3(b)]: hence a more careful analysis is required in this case.

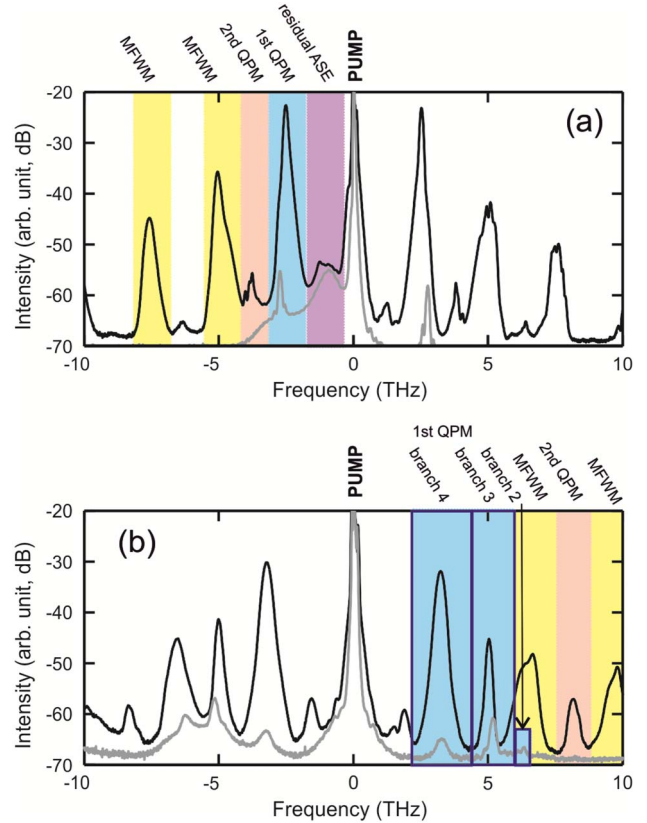


Fig. 3. (a) Experimental output spectrum for a pump wavelength of 1536 nm for pump powers of 3.5 and 7 W (gray and solid black lines, respectively). (b) Experimental output spectrum for a pump wavelength of 1554 nm for pump powers of 7 and 9 W (gray and solid black lines, respectively).

In qualitative agreement with the theoretical prediction of Fig. 1, higher pump powers are required to reach a level that can be detected on the OSA. The results

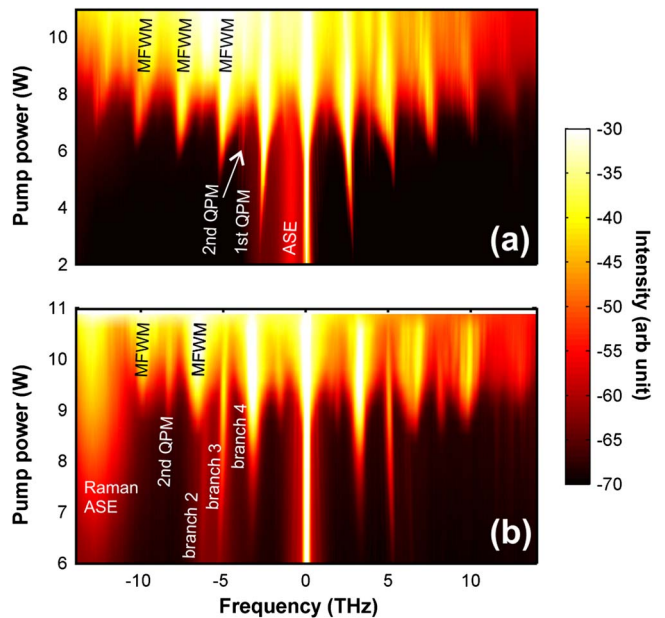


Fig. 4. Evolution of the output spectrum according to the input power recorded experimentally for a pump wavelength of (a) 1536 nm and (b) 1554 nm. Results are plotted using a 40 dB dynamics.

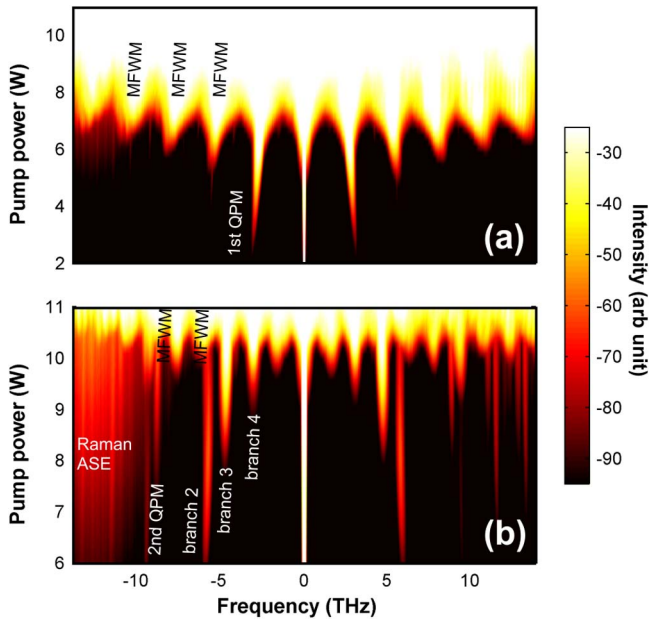


Fig. 5. Evolution of the output spectrum according to the power for a pump wavelength of (a) 1536 nm and (b) 1554 nm. Results obtained from the numerical integration of the extended NLSE. Results are averaged over 36 simulations.

obtained for a pump power of 7 W reveal the emergence of three distinct sidebands, which result from the splitting of the first QPM sideband. The most powerful branch 3 is shifted by 5 THz from the pump. When increasing the pump power to 9 W, the branch 4 which is shifted by nearly 3 THz grows the largest, in good quantitative agreement with the Floquet analysis. Once again, FWM-induced sidebands are also observed, and they overlap branch 2 (shifted by 6 THz) of the first QPM sideband.

The experimental signature of MI sideband splitting was clearly confirmed by systematic measurements of the MI spectrum evolution [24 measurements are summarized in Fig. 4(b)]. Here the emergence and growth of the second QPM sideband is also observed, along with a broad Raman peak at -13 THz. For pump powers higher than 10 W, a continuum is formed.

To further validate our experimental results, as well as the analysis of the sideband splitting process, we carried out simulations of the propagation of the pulsed pump in the DOF. For this purpose, we used the extended NLSE including the third-order and fourth dispersion terms (TOD and FOD, 4.7×10^{-5} ps³/m, and 5×10^{-8} ps⁴/m) and the delayed Raman response of silica. Given their potential impact in the process of spectral splitting, we also included linear fiber loss (0.7 dB/km) [13] and the

pump pulse shape [17]. Simulation results are summarized in Fig. 5, and reproduce nearly all of experimentally observed features which were not predicted by the LSA of Fig. 1. We have checked that FOD does not have a significant influence on the observed spectral splitting of the first QPM sideband [14,18].

In conclusion, we presented the first experimental demonstration of the sideband spectral splitting effect in strongly dispersion oscillating fibers. The Floquet-based LSA was completed by pulse propagation simulations.

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