

The Radcliffe Wave Parameters from Data on Open Star Clusters Postprint

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Abstract

A spectral analysis of the vertical positions and velocities of 374 open star clusters (OSCs) was carried out. We took these OSCs from the Hunt and Reffert catalog; they have an average age of about 10 million years, and are located on the galactic plane XY in a narrow zone inclined by 25° to the galactic axis Y. The following estimates of the parameters of the Radcliffe wave were obtained: (a) the maximum value in periodic perturbations of vertical coordinates p_z with the wavelength of these perturbations $\lambda_z = 4.82 \pm 0.09$ kpc; (b) the maximum value of the velocity of vertical disturbances v_z with disturbance wavelength $\lambda_W = 1.78 \pm 0.02$ kpc. Note that the results of the vertical velocity analysis are first-class in accuracy and completely new.

Full Text

Preamble

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Abstract

A spectral analysis of the vertical positions and velocities of 374 open star clusters (OSCs) was carried out. We took these OSCs from the Hunt and Reffert catalog; they have an average age of about 10 million years, and are located on the galactic plane XY in a narrow zone inclined by 25° to the galactic axis Y. The following estimates of the parameters of the Radcliffe wave were obtained:

(a) the maximum value in periodic perturbations of vertical pc with the wavelength of these perturbations $\lambda_z = 4.82 \pm 0.09$ kpc; (b) the coordinates km s⁻¹ with disturbance wavelength maximum value of the velocity of vertical disturbances $\lambda_W = 1.78 \pm 0.02$ kpc. Note that the results of the vertical velocity analysis are first-class in accuracy and completely new.

Key words: (Galaxy:) local interstellar matter -Galaxy: structure -(Galaxy:) solar neighborhood

1. Introduction

The Galaxy's disk is far from dynamic equilibrium. Perturbations in the coordinates and velocities of its components are detected at various scales. The causes of such disturbances are both internal and external factors. Internal factors are responsible, for example, for the presence of large-scale galactic spiral structure and a central bar (Lin & Shu 1964; Debattista & Sellwood 2000). External gravitational influence is typically invoked to explain large-scale curvature of the disk in the vertical direction (for example, Bekki 2012). Other disturbances in the spatial velocities of stars, particularly vertical ones, have also been discovered that are not associated with spiral structure (for example, Widrow et al. 2012; Antoja et al. 2018).

In the nearest circumsolar neighborhood with a radius of about 2.5 kpc, a Radcliffe wave was recently discovered (Alves et al. 2020), the study of which is the main goal of this work.

This wave was first identified by Alves et al. (2020) when studying a large sample of molecular clouds. The main feature of the Radcliffe wave is that in the galactic plane XY the clouds are elongated “in a string,” which is inclined at an angle $\beta \approx 30^\circ$ to the galactic axis Y, and their vertical coordinates Z exhibit a wave-like character. The maximum value of the Z amplitude is observed in the immediate vicinity of the Sun.

The behavior of vertical coordinates characteristic of the Radcliffe wave is manifested in the distribution of interstellar dust (Lallement et al. 2022), molecular clouds (Zucker et al. 2022), masers and radio stars (Bobylev et al. 2022a, 2022b), T Tauri stars (Li & Chen 2022), massive OB stars (Donada & Figueras 2021; Thulasidharan et al. 2022), as well as young scattered star clusters (Donada & Figueras 2021).

The vertical velocities of objects in the Radcliffe wave have not yet been well studied. Donada & Figueras (2021) apparently found the first connection between vertical coordinates and vertical velocities from an analysis of 11 open star clusters (OSCs). Thulasidharan et al. (2022) showed that the maximum amplitude of vertical velocities of OB stars in the Radcliffe wave can reach 3–4 km s⁻¹. Bobylev et al. (2022a) found a relationship between the vertical coordinates and vertical velocities of masers and radio stars.

A number of hypotheses for the origin of the Radcliffe wave have been proposed.

For example, Fleck (2020) links the origin of the Radcliffe wave to the Kelvin-Helmholtz instability. Marchal & Martin (2023) connect the origin of the Radcliffe wave with the evolution of the North Celestial Pole Loop (NCPL). In their opinion, a narrow chain of material (from which the Radcliffe wave was formed) arose at the outer boundary of the NCPL as a result of the impact of shock waves from several supernovae and their stellar winds. A hypothesis has also been put forward about the impact of an external impactor on the galactic disk (Thulasidharan et al. 2022; Oseguera et al. 2023). Such an impactor could be a dwarf galaxy or a globular cluster. The passage of such a massive body through the galactic disk can cause wave disturbances propagating across the disk. Each of the listed hypotheses currently has its own advantages and disadvantages, but a generally accepted hypothesis for the formation of the Radcliffe wave has not yet been established.

For a detailed study of the distribution and kinematics of stars, measurements of such characteristics as trigonometric parallaxes, proper motions, and radial velocities of stars are important. Recently, such measurements have emerged as a result of the Gaia space project (Gaia Collaboration et al. 2016). In the latest version of the project, Gaia Data Release 3 (DR3) catalog (Gaia Collaboration et al. 2022), the proper motions of about half of the stars in the catalog were measured with a relative error of less than 10%, and radial velocities were measured for a large number of stars.

The presence of three components of stellar velocities allows us to perform a full three-dimensional analysis of their kinematics. This is especially important when studying the Radcliffe wave, since only the spatial distribution of its components has been well studied. All the more interesting are the kinematic data not about single stars, but about OSCs, where more accurate average values have been calculated for a large number of cluster members. One of the most extensive modern kinematic databases on galactic OSCs is the Hunt & Reffert (2023) catalog, which contains the parameters of 7200 OSCs identified according to the Gaia DR3 catalog. In this work, we apply spectral analysis to the coordinates and vertical velocities of OSCs to clarify the features of the Radcliffe wave using a large sample of young OSCs from Hunt & Reffert (2023).

2. Method

Two coordinate systems are used: (1) a rectangular heliocentric coordinate system, in which the x axis is directed from the Sun to the center of the Galaxy, the y axis coincides with the direction of rotation of the Galaxy and the z axis is directed to the north galactic pole; (2) a galactocentric rectangular coordinate system X, Y, Z , in which the direction of the X axis is opposite to the direction of the x axis, and the directions of the Y and y axes, as well as the Z and z axes, coincide.

The orientation of the Radcliffe wave relative to the y and Y axes differs only in sign. In the coordinate system xy , we make the transition to the primed axis

y' by rotating the system by an angle β . As a result, we obtain a connection between the coordinate y' and the coordinates x, y in the form:

$$y' = x \sin \beta + y \cos \beta - x_1 \sin \beta$$

To study the periodic structure in the coordinates and velocities of stars, Bobylev et al. (2022a, 2022b) proposed to use spectral analysis based on the standard Fourier transform of the original sequence:

$$F(\lambda) = \sum_{j=1}^N z(y_j) e^{-2\pi i y_j / \lambda}$$

where $F(\lambda)$ is the spectrum amplitude, and $\phi(\lambda)$ is the spectrum phase.

We limit the resulting spectrum to the wavelength range that most accurately describes the original data. Essentially, it coincides with the main peak (lobe) of the calculated spectrum in the wavelength range from λ_{min} to λ_{max} (within these boundaries the spectrum smoothly decreases starting from the maximum value, and outside starts to increase).

The desired curve, which approximates the original data, is calculated using the inverse Fourier transform formula in the wavelength range we have determined:

$$z(y) = k \sum_{\lambda_{min}}^{\lambda_{max}} F(\lambda) e^{2\pi i y / \lambda}$$

where the coefficient k is found from the condition of minimum residual.

3. Data

The catalog of Hunt & Reffert (2023) includes 4780 previously known OSCs, and 2420 of the total number found are new candidates. For all OSCs in the catalog, ages, lifetimes, distances, and kinematic characteristics were estimated. An important advantage of the Hunt & Reffert (2023) catalog is the availability of average radial velocities for a large number of OSCs, many of which are new. Moreover, the average radial velocities of all OSCs were calculated exclusively from the data of the Gaia DR3 catalog.

In this work, clusters were selected in a zone limited by two lines on the xy plane: $y = 0.65x + 0.10$ and $y = 0.65x - 0.10$, where the angle $\beta = 25^\circ$ was selected so that the wave manifests itself in the best possible way. The center of the selection zone does not pass through the origin of coordinates, but cuts the x axis at the point x_1 ; therefore, the transition to the y' axis was performed according to the formula $y' = x \sin \beta + y \cos \beta - x_1 \sin \beta$, where $x_1 = -0.28$ kpc. OSCs younger than 25 million years were selected. The selection zone contained 374 OSCs with an average age of 9.7 Myr. The distribution of these OSCs in projection on the galactic plane XY is given in Figure 1.

4. Results and Discussion

The positions of the young OSCs we selected in the galactic plane XY were projected onto the y' axis. Next, a spectral analysis of the vertical positions and vertical velocities of the OSCs was carried out in this coordinate system. Based on the distribution of OSCs in the vertical direction, the following estimates of z_{max} and λ_z were obtained: $z_{max} = 10$ pc, $\lambda_z = 4.82 \pm 0.09$ kpc, and the value z_{max} is achieved at $y' = -0.28$ kpc. Based on the vertical velocities of the OSCs, an estimate of the maximum value of their disturbance velocity W_{max} with the wavelength of these disturbances λ_W was obtained: $W_{max} = -0.12$ km s⁻¹, $\lambda_W = 1.78 \pm 0.02$ kpc, and W_{max} is achieved at $y' = -0.71$ kpc. The results of the spectral analysis are shown in Figures 2 and 3.

The value of the wavelength λ_z found in solution (5) differs markedly from the results of other authors (where $\lambda \sim 2.5$ kpc is usually reported), but our estimates of the W velocities (solution 6) are first-class in accuracy and completely new.

In the work of Bobylev et al. (2022a), two samples of young stars were studied, namely a sample of masers with measured trigonometric parallaxes and a sample of T Tauri stars. In both cases, these are protostars and very young stars of various masses. After appropriate selection of stars in a narrow band inclined at an angle of 25° to the galactic axis Y, it was shown that the Radcliffe wave manifests itself in both the positions and velocities of masers and T Tauri stars. Based on the spectral analysis of the masers, the following estimates were obtained: $z_{max} = 23$ pc and $\lambda_z = 2.8 \pm 0.1$ kpc, and from the vertical velocities $W_{max} = -0.7$ km s⁻¹ and $\lambda_W = 3.9 \pm 1.6$ kpc. The following estimates were obtained for T Tauri stars: $z_{max} = 15$ pc and $\lambda_z = 2.0 \pm 0.1$ kpc.

Analysis of various populations of young objects belonging to the Radcliffe wave does not give an unambiguous picture of the behavior of vertical velocities along the wave. Tu et al. (2022) found no significant changes in the vertical velocities of young stars depending on position along the wave. These authors concluded that such changes could be less than a few kilometers per second. Li & Chen (2022), studying the proper motions of young stars that have not reached the main sequence stage, found a phase difference of about $2\pi/3$ between the waves of vertical coordinates and velocities. This conclusion contradicts the results of the analysis of W velocities obtained by Donada & Figueras (2021), Thulasidharan et al. (2022), and Bobylev et al. (2022a, 2022b). This conclusion also contradicts the results of this work. Indeed, based on the position of the main minimum in Figures 2 and 3, we cannot speak of a significant shift in the phases of the two waves.

5. Conclusion

The study of the spatial and kinematic characteristics of the Radcliffe wave was carried out using a sample of young OSCs. For this purpose, we selected clusters younger than 25 Myr from the modern catalog of Hunt & Reffert (2023).

The selection of OSCs was carried out from the near-solar neighborhood with a radius of about 3 kpc, in a narrow strip located at an angle of 25° to the galactic axis Y. There were 374 such clusters, which have an average age of 9.7 Myr. It is shown that there is a periodicity characteristic of the Radcliffe wave, both in the vertical coordinates and in the vertical velocities of the OSCs.

To evaluate the characteristics of the Radcliffe wave, we used spectral analysis. As a result, the following estimates were obtained: (a) maximum value of the coordinate z , $z_{max} = 10$ pc and disturbance wavelength $\lambda_z = 4.82 \pm 0.09$ kpc; (b) maximum value of vertical velocity disturbances $W_{max} = -0.12$ km s $^{-1}$ and the wavelength of these disturbances $\lambda_W = 1.78 \pm 0.02$ kpc.

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