

Mid-IR lasers: Challenges Imposed by the Population Dynamics of the Gain System

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Outline

1. **Introduction: Level scheme, spectroscopic processes**
2. **Erbium 3- μm fiber lasers: Depleting the lower laser level**
3. **The cascade-lasing regime**
4. **The lifetime-quenching regime**
5. **The energy-recycling regime**
6. **The thermal problem**
7. **Another cascade-lasing regime**
8. **Other 3- μm fiber laser**
9. **Conclusions**

Lanthanide Ions in the Periodic System

1a	2a											3a	4a	5a	6a	7a	8a
H																	He
Li	Be											B	C	N	O	F	Ne
Na	Mg	3b	4b	5b	6b	7b	8b	8b	8b	1b	2b	Al	Si	P	S	Cl	Ar
K	Ca	Sc	Ti	V	Cr	Mn	Fe	Co	Ni	Cu	Zn	Ga	Ge	As	Se	Br	Kr
Rb	Sr	Y	Zr	Nb	Mo	Tc	Ru	Rh	Pd	Ag	Cd	In	Sn	Sb	Te	J	Xe
Cs	Ba	La	Hf	Ta	W	Re	Os	Ir	Pt	Au	Hg	Tl	Pb	Bi	Po	At	Rn
		↑	58 Ce	59 Pr	60 Nd	61 Pm	62 Sm	63 Eu	64 Gd	65 Tb	66 Dy	67 Ho	68 Er	69 Tm	70 Yb	71 Lu	
Fr	Ra	Ac	Lr	Rf	Db	Sg	Bh	Hs	Mt	Ds							
		↑	Th	Pa	U	Np	Pu	Am	Cm	Bk	Cf	Es	Fm	Md	No	Lw	

Lanthanide = 4f rare-earth ion, $_{57+n}\text{Ln} [_{54}\text{Xe } 6s^2 5d 4f^n \text{ or } _{54}\text{Xe } 6s^2 4f^{n+1}]$

Shielding of the 4f Sub-shell

1. Shielding vs. core electric charge by inner shells (1s, ..., 4d)

**⇒ central-field approximation
(neglects perturbations within 4f sub-shell)**

**2. Shielding vs. interactions with host lattice
by outer 5s and 5p sub-shells**

⇒ relatively small electron-phonon coupling

Energy Levels: Central Field Approximation

The energy of the 4f subshell can be calculated in the central field approximation.

This approach takes into account the electric field produced by the charge of the nucleus and the charges of the filled inner shells which shield the charge of the nucleus.

It neglects the coulomb interaction between electrons within the partially filled 4f subshell, their spin-orbit coupling, and the crystal field generated by the ligand ions in the host material.

Central-Field Approximation: Perturbations

1. a) Non-centrosymmetric splitting (Coulomb interaction)

⇒ total orbital angular momentum

$$\vec{L} = \sum \vec{\ell}$$

b) Accordingly:

⇒ total electron-spin momentum

$$\vec{S} = \sum \vec{s}$$

2. Spin-orbit coupling (“LS” coupling)

⇒ total angular momentum

$$\vec{J} = \vec{L} + \vec{S}$$

lanthanides: intermediate coupling (LS / jj)

3. Crystal-field splitting (“Stark effect”)

⇒ total magnetic dipole moment

$$\vec{m}_J$$

Amounts of Splittings

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Non-centrosymmetric splitting | $\sim 10000 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ |
| 2. Spin-orbit splitting | $\sim 1000 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ |
| 3. Crystal-field splitting | $\sim 100 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ |

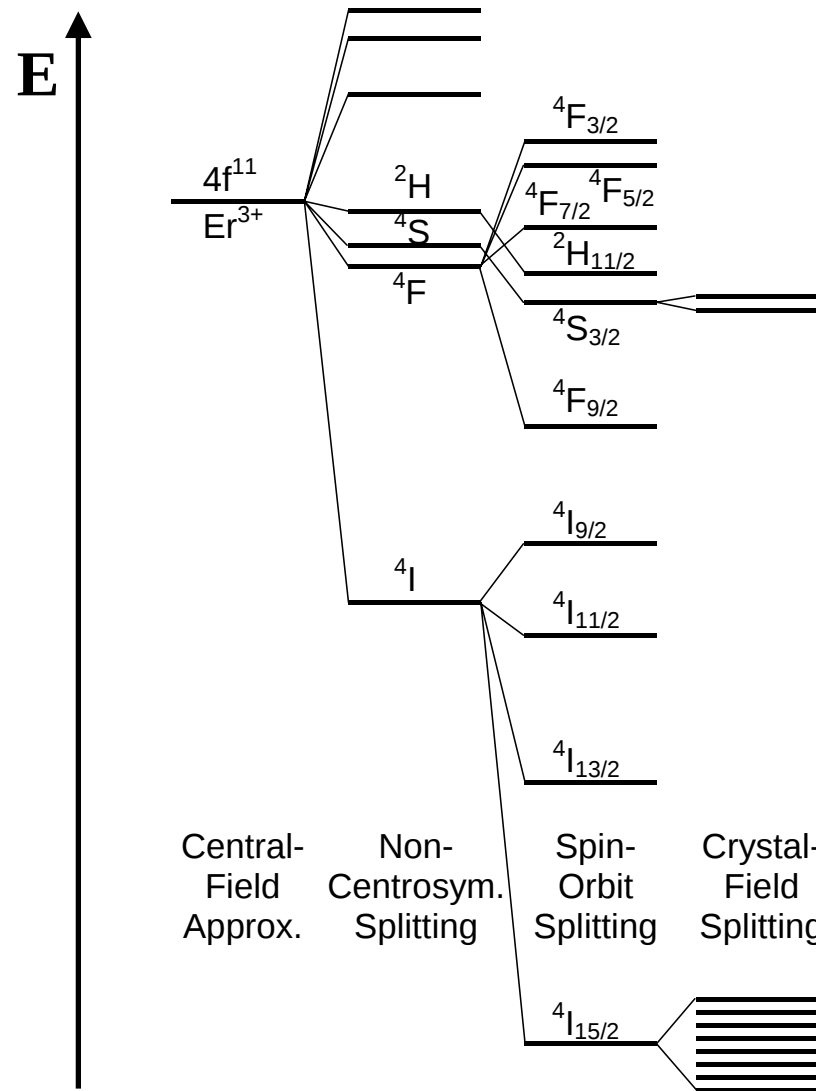
Unit (cm^{-1}) : photon energy $E = hc / \lambda \propto 1 / \lambda$

$$5000 \text{ cm}^{-1} = 2 \text{ } \mu\text{m}$$

$$10000 \text{ cm}^{-1} = 1 \text{ } \mu\text{m}$$

$$20000 \text{ cm}^{-1} = 500 \text{ nm}$$

Partial Energy-Level Scheme of Er^{3+}

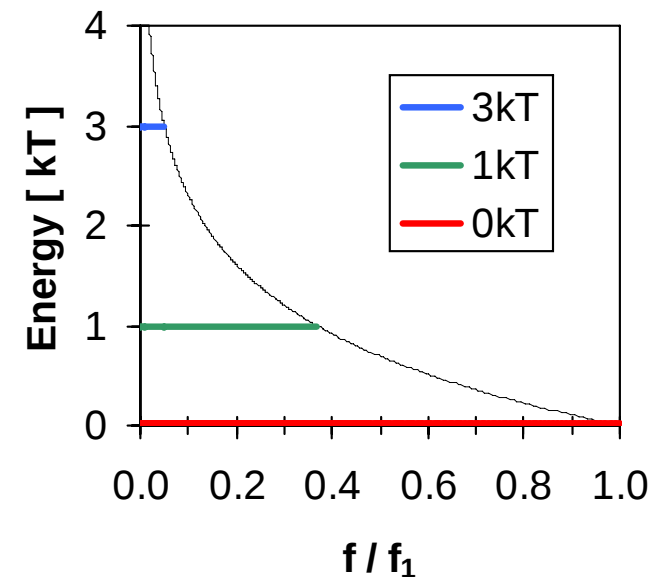


Boltzmann Factors

At room temperature (300 K), $k_B T = 200 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ is in the order of the energy splitting within a crystal-field multiplet

⇒ Boltzmann distribution of excitation energy within each crystal-field multiplet $^{2S+1}L_J$

$$f_i = \frac{\exp\left[(E_1 - E_i)/(k_B T)\right]}{\sum_i \left\{ \exp\left[(E_1 - E_i)/(k_B T)\right] \right\}}$$



Population Mechanisms

Stimulated processes:

Ground-state absorption

Excited-state absorption

Stimulated emission

Spontaneous processes:

Luminescence decay

Multiphonon relaxation

Interionic processes:

Energy migration

Cross-relaxation

Energy-transfer upconversion

Luminescence Decay

Einstein coeff. A for spontaneous emission

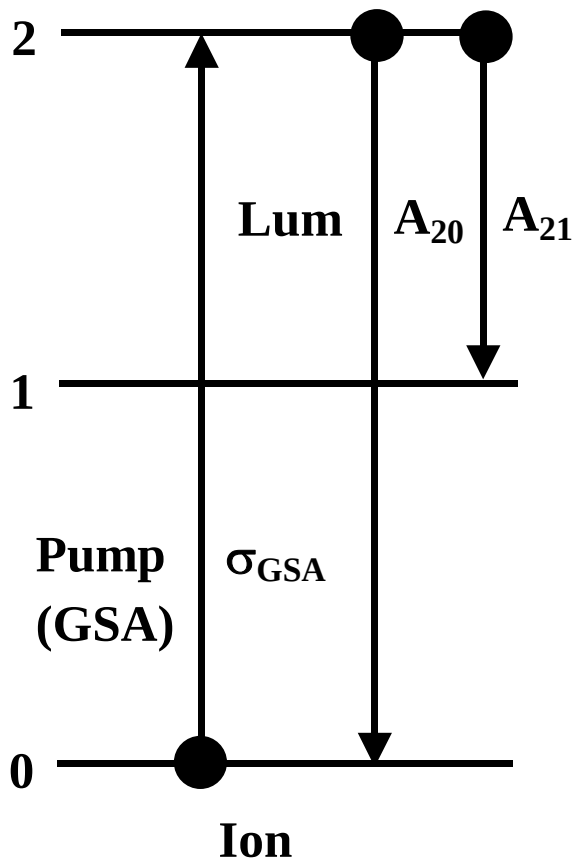
$$\sum_j A_{ij} = A_i = \tau_{i,rad}^{-1} \quad \text{radiative rate constant}$$

Lifetime

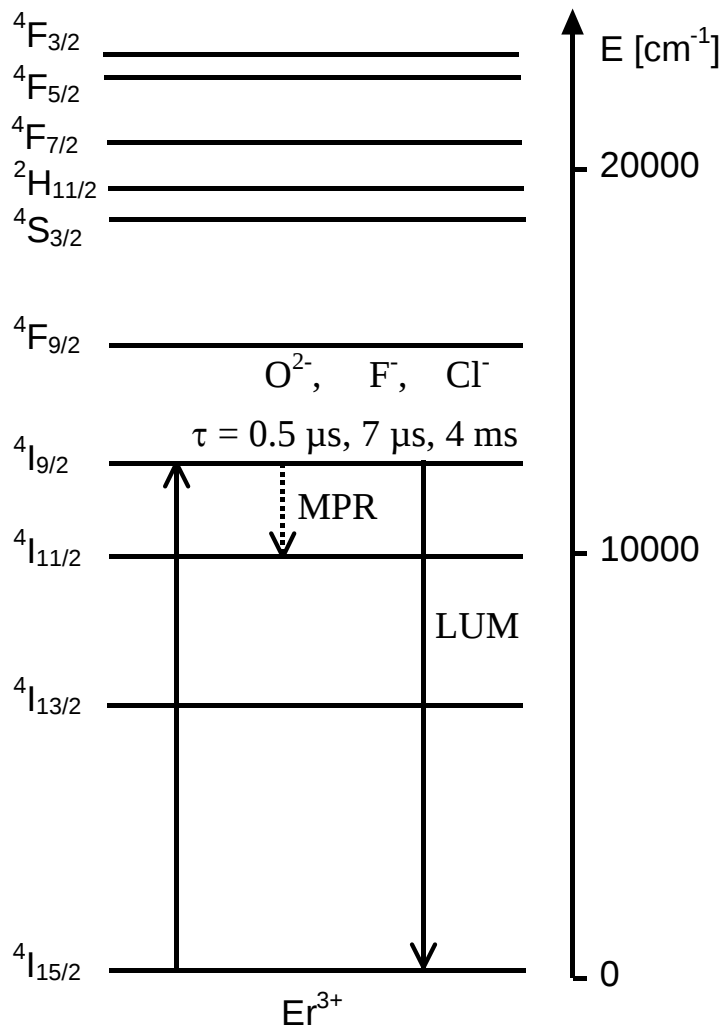
$$\tau_i^{-1} = A_i + W_i \quad (\text{rad.} + \text{nonrad. decay})$$

Radiative rate constant,
emission cross-section,
oscillator strength
are directly connected with each other.

$$\text{Decay rate: } R_{ij} = -A_{ij} N_i$$



Multiphonon Relaxation: Consequences for Lifetime



Example:

**Decay from the $^4\text{I}_{9/2}$ level of Er^{3+}
(to next lower-lying level: $\Delta E \approx 2000 \text{ cm}^{-1}$)**

**Competition between luminescence decay
and multiphonon relaxation**

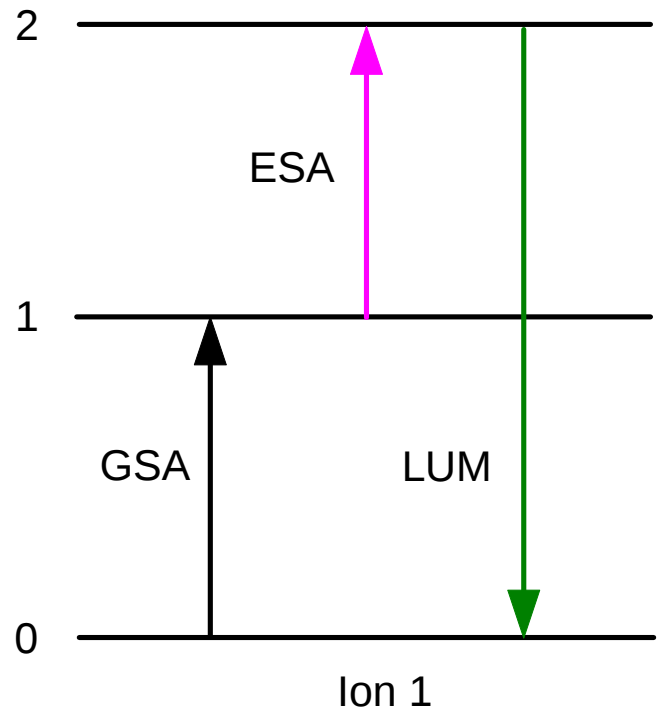
**Number of highest-energy phonons
required to bridge ΔE :**

Oxide: $p \approx 2 \Rightarrow \tau = 0.5 \mu\text{s}$

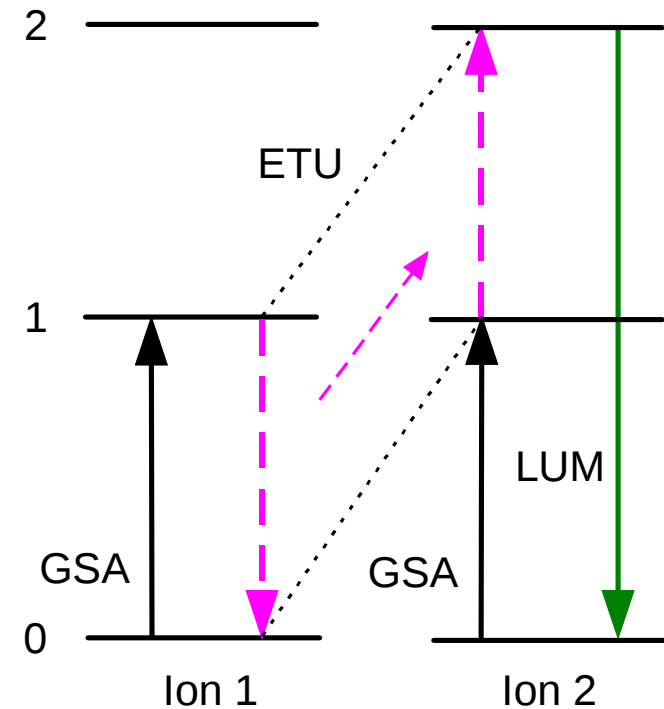
Fluoride: $p \approx 4 \Rightarrow \tau = 7 \mu\text{s}$

Chloride: $p \approx 7 \Rightarrow \tau = 4 \text{ms}$

Upconversion Mechanisms

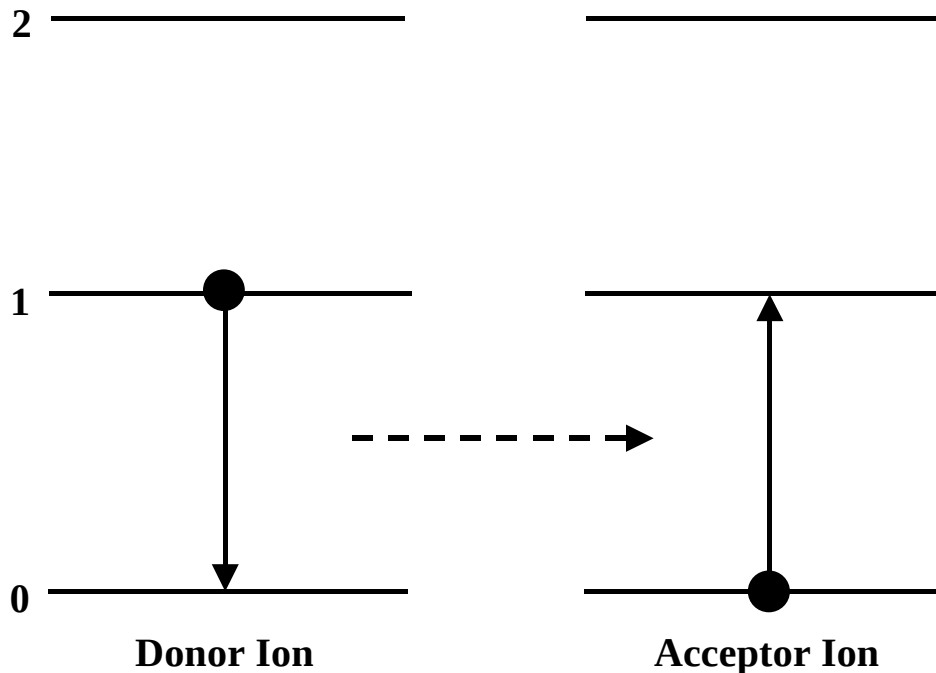


Intraionic process: ESA
(Excited-state absorption)



Interionic process: ETU
(Energy-transfer upconversion)

Energy-Transfer Processes



Interaction mechanisms:

1. multipole-multipole interaction:

One oscillating multipole forces another nearby multipole to oscillate as well.

2. exchange interaction:

Direct overlap between the atomic functions of two nearby ions

Most common:

Electric dipole-dipole interaction

Electric Dipole-Dipole Transfer

Transfer probability donor (D) $\rightarrow$ acceptor (A)

$$R_{DA} = \frac{3\hbar^4 c^4}{4\pi n^4} \frac{Q_A}{\tau_D} \frac{1}{r_{DA}^6} \int f_D(E) F_A(E) E^{-4} dE$$

D.L. Dexter, J. Chem. Phys. 21 (1953) 836

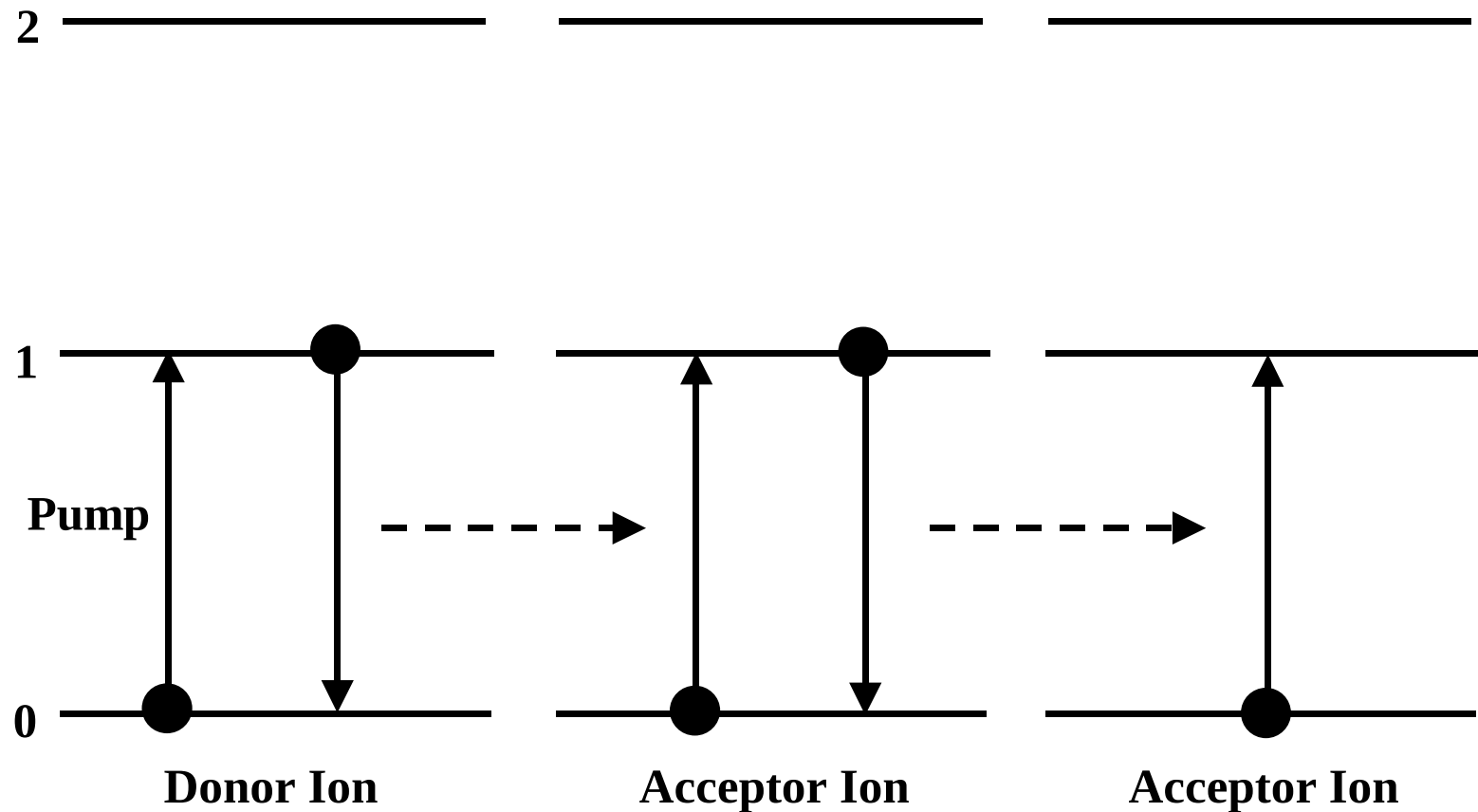
Q_A = integral absorption cross-section of A
(measure of absorption probability)

τ_D = radiative lifetime of D
(measure of emission probability)

f_D, F_A = normalized emission, absorption line shapes of D, A
(integral is measure of spectral overlap)

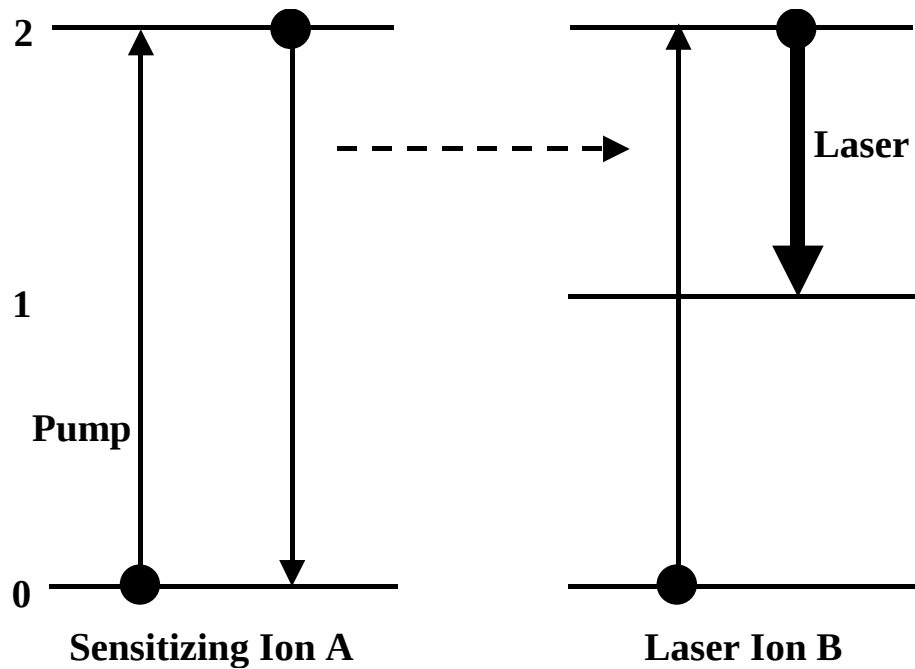
r_{DA} = distance between D and A ($R_{DA} \propto r^{-6}$!!!)

Energy Migration

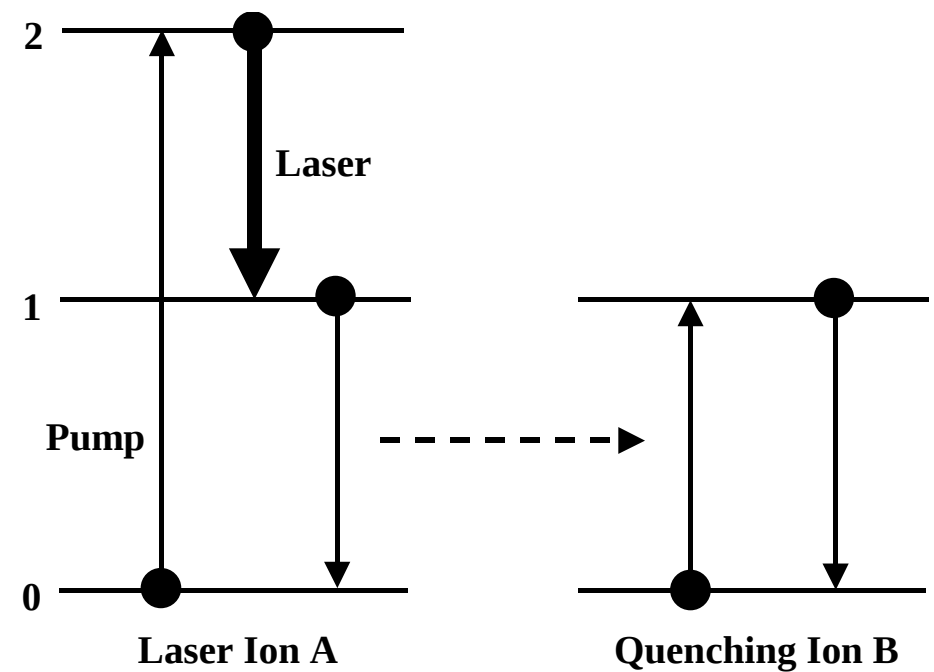


Sensitization and Quenching

Sensitization

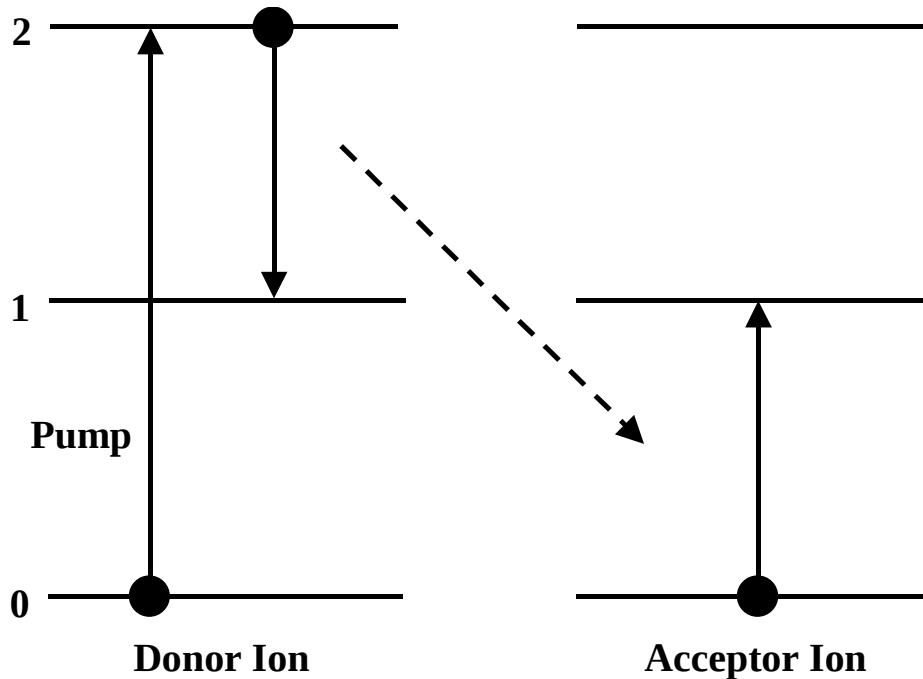


Quenching

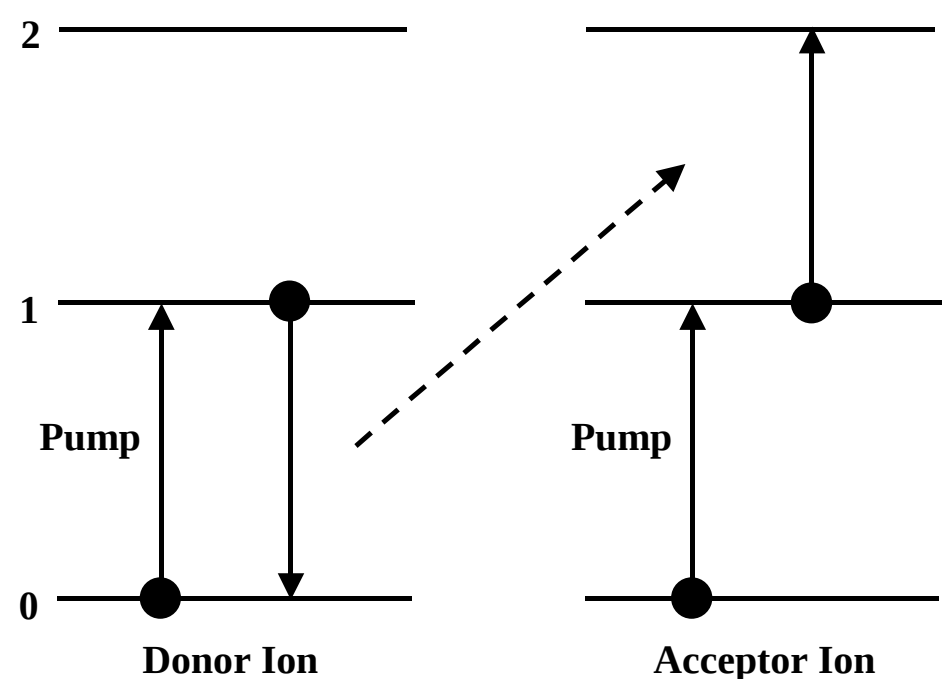


Cross-Relaxation and Energy-Transfer Upconversion

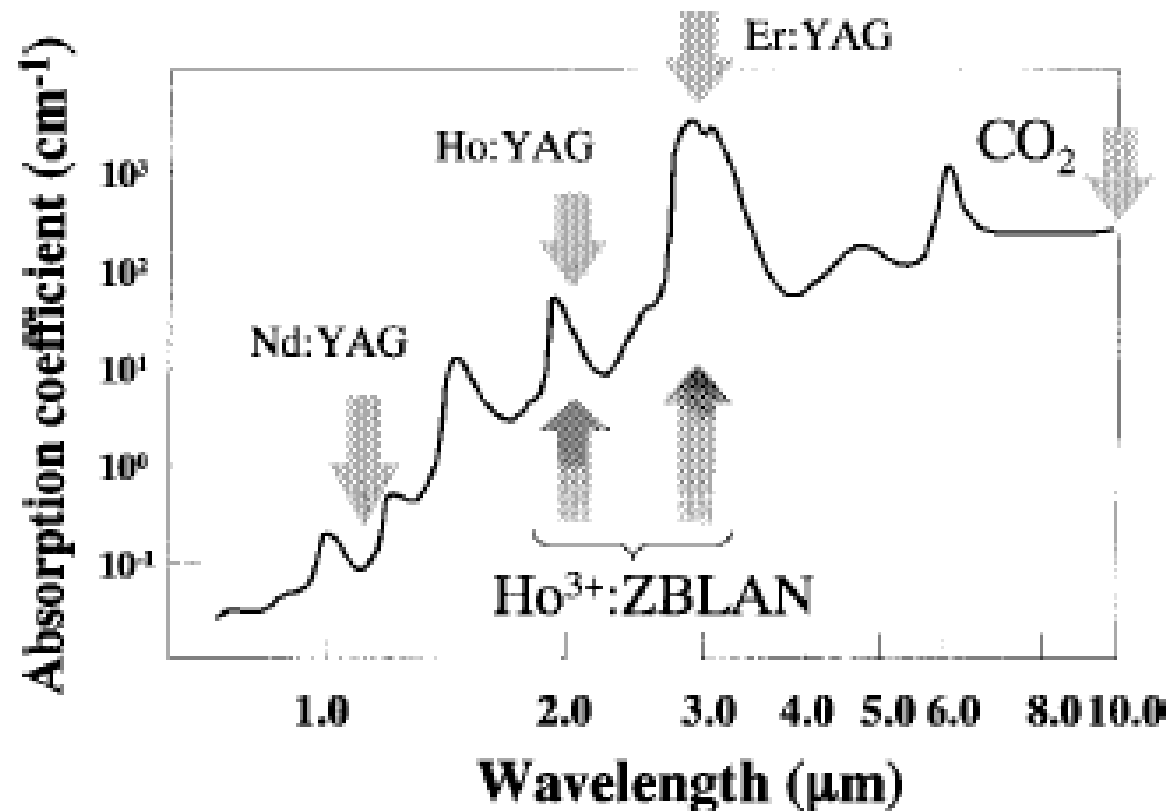
Cross-Relaxation



Energy-Transfer Upconversion

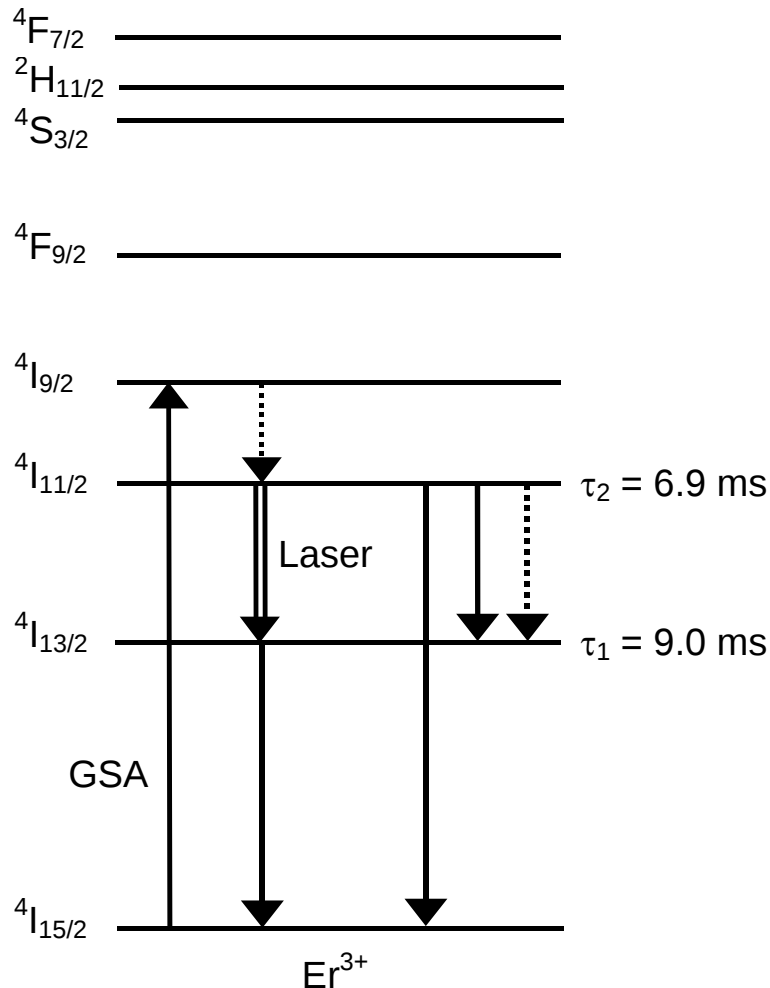


Laser Wavelengths for Micro-Surgery



T. Sumiyoshi, IEEE J. Select. Topics Quantum Electron. 5 (1999) 936

3- μm Erbium Laser: A « simple » Four-Level Laser



"Bottleneck" owing to longer lower level lifetime $\Rightarrow$

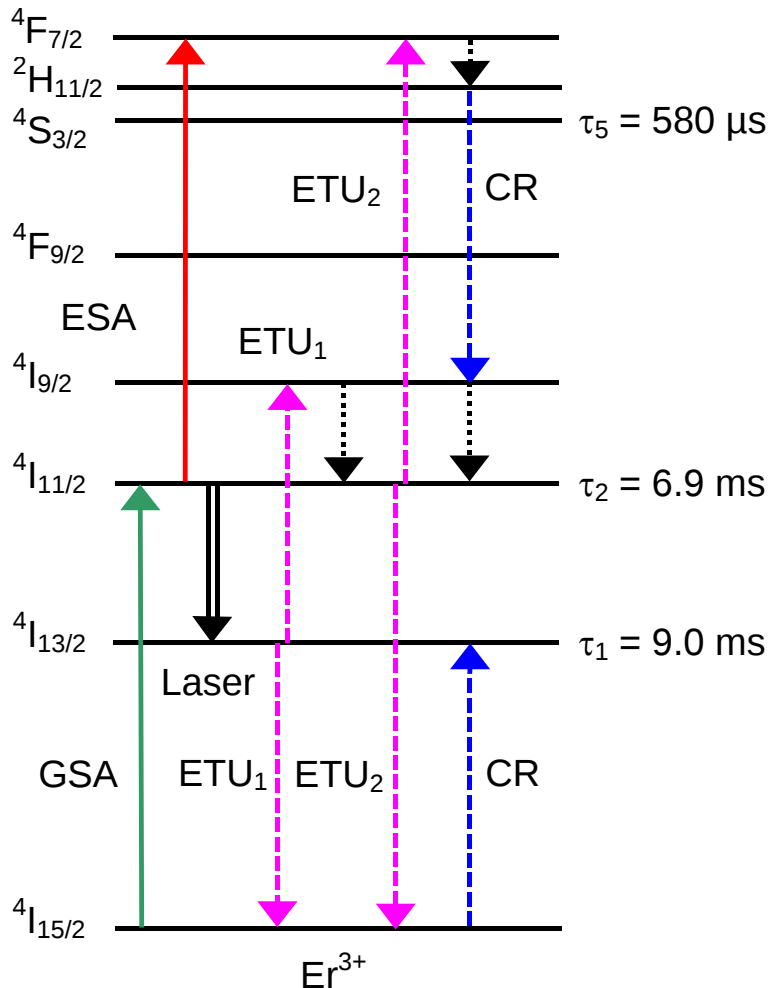
"self-terminating" transition in continuous-wave operation.

CW inversion due to

- 1. weak feeding of lower level (host materials with low maximum-phonon energy)**
- 2. Stark splitting**

Depletion of lower laser level is desired to overcome bottleneck

The Erbium 3- μm Laser



Important processes:

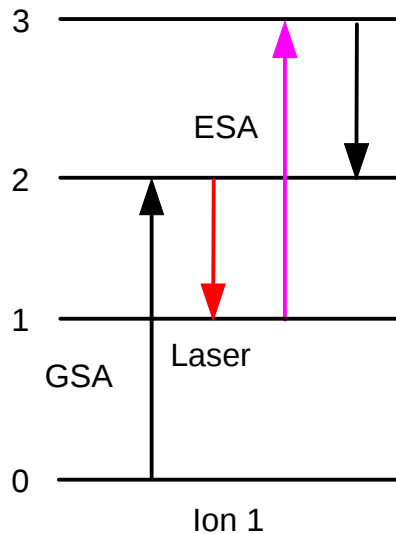
Pump **GSA** @ 800 nm or 980 nm

Pump **ESA** @ 800 nm or 980 nm

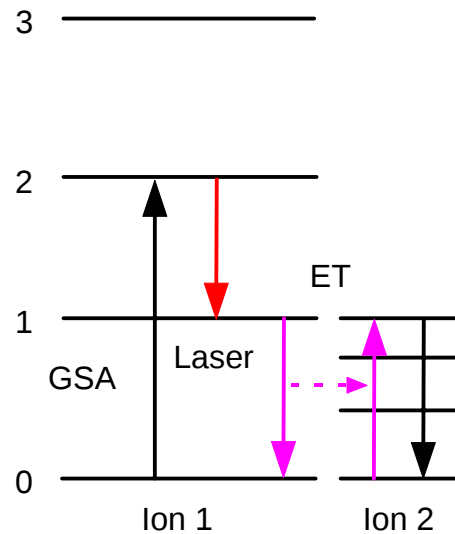
ETU involving two ions in
lower (1) or upper (2)
laser level

Cross Relaxation (**CR**)

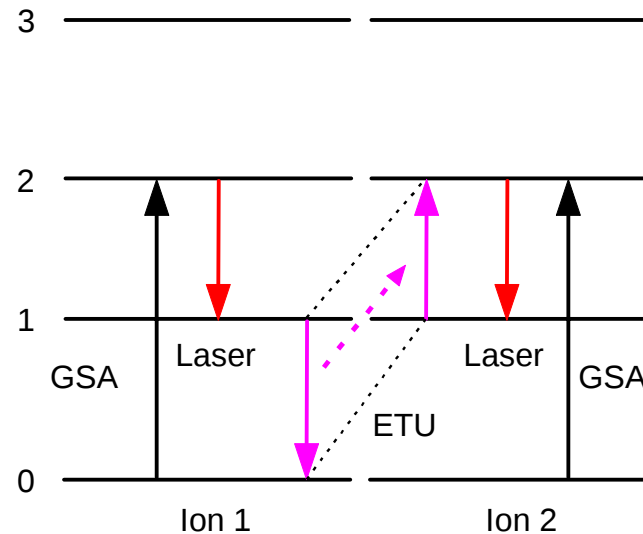
Depletion of Lower Laser Level



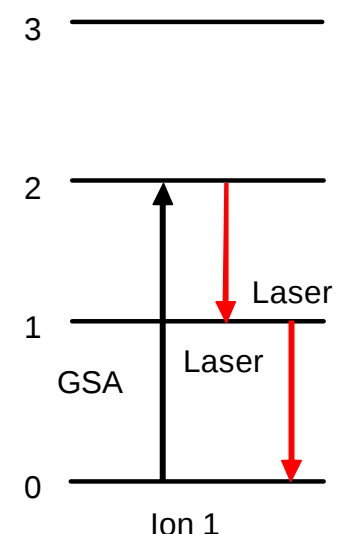
ESA



Energy Transfer



ETU



Laser

ZBLAN Fiber Laser at Low Dopant Concentration

Core-pumped fiber with typically

0.1 mol. % (1000 ppm molar) ($1.6 \times 10^{19} \text{ cm}^{-3}$)

**Low dopant concentration in combination with high-intensity
core pumping favors ground-state bleaching**

ESA becomes stronger than GSA

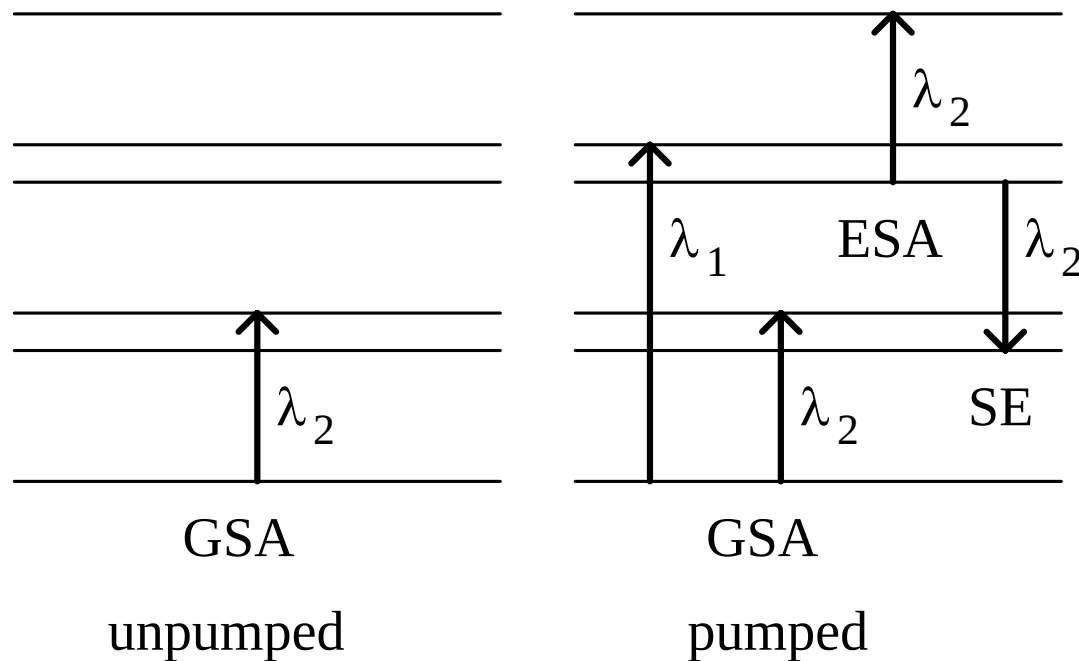
ETU is not important because of large distance between ions

Excited-State Absorption

GSA = Ground-State Absorption

ESA = Excited-State Absorption

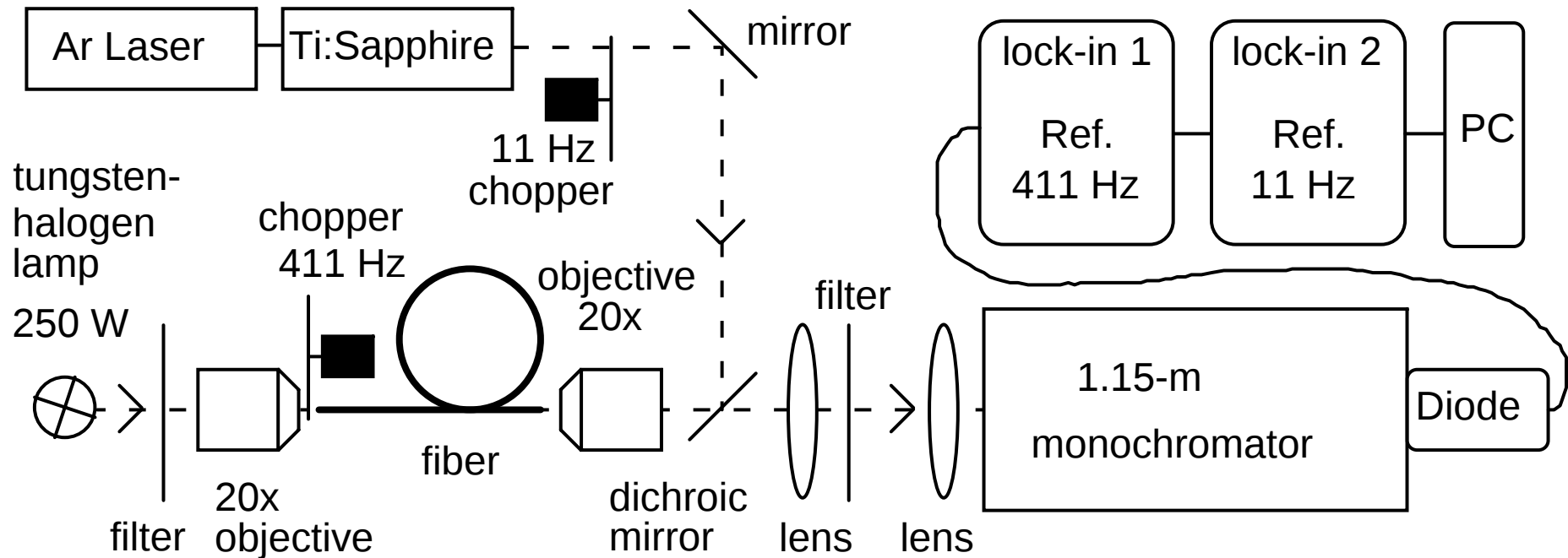
SE = Stimulated Emission



λ_1 = pump wavelength
(strong laser)

λ_2 = probe wavelength
(broadband lamp)

ESA Measurement

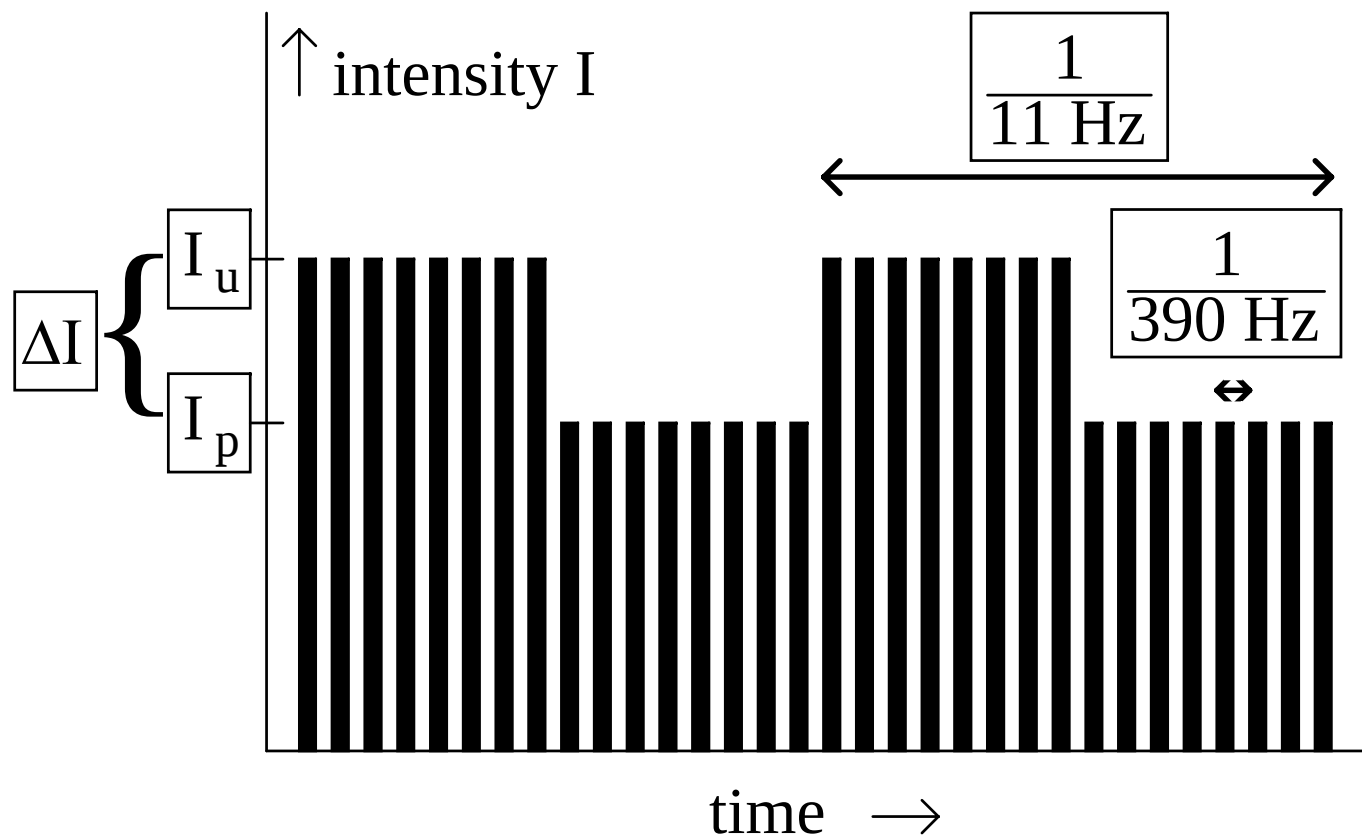


S. Zemon, SPIE Vol. 1373 (1990) 21

J. Koetke, Appl. Phys. B 61 (1995) 151

M. Pollnau, Appl. Phys. B 67 (1998) 23

Double Lock-in Amplifier Technique



2. Lock-in:

Ref. 11 Hz ,
detects ΔI

1. Lock-in:

Ref. 390 Hz ,
detects I_u or I_p

Determination of ESA Cross-Sections

Transmitted probe-beam intensity:

unpumped:

$$I_u = I_0 \exp\{-d \cdot N_e \cdot \sigma_{ESA}\}$$

pumped:

$$I_p = I_0 \exp\left\{d \left[-(1 - N_e) \cdot \sigma_{GSA} - \sum_i N_i \cdot \sigma_{ESA,i} + \sum_i N_i \cdot \sigma_{SE,i} \right] \right\}$$

Calculation:

$$\frac{1}{N_e \cdot d} \ln\left(\frac{I_u}{I_p}\right) + \sigma_{GSA} = \sum_i \left[\frac{N_i}{N_e} (\sigma_{ESA,i} - \sigma_{SE,i}) \right]$$

M. Pollnau, Appl. Phys. A 54 (1992) 404

M. Pollnau, Appl. Phys. B 67 (1998) 23

Determination of ESA Cross-Sections

Measure GSA cross-section σ_{GSA} , probe-beam intensities I_u , I_p

Fit excitation density N_e until measured bleaching is completely compensated by addition of GSA (at wavelengths where no ESA or SE occurs)

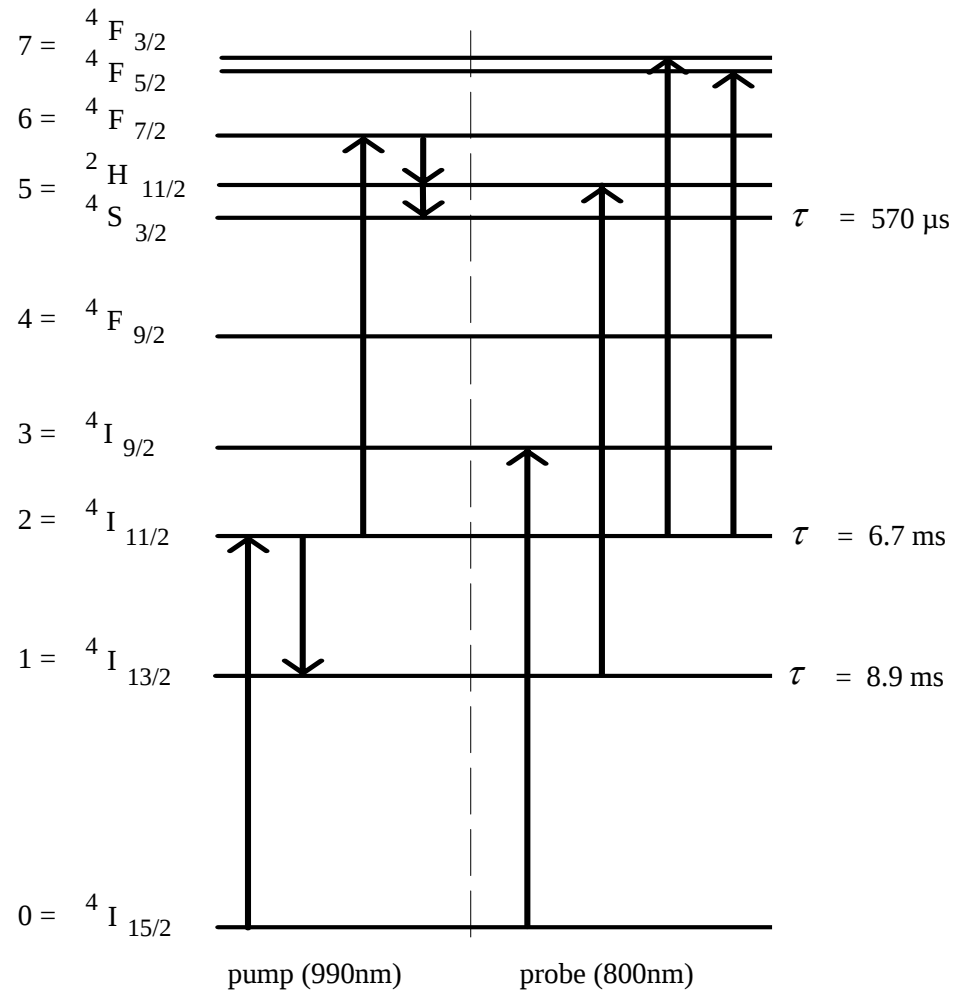
Obtain ESA cross-sections $\sigma_{\text{ESA},i}$ times relative population densities N_i/N_e

Determine relative population densities N_i/N_e and calculate ESA cross-sections $\sigma_{\text{ESA},i}$

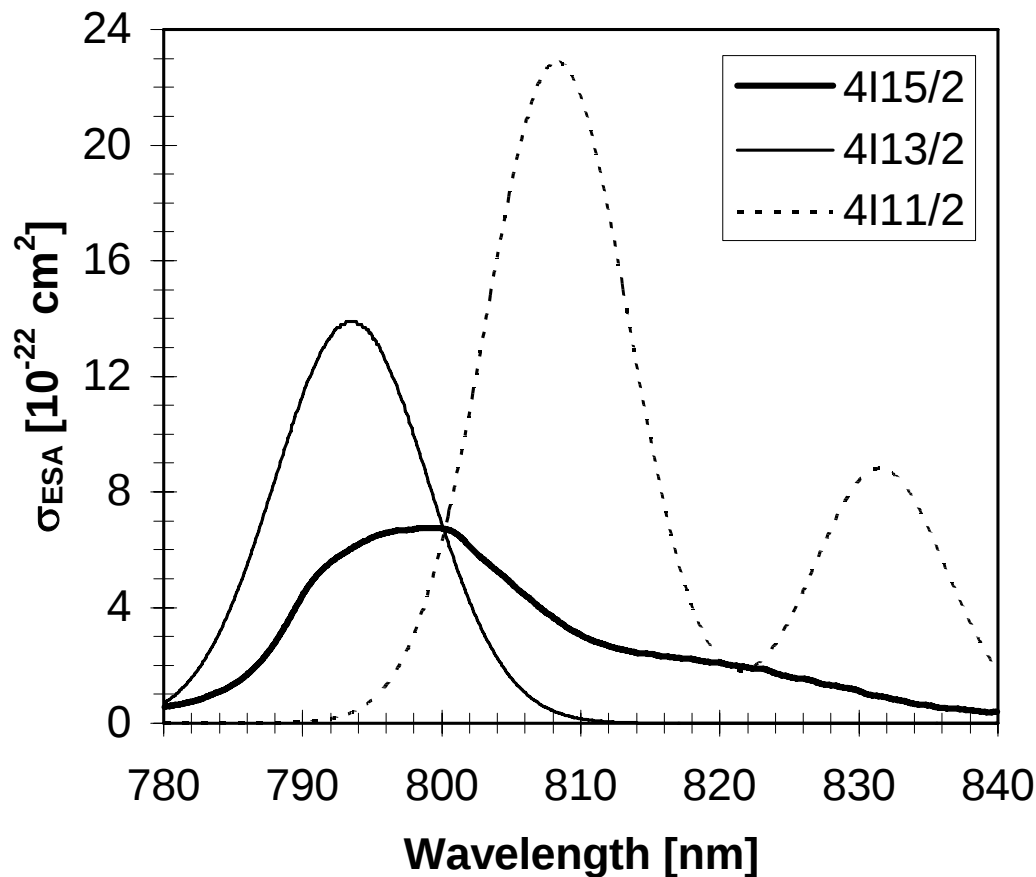
M. Pollnau, Appl. Phys. A 54 (1992) 404

M. Pollnau, Appl. Phys. B 67 (1998) 23

ESA at 800 nm in ZBLAN:Er³⁺



ESA Cross-Sections Near 800 nm



ESA cross sections determined from pump- and probe-beam measurements

M. Pollnau,
Appl. Phys. B 67 (1998) 23

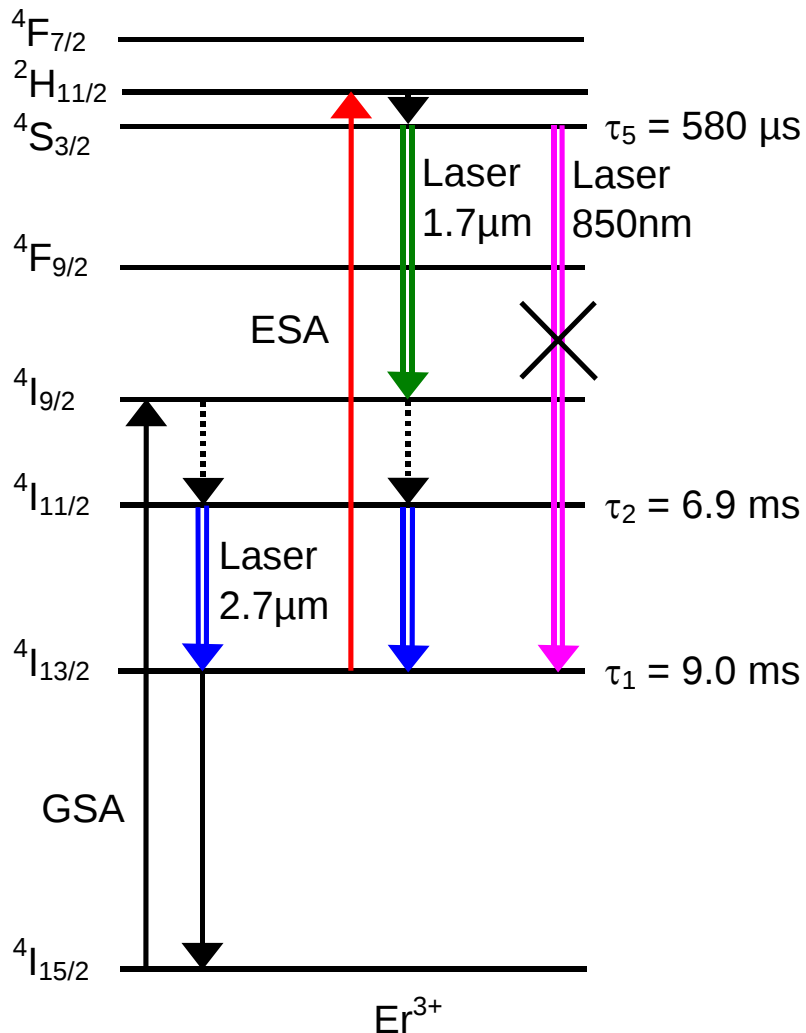
Best pump wavelength at 792 nm:

Relatively strong GSA,

Strong ESA from $4I_{13/2}$,

Weak ESA from $4I_{11/2}$

The Cascade-Lasing Regime



Two-loop cascade laser:

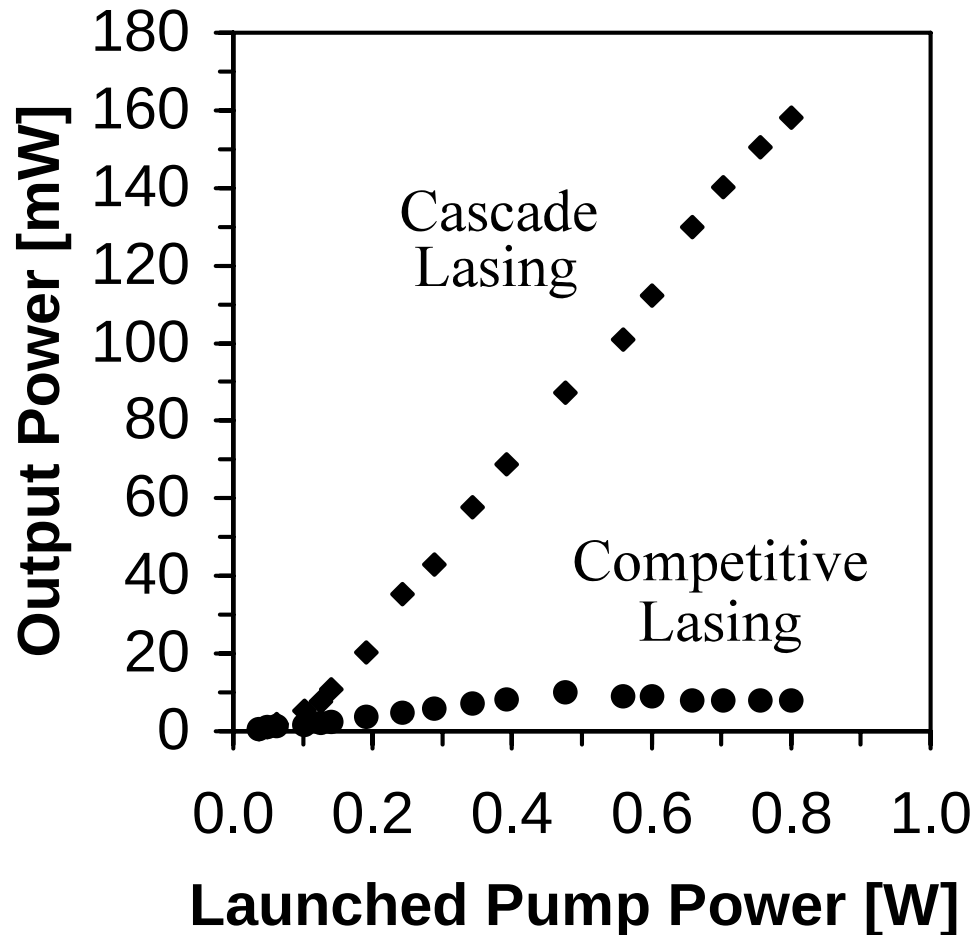
ESA depletes lower laser level of **2.7- μm laser**

$^4S_{3/2}$ level clamped to threshold inversion by **1.7- μm laser, energy recycled**

Competitive **850-nm laser**

$^4S_{3/2} \rightarrow ^4I_{13/2}$ (bypasses upper and populates lower laser level) is suppressed

Performance Under Cascade Lasing



**Ti:sapphire core-pumped
ZBLAN fiber laser at 2.7 μm :**

**Strong increase of slope eff. and
output power at the onset of
cascade-lasing:**

Slope eff. 23%

Output power 150 mW

***M. Pollnau, Appl. Phys. Lett. 66
(1995) 3564***

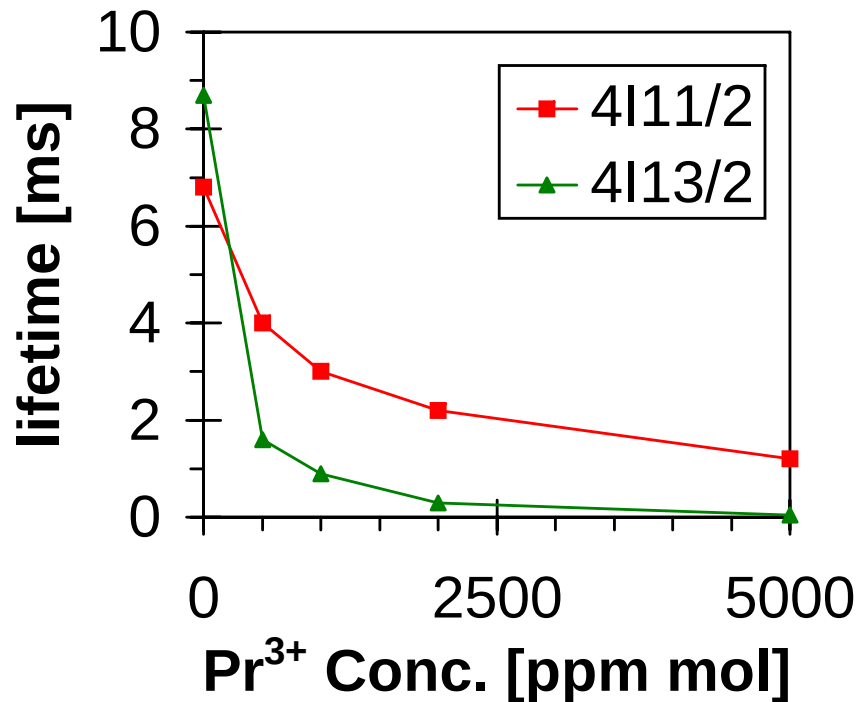
ZBLAN Fiber Laser at Medium Dopant Concentration

Cladding-pumped fiber with typically
1 mol. % (10000 ppm molar) ($1.6 \times 10^{20} \text{ cm}^{-3}$)
co-doped with Pr^{3+}

Higher dopant concentration in combination with low-intensity
cladding pumping and lifetime quenching by Pr^{3+} favors ET

Ground-state bleaching and ESA are not important because of
higher dopant concentration and low pump intensity

Er³⁺ Lifetimes in the Presence of Pr³⁺

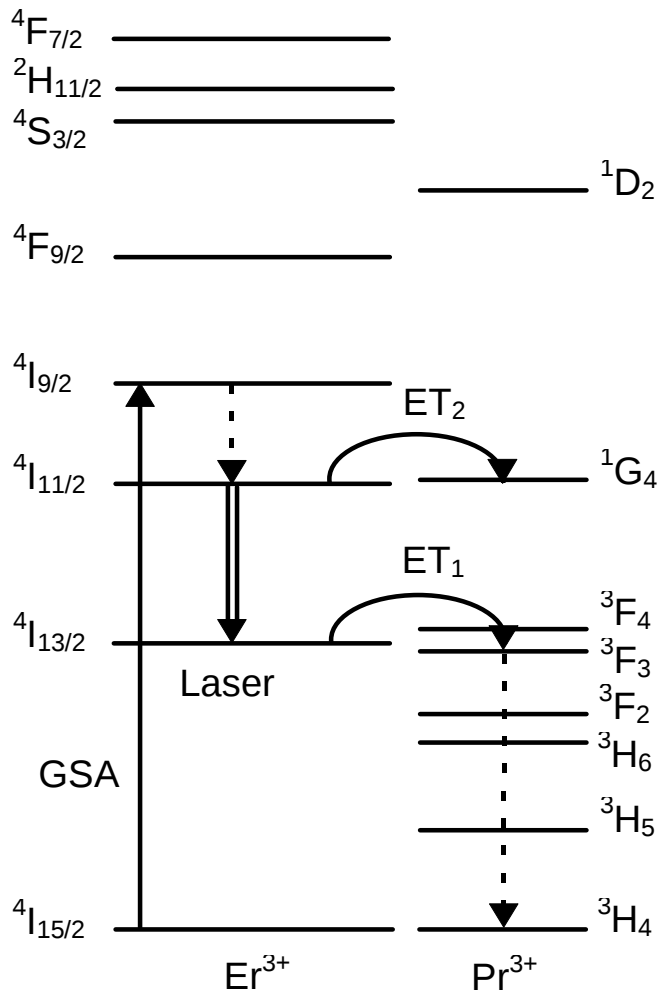


Lifetimes of ⁴I_{11/2} upper and
⁴I_{13/2} lower laser levels
vs. Pr³⁺ concentration

Quenching of lower level lifetime
much stronger
(from 9 ms down to 20 μs),
because corresponding
absorption transition in Pr³⁺
has high oscillator strength

*P.S. Golding,
Phys. Rev. B 62 (2000) 856*

The Lifetime-Quenching Regime



Simple four-level laser:

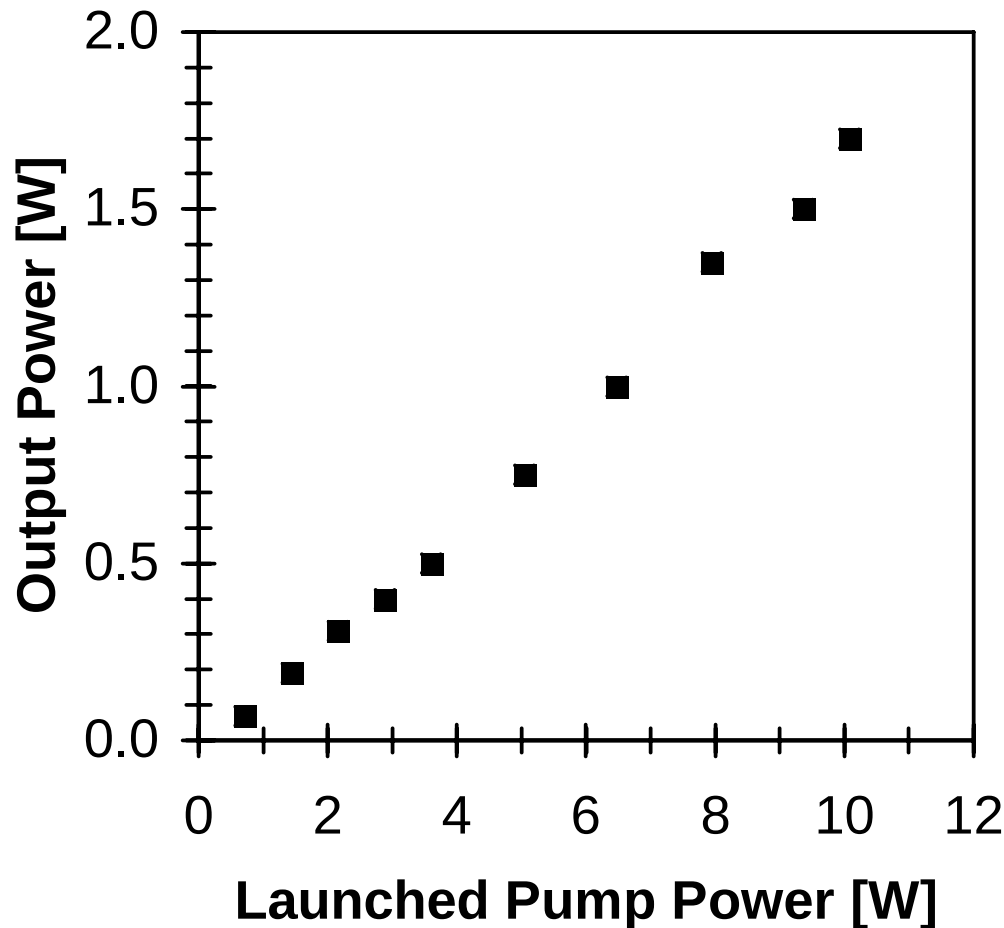
**Energy transfer to Pr^{3+} co-dopant
depletes lower laser level
efficiently**

**CW threshold condition
removes energy
from $4I_{11/2}$ upper laser level**

ESA is avoided

***M. Pollnau,
IEEE JQE 33 (1997) 1982***

Performance Under Lifetime Quenching



**Diode-pumped double-clad
ZBLAN fiber laser at
2.7 μm :**

**Low-brightness pump is
converted to single-mode
output**

Slope eff. 17%

Output power 1.7 W

***S. D. Jackson,
Opt. Lett. 24 (1999) 1133***

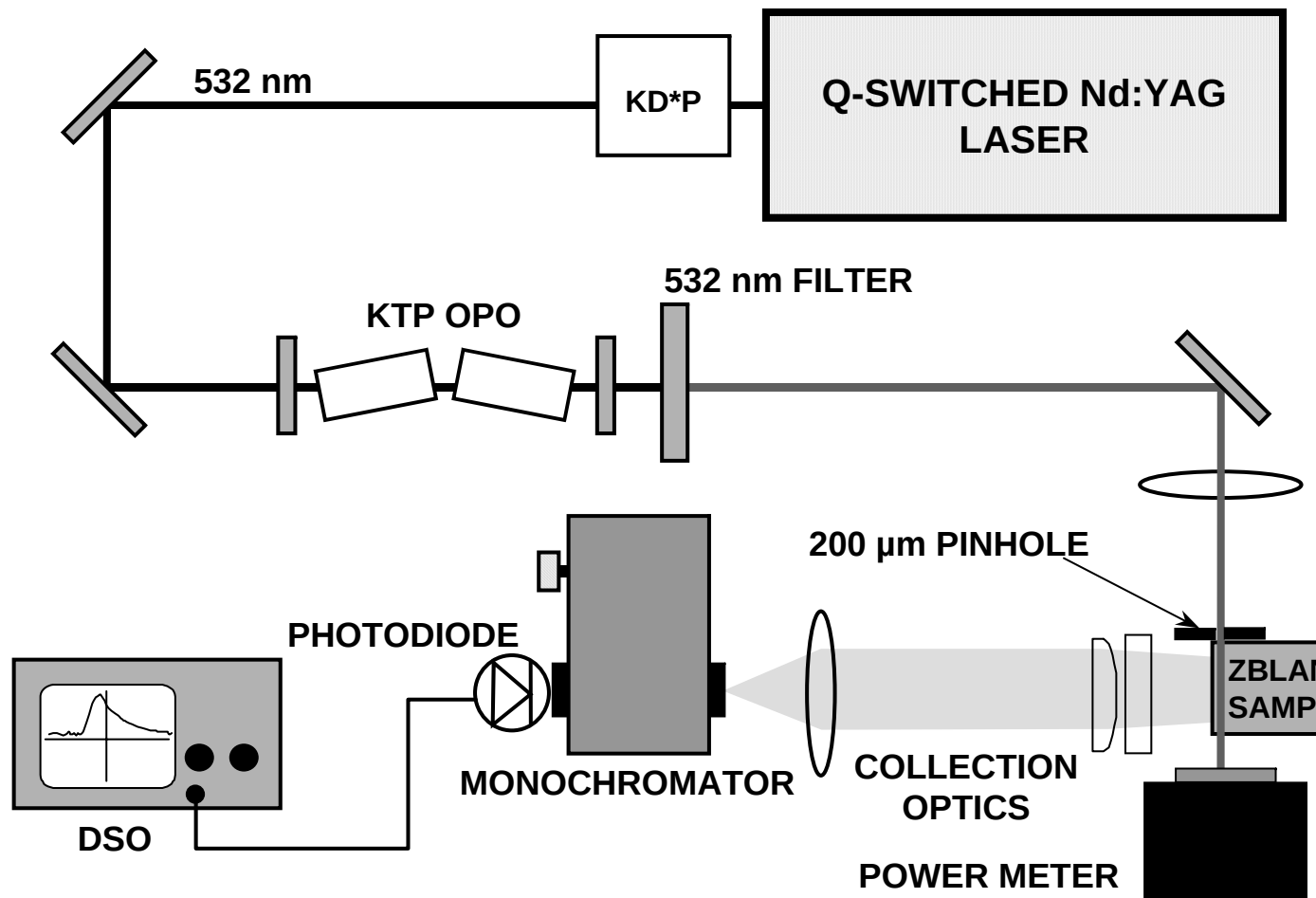
ZBLAN Fiber Laser at High Dopant Concentration

Cladding-pumped fiber with up to
10 mol. % (100000 ppm molar) ($1.6 \times 10^{21} \text{ cm}^{-3}$)

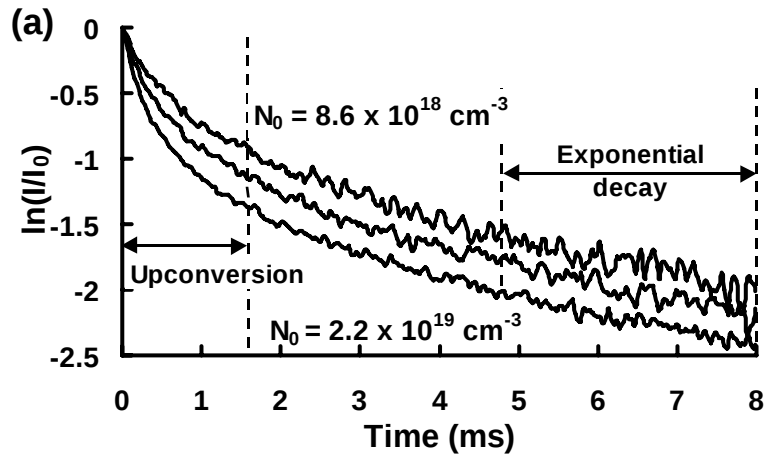
High dopant concentration favors ETU

Ground-state bleaching and ESA are not important because of
high dopant concentration and low pump intensity

Measurement of ETU



Measured Luminescence Decay



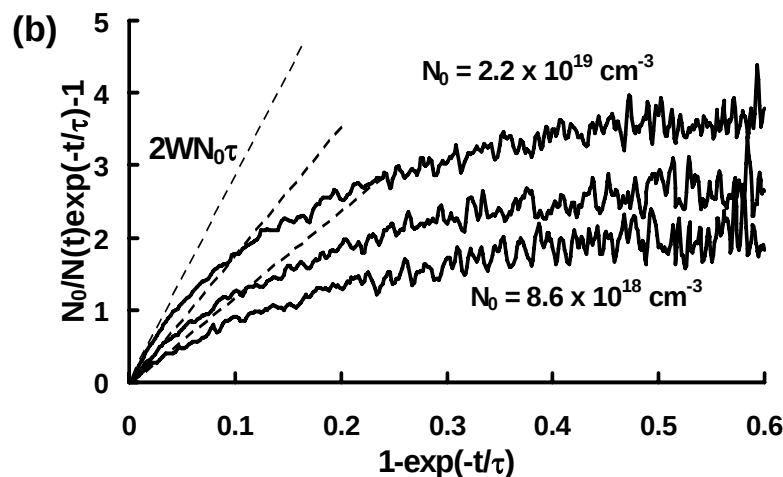
Normalized decay curves:

First temporal part:

high excitation density,
includes decay by ETU,
non-exponential

Last temporal part:

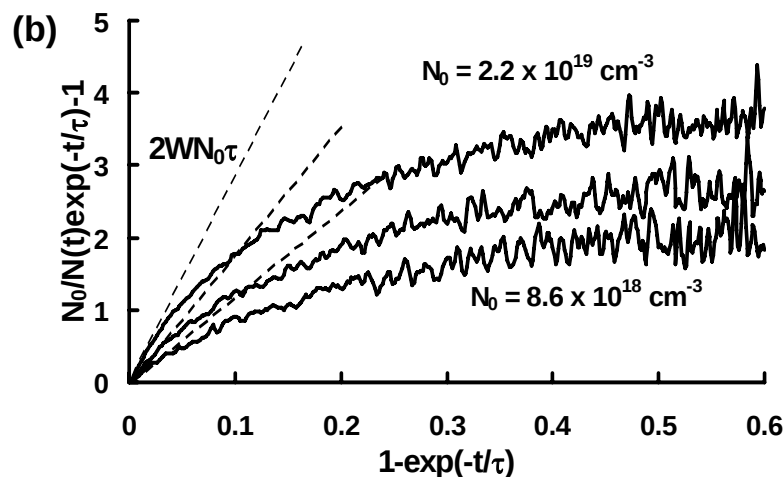
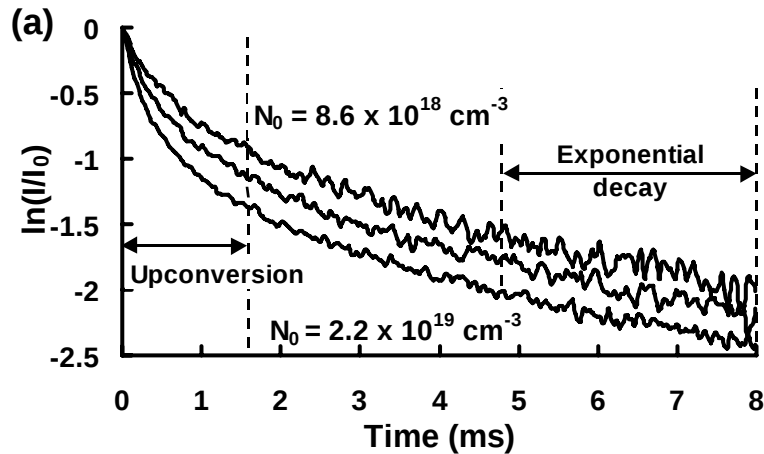
low excitation density,
includes no ETU,
exponential



P.S. Golding,

Phys. Rev. B 62 (2000) 856

Luminescence Decay Curves



Rate-equation for decay:

$$dN / dt = -\tau^{-1}N - 2WN^2$$

Solution (Bernoulli-Eq.):

$$N(t) = \frac{N_0 \exp(-t / \tau)}{1 + 2WN_0\tau[1 - \exp(-t / \tau)]}$$

Linearized solution:

$$\begin{aligned} [N_0 / N(t)] \exp(-t / \tau) - 1 \\ = 2WN_0\tau[1 - \exp(-t / \tau)] \end{aligned}$$

$$Y = A \cdot X$$

*T. Jensen, Ph.D. Thesis,
Univ. Hamburg (2000)*

Determination of ETU Parameters

Linearized solution:

$$\left[N_0 / N(t) \right] \exp(-t / \tau) - 1 = 2WN_0\tau \left[1 - \exp(-t / \tau) \right]$$

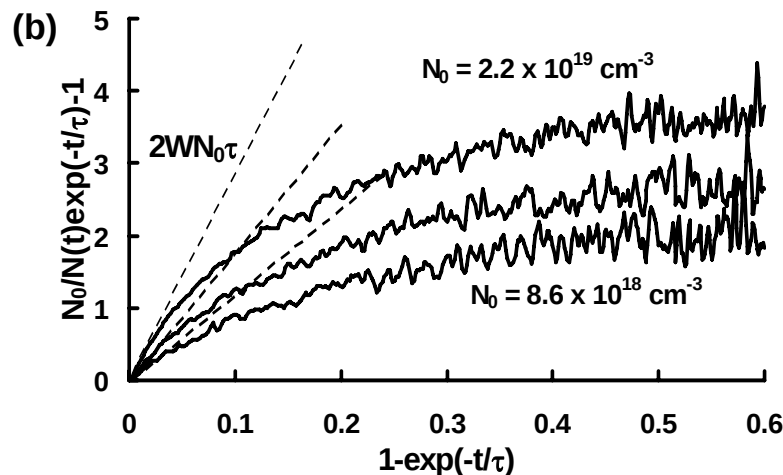
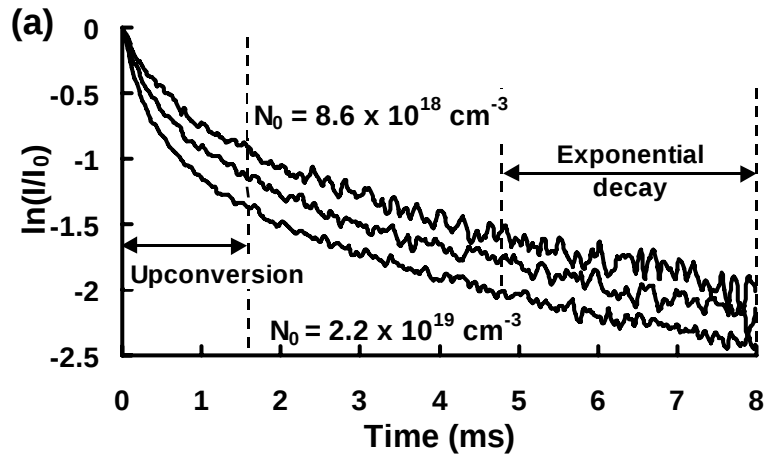
Determine

t from exponential part,

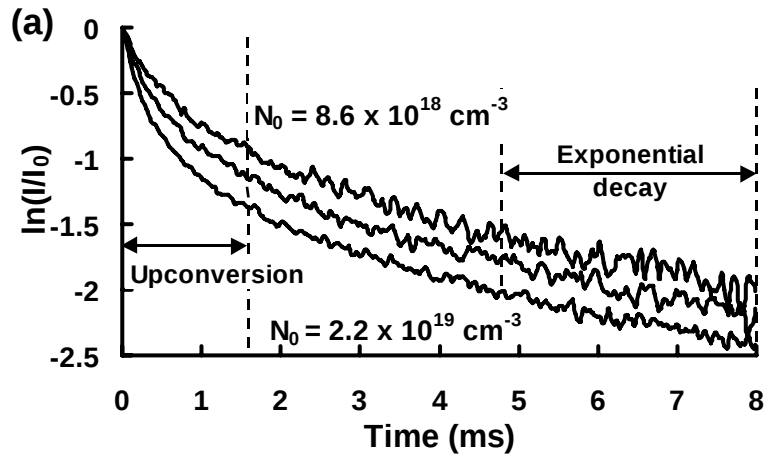
N_0 from excited volume and absorbed pump energy,

Fit straight lines $\Rightarrow W$

*T. Jensen, Ph.D. Thesis,
Univ. Hamburg (2000)*



Advantage of Procedure

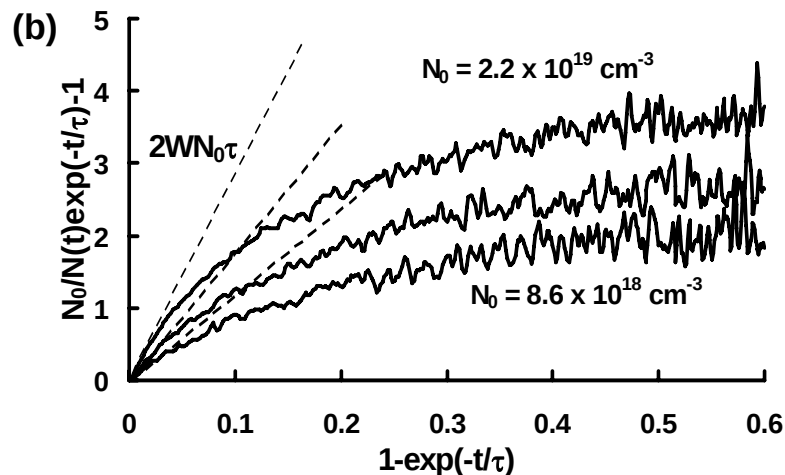


If equation were not linearized,
onset of repopulation from
higher levels would not be seen

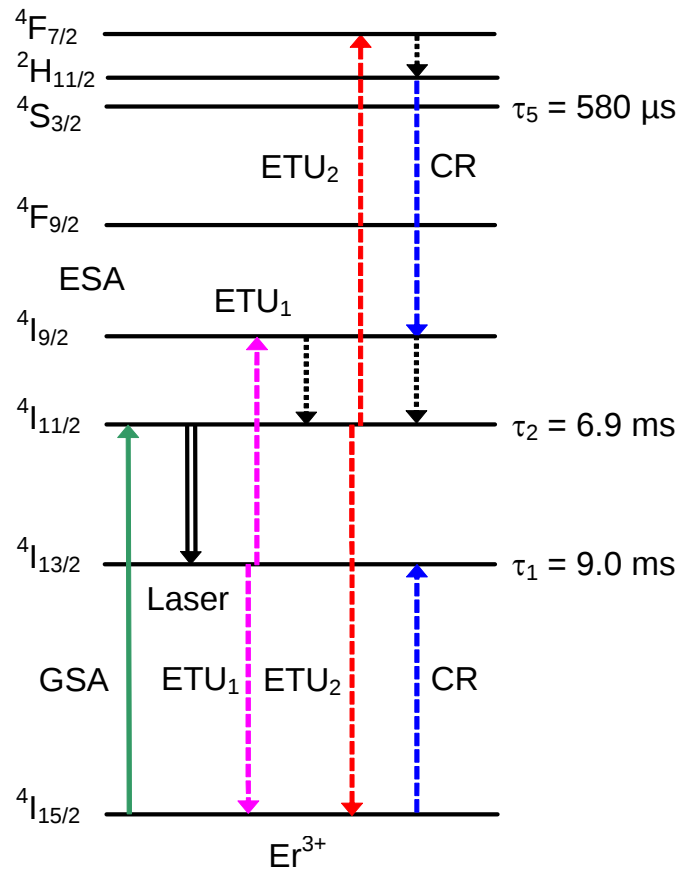
⇒ complete set of rate equations
from all levels must be solved

⇒ one has to know all parameters
(further ETU parameters !!!)

*T. Jensen, Ph.D. Thesis,
Univ. Hamburg (2000)*



ETU and CR Processes



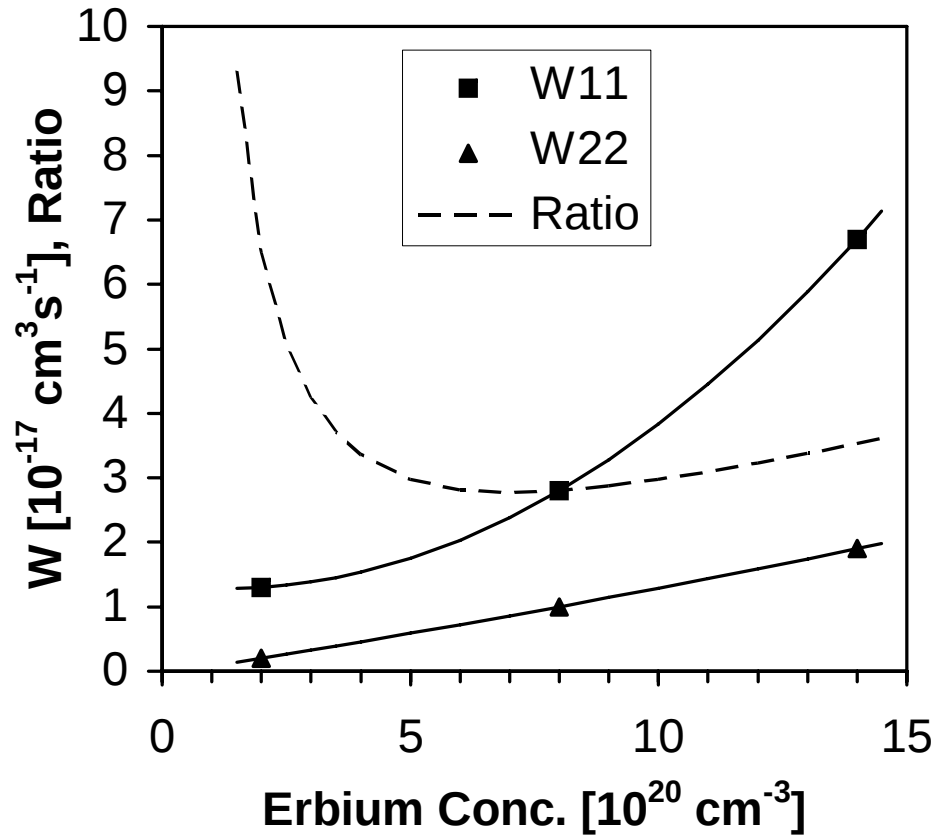
Measured parameters:

CR from $^4S_{3/2}$ level

ETU from $^4I_{11/2}$ upper laser level

ETU from $^4I_{13/2}$ lower laser level

ETU Parameters



ETU parameters determined
from fluorescence decay

P.S. Golding,
Phys. Rev. B 62 (2000) 856

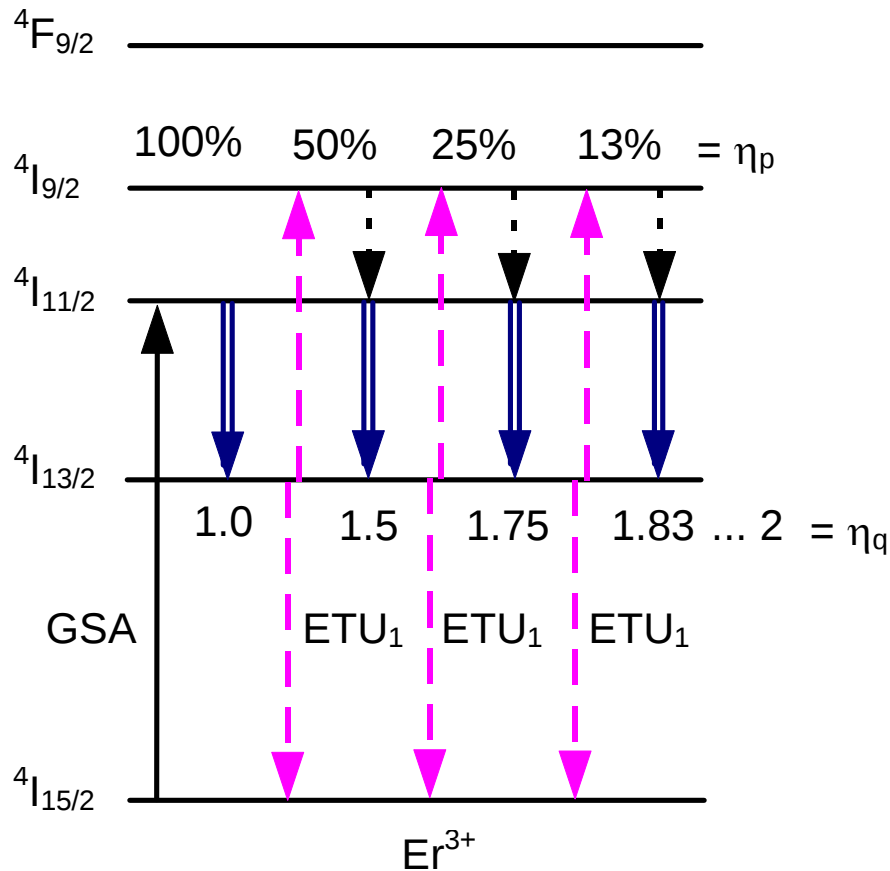
Quantum efficiency:

$$\eta_q = 2 - \frac{b_1^2}{b_2^2} \frac{W_{22}}{W_{11}}$$

Important: Ratio W_{11}/W_{22}

M. Pollnau,
IEEE JQE 32 (1996) 657

The Energy-Recycling Regime



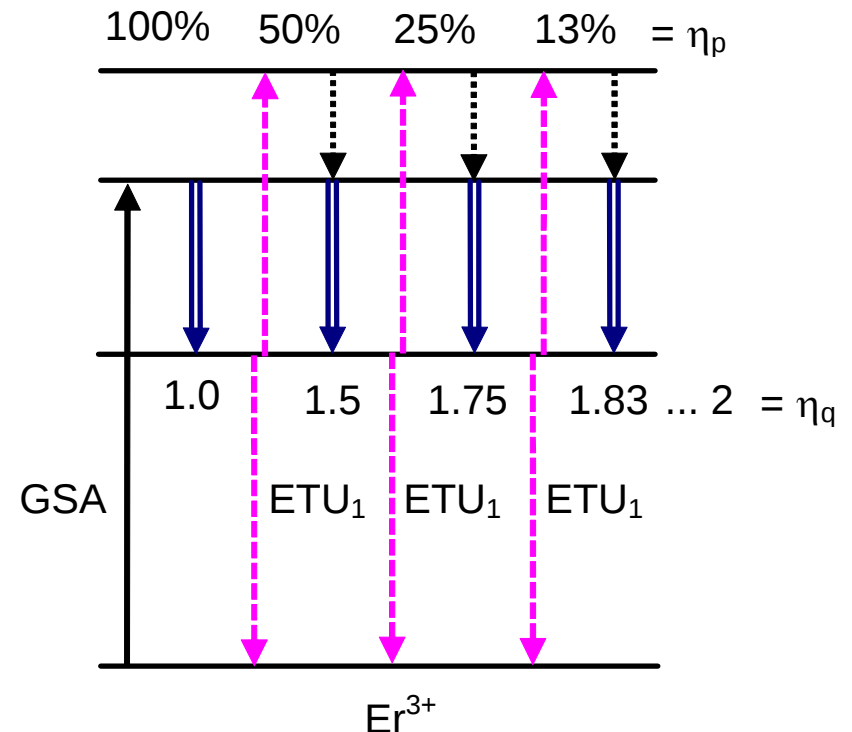
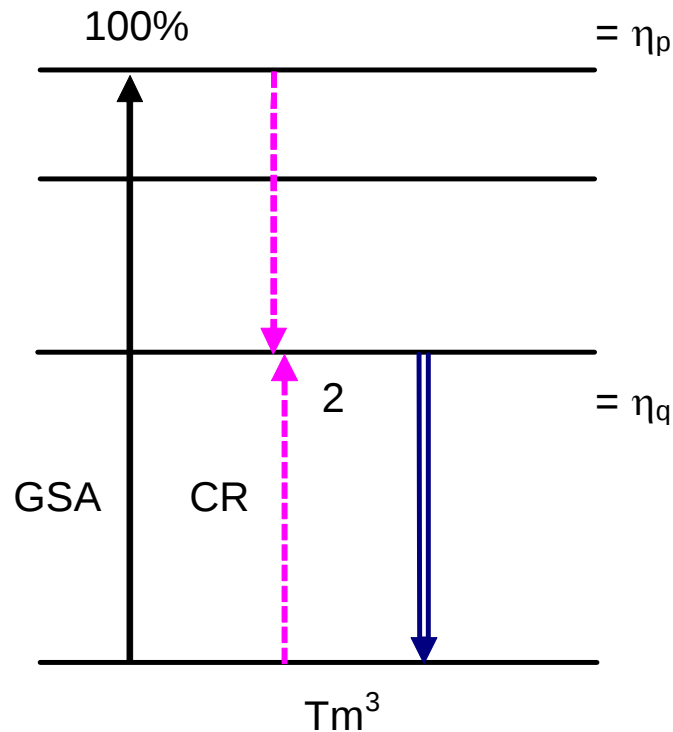
ETU processes from
lower laser level ($4I_{13/2}$)
recycles energy to
upper laser level ($4I_{11/2}$)

⇒ quantum efficiency of 2

⇒ increase in slope efficiency by
factor of 2

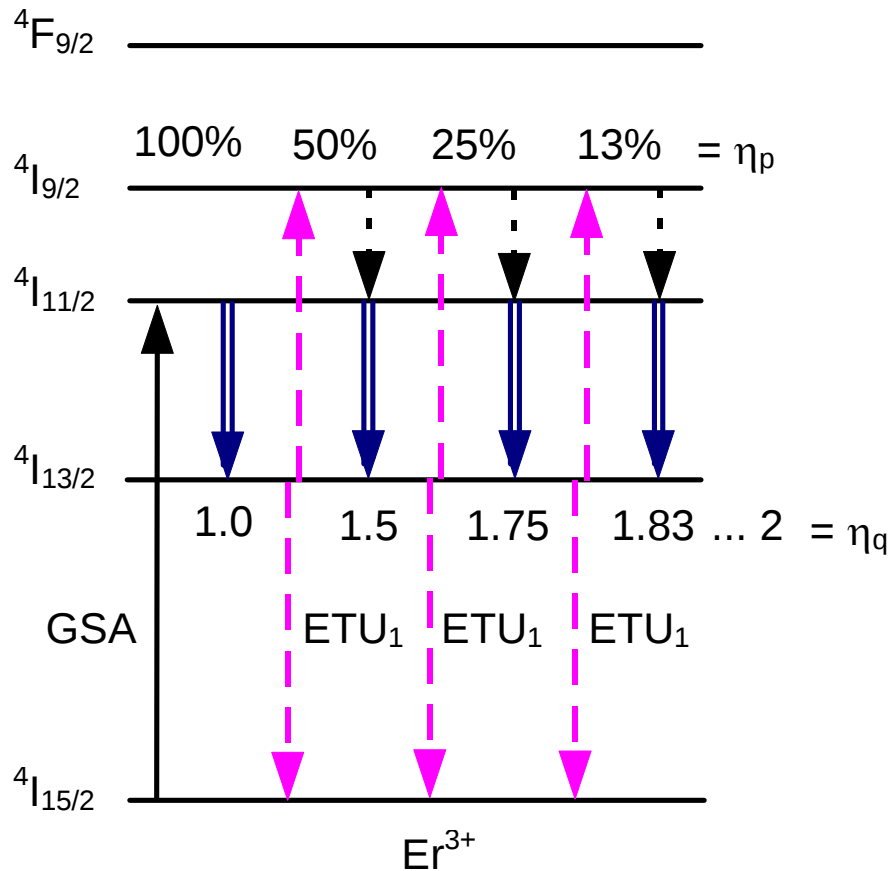
*M. Pollnau, IEEE J. Select. Topics
Quantum Electron. 7 (2001) 30*

Comparison: Thulium 2- μm vs. Erbium 3- μm Lasers



In both cases: increase in slope efficiency by factor of 2

Experimental Results in Crystals



Various host materials
(YLF, YAG, YSGG, GGG, ...)

~1 W output power

T. Jensen, Opt. Lett. 21 (1996) 585

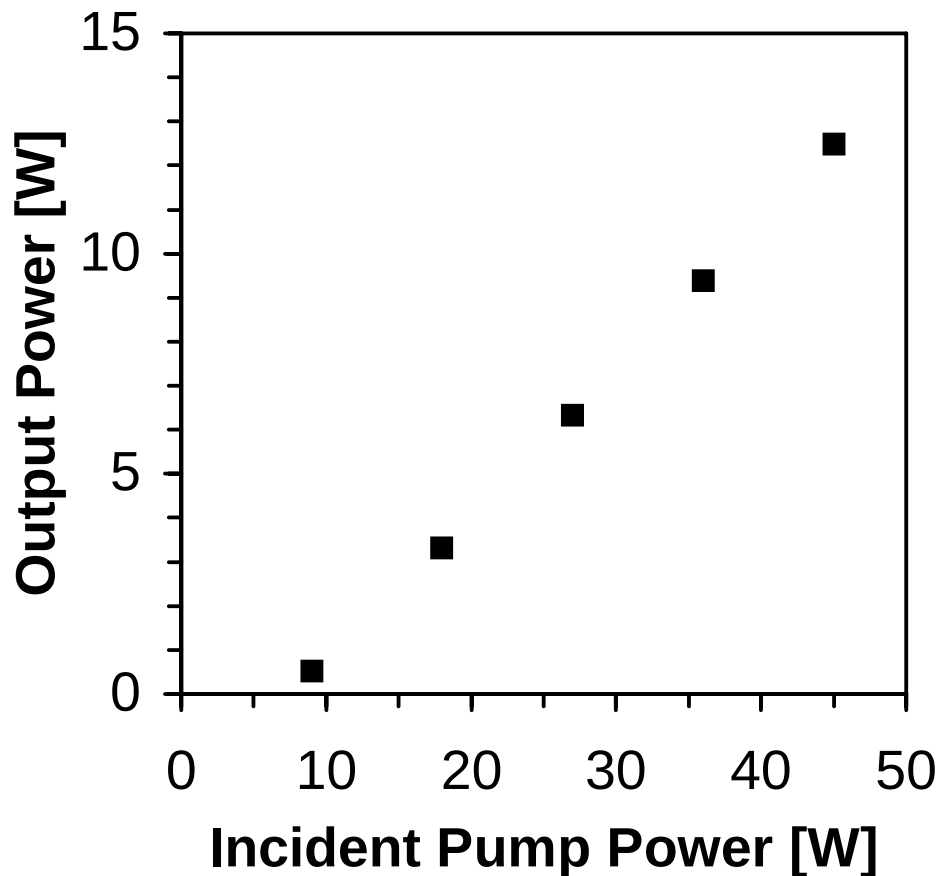
~50% slope efficiency

C. Wyss, Opt. Commun. 139 (1997) 215

~2-4 W output power

A.Y. Dergachev, CLEO Technical Digest (2000), 564

Expected Fiber Performance Under Energy Recycling



**Diode-pumped double-clad
ZBLAN fiber laser at 2.7 μm :**

Rate-equation calculation:

ETU can be exploited

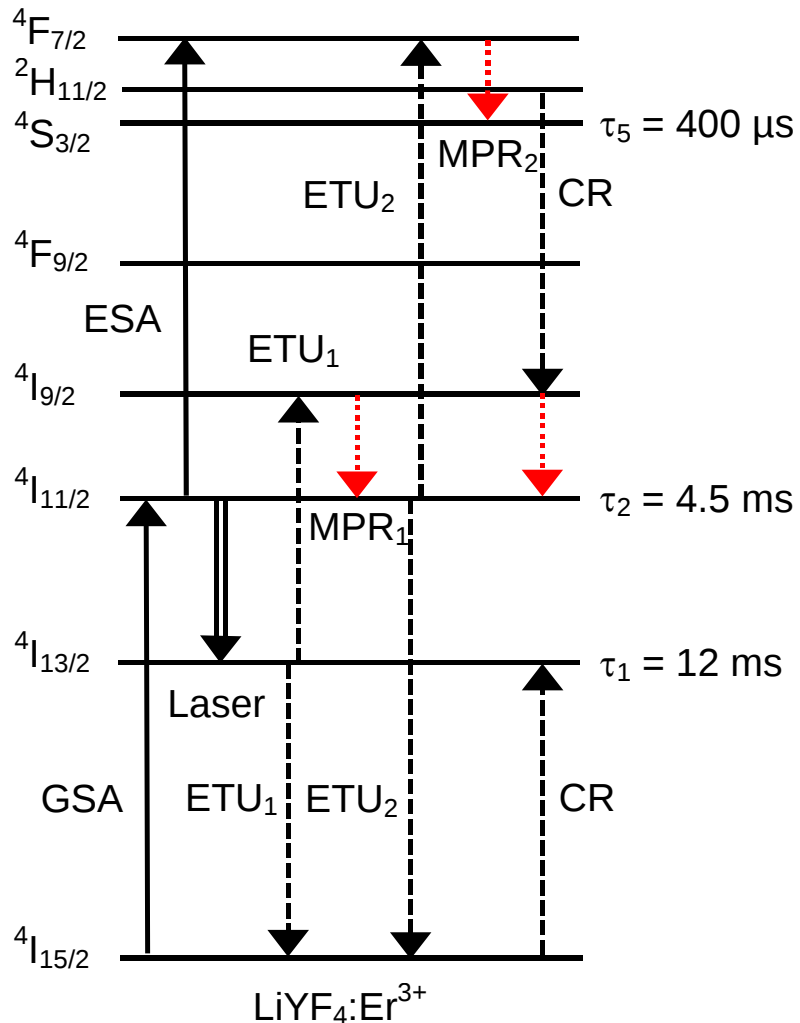
Prediction:

Slope eff. 50%

Output power >10 W

***M. Pollnau,
IEEE JQE 38 (2002) 162***

The Thermal Problem



Strong heat load owing to
multiphonon relaxations
following the ETU processes

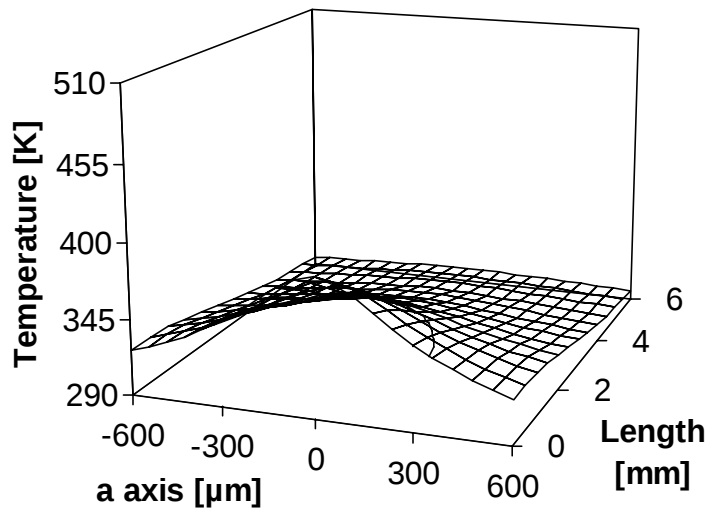
⇒ strong temperature increase

⇒ strong thermal lensing
(crystal laser:
2x that of 1- μm Nd^{3+} laser!)

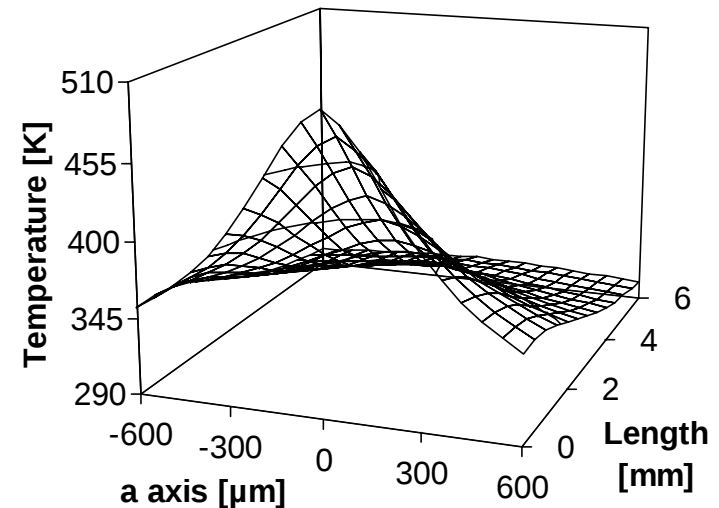
⇒ rod fracture

⇒ fiber melting

Example: $\text{LiYF}_4:\text{Er}^{3+}$



Lasing conditions



Non-lasing conditions

M. Pollnau, IEEE J Q-E 39 (2003) 350

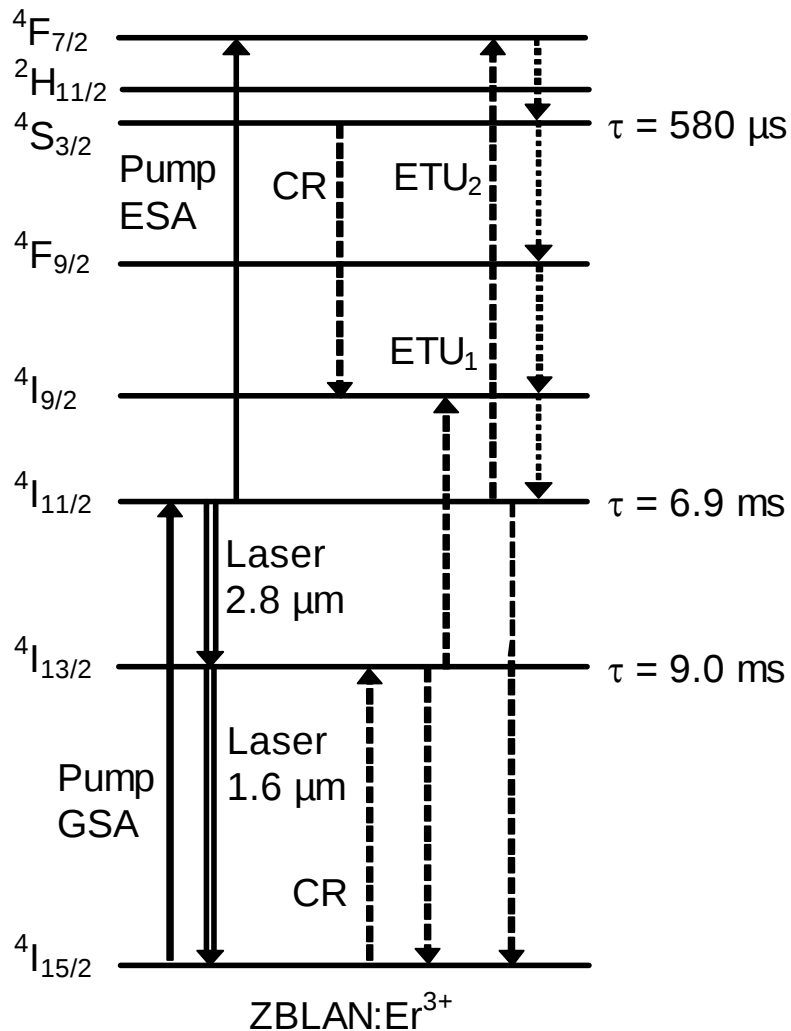
ZBLAN Fiber Laser at Medium Dopant Concentration

Cladding-pumped fiber with typically
0.5 mol. % (5000 ppm molar) ($8 \times 10^{19} \text{ cm}^{-3}$)

Lower dopant concentration in combination with low-intensity
cladding pumping and cascade lasing at $1.6 \mu\text{m}$ diminishes
other spectroscopic processes

ESA and ETU are not that important because of low excitation
density, ET is impossible because of lack of Pr^{3+}

Population Dynamics in Lower Cascade Lasing



The laser at 2.8 μm starts lasing first.

As soon as the laser transition at 1.6 μm reaches threshold,

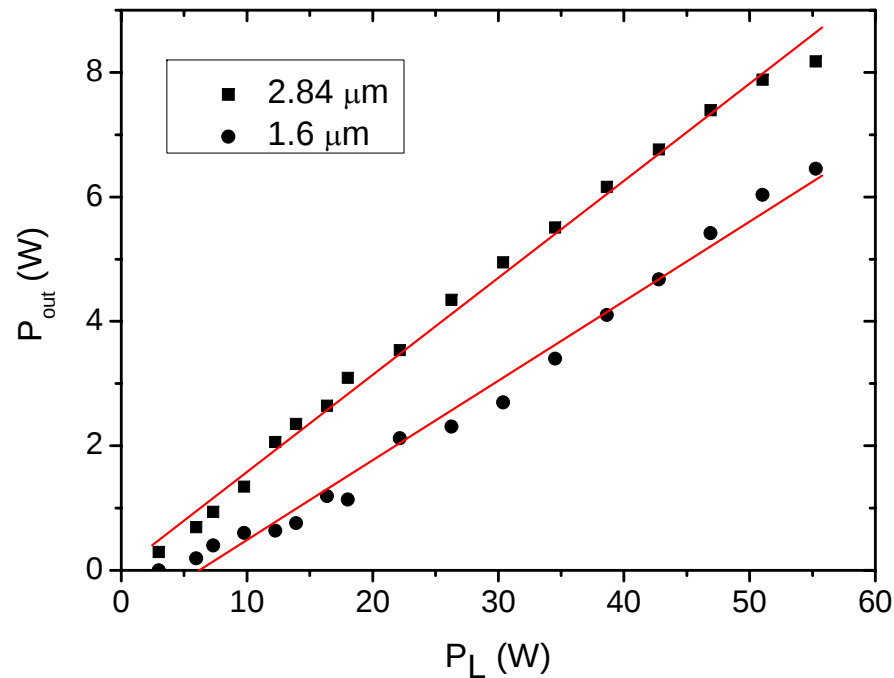
$4I_{11/2}$ is clamped to threshold inversion vs. $4I_{13/2}$,

$4I_{13/2}$ is clamped to threshold inversion vs. $4I_{15/2}$.

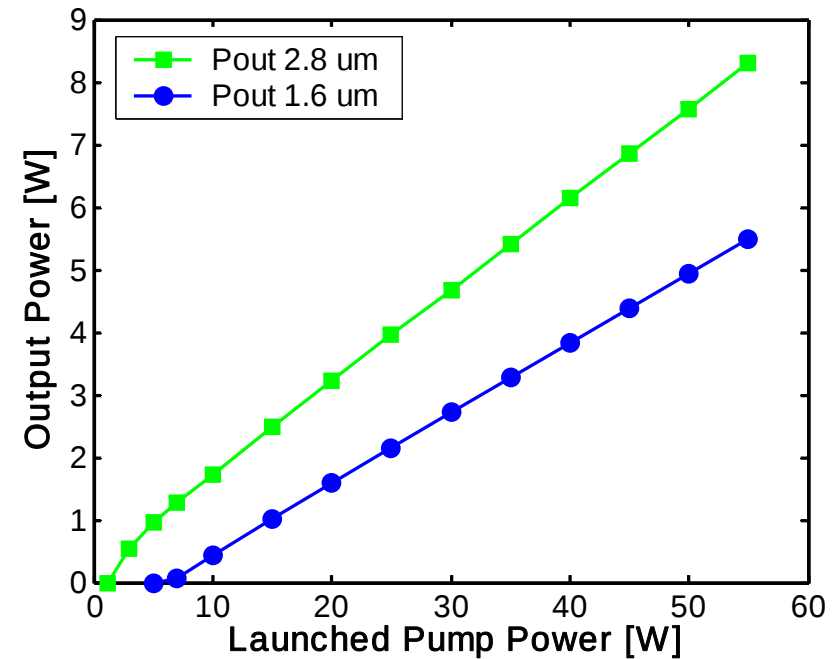
$\Rightarrow$ All three levels remain at constant density, heat input is minimal, no parasitic processes become important.

Input-Output Curves

Experimental



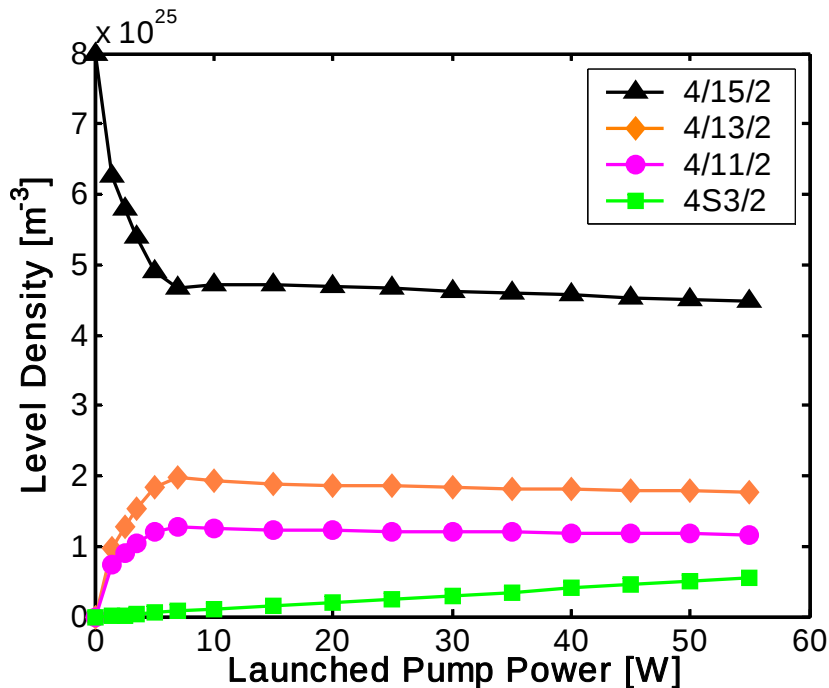
Calculated



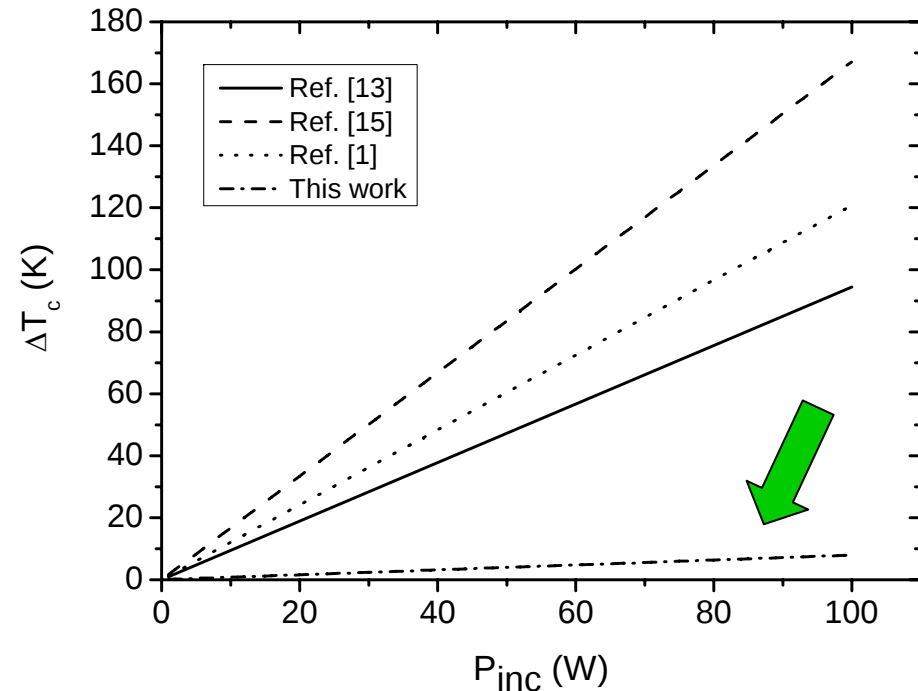
S.D. Jackson et al., submitted (2010)

Population Densities and Heat Input

Calculated population densities



Calculated heat input



Concerning heat input, there's plenty of room for higher power!

S.D. Jackson et al., submitted (2010)

Latest Experimental Result

Uncooled ZBLAN fiber doped with 6 mol% Er^{3+}

9 W output power with 21% slope efficiency.

X.S. Zhu et al., Opt. Lett. 32 (2007) 26

Cooled ZBLAN fiber doped with 6 mol% Er^{3+}

24 W output power with 16% slope efficiency.

S. Tokita et al., Opt. Lett. 34 (2009) 3062

Uncooled ZBLAN fiber doped with 0.5 mol% Er^{3+}

8 W output power with 19% slope efficiency, cascade laser.

S.D. Jackson et al., submitted (2010)

Other 3- μm Fiber Lasers

T. Sumiyoshi,

**“High-power continuous-wave 3- and 2- μm cascade
Ho³⁺:ZBLAN fiber laser and its medical applications”,
IEEE J. Select. Topics Quantum Electron. 5 (1999) 936**

S.D. Jackson,

**“Single-transverse-mode 2.5 W holmium-doped fluoride fiber laser
operating at 2.86 μm ”,
Opt. Lett. 29 (2004) 334**

S.D. Jackson,

**“Continuous wave 2.9 μm dysprosium-doped fluoride fiber laser”,
Appl. Phys. Lett. 83 (2003) 1316**

Summary

Population mechanisms of Er^{3+} 3- μm fiber laser depend on Er^{3+} conc., pump parameters, fiber geometry

$\Rightarrow$ we need to understand its spectroscopy!

With increasing erbium conc., four different operation regimes have successfully been demonstrated experimentally:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. core pump, ESA | $\Rightarrow$ upper cascade lasing |
| 2. clad pump, codoping | $\Rightarrow$ lifetime quenching |
| 3. clad pump, ETU | $\Rightarrow$ energy recycling |
| 4. clad pump, laser depletion | $\Rightarrow$ lower cascade lasing |

Current output power is at 9 W uncooled and 24 W cooled.