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Nikolov, Nikola Ivanov; Bang, Ole; Bjarklev, Anders Overgaard

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Improving efficiency of supercontinuum generation in photonic crystal fibers by direct degenerate four-wave-mixing

N.I. Nikolov (1,2), O. Bang (1), A. Bjarklev (3)
1: Department of Informatics and Mathematical Modelling, Technical University of Denmark, DK-2800 Kongens Lyngby, Denmark, nin@imm.dtu.dk / ob@imm.dtu.dk
2. Risø National Laboratory, Optics and Fluid Dynamics Department, OFD-128 P.O. Box 49, DK-4000 Roskilde, Denmark
3: Research Center COM, Technical University of Denmark, ab@com.dtu.dk

Abstract: The efficiency of supercontinuum generation in photonic crystal fibers is significantly improved by designing the dispersion to allow widely separated spectral lines generated by degenerate four-wave-mixing directly from the pump to broaden and merge.

Introduction.
Photonic crystal fibers (PCFs) [1] and tapered fibers [2] are promising sources for efficient supercontinuum generation (SCG) due to their unusual dispersion properties and high effective nonlinearities. These fibers have similar dispersion and nonlinearity characteristics and they have the advantage that their dispersion may be modified by a proper design of the cladding structure [3], and by changing the degree of tapering [2], respectively. Using femtosecond pulses a supercontinuum (SC) spanning one octave has been generated in a PCF, whereas impressive two octave SC has been obtained in a tapered fiber. The latter two octave wide SC was later explained to be a result of self-phase modulation (SPM) and direct degenerate four-wave-mixing (FWM) [4].

However complex high power femtosecond lasers are not necessary, SCG may be achieved with picosecond and even nanosecond pulses. Thus Coen et al. generated a one octave SC in a PCF using sub-kilowatt picosecond pulses and showed that the primary mechanism was the combined effect of stimulated Raman scattering (SRS) and parametric FWM, allowing the Raman shifted components to interact efficiently with the pump [5]. Here we show how direct degenerate FWM can be used to significantly improve the efficiency of SCG with sub-kilowatt picosecond pulses in PCFs, if the dispersion is properly designed.

Improving efficiency of SCG with picosecond pulses in PCFs using degenerate FWM.
We study the SCG process numerically using the well known coupled nonlinear Schrödinger equations that describe the evolution of the x- and y-polarization components of the field for pulses with a spectral width up to 1/3 of the pump frequency [5]. This model accounts for SPM, cross-phase-modulation, FWM, and SRS. An initial random phase noise seeding of one photon per mode is included.

We consider the same PCF and numerical and experimental data as in [5], kindly provided by S. Coen. Thus we pump along the slow axis with 30 ps pulses of Ip=400W peak power and pump wavelength λp=647nm. Our PCF has core area Acore=1.94μm², dispersion D(λp)=30ps/(nm km), zero dispersion wavelength λz=875nm, n2=3x10⁻²²m²/W, and birefringence n1-n2=1.9x10⁻⁶. The dispersion is expanded around the pump to include β2=7.0ps⁴/km, β3=5.1x10⁵ps⁶/km, β4=4.9x10⁷ps⁸/km, β5=1.2x10⁴, ps¹⁰/km, and β6=1.2x10³ps¹²/km. A uniform loss of 0.1dB/m is used and the effective area is approximated with the core area, giving the nonlinearity parameter γ=2πn2/(λpAcore)=0.15(Wm)⁻¹.

![Image](image_url)

**Fig. 1** a) Phase-mismatch Δβ and spectrum of the slow axis polarization component at L=17.4cm. b) Same spectrum at L=4.3cm, 2.6m and 3.7m.

We use the standard split-step Fourier method with 2¹⁷ points in a time window of T=236ps. In our longest
The loss and walk-off of the PCF gives the maximum distance \( L_{\text{max}} \) over which nonlinear processes, and thus the SCG process, are efficient. From Fig. 1(b) we see that after the FWM stokes and anti-stokes components are generated they broaden much in the same way as the central part of the spectrum around the pump. The merging of the spectral parts around \( \lambda_{\text{sa}} \), \( \lambda_{\text{p}} \), and \( \lambda_{\text{s}} \) would create an ultra broad spectrum as observed in tapered fibers with femtosecond pulses [2,4]. However, in this particular case the FWM stokes and anti-stokes lines are too far away for a merging to take place within the maximum length \( L_{\text{max}} \), i.e., before nonlinear effects become negligible.

The wavelengths \( \lambda_{\text{s}} \) and \( \lambda_{\text{sa}} \) can be adjusted to be closer to the pump wavelength \( \lambda_{\text{p}} \) by a proper design of the dispersion. This will enable the FWM stokes and anti-stokes lines to broaden enough to allow a final merging. To show the effect we modify \( \beta_0 \), \( \beta_s \), and \( \beta_a \) to \( \beta_0=1.0 \text{ps}^2/\text{km} \), \( \beta_s=-2.5 \times 10^6 \text{ps}^3/\text{km} \), and \( \beta_a=-3.25 \times 10^{-10} \text{ps}^5/\text{km} \). The phase-matching condition \( \Delta \beta=0 \) then gives \( \lambda_s=850 \text{nm} \) and \( \lambda_{\text{sa}}=530 \text{nm} \). The effect on the dispersion profile is to down-shift the zero dispersion wavelength to \( \lambda_{\text{p}}=660 \text{nm} \) and reduce the normal dispersion to \( D(\lambda_{\text{sa}})=-4.35 \text{ps}/(\text{nm} \cdot \text{km}) \), as shown in Fig. 2.

The numerical results shown in Fig. 3 confirm our hypothesis. The FWM stokes and anti-stokes lines are still widely separated, but now generated close enough to the pump to broaden and merge. The resulting ultrabroad SC is flat within 20dB and spans 510nm (at -40dB from the flat part) in contrast to the original 230nm observed in [5].

Fig. 3 a) Phase-mismatch \( \Delta \beta \) and spectrum of the slow axis polarization component at \( L=17.4\text{cm} \). b) Same spectrum at \( L=8.7\text{cm}, 43\text{cm} \), and \( 2.154\text{m} \).

Conclusion:
We have numerically considered SCG in birefringent PCFs using sub-kilowatt picosecond pulses. Our results show that by properly designing the dispersion properties and using the simultaneous broadening and final merging of widely separated pump and FWM stokes and anti-stokes lines the SCG efficiency can be significantly improved. Further investigations will involve the robustness of the process towards variations in the birefringence along the PCF. This work was supported by the Danish Technical Research Council (Grant no. 26-00-0355) and the Graduate School in Nonlinear Science (The Danish Research Agency).

References: