Low-energy collective electronic excitations at metal surfaces

Vyacheslav M. Silkin^{1,2,3} and *E. V. Chulkov*^{1,2}

¹ Donostia International Physics Center, Donostia/San Sebastian, Spain,

² Departamento de Fisica de Materiales, Facultad de Ciencias Químicas, Universidad del Pais Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, Donostia/San Sebastian, Spain

³ IKERBASQUE, Basque Foundation for Science, Bilbao, Spain

E-mail: waxslavas@sc.ehu.es

Address : Donostia International Physics Center, Paseo Manuel de Lardizabal 4, 20018
Donostia/San Sebastian, Basque Country, Spain

Telephone : +34-943018284

Collective electronic excitations at metal surfaces are well known to play a key role in numerous phenomena, ranging from physics and material science to biology and medicine. From the fifties it is known [1] that at the planar vacuum/metal boundary a mode, called surface plasmon, may emerge with frequency, $\omega_{sp} = \omega_p/\sqrt{2}$ where ω_p is the bulk plasmon frequency. This relation between the bulk and surface plasmon frequencies is a manifestation of the fact that in a long-wavelength limit both quantities are entirely determined by the bulk dielectric function properties. In particular, the surface plasmon properties at small momentum transfers can be studied on the base of a surface response function ϵ [2] related to the bulk dielectric function as $g=(\epsilon-1)/(\epsilon+1)$.

In real metallic systems the bulk dielectric function is often very different from the predictions of the free-electron-gas mode. In particular, recently it was demonstrated that indeed in many materials, like normal [3], charge-density-wave [4,5] and superconducting [6-10] metals and intercalated graphite [11], additionally to the conventional bulk plasmon, there exists a number of other bulk collective modes characterized by significantly lower frequencies. In this contribution we analyze which impact the presence of such low-energy modes in the bulk may produce on collective electronic excitations at the surface.

References

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