

# Bose-Einstein condensate in an elliptical waveguide

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## Abstract

We investigate the effects of spatial curvature for an atomic Bose-Einstein condensate confined in an elliptical waveguide. The system is well described by an effective 1D Gross-Pitaevskii equation with a quantum-curvature potential, which has the shape of a double-well but crucially depends on the eccentricity of the ellipse. The ground state of the system displays a quantum phase transition from a two-peak configuration to a one-peak configuration at a critical attractive interaction strength. In correspondence of this phase transition the superfluid fraction strongly reduces and goes to zero for a sufficiently attractive Bose-Bose interaction.

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## 1 Introduction

How does a locally-varying spatial curvature influence the properties of low-dimensional quantum systems? This is a relevant question asked by scientists working in very different fields such as

quantum gravity [1] or quantum chaos [2]. It is well known [3–5] that the local curvature of a curve on the three-dimensional (3D) Euclidean space is characterized by the so-called geodesic curvature. This geodesic curvature  $\kappa$  is an extrinsic quantity: it does not remain invariant if the curve is under the effect of a distance-preserving transformation [3–5]. Instead, the local curvature of a surface on the 3D Euclidean space is characterized by the so-called Riemann curvature tensor, which can be written in terms of the invariant Gaussian curvature and the not-invariant average curvature [3–5]. The highly nontrivial role of curvature for constrained quantum systems has been recently theoretically investigated with ultracold atomic gases confined in a quasi-1D [6–9] and quasi-2D configurations [10]. The main result of these investigations is that the local curvature gives rise to a quantum-curvature potential [6–10].

In this paper we consider an atomic Bose-Einstein condensate (BEC) confined in a quasi-1D elliptical waveguide finding that the quantum-curvature potential has the shape of a double-well, if the eccentricity of the ellipse is different from zero. By numerically solving the 1D Gross-Pitaevskii equation of the BEC wavefunction under the effect of this quantum-curvature potential, we show that the ground state of the system is uniform along the waveguide only if the eccentricity  $\epsilon$  of the ellipse is zero (circular waveguide with constant curvature). Instead, for  $\epsilon \neq 0$  we find that the ground state is generically characterized by a two-peak configuration, where the peaks are located around the minima of the effective double-well potential. However, we discover that in the case of attractive interaction it exists a critical (negative) interaction strength below which the ground state exhibits a quantum phase transition from the two-peak configuration to a one-peak configuration. This is the analog of the spontaneous symmetry breaking, *i.e.* the [modulational instability](#) [11], of the uniform configuration predicted some years ago for an 1D attractive BEC in a circular waveguide [12–14]. Our results show that the critical interaction strength depends on the eccentricity  $\epsilon$  of the ellipse in a non-trivial way. We also analyze the effect of a boost velocity on the BEC moving in the elliptical waveguide deriving the Leggett formula [15] for the superfluid fraction of a 1D bosonic system [16–18]. Our numerical investigation reveals that the superfluid fraction decreases dramatically in response to this quantum phase transition, eventually reaching zero for a sufficiently negative Bose-Bose interaction.

## 2 Quantum-curvature potential

We consider a Bose-Einstein condensate (BEC) made of  $N$  identical bosonic atoms of mass  $m$ . The atoms are constrained to move along a curve  $\mathcal{C}$  by the presence of a strong harmonic potential of frequency  $\omega_{\perp}$  in the local transverse plane with respect to  $\mathcal{C}$ . The characteristic length of the transverse confinement is  $l_{\perp} = \sqrt{\hbar/(m\omega_{\perp})}$  where  $\hbar$  is the reduced Planck constant. We introduce a local system  $(s, u, v)$  of coordinates, where  $s$  is the curvilinear abscissa (arclength) along  $\mathcal{C}$  while  $u$  and  $v$  are two coordinates of the transverse plane [6–9]. In this way the Lagrangian density of our problem is given by

$$\mathcal{L} = \frac{i\hbar}{2} (\Psi^* \partial_t \Psi - \Psi \partial_t \Psi^*) - \frac{\hbar^2}{2m} |\nabla \Psi|^2 - \frac{m\omega_{\perp}^2}{2} (u^2 + v^2) |\Psi|^2 - \frac{1}{2} g |\Psi|^4, \quad (1)$$

where  $\Psi(s, u, v, t)$  is the BEC wavefunction normalized to one and  $g = 4\pi\hbar^2 a_s (N-1)/m$  is the 3D strength of the contact inter-atomic potential with  $a_s$  the s-wave scattering length. Clearly, the Laplacian operator  $\nabla^2$  must be written in terms of the local system  $(s, u, v)$  of coordinates [6–9]. Assuming the factorization

$$\Psi(s, u, v, t) = \psi(s, t) \frac{e^{-\frac{(u^2+v^2)}{2\sigma(s,t)^2}}}{\pi^{1/2}\sigma(s, t)} \quad (2)$$

and inserting this ansatz into the Lagrangian density, after integration over  $u$  and  $v$  one gets [9, 19, 20],

$$\begin{aligned} \bar{\mathcal{L}} &= \frac{i\hbar}{2} (\psi^* \partial_t \psi - \psi \partial_t \psi^*) - \frac{\hbar^2}{2m} |\partial_s \psi|^2 + \frac{\hbar^2 \kappa^2(s)}{8m} |\psi|^2 \\ &- \left( \frac{\hbar^2}{2m} \frac{1}{\sigma^2} + \frac{m\omega_\perp^2}{2} \sigma^2 \right) |\psi|^2 - \frac{1}{2} \frac{g}{2\pi\sigma^2} |\psi|^4, \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

where  $\kappa(s)$  is the local geodesic curvature of  $\mathcal{C}$ , and the conditions  $\sigma\kappa \ll 1$  and  $\sigma \ll \xi$  must hold, with  $\xi = \hbar/\sqrt{2g|\Psi|^2}$  the 3D healing length [9]. The Euler-Lagrange equations of the 1D action functional with respect to the 1D wavefunction  $\psi(s, t)$  and the transverse width  $\sigma(s, t)$  are

$$i\hbar\partial_t\psi = \left[ -\frac{\hbar^2}{2m}\partial_s^2 - \frac{\hbar^2\kappa^2(s)}{8m} + \frac{\hbar^2}{2m}\frac{1}{\sigma^2} + \frac{m\omega_\perp^2}{2}\sigma^2 + \frac{2\hbar^2 a_s(N-1)}{m\sigma^2} |\psi|^2 \right] \psi, \quad (4)$$

and

$$\sigma^2 = l_\perp^2 \sqrt{1 + 2a_s(N-1)|\psi|^2} \quad (5)$$

Eq. (4), equipped with Eq. (5), is the time-dependent 1D nonpolynomial Schrödinger equation (NPSE) [19, 20] for the wavefunction  $\psi(s, t)$  of the BEC moving along the curve  $\mathcal{C}$  (see also [9]). As previously discussed, the geodesic curvature  $\kappa(s)$  gives rise to an effective potential

$$U_Q(s) = -\frac{\hbar^2\kappa(s)^2}{8m}. \quad (6)$$

This curvature potential  $U_Q(s)$  is quantum because it involves the square of the reduced Planck constant  $\hbar$ . At fixed atomic mass  $m$ , only if the square of the curvature  $\kappa(s)$  is sufficiently large the effects of this quantum-curvature potential become relevant.

Under the assumption that  $\sigma \simeq l_\perp$ , which corresponds to a very strong transverse confinement, the 1D NPSE becomes the familiar 1D Gross-Pitaevskii (GPE) equation

$$i\hbar\partial_t\psi = \left[ -\frac{\hbar^2}{2m}\partial_s^2 - \frac{\hbar^2\kappa(s)^2}{8m} + \hbar\omega_\perp + \frac{2\hbar^2 a_s(N-1)}{ml_\perp^2} |\psi|^2 \right] \psi. \quad (7)$$

It is very important to stress that, from Eq. (5), the condition  $\sigma \simeq l_\perp$  implies  $2a_s(N-1)|\psi|^2 \ll 1$ . In the rest of the paper we will work within this 1D regime. In the new version of the manuscript I shall discuss the role **Clearly, Eq. (7) is reliable in the weak-coupling and strong-transverse-confinement regime, where both beyond-mean-field and transverse-size effects are very small.**

### 3 Properties of the elliptical waveguide

We now choose an ellipse for the curve  $\mathcal{C}$ . By using cartesian coordinates its defining equation reads

$$\frac{x^2}{a^2} + \frac{y^2}{b^2} = 1, \quad (8)$$

where  $a$  and  $b$  are the lengths of the two semi-axes of the ellipse. Here we assume that  $a \geq b$ , such that  $a$  is the length of the major semi-axis. The eccentricity of the ellipse is defined as [5]

$$\epsilon = \sqrt{1 - \frac{b^2}{a^2}}. \quad (9)$$

Clearly,  $0 \leq \epsilon < 1$  and for  $\epsilon = 0$  we obtain a circle of radius  $R = a = b$ . Introducing the angle  $\phi \in [0, 2\pi]$  we can write

$$x = a \cos(\phi) \quad (10)$$

$$y = b \sin(\phi) \quad (11)$$

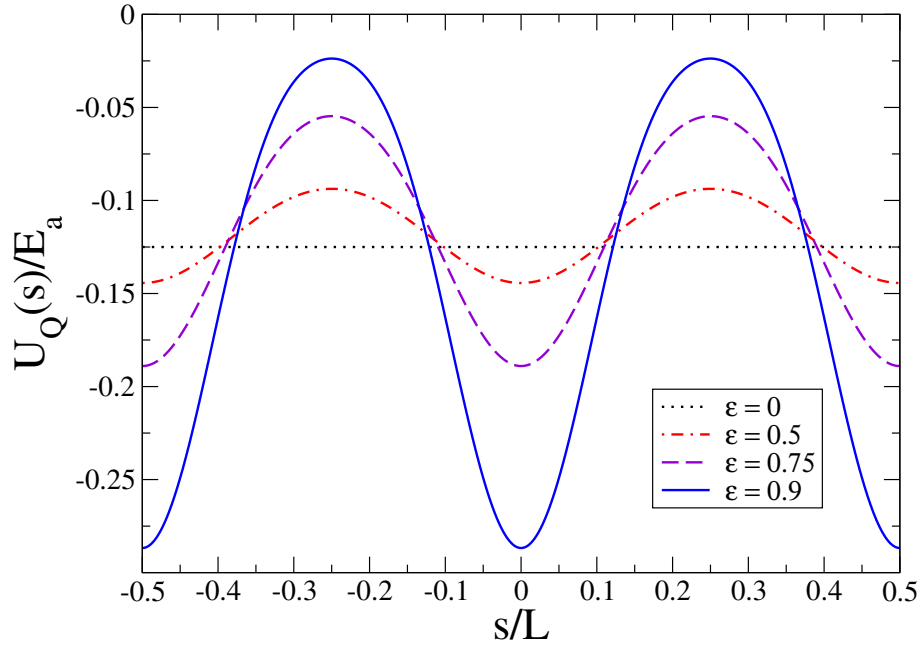


Figure 1: Quantum-curvature potential  $U_Q(s)$ , Eq. (6), induced by the geodesic curvature  $\kappa(s)$  of an ellipse, as a function of the arclength  $s$ , where  $a$  is the length of the major semi-axis,  $L = aE(2\pi, \epsilon)$  is the perimeter of the ellipse, and  $E_a = \hbar^2/(ma^2)$  a characteristic energy. The curves are obtained for different values of the eccentricity  $\epsilon$ .

and the arclength  $s$  along the ellipse can be expressed with the formula [5]

$$s = a E(\phi, \epsilon), \quad (12)$$

where

$$E(\phi, \epsilon) = \int_0^\phi \sqrt{1 - \epsilon^2 \sin^2(\phi')} d\phi' \quad (13)$$

is the incomplete elliptic integral of the second kind. It follows that the perimeter  $L$  of the ellipse reads

$$L = a E(2\pi, \epsilon), \quad (14)$$

such that for  $\epsilon = 0$  we have  $L = 2\pi a$  because  $E(2\pi, 0) = 2\pi$ . Instead, for  $\epsilon \rightarrow 1$  we have  $L \rightarrow 4a$  because  $E(2\pi, 1) = 4$ . We conclude that  $4a < L \leq 2\pi a$ . The geodesic curvature  $\kappa$  of the ellipse can be written as [5]

$$\kappa = \frac{1}{a} \frac{\sqrt{1 - \epsilon^2}}{\left(\sin^2(\phi) + \sqrt{1 - \epsilon^2} \cos^2(\phi)\right)^{3/2}}. \quad (15)$$

At fixed  $a$  and  $\epsilon$ , the maximum of the curvature is obtained for  $\phi = 0$  and  $\phi = \pi$ , i.e.

$$\kappa_{max} = \frac{1}{a} \frac{1}{(1 - \epsilon^2)^{1/4}}, \quad (16)$$

while the minimum of the curvature is obtained for  $\phi = \pi/2$  and  $\phi = 3\pi/2$ , i.e.

$$\kappa_{min} = \frac{1}{a} \sqrt{1 - \epsilon^2}. \quad (17)$$

Thus, for  $\epsilon = 0$  we have  $\kappa_{max} = \kappa_{min} = 1/a$  while for  $\epsilon \rightarrow 1$  we have  $\kappa_{max} \rightarrow +\infty$  and  $\kappa_{min} \rightarrow 0$ . We conclude that  $1/a \leq \kappa_{max} < +\infty$  and  $0 < \kappa_{min} \leq 1/a$ . In general, the

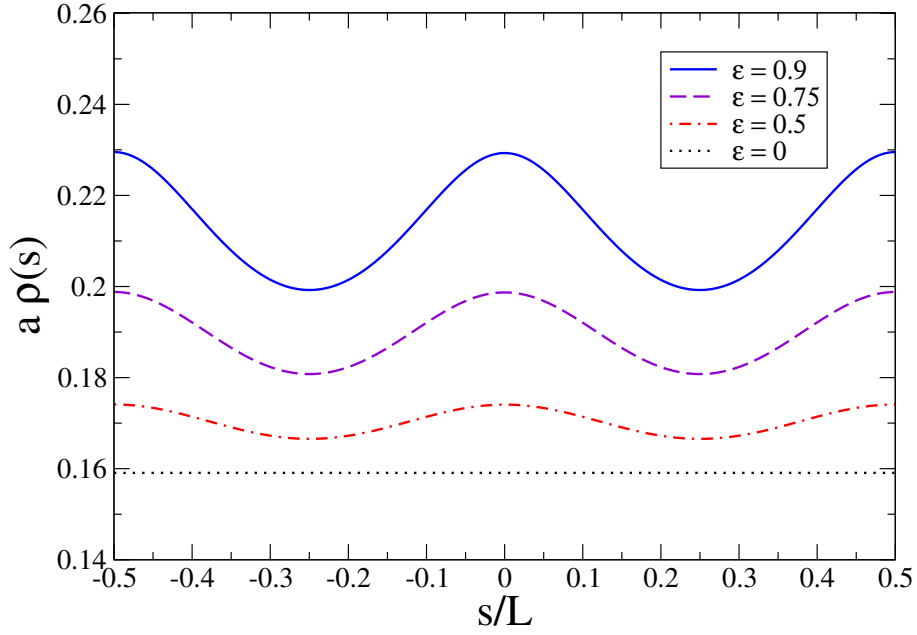


Figure 2: Probability density  $\rho(s)$  of the non-interacting BEC ground state in an ellipse as a function of the arclength  $s$ , where  $a$  is the length of the major semi-axis and  $L = aE(2\pi, \epsilon)$  is the perimeter of the ellipse. The curves are obtained for different values of the eccentricity  $\epsilon$ . Here the  $s$ -wave scattering length  $a_s$  is set to zero or, equivalently, the number  $N$  of particles is set to one.

formula which gives the curvature  $\kappa$  as a function of the arclength  $s$  is called Cesaro equation. Unfortunately, in the case of the ellipse there is no Cesaro equation. In other words, an analytical formula of  $\kappa$  as a function of  $s$  is not available. However, from Eqs. (12) and (15), fixing the length  $a$  and the eccentricity  $\epsilon$  of the ellipse, we can easily plot  $\kappa$  vs  $s$  using  $\phi$  as dummy variable. More explicitly: we calculate separately  $\kappa$  vs  $\phi$  and  $s$  vs  $\phi$ , and then we plot  $\kappa$  vs  $s$ . The curvature  $\kappa(s)$  has a periodic structure of  $\kappa(s)$ . By increasing  $\epsilon$ , the perimeter  $L$  of the ellipse slightly decreases while  $\kappa_{max}$  and  $\kappa_{min}$  pull away. In Fig. 1 we plot the quantum-curvature potential  $U_Q(s)$ , Eq. (6), induced by the curvature  $\kappa(s)$  of the ellipse for different values of the eccentricity  $\epsilon$ . The figure clearly shows that, for  $\epsilon \neq 0$ ,  $U_Q(s)$  is symmetric double-well potential where the depth of the wells becomes larger by increasing the eccentricity. The minima (maxima) of the quantum-curvature potential  $U_Q(s)$  are in correspondence to the maxima (minima) of the curvature  $\kappa(s)$ .

## 4 BEC ground state in elliptical waveguide

The time-independent 1D GPE is obtained from Eqs. (7) setting

$$\psi(s, t) = \Phi(s) e^{-i(\mu + \hbar\omega_{\perp})t/\hbar}. \quad (18)$$

In this way we have

$$\mu \Phi = \left[ -\frac{\hbar^2}{2m} \partial_s^2 - \frac{\hbar^2 \kappa(s)^2}{8m} + \frac{2a_s(N-1)\hbar^2}{ml_{\perp}^2} |\Phi|^2 \right] \Phi, \quad (19)$$

that is the 1D GPE equation for the stationary wavefunction  $\Phi(s)$ , such that  $\rho(s) = |\Phi(s)|^2$  is the probability density of finding the BEC at the position  $s$ . In Fig. 2 we report the probability

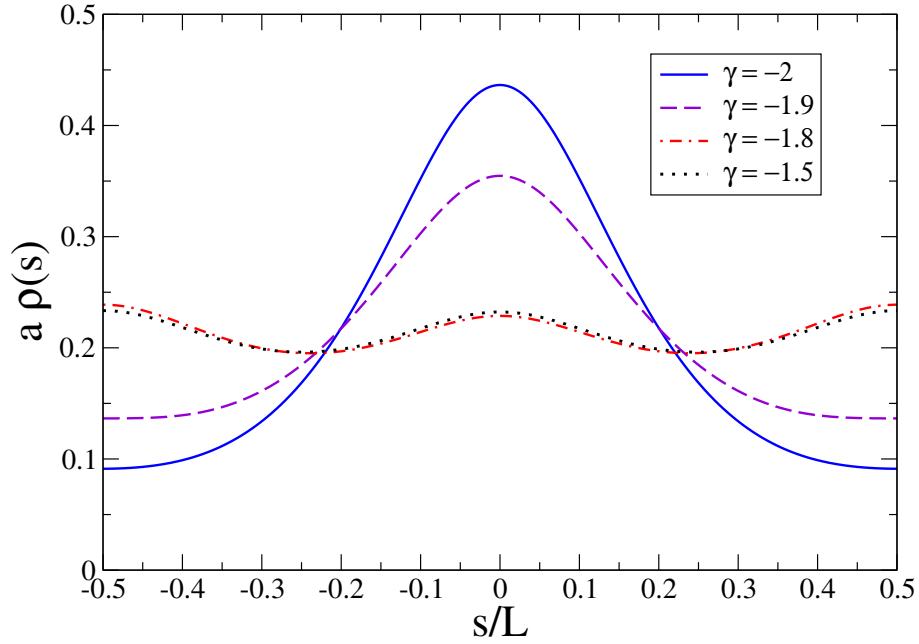


Figure 3: Probability density  $\rho(s)$  of the attractive BEC ground state in an ellipse as a function of the arclength  $s$ , where  $a$  is the length of the major semi-axis and  $L = aE(2\pi, \epsilon)$  is the perimeter of the ellipse. The curves are obtained with eccentricity  $\epsilon = 0.9$  for different values of the adimensional interaction strength  $\gamma = 2aa_s(N - 1)/l_\perp^2$ , where  $a_s$  is the 3D s-wave scattering length and  $l_\perp$  is the characteristic length of the transverse harmonic confinement.

density  $\rho(s)$  of the ground-state of the non-interacting ( $a_s = 0$  or, equivalently,  $N = 1$ ) BEC confined along the ellipse as a function of the arclength  $s$ . Our results are obtained by solving Eq. (7) with a Crank-Nicolson predictor-corrector method and imaginary time. In the figure, the curves correspond to different values of the eccentricity  $\epsilon$ . Clearly, for  $\epsilon = 0$  the ground state is uniform along the ellipse. However, for  $\epsilon \neq 0$  the ground state is no more uniform due to a non-constant curvature  $\kappa(s)$  which implies a non-constant effective potential  $U_Q(s) = -\hbar^2 \kappa(s)^2 / (8m)$ . By increasing the eccentricity  $\epsilon$  the localization of  $\rho(s)$  around the minima of  $U_Q(s)$ , where the curvature is larger, becomes more evident.

## 5 Quantum phase transition

It is interesting to investigate the effect of the inter-atomic interaction on the ground state properties of the system. In adimensional units the interaction strength reads  $\gamma = g / (2\pi l_\perp^2 a E_a) = 2aa_s(N - 1)/l_\perp^2$  with  $E_a = \hbar^2 / (ma^2)$ . In Fig. 3 we consider the case of an attractive BEC and plot our numerical results obtained for different values of a negative  $\gamma$  with fixed eccentricity  $\epsilon = 0.9$ . Quite remarkably, for  $\gamma < -1.5$  the ground state has a spontaneous symmetry breaking: one of the two local minima contains more bosons. Indeed for  $\gamma = -2$  this single-well localization is very clear. It is important to observe that this kind of quantum phase transition happens for any  $\epsilon$ . In the case of a circle ( $\epsilon = 0$ ) a similar spontaneous symmetry breaking was predicted about 20 years ago [12–14]. **Actually, this quantum phase transition, or spontaneous symmetry breaking, is nothing else than the modulational instability of the ground-state configuration, induced by the appearance of an imaginary component in the energies of the elementary excitations of the ground state [11].** However, for  $\epsilon = 0$  there is a quantum phase transition from a uniform configuration to a

single-peak configuration, while for the  $\epsilon \neq 0$  there is a quantum phase transition from a two-peak configuration to a single-peak configuration. This quantum phase transition was observed some years ago with an attractive BEC of  $^{39}\text{K}$  atoms, where the double-well potential was created by intersecting two pairs of laser beams [22]. Our double-well system is slightly different because the particles tunnel from one well to the other well following two different curved paths; moreover, our ellipsoidal configuration offers also the possibility of having persistent currents. For a sufficiently attractive BEC the transverse width  $\sigma$  of the BEC becomes smaller than  $l_{\perp}$  and there is the collapse of the single-peak configuration. For  $\epsilon = 0$  the 1D NPSE predicts the collapse of this single-peak configuration at  $\gamma_c = (4/3)(a/l_{\perp})$  [19, 21]. Thus, our numerical results of Fig. 3, obtained from the 1D GPE, are fully reliable under the condition  $a/l_{\perp} \gg 1$ . This is again the condition of a tight transverse confinement.

## 6 Superfluid fraction

Let us consider the effect of a boost velocity  $v_B$  on the BEC moving along the ellipse. In this case Eq. (19) is modified as follows

$$\mu \Phi = \left[ \frac{1}{2m} (-i\hbar\partial_s - mv_B)^2 - \frac{\hbar^2\kappa^2(s)}{8m} + \frac{2a_s(N-1)\hbar^2}{ml_{\perp}^2} |\Phi|^2 \right] \Phi, \quad (20)$$

Now we set

$$\Phi(s) = \frac{n(s)^{1/2}}{\sqrt{N}} e^{i\theta(s)}, \quad (21)$$

where  $n(s) = N\rho(s)$  is the local number density of the BEC. Moreover, we introduce the local velocity field

$$v(s) = \frac{\hbar}{m} \partial_s \theta(s). \quad (22)$$

Inserting these formulas into Eq. (20) we obtain 1D stationary equations of zero-temperature superfluid hydrodynamics

$$\mu = -\frac{\hbar^2}{2m\sqrt{n}} \partial_s^2 \sqrt{n} + \frac{m}{2} (v - v_B)^2 - \frac{\hbar^2\kappa(s)^2}{8m} + \frac{2a_s(1-1/N)\hbar^2 n}{ml_{\perp}^2}, \quad (23)$$

and also

$$\partial_s [n(v - v_B)] = 0. \quad (24)$$

Eq. (24) implies that  $n(v - v_B) = J$ , where  $J$  is a constant current density. This result is very interesting because it says that if  $n(s)$  has spatial variations then also  $v(x)$  must have spatial variations.

Inspired by Ref. [18], we now introduce the average value of the velocity  $v(x)$  in a region  $[a, b]$  of the ellipse as

$$\bar{v} = \frac{1}{(b-a)} \int_a^b v(s) ds, \quad (25)$$

Then, from the previous equations we obtain

$$\bar{v} = \frac{1}{(b-a)} \int_a^b \left( \frac{J}{n(s)} + v_B \right) ds = \frac{J}{\bar{n}_s} + v_B, \quad (26)$$

where

$$\bar{n}_s = \frac{1}{\frac{1}{(b-a)} \int_a^b \frac{1}{n(s)} ds}. \quad (27)$$

The number density  $\bar{n}_s$  can be interpreted as the superfluid number density of the stationary state in the spatial region  $[a, b]$ . Indeed, Eq. (27) is the 1D version of the formula obtained by Leggett [15] for a supersolid with spatial periodicity  $(b - a)$ , and recently discussed by others [16–18]. If the stationary state  $\Psi(s)$  moves with the average velocity  $\bar{v}$ , its current density reads  $J = \bar{n}_s (\bar{v} - v_B)$ , where  $\bar{v}$  is the average velocity in the region  $[a, b]$  and  $\bar{n}_s$  the corresponding superfluid number density. We can also introduce

$$\bar{n} = \frac{1}{(b - a)} \int_a^b n(s) ds \quad (28)$$

that is the average number density in the region  $[a, b]$ . Consequently, the superfluid fraction of the BEC in the region  $[0, L]$  reads

$$f_s = \frac{\bar{n}_s}{\bar{n}} = \frac{1}{\frac{N}{L^2} \int_0^L \frac{1}{n(s)} ds}, \quad (29)$$

where  $N = \int_0^L n(s) dx = L\bar{n}$ . This formula can be also obtained as the response of the linear momentum of the BEC to the boost velocity  $\bar{v}_B$ , that is the non-classical translational inertia of the system [16].

In Fig. 4 we plot our numerical results of the superfluid fraction  $f_s$  as a function of the adimensional interaction strength  $\gamma$  for different values of the eccentricity  $\epsilon$  of the ellipse. For positive values of  $\gamma$  the superfluid fraction  $f_s$  is close to 1 also with  $\epsilon = 0.9$ . However, for  $0 \leq \gamma < 1$  and a very large eccentricity ( $\epsilon = 0.99$ ) we find  $f_s \simeq 0.95$ . This result is quite reasonable because the wavefunction is strongly localized in the two well of the quantum-curvature potential. For negative values of  $\gamma$  the most interesting effect appears in Fig. 4: around  $\gamma \simeq -1.6$  the superfluid fraction  $f_s$  quickly decreases and it goes to zero for very large negative values of  $\gamma$ . This is exactly the quantum phase transition from a two-peak configuration to a one-peak configuration. As previously stressed, the one-peak configuration becomes modulationally unstable when at least one of the energies of its elementary excitations acquires an imaginary component. A similar modulational instability [11] happens in the formation of a train of bright solitons from a single-peak Bose-Einstein condensate, induced by a sudden change in the sign of the scattering length from positive to negative [23]. Our Fig. 4 reveals that the critical strength  $\gamma_c$  crucially depends on the eccentricity  $\epsilon$ , such as the behavior of  $f_s$  as a function of  $\gamma$  for  $\gamma < \gamma_c$ . In particular, we find that  $\gamma_c$  slightly reduces by increasing  $\epsilon$ , but this effect is quite weak.

An important remark is that Eq. (29) has been derived here without any assumption about the sign of  $\gamma$ . Moreover, the absence of superfluidity for  $\gamma = 0$  is true only in the thermodynamic limit. In a ring there is a finite energy gap between the ground state and the first excited state also for  $\gamma = 0$ . The Bose system we are considering has a finite size because it is confined in a finite elliptical ring. Finally, the 3D version of Eq. (27) was proposed historically by Leggett to characterize the superfluid density of a supersolid [15], while here Eq. (27) is used to determine the superfluid density of a Bose-Einstein condensate which is not supersolid but it is instead spatially modulated due to the crucial interplay between elliptical confinement and attractive interaction.

## 7 Conclusions

The main goal of this paper was to understand the role of a locally-varying curvature for a Bose-Einstein condensate confined in an elliptical waveguide. The proposed setup, and the double-well quantum-curvature potential that we have found, can be experimentally achieved by using ultracold atoms, which are a paradigmatic physical platform due to the high experimental tunability of inter-atomic interactions and trapping potentials. For instance, one can trap  $N = 10^4$  ultracold Rb atoms by using a rapidly moving laser beam which creates a time-averaged elliptic-shaped toroidal



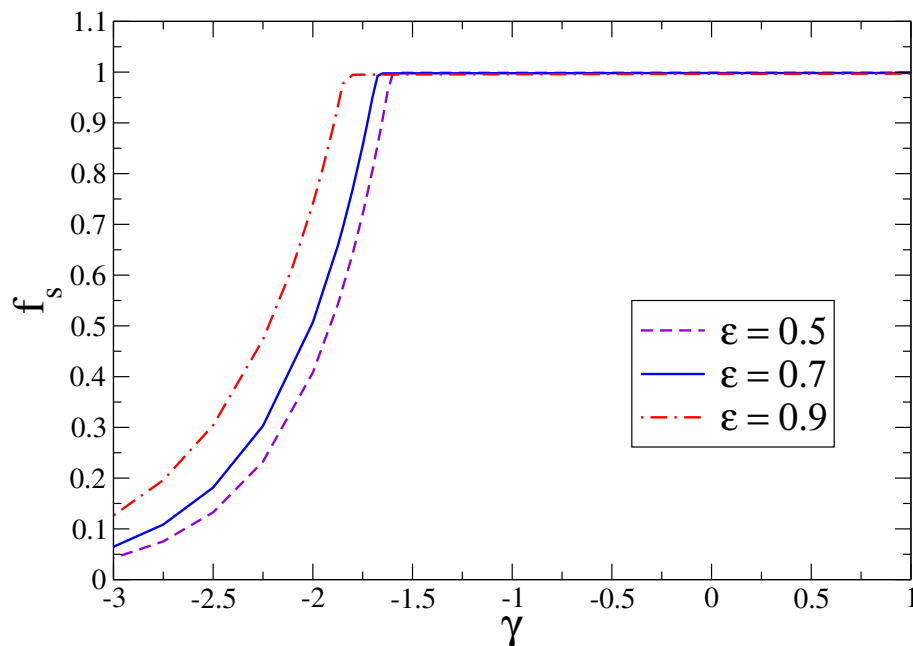


Figure 4: Superfluid fraction  $f_s$  of the BEC ground state in an ellipse as a function of the adimensional interaction strength  $\gamma = 2aa_s(N - 1)/l_\perp^2$ , where  $a$  is the length of the major semi-axis,  $a_s$  is the 3D s-wave scattering length and  $l_\perp$  is the characteristic length of the transverse harmonic confinement. The curves are obtained for three values of the eccentricity  $\epsilon$  of the ellipse.

optical dipole potential [24]. The length  $a$  of the major semi-axis of the ellipse can be  $a \simeq 100$  microns and the transverse length  $l_\perp = 5$  microns. The scattering length  $a_s$  could be then tuned by using an external magnetic field, which induces a Fano-Feshbach resonance [25]. Despite the fact that we focused on space curvature rather than space-time curvature, we believe that our results can be of interest not only to atomic and condensed matter physics researchers, but also to a large community working on general relativity and relativistic quantum field theory.

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