Pioneer's Anomaly

The anomalous acceleration of Pioneer 10 and 11

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Introduction

- Pioneer 10 was launched on 2 March 1972
- Its sister craft, Pioneer 11, was launched on 5 April 1973

http://history.nasa.gov/SP-349/
After Jupiter and Saturn encounters Pioneer 11 followed escape hyperbolic orbit.
The last telemetry data point was obtained on 1 October 1990 (~30AU)
The science mission ended on 30 September, 1995
Latest contact was on November, 1995

http://history.nasa.gov/SP-349/
After Jupiter encounters the craft followed escape hyperbolic orbit.
The science mission ended on 31 March, 1997
Latest contact was on 7 February, 2003
The last telemetry data point was obtained on 27 April 2002 (~80AU)

http://history.nasa.gov/SP-349/
The Pioneers are excellent craft for the purposes of precision celestial mechanics experiments, due to:

- Their attitude control
- Power design
- Precise Doppler tracking
The analysis of the Pioneer 10 and 11 data (Anderson et al. 1998, 2002) demonstrated the presence of anomalous Doppler frequency blue shift drift (Turyshhev et al. 2005)

\[ \sim 6 \times 10^{-9} \text{Hz/s}. \]

This drift can be interpreted as existence anomalous sunward constant acceleration

\[ = (8.74 \pm 1.33) \times 10^{-10} \text{m/s}^2. \]

This anomaly is present in four independent and different navigational computer programs (Anderson et al. 1998, 2002, Markwardt 2002, Olsen 2005)
Basic properties of the Pioneer anomaly

**Distance**: It is unclear how far out the anomaly goes, but the Pioneer 10 data supports its presence at distances up to ~70AU from the Sun. The Pioneer 11 data shows the presence of the anomaly as close in as ~20AU.

**Direction**: generally pointing in the innermost region of the solar system.

**Constacy**: Both temporal and spatial variations of the anomaly's magnitude are of order 10% for each craft, while formal errors are significantly smaller.
Original efforts to explain the anomaly


Effects with sources external to the spacecraft.
- The solar radiation pressure
- Solar wind
- The effect of the corona on the propagation of a radio wave signals
- The influence of the Kuiper belt's gravity
- Galactic gravity
- Electromagnetic Lorentz forces
- Errors in accepted values of the Earth's orientation parameters:
  - Precession
  - Nutation
  - Effect due to the troposphere and ionosphere
Original efforts to explain the anomaly


- Study of the on-board systematics
  - Differential emissivity of the Radioisotope Thermoelectric Generators (RTGs)
  - Radiative cooling of the spacecraft
  - Propulsive gas leaks from trusters of the attitude control system

- Computational Systematics
  - Mismodelling of maneuvers
  - Solar corona model used to describe the propagation of radio waves
Recent efforts to explain the anomaly

- **Search for independent confirmation**
  - Attempt to verify the anomaly using other spacecraft (Voyager, Galileo, Ulysses, Cassini) proved disappointing
  - Many of the deep space missions that are currently being considered may not provide the needed navigational accuracy

- **Conventional physics mechanisms**
  - Kuiper belt objects or dust could explain the anomaly by
    - Gravitational acceleration
    - Additional drag force
    - Frequency shift of the radio signals proportional to the distance

- **Numerical coincidence** \( a_p \approx cH_0 \).
Recent efforts to explain the anomaly

Possibility for new physics?