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Violation of lepton flavour universality in composite Higgs models

Christoph Niehoff, Peter Stangl, David M. Straub *

Excellence Cluster Universe, Technische Universität München, Boltzmannstr. 2, 85748 Garching, Germany

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ABSTRACT

We investigate whether the 2.6σ deviation from lepton flavour universality in $B^+ \to K^+\ell^+\ell^-$ decays recently observed at the LHCb experiment can be explained in minimal composite Higgs models. We show that a visible departure from universality is indeed possible if left-handed muons have a sizable degree of compositeness. Constraints from Z-pole observables are avoided by a custodial protection of the muon coupling.

1. Introduction

Rare B meson decays based on the quark-level transition $b \to s\ell^+\ell^-$, with $\ell = e, \mu, \tau$, are sensitive probes of physics beyond the Standard Model (SM) as these flavour-changing neutral currents are loop and CKM suppressed in the SM. In addition to probing flavour-violation in the quark sector, also lepton flavour universality (LFU) can be tested by comparing the rates of processes with different leptons in the final state. Recently, the LHCb Collaboration has measured the ratio R_K of the $B^+ \to K^+\mu^+\mu^-$ and $B^+ \to K^+e^+e^-$ branching ratios [1],

$$R_K = \frac{\mathrm{BR}(B^+ \to K^+\mu^+\mu^-)_{[1,6]}}{\mathrm{BR}(B^+ \to K^+e^+e^-)_{[1,6]}} = 0.745^{+0.090}_{-0.074} \pm 0.036\,, \qquad (1)$$

which corresponds to a 2.6σ deviation from the SM value, which is 1.0 to an excellent precision. If confirmed, this deviation from unity would constitute an irrefutable evidence of new physics (NP).

Supposing the measurement (1) is indeed a sign of NP, it is interesting to ask which NP model could account for this sizable violation of LFU. It has been demonstrated already that in models where the $b \to s\ell^+\ell^-$ transition is mediated at the tree level by a heavy neutral gauge boson [2–8] or by spin-0 or spin-1 leptoquarks [3,9–12], it is possible to explain the measurement without violating other constraints. However, in more complete models, it often turns out to be difficult to generate a large enough amount of LFU violation. In the MSSM, it has been shown that it is not possible to accommodate the central value of (1) [7]. In composite Higgs models, which at present arguably constitute the most compelling solution to the hierarchy problem next to supersymmetry, one interesting possibility recently considered to explain (1) is to postulate the presence of composite leptoquarks [13]. This however comes at the price of a significant complication of the models. In more minimal models a thorough analysis of the possible size of LFU violation is still lacking and it is the purpose of this study to fill this gap.

2. FCNCs and partially composite muons

A departure from LFU in $b \to s\ell^+\ell^-$ transitions can be described in the weak effective Hamiltonian by a non-universal shift in the Wilson coefficients of the operators

$$O_9^{(\prime)\ell} = (\bar{s}\gamma_\mu P_{L(R)}b)(\bar{\ell}\gamma^\mu\ell)\,, \qquad (2)$$

$$O_{10}^{(\prime)\ell} = (\bar{s}\gamma_\mu P_{L(R)}b)(\bar{\ell}\gamma^\mu\gamma_5\ell)\,. \qquad (3)$$

A global analysis has shown that the data prefer a negative shift in C_9^μ, with a possible positive contribution to C_{10}^μ [7] (see also [14,15] for other recent fits). In the following, we will denote the shift in the Wilson coefficients with respect to their SM values by δC_i. Interestingly, for $\delta C_{10}^\mu = -\delta C_9^\mu$, which corresponds to the limit in which only the left-handed leptons are involved in the transition, a comparably good fit to the case of NP in δC_9^μ only is obtained.

In models with partial compositeness, there are two distinct tree-level contributions to the $b \to s\ell^+\ell^-$ transition (cf. [16,17]).

- Z exchange, facilitated by a tree-level flavour-changing Z coupling that arises from the mixing after EWSB of states with different $SU(2)_L$ quantum numbers; this effect is thus always parametrically suppressed by v^2/f^2, but not mass-suppressed.

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: christoph.niehoff@tum.de (C. Niehoff), peter.stangl@tum.de (P. Stangl), david.straub@tum.de (D.M. Straub).

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- Heavy neutral spin-1 resonance exchange. This effect does not require the insertion of a Higgs VEV, but is mass-suppressed by the heavy resonance propagator.

Concerning the heavy resonance exchange, one can distinguish two qualitatively different effects depending on how the coupling of the resonance to the final-state leptons comes about.

- There is a contribution stemming from the mixing of the heavy resonances with the Z boson; in this case, the coupling to the leptons is to a good approximation equal to the SM Z coupling of the leptons.
- Another contribution stems from the mixing of the leptons with heavy vector-like composite leptons. While the coupling of the resonance to composite leptons is expected to be strong, this contribution is suppressed by the (squared) degree of compositeness of the light leptons.

A crucial observation first made in [17] is that both the Z-mediated contribution and the resonance exchange contribution based on vector boson mixing lead to $\delta C_9^\mu/\delta C_{10}^\mu = (1-4s_w^2) \approx 0.08$ due to the (accidentally) small vector coupling of the Z to charged leptons in the SM. Such a pattern of effects is not supported by the global fit to $b \to s$ data.

We are therefore led to the conclusion that the vector resonance exchange with the resonance-lepton coupling induced by the mixing of muons with heavy vector-like partners is the only way to explain the R_K anomaly in our framework in accordance with the data. While the product of degrees of compositeness of the left- and right-handed muon needs to be small to account for the smallness of the muon mass, one of the two could be sizable. In the case of left-handed muons, as mentioned above, this would lead to a pattern $\delta C_9^\mu = -\delta C_{10}^\mu$, while right-handed muons would imply $\delta C_9^\mu = +\delta C_{10}^\mu$. The latter however is not preferred by the global fit to $b \to s$ data, so we require the *left-handed muons* to be significantly composite. The main questions are then:

- How large does the degree of compositeness of left-handed muons have to be to explain (1)?
- How large do precision measurements allow this degree of compositeness to be?

Concerning the first question, an important point is that the quark flavour-changing coupling to the vector resonances cannot be too large since it would otherwise lead to a large NP effect in B_s–$\bar{B}_s$ mixing that is not allowed by the data [7] (see also [17–21]). Combining the B_s mixing constraint with the requirement to get a visible effect in R_K leads to a lower bound on the coupling of the vector resonances to muons. Estimating this coupling in our case as $g_\rho s_{L\mu}^2$, where g_ρ is a generic (strong) coupling between the composite lepton partners and the vector resonances and $s_{L\mu}$ is the degree of compositeness of left-handed muons, and writing a common vector resonance mass as $m_\rho \equiv g_\rho f/2$,[1] one finds that a visible effect in R_K requires, up to a model-dependent $\mathcal{O}(1)$ factor, $s_{L\mu} \gtrsim 0.15\,\xi^{-1/4}$, where $\xi = v^2/f^2$.

Such a sizable degree of compositeness is problematic at first sight. In general, the left-handed muons mix after EWSB with composite states that have different $SU(2)_L$ quantum numbers. This leads to a shift in the Z coupling to left-handed muons that is generically of the size $\delta g^L_{Z\mu\mu} \sim \xi s_{L\mu}^2$. Given the LEP precision measurements which require $|\delta g^L_{Z\mu\mu}| \lesssim 10^{-3}$ implies, again up to a model-dependent $\mathcal{O}(1)$ factor, $s_{L\mu} \lesssim 0.03\,\xi^{-1/2}$. Even if just a rough estimate, this shows clearly that a model satisfying this naive estimates is not viable. However, it is well-known that models exist where certain couplings of the Z boson do not receive any corrections at tree level due to discrete symmetries: in the same way as this *custodial protection* prevents the $Z\bar{b}_L b_L$ coupling from large corrections [22], the $Z\bar{\mu}_L\mu_L$ coupling could be protected [23], opening the possibility of significantly composite left-handed muons.

3. Model setup

Composite Higgs models generally allow for many possibilities in model building. To make our results less model-dependent, our guideline will be to use the simplest model including partial compositeness. Indeed as we will see, very much is already fixed by demanding compatibility with electroweak precision tests.

In general, composite Higgs models feature a SM-like elementary sector and a strongly interacting BSM sector with a global symmetry H. It is well-known that in order to avoid critical tree-level corrections to the T parameter one has to impose custodial symmetry, which is most easily done by choosing $H = SO(4) \sim SU(2)_L \times SU(2)_R$. We further assume that the global symmetry in the composite sector contains a $U(1)_X$ such that hypercharge is given by $Y = T_{3R} + X$ where T_{3R} is the third component of right-handed isospin.

Under the paradigm of partial compositeness the elementary leptons χ mix linearly with fermionic composite operators $\mathcal{O}^{(\chi)}_{\text{comp}}$ such that $\mathcal{L}_{\text{mix}} = \sum_\chi \bar{\chi}\mathcal{O}^{(\chi)}_{\text{comp}} + \text{h.c.}$ Demanding a custodial protection of the $Z\bar{\mu}_L\mu_L$ vertex by the introduction of a discrete P_{LR} symmetry restricts the possible choices for representations of the composite operators under the custodial symmetry [22]. We find that for the operator mixing with the left-handed lepton doublet, this leaves only one possibility, $(\mathbf{2},\mathbf{2})_0$ under $SU(2)_L \times SU(2)_R \times U(1)_X$. By the same reasoning the right-handed muon then has to mix with a $(\mathbf{1},\mathbf{3})_0$. On the composite side we thus embed the lepton partners into a representation $(\mathbf{2},\mathbf{2})_0 \oplus (\mathbf{1},\mathbf{3})_0 \oplus (\mathbf{3},\mathbf{1})_0$, where the $(\mathbf{3},\mathbf{1})_0$ is required by the P_{LR} symmetry. This implies that additionally to the bidoublet L and the $SU(2)_R$ triplet E there will also be an $SU(2)_L$ triplet E' appearing in the spectrum of composite resonances. This choice of representations is in fact unique unless one allows for $SU(2)_R$ representations with dimension higher than 3 (which would imply the presence of states with exotic electric charges greater than ± 2).

The second generation lepton sector Lagrangian then reads

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{L}_f = &\bar{l}_L(i\not{D})l_L + \bar{\mu}_R(i\not{D})\mu_R \\ &+ \bar{L}(i\not{D} - m_L)L + \bar{E}(i\not{D} - m_E)E + \bar{E}'(i\not{D} - m_E)E', \qquad (4)\end{aligned}$$

where the covariant derivative $\mathcal{D}_\mu$ contains the couplings to the composite vector resonances associated with the $SU(2)_L \times SU(2)_R \times U(1)_X$ global symmetry[2] for the composite leptons and the coupling to the elementary gauge bosons for the elementary fermions. The composite-elementary mixings can be written as[3]

[1] Here, $m_\rho \equiv g_\rho f/2$ is just a convenient definition because f is the suppression scale of dimension-6 operators mediated by vector resonance exchange. In models with a composite pseudo-Goldstone boson Higgs, f can be identified with the Goldstone boson's "decay constant".

[2] Contrary to [24], we will include resonances associated with $U(1)_X$ and $SU(3)_c$ in the following.

[3] In models where the Higgs boson is implemented as a pseudo Nambu–Goldstone boson these mixing terms correspond to an expansion in the Higgs non-linearities. For example, in a dimensionally deconstructed model like [24] with coset structure $SO(5)/SO(4)$ these are only the leading terms in h/f. In this case the composite fermions should be embedded into the $SO(5)$ adjoint representation $\mathbf{10}_0 = (\mathbf{2},\mathbf{2})_0 \oplus (\mathbf{1},\mathbf{3})_0 \oplus (\mathbf{3},\mathbf{1})_0$ to achieve the custodial protection of the Z vertex.