Proceedings of ICRC 2001: 1 © Copernicus Gesellschaft 2001

ICRC 2001

Nonparametric Determination of Energy Spectra and Mass Composition of Primary Cosmic Rays for Slant Depth

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Abstract. The data measured by the KASCADE (KArlsruhe Shower Core and Array DEtector) experiment are the basis for a multi-component analysis with the aim to determine the mass composition of the primary cosmic rays in the knee region. We discuss the methods used for estimating mass and energy of primary particles by utilizing neural network and nonparametric classification methods. By applying such techniques, measured data have been analyzed in an event-by-event mode and the mass and energy of individual EAS inducing particles are reconstructed. Recent results of all-particle energy spectra and relative abundances for different groups of primary particles on basis of the electron and muon size data measured for different slant depths are presented. The analyses of measured data indicate a transition to a heavier composition above a knee energy of ca. 5 PeV. It turns out that the mass composition depends on the particular set of observables (e.g. electron size N_e, truncated muon size N_μ^{tr}, hadron size N_h, most energetic hadron $E_h^{\max}$,...) being considered simulataneously in the analysis. Though different sets of observables result in a qualitativly similar mass composition, quantitatively this leads to conspicuous differences. In this way the limitations of a particular interaction model is revealed and the necessity of detailed studies of correlations of EAS observables as test of the hadronic interaction model is shown.

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1 Introduction

The basic astrophysical questions in high-energy cosmic rays (CR) relate to the sources, the acceleration mechanisms and the propagation of CR through space. In particular, the observation of the change of the power law slope (the *knee*; Kulikov and Khristiansen (1959)) of the all-particle spectrum at an energy of a few times 10^{15} eV has induced considerable interest and experimental activities. Nevertheless, despite of many conjectures and attempts, the origin of the knee phenomenon has not yet been convincingly explained.

Due to the rapidly falling intensity and low fluxes, cosmic rays of energies above 10^{14} eV can be studied only indirectly by observations of extensive air showers (EAS) which are produced by successive interactions of the cosmic particles with nuclei of the Earth's atmosphere. EAS develop in the atmosphere as avalanche processes in three different main components: the most numerous electromagnetic (electron-photon) component, the muon component and the hadronic component. The properties of EAS are usually measured with large ground-based detector arrays. In most experiments only one or two components are studied. The KASCADE experiment (Doll et al., 1990; Klages et al., 1997) studies all three main components simultaneously and a large number of shower parameters are registered for each event. Their analysis to determine the properties of the primary particle are obscured by the considerable fluctuations of EAS development.

The analysis of the EAS variables to deduce the properties of the primary particle relies on the comparison with Monte

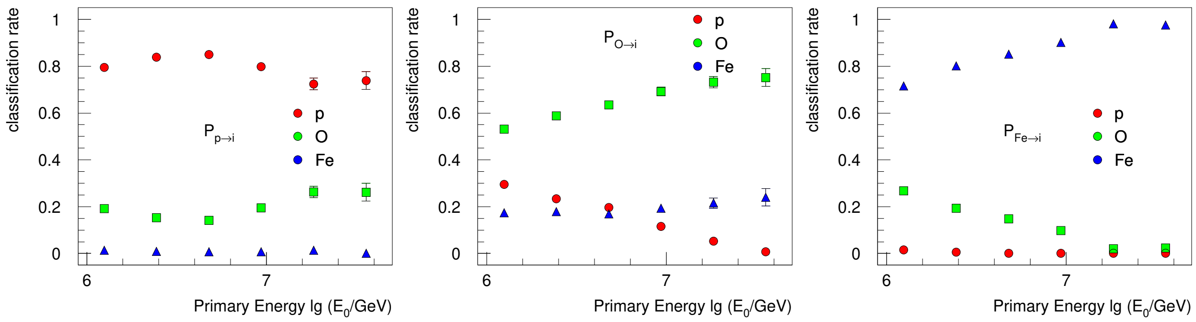

Fig. 1. Classification rate for three classes (p,O and Fe). The used observables are $N_\mu^{\rm tr}$ and $N_{\rm e}$.

Carlo simulations (MC) of the shower development, including the detector response. Usually only one or two EAS parameters are measured and various simplified procedures are used to describe the relation between the observed EAS properties and the nature and energy of the primary particle. The simplification often implies the use of parameterizations of the average behavior, which may bias the results and limit the accuracy because fluctuations are neglected or not properly accounted for. For the analysis of multivariate parameter distributions and accounting for fluctuations more sophisticated methods are needed. The Bayesian methods and the neural network approaches, currently in vogue, meet these necessities. The methods facilitate an event-by-event analysis. For a detailed description of the applied methods see Antoni et al. (in press).

In the present paper we report on an investigation of the energy spectrum and mass composition of cosmic rays in the energy range of $10^{15} - 5 \times 10^{16}$ eV, based on the analysis of c. 4,000,000 EAS events. A subset of approximately 8000 showers with cores near the center of the hadron calorimeter yields information on all three components and has been studied in more detail. The simulated showers calculated with the simulation program CORSIKA (Heck et al., 1998) have been convoluted with the apparatus response using the GEANT code (CERN Long Writeups, 1993). Non-parametric procedures (Chilingarian, 1989) yield not only an estimate of the primary energy and mass composition, but they also allow to specify the uncertainty of the results in a quantitative way.

2 Simulation and reconstruction

The simulations of the EAS development have used the air shower simulation program CORSIKA (vers. 5.62) (Heck et al., 1998). The code incorporates several options of high-energy interaction models and is continuously under improvement. In particular, we consider the latest version of QGSJet (Kalmykov and Ostapchenko, 1993). QGSJet is a model based on the Gribov-Regge theory, and extrapolate the interaction features in a well defined way into energy regions which are far beyond energies available by accelerators, and especially into the extreme forward direction. For the low-energy interactions CORSIKA includes the GHEISHA code (Fesefeldt, 1985). The influence of the Earth magnetic field on charged particle propagation is taken into account. As density profile of the atmosphere the U.S. standard atmosphere is chosen.

Samples of c. 300,000 proton, oxygen and iron-induced showers have been simulated. The energy distribution follows a power law with a spectral index of -1.5 in the energy range of 10^{14} eV to 10^{17} eV. The zenith angles are distributed in the range $[0°, 35°]$. The centers of the showers are spread uniformly over the area of the detector array. In addition simulations are used where the shower core exceeds the surface of the hadron calorimeter by 2 m on each side. The signals observed in individual detectors are determined by tracking all secondary particles down to observation level and passing them through a detector response simulation program based on the GEANT package (CERN Long Writeups, 1993).

The reconstruction of the EAS observables which is described in detail in preceding publications of the KASCADE collaboration (Haungs et al., 1996; Antoni et al., 2001; Unger et al., 1997; Hörandel, 1998; Weber et al., 1999), applies an iterative procedure for reconstructing the shower size parameters. In the end the procedure results in reconstructed observables like the electron and trucated muon sizes $N_{\rm e}$, $N_\mu^{\rm tr}$ (Weber et al., 1999), observables of the multiwire proportional chambers (Haungs et al., 1996) $N_\mu^\star$, D_{-6}, D_6 as well as hadronic observables like the reconstructed number of hadrons $N_{\rm h}^{E>100\,{\rm GeV}}$, the energy of the most energetic hadron observed in the shower $E_{\rm h}^{\rm max}$, and the energy sum of all reconstructed hadrons $\sum E_{\rm h}$ (Unger et al., 1997; Hörandel, 1998).

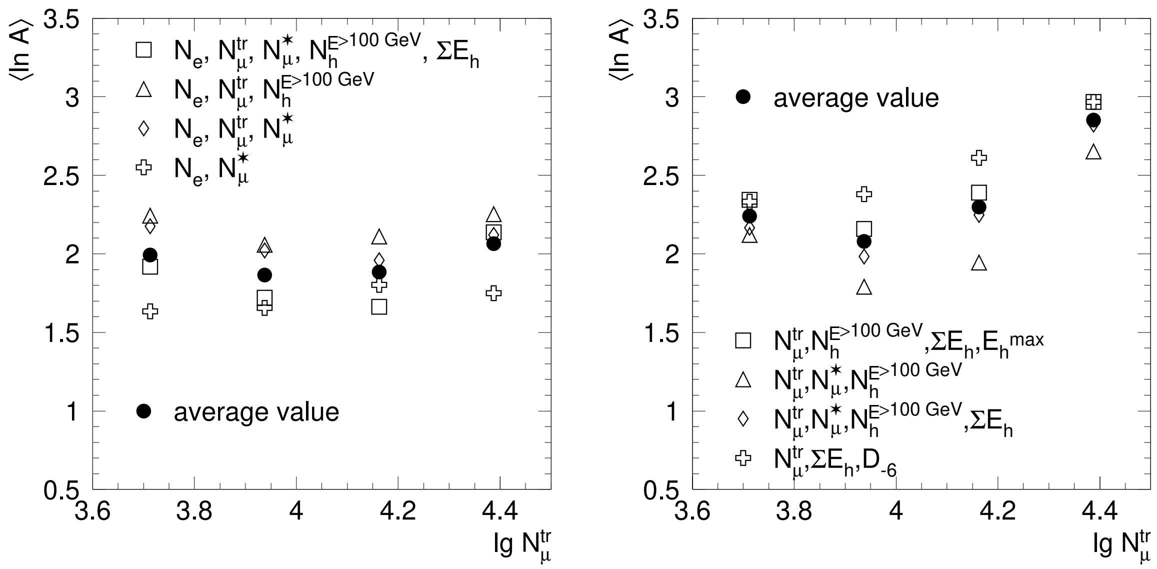

Fig. 2. Mean logarithmic mass $\langle \ln A \rangle$ resulting from the analysis of different sets of observables vs. $\lg N_\mu^{\mathrm{tr}}$ (QGSJet prediction). The sets displayed on the right do not include the observable N_e. The error bars are omitted to simplify the presentation of the synopsis, but are not larger than 25%.

3 Mass composition and energy determination

Due to the limited number of simulated EAS and the correspondingly limited statistical accuracy it is hardly reasonable to use the full set of observables simultaneously to achieve a reliable result about mass composition. Hence we consider simultaneously only a few observables.

Each simulated or measured event is represented by an observation vector $x = (N_\mathrm{e}, N_\mu^{\mathrm{tr}}, \ldots)$ of the n observables. Applying the technique described in Antoni et al. (in press) the likelihood (probability density distribution) $\hat{p}(x|\omega_i)$ of an event x for each class $\omega_i \in \{\mathrm{p}, \mathrm{O}, \mathrm{Fe}\}$ can be calculated, i.e. the probability of an event x belonging to a given class ω_i. The classification rates $P_{ij} = \hat{P}_{\omega_i \to \omega_j}$ (see Antoni et al. (in press)) give the fraction of correctly, P_{ii}, and wrongly, P_{ij}, classified events with $i \neq j$. An example for three mass classes is given in Figure 1. Of course, the sum of each row has to be 100%. Taking into account these classification rates the relative abundancies of the different sets of observables included in the analysis are calculated and comprised in the determined mean logarithmic mass (see Figure 2). This procedure to calculate $\langle \ln A \rangle$ is of course to some extent arbitrary, but this is always implicit, when $\langle \ln A \rangle$ is used. In Figure 2 only the subset of showers is used where the shower core is within a circle of 6 m relative to the centre of the calorimeter. Remarkably, all sets omitting the electron size N_e (right graph) result in a heavier composition and a more pronounced increase above the knee. As the electron size has the strongest mass sensitivity, as well as the smallest fluctuations, the mass compositions are predominantly determined by N_e and N_μ^{tr} (left). Compositions resulting from sets of less sensitive observables differ from these values (right).

The fact that different combinations of observables taken into account in the analysis, lead apparently to different mass compositions (shown in Figure 2), reveals inadequacies of the reference model, i.e. that the degree of the intrinsic correlations of different observables differs from those of the real data. Otherwise the determined mass compositions should be identical within the statistical errrors.

To estimate the primary energy E the most important parameters are N_e and N_μ^{tr} again, where now N_μ^{tr} carries most of the information. Thus we use as data basis all data of the array. Due to the large computing time requirements we do not apply the Bayesian algorithms here and use instead neural networks only. In principal there are no basic arguments to prefer one particular method. Previous publications have demonstrated the consistency and equivalence of neural network and Bayesian methods in EAS analyzes (Roth, 1999; Chilingarian et al., 1997). Detailed studies show that the neural network estimator reconstructs the energy without any bias independent of the primary particle. Only the spread of the esimated energies varies from proton (largest) to iron (smallest). Figure 3 presents the reconstructed energy spectra of measured data resulting from the analysis of three different angular intervalls. Within the errors no systematic discrepancy can be stated. The best-fit results are $\langle \gamma_1 \rangle = 2.76 \pm 0.003 \pm 0.03$, $\langle \gamma_2 \rangle = 3.1 \pm 0.02 \pm 0.06$ and $\langle E_{\mathrm{knee}} \rangle = 5 \times 10^6\mathrm{GeV}$, including statistical errors as well as the methodical error derived from different training parameters of the neural network. It is obvious that the statistical errors are considerably smaller than the systematic

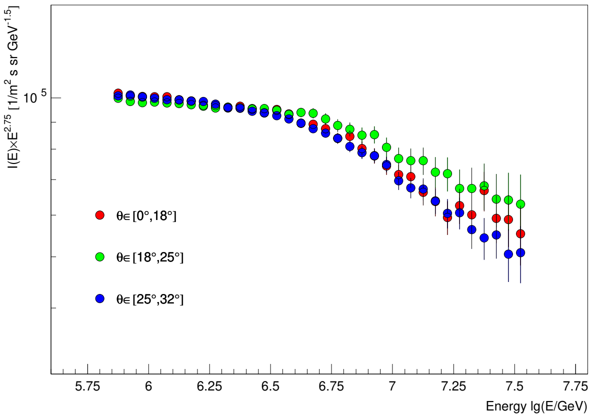

Fig. 3. Differential energy spectra resulting from the analysis of data of the KASCADE experiment using a neural network for three different angular intervalls. The used observables are $N_{\mu}^{\rm tr}$ and $N_{\rm e}$.

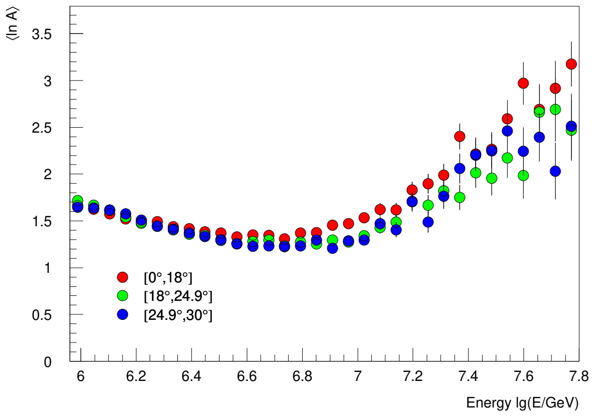

Fig. 4. Mean logarithmic mass as a function of energy. The used observables are $N_{\mu}^{\rm tr}$ and $N_{\rm e}$.

uncertainties resulting from the small number of simulated events and from interaction models.

In the present status of our analysis procedure it is hardly possible to introduce more than three classes for the reconstruction of the mass composition. If this were to be attempted additional observables had to be included. A finer binning of the energy scale (beyond the energy resolution $(\Delta E/E)_{\rm est}$) for the spectra of single masses would require to deconvolute the resolution effects. In the actual analysis this step has not been performed and only the mean logarithmic variation of the mass composition (and no detailed energy spectra of the different mass classes) are presented in Figure 4. Remarkably, within the errors no systematic discrepancy can be stated, too. To analyze the data beyond this limit we need, in the simplest case, to construct from the misclassification matrices a matrix $A_{\rm AA';EE'}$ deconvoluting mass and energy resolution effects. For this reason we are presently unable to infer any significant fine structure from the all-particle energy spectrum beyond the resolution of $(\Delta E/E)_{\rm est}$.

4 Conclusion

It should be stressed that the present study emphasizes the methodical aspects of how to infer energy spectrum and mass composition of CR. A final answer requires improved statistical accuracy both in experiment and simulation and, first of all, a reduction of systematic uncertainties due to the incomplete knowledge of high energy interactions. Nevertheless our findings on spectrum and mass composition are compatible within the methodical accuracy to the results of other experiments.

Acknowledgements. The KASCADE experiment is supported by Forschungszentrum Karlsruhe and by collaborative WTZ projects in the frame of the scientific-technical cooperation between Germany and Romania (RUM 97/014), Poland (POL 99/005) and Armenia (ARM 98/002). The Polish group (Soltan Intitute and University of Lodz) acknowledges the support by the Polish State Committee for Scientific Research (grant No. 5 P03B 133 20).

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