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# A new simple analytical method for a highly accurate determination of the optical parameters of a slab from transmittance data

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## Abstract

To date, determining with high accuracy the optical parameters (extinction coefficient *k* and refractive index *n*) of a slab from the sole transmittance data requires an inverse method based on numerical iteration procedures. In this paper, we propose a new inverse analytical method of extracting (*k*, *n*) without numerical iterative processes. The high accuracy of this new inverse method is assessed, and as an application example, the optical parameters of $CaF_2$ and Si substrates are determined in the IR spectral range of 4-8 µm.

**Keywords:** optical constants, extinction coefficient, refractive index, transmittance, analytical modeling, calcium fluoride, silicon.

## Introduction

The optical properties of a material depend on two main parameters: the refractive index *n*, which is related to the wave propagation velocity inside the material, and the extinction coefficient *k*, which is linked to the wave intensity attenuation due to absorption by the constitutive molecules of the material. Accurate knowledge of *k* and *n* over a wavelength range is of crucial importance for many optical applications, from laser windows and fiber optic systems[1,2] (for which low-absorption materials are used) to thin-film optical coatings, whose characteristics depend on the refractive indices of the substrates and the thin films deposited.[3-5]

Since *k* and *n* cannot be simultaneously determined directly, a usual strategy consists of measuring two other parameters and then employing an inverse procedure to obtain *k* and *n*. Typical methods include the following spectrophotometry measurements:

- the use of Kramers-Kronig analysis of transmittance *T*, which enables the calculation of a phase shift (φ): the knowledge of *T* and φ allows then the extraction of (*k*, *n*).[6,7] However, this requires a numerical iteration inversion and the measurement of *T* over a maximum possible wavelength range,
- reflectance *R* and transmittance *T* of a single slab:[8] numerical iteration procedures have first been proposed to solve the (*R*, *T*)→(*k*, *n*) inverse problem.[9-11] Later, exact analytical solutions have been found and applied to the study of slabs.[12-15] The main challenge lies here in the fact that measuring *R* and *T* at the same location is difficult.[6] Moreover, materials with low refractive index yield weak reflection, thus the precise measurement of *R* appears tricky in this case,[16,17]
- transmittance of several samples of the same material: this ($T_1$, $T_2$)→(*k*, *n*) method has been applied to one-layer structures (solid slabs[18-20] or liquids in a simplified model[17]), as well as to three-layer structures to determine the optical parameters of liquids.[21-24] In all the cases, the ($T_1$, $T_2$)→(*k*, *n*) inverse problem corresponds to a set of nonlinear equations, which are too complex to be solved mathematically; hence, numerical iterative techniques have been used. These methods are inherently confronted with difficulties, such as convergence towards several possible values[16,22] or slow convergence speed.[18,19] To overcome such difficulties, different strategies have been proposed recently, such as faster iterative algorithms[20,22] or a combined transmittance-ellipsometry approach[16,23,24] which also includes a numerical iterative step.

In the one-layer structure, using highly accurate analytical expressions to solve the ($T_1$, $T_2$)→(*k*, *n*) inverse problem would represent an obvious advantage over numerical iteration processes. However, to date, there is no analytical inverse method, which allows *k* to be obtained with high accuracy, similar to what iterative calculations can achieve. The only well-known classical analytical inverse method (CAIM) allows the derivation of the absorption coefficient α (hence the extinction coefficient *k*), using[9]

$$\alpha = \frac{1}{(d_2 - d_1)} . \ln\left(\frac{T_1}{T_2}\right) \Rightarrow k = \frac{\lambda}{4\pi.(d_2 - d_1)} . \ln\left(\frac{T_1}{T_2}\right) \quad (1)$$

where $T_1$ (resp. $T_2$) is the transmittance for the sample with thickness $d_1$ (resp. $d_2$) at wavelength λ.

However, Eq. (1) is only considered as a rough estimation,[9] and for high-refractive-index materials, it may at first sight result in relative errors on *k* and *n* reaching up to 45% or more.[25]

In this study, after precisely specifying the accuracy of the CAIM, we proposed a novel method to obtain the extinction coefficient *k* and the refractive index *n* of a slab from $T_1$ and $T_2$ measurements at normal incidence (Figure 1) by establishing analytical expressions, that yield highly accurate (*k*, *n*) values.

The accuracy of our new analytical inverse method (NAIM) was studied and assessed. As an application example, we then determined the optical parameters of $CaF_2$ (low-refractive-index material) and Si (high-refractive-index material) and compared their values with literature data.

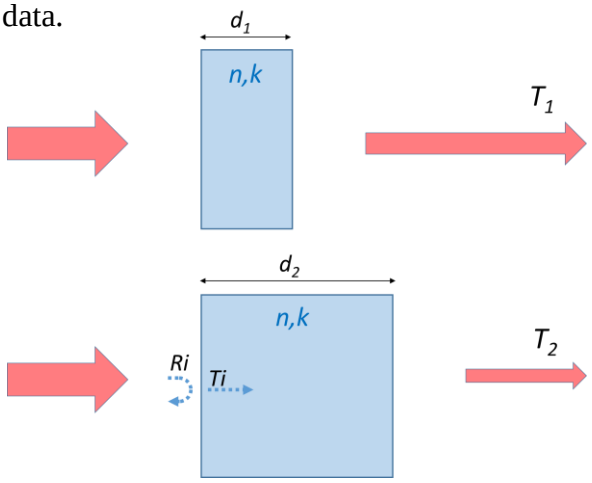


**Figure 1.** Schematic view of two samples of thicknesses $d_1$ and $d_2$ ($d_2 > d_1$) of the same material, yielding transmittance $T_1$ and $T_2$ ($T_2 < T_1$). The coefficients *Ri*, *Ti* are the Fresnel intensity reflectance and transmittance coefficients of a single slab face at normal incidence. These Fresnel intensity coefficients (only drawn on the thickest sample for clarity) do not depend on the thickness of the slab.

## Determination of the accuracy of the classical analytical inverse method (CAIM)

### *Test procedure to establish the accuracy of an inverse method*

To obtain the accuracy of a ($T_1$, $T_2$)→($k$, $n$) inverse method, two different thicknesses ($d_1$ and $d_2$) were used as references. The two thicknesses should not be too close to each other so that the transmittance curves may appear better separated. Besides, optical windows with thicknesses below 10mm are easy to carry out experiments with (and are easily commercially available). Therefore $d_1$ = 2mm and $d_2$ = 8mm were selected as the thickness references for the analysis.

Next, we describe a test procedure (summarized in Figure 2) that will be applied in the subsequent sections. First (step 1), for a given wavelength λ, assigning $k$ values in the range [$10^{-7}$-$10^{-3}$] and $n$ values in the range [1.4 - 4.0] allows the calculation of the intensity reflectance coefficient *Ri* (using the Fresnel equations) and the attenuation coefficient α expressed as follows:

$$Ri = \frac{(n-1)^2+k^2}{(n+1)^2+k^2} \quad \text{and} \quad \alpha = \frac{4\pi.k}{\lambda} \tag{2}$$

The transmission $T$ of the slab (of thickness $d$) is then given by the exact analytical expression below, which takes into account the multiple reflection contributions at the front and back air/sample interfaces:[8,12]

$$T = \frac{(1-Ri)^2.e^{-\alpha.d}}{1-Ri^2.e^{-2.\alpha.d}} \tag{3}$$

Hence (step 2) transmittances $T_1$ and $T_2$ can be computed with arbitrary precision using Eq. (3), which corresponds to the direct problem. Once $T_1$ and $T_2$ are known, trying to solve the ($T_1$, $T_2$)→($k$, $n$) inverse problem leads to the following set of two nonlinear equations, where *Ri* and α are the two unknowns:

$$\begin{cases} T_1 = \frac{(1-Ri)^2.e^{-\alpha.d_1}}{1-Ri^2.e^{-2.\alpha.d_1}} \\ T_2 = \frac{(1-Ri)^2.e^{-\alpha.d_2}}{1-Ri^2.e^{-2.\alpha.d_2}} \end{cases} \tag{4}$$

This set of equations (Eq. (4)) appears too complex to be solved analytically; thus, approximate values of *Ri* and α have to be computed, which then yield (by solving Eq. (2)) approximate values $k_{ap}$ and $n_{ap}$ (step 3). Finally, (step 4) $k_{ap}$ may be compared to $k$ (through percent error *PEk*), and $n_{ap}$ may be compared to $n$ (through absolute error $\Delta n$), as follows:

$$PEk = 100.\left|\frac{k_{ap}-k}{k}\right| \qquad \Delta n = \left|n_{ap} - n\right| \tag{5}$$

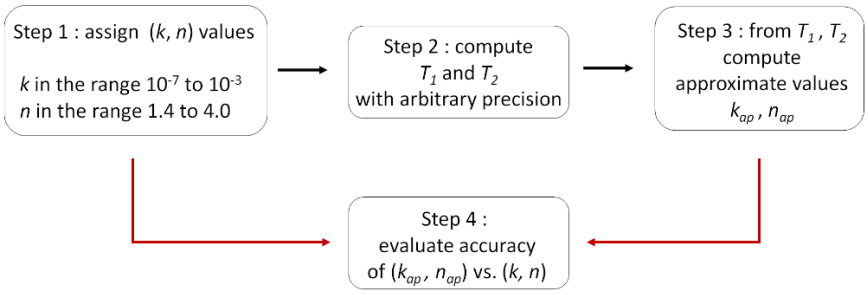


**Figure 2.** Schematic view of the steps to study the accuracy of approximate values ($k_{ap}$, $n_{ap}$) of ($k$, $n$)

### *Application: determination of the accuracy of the classical analytical inverse method*

Starting from the following analytical expression of the transmittance:[8]

$$T = \frac{(1-Ri)^2.e^{-\frac{4\pi.k.d}{\lambda}}}{1-Ri^2.e^{-\frac{8\pi.k.d}{\lambda}}} \tag{6}$$

the denominator may be approximated by 1 if $Ri \ll 1$ (this is the case for low-refractive index materials such as glasses), or if $e^{-\frac{8\pi.k.d}{\lambda}} \ll 1$ (which happens if the material is highly absorbent at the considered wavelength and thickness). Under these assumptions, Eq. (6) may be simplified as:

$$T = (1 - Ri)^2.e^{-\frac{4\pi.k.d}{\lambda}} \tag{7}$$

Thus, the $k$ parameter is easy to obtain and corresponds to the classical analytical inverse method (CAIM):[9]

$$k = \frac{\lambda}{4\pi.(d_2-d_1)}.\ln\left(\frac{T_1}{T_2}\right) \tag{8}$$

Once $k$ is known, *Ri* can be computed using Eqs. (6) or (7), using the $T_1$ data for the less thick sample ($d_1$). Note that deducing *Ri* in terms of $k$ and $T$ using Eq. (6) yields a much more accurate *Ri* value than that obtained using Eq. (7). Hence only Eq. (6) is considered here: this 2nd order equation can be solved analytically, yielding the only acceptable solution for *Ri* (satisfying $Ri < 1$):

$$Ri = \frac{1-T_1.\sqrt{1+\frac{1}{T_1.Y_1}-\frac{Y_1}{T_1}}}{1+T_1.Y_1} \quad \text{with} \quad Y_1 = e^{-\frac{4\pi.k.d_1}{\lambda}} \tag{9}$$

From *Ri*, the refractive index $n$ can be obtained by solving Eq. (2), yielding the following formula:

$$n = \frac{1+Ri}{1-Ri} + \sqrt{\frac{4.Ri}{(1-Ri)^2} - k^2} \approx \frac{1+\sqrt{Ri}}{1-\sqrt{Ri}} \tag{10}$$

Figure 3 shows the accuracy of the CAIM for determining $k$ and $n$.

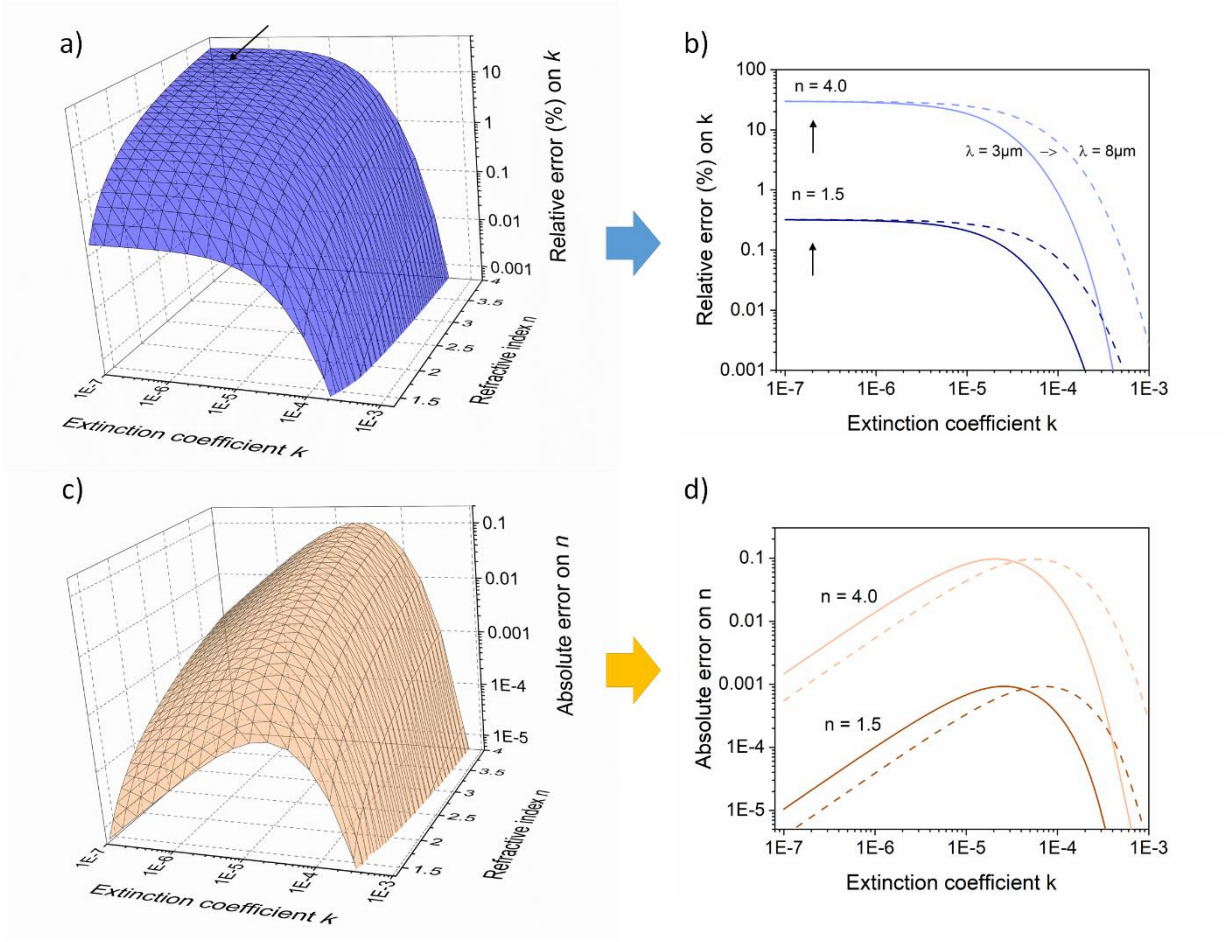


**Figure 3.** Using the classical method (CAIM) leads to the following quantified errors (a) *PEk* percent error on the determination of *k* (b) *PEk* percent error on *k*, for two values of *n* (1.5 and 4), for λ = 3μm (solid curves) and for λ = 8μm (dashed curves) (c) Δ*n* absolute error on the determination of *n* (d) Δ*n* absolute error on *n* for two values of *n*, for λ = 3μm (solid curves) and for λ = 8μm (dashed curves)

Concerning the accuracy of the CAIM in determining the coefficient *k*, it can first be noted that the highest percent error values, reaching ~ 30% (Figure 3a, black arrow), occur for high refractive indices and low extinction coefficients. Moreover, for a given refractive index *n* (Figure 3b), all the *PEk* percent error curves appear constant for low *k* values, then decrease for increasing values of *k*. Hence the maximum of a *PEk* curve, denoted max(*PEk*), is defined, and depends on the *n* value (fig 3b); it can be seen that max(*PEk*) increases with *n*: max(*PEk*) ≈ 0.3% for *n* = 1.5, and max(*PEk*) ≈ 30% for *n* = 4. In addition, changing the considered wavelength λ only shifts the *PEk* curves horizontally (Figure 3b, λ = 3 μm and λ = 8 μm): the curve maximum stays at the same value (black arrows); hence, max(*PEk*) does not depend on λ and can be defined as the global maximum percent error on *k* of the CAIM for a given *n*. In concrete cases, *n* and *k* depend on λ, hence the *k*(λ) and *n*(λ) curves can be viewed as particular (*k*, *n*) sets whose maximum percent error on *k* is most often lower than (or in the worst case, equal to) max(*PEk*), using the highest *n* value of *n*(λ).

Concerning the accuracy of the CAIM in deriving the refractive index *n* (Figure 3c,d), it can be observed that for a given value of *n*, all the Δ*n* curves (Figure 3d) go through a maximum, which is higher for high refractive indices *n*. Hence the Δ*n* curve maximum, denoted max(Δ*n*), is defined and depends on the *n* value. For *n* = 1.5, max(Δ*n*) ≈ 0.001,

which corresponds to an accuracy of one unit on the 3rd decimal place. However, for $n$ = 4, max($\Delta n$) reaches ≈ 0.1 (error of one unit on the 1rst decimal place). This underlines that the CAIM appears unsuitable for high-refractive-index materials. A change in λ also shifts the $\Delta n$ curves only horizontally (Figure 3d, λ = 3 µm for the solid curve and λ = 8 µm for the dashed curve); hence, max($\Delta n$) does not depend on λ or $k$, and can be defined as the global maximum absolute error on $n$ of the CAIM for a given $n$.

Hereafter, a new analytical expression for $k$ is established, whose much higher accuracy allows (through Eqs. (9-10)) derivation of $n$ with a much higher accuracy.

## New analytical expression for the extinction coefficient *k*

### *Mathematical modeling*

Starting from the following analytical expression of the transmission $T$:

$$T = \frac{(1-Ri)^2.e^{-\alpha.d}}{1-Ri^2.e^{-2.\alpha.d}} \tag{11}$$

And taking the logarithm of both sides leads to:

$$\ln(T) = \ln((1-Ri)^2) - \alpha.d - \ln(1-Ri^2.e^{-2.\alpha.d}) \tag{12}$$

The last term can be rewritten, by using, for $x$ such that $0<x<1$, the approximation:

$$-\ln(1-x) \approx x \quad \Rightarrow \quad -\ln(1-Ri^2.e^{-2.\alpha.d}) \approx Ri^2.e^{-2.\alpha.d} \tag{13}$$

A simpler expression is thus obtained:

$$\ln(T) \approx \ln((1-Ri)^2) - \alpha.d + Ri^2.e^{-2.\alpha.d} \tag{14}$$

In Eq. (14), the last term appears complex to handle. First, $e^{-2.\alpha.d}$ may be expressed in terms of $T$. For this, we use Eq. (11) again, assuming that in Eq. (11) $e^{-2.\alpha.d} \approx 1$ (valid in the transparent region). This yields:

$$T \approx \frac{(1-Ri)^2}{1-Ri^2}.e^{-\alpha.d} = \frac{1-Ri}{1+Ri}.e^{-\alpha.d} \tag{15}$$

Therefore, we have

$$e^{-2.\alpha.d} \approx \left(\frac{1+Ri}{1-Ri}\right)^2.T^2 \tag{16}$$

Replacing then Eq. (16) in Eq. (14) leads to:

$$\ln(T) \approx \ln((1-Ri)^2) - \alpha.d + Ri^2.\left(\frac{1+Ri}{1-Ri}\right)^2.T^2 \tag{17}$$

The set of equations for the two thicknesses $d_1$ and $d_2$ can thus be written as follows:

$$\begin{cases} \ln(T_1) \approx \ln((1-Ri)^2) - \alpha.d_1 + Ri^2.\left(\frac{1+Ri}{1-Ri}\right)^2.{T_1}^2 \\ \ln(T_2) \approx \ln((1-Ri)^2) - \alpha.d_2 + Ri^2.\left(\frac{1+Ri}{1-Ri}\right)^2.{T_2}^2 \end{cases} \tag{18}$$

The coefficient α (and consequently $k$) can be retrieved by subtracting the two preceding expressions:

$$k = \frac{\lambda}{4\pi}.\alpha = \frac{\lambda}{4\pi.(d_2-d_1)}.\left[\ln(T_1/T_2) - \left(Ri^2.\left(\frac{1+Ri}{1-Ri}\right)^2\right).\left({T_1}^2 - {T_2}^2\right)\right] \tag{19}$$

It then remains to find an expression for *Ri*, which may be precise enough to be used in Eq. (19). For this, assuming $e^{-2.\alpha.d} \approx 1$ (valid in the transparent region), Eq. (12) can be simplified:

$$\ln(T) = \ln((1-Ri)^2) - \alpha.d - \ln(1-Ri^2) \tag{20}$$

which leads to :

$$\ln(T) = \ln\left(\frac{1-Ri}{1+Ri}\right) - \alpha.d \tag{21}$$

Then using $T_1$ and $T_2$, the following set of equations is obtained:

$$\begin{cases} \ln(T_1) = \ln\left(\frac{1-Ri}{1+Ri}\right) - \alpha.d_1 \\ \ln(T_2) = \ln\left(\frac{1-Ri}{1+Ri}\right) - \alpha.d_2 \end{cases} \tag{22}$$

Eliminating α from the two equations, we have:

$$\ln\left(\frac{1-Ri}{1+Ri}\right) = \frac{d_2.\ln(T_1) - d_1.\ln(T_2)}{d_2 - d_1} \tag{23}$$

Thus, *Ri* can be expressed as follows:

$$Ri = \frac{1-e^{-C}}{1+e^{-C}} = \tanh(C/2) \quad \text{with} \quad C = \frac{d_1.\ln(T_2) - d_2.\ln(T_1)}{d_2 - d_1} > 0 \tag{24}$$

Therefore the final simple expression of *k* as a function of $T_1$, $T_2$, $d_1$, $d_2$ is:

$$k = \frac{\lambda}{4\pi.(d_2 - d_1)}.\left[\ln(T_1/T_2) - N.\left({T_1}^2 - {T_2}^2\right)\right] \tag{25}$$

with

$$N = \left(e^C.tanh(C/2)\right)^2 \quad \text{and} \quad C = \frac{d_1.\ln(T_2) - d_2.\ln(T_1)}{d_2 - d_1}$$

To get *n*, Eqs. (9) and (10) are used.

### *Accuracy of the new analytical inverse method (NAIM)*

Figure 4 shows the comparative accuracies of the NAIM and the CAIM for λ = 3µm. The accuracies of both methods are shown for a low refractive index (*n* = 1.5, Figure 4a,b), which is interesting because many types of glasses have refractive indices close to this value. For *k*, the new method leads to a maximum percent error of 0.001% (Figure 4a), which is more than two orders of magnitude better than the classical method (≈ 0.3%). For *n*, Figure 4b shows that the new method yields an accuracy of ±0.00001, which is two decades better than the classical method (max(Δ*n*) ≈ 0.001).

The accuracies of the NAIM and the CAIM are also shown for silicon, which is a high-refractive-index material (*n* = 3.4, Figure 4c,d). For *k*, the new method (Figure 4c) results in a maximum percent error of ≈1.5% (compared to ≈ 20% with the classic method). For *n* (Figure 4d), the accuracy reaches ±0.004, which is 25 times better than that of the classical method (±0.1).

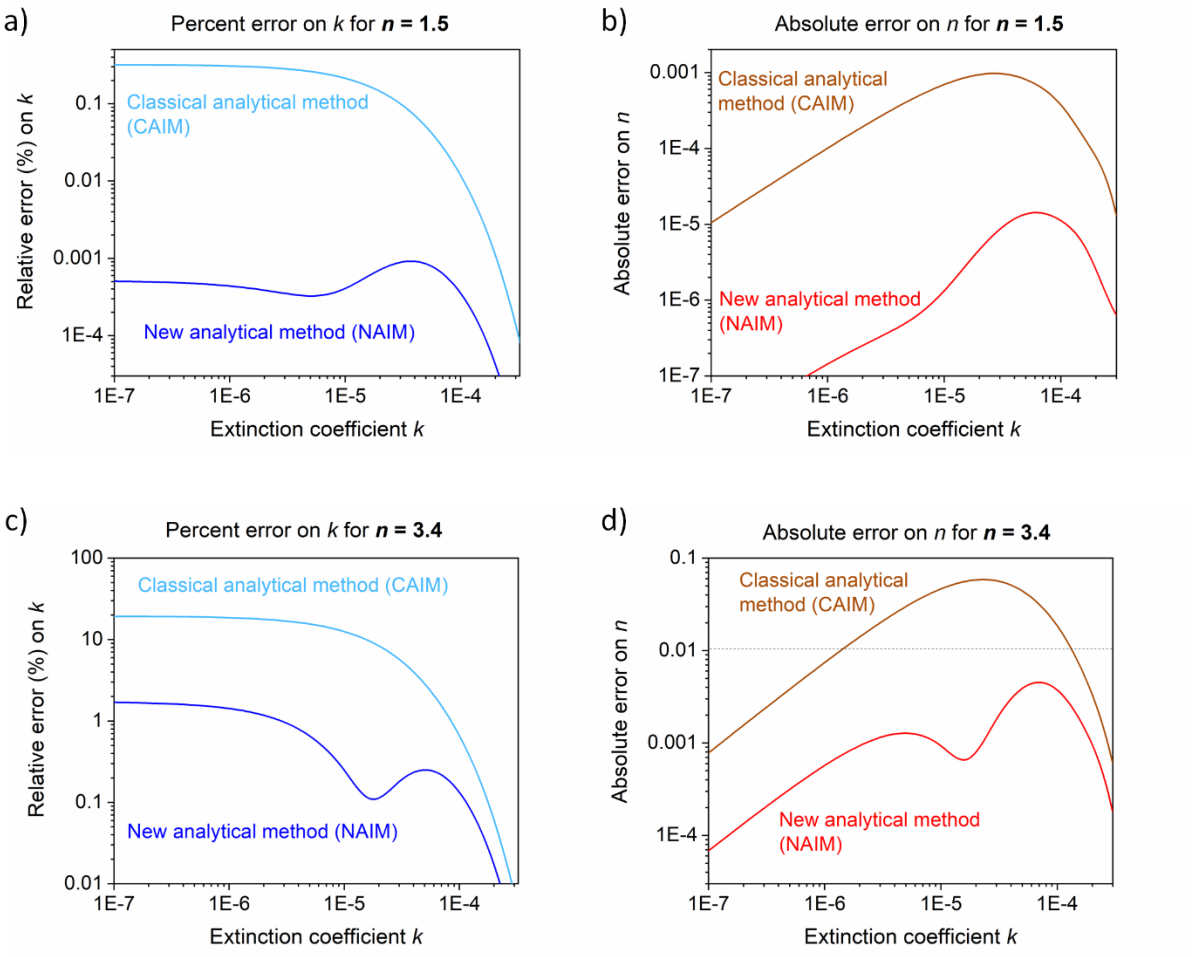


**Figure 4.** Comparative accuracies of the CAIM and the NAIM in the determination of (*k*,*n*); (a) *PEk* for *n* = 1.5 (b) Δ*n* for *n* = 1.5 (c) *PEk* for *n* = 3.4, and (d) Δ*n* for *n* = 3.4; the dotted line represents an absolute error of 1 digit on the second decimal place of *n*.

## Application example: determination of (*k*, *n*) for $CaF_2$ and Si

The transmittance of $CaF_2$ and Si optical samples (circular slabs) was measured at normal incidence in the 4-8μm IR range, using a Spectrum 400 FT-IR spectrometer (Perkin Elmer Company) with a MCT detector; the resolution was set to 4 $cm^{-1}$ (the transmittance curves are shown in the Supplemental Material S1, and the raw data are available as supplemental files). The possible sources of transmittance uncertainties are multiple (e.g. detector nonlinearity, defocusing effects, etc…).[26,27] In our case, the accuracy of the FTIR instrument was estimated at ±0.1% (similar to literature data[28]). Moreover, in opaque regions, we observed that the transmittance noise level and the systematic errors were lower than 0.1%. Hence $\sigma_T = 0.2\%$ was taken as an estimate of the standard deviation of the measured transmittance.

Figure 5a,b shows the determined (*k*, *n*) parameters of $CaF_2$ optical windows (thickness $d_1$ = 2.00mm and $d_2$ = 8.00mm, supplier: Crystran Company, UK). In the 4-8μm range, *k* increases with wavelength from $3\times10^{-7}$ to $1\times10^{-5}$. These values are quantitatively in very good agreement with recently published data.[29] The *n* values (Figure 5b), which decrease with the wavelength from about 1.41 to 1.36, are also in very good agreement with literature data.[29,30] The standard deviation of transmittance chosen ($\sigma_T$ = 0.2%) yields uncertainties of ±0.01 for *n*. For *k*, the error results in the highly transparent region ($k < 10^{-6}$) may be further lowered using thicker samples.

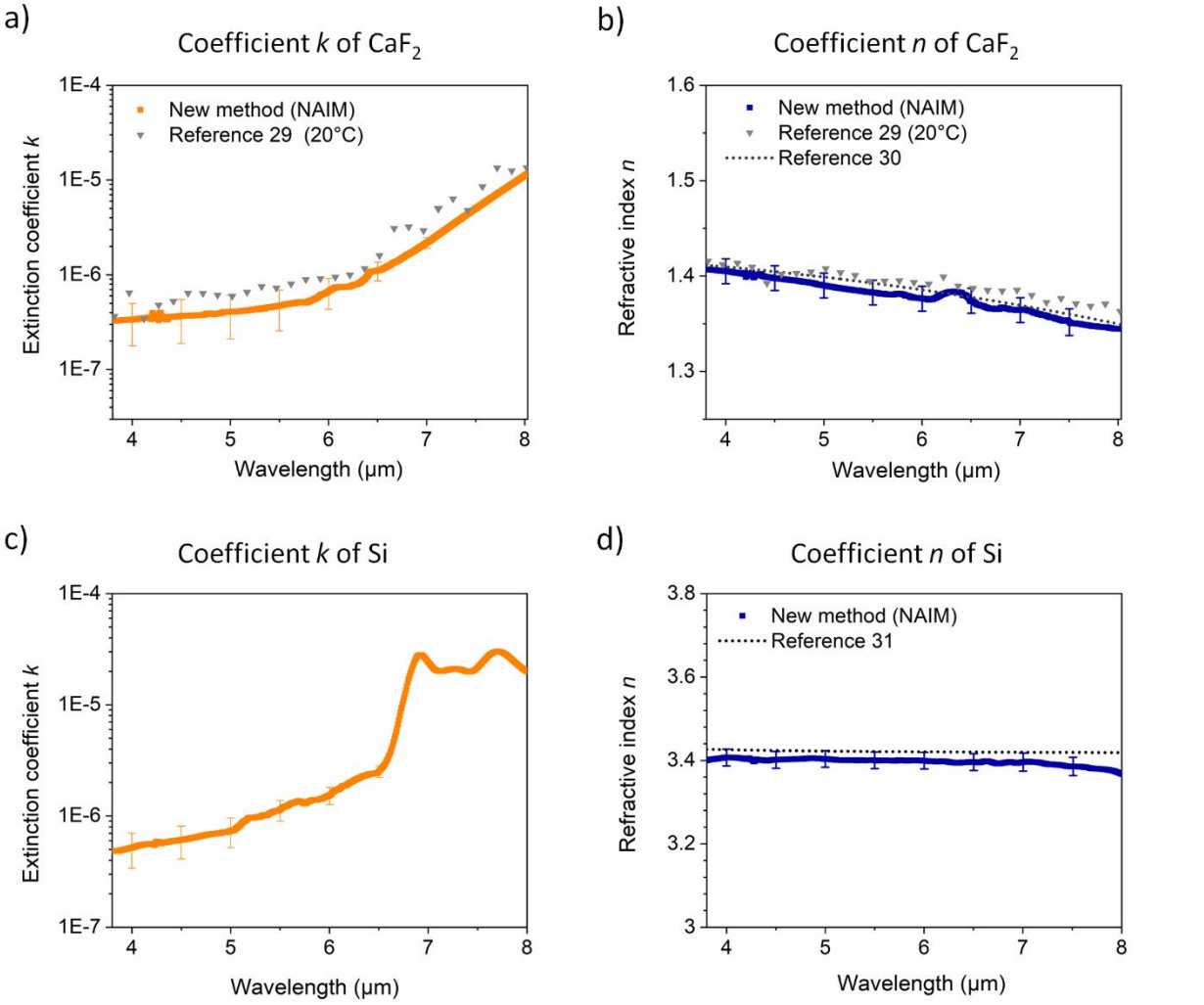


**Figure 5.** Determination of (*k*, *n*) of $CaF_2$ and FZ-Si windows using the NAIM (a) Extinction coefficient *k* of $CaF_2$ (NAIM), and *k* data from Reference 29 (b) Refractive index *n* of $CaF_2$ (NAIM), and *n* data from References 29 and 30 (c) Extinction coefficient *k* of FZ-Si (NAIM) (d) Refractive index *n* of FZ-Si (NAIM), and *n* data from Reference 31.

Figure 5c,d shows the determined (*k*, *n*) parameters of FZ-Si optical windows (thickness $d_1$ = 2.06mm and $d_2$ = 10.01mm, supplier : ATS Company, China). The thickness $d_2$ considered here is a little higher than 8mm, but it has been verified that the results shown in Fig. 4c,d remain valid. In the 4-8µm range, using the NAIM leads to an extinction coefficient *k* (Figure 5c) which increases with the wavelength from $5\times10^{-7}$ to $\sim3\times10^{-5}$, with an abrupt change around $\lambda$ = 6.5µm. For *n* (Figure 5d), using the NAIM results in a refractive index *n* which decreases slightly from 3.41 to 3.38, which is in good agreement with literature data.[31]

The small difference with the published data (≤0.02 absolute difference with reference 31 at 5µm) may be attributed to the different quality of our FZ-Si samples, or to the accuracy limit of the transmittance measurements:[26-28] indeed, the chosen standard deviation of transmittance ($\sigma_T$ = 0.2%) yields uncertainties of ±0.02 for *n*.

It can be noted that the errors arising from the new analytical calculation of *n* from transmittances $T_1$ and $T_2$ are negligible ($\leq 0.00001$ for $CaF_2$ and $\leq 0.004$ for Si), compared to the errors in *n* (±0.01 for $CaF_2$ and ±0.02 for Si) owing to the experimental measurement

uncertainties on $T_1$ and $T_2$. Thus two limitations of the present method may be considered: for highly transparent samples, $T_1$ and $T_2$ may be too close to each other to be well-separated (hence thicker samples may be used, in a reasonable range to explore). Conversely, for regions with very high absorption, the transmittance is too low to be measured by FTIR; in this case, our method cannot be used, and alternative methods (e.g., reflectance spectroscopy,[32,33] ellipsometry[16]) are effective for measuring high $k$ values (> $10^{-3}$).

## Conclusions

In this study, we proposed a new analytical inverse method (NAIM) to extract the optical constants ($k$, $n$) of a solid material with high accuracy from transmittance data of samples with two different thicknesses (in the range 2-10mm), without any numerical iterative process. To this end, we established easy-to-use analytical expressions for $k$ and $n$. Given transmittance data, the NAIM is used to solve the ($T_1$, $T_2$)→($k$, $n$) inverse problem with high accuracy (e.g. 0.00001 for $n$ in the case $n$ = 1.5, and 0.004 for $n$ in the case $n$ = 3.4). As an illustrative example, the ($k$, $n$) optical parameters of two materials ($CaF_2$ and FZ-Si) were determined straightforwardly in the 4-8µm IR spectral range, and the results obtained are in very good agreement with published data. Hence this new method may be a useful alternative for deriving the optical constants of solid materials with high accuracy.


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## Conflict of interest

The authors report there are no conflicts of interest

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