Cryogenic oxygen jet response to transverse acoustic excitation with 1T and 1L1T modes

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Abstract

The intact length of the dense oxygen core from an oxygen-hydrogen, shear coaxial rocket injector was measured. The measurements were made in a rectangular rocket combustor with optical access and acoustic forcing. The combustor was operated at chamber pressures of 40 and 60 bar, with either ambient temperature or cryogenic hydrogen. The multi-element injection spray is subjected to forced transverse gas oscillations of two different acoustic resonance modes; the first transverse (1T) mode at 4200 Hz, and the first combined longitudinal-transverse (1L1T) at 5500 Hz. Intact core length is measured from high-speed shadowgraph imaging. The dependence of intact core length with increasing acoustic amplitude is compared for the two modes of excitation.

1. Introduction

A well-known problem faced by designers of liquid propellant rocket engines (LPREs) is the occurrence of selfsustaining oscillations in chamber pressure. The pressure oscillations may organise in such a way that they take on the form and frequency of acoustic resonance modes of the combustion chamber volume. The transverse modes, with gas oscillations across the face of the injector, are usually favoured. They become self-sustaining by efficiently transferring energy from the reacting propellants to the acoustic field, quickly allowing growth to very high amplitudes which may jeopardise the lifespan of the engine [1], [2].

This problem, usually referred to as high frequency (HF) combustion instability, has, from a scientific standpoint, not yet been solved. Engine designers often employ passive damping measures to extract acoustic energy from the combustion chamber and thereby suppress HF instability. Such measures allow engines to fly, however this engineering approach to the problem has proven its fallibility. In Europe, for example, an Ariane 1 launcher was famously struck by an instance of HF instability in one of its Viking engines. Episodes of HF instability have also occurred during testing of the cryogenic, upper-stage HM7B engine for the Ariane 4 vehicle [3], which uses the liquid oxygen/hydrogen (LOx/H₂) propellant combination. At sub-scale, a research combustor at DLR Lampoldshausen known as L42-BKD experiences HF instabilities which initiate spontaneously under certain operating conditions [4]. The mechanisms by which energy from combustion is transferred to the acoustic field and allow these instabilities become self-sustaining need to be better understood in order to reliably prevent their occurrence.

In LPREs running with LOx/H₂, the use of shear-coaxial type elements in the injector assembly is common. Each element injects a central jet of dense, cryogenic LOx and a surrounding, high-speed jet of supercritical H₂. The dense 'core' of injected LOx penetrates into the combustion chamber and is broken up and atomised by the shear forces exerted by the surrounding H₂ flow. Numerous researchers have investigated the breakup behaviour experimentally using backlit-shadowgraph imaging techniques [5], [6], [7]. Others have characterised the breakup behaviours into regimes based on injection parameters [8], [9], [10].

The distance the LOx core penetrates into the combustion chamber before being atomised is thought to be important to the coupling of acoustic disturbances with combustion. A measure of this penetration distance is often taken as the axial length of the intact part of the LOx core; from injection to the first complete break in the core. Woodward et al. [11], Yang et al. [12], and Locke et al. [13], for example, have made systematic measurements of the intact core length in lab-scale, shear-coaxial, single-injector combustors burning LOx/H_2 .

Of particular relevance to acoustic coupling is the behaviour of the LOx core in response to conditions of HF instabilities. Under cold-flow conditions, HF instability has been simulated by forcing a transverse acoustic field using loud speakers. Miesse [14] showed simple jets of water contracting when subjected to oscillating transverse acoustic velocity. A research group at AFRL in the U.S. has conducted extensive testing with cryogenic liquid nitrogen/gaseous nitrogen as LOx/H_2 simulants, subjected to acoustic forcing. The dependence of core length reduction in response to the transverse acoustic velocity was found to be dependent on chamber pressure as well as injection parameters such as gas/liquid velocity ratio (*VR*) and momentum flux ratio (*J*) [15], [16], [17].

In France and Germany, two-dimensional combustor designs with optical access have allowed the response of reacting injection sprays to be studied. Under hot-fire conditions, modulating the exhaust nozzle flow rate using a

toothed wheel, or siren, has proven to be an effective means of exciting transverse acoustic resonance modes of the combustion chamber. Rey et al. [18], Richecoeur et al. [19], [20], and Méry et al. [21] have studied LOx/H₂ and LOx/CH₄ response from multiple shear-coaxial injection elements. Valuable observations were made from high-speed imaging of both the flame luminosity and the LOx core. The flame was imaged by capturing filtered chemiluminescent emission from the hydroxyl radical (OH*), and the LOx core was visualised using a backlit shadowgraph technique. No measurements of the intact length of the LOx core were presented. Sliphorst [22] applied the same imaging techniques to a single LOx/CH₄ injector and made systematic core length measurements. However, external acoustic forcing was not found to have a measurable influence on the core length, which was attributed to the relatively low acoustic amplitudes.

Measurements of the intact core length with increasing transverse acoustic amplitude were presented by Hardi et al. [23], [24], [25]. The measurements were made in a two-dimensional, multi-element, LOx/H_2 combustor with optical access and siren forcing, known as 'BKH'. High-speed images show significant reduction in core length during excitation of the first transverse (1T) mode of the combustion chamber. The core length is found to be dependent on the amplitude of the oscillating transverse acoustic flow, with a core length reduction of up to 75% for amplitudes approaching those of naturally occurring HF combustion instabilities. Furthermore, a change in the nature of the core breakup and atomisation mechanism was observed.

These previous studies with BKH were made using excitation of the 1T mode, around 4200 Hz. This is close to the 1T frequency in real, upper-stage engines. BKH was deliberately designed with this 1T-mode trait so as to result in spray-acoustic interaction at representative time scales. However, the aforementioned L42-BKD combustor experiences spontaneous instabilities with 1T-mode frequencies above 10 kHz. Therefore, the current paper aims to explore the influence of excitation frequency on the core length response.

Core length measurements from BKH during 1T-mode excitation will be compared with those during excitation of the first combined longitudinal-transverse (1L1T) mode. The 1L1T mode also produces strong transverse acoustic velocity oscillations at the injector, yet has a resonance frequency at least 1000 Hz higher. BKH is operated at conditions which are representative of real engines, which is intended to maximise the relevance of the results in understanding the coupling mechanisms are at work in full-scale combustion instabilities.

2. Experimental method

2.1. Combustor

Testing was conducted using the BKH combustor at the European Research and Technology Test Facility P8 for cryogenic rocket engines at DLR Lampoldshausen. BKH has a rectangular cross-section in order to fix the excited acoustic resonance frequencies and mode structures, and optical access windows for application of high-speed imaging. The injector consists of five shear-coaxial elements arranged in a pattern which provides a representative environment for the central element, surrounded on all sides by other elements. Figure 1 shows BKH illustrated conceptually, and photographed during testing with the optical access window clearly visible.



Figure 1: Conceptual illustration of BKH (left) and a photograph taken during optical testing (right)

2.2. Diagnostics

BKH uses a suite of conventional, low-frequency diagnostics to specify the operating conditions; fluid temperatures, pressures, and flow rates. A set of six high-frequency Kistler pressure transducers are flush-mounted in the upper and lower combustion chamber walls. These transducers are sampled at 100 kHz, and are used for characterising the acoustic field. Optical access windows provide a viewing area measuring 50 mm high and 100 mm long, with one side aligned with the injection plane and the height sufficient to view the entire five-element injector. The setup of high-speed cameras is illustrated schematically in Figure 2.

Backlit shadowgraph images are recorded with a Photron Fastcam SA5 using an RG 850 long pass filter to minimise flame luminosity. Different camera settings were used for different tests. Some of the tests were recorded with a frame rate of 7000 fps, shutter speed 50 μ s, and pixel resolution 890 × 445, while the others had 20,000 fps, shutter speed 33 μ s, and resolution 690 × 345. The first set of camera settings results in a sensing resolution of 0.11 mm² per pixel. The velocity of LOx at the point of injection is around 12 m/s, resulting in a flow displacement of approximately 5 pixels (~ 0.6 mm) during exposure time. The second camera setting gives a sensing resolution of 0.14 mm² per pixel, resulting in flow displacements of around 3 pixels (~ 0.4 mm) during image exposure. This means the shadowgraph images from both tests may suffer from blurring in some locations. An example of an instantaneous shadowgraph image is shown in Figure 3.

A beam splitter allows a second high-speed camera to simultaneously record OH* chemiluminescence. For this purpose a Photron Fastcam-ultima APX-i2 intensified camera with a filter of pass-bandwidth 310 ± 5 nm was used to record images with a frame rate of 24,000 fps and resolution of 256×128 pixels. An example of an instantaneous recorded image, presented in false colour, is shown in Figure 4. Such OH* emission imaging is taken to indicate the distribution of the reaction zone of the flame.

2.3. Operating conditions

BKH operates with injection parameters and mean chamber pressures (P_{cc}) which are representative of real, upperstage LPREs. In this work, imaging results are examined from tests with $P_{cc} = 40$ or 60 bar, using either ambient temperature (*T*), gaseous hydrogen (GH₂) or cryogenic, liquid hydrogen (LH₂), and with an oxidiser-to-fuel ratio (*ROF*) of 6. These injection parameters corresponding to each operating condition are summarised in Table 1. Other parameters provided are per-element total mass flow rate, \dot{m} , and injection velocity, *u*, where the subscripts *O* and *H* refer to oxygen and hydrogen, respectively. Non-dimensional numbers provided are: hydrogen-to-oxygen velocity ratio, $VR = u_H/u_O$; momentum flux ratio, $J = (\rho u^2)_{H'} (\rho u^2)_O$; oxygen Reynolds number, $\text{Re}_O = (\rho u D/\mu)_O$, where *D* is the oxygen injector outlet diameter; and hydrogen Weber number, $\text{We}_H = \rho_H (u_H - u_O)^2 D/\sigma_O$. Results from multiple tests running similar conditions are distinguished by the designator A, B or C.



Figure 2: Experimental setup for high-speed optical imaging



Figure 3: Typical backlit shadowgraph image revealing the structure of the LOx cores



Figure 4: Typical OH* chemiluminescence image showing the distribution of the reaction zone

		40 bar		60 bar				
		LH_2		GH_2			LH_2	
		А	В	А	В	С	А	В
P_{cc}	(bar)	43.5	43.5	59.7	60.3	60.5	61.3	60.3
ROF		6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0
T_H	(K)	75	62	281	278	288	64	62
T_O	(K)	132	132	124	128	123	127	126
'n	(g/s)	112	112	132	132	132	140	141
u_O	(m/s)	11	11	12	12	12	13	13
u_H	(m/s)	118	90	423	405	422	84	80
VR		11	8.1	35	33	35	6.4	6.2
J		1.9	1.4	6.3	5.7	6.2	1.1	1.1
Re_O		4.1×10^{5}	4.1×10^{5}	4.1×10^{5}	4.3×10^{5}	4.0×10^{5}	4.6×10^{5}	4.5×10^{5}
We_H		1.1×10^{5}	7.7×10^{4}	8.4×10^{5}	7.8×10^5	8.3×10 ⁵	1.3×10^{5}	1.2×10^{5}

Table 1: Operating conditions

2.4. Acoustic excitation

BKH has a main nozzle at the end of the combustion chamber, as well as a secondary nozzle in the upper wall (Figure 1). The exhaust flow through the secondary nozzle is modulated with a siren to excite acoustic resonances inside the combustion chamber. The frequency of acoustic excitation is determined by controlling the rotational speed of the siren wheel. By linearly increasing the rotational speed, the excitation frequency is ramped through a desired range between 0 and 6000 Hz over the course of a 40 to 70 s test firing. The 1T resonance mode of the combustion chamber volume is excited as the excitation frequency passes through approximately 4200 Hz. The 1L1T mode is excited at around 5500 Hz.

The structures of the 1T and 1L1T modes, obtained from a numerical modal analysis, are given in Figure 5. Acoustic pressure distributions are given on the left hand side, and the corresponding acoustic particle velocity vector field on the right. The 1T mode (Figure 5a) has a pressure node in the near injector region which means that exciting this mode results in high amplitudes of oscillating acoustic gas motion transverse to the injection axis of the flames. The 1L1T mode (Figure 5b) has a similar acoustic field distribution to the 1T mode at the location of the injector, also

resulting in transverse oscillating gas flow across the injector face. A detailed study of the acoustic characteristics of BKH is presented by Hardi et al. [26].



Figure 5: Acoustic mode shapes of the (a) 1T and (b) 1L1T resonance modes in BKH, showing the pressure distribution (left) and velocity distribution (right). The upper row of each group is at the start of an acoustic cycle, the lower row one-quarter of a cycle later

Measurements of acoustic amplitude are taken from the dynamic pressure transducer located in the lower wall of the chamber, nearest the injector face, as indicted in Figure 1. This sensor is chosen as it is located in a pressure antinode for both the 1T and 1L1T modes. HF transducer signals are processed in the following way to obtain a time-dependent estimate of amplitude. First, the signal is high-pass filtered to retain only acoustic resonance content above 2800 Hz. A Butterworth filter was used, employing the filtfilt command in Matlab to prevent any phase shift of the output signal. A sliding RMS calculation is performed on the filtered signal, with a mean-window length of 121

samples and 50% overlap. Finally, pressure amplitude p' is obtained by multiplying the RMS value by the squareroot of 2. From p', the magnitude of acoustic velocity (u') at the nodal line is estimated using $u' = (c_{bulk}/\gamma)(p'/P_{cc})$, where c_{bulk} is the mean sound speed of the bulk gas mixture in the combustion chamber volume, and γ is the ratio of specific heats.

Excitation of the 1T and 1L1T resonance modes achieves acoustic pressure amplitudes (p') of up to 9% of P_{cc} (18% peak to peak), as compared to the chamber background noise during off-resonance periods of $p'/P_{cc} \sim 0.9\%$. Traditionally, an LPRE is considered to experience HF instability when acoustic oscillations reach amplitudes greater than 5% of P_{cc} (10% peak to peak) [27].

2.5. LOx core measurements

A typical BKH test sequence involves running the combustor to a steady-state operating condition, and then accelerating the siren through a range of excitation frequencies so as to meet and excite several acoustic modes of interest. The high-speed cameras are triggered to record for 1 to 4-s durations, as the excitation frequency approaches and passes through peak resonance of the 1T and 1L1T modes.

Sample periods of 5-ms duration were selected for various p' levels throughout this recording time. Samples were chosen from periods where fluctuations in p' were minimal. Sampled image sequences consist of 35 and 100 frames for the 7000 and 20,000 fps recordings, respectively. Although the excitation frequency is continuously increased at 166 Hz/s, over a 5-ms sample period it can be considered quasi-steady.

Flow field turbulence, as well as insufficient contrast in the raw shadowgraph images, prohibited successful implementation of an automated routine to detect and trace the intact LOx core. Instead, frame-by-frame identification of the end point of the intact core was performed manually. The images were first processed to enhance contrast gradients and reduce noise to aid the operator in identifying the core end point. Figure 6 shows an example frame where the end-point location has been identified in the raw image with the assistance of the contrast-enhanced image.



Figure 6: Example LOx core measurement, showing the contrast-enhanced image (left), and the manually identified end-point location overlaid on the raw image (right)

3. Results

3.1. Without acoustic excitation

First, the qualitative character of the shadowgraph image in Figure 3 is considered, taken from the 60 bar, GH_2 test A. As this image was taken during off-resonance excitation with very low acoustic amplitudes, it is considered to represent the natural behaviour of the injected spray flame. The dense LOx core of the central injection jet and those of the nearest outer (upper and lower) elements are clearly visible. They are identifiable by the light shade of grey which masks the surface of the dense LOx structures. This shade of grey is near-infrared emission from hot combustion products (H₂O) forming in the thin shear layer between the surface of the LOx core and the surrounding H₂ where primary mixing and reaction takes place. The presence of infrared emission in the image is the result of the longer exposure time required to compensate for the lower intensity of a continuous backlighting source. A similar effect of this compromise was experienced by Locke et al. [13].

While the outer LOx jets deflect outwards somewhat, the central LOx jet appears to continue more or less axially, as would be expected inside a real engine. The outer four injectors appear to have served their somewhat sacrificial purpose of providing a representative environment for the central injector. Dynamic behaviour of the central LOx core is observed in the high-speed image sequences. The central core penetrates a distance of approximately 13 L/D into the chamber before beginning to breakup, where L is the intact core length and D is the diameter of the LOx injector; 3.5 mm. The breakup mechanism is one of successive detachment of large, dense oxygen structures which become entrained in the axial mean flow. A detailed description of this natural shedding behaviour, as well as example image sequences, can be found in Refs [24], [25].

3.2. With acoustic excitation

Figure 7 shows example frames during 1T-mode excitation in 60 bar, GH_2 test C. Here, the central LOx core length is greatly reduced compared to its natural state, now only extending around 7 *L/D* downstream of injection. The core is no longer given the opportunity to develop downstream because each pass of the transverse acoustic wave strips material from its surface. The core breakup mechanism has changed from its natural axial shedding mode to one of stripping and entrainment in the oscillating transverse flow. Again, this behaviour is described in more detail in Refs [24], [25].



Figure 7: Example shadowgraph and OH* image sequence during 1T-mode excitation

Shortening of the LOx cores is accompanied by a retraction of the flame towards the injection plane. The instantaneous OH* images in Figure 7 (lower row) shows that the reaction zone is no longer well distributed as the LOx core travels downstream; rather, there are compact regions of high emission intensity as all combustion is taking place in a space approximately half the length of the window (50 mm). This demonstrates the importance of characterising the response of the LOx cores to transverse acoustic oscillations, since redistribution of heat release in the chamber will affect the coupling mechanism driving HF instability.

3.3. Comparison of response to 1T and 1L1T modes

Transverse acoustic atomisation appears not be as effective for the 1L1T mode as for the 1T mode. Figure 8 shows a comparison of instantaneous core length measurements for the 1T and 1L1T modes. Two sets of measurements at different operating conditions are presented (left and right sides in Figure 8), each set for the same acoustic amplitude. In both examples, the core is longer during 1L1T-mode excitation. Its structure appears more sinuous, as if the transition from the natural breakup mechanism (for low acoustic amplitudes) to the transverse stripping mechanism (at higher amplitudes) is not as advanced.



1T mode, $p'/P_{cc} = 6.7\%$, 40 bar, LH₂ test B



1T mode, $p'/P_{cc} = 5.5\%$, 60 bar, LH₂ test A



1L1T mode, $p'/P_{cc} = 6.7\%$, 40 bar, LH₂ test A

1L1T mode, $p'/P_{cc} = 5.5\%$, 60 bar, LH₂ test A

Figure 8: Comparison of instantaneous core length measurements for 1T and 1L1T modes, for the same acoustic amplitude

3.4. Intact core length

Systematic measurements of intact core length were made during 1L1T-mode excitation, for various levels of acoustic excitation amplitude. These are presented here for comparison with the previous measurements made by the Authors [24] under 1T-mode excitation. Table 1 lists the complete range of operating conditions covered for all 1T and 1L1T measurements.

Figure 9 presents all core length measurements with increasing acoustic amplitude for tests with 60-bar chamber pressure. A trend line is provided for tests with GH_2 ; it is not a fit to the data, but arbitrarily drawn and provided merely to assist the eye in orienting the many measurement points. Filled and semi-filled symbols are used for 1L1T excitation. These points consistently lie above those for 1T excitation, meaning the core length was greater for the same acoustic amplitude, but under a 1L1T-mode distribution and frequency. A second trend line, converging on the same natural core length, is provided for orientation with the GH_2 , 1L1T set of points.

Figure 10 presents measurements for 40-bar chamber pressure. Here, the divide between 1T and 1L1T excitation is also clearly evident. Trend lines are again provided for orientation, although the fewer number of measurement points available renders their placement even less meaningful. They do, however, appear to converge on a longer natural core length than for the tests at 60 bar.

In both plots, the vertical error bars reflect fluctuation in core length due to the natural breakup mechanism, with axial growth and detachment. The noticeable reduction in error bar length with increasing acoustic amplitude reflects the transition from this natural breakup to the transverse stripping mechanism.

Scatter in the measurements is due to natural turbulence and bending of the long, sinuous core. Bending of the core occasionally gives an artificially short length measurement. Using the integrated length of the core centre instead of end point location may reduce the influence of this behaviour. However, as discussed previously, the automated core detection and tracing routine was unreliable.

4. Discussion

Intact core length results show consistently longer cores for 1L1T-mode excitation. The acoustic field distribution for the 1L1T mode may account for its lesser influence. The 1T mode has a more or less uniform acoustic velocity field along the main chamber axis, corresponding to its pressure nodal line. By nature, the 1L1T mode as a vertical nodal line approximately half way along the chamber axis. This means the amplitude of oscillating acoustic velocity, u', changes in the chamber axial direction. From a velocity antinode at the injection plane, it decreases to zero at the vertical nodal line, then increases again (with opposing phase) approaching the main nozzle end of the chamber. Figure 11 compares profiles of the transverse (vertical) component of u' along the chamber central axis for the 1T and 1L1T modes. The velocity amplitude profiles were extracted from the numerical modal analysis in Figure 5.



Figure 9: Intact core length measurements under 1T- and 1L1T-mode excitation, in tests with $P_{cc} = 60$ bar



Figure 10: Intact core length measurements under 1T- and 1L1T-mode excitation, in tests with $P_{cc} = 40$ bar

The first 100 mm of the transverse velocity profiles in Figure 11 are compared more closely, as this is the region where most jet-acoustic interaction occurs, and where LOx core measurements can still be made. By the end of the optical window, 100 mm downstream, u' is practically zero for the 1L1T mode, while the 1T mode is still almost at full strength. The mean value of transverse u' from 0 to 100 mm for the 1L1T mode is 40% less than that of the 1T mode.

Additionally, the different time scales of jet-acoustic interaction may contribute to the difference in 1T and 1L1T mode response. The higher frequency 1L1T wave has a shorter interaction time with the LOx core. For each acoustic cycle, the duration over which the shear force from the transverse acoustic flow acts on the LOx jet is around 24% shorter than for the 1T mode. Thus, the transverse stripping mechanism may not be as effective for the 1L1T mode as for the lower frequency 1T mode.

The goal of this study was to resolve such influence of frequency on LOx core breakup. However, in the current BKH configuration, the influence of frequency cannot be distinguished from that of the different mode shapes. It appears likely that the difference in modal velocity distributions is mostly responsible for the difference in LOx core length.

The question of frequency dependence of the transverse acoustic atomisation mechanism remains. It will determine the applicability of results from research combustors such as BKH to the modelling of other unstable combustors, for example BKD. While BKH and BKD have a similar injector element, in both design and scale, BKD has different dominant frequencies of 1T-mode instability. Any frequency dependence of intact core length should be taken into account, as the distribution of energy release is also affected.



Figure 11: Transverse velocity amplitude profiles along the chamber central axis for the 1T and 1L1T modes (left), and the modal velocity distributions from which they are extracted (right)

5. Conclusions

The rectangular rocket combustor BKH was operated at conditions representative of real, upper-stage engines. Highspeed backlit shadowgraph images were used to measure the length of the intact LOx core from the central element of the five-element, shear-coaxial injector. Acoustic forcing was used to excite the chamber 1T and 1L1T resonance modes to amplitudes representative of real HF combustion instabilities. Exciting these modes subjects the injected propellant streams to oscillating transverse acoustic gas motion. The core length decreases with increasing acoustic amplitude, and the mechanism of core breakup changes.

Core lengths under 1L1T-mode excitation were consistently greater than for the 1T mode. This is thought to be due primarily to the modal velocity distribution of the 1L1T mode, resulting in overall lower transverse velocity amplitudes incident on the LOx core.

The higher frequency of the 1L1T mode provides less time for each passing wave to interact with the core. This may contribute to the greater core lengths under 1L1T-mode excitation. However, any frequency dependence of the transverse atomisation mechanism could not be resolved from the influence of the modal velocity distribution.

Nevertheless, any such frequency dependence should be taken into account when attempting to exploit core length measurements in modelling of combustion instabilities. Measurements made in one system may not apply to another where the instability has a different dominant frequency.

Changing core length was observed to change the extent of the flame, and thus the distribution of heat release in the combustion chamber. This undoubtedly plays a role in the coupling of unsteady heat release with acoustics in unstable rocket engines. LOx core measurements are therefore important in understanding the driving mechanisms of HF instabilities.

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