The choice of torsional or longitudinal excitation in guided wave pipe inspection

D N Alleyne¹, T Vogt ², P Cawley³

¹ & ²D N Alleyne and T Vogt, Guided Ultrasonics; 17 Doverbeck Close, Nottingham NG15 9ER, UK.
³P Cawley, Department of Mechanical Engineering Imperial College; London SW7

Navid Maghbooli - Kawoshkaran Co. Ltd. (www.KAWOSHKARAN.com)

Abstract

Long-range screening of pipework using guided waves is now in routine industrial use. The T(0,1) mode is generally preferable to the L(0,2) mode as the transduction system required is simpler and lighter. The L(0,2) mode may be useful in a small number of cases but tests reported here demonstrate that it is unlikely to be useful in liquid-filled pipes. It also tends to give poorer signal-to-noise ratio, and a double mode conversion phenomenon can give extra echoes that could be incorrectly called as defects. In principle it is possible to test each length of pipe using both modes, though at a considerable penalty in equipment complexity, weight and cost. It is argued that if increased confidence is required, a better strategy generally is to test each section of pipe from both directions using the torsional mode.

Keywords: LRUT, Guided wave, Pipe inspection

1- Introduction

Long-range ultrasonic guided wave inspection is now established as a screening technique for corrosion in pipework in a wide variety of applications such as corrosion under insulation (CUI), road crossings, buried pipes and offshore risers. The method involves attaching a ring of transducers at one location on the pipe. This sends guided waves along the pipe and receives returning echoes from pipe features such as welds, tees and defects. In typical 30 year- old refinery pipework with general surface corrosion it is possible to test around 30 m in each direction from a single transducer location, and longer distances are possible in newer pipe. The test is therefore much quicker than conventional inspection that requires access to each test point and offers 100% screening of the pipe wall, rather than the series of spot measurements conventionally done with conventional ultrasonic thickness gauging.

Only two ultrasonic bulk waves exist (compression and shear); in contrast there are many guided wave modes in plates and pipes and they are, in general, dispersive (their velocity is a function of frequency). A key to successful guided wave inspection is therefore to control the modes that are excited and received[1,2]. Figures 1(a) and 1(b) show subsets of the group velocity dispersion curves for 3 inch (wall thicknesses 5.5 mm) and 12 inch (wall thickness 10.3 mm) schedule 40 steel pipes, respectively. Two mode families are shown in each case: the torsional-type modes (T(0,1), F(1,2), F(2,2)) and the longitudinal-type modes (L(0,1), L(0,2), F(1,3) and F(2,3)), the mode numbering convention used being that given by Silk and Bainton[3]. The T(0,1), L(0,1) and L(0,2) modes are axially symmetric while the F(m,n) modes (m≠0) are termed flexural modes and have m wavelengths around the circumference of the pipe. The n=2 modes have displacements primarily in the circumferential direction and are therefore members of the torsional family, while the n=3 modes have displacements primarily in the axial direction and are therefore members of the longitudinal family. It can be seen that there are many more modes below 100 kHz in the 12 inch pipe; Figure 1(a) shows all modes in the F(m,2) and F(m,3) families of the 3 inch pipe up to 100 kHz, while Figure 1(b) shows them only up to 10th order in the 12 inch pipe.

Figure 1. Group velocity dispersion curves for order zero, F(*,2) and F(*,3) modes in schedule 40 steel pipes: (a) 3 inch; (b) 12 inch (F modes only shown up to 10th order)
The L(0,2) and T(0,1) modes are the most attractive modes to excite in practical pipe inspection. The T(0,1) mode is non-dispersive at all frequencies, while the L(0,2) mode is practically non-dispersive over a wide frequency band. They can be excited in a pure form without producing any flexural waves by applying uniform excitation over the circumference of the pipe: this can be achieved with a ring of piezoelectric transducers as shown in Figure 2, or with an electromagnetic system using a coil wrapped round the pipe[4]. These modes have practically uniform displacement and strain through the pipe wall and so are equally sensitive to defects at the internal and external surfaces. Since weld caps are generally not removed, welds present a change in cross-sectional area, and hence in effective acoustic impedance. This means that reflections are seen at welds. In order to correctly identify a reflector as a weld, rather than, for example, a defect, the extent of mode conversion produced by a reflector is also measured. If an axially symmetric mode is incident on an axially symmetric feature in the pipe such as a uniform weld or flange, then only axially symmetric modes are reflected. However, if the feature is non-axially symmetric, such as a corrosion patch, some non-axially symmetric waves will be generated. If the L(0,2) mode is incident, the most important mode conversion is to the F(m,3) family, while if the T(0,1) mode is used, the major mode conversion is to the F(m,2) family. The amount of mode conversion obtained depends on the degree of asymmetry, and hence on the circumferential extent of the defect. The F(m,2) and F(m,3) mode families have very similar velocities to the T(0,1) and L(0,2) modes, respectively, and so reflections of these modes from a given feature appear close together. They can be identified by processing the signals obtained at individual transducers in the rings of Figure 2, or from groups of transducers wired together in segments. Further details can be found in[5,6]. These flexural modes are also important in focusing to obtain better circumferential resolution[7-10].

Figure 2. Transducer ring set-ups used: (a) longitudinal mode: all four rows used; (b) torsional mode: central two rows only used, outer rows pulled back. Rings shown are for 6 inch pipes; similar designs used for other pipe sizes

The discussion above suggests that a single ring of transducers is sufficient. However, a single ring will transmit waves equally in both directions and will be unable to distinguish the direction from which a reflection has come. Knowledge of the direction from which a reflection has come is essential in practical testing so direction control is required. This can be achieved by phasing the signals applied to and received from multiple rings[11,12]. In the torsional mode case, for typical pipe wall thicknesses, T(0,1) is the only axially symmetric mode in the frequency range usually employed (below 100 kHz), so only two rings of transducers are required since it is only necessary to cancel the T(0,1) mode in one direction. However, in the longitudinal mode case, the L(0,1) mode exists together with the L(0,2) mode so, if a single ring is used, both modes are generated in both directions. It is therefore necessary to suppress the L(0,1) mode in both directions and the L(0,2) mode in one direction. This can be achieved with four rings of transducers as shown in Figure 2(a), though it is also possible to achieve good results with three rings[12]. The original research was carried out using the L(0,2) mode[11,13] and the first commercial system, produced by the TWI company Plant Integrity Ltd, also used this mode[14]. However, as discussed above, the T(0,1) mode requires fewer rings for direction and mode control, giving a lighter and cheaper transduction system. It is also completely non-dispersive and exists at all frequencies, whereas the L(0,2) mode has a cut-off at low frequency after which it has a strongly dispersive region before it reaches its plateau velocity, as shown in Figure 1. The T(0,1) mode can therefore be used at very low frequencies, which can be advantageous in cases where the attenuation is very high. Another key advantage is that it is unaffected by non-viscous liquids, as discussed below. Therefore, the Guided Ultrasonics Ltd Wavemaker system primarily employs the T(0,1) mode, though the L(0,2) mode can also be used when necessary[6]. The current Plant Integrity Teletest system can also use either mode[15]. While the T(0,1) mode is generally advantageous, the L(0,2)mode may be a better choice in some circumstances, notably:

- c1 It is the fastest mode, which means that it is the first signal to arrive from a feature. This is a significant advantage when a defect occurs before other features such as welds, bends, tees etc, but the advantage diminishes with the number of features before the defect, since many arrivals from these features are likely to
occur before the L(0,2) reflection from the defect, so it is no longer the first signal;

- Its sensitivity to circumferential cracks is marginally higher than that of the torsional mode\textsuperscript{[16, 17]}, though it is insensitive to axial cracks since the hoop stress is zero;
- It often gives a smaller reflection from axially welded supports than the torsional mode. The torsional mode reflections from such supports are particularly large at low frequencies on small-diameter pipes as they then significantly affect the torsional stiffness and hence present a large acoustic impedance change. However, the advantage of L(0,2) is reduced, since it cannot be used at low frequencies on small-diameter pipes due to its cut-off (see Figure 1(a)), though when the pipe is very small, for example a boiler tube, it is sometimes possible to use the L(0,1) mode;
- It has lower attenuation in some coated pipe cases\textsuperscript{[18]}.

This paper further explores the performance of the two modes, looking particularly at the effect of fluid in the pipe, the signal-to-noise ratio obtained in practice and double mode conversion phenomena. The merit of employing both modes in a given inspection is also discussed.

2. Effect of fluid in pipe

While the longitudinal mode family is characterised by the dominant displacement component being in the axial direction, these modes do have some radial motion and therefore couple to a liquid in the pipe. Hence, introducing fluid into a pipe significantly affects the dispersion behaviour of this mode family. In contrast, the T(0,1) mode has no radial motion and is therefore unaffected by a non-viscous fluid. The dispersion behaviour of a fluid-filled pipe has been predicted by several authors, see for example\textsuperscript{[19-22]}. Figure 3 shows the phase velocity dispersion curves for a water-filled 3 inch, schedule 40 steel pipe. For simplicity, only the axisymmetric, L(0,n) modes are shown, and the L(0,2) mode for an empty pipe is shown dotted. Multiple L modes are present in the water-filled pipe, each of which follows the plateau of the L(0,2) mode in an empty pipe over a limited frequency band before deviating from it; the mode shape in this plateau region is similar to that in the empty pipe\textsuperscript{[22]}. At frequencies where the modes deviate from the plateau there is no axially symmetric mode similar to the L(0,2) mode of the empty pipe so any excitation in these regions will generate highly dispersive modes that will create complicated signals in long-range guided wave testing.

The problem is demonstrated in Figure 4(a) that shows the longitudinal mode signal on a 3 inch liquid butane-filled line in good condition obtained with the Guided Ultrasonics Ltd Wavemaker G3 system employing a four-row transducer ring system of the type shown in Figure 2(a), using a seven-cycle Hanning windowed toneburst at a centre frequency of 43 kHz. The black curve shows the axially symmetric mode (order 0) arrivals, while the red trace shows the order 1 (mainly corresponding to the F(1,3) mode when the longitudinal mode is excited) components. The ring is located at the origin in the middle of the green section that denotes the dead zone. The shaded section around the dead zone indicates a region where signals can be seen but direction control is imperfect and signal amplitudes may not be accurate. The schematic diagram above the traces shows the pipe layout with features marked: CS indicates a contact (simple) support, WS denotes a welded support, W indicates a butt weld in the pipe and B is a bend. The dark shading round the pipe in the positive direction indicates a sleeved road crossing. A complex series of reflections is seen from the bend at around -11 m and the noise level after the bend is high. This example was chosen to show relatively good performance with the L(0,2) mode; at other centre frequencies, much poorer results could be obtained.

Figure 4(b) shows the corresponding result using the T(0,1) mode with the same centre frequency and input signal. In this case the torsional mode was generated using the middle two rows of the transducer system of
Figure 2(a) employed for the longitudinal mode, with the individual transducers rotated through 90° to provide tangential excitation, as shown in Figure 2(b). The outer two rows were retracted so that they did not contact the pipe. In practice, if only the torsional mode was used, a smaller and lighter two-row system would be employed. Here, the small reflection from the contact support at -8 m and the reflections from the welds on either side of the elbow piece forming the bend are clearly identified. The noise level remote from the reflectors is extremely low compared to that of Figure 4(a), particularly after the bend, so extra reflections from defects would be more reliably detected.

Figure 4. Test on 3 inch (approx) DN 80 (nominal 4.9 mm wall thickness) fluid-filled (liquid butane) line at 43 kHz centre frequency that gave best result with longitudinal mode: (a) longitudinal mode; (b) torsional mode. CS is a contact support, WS a welded support, B a bend, W a butt weld

This example demonstrates the problems with using longitudinal excitation in liquid-filled lines: the signal-to-noise ratio is compromised and reflections from features appear very complex, making it difficult to identify any smaller reflectors close to the feature, particularly downstream from it.

3. Signal-to-noise ratio

In most guided wave tests, the noise in the signal is predominantly coherent rather than random noise. It arises mainly from modes other than the desired mode being generated and detected, and from signals coming from the opposite direction being incompletely cancelled. The poorer signal-to-noise ratio obtained with the longitudinal mode is not confined to tests on liquid-filled pipes. Figure 5(a) shows the transducer ring attached to a 6 inch jet fuel line with longitudinally welded supports, as shown in Figure 5(b). The best result (highest signal-to-noise ratio) with longitudinal mode excitation was obtained with a centre frequency of 51 kHz and is shown in Figure 5(c) at a bandwidth equivalent to that of a 20-cycle Hanning windowed toneburst. The best result with torsional mode excitation was obtained at a centre frequency of 47 kHz, and is shown in Figure 5(d) at a similar bandwidth to that of Figure 5(c). Although being displayed at similar frequencies, the lower torsional mode velocity gives a smaller wavelength, so the reflections from features with the torsional mode are shorter, giving better spatial resolution. In addition, the signal-to-noise ratio with the torsional mode is better throughout the trace.

Figure 5. Test on 6 inch schedule 40 (nominal 7.1 mm wall thickness) jet fuel line with longitudinally welded supports: (a) ring attached to pipe; (b) example welded support; (c) best result with longitudinal mode; (d) best result with torsional mode. WS signifies a welded support of type shown
Figure 6 shows a test on a 2 inch inert gas line. Severe corrosion can be seen in the region indicated on Figure 6(a) that was about 10 m from the transducer location of Figure 6(b); the corrosion was located in the middle of a road crossing as indicated by the shaded area in the results of Figures 6(c) and 6(d). The road crossing was removed as part of a general work programme at the refinery and the photograph of Figure 6(a) was taken after excavation. In this case the best signal-to-noise ratio with the longitudinal mode was obtained at 70 kHz with a 10-cycle Hanning windowed toneburst excitation signal, and is shown in Figure 6(c), while the best result with the torsional mode was obtained at a similar bandwidth at 50 kHz and is shown in Figure 6(d). The same features are seen in the two traces, the reflection from the defective region being a similar amplitude with respect to the weld echoes but the signal-to-noise ratio is better in the torsional case. The signal marked R around -6 m is a reverberation of the weld echo at about -3 m and the bend at 0 m (the origin in Figures 6(a) and 6(b) has been re-defined to be at the bend on the right-hand side of the ring). The reflection from the weld passes the transducer ring, is reflected at the bend, passes the transducers again travelling in the negative direction and is then reflected again at the weld, returning to the transducers where it correctly appears as a signal coming from the negative direction. Further reverberations are seen just before the defect at about -9 m and -12 m. These later reverberations are seen more clearly in the torsional trace due to the better signal-to-noise ratio; the reverberation close to the defect interferes with the echo from the defect and so is more difficult to identify.

The improved signal-to-noise ratio in the torsional mode case is probably a result of only one axially symmetric mode being present. Therefore, when ‘looking’ for torsional mode echoes from one direction, the signal processing only has to cancel the torsional mode coming from the opposite direction. In contrast, when the longitudinal mode is used, the signal processing has to cancel the L(0,2) mode from the opposite direction and the L(0,1) mode from both directions. This is a more difficult task and the residual signals from unwanted modes/directions tend to be larger. Double mode conversion can also generate extra noise with longitudinal mode excitation, as discussed below.

4. Double mode conversion

A further problem with longitudinal mode excitation is that double mode conversion can occur and produce confusing signals. This is illustrated in Figure 7(a), which shows a test on a 3 inch pipe in the laboratory at 56 kHz using a four-cycle Hanning windowed toneburst excitation signal. A notch was cut in the pipe at 2 m from the ring position, followed by a weld at about 2.4 m. The torsional mode trace of Figure 7(b) was obtained at the same frequency but with a seven-cycle toneburst so that the spatial lengths of the reflections are similar in Figures 7(a) and 7(b) (the wavelength of the torsional mode is about 4/7 that of the longitudinal mode so that seven cycles of the torsional mode occupy roughly the same spatial length as four cycles of the longitudinal mode). Figure 7(b) clearly shows the echoes from the defect and the weld and there is also a small reflection from a simple support at about 3.1 m. The amplitude of the non-symmetric reflection from the defect (red trace) is similar to that of the symmetric reflection (black trace), indicating a highly asymmetric feature. There is a significant non-symmetric reflection from the weld due to mode conversion at the defect generating a non-symmetric forward travelling wave that is then reflected at the (essentially symmetric) weld. As in the previous examples, the signal-to-noise ratio in Figure 7(a) when the longitudinal mode is used is not nearly as good as that obtained with the torsional mode. There is also an extra reflection labeled DMC (double mode conversion) at about 2.7 m.
The origin of the double mode conversion signal is explained in Figure 7(c). There are four main sources of an L(0,2) mode reflection from the weld after the defect. The biggest signal comes from the L(0,2) mode propagating past the defect, being reflected from the weld, propagating past the defect again and being received at the ring. This is the main signal at 2.4 m labelled W in Figure 7(a). However, the L(0,2) mode is partially mode converted at the weld to give the L(0,1) mode and this can be reconverted to L(0,2) at the defect, so arriving at the ring later than the main reflection since the velocity of L(0,1) is lower than that of L(0,2). Likewise, the L(0,1) mode can be generated by mode conversion at the defect and then be mode converted back to L(0,2) at the weld, or reflect as L(0,1) at the weld and be reconverted to L(0,2) at the defect. The arrival time of these double mode converted arrivals is a function of the distance travelled by the slower L(0,1) mode and they overlap in Figure 7(a). These echoes cannot be removed by signal processing to exclude the L(0,1) mode because they arise from transmitted and received L(0,2) mode signals; the processing does suppress the lighter paths shown in Figure 7(c) in which the L(0,1) mode propagates back to the ring.

Figure 7. Test on 3 inch schedule 40 (nominal 5.5 mm wall thickness) pipe double mode conversion (DMC) with longitudinal mode: (a) L(0,2); (b) T(0,1); (c) Schematic showing the process of double mode conversion. D is defect, W is weld, S is support

While the example shown here involves mode conversion at a defect, similar phenomena are seen at combinations of tees and welds and at any other combination of reflectors, at least one of which gives strong L(0,2) to L(0,1) mode conversion and vice versa. Since both the L(0,2) and L(0,1) modes are symmetric, it is not necessary that either of the reflectors is asymmetric to give the double mode converted reflection.

5. Conclusions

Long-range screening of pipework using guided waves is now in routine industrial use. The T(0,1) mode is generally preferable to the L(0,2) mode because the transduction system required is simpler and lighter. The L(0,2) mode may be useful in a small number of cases but this paper has demonstrated that it is unlikely to be useful in liquid-filled pipes; it tends to give poorer signal-to-noise ratio, and a double mode conversion phenomenon can give extra echoes that could be incorrectly called as defects.

It is possible to use the L(0,2) and T(0,1) modes in turn to test the same length of pipe, though this requires the individual transducers in the ring to be rotated between tests as shown in Figure 2. Alternatively, separate torsional and longitudinal mode rings could be used or a heavier and more expensive system incorporating three or four rows of longitudinal mode transducers and two rows of torsional transducers could be employed. The problem with this strategy is that the poor signal-to-noise ratio obtained with the L(0,2) mode tends to lead either to false calls, or to defects being missed. One possibility is to call defects only if there is a signal in both the torsional and longitudinal mode tests. However, the examples of this paper show that the noise levels in the longitudinal mode tests tend to be higher than with the torsional mode, so that it is difficult to say that a reflection is not present at most locations, particularly after features. If defects are only ‘called’ on the basis of a signal in the torsional mode test, then effectively the back-up L(0,2) mode information is not used, making the L(0,2) test superfluous. On the other hand, if defects are called on the basis of a reflection in either test, then the false call rate will tend to be high. Therefore, from an inspection point of view, the use of L(0,2) has little value and significantly increases equipment cost and weight as well as the time for testing, interpretation and reporting of the data. Hence, in most cases, this type of multi-mode testing is not recommended.

There would be a strong case for employing a second test if the defect sensitivity and false call rates in the two were similar. This can be achieved by testing the same region of pipe from both directions using the torsional mode. If, for example, the test range is 30 m in each direction from the ring then ring locations 60 m apart are sufficient to give complete coverage. However, if tests are done with ring positions 30 m apart then each location is tested from two ring positions, with waves incident from opposite sides. Comparing these two results can greatly increase confidence in defect calls. This strategy also has the advantage that the dead zone around the
transducer ring position is tested from the transducer locations on either side, so giving 100% pipe coverage.

References