Novel motorization axis for a Coarse Pointing Assembly in Optical Communication Systems

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Abstract: The demand for higher data transfer between satellites and ground stations is ever increasing. To address this, (free-space) optical communication (OC) technology is emerging. Pointing mechanisms with low size, weight and power (SWaP), high accuracy and low recurring costs are key enablers for constellations of OC systems. In this paper, TNO presents a novel motorization concept for coarse pointing assemblies (CPA) using a switched reluctance actuation principle combined with a magnetic hall sensor. Results on a single axis test setup show promising performance in terms of sensor accuracy, pointing jitter and motor control. The presented concept is a potential enabler for future motorization of CPAs.

Keywords: Optical Communication, Pointing Mechanisms, Optomechatronics, Switched Reluctance Motor, Hall Effect Sensor, Linearization, Feedback Control.

1. INTRODUCTION

Scientific and technological developments in the recent decades have led to an increasing demand in data transfer between satellites and earth. Scientific discovery, e.g. earth observation or the Internet of Things (IoT) require more data and higher data rates. To enable the next steps in high throughput and secure data communication, currently significant progress is being made in the development of optical communication (OC) systems. In contrast to the established method of data communication through radio frequency (RF), in these systems optical sources (lasers) are used. Communication links can range from ground-to-Lower Earth Orbit (LEO, 2000 km) links, to intersatellite (e.g. LEO-to-LEO) or ground-to-geostationary orbit (GEO, 36000 km) links. Feasibility of optical communication over these links has readily been shown, e.g. in Tolker-Nielsen and Oppenhaeuser (2002), Cazaubiel et al. (2006), Saathof et al. (2019b).

Towards realization of large OC constellations and the required communication terminals, it will be key to develop low cost communication terminals with minimal complexity that can be produced in high volume. Requirements such as low size, weight and power (SWaP), low recurring costs and high reliability form key development drivers. Therefore, TNO (Netherlands Organization for Applied Scientific Research) is developing, together with many industrial partners, OC systems that are reliable, secure and cost effective for ground- and space-based applications. TNO focuses on the design of both complete OC terminals, as well as the development of pointing mechanisms and sensors that are required for these systems (Saathof et al. (2019a,c)).

Communication over large distances using a laser beam requires stringent (a few µrad) pointing performance. Typically, this is achieved by combining a coarse and fine optical pointing mechanism. The fine stage achieves high-bandwidth disturbance rejection with a relatively short stroke (typically a few deg maximum). The Coarse Pointing Assembly (CPA) provides the long stroke pointing of the OC system. Furthermore, it is desired that the CPA does not induce disturbances into the optical path that contains significant power at high frequencies i.e. it is desired to have low positioning jitter. In Kuiper et al. (2018), Witvoet et al. (2018), TNO proposes a low SWaP high performance Fine Steering Mechanism (FSM), that addresses the challenges described in this paragraph for a short stroke mechanism. However, for the coarse stage such low SWaP mechanism with minimal pointing jitter and accurate pointing knowledge is not available. In Mussett et al. (2003), a CPA for OC systems is proposed that uses an open-loop stepper motor with gear-box reduction. In Barbo and Schmid (2003), Szekely et al. (2010) a CPA design is proposed that uses a high end optical encoder combined with a brushless DC motor actuation. Although in these works various designs are proposed for a CPA, in this work the focus is emphasized on a design aiming for low SWaP and costs with smooth tracking behavior based on a different design philosophy.

Therefore, the main contribution of this paper is the development and verification of a novel motorization axis for Coarse Pointing Assemblies based on a switched reluctance motor principle and Hall sensor. The paper is organized as follows. First, in section 2 a design description is provided for the motorization axis. This includes the switched reluctance motor, the magnetic Hall sensor together with
2. DESIGN DESCRIPTION

2.1 Concept description

As introduced in the previous section, the main design drivers for a high volume CPA concept are low SWaP (size, weight and power), low recurring costs, scalability and smooth pointing behavior. To achieve these goals, TNO has developed a novel motorization axis that includes the following features:

- Switched Reluctance Motor (SRM)
- Magnetic Hall encoder
- Soft preloaded bearings

A cross section and top view of the conceptual layout of the novel motorization axis is shown in Fig. 1. The actuation and sensing are combined in a single toothed ring to reduce mass, complexity and costs. The Switched Reluctance Motor (SRM) is a high force density direct drive motor, without wear and low mechanical complexity. The Magnetic encoder is based on a low-cost and space proven Hall sensor chip that measures the magnetic field variations induced by the toothed ring. The static magnetic field offset is created by a permanent magnet. The bearings are preloaded with a soft spring to achieve stable friction behavior resulting in minimal wear and pointing jitter. The motorization concept is easily scalable for different sizes and configurations and can therefore be optimized for each specific application. An integration example of the novel motorization axis in a complete LEO-LEO CPA design is shown in Fig. 2, for which the typical requirements are summarized in table 1. The most important requirements for the motorization axis are the pointing knowledge and jitter. The pointing knowledge is determined by the accuracy of the Hall encoder. The pointing jitter is defined as the position error, filtered by the FSM sensitivity function. This is motivated by the aimed dual-stage pointing design of an OC system, as explained in the introduction.

2.2 Switched Reluctance Motor

The Switched Reluctance Motor (SRM) has gained increasing interest in the last decades, due to its simple construction, reliability and many other advantages over other DC or AC machines as described by Miller (2001). This is mainly caused by the advancement in power electronics and digital signal processing, that allows for simplification of the mechanics at the costs of advanced control methods. The SRM design of the motorization axis has no permanent magnets and therefore does not suffer from motor cogging. The motor has three- phases that are mutually shifted by 120°, such that a continuous torque can be generated. When neglecting magnetic saturation, the torque of a single motor phase can be written as

\[ T = \frac{3}{2} P L I \sin \theta \]

Table 1. Typical requirements for a LEO-LEO CPA.

| Specification       | Value                        |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Optical aperture    | ≥70 mm                       |
| Range               | ±180° Azimuth ±20° Elevation |
| Pointing knowledge  | < 500 µrad (3σ)              |
| Pointing jitter*    | < 1 µrad (3σ)                |
| Power dissipation   | < 5 W maximum, < 1 W typical |
| Mass                | < 5 kg                       |

* Jitter is defined as the position error, filtered by the FSM sensitivity function.
2.3 Magnetic Hall Encoder

The design drivers for OC system are low SWaP and low complexity. Therefore, in this motorization design a magnetic Hall encoder is used to measure the axis position. Complexity is very limited since the actuation rotor with teeth can be used for sensing as well. The Hall encoder principle is shown in Fig. 4 and consists of four Hall sensors. Sensor 1 & 2 are shifted by 180° relative to the rotor tooth period, which provides the Hall signals in Fig. 3 (b) as obtained with 2D FEM modeling. Subtracting signal rotor tooth period, which provides the Hall signals in Fig. 3 (a). The torque of a single phase is the multiplication between force and mean radius of the rotor.

The most straightforward approach to obtain an accurate angular position from the sin/cos encoder signals is to use the 2-argument arctangent, i.e.

$$\theta_z = \text{atan2}(d_1, d_2),$$

where $d_1 = s_1 - s_2$, and $d_2 = s_3 - s_4$ are the differential Hall sensor measurements. However, the signals $d_1$, $d_2$, are not exact sine or cosine functions. Therefore, $\theta_z$ is not equal to the actual angular position denoted by $\phi_z$. Furthermore, slight variations in the teeth due to production tolerances will result in variations in the measured flux density. Therefore, a calibration algorithm using an external calibration encoder is formulated to compensate for both rotor teeth variations and higher order terms in the sine/cosine signals. To obtain this, a compensation function is fitted using the calibration encoder based on the following minimization,

$$\phi_z = f(\theta_z, i, c_1 \ldots c_N),$$

$$c_1 \ldots c_N = \text{argmin} \left\| f(\theta_z, i, c_1 \ldots c_N) - \phi_z \right\|_2^2,$$
The performance of the complete controller is usually determined by the control bandwidth of the FSM, which is typically a few hundred Hz. The control bandwidth of the CPA is much lower compared to the bandwidth of the FSM and follows from a trade-off between tracking performance for coarse positioning (e.g., to keep the FSM within range) and sensor noise propagation. The frequency content of the CPA error should be as low as possible, such that it can be compensated by the FSM. The bandwidth for the motorization axis is set to 15 Hz, but can be increased or decreased, depending on the error propagation in the system. The controller is simple PID controller, i.e.:

$$C(s) = k \cdot \left(1 + \frac{2\pi 1.5}{s}\right) \cdot \frac{s/2\pi 1.5 + 1}{s^2/2\pi 1.5 + 1},$$

where $k$ is such that a bandwidth of 15 Hz is achieved.

## 3. TEST RESULTS

In the previous sections the concept, motor, sensor and control principles of the motorization axis are introduced. To verify the proposed concepts and performance, a breadboard test setup has been designed and built. The breadboard test setup is shown in Fig. 7 and consists of a single motorization axis with toothed ring, SRM, Hall encoder, soft preloaded bearings and a Renishaw Signum encoder system. In the following subsections the breadboard results for the motor, Hall encoder and tracking performance are shown.

### 3.1 Motorization

The torque of the motor has been measured with a force probe at different positions in a single motor period for current levels of 0.2-0.8 A (Fig. 8 (a)). Dividing the measured torques by the current squared provides the measured $G_T$ for the three different phases as shown in Fig. 8 (b). The measured $G_T$ is approximately constant until a current of 0.6 A; for higher currents $G_T$ decreases due to magnetic saturation. The measured $G_T$ is fitted with a sum of sines and inverted to obtain $G_T^{-1}$ for the commutation.
algorithm, based on current levels until 0.6 A. The maximum continuous motor torque is between 400 and 500 N mm (Fig. 8 (a)), which is limited by magnetic saturation and the smooth phase transition by the commutation algorithm. For the 500 N mm motor torque, a maximum current of 0.8 A is required (Fig. 8 (b)). To guarantee stability at current levels up to 0.8 A, the gain margin of the controller should be sufficient (typically factor 2). For current levels above 0.8 A, additional measures should be implemented in the commutation algorithm. The difference in motor torque between 2D FEM simulation and measurement of the SRM was found to be within 10%, which indicates that the motor torque can be scaled accurately for each application.

3.2 Hall Encoder

The magnetic field offset of 40 mT for the Hall sensors is generated by a coil, but will be replaced by a small permanent magnet in the final design. The differential Hall signals (d1 and d2) provide smooth sinusoidal functions with an amplitude of approximately 5 mT, which corresponds to the 2D FEM simulation in Fig. 3 (b). To verify the performance of the Hall encoder, the calibration algorithm presented in section 2.3 is applied. A polynomial fit is applied to both the average measured tooth profile over a full rotation, as well as a piecewise polynomial fit for each individual tooth. The calibration error between the reference encoder and the estimated angle $\epsilon_\phi = \hat{\phi}_2 - \phi_2$ is evaluated and depicted in Fig. 9. It is observed that with the average fit, variation of the specific tooth w.r.t. the average leads to a calibration error. With the piecewise polynomial applied for each individual tooth, it is observed that this is mitigated and thereby making the calibration robust for the expected manufacturing tolerances. Note that this requires an absolute reference on the rotor. Results of the Hall sensor measurements indicate that

3.3 System identification

An initial PID controller has been designed based on parameters of the CAD model and implemented in the digital controller. The real plant dynamics have been identified using closed loop system identification at different positions in a single motor period (Fig. 10). The results show that the identified plant dynamics are approximately independent on motor position. This shows that the commutation strategy results in a position independent torque level, as required. The measured slope between 8 and 500 Hz is not identical to a typical mass/inertia line of -40 dB/decade, which is caused by eddy currents in the magnetic material. The constant gain at frequencies below 8 Hz is expected to be caused by the bearing pretension and lubricant. The small resonances at 40 and 80 Hz show small mass decoupling (anti-resonance, resonance), which do not cause instability. The measured plant dynamics are used to update the controller to the required bandwidth.

3.4 Tracking performance

The tracking performance of the motorization axis is measured with the presented SRM, commutation algorithm, controller and Renishaw reference encoder (Renishaw REXM20USA052 i.c.w. SIGNUM SR050A readhead) as feedback sensor. The reference was set to a constant speed of 1 mrad/s, which is the maximum speed of a typical LEO-LEO reference motion with 60° amplitude and a period of 90 minutes. The Power Spectral Density (PSD) of the error is shown in Fig. 11. The tracking error is smaller than 4 µrad rms and dominated by frequency content below 10 Hz. As explained in section 2 and visualized by the pointing variable $\phi_0$ in Fig. 5, the pointing performance of a complete OC terminal is determined by the combination between a FSM and CPA. As introduced previously, the pointing jitter is defined as the CPA tracking error, filtered by the FSM sensitivity function, which is approximated by a first-order 200 Hz high-pass filter (Witvoet et al. (2018)). The resulting pointing jitter is below 0.3 µrad rms. This is
In this paper the development and verification of a novel motorization axis for Coarse Pointing Assemblies is presented, where the design has been aimed at low costs and low size, weight and power (SWaP). Results show that with a low SWaP design promising performance has been achieved, enabling a low cost coarse pointing solution for future data communication constellations. The test results show that the measured SRM torque is within 10% of the FEM simulations and therefore indicates that the design could be easily scaled for each specific application. Results of the Hall sensor measurements indicate that an accuracy below 100 μrad can be achieved with the proposed sensor design and calibration. The tracking error is below 4 μrad and reduces below the desired performance of 1 μrad (3σ) when combined with a fine pointing mechanism.

Next steps include further development of the Hall encoder calibration and closed loop control with the Hall encoder as feedback sensor.

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