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Performance assessment of classical and fractional controllers for transient operation of gas turbine engines

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Abstract: The nonlinear behaviour of gas turbine engines has motivated the development of advanced controllers for ensuring their safe and reliable operation. In this paper, the problem of controller design for a two-shaft industrial gas turbine is addressed. Specifically, a transient dynamic engine model has been developed in MATLAB/Simulink for assessing the performance behaviour of the engine. Observed engine behaviour during transient manoeuvres has enabled the development of a PI controller capable of ensuring a smooth gas turbine operation. The performance of the gas turbine engine implementing the developed PI controller has been also compared to a fractional PI controller. Results demonstrate and illustrate the remarkable impact that transient engine simulation has in the development of robust controllers.

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Keywords: Gas Turbine, MATLAB/Simulink; Engine Performance, Transient Simulation, Gas Turbine Control, PI Controller,

1. INTRODUCTION

The intermittent nature of renewable energy sources encourages the gas turbines to operate with increased flexibility for supporting their renewable plant partners and maintaining the stability of the electricity grid, as demonstrated by Barelli et al. (2017); di Gaeta et al. (2017). Fast start-up, shut-down, load-following modes, and part-load operation, as examined by Bahlawan et al. (2017), are dominating the operating regime of today’s gas turbines. Understanding the behaviour of these engines under such demanding operating conditions is crucial for their successful operation and maintenance (O&M), see Tsoutsanis et al. (2017). For the above purposes, the engine manufacturers invest a significant amount of their resources and human capital exclusively for modelling, monitoring, and analysing the performance of power plants, as reviewed by Tahan et al. (2017).

Gas turbine engine models have a pivotal role in today’s digital platform, since their simulations aid the development of engine controllers, see Ponce et al. (2016), and the optimisation of operating schedules. Recently, studies that explore the dynamic simulation aspect of gas turbines, such as Alobaid et al. (2017), have gained considerable attention.

The reason for this transition lies in the fact that dynamic engine models are capable of assessing the behaviour of an engine for a wide range of operating conditions including transient operation. In addition, dynamic models enable novel diagnostics, see Tsoutsanis et al. (2014, 2015); Amozegar and Khorasani (2016); Ceschin et al. (2018), and prognostics solutions, as presented in Tsoutsanis et al. (2016); Tsoutsanis and Meskin (2017), which indeed improve the O&M of gas turbines. Therefore, the recently transformed gas turbine operating profile has motivated the development of robust, modular, flexible, and accurate engine models that can facilitate the performance analysis of gas turbines in real-time conditions. Moreover, the observed engine model behaviour at transient operating conditions has the potential to aid the design of engine controllers that will enable modern gas turbines to fulfill their role in this dynamic and flexible operating environment.

In this paper, a dynamic engine model of a gas turbine engine developed in MATLAB/Simulink environment by the authors Tsoutsanis et al. (2016), is used in the design of an engine controller. The engine model implements a family of component performance maps, as look up tables, and is represented by a set of first order differential equations which are added to the steady state component matching thermodynamic equations. The transient performance simulations highlighted some key issues that might be hazardous for a real gas turbine. This prompted the development of an engine controller for enabling smooth and safe engine operation. Among a variety of classical controllers, the most common type of controller used for gas turbine engines is the proportional and integral (PI) controller.

Recently, alternatives to the classical controllers, called fractional controllers, have gained significant attention Shah and Agashe (2016); Podlubny (1998); Petras (2011); Machado et al. (2011). Their fractional calculus nature provides additional degrees of freedom, in comparison to classical controllers, and therefore have the potential to
provide a more robust alternative to the classical controllers. However, there are limited number of studies of fractional controllers used for energy systems, see Sondhi and Hote (2014, 2016), and even less on gas turbines engines, see Jadhav et al. (2014). This motivated the development of a fractional controller for a gas turbine engine. In this study, we implement both a fractional and classical PI controller, and under dynamic operating conditions, we assess and compare their respective performance. In contrary to Jadhav et al. (2014), where the gas turbine is represented by a simple Rowen’s model, see Rowen (1983), and the fractional controller is based on the Bode’s ideal loop transfer function, in this study we implement an advanced component-based thermodynamic model, that utilises component performance maps, and a simpler fractional controller, developed in MATLAB/Simulink environment by Teplyakov et al. (2011). This simulated study gives additional insights of the engine dynamic behaviour that has the potential to serve as a useful guide for designing and optimising of engine controllers suitable for transient engine operation.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Gas Turbine Model

For this study, an engine model of a two-shaft industrial gas turbine is developed in MATLAB/Simulink. The system consists of a gas generator and a free power turbine. The main components of the gas generator are the compressor, the combustor, and the turbine. The exhaust gases of the gas generator are driving the power turbine which is coupled to an electricity generator as seen from Fig. 1.

The following notation is used throughout the paper. Temperature and pressure are denoted by \( T_i \) and \( P_i \), respectively where subscript \( i = a, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 \) represents the engine station. For the transient performance analysis, a dynamic engine model has been developed in Simulink based on the Inter-Component Volume (ICV) method. For a detailed description of the model the reader is prompted to Tsoutsanis et al. (2013). The ICV method assumes the existence of mass flow imbalances during the dynamic operation. For implementing this method, two plenum volumes are integrated in the engine model as seen from Fig. 2.

As far as the plenum volumes are concerned, one is placed between the compressor and the turbine, and the other between the turbine and the power turbine. These volumes are introduced for taking into account all the flow imbalances given that in transient operating conditions only the flow compatibility is satisfied. The mass flow imbalances initiated by the fuel addition in the combustor are utilised for evaluating the rate by which pressure increases. A description of the engine dynamics follows in the next paragraphs.

A simplified version of the law of continuity of mass is commonly used to describe the pressure rise within the combustor:

\[
\frac{dP_2}{dt} = \frac{RT_2}{V_1}(\dot{m}_1 + \dot{m}_f - \dot{m}_3),
\]

where \( R, V_1, \) and \( P_2 \) denote the gas constant (287 J/kg), the combustor volume, and the compressor delivery pressure, respectively. The air mass flow rate entering the combustor and the fuel flow rate are denoted by \( \dot{m}_1 \) and \( \dot{m}_3 \), respectively. The combustor outlet pressure can be calculated as a simple proportionality from:

\[
\frac{P_2 - P_3}{P_2} = PLF,
\]

where \( PLF \) is the combustor pressure loss factor and for this study a 5% drop in pressure is assumed. A similar set of equations has been used for the duct volume between the turbine and the power turbine, such as:

\[
\frac{dP_4}{dt} = \frac{RT_4}{V_2}(\dot{m}_3 - \dot{m}_4),
\]

where \( V_2 \) and \( P_3 \) denote the duct volume and the turbine delivery pressure, respectively. The mass flow rate entering the power turbine is denoted by \( \dot{m}_4 \).

Due to the fact that only flow compatibility is satisfied during transient conditions, the difference between the work consumed by the compressor \( W_c \) and the work extracted by the turbine \( W_t \) is utilised to compute the acceleration of the engine as follows:

\[
\frac{dN}{dt} = \left( \frac{30}{\pi} \right)^2 \frac{W_t - W_c}{JN},
\]

where \( J \) denotes the shaft polar moment of inertia measured in kg m\(^2\) and \( N \) denotes the gas turbine’s shaft speed measured in rpm.

2.2 System States

Let us assume that the set of variables which govern the dynamics of the system is denoted by \( x \) and the vector input that changes the system’s state is denoted by \( u \). For the dynamic engine model, the compressor and turbine exit pressures \( P_2 \) and \( P_4 \) can be considered as the states of the systems which are critical. If all the isentropic efficiencies and temperatures of the gas turbine components are determined, then the engine gas path pressures can be computed from the thermodynamic equations. The shaft rotational speed \( N \) of the gas turbine is another critical state of the system. The fuel flow rate \( \dot{m}_f \) is implemented for controlling the system’s state. Thus, the state and control variables are defined as follows

\[
x = [P_2, P_4, N]^T, \quad u = \dot{m}_f.
\]

The gas path pressures along with the shaft rotational speed of the steady state conditions serve as initial condi-

Fig. 1. The engine model schematic layout representing a two shaft gas turbine.
2.3 PI Controller

Depending of the fuel flow command, the engine might be forced to operate in unfavourable conditions. Especially when there are sudden changes in the demanded shaft rotational speed, this could lead to violation of the engine firing temperature limits and even to compressor surge. This motivates the development of a suitable controller for ensuring that the fuel flow command will guarantee a safe and reliable operation of the engine.

Numerous control methods and controllers are available for gas turbine engines but for this study we implement a simple PI controller to demonstrate its effectiveness. The PI controller is one of the most common controllers used in gas turbines and its objective is to regulate the fuel flow rate according to the actuating signal \( \varepsilon \) arising from the comparison of the desired \( N_d \) and the measured \( N_m \) shaft rotational speed of the engine. One of the prerequisites for the design of a controller is to represent the behaviour of the fuel flow actuator system and the speed measurement sensor. For the above purpose the fuel flow actuator system and the speed sensor are both represented by first order transfer functions that are typical for these systems, see Camporeale et al. (2006); MacIsaac and Langton (2011), to be as follows:

\[
G_1(s) = \frac{\dot{m}_{f_a}(s)}{\dot{m}_{f_a}(s)} = \frac{1}{0.05s + 1} \tag{10}
\]

where \( K_p \) and \( K_i \) denote the coefficients of the proportional and the integral terms, respectively. The transfer function of this PI controller can be expressed as follows:

\[
C(s) = \frac{\dot{m}_{f_i}(s)}{\varepsilon(s)} = K_p + \frac{K_i}{s} \tag{8}
\]

The first order lag equations are adequate for satisfying the objective of this analysis which is to demonstrate the effectiveness of a controller on the engine transient behaviour. However, if a more detailed simulation approach for the fuel flow system dynamics is sought, then the reader is prompted to Wang et al. (2017). Based on the observations of the engine model behaviour at transient conditions we have developed a PI controller and tuned accordingly its coefficients \( K_p \) and \( K_i \) in order to obtain smooth operation of the engine model. The implementation of such a controller ensures smooth acceleration and deceleration of the engine.
2.4 Fractional PI\(^\lambda\) Controller

A fractional PI\(^\lambda\) controller is an extension of the classical PI controller. The transfer function of this PI\(^\lambda\) controller can be expressed as follows:

\[
C(s) = \frac{\dot{m}_f(s)}{\epsilon(s)} = K_p + \frac{K_i}{s^\lambda}\tag{12}
\]

which involves an integrator of order \(\lambda\). If \(\lambda = 1\) we obtain a classical PI controller.

For this study the FOMCON MATLAB toolbox developed by Tepljakov et al. (2011) is implemented. This toolbox provides Simulink blocks for fractional PID controllers, fractional transfer functions etc. The toolbox is available for download from http://fomcon.net/fomcon-toolbox/download/

3. RESULTS

3.1 Case Study 1: Transient Step Response without a Controller

The objective of case study 1 is to analyse the engine model performance for step fuel flow commands. The engine model arrangement for this case study represents an open-loop control system since there is no controller implementation. For this case study the fuel flow, shown in Fig. 4, commences at time instant \(t=0\) seconds from its steady state condition until it reaches the time instant \(t=3\) seconds. At \(t=3\) s a step input is utilised to instantly decrease the fuel flow to 70\% of its design point value. The fuel flow command will be maintained at this level for another 4 seconds until \(t=7\) s where it will step back to its original steady state condition for the remaining simulation.

The assessment of the engine performance during fast step responses provides useful insights about the operating and surge limits of the engine that could subsequently facilitate the development of a controller. A close examination of the measured parameters shown in Fig. 4 proves that the response of the engine to this step command results in sudden temperature changes to the hot end of the engine. These are reflected by the temperatures at the power turbine exit \(T_5\).

In practice, unregulated fuel flow commands such as these might prove catastrophic for the engine since they might violate its firing temperature limits. These types of observations and insights promote the importance of the transient performance analysis of an engine. It can be concluded that fast and accurate preliminary model-based evaluation of the transient engine behaviour has the prospect of saving costs by avoiding tests that might lead to engine failure and more importantly to facilitate the design of controllers for establishing the safe operating limits of a complex and highly nonlinear system.

3.2 Case Study 2: Transient Step Response with PI Controller

The objective of this case study is to assess the effect of a simple PI controller under transient conditions. Specifically, a PI controller is used to regulate the fuel flow...
3.3 Case Study 3: Transient Step Response with fractional PI$^\lambda$ Controller

The objective of this case study is to assess the effect of a fractional order PI controller under transient conditions. The fractional PI controller is having the same objective with the classical PI controller of Case Study 2.

A fractional order PI controller from the FOMCON toolbox replaced the previous classical PI controller. The coefficients $K_p$ and $K_i$ and the $\lambda$ have been modified to achieve a smooth engine operation. For this Case Study, the coefficients of the PI$^\lambda$ controller and the transient response characteristics are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. The parameters of the PI$^\lambda$ controller.

| Parameter  | Value       | Units |
|------------|-------------|-------|
| $K_p$      | 4.85E-05    | -     |
| $K_i$      | 0.0214      | -     |
| $\lambda$ | 0.9         | -     |
| Rise time  | 0.026       | seconds |
| Settling time | 0.052   | seconds |
| Overshoot  | 0           | %     |
| Peak       | 1           | -     |

It becomes clear from Fig. 7 that the speed demand $N_d$ is satisfied faster than the classical PI controller. It is noticed that during the initialisation stage there is a large fluctuation of the simulated parameters. The reason for this problem is due to the fact that the FOMCON toolbox is currently not providing the user with the option of setting up the initial conditions of a fractional controller. A closer look at the Fig. 7 reveals that the power turbine exit temperature $T_5$ exhibits a small fluctuation in the final stages of the step commands.

A comparison between the classical and fractional order PI controllers is shown in Fig. 8. It is evident that while the speed demand $N_d$ is accurately matched by implementing a fractional PI$^\lambda$ controller, it still exhibits a small oscillation for the power turbine exit temperature $T_5$.

4. CONCLUSION

The problem of controller design for transient gas turbine engine operation has been addressed in this paper.
A dynamic engine model has been used to evaluate and compare classical and fractional order controllers. The engine model has been developed in MATLAB/Simulink environment. Three engine simulation scenarios have been carried out by using the classical PI controller available from Simulink and a fractional PI controller available from FOMCON toolbox. The results demonstrated the potential that fractional controllers have over their classical counterparts in terms of performance and robustness. For a typical transient manoeuvre of a gas turbine engine the fractional PI controller is faster and more accurate than a classical PI controller. However, these types of controllers present several challenges for their implementation. Tuning and optimising the coefficients of such controllers still remains a challenging topic that has to be properly addressed by the scientific community.

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