Polymer Flow Influenced by Mold Cavity Surface Roughness

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Polymer injection molding is the most used technology of polymer processing nowadays. It enables the manufacture of final products, which do not require any further operations. Working of shaping cavities is the major problem involving not only the cavity of the mold itself, giving the shape and dimensions of the future product, but also the flow pathway (runners) leading the polymer melt to the separate cavities. This paper shows the influence of cavity surface roughness, polymer material (with different flow properties) and technological parameters on the flow length of polymers into mold cavity. Application of the measured results may have significant influence on the production of shaping parts of the injection molds especially in changing the so far used processes and substituting them by less less expensive production processes which might increase the competitiveness of the tool producers and shorten the time between product plan and its implementation.

Keywords: Injection Molding, Surface Roughness, Polymer, Fluidity, Tools

1 Introduction

Injection molding is one of the most extended polymer processing technologies. It enables the manufacture of final products, which do not require any further operations. The tools used for their production – the injection molds – are very complicated assemblies that are made using several technologies and materials. The correct function of shaping cavities is the major problem involving not only the cavity of the mold itself, giving the shape and dimensions of the future product, but also the flow pathway (runners) leading the polymer melt to the separate cavities. In practice, high quality of runner surface is still very often required. Hence surface polishing for perfect conditions for melt flow is demanded. The aforementioned finishing operations are very time and money consuming leading to high costs of the tool production. The fluidity of all polymers during injection molding cycle is affected by many parameters (mold design, melt temperature, mold temperature, injection rate, pressures, etc.) and by the flow properties of polymers. Results of the experiments carried out with selected types of polymer materials proved a minimal influence of surface roughness of the runners on the polymer melt flow. This concerns excluding (if the conditions allow it) the very complex and expensive finishing operations from the technological process as the influence of the surface roughness on the flow characteristics does not seem to play as important role as was previously thought. A plastic nucleus is formed by the way of laminar flow, which enables the compression of the melt in the mold and consecutive creeping.

A constant flow rate given by the axial movement of the screw is chosen for most of the flows. During filling of the mold cavity the plastic material does not slide along the steel mold surface but it is rolled over. This type of laminar flow is usually described as a “fountain flow” (Fig.1).

2 Injection molding technology

The testing samples were prepared by injection molding technology. The injection mold for this task was designed to have easiest possible manipulation both with the mold itself and during injection molding process while changing the testing plates, size of the mold gate, pressure and temperature sensors inside the cavity, etc. The cavity space of the mold is generated by the female mold part, called cavity, and a male mold part, called the core. It is necessary to fill the mold cavity fully during the injection molding process. The ability of cavity filling could be affected by the polymer properties and the properties of cavity walls. The shaping part of the injection mold is composed of right and left side. The most important parts of the injection mold concerning the measurements are: testing plate, cavity plate and a special sprue puller insert. It is possible to use pressure and temperature sensors in the mold cavity to evaluate the values progress.

The cavity (Fig. 5) of testing injection mold is in a shape of a spiral with the maximum possible length of 2000 mm and dimensions of channel cross-section: 6x1 mm. The cavity is created when the injection mold is closed, i.e. when shaping plate seals the testing plate in the
parting plane of the mold. The mold cavity is cooled by flowing oil from tempering unit. [2]

![Injection mold](image)

**Fig. 3 Injection mold**

![Diagram of injection mold](image)

**Tab. 1 Surfaces of testing plates**

| Surface photo | Polished plate | Grinded plate | Electro – spark machined plate with a fine design | Milled plate | Electro – spark machined plate with a rough design |
|---------------|----------------|---------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Roughness Rₐ [μm] | 0.10 | 0.17 | 4.06 | 4.50 | 9.57 |

The surface of the plates was machined by four different technologies, which are most commonly used to work down the cavities of molds and runners in industrial production. These technologies are polishing, grinding, milling and two types of electro-spark machining – fine and rough design (Table 1). The surface roughness of all testing plates was measured on Talysurf CLI 500 by TaylorHobson. Scanned area was 4x4 mm. Pitch of points was set to 0.01 mm.

The testing plates are made from tool steel (W.Nr. 1.2343) that are use for simple and fast change of the surface of the mold cavity. [7]

Injection molding machine ARBURG Allrounder 420C 1000 – 350 with oil tempering unit Regloplas 150 smart was used for testing samples production.
3 Tested polymers

Four types of thermoplastic elastomers have been chosen for the fluidity testing. Thermoplastic polyurethane TPU from Bayer, specifically, it was Desmopan 372 („TPU 372“). Three thermoplastic elastomers TPE, two from DuPont („Hytrel 3078“ a „Hytrel 7246“) and one from PTS (v-pts-uniflex-e27d/M*M800/20) („TPE E27“).

Tab. 2 Selected material properties

| Material          | Melt Flow Index | Density 23°C | Hardness Shore A, D | Tensile Strength | Elongation |
|-------------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------------|-----------------|------------|
|                   | Conditions      | Value        | g/10 min            | kg/m³           | MPa        | %          |
|                   | °C/kg           |              |                     |                 |            |
| TPU 372           | 230/2.16        | 13.2         | 1240                | -               | 98         | 70         | 250       |
| TPE E 27          | 190/2.16        | 8.6          | 1100                | 85              | 18.6       | 874        |
| Hytrel 3078       | 190/2.16        | 5            | 1070                | 30*             | 24         | 740        |
| Hytrel 7246       | 240/2.16        | 12.5         | 1260                | 72*             | 53         | 450        |

* Shore D

4 Results

Fig. 6 Influence of the surface roughness on flow length (material TPU 372)

Fig. 7 Influence of the surface roughness on flow length (material TPE E27)
The filling of mold cavity depends on material properties, technological conditions and surface quality. Very important result rises from experiments which analyzed the influence of surface quality on injection mold filling. It could be generally said that the surface quality of flow pathway significantly affects flow of polymer melt. It was found that better quality of wall surface worsened the flow condition and the length of injected sample spiral was shorter. This finding could have very important effect for tools producers. It is not necessary to use high precision cutting operation and it would be possible to exclude some very costly final operation as for example grinding or polishing.

5 Conclusion

This research looked into the influence of technological parameters on filling of the injection mold cavity and the flow length respectively. The differences in flow lengths on the testing cavity plates with different surface roughness were very small, rather higher in case of testing plates with rougher surfaces of the mold.

The measurement shows that surface roughness of the injection mold cavity or runners have no substantial influence on the length of flow. This can be put directly into
practice. It also suggests that final working and machining (e.g. grinding and polishing) of some parts of the mold, especially the flowing pathways (cold runner system), are not necessary.

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