

Trickle Flow

Hydrodynamic Multiplicity

Trickle Flow Hydrodynamic Multiplicity

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“Hydrodynamics has little significance for the engineer because of the great mathematical knowledge required for an understanding of it and the negligible possibility of applying its results.”

Prandtl (1904)

ABSTRACT

Title: Trickle Flow Hydrodynamic Multiplicity

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Trickle flow is encountered in a variety of process engineering applications where gas and liquid flow through a packed bed of stationary solid. Owing to the complexities of three interacting phases, a fundamentally exhaustive description of trickle flow hydrodynamics has not been achieved. A complicating factor in describing the hydrodynamics is the fact that the hydrodynamic state is dependent not only on the present operating conditions but also on their entire history, including fluid flow rate changes and pre-wetting procedures. This phenomenon is termed hydrodynamic multiplicity and is the subject of this work. Hydrodynamic multiplicity greatly complicates both the experimental investigation into the behaviour of a trickle flow column and the theoretical modelling of the observed behaviour.

Broadly speaking, this study addresses hydrodynamic multiplicity on three levels. First, a conceptual framework is proposed that can be used to study hydrodynamic multiplicity with limited resources. It is based on the absolute limiting values that the hydrodynamic parameters can adopt for a certain set of conditions, and encompasses both flow rate hysteresis loops and pre-wetting procedures. There are 5 such hydrodynamic modes. When the existing literature is critically evaluated in light of this framework, it is established that the reported experimental studies have not addressed all the issues. Previous modelling

attempts are also shown to be unable to qualitatively explain all the existing data. Moreover, authors have suggested different (and often contradictory) physical mechanisms responsible for hydrodynamic multiplicity.

Secondly, an experimental investigation intended to supplement the existing literature and illustrate the utility of the proposed framework is launched. This includes bed-scale measurements of liquid holdup, pressure drop and gas-liquid mass transfer for a variety of conditions including different flow rates, pressures, particle shapes, particle porosity and surface tension. The second part of the experimental effort uses radiography and tomography in new ways to visualise the temporal and spatial characteristics of the different hydrodynamic modes. The tomographic investigation incorporates advanced image processing techniques in order to culminate in a pore-level evaluation of the hydrodynamic modes that reveals additional features of hydrodynamic multiplicity.

Thirdly, the experimental insights are condensed into a set of characteristic trends that highlight the features of hydrodynamic multiplicity. A pore-level capillary mechanism is then introduced to qualitatively explain the observed behaviour. The mechanism shows how the differences in advancing and receding contact angles and the characteristics of the packed structure (or pore geometries) are ultimately responsible for the observed hydrodynamic multiplicity behaviour.

Lastly, the effect of hydrodynamic multiplicity on trickle bed reactor performance is discussed. It is established experimentally that depending on the reaction conditions, different modes yield optimal performance. The idea of optimizing the performance by manipulating the hydrodynamic state is introduced.

In totality, this work advances the understanding of trickle flow hydrodynamics in general and hydrodynamic multiplicity in particular.

Keywords: hydrodynamics, trickle flow, multiphase, hysteresis, pre-wetting, tomography, radiography, image processing, packed bed, multiplicity.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	xi
List of Figures.....	xii
Nomenclature	xix
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2. Literature.....	4
2.1 Trickle Flow Hydrodynamics in General	5
2.1.1 Flow Regimes	7
2.1.2 Hydrodynamic Trends (not associated with multiplicity)	9
2.2 Experimental Investigations into Multiplicity	13
2.2.1 Hysteresis and Pre-wetting	13
2.2.2 Framework of Limiting Cases	16
2.2.3 Holdup and Pressure Drop.....	17
2.2.4 Mass Transfer Coefficients	22
2.2.5 Wetting Efficiency	24
2.2.6 Liquid Distribution.....	24
2.2.7 Summary of Experimental Studies	28
2.3 Hydrodynamic Modelling.....	32
2.3.1 Hydrodynamic Modelling in General	32
2.3.2 Hydrodynamic Multiplicity Modelling.....	45
2.3.3 Outstanding Issues	51
2.4 Conclusions.....	52
Chapter 3. Objectives	54
3.1 Objectives	54
3.2 Thesis Structure	55
Chapter 4. Bed-Scale Phenomena	56

4.1 Experimental.....	56
4.2 Multiplicity in Beds of Non-Porous Particles.....	57
4.3 Multiplicity in Beds of Porous Particles.....	71
4.4 The Effect of High Pressure Operation on Hydrodynamic Multiplicity.....	76
Chapter 5. Preliminary Visualizations.....	86
5.1 Background.....	86
5.2 Introduction.....	91
5.3 Experimental.....	93
5.4 Results.....	97
5.4.1 Two Dimensional Radiographs.....	97
5.4.2 Three Dimensional Tomography Results.....	113
5.5 Conclusions.....	120
Chapter 6. Advanced Visualizations.....	122
6.1 Novel Image Processing Strategy.....	122
6.1.1 Introduction.....	122
6.1.2 Image Processing Steps.....	124
6.1.5 Image Processing Strategy Conclusions.....	138
6.2 Tomography Results.....	139
6.3 Bed Structure and Flow Pattern Characterization.....	146
Chapter 7. Interpretations.....	154
7.1 Introduction: Trends Revisited.....	154
7.2 Proposed Mechanism.....	156
7.3 Capillary Gate Model For Explaining Multiplicity Trends.....	161
7.3.1 Model Development.....	161
7.3.2 Model Performance and Characteristics.....	173
7.3.3 Detractions, Limitations, Validations and Extensions.....	182
7.4 Conclusion.....	185
Chapter 8. Impact of Multiplicity on Reactor Performance.....	187
8.1 Multiplicity in an Industrial Reactor.....	187

8.2 Expectations of Impact on Reactor Performance.....	190
8.3 Experimental Case Study: Alpha-Methyl Styrene Hydrogenation.....	193
8.3.1 Introduction.....	193
8.3.2 Results and Discussion	198
8.3.3 Reaction Case Study Conclusions	205
8.4 Conclusions.....	206
Chapter 9. Conclusions.....	207
APPENDIX A. Experimental Detail for Reaction Study	209
References.....	214

List of Tables

<i>Number</i>	<i>Page</i>
Table 1. Definitions of hydrodynamic parameters.....	5
Table 2. Experimental methods by which parameters are determined	6
Table 3. Impact of hydrodynamics on reactor/column performance	7
Table 4. Qualitative effect of bed and operating conditions on trickle flow hydrodynamics (based on experimental data).....	10
Table 5. The five limiting cases (modes) of hydrodynamic multiplicity.....	16
Table 6. Typical differences in pressure drop and holdup due to multiplicity.....	20
Table 7. Summary of experimental studies of hydrodynamic multiplicity.....	29
Table 8. Six major approaches to trickle flow hydrodynamic modelling.....	35
Table 9. Hydrodynamic multiplicity modelling in literature	47
Table 10. Thesis structure	55
Table 11. Experimental details.....	58
Table 12. Reproducibility of results.....	59
Table 13. Experimental details of high pressure experiments	77
Table 14. Trickle flow CT and radiation studies in literature	89
Table 15. Experimental parameters for radiography study	95
Table 16. Values of variables used in flow simulation	167
Table 17. Comparison between observed multiplicity trends and model capability	185
Table 18. Experimental conditions in industrial reactor	189
Table 19. Comparison between Levec and Kan-Liquid modes (approximate).....	194

List of Figures

<i>Number</i>	<i>Page</i>
Figure 1. Schematic of the structure of this work.....	3
Figure 2. A flow regime map showing the different flow morphologies – the red shaded area shows the regimes where multiplicity exists (based on Charpentier & Favier, 1975, with adaptations from Gianetto et al., 1992, Satterfield, 1975, Sie & Krishna, 1998 and Larachi et al., 1999).....	8
Figure 3. A flow regime map showing the operating velocity ranges of 58 recent trickle bed reactor studies	9
Figure 4. A schematic hysteresis loop (based on Levec et al., 1986).....	14
Figure 5. Single loop hysteresis for pressure drop and liquid holdup as functions of liquid (a-j) and gas (k-t) velocities (based on Kan & Greenfield, 1978, Kan & Greenfield, 1979, Levec et al., 1986, Levec et al., 1988, Christensen et al., 1986 and Wang et al., 1995).....	18
Figure 6. Effect of gas velocity on the difference between Levec and Super modes (data from Levec et al., 1986).....	21
Figure 7. Single loop hysteresis for mass transfer coefficients as functions of liquid (a-j) and gas (k-t) velocities (based on Wammes et al., 1991, Wang et al., 1994, Wang et al., 1997 and Sims et al., 1993)	23
Figure 8. Recent liquid distribution results. (a) Annular collector liquid flux results, (b) Capacitance tomography holdup contours, (c) Pore holdup distribution for two velocities by tomography, (d) A particle wetting distribution (PWD) by tomography, (e) PWDs by colorimetry showing uni-modal and bi-modal character in Kan-Liquid and Levec modes respectively, (f) Levec mode channelling.....	26

Figure 9. Geometries of three of the six modelling approaches. (a) Double slit model, (b) Fundamental forces, (c) Pore-network. See references in Table 8.....	36
Figure 10. The inapplicability of the power law form for the Levec mode's permeability-saturation relationship at high u_L . Model and data from Levec et al. (1986).	48
Figure 11. Experimental setup for bed scale experiments.	57
Figure 12. Pressure drop as a function of gas and liquid velocity	60
Figure 13. Liquid saturation (ϵ_L/ϵ) as a function of gas and liquid velocity	61
Figure 14. Volumetric gas-liquid mass transfer coefficient as a function of gas and liquid velocity	62
Figure 15. Pressure drop, liquid saturation and volumetric gas-liquid mass transfer coefficient as a function of gas velocity at $u_L = 9$ mm/s.	63
Figure 16. Liquid and gas relative permeabilities as functions of the phase saturations. Numbers on the lines indicate approximate slopes that correspond to the power of the saturation in equations 9 and 10.....	65
Figure 17. Gas and liquid flow rate induced hysteresis loops in all the hydrodynamic modes (a complete version of Figure 5).	67
Figure 18. Effect of repeated flow rate variation loops on liquid saturation. In most cases little drift is observed after 2 loops (a) Filled symbols: $u_L = 5$ mm/s, open symbols: $u_L = 7$ mm/s. (b) Filled symbols: $u_G = 2$ cm/s, open symbols: $u_G = 4$ cm/s.	68
Figure 19. The effect of surface tension changes on hydrodynamic multiplicity. (a) A liquid velocity hysteresis loop with a low surface tension liquid at $u_G = 2$ cm/s (note that two y-axis scales are used) (b) The effect of surfactant doping, i.e. a surface tension change induced hysteresis loop.....	70
Figure 20. The limiting cases of hydrodynamic multiplicity and their inter-relationships. The limiting cases for gas-liquid mass transfer are the same as those for pressure drop.	72
Figure 21. Comparison between porous and non-porous data at $u_G = 4$ cm/s.	74

Figure 22. Comparison between the extent of hydrodynamic multiplicity (between the Kan-Liquid and Levec modes) for porous and non-porous packing (at $u_G = 4$ cm/s and $u_L = 5$ mm/s).....	74
Figure 23. Pressure drop multiplicity as a function of liquid velocity for porous spheres and porous extrudate at two gas velocities.	76
Figure 24. Pressure drop (a-c) and dynamic holdup (d-f) data at increasing pressure ($u_G \approx 5.7$ cm/s).....	78
Figure 25. Pressure drop data at increasing pressure per mode ($u_G = 5.8$ cm/s).....	80
Figure 26. The ratio of Levec to Kan-Liquid pressure drops as a function of (a) gas superficial mass flux liquid and (b) liquid velocity.	81
Figure 27. The ratio of Levec to Kan-Liquid pressure drops as a function of pressure drop in the Levec mode. Note that a ratio of 1 (black dashed line) implies that there is no difference in the pressure drop and therefore no hydrodynamic multiplicity.....	82
Figure 28. CT results from earlier investigators - representative of various techniques, (a) γ -ray: Toye et al. (1998) – liquid in blue, solid in grey, (b) MRI: Sederman & Gladden (2001) – solid in black, liquid in white, (c) X-ray: Boyer & Fanget (2002) – liquid saturation intensity image, (d) Processed MRI: Gladden et al. (2003a) – solid in black, liquid in white. Additional detail in Table 14. Also see Figure 8b for a representative capacitance tomography image.....	90
Figure 29. Experimental setup for radio-imaging study	94
Figure 30. A selection of radiographs.....	96
Figure 31. Liquid distribution in the various pre-wetting modes ($u_L = 8$ mm/s, $u_G = 16$ cm/s).....	98
Figure 32. Gravimetric and radiographic saturation comparisons.....	102
Figure 33. Flow patterns with increased fluid fluxes.....	103
Figure 34a. Temporal saturation behaviour (saturation)	105
Figure 35. Difference maps ($u_L = 8.0$ mm/s, $u_G = 1.6$ cm/s).....	107

Figure 36. Liquid saturation changes in different zones showing the size and frequency of changes	109
Figure 37. Comparison between a difference map and a deviation map ($u_L = 8.0$ mm/s, $u_G = 1.6$ cm/s).....	110
Figure 38. Flow pattern and liquid saturation reproducibility. (a) The overall saturation is reproducible (b) The flow pattern is not reproducible - dark and light intensities indicate areas where the saturation of runs 1 and 2 were different ($u_L = 1.3$ mm/s, $u_G = 1.6$ cm/s).....	112
Figure 39. Cross-section of a raw reconstruction. Note the difficulty in clearly distinguishing the three phases.	114
Figure 40. (a) Single particle reconstruction (cross-section). (b) Intensity line profile through section A-A showing the edge effect.....	116
Figure 41. Ternary gated image processed according to the thresholding method.....	118
Figure 42. Schematic of how the edge effect creates “necks” when thresholding is used (a) true image (b) reconstructed image (c) thresholded reconstructed image.....	119
Figure 43. Image processing steps.....	125
Figure 44. Cross-sections of a (a) Filtered image, (b) Edge image, (c) Hough-like transform.....	126
Figure 45. Beam hardening correction. (a) Uncorrected (b) Corrected.	130
Figure 46. Motivation for the growth prioritizing.....	132
Figure 47. Solids image (non-sphericals shown in white).....	133
Figure 48. (a) Dynamic liquid in the bed obtained from subtracting the drained image from the flow image. (b) Ternary gated image (T) showing solids in grey and dynamic liquid in white.....	135
Figure 49. Addition of RLH (in white).....	139
Figure 50. Tomography results at $u_L = 2.7$ mm/s and $u_G = 4.7$ cm/s	141

Figure 51. Three dimensional images of the (a) solid (yellow), and (b-h) the liquid (surface in light blue, slice plane in dark blue) in the bed in the different modes. High $u_L = 5.3$ mm/s, low $u_L = 2.6$ mm/s, $u_G = 3.2$ cm/s.	142
Figure 52. Porosity distribution in the radial and axial directions.	143
Figure 53. Bed-averaged hydrodynamic parameters computed by the method developed in this study ($u_G = 1.6$ cm/s). (a), (c), (e) is the dynamic saturation, gas-liquid area and wetting efficiency, (b), (d), (f) is the total saturation, gas-liquid area and wetting efficiency.	144
Figure 54. Three-dimensional images of typical partially wetted spheres (dry surfaces in yellow, dynamically wetted surface in blue, statically wetted surface in green).	145
Figure 55. Pore space classification (a) Original image (b) Thinned image (c) Pore (white line shows pore boundary).....	147
Figure 56. The ambiguity of pore classification. (a) Thinned image (b) Surface plot showing local maxima (labelled 1 and 2) (c) Pore classification with small window (b) Pore classification with large window.....	148
Figure 57. An example of a typical pore, (a) in relation to its neighbourhood (b) the pore nestled in the void space (c) the pore on its own (d) the liquid inside the pore (e) the pore from another angle (d) the liquid inside the pore from another angle.	150
Figure 58. Pore-scale statistics of the packed bed. (a) Pore size distribution (b) Pore external surface area distributions (c) Pore coordination number distribution (d) Pore sphericity distribution.	151
Figure 59. Pore-scale statistics of the flow pattern in the Levec (blue) and Kan-Liquid (black) modes. (a-c) Pore holdup distribution with increasing liquid velocity, (d-f) Pore wetting fraction distributions, i.e. the fraction of the solid surface exposed to the pore that is dynamically wetted, (g-i) Pore gas-liquid area distribution. $u_G = 4.7$ cm/s for all figures.	152

Figure 60. Fraction of pores without dynamic holdup in them (dry pores) as a function of gas and liquid velocity and hydrodynamic mode.....153

Figure 61. Liquid suspended by capillary force in a vertical conical capillary tube. (a)-(c) Menisci shapes as the weight in the tube increases (d) Just after the critical contact angle is exceeded (e) As flow rate is reduced θ' decreases until the flow stops at θ'_{rec} (f) The fringe region enlarged (g) Bottom contact angle as a function of weight - showing the weight to capillary force regions where the gate is closed (red) and open (green).158

Figure 62. Liquid discharge from a vertical capillary in the presence of a substrate. (a) Droplet is critically poised (b) Just after liquid bridge was created (c) Liquid bridge at the weight where the flow in the substrate-less case stopped – flow persists down to smaller weights because the additional support allows θ' to take longer to reach θ'_{rec} as the weight is decreased.160

Figure 63. A pore can be approximated as a tube with a constricted exit163

Figure 64. Applying the hydrodynamic multiplicity mechanism to a pore. (a) Single tank geometry, (b) Qualitative plot of the capillary correction factor as a function of liquid height, (c-d) Two approximations of the capillary correction factor as a function of liquid height.164

Figure 65. A system of three capillary tanks shows hysteresis akin to that of the packed bed. (a) Low flow condition – increasing leg (b) High flow rate condition (c) Low flow rate condition – decreasing leg.168

Figure 66. A liquid flow rate variation induced hysteresis loop for the model system. (a) Height in each tank. (b) Total retained volume. Point A corresponds to the illustration in Figure 65a, point B with Figure 65b and point C with Figure 65c. Note that the total retained volume (the analogue of holdup) is higher at point C than at point A.....169

Figure 67. The proposed hydrodynamic model for gas and liquid flow.....173

Figure 68. Model performance: dynamic evolution of saturation and pressure drop with liquid flow rate changes.....174

Figure 69. Liquid distribution by tank for the simulation shown in Figure 68.....	177
Figure 70. Gas flow rate variation induced hysteresis starting from the (a) Kan-Liquid mode and (b) Levec mode.....	179
Figure 71. Pore exit statistics. (a) Pore exit area distribution (b) Pore exit filling fraction (Levec mode at $u_L = 5.3$ mm/s, $u_G = 4.7$ cm/s – other conditions look similar).....	183
Figure 72. Pore wetting efficiency as a function of pore holdup from tomography. Note the nearly linear relationship ($u_L = 2.7$ mm/s, $u_G = 4.7$ cm/s). Other conditions show similar behaviour.	184
Figure 73. Schematics of the method of investigating hysteresis in an industrial reactor. (a) Liquid velocity (red) and pressure drop (blue) against time for the cases of interest, (b) The equivalent pressure drop hysteresis loop.	188
Figure 74. Pressure drop hysteresis in an industrial reactor. Error bars indicate relative standard deviations of the pressure drop signal over a period of approximately 2 days. The difference between the upper and lower legs is 8-20%.....	189
Figure 75. Concentration profiles and rate processes for gas phase reagents and non-volatile liquid phase reagents (based on Mills & Dudukovic, 1980).....	191
Figure 76. Conversion and temperature rise for gas limited conditions	199
Figure 77. Conversion and temperature rise for liquid limited conditions	200
Figure 78. Representative pressure drop plot.....	201
Figure 79. Productivity difference as a function of the degree of gas or liquid limitation.....	202
Figure 80. Experimental setup for reaction study	210

Nomenclature

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Definition (units)</i>
A	Cross-sectional area (m ²)
A	Convolution target in Chapter 6
A	Ergun constant in Chapters 2 and 4
a	Hole area in Chapter 7 (m ²)
$a1, a2, a3$	Size of A
$A_{\alpha S}$	Interfacial area between phase α and the solid (m ²)
B	Convolution kernel in Chapter 6
B	Second Ergun constant
b	Stoichiometric coefficient
$b1, b2, b3$	Size of B
C	Concentration in Chapter 8 (kmol/m ³)
C	Constant in Chapter 7
C	Convolution of A with B
$c1, c2, c3$	Size of C
d	Capillary diameter in Chapter 7
D	Column diameter (cm)
D	Difference operator (convolution kernel)
D	Diffusivity in Chapter 8 (m ² /s)
d	Particle diameter (m)
D_{AX}	Axial dispersion coefficient (m ² /s)
D_h	Hydraulic diameter (m)
d_t	Hydraulic diameter of tube in Chapter 7 (m)
E	Attenuation coefficient (1/m)
E	Edge image
ex, ey, ez	Voxels coordinates
F	Filtered image

F	Force (N)
f	Wetting efficiency
f_s, f_v	Shear and velocity slip factors
F_α	F-function parameter
G	Gas superficial flux (kg/m ² s)
g	Gravity acceleration (m/s ²)
Ga	Galileo number
h	Height in Chapter 7 (m)
h	Hough-transform value in Chapter 6 (normalized)
H	Packed height (cm)
I	Image
$k_{GL}a_{GL}$	Volumetric gas-liquid mass transfer coefficient (1/s)
$k_{LS}a_{LS}$	Volumetric liquid-solid mass transfer coefficient (1/s)
$k_\alpha, k_{\alpha i}$	Relative permeabilities of phase α
l	Characteristic tube length (m)
L	Liquid superficial flux (kg/m ² s)
M	Maldistribution factor
m	Mass (kg)
\mathbf{n}	Normal vector
N	Number of observations (Chapter 2)
N	Number of particles in Chapter 6
P	Pressure in Chapter 4 (Pa)
P	Productivity in Chapter 8 (kmol/s)
Q	Volumetric flow rate (m ³ /s)
r	Particle radius (m)
r_c	Radial distance from central axis (pixels or m)
Re	Reynolds number
S	Solids image
T	Ternary image

t	Threshold in Chapter 6
t	Time (s)
u	Direction normal to edge in Chapter 6
U	Interstitial (or characteristic) velocity (m/s)
u	Velocity (m/s or mm/s)
\mathbf{u}	Velocity vector (m/s)
$u_{L,pulse}$	Pulsing velocity (m/s)
v	Number of overlaps
V	Volume (m ³)
W_{Pd}	Mass palladium (kg)
X	Conversion
x	Generic hydrodynamic parameter in Chapter 2
x	Thickness in Chapter 5 (m)
z	Length (m)
<i>Greek</i>	<i>Definition (units)</i>
ΔH	Heat of reaction (kJ/kmol)
$\Delta P/\Delta z$	Pressure drop (kPa/m)
Δs	Image resolution (pixels or m)
Ω	Stresses
Ψ	Momentum vector
$\beta_{L/G}$	Liquid/Gas saturation
δ	Reduced liquid saturation in Chapter 2 and 4
ε	Porosity
ε_L	Liquid holdup
ϕ	Capillary correction factor for liquid in Chapter 7
γ	Gas- or liquid limitation factor in Chapter 8
λ, ψ	Parameters in Chapter 2

μ	Viscosity (Pa.s)
θ, ϕ	Spherical voxel coordinates in Chapter 6
θ, θ'	Contact angle and bottom contact angle in Chapter 6
ρ	Density (kg/m^3)
ρ_i	Intensity density ($1/\text{m}^3$)
σ	Surface tension (N/m)
σ_α	Tension vector (N/m)
ψ	Capillary correction factor for gas in Chapter 7

Subscripts

$0, o$	Reference
A	Gas phase reagent in Chapter 8
B	Liquid phase reagent in Chapter 8
$crit, rec$	Critical, receding (Chapter 7)
G, L, g, l	Gas, liquid
i, j, k, m, n, p	Indices in Chapter 6
p	Particle
res	Residual
sub	Substrate
T	Total
v	Volumetric
α	Indicates phase α
β, γ	Indicates liquid and gas phases in Chapter 2