IMPACT OF ACTIVATION IN PROJECTION WELDING WITH CAPACITOR DISCHARGE USING MULTIPHYSICS SIMULATION AND A PROCESS-INTEGRATED TRANSITION RESISTANCE MEASUREMENT

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DOI 10.3217/978-3-85125-968-1-31

ABSTRACT

Capacitor discharge welding (CDW) is defined by a pulsed current profile. It is usually used for projection welding and is characterized by very high power density and very short welding time. The process can be classified into four phases: Contacting, Activating, Material Connection and Holding Pressure. High-speed images show the formation of metal vapor during the activation phase. This removes impurities and oxide layers from the contact zone and activates the surfaces. The material connection is achieved by pressing the activated surfaces together. The purpose of the investigation is to describe the impact of activation on the formation of the material connection.

A capacitor discharge welding system at the Technische Universität Dresden has the unique feature of interrupting the current flow at a given time. That allows different current profiles with the same rate of current increase. This unique feature permits the experimental investigation of activation and their impact on the formation of the material connection. To achieve this, projection components with different interruption times were welded. The transition voltages were measured before, while and after welding at each contact area. The mechanical strength of the welded joints was measured and a metallographic investigation was performed. To evaluate the impact of the activation in time and location, the experimental results were combined with simulative investigations. The evaluation of temperature and current density distributions enables the physical description of the activation. An iteratively coupled electrical-thermal and mechanical-thermal FEM-model was used. The experimental measured process variables force and current were used as boundary conditions for the simulation. A contact theory was implemented. In addition, the model considers temperature-dependent material characteristics and a remeshing procedure to model high projection deformations. The validation of the simulation was done by comparing measured and simulated transition voltages at the contact areas.

Keywords: Capacitor Discharge Welding, Projection Welding, Numerical Simulation, Contact Resistance, Transition Resistance, Activation

INTRODUCTION

Capacitor discharge welding (CDW or CD-Welding) is a stable, efficient, cost-effective and easy-to-use joining process. It is mostly used for projection welding. For example, finished components with diameters up to 200 mm can be welded in a few milliseconds [1]. The Chair of Joining Technology and Assembly at the Technische Universität Dresden has developed a new process understanding in recent years [2-4]. The process is classified into four phases transitioning into each other (contacting, activating, material connection, holding pressure). When activating, the power density in the joining zone is so high that metal vaporization appears. This results in the activation of the surfaces. The joint is established without a welding nugget. The joint is established just by pressing the activated surfaces together. Plastic deformation of the projection activates further surface areas by displacing the surface layer. Activation by metal vaporization has been verified by high-speed imaging [2, 3]. It has not been possible yet to determine the impact of activation, because the joint is formed under electrical, thermal and mechanical stress, hidden and nearly immediately within a very short time (5 to 15 ms). Only by numerical process simulation, it is possible to investigate the hidden short-time process in a locationand time-dependent way. The finite element method allows electrical, thermal and mechanical evaluation, local resolution of the stress, time resolution of the stress and sensitive analysis with boundary conditions that cannot be adjusted experimentally. Therefore, a numerical simulation model has been developed to provide a more holistic representation of the CD projection welding process. The joining process includes the following complexities that make model development difficult:

• Very high temperature gradients

- Strong temperature-dependent deformation of the projection
- Emergence of different phases (melt, metal vaporization)

The high temperature-dependent projection deformations produce a high distortion of the mesh. This results in convergence problems. To avoid this, the simulation model must be remeshed at the time of strong distortion [5-7]. By experimental investigations on a new machine technology for CD welding, it is possible to measure transition resistances before and after welding in a process-integrated way for the first time. The current flow can also be interrupted. This means that for the first time, different current intensities can be investigated at the same rates of current rise. In addition to the simulative analysis, this also enables an experimental estimation of the influence of activation.Capacitor Discharge projection Welding

PROCESS FUNDAMENTALS

CD welding is mostly used for projection welding and is a conductive resistance welding process. Before starting the welding process, one or more capacitor banks are charged. This causes an electrical energy E_{el} to be stored in the capacitor as a function of the charging voltage U_c and the capacity C (see equation 1) [8].

$$
E_{\rm el} = \frac{1}{2} C \ast U_C^2 \tag{1}
$$

Discharging the electrical energy E_{el} starts the welding process. The current flow is transferred to the joining point. This results in the transformed and unregulated welding current as shown in Fig. 1. The peak current I_p is reached in a few milliseconds. This time is called the current rise time t_p . The welding time t_h is reached when the peak current I_p drops by 50%. The current flow time t_1 is reached when the current drops to 95%. [1]

Fig. 1 Characteristic current curve of a capacitor discharge projection welding

This clearly illustrates the differences to mid-frequency (MFDC) spot welding. This means that very high current intensities are obtained in very short current rise times [1, 9]. The projection geometry in the joining zone focuses the current flow and therefore increases the electric current density i . Based on Joule's heat law, the amount of heat \hat{Q} is

generated in an electrical wire as a function of the square of the current and the ohmic resistance R (see equation 2). A differential observation based on equation 3 allows the local description of the heating by the heat flux density \dot{q} . This depends on the specific electric resistance ρ of the material and the current density *i*. The differential description is useful, for example, for using the finite element method (FEM). Equation 3 shows that a high current density in the joining zone results in a high heat flux density. The high power density in the joining zone is the critical parameter for the heating of the short-time projection welding process. That's why the heat flux $\dot{Q_W}$ caused by the resistance heating in the projection and component is much smaller than the heat flux \dot{Q}_R caused by the contact resistance heating in the joining zone at the beginning of the process (see equation 4). As a result, no weld lenses are obtained in CD projection welding (see Fig. 2). [10]

$$
Q = I^2 \cdot R \cdot t \tag{2}
$$

$$
\dot{q} = \frac{\dot{Q}}{V} = \rho \cdot j^2 \tag{3}
$$

$$
\dot{Q}_{R} = \iint j^{2} \cdot R_{C} \cdot dA \gg \dot{Q}_{W} = \iiint l^{2} \cdot R \cdot dV \tag{4}
$$

Fig. 2 Missing of a joint without nugget lens in the joining zone during CD projection welding

SURFACE ACTIVATION

Investigations using high-speed imaging have shown that metal vaporization occurs due to the high power density in the joining zone [10]. CD projection welding is always associated with the appearance of weld spatter. Objective criteria for evaluating weld spatter were defined in [10]. This makes it possible to classify the weld spatter into four classes (classes 0 to 3). These classes are shown in Fig. 3. No sparks or weld spatter can be detected in class 0. Only a glow in the contact area may be visible. There is hardly any weld spatter visible in Class 1. These glow after a very short time. In Class 2, weld spatter is clearly visible. The direction of travel of the weld spatter is towards the ground. They do not reach the ground. Strong weld spatter can be seen in Class 3, which flies down to the ground and can also continue to glow there.

In [2-4] a new process understanding with four characteristic phases has been defined: Contacting, Activating, Material Connection and Holding Pressure. When contacting the electrodes moves onto the components. The electrode force is increasing up to the predefined welding force. Plastic deformation begins in the contact area of the projection. When activating, the current flow starts with high current density gradients. This results in very high power densities in the contact area. This eliminates the foreign and oxide layers on the surfaces. With this begins the activation of the contact surface. To build the material connection, the activated contact areas are pressed together. The current and the current density decreases. The heat conduction of the projection starts. Further softening and plastic deformation of the projection occurs. With a further decrease of the current density, the last phase begins: Holding Pressure. The electrodes continue to follow-up. Further plastic deformation of the projection continues. This increases the contact area. Finally, the follow-up of the electrodes ends. The heat conduction continues and the joining zone is cooling down.

Following the characterization of the process phases, an activation of the surface by metal vaporization is necessary for the formation of the material connection. This means that a joint cannot be formed without activation. A capacitor discharge welding system at Technische Universität Dresden has the unique property of interrupting the current flow at a specific point of time. This allows different current profiles at the same rate of current rise. This unique feature allows the experimental investigation of activations and their effects on the formation of the material connection.

Fig. 3 Classification of welding spatters in capacitor discharge welding [9]

NUMERICAL SIMULATION

In addition to the experimental investigation of surface activation, the finite element method can also be used. The FEM allows an electrical, thermal and mechanical evaluation, local resolution of the stress, temporal resolution of the stress and sensitive analyses with boundary conditions that cannot be set experimentally. An iteratively coupled simulation model for CD projection welding was developed at the Technische Universität Dresden with *ANSYS MECHANICAL APDL*. The iterative simulation process is described in detail in [11]. Input data are the current and the force as a function of time by experimental measurement data. The mechanical environment is solved for a small time step Δt . Then the contact pressure σ_K is determined in all contact areas. Using the contact pressure $\sigma_{\rm K}$ and the room temperature T_R at the beginning, it is possible to calculate the contact resistance R_C by equation 5 [12]. This temperature and contact

pressure dependant contact theory according to SONG is validated for projection welding of steel alloys. The yield strength σ_s of the soft material, the specific electric resistances $\rho_{1,2}$ and a specific film resistance ρ_{film} are considered. Two numerical parameters are also considered. According to Song, the numerical parameters ξ and κ describes the surface condition.

$$
R_{\rm K}(T,\sigma_{\rm K}) = 3\xi \cdot \left(\frac{\sigma_{\rm s}(T)}{\sigma_{\rm K}}\right) \cdot \left(\frac{\rho_{1}(T) + \rho_{2}(T)}{2} + \rho_{\rm film}\right) \tag{5}
$$

The developed numerical process simulation is adapted to experimental measurement data. For this, the transition voltages $U_{e,p}$, $U_{p,s}$ und $U_{s,e}$ of the single contact zones are measured during the process. When evaluating the transition voltages, they are corrected by subtracting the induced voltage of the CD welding machine [13]. The measurement setup is shown in Fig. 4a. The numerical parameters are time varied in the numerical process simulation so that the voltage curve matches the reality (Fig. 4b). [11]

a) Experimental Setup b) Voltage curve of all contact zone

Fig. 4 Experimental Setup to measure the dynamic transition resistance for adjusting the numerical parameters for all contact zones

With the progress of the simulation time, strong temperature-dependent plastic deformation appears. These result in such strong mesh distortions that convergence problems occur. Therefore, a remeshing is necessary [5-7]. Fig. 5 shows a situation where mesh distortion becomes too big. The initial situation for the remeshing process is a converged solution n_{know} . The next load step $n_{\text{know}} + 1(a)$ results in convergence problems because of strong mesh distortion. A remeshing will result in the solution of the load step $n_{\text{kony}} + 1(b)$.

Since the distortion of the mesh with the high temperature-dependent deformation occurs in the mechanical environment, remeshing starts there. Proprietary simulation applications usually provide remeshing for structural analysis to calculate large deformations [14]. In the thermo-electric environment, these tools usually cannot be used. Therefore, the challenge is to remesh the thermo-electric environment as well and implement it into the iteratively coupled simulation process. Both indirectly coupled simulation environments require the same mesh. To do this, the last converged load step in the structural simulation is loaded. The global node coordinates (physical coordinates) are exported. The remeshing is then performed in the region of greatest distortion. Based on the new mesh geometry, the thermo-electric simulation must be continued. For this, the temperature distribution on the old mesh must be transferred to the new mesh generated in the mechanical domain. To do this, all the associated elements of new coordinates are defined in the old mesh. Then the natural node coordinates (element coordinates from -1 to 1) of the new physical coordinates in the old elements are determined. With the determined natural node coordinates, the temperature and electric voltage can be interpolated using to the element solution of the old mesh and the shape functions. At the end, interpolated solutions are available for all nodes in the new mesh, which can be applied as initial conditions. As a last step, a converged solution on the new mesh must be generated in order to continue the thermal electric simulation.

EXPERIMENTAL AND NUMERICAL PROCEDURE AND RESULTS

EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATION

The resistance welding task consists of a sheet and a ring projection with a projection diameter $d_R = 15$ mm, radial contact area $A_R = 1$ mm and a projection angle $\alpha_R = 45^\circ$ (see Fig. 6a). The sheet thickness of the component is $t_s = 3$ mm. The ring projection and the sheet are made of S355MC. The resistance welding electrodes are made of CuCr1Zr. The investigations are performed on a portal system \mathcal{R} *KKP 18-MCS/gKE*" of the company Kapkon GmbH. The system has an electric servo motor with an electrode force of up to 30kN. It is possible to weld both MFDC and CD. This enables investigation of the electrical influence on the welded joint without affecting the mechanics. Four capacitor banks are available for capacitor discharge. Peak currents of up to 210kA in 2.1ms can be realized. A unique feature is the process-integrated transition resistance measurement during CD welding. During the transition resistance measurement, the CD circuit is disconnected so that the measurement current flows solely through the welding task. Additionally, current flows in the welding process can be interrupted using a pulsed

capacitor discharge. This results in different current profiles depending on the interruption time t_1 . Fig. 6b shows this behavior. The capacitor bank was charged with a voltage U_C = 1000 V. This capacitor bank has a capacity of 21320 μ F. This charging voltage U_C allows the activation to be investigated, since no welding connection is established at an interruption time $t_1 = 0.4$ ms and the upper limit of the welding range has been established at an interruption time $t_1 = 30$ ms. The interruption time $t_1 = 30$ ms is equivalent to no interruption, because after 30ms the capacitor banks are already completely discharged. The upper limit is defined by the appearance of class 2 to 3 weld spatter and by imperfections in the cross section. A total of 11 interruption times t_1 were investigated. Each interruption time was repeated 7 times. A static press-out test was performed for each experiment. A total of 76 experiments were evaluated, as one false measurement was removed.

a) Geometry of investigated projection b) Current curves at interruption time t_1

Fig. 6 Geometry of the ring projection and current curves as a function of the interruption time t_I

The results of the transition resistance measurement before and after welding are shown in Fig. 7a. An instantaneous drop of all transition resistances R_T can be observed at an interruption time of $t_1 = 0.4$ ms. The drop in the transition resistances R_T changes the order of the single transition resistances R_{EP} , R_{PS} , R_{SE} . The transition resistance R_{EP} in the welding zone now represents the largest value of $14.35\mu\Omega \pm 0.03\mu\Omega$ for $t_1 = 0.4$ ms. The transition resistance before welding was R_{PS} 35.27µ $\Omega \pm 0.16 \mu \Omega$. At an interruption time of $t_1 = 0.4$ ms no material connection is established, even though the resistances drop significantly. Only at an interruption time of $t_1 = 0.8$ ms and bigger it is possible to establish a material connection. The transition resistances have fallen further to R_{PS} 10.66μ Ω ± 0.02μ Ω . But that does not mean high press-out forces $F_z = 6.87$ kN \pm 1.06 kN (see Fig. 8) can be reached. Fig. 7b shows a detailed evaluation of the transition resistances after welding. Especially in the joining zone, the transition resistance R_{FP} decreases strongly with an increase of the interruption time from $t_1 = 0.4$ ms to $t_1 = 0.6$ ms $(-4.08 \mu\Omega \triangleq 28.4 \text{ %})$. As the process continues, the transition resistances continue to decrease. From an interruption time $t_1 = 1.4$ ms a value of approx. 7.3 µ Ω until 7.8 µ Ω is reached for the joining zone. From this time on, the destructive force F_Z of the press-out

test also stops increasing and varies between 23kN until 30 kN (see Fig. 8). A connection is completely established at an interruption time of $t_1 = 1.4$ ms and more. The further energy up to $t_1 = 30$ ms does not provide a significant increase of the press-out force. Only from $t_1 = 30$ ms a lower standard deviation is evident. But in this range, a spatter class 3 is always detected or bonding defects are present in the microsection.

Fig. 7 Transition resistances R_T before and after welding. Before welding is the reference (REF)

Fig. 8 Press-out force F_z of the ring projections as a function of the interruption time t_1

NUMERICAL INVESTIGATION

The numerical process simulation is based on the modeling method according to [11]. This considers the continuous adjustment of the contact resistance as a function of temperature and contact pressure, a nonlinear adaptive remeshing according to [7], the input parameters as time-dependent measurement data and the temperature-dependent material data for S355MC and CuCr1Zr. The material data used are in the appendix. In Table 1 are the temperature-dependent thermomechanical properties of S355MC. In Table 2 are the temperature-dependent thermomechanical properties of CuCr1Zr. Table 4 and Table 5 show the corresponding temperature-dependent flow-stress curves for S355MC. In [15] the flow-stress curves for CuCr1Zr are shown.

The experimental investigations have shown that a significant collapse of the transition resistances already begins at $t_1 = 0.4$ ms. Fig. 9a shows the temperature distribution for the time $t = 0.4$ ms. The heating is the highest at the edges of the projection cross-section. The temperature is about 80 K over the value in the middle of the cross section. Fig. 9b shows the temperature distribution for $t = 0.8$ ms. A connection might be established at this time. The heating continues to increase at the edge of the projection cross-section, since the contact resistance heating continues to dominate over the conductive heating (see equation 4). The temperature difference is now about 220 K. No strong projection deformations are noticeable at both time points. The current density is at its highest in the regions of the highest temperature increases. The maximum current density at $t = 0.4$ ms is $j = 6.17 * 10^9$ A/m² and at $t = 0.8$ ms it is 9.07 * 10⁹ A/m². This results in a maximum power density of 0.585 MW/cm² at $t = 0.4$ ms and 1.501 MW/cm² at $t =$ 0.8ms.

a) Temperature distribution at $t = 0.4$ ms b) Temperature distribution after $t = 0.8$ ms

Fig. 9 Temperature distribution of the numerical process simulation in the projection crosssection in the joining zone after different interruption times t_I

Fig. 10 shows the distribution of the current density j at the time of maximum current $(l_w = 117 \text{ kA}, t_w = 2.4 \text{ ms})$. This results in a maximum power density of 32.56 MW/cm². The deformation of the projection starts to increase further at this time. Contact resistance heating continues to be highest in the outer zone of the projection ($T_{\text{max}} = 2100 \text{ K}$).

Fig. 10 Current density distribution at the time of maximum current ($t = 2.37$ ms)

DISCUSSION

The decrease of the transition resistance in the contact zone points to a surface activation even at very low current maxima. With a small increase of the interruption time to $t_1 =$ 0.6ms no connection could be established. It can be concluded that activation is not completed yet. With a further increase of to $t_1 = 0.8$ ms a connection with low press-out forces can be reached. This shows that the surface activation at this point is enough to establish a connection. The remaining energy at this interruption time is not high enough to optimize the connection. As interruption times continue to increase, the connection quality becomes better. These investigations are consistent also with the observations from high-speed imaging [3, 10].

The numerical process simulation shows the heating in the outer area of the projection. This is the reason why the activation is clearly visible on the high-speed images. The heating proceeds from the outside to the inside. Investigations in laser keyhole welding with steel alloys indicate this. In laser keyhole welding a metal vapor-filled keyhole is formed, when high power densities are achieved. The required power densities depends on the material, the traveling speed and the depth of the keyhole. Recent investigations show that these vary between 1 and 5 MW/cm^2 [16-18]. The evaluation of the power density confirms the hypothesis of surface activation by metal vapor. These values are not reached with interruption times of $t_1 = 0.4$ ms. The connection is also not established at these interruption times. However, the necessary power densities are reached at $t_1 =$ 0.8ms and the formation of a welded connection can also be discovered for the first time. The power density in the joining zone increases with a further increase in the current intensity. The experiments also show this, because the splash class increases up to class 3. This defines the upper limit the welding range. The use of a multi-pulse technology is useful to further increase the connection quality. One pulse can be initiated to activate the surfaces. The connection is then established with a following second pulse.

The combination of experiment and simulation confirms the hypothesis of surface activation by metal vaporization. The formation of the connection by pressing activated

surfaces onto each other is to be analyzed in further investigations. Additionally, the activation of the surface is to be investigated as a function of different surface properties. Finally, further investigations with multi-pulse discharges are intended.

CONCLUSIONS

The experimental investigations show an immediate drop in the transition resistances of all contact zones after just $t_1 = 0.4$ ms. First connections could only be established after t_1 $= 0.8$ ms. The connection quality did not increase further after approximately $t_I = 1.4$ ms. From the experimental investigations it can be concluded that activation does not occur sufficiently at the lowest interruption times. The temperature distribution and current density distribution were investigated in numerical simulations to describe this physically. It was determined that the heating occurs in the outer region of the projection and moves inward. The current density is also the highest there because of the concentration of heating in the outer region. Power density of 0.585 MW/cm² was observed for the interruption time $t_1 = 0.4$ ms. This is close to the power densities necessary for deep-hole welding. Metal vaporization is well known to occur there. Power densities of 1.501 MW/cm² are determined from an interruption time of $t_1 = 0.8$ ms onwards. The occurrence of metal vaporization during CD projection welding for steel alloys can be demonstrated by combining experimental and simulative investigations. This also confirms the observations from high-speed imaging.

APPENDICES

T/K	$\rho_D I$ $kg*m-3$	E l GPa	μ / 1	α / $K^{-1*}10^{-5}$	λI $W^*m^{-1*}K^{-1}$	h_V / $MJ*m-3$	ρI $\mu\Omega^*$ mm ^{2*} m ⁻¹
298	7807	208	0.290	Reference	37.368	1	0.251
333	7797	207	0.291	3.185	38.113	10	0.272
373	7785	205	0.293	3.216	38.787	103	0.297
403	7775	204	0.294	3.239	39.163	216	0.317
433	7766	202	0.295	3.263	39.426	332	0.337
473	7753	199	0.297	3.296	39.601	491	0.366
503	7743	197	0.298	3.320	39.602	613	0.389
533	7733	195	0.299	3.345	39.497	737	0.413
573	7720	191	0.301	3.379	39.200	908	0.448
603	7710	189	0.302	3.405	38.871	1040	0.475
633	7700	186	0.303	3.432	38.458	1175	0.504
673	7686	181	0.304	3.468	37.799	1360	0.546
703	7675	178	0.306	3.495	37.236	1504	0.580
733	7664	175	0.307	3.523	36.627	1652	0.615
773	7650	170	0.308	3.561	35.768	1856	0.665
803	7639	166	0.309	3.590	35.102	2016	0.704

Table 1 Thermophysical properties of S355MC

Table 2 Thermophysical properties of CuCr1Zr

Table 3 Flow-stress curve of S355MC for 298 K until 673 K

σ_F / MPA												
ϵ /1	773 K	873 K	973K	1073K	1273K	1473K	1673K					
0.00	135.5	135.4	131.9	0.0	58.4	42.3	34.8					
0.02	228.7	214.3	200.9	0.0	101.2	72.5	41.4					
0.04	254.9	237.4	221.8	0.0	116.2	83.1	41.4					
0.06	271.7	252.3	235.2	0.0	126.1	83.1	41.4					
0.08	284.4	263.4	245.3	0.0	133.7	83.1	41.4					
0.10	294.7	272.4	253.4	0.0	139.9	83.1	41.4					
0.15	314.3	289.7	269.0	0.0	151.9	83.1	41.4					
0.20	329.1	302.6	280.7	0.0	161.1	83.1	41.4					
0.25	341.0	313.0	290.1	0.0	167.5	83.1	41.4					
0.30	351.1	321.8	298.1	0.0	167.5	83.1	41.4					
0.35	359.9	329.4	305.0	0.0	167.5	83.1	41.4					
0.40	367.7	336.1	311.1	0.0	167.5	83.1	41.4					
0.50	381.0	347.7	321.6	0.0	167.5	83.1	41.4					
0.60	392.3	357.5	330.4	0.0	167.5	83.1	41.4					
0.70	402.1	366.0	338.1	0.0	167.5	83.1	41.4					
0.80	410.8	373.5	344.9	0.0	167.5	83.1	41.4					
0.90	418.7	380.2	346.3	0.0	167.5	83.1	41.4					
1.00	425.8	386.4	346.3	0.0	167.5	83.1	41.4					
2.00	475.8	429.4	346.3	0.0	167.5	83.1	41.4					

Table 4 Flow-stress curve of S355MC from 773K until 1673K

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