Flow averaging tube geometry improvement for $K$-factor stability increase

Abstract

Fluid flow around two-profile averaging differential pressure sensor was investigated in this paper. Research concentrated particularly on fluid movement direction and velocity over the investigated flow sensor. Analysis was conducted experimentally in low velocity wind tunnel. Because of large number of measuring points placed very close to each other, it was decided that velocity profile measurement will be performed by means of fully automated test stand. Due to a recirculation of the stream in the vicinity of the probe tested in the wind tunnel, an original two-direction probe was used. A linear module with a stepper motor formed an integral part of the measurement system. The location of the measuring probe, the possibility of adjusting stream mean velocities and data acquisition was undertaken by means of a dedicated program. The above mentioned investigation method helped to improve the metrological properties of the flowmeter applying non symmetrical probe cross-section forced air stream to be redirected in the desired direction. This modification significantly increased $K$-factor value and stability of air flow through the contraction of the flowmeter.

Keywords: velocity profiles, air flow measurement, closed conduits, automated test stand, flow averaging Pitot tube.

1. Introduction

Flow averaging tubes (Fig. 1) along with their armature and differential pressure transducer are listed among differential pressure flowmeters. This group contains also other tube designs including measuring and slotted orifices, nozzles, as well as meters used for estimating local fluid velocities such as Prandtl and Pitot tubes (mainly used for velocity profile determination). Fig. 1 presents an example of a flow averaging tube and time averaged distribution of static pressure along its surface.

This type of tubes has a number of advantages. In comparison to orifices, practically it is not observed significant permanent pressure losses. Besides, their installation is considerably cheaper and easier. The disadvantages are associated with relatively small values of the measured differential pressure ($\Delta p$) and intermittently variable motion of the fluid in the surrounding of the probe, which affects the pressures in the flow averaging chambers [11].

For the case of flow averaging tubes the relation between mean velocity of flow in the channel and the differential pressure $\Delta p$ measured in the flow averaging chambers takes the form

$$V_m = K \sqrt{\frac{2 \Delta p}{\rho}} \quad (1)$$

where $\rho$ is the density of the fluid, and $K$ – flow coefficient.

The flow averaging tubes applied in industrial practice have a wide range of engineering designs [1-4]. This concerns the shapes of the cross-section of the probe, the shape of the internal surface of the tube (flow averaging chambers) and the number and distribution of impulse holes along the side of inflow and outflow (side walls).

Exemplary values of $K$-factor and differential pressure $\Delta p$ (for relatively low velocity) for common cross-section of flow averaging probes was shown in Tab.1. The problem is that possible low differential pressure could exceed about 150 Pa. Lower differential pressure makes impossible to measure fluid flows at low velocities.

Tab. 1. Flow coefficient $K$ and differential pressure $\Delta p$ for various cross-sections of flow averaging sensors for free air flow

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensor’s cross-section</th>
<th>$K$</th>
<th>$\Delta p$, Pa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.67</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.69</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.79</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.83</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The authors have proposed a modernized design of the flow averaging tube (Fig. 2b) [5]. This decision was made after the analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the parameters and requirements associated with them. The flow averaging tube presented in Fig. 2 offers relatively lower value of $K$-factor ($K$-0.62, $\Delta p$=157 Pa at 10 m/s) [5, 7].
2. Research methods

A problem which needed to be solved was associated with the determination of an optimum distance between the profiles and their relative angle position (referred to dimension L). Concurrently, the determination of these quantities was necessary prior to the development of the engineering specification of the tubes and production of the prototypes.

The testing was undertaken in a wind tunnel [6, 7] which formed a part of the test stand presented in Fig. 3. This figure presents the manner in which they were installed in the test stand after their appropriate location had been established.

One can note very clearly here that the characteristics presented in the Figs. 4 and 5 concern the testing in a wind tunnel. In the pipelines with the internal diameter of 0.1 to 0.3 m the two-profile probe has the value of the flow factor $K$ in the range from 0.3 – 0.44 at the expense of generating larger permanent pressure losses.

The initial testing confirmed the beneficial characteristic of the flow averaging tubes. However, for some profile configurations it was observed that the $K$-factor changes its value stepwise by noting its 0.1 – 0.2 increase or decrease. By testing with a two-directional probe with a small diameter the flow behind the throat of the probe it was concluded that a recirculation is formed, which affects a change in the value of flow factor $K$ depending on the location and direction of circulation. Fig. 4 presents the characteristics of this factor for symmetrical profiles. The value of the flow coefficient changes stepwise in the velocity range of 18 do 23 m/s. For the case of symmetrical profiles this phenomenon occurs in the entire range of the configurations of the distances and angles between the profiles in a manner which is difficult to anticipate and register. From the view point of metrology such a property of a measurement device prevents its normal exploitation. In order to avoid this undesirable and random phenomenon, the geometry of the throat was modified to include a specific hump which imposes the flow of a stream in a specific direction. After a defined value of mutual angle position is exceeded, the mentioned above hump in a throat stops to play its role (for smaller fluid velocities in accordance with Fig. 4). This is caused by a stream separation along the wall surface on the side of the impulse hole in the underpressure profile.

The analysis of the initial results has encouraged authors to maintain the engineering change involving the application of a hump in the throat on the surface of the profile with the $p^+$ pressure measurement. This has brought the need to redirect the stream in the direction of the surface with the inflow pressure $p^−$. The modernization results of the one probe cross-section brought the results of better characteristics of flow coefficient $K$ (Fig. 5).

The optimum distance between two profiles are set to 44 mm. Larger distance $L$ produces lower $K$-factor but its value is not stable in the whole range of velocities during tests (Fig. 5 - red line).

The size, shape and location of the threshold were the subject of numerous tests and experiments. Subsequently, after the final determination of the tube profile, as demonstrated in Fig. 2, the profiles were made in accordance with the resulting data and parameters were tested in a wind tunnel. The results in the form of $K_{ef}(w)$ characteristics for selected configurations of the profiles and $p^+$ pressure tapping points are presented below.

The flow phenomena between and behind the profiles were found to be so interesting that the velocity profile was measured in the direction y (normal in relation to the plane of the tube location)
for several distances behind the probe throat. Two-directional probe (author’s construction) was used for this purpose, as presented in Fig. 3.

3. Experimental results

The motion of the fluid, especially downward from the flow averaging tube, has unsteady character. The results of measurements presented in Figs. 6 and 7 are values averaged in time. The averaging was realized in the computer program working in LabVIEW environment [8].

Figs. 6 and 7 presents velocity distributions [9, 10, 12] behind the throat, for the distance \( L=44 \) mm, for mean velocity of the air inflow \( w=10 \) m/s and \( w=18 \) m/s. Locations are marked in the ordinate axis, in which the measurements were made (coordinates of the broken line). The velocity in the broken line is also marked in the ordinate axis. Its value for a given coordinate \( x \) is defined by the interval between the coordinate \( y \) marked by the solid and broken lines of a specific colour (style). For example: 40 mm distance (brown solid line) represents values of velocity which must be diminished of 40 m/s value thus for \(-60 \) mm (\( x \)-axis) we obtain finally 12 m/s (52 m/s – 40 m/s).

The data in Fig. 7 indicate that flow between two symmetrical profiles becoming more and more complex and the maximum \( V_y \) approaches the symmetry axis. This can also demonstrate a significantly non-stationary character of fluid flow.

In this case, the testing was performed for the mean velocity of inflowing stream of 18 m/s. These results are comparable to the results of measurement for a system with a hump, which are found in Fig. 7.

The complexity of the time averaged velocity profiles demonstrates the confirmation of high repeatability of the results obtained. Fig. 8 contains a comparison between the values measured in three series for mean velocity 18 m/s for symmetrical cross-section (more difficult case). This comparison indicates a very good repeatability of the results and, thus, provides information regarding good reliability of the measurements.

The results of the measurements were applied and elaborated with regard to the fluid flow in the direction of the maximum value of velocity \( V_y \), 80 mm behind it. This direction was denoted as the main stream of fluid. The results of the measurement elaborated in this manner are presented for symmetrical profiles in Fig. 9, and for asymmetrical ones (including a hump) in Fig. 10.

Fig. 6. A \( y \)-component velocity profiles behind the flowmeter throat \((L=44\text{mm})\), \( V_m=10 \text{ m/s} \)

Fig. 7. A \( y \)-component velocity profiles behind the flowmeter throat (symmetrical shape of probe cross-section) for \( V_m=18 \text{ m/s} \) and \( L=44 \text{ mm} \)

Fig. 8. Repeatability of experimental results (symmetrical shape of probe cross-section) for \( V_m=18 \text{ m/s} \) and \( L=44 \text{ mm} \)

Fig. 9. Main fluid stream flows through the contraction on the base on \( y \) velocity component \( (V_y) \) for symmetrical geometry, \( L=44 \text{ mm} \)
5. References


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