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Effects of minimal quantity lubrication (MQL) on surface integrity in robotic milling of austenitic stainless steel

Lutfi Taner Tunc^{a,*}, Yuchen Gu^b, Mary Grace Burke^b

^aNuclear Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre, The University of Sheffield, Sheffield, S60 5WG, UK

^bMaterials Performance Centre, School of Materials, The University of Manchester, Manchester, M13 9PL, UK

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44-0-114-222-6676. E-mail address: l.tunc@sheffield.ac.uk

Abstract

Robotic milling is considered to be a promising portable manufacturing technology for large scale part manufacturing industries such as nuclear, aerospace and power generation. However, considering the open environment of robotic milling, minimal quantity lubrication (MQL) stands to be one of the most suitable techniques for cooling and lubricating in robotic milling. In this paper, the effects of MQL conditions on surface integrity in robotic milling of austenitic stainless steel are discussed. The surface integrity is assessed in terms of surface residual stress (XRD) and surface roughness (optical metallography), where MQL conditions for improved tool life are also investigated.

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1. Introduction

Proper heat removal and lubrication is crucial for surface quality and tool wear in metal cutting. Mostly, flood cooling is used for machine tools having full enclosures around. However, there have been issues reported with the waste disposal, operators' health and negative effects on environment. Minimum quantity lubrication (MQL), which requires further investigation [1], is one of the proposed approaches to reduce the amount of metal working fluid. This suits robotic machining considering the lack of enclosure.

Shokrani et al. [2] reviewed cooling techniques such as dry, MQL, chilled air and cryogenics used in cutting of difficult-to-machine materials, but none of these were suggested as a suitable alternative to flood cooling. Further research on cooling techniques, cutter materials, cutting parameters and tool geometries were suggested. Spray pressure, nozzle to workpiece distance, nozzle angle to the feed rate direction and type of oils were the key performance parameters for MQL. The performance measures were tool wear progression, tool life, chip formation, surface roughness, surface residual stress, cutting forces, ecological issues, and aerosols.

In one of the early studies, Aoyama [3] showed that with proper supply of lubricant oil, MQL may perform better than flood cooling in terms of surface roughness, cutting torque, and tool life in drilling. Rahman et al. [4], compared performance of MQL to flood coolant in milling. No catastrophic failure of the tool was observed in MQL contrary to flood cooling. The tool wear was comparable to flood cooling. It was experimentally shown that the surface roughness and cutting forces generated by MQL were almost equivalent to flood cooling. Lacalle et al. [5] compared the performance of oil-water emulsion spray through computational fluid dynamics (CFD) simulations and experiments. It was shown that the orientation of the nozzles is of great importance to achieve increased tool life. It was also identified that the emulsion coolant is not efficient in high speed machining as it is not able to reach the flute-workpiece contact region. Whereas MQL flow penetrates in the cutting zone and it helps cooling, lubrication, and chip removal. Liao and Lin [6] studied the mechanism of MQL in high speed milling of hardened steel. One of the interesting conclusions was that MQL can provide extra oxygen, leading to the formation of a protective oxide layer between the chip and tool. As this layer includes Fe, Mn, Si, and Al elements, it acts

as a diffusion barrier, leading to improved tool life. They identified an optimal cutting speed at which a stable protective layer can be formed. Tasdelen et al. [7] compared dry cutting with MQL, compressed air and emulsion coolant in terms of chip contact length and chip morphology in turning. They compared the effect of cooling techniques for different engagement durations by machining cylindrical samples with two and six grooves. MQL was found to be suitable for interrupted cutting. Park et al. [8] showed the effect of spray pressure and nozzle to workpiece distance on the droplet size and distribution through an empirical model. In a recent study, Ji et al. [9] proposed an analytical modelling approach for estimation of the residual stress in MQL cooling. The study coupled the cutting force and cutting temperature into a thermo-mechanical model. The kinematic hardening and strain compatibility are incorporated to predict the resulting residual stress. They showed that the average compressive residual stress decreases with the flow rate under MQL conditions.

Conformance of the parts to the surface residual stress and surface roughness standards is crucial to prevent stress corrosion cracks in nuclear manufacturing, where components stay in service for up to 60 years. Considering that MQL fitted robotic machining is a proposed alternative to large scale machine tools, this paper contributes to the understanding of the effects of MQL on surface integrity. In Section 2, the MQL fitted robotic machining setup is described, followed by the experimental procedure in Section 3. The paper is finalized with results and discussion in Section 4.

Nomenclature

b	step over
ω_t	tooth passing frequency
Ra	Arithmetic mean deviation of the roughness profile
θ	Residual stress measurement angle
P1, P2	Average max surface residual principal stress
S	Average max surface residual shear stress

2. Experimental setup and system configuration

A spindle is retrofitted with a Stewart type hexapod robot as the mobile machining platform, equipped with an MQL spraying system. In this section, technical details and capabilities of the machining unit developed for robotic milling with the MQL spraying system are given.

2.1. Robotic machining unit

The equipment configured for robotic milling consists of a Fanuc F200iB six degree of freedom parallel kinematic hexapod robot controlled by Fanuc R-30iA controller. The platform has 8kW spindle attached to the top plate as shown in Fig. 1. Based on the manufacturer's specification the hexapod platform is allowed to carry 100 kg payload, 60 kgfm of load moment at the face plate, which are enough for light or medium duty cutting operations. The motion speed limits of the platform are 18 m/min and 900 m/min in vertical (Y axis) and horizontal directions (X-Z plane), respectively.



Fig. 1 MQL fitted robotic machining unit. (a) Spindle retrofitted mobile machining (b) MQL mist unit (c) MQL nozzles.

The tool tip is lubricated by misting the lubricant air mixture through two external nozzles (see Fig. 1b), where the lubricant is pumped by the system shown in Fig. 1c. The system consists of (i) air pressure valve, (ii) stroke setter, (iii) air flow adjuster. The system is able to supply air and oil through two channels, where the oil and air are mixed at the nozzle tip. The mist system can supply oil having up to 800cSt (40°C) at a discharge rate from 0 to 40 mm³ per stroke, where the number of strokes can be adjusted from 1 to 240 strokes/min. The air flow rate is adjusted by a screw having 11 threads. The air pressure can be adjusted between 4.5 and 7 bars. Overall, air pressure, oil-air ratio and the duty cycle affects the oil flow rate. Thus, it is important to identify adequate oil supply parameters in order to minimize the oil consumption to mitigate environmental effects.

The robot programming is performed in the following manner; the reference point of the workpiece is defined to the robot as a user frame, whereas the tool center point is taught as tool frame with respect to the global frame of the robot. The cutter pass control is performed by converting the tool path file to series of motion commands, where the tool path is generated using Siemens NX9 ©.

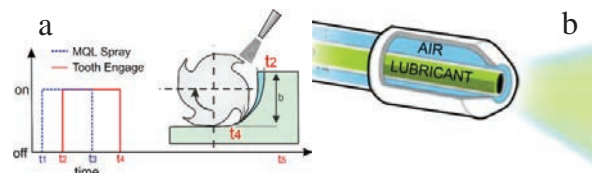


Fig. 2 MQL in milling. (a) Illustration of tool-chip interface and MQL spray operation. (b) Dual-channel MQL flow.

2.2. Design of experiments

The experiments are designed to investigate the effects of MQL parameters such as air pressure, lubricant flow rate and duty cycle on surface integrity. In the literature, it is mentioned that air pressure affects the lubricant particle size and hence the MQL performance [5]. The amount of lubrication and heat removal depends on the lubricant flow rate. The lubricant-air mixture is sprayed to the tool tip with duty cycle, i.e. number of strokes per second. As milling is an interrupted cutting process enough time is required to let the lubricant particles penetrate into the tool-chip interface. The engagement time of the tool-chip interface is mainly related to the step over, b, and the tooth passing frequency, ω_t , as

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