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Review

Roles of drag reducing polymers in single- and multi-phase flows

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A B S T R A C T

It has become a well-known fact that finding sustainable solutions to the unavoidable high pressure losses accompanying pipeline flows to increase the pumping capacity without necessarily adding more pump stations is inevitable. Polymers, as one of the drag reducing agents which have been found to offer such an economic relieve, is the most widely investigated and most often employed in industries because they can produce drag reduction up to 80% when they are added in minute concentrations. In addition, polymer additives modify the flow configurations of multi-phase flows to such an extent that stratification of individual phases is enhanced thereby making the separation of the phases at the fluid destination much easier. The achievements so far made and the challenges facing the use of polymers as drag reducers in turbulent single and multiphase flows are comprehensively reviewed. This review discusses the experimental studies of the effects of polymer additives in turbulent flows, the analytical studies, and the proposed models as well as the suggested mechanisms that explain the drag reduction. Likewise, specific areas of interest in the review include phenomena of drag reduction by polymers, factors influencing the effectiveness of the drag reducing polymers, methods of injecting the polymers into the base fluids, degradation of the polymers and industrial applications of polymers as drag reducing agents. The current and future research interests are also addressed. Although finding reveals that there are quite a lot of research in this area, most of the experimental and theoretical works are devoted to single phase flows while the remaining ones are mostly directed towards gas–liquid flows except in very recent time when investigation into the use of polymers in liquid–liquid flows is being focused. Despite this voluminous works on drag reducing polymers, there are no universally accepted models and hence the mechanisms of drag reductions by polymers.

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Keywords: Drag reducing polymer; Drag reduction; Single phase flow; Multiphase flow; Flow patterns

Contents

1. Introduction	00
2. Drag reductions in single phase flow experiments	00
2.1. Drag reduction and maximum drag reduction	00
2.2. Turbulence measurements	00
2.3. Parameters influencing the performance of DRPs in single phase flow	00
2.3.1. Effect of channel size and geometry	00

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2.3.2.	Effect of surface roughness	00
2.3.3.	Effect of molecular weight	00
2.3.4.	Effect of chain flexibility	00
2.3.5.	Effect of polymer structure and composition	00
2.3.6.	Effect of pH and temperature	00
2.3.7.	Effect of solvent and salt content	00
2.4.	Other DRP studies in single phase flow	00
2.5.	Industrial use of DRPs for crude oil transportation	00
3.	Drag reductions in multiphase flow experiments	00
3.1.	Two-phase gas-liquid flow experiments with DRPs	00
3.1.1.	Drag reduction	00
3.1.2.	Effect on flow patterns	00
3.2.	Two-phase liquid-liquid flow experiments with DRPs	00
3.2.1.	Drag reduction	00
3.2.2.	Effect on flow patterns	00
3.3.	Two-phase solid-liquid flow experiments with DRPs	00
3.4.	Three phase flow experiments with DRPs	00
3.5.	Parameters influencing the performance of DRPs in multiphase flow	00
3.5.1.	Effect of channel size and roughness	00
3.5.2.	Effect of inclination angle	00
3.5.3.	Effect of molecular weight	00
3.5.4.	Effect of concentration	00
3.5.5.	Effect of salts	00
4.	Measurement techniques	00
4.1.	Single phase flow	00
4.1.1.	Pressure drop measurements	00
4.1.2.	Velocity measurements	00
4.2.	Multiphase flow	00
4.2.1.	Pressure drop measurements	00
4.2.2.	Flow patterns observation	00
4.2.3.	Liquid hold up measurements	00
5.	Injection methods or effect of mixing	00
5.1.	Single phase flow	00
5.2.	Multiphase flow	00
6.	Theoretical studies of DRPs in pipelines	00
6.1.	Single phase flow	00
6.2.	Multiphase flow	00
7.	Suggested mechanisms behind drag reduction with DRPs	00
7.1.	Single phase flow	00
7.2.	Multiphase flow	00
8.	Major problems with the use of DRPs	00
8.1.	Degradation	00
8.2.	Toxicity	00
9.	Applications of DRPs	00
10.	Commercially available DRPs	00
11.	Knowledge gap and research questions	00
11.1.	Single phase flow	00
11.2.	Multiphase flow	00
12.	Conclusions	00
	Acknowledgment	00
	References	00

1. Introduction

The concept of drag (or pressure drop) reduction in pipe flow using drag reducing agents (DRAs) has generated practical engineering interest because of these agents' abilities to reduce pumping power and increase piping system capacity. Recently, some drag reduction studies in multiphase flows revealed that apart from pressure drop, DRAs can also affect the spatial distribution of the fluids in the pipe and the boundaries between different flow patterns (Oliver and Young, 1968; Greskovich and Shrier, 1971; Virk, 1975; Al-Sarkhi and

Hanratty, 2001a,b). Such areas of interest where these additives are particularly gaining tremendous attention are oil production and transportation pipelines, and district heating and cooling. The additives causing drag reduction can be divided into five categories: polymers, surfactants, fibres, micro-bubbles and compliant coating. This review presents only the use of polymers as drag reducers in turbulent single and multiphase flows as they have been most employed at industrial level due to their advantage of being applied in very small quantities when compared to surfactants and fibres.

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