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MECHANICAL ENGINEERING

Performance of polyacrylamide as drag reduction polymer of crude petroleum flow



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Received 23 November 2013; revised 25 February 2014; accepted 9 April 2014

Available online 22 May 2014

KEYWORDS

Material selection;
Surface engineering;
Drag reduction;
Surfactants;
Crude oil;
Fluid flow

Abstract The influence of polyacrylamide (PAM) as drag reducing polymer on flow of Iraqi crude oil in pipe lines was investigated in the present work. The effect additive concentration, pipe diameter, solution flow rate and the presence of radius elbows on the percentage of drag reduction ($\%Dr$) and the amount of flow increases ($\%FI$) were the variables of study. Maximum drag reduction was 40.64% which was obtained with 50 ppm of PAM polymer flowing in straight pipes of 0.0508 m I.D. The dimensional analysis was used for grouping the significant quantities into dimensionless group to reduce the number of variables. The results showed good agreement between the observed drag reduction percent values and the predicted ones with high value of correlation coefficient.

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1. Introduction

A spectacular reduction in energy losses in turbulent flows can be achieved by the addition of small amounts of certain polymers. Polymer drag reduction is due to the large elongational viscosity of the polymer solution; this stabilizes the turbulent boundary layer, leading to less turbulent energy generation and hence less dissipation [1]. Drag-reducing polymer solution flows behave like viscoelastic characteristics. The most notable elastic property of the viscoelastic polymer solution is that stress does not immediately become zero when the fluid motion stops, but rather decays with some characteristic time (the

relaxation time), which can reach seconds and even minutes. It is generally believed that the frictional drag reduction caused by polymer and surfactant additives in a wall-bounded flow is the consequence of the interaction between viscoelasticity and turbulence in the flow. In a cationic surfactant solution, rod-like micelles can be formed if the surfactant/counterion chemical structures, molar ratios, concentrations, and temperature are under right conditions. This network microstructure imparts viscoelasticity to the solution flow, which was often stated to be responsible for the occurrence of Dr [2,3]. Polyacrylamide is a high molecular weight water soluble polymer that used to improve flow. It is used to reduce energy and friction losses and can also be called friction reducers. Water can be injected to simulate oil production. The spontaneous flow of oil and water in crude petroleum production and transportation pipelines is a common occurrence, seen anywhere from the well perforations to the final stages of separation. The goal of the present work was to investigate the validity of the effectiveness of polyacrylamide (PAM) as drag reducing agent with Kirkuk crude oil. Also the effect of additives concentration,

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Peer review under responsibility of Ain Shams University.



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pipe diameter, solution flow rate and the presence of radius elbows on the percentage of drag reduction (%*Dr*) and the amount of flow increases (%*FI*) were the variables of the study.

2. Experimental work

2.1. Liquids

Kirkuk crude oil (Kirkuk governorate – Iraq) was used in the present work (provided from Al-Dura refinery – Iraq). The physical properties of this crude oil were 2.296 viscosity @ 50 °C (c.st), 0.8513 specific gravity, and 35.40 API. The kinematic viscosity of Iraqi crude oil was calculated according to ASTM D-445, while specific gravity was according to ASTM D 1217-81.

2.2. Drag reduction agent

Polyacrylamide (PAM) is a versatile family of synthetic polymers used worldwide and high infinitely soluble in water. It is white dry solid form with molecular weight of 3×10^6 . Polyacrylamide was used in concentration of (10, 20, 30, 40 and 50 ppm).

2.3. Description of circulating flow loop system

Fig. 1 represents the schematic diagram of flow system apparatus used in the present work, which consist of reservoir tank of solution ($0.88 \times 0.88 \times 0.88 \text{ m}^3$ volume), centrifugal pumps (flow rate = $45 \text{ m}^3/\text{h}$; power = 25 hp) which used to circulate the solution from the reservoir tank through pipes, while another pump (flow rate = $1 \text{ m}^3/\text{h}$; power = 0.5 hp) was connected to the draining exit of the tank., flow meter ($12 \text{ m}^3/\text{h}$ maximum flow rate), valves to control the amount and direction of solution flow rate through the system, pressure gauges, pipes 3 m in length of different inside diameters (0.0508, 0.0254 and 0.0191 m). These pipes are made of commercial carbon steel with relative roughness shown in Table 1.

2.4. Experimental procedure

The preparation of PAM solution by mixing small amount of polymer with a sample of crude oil is the first step in the

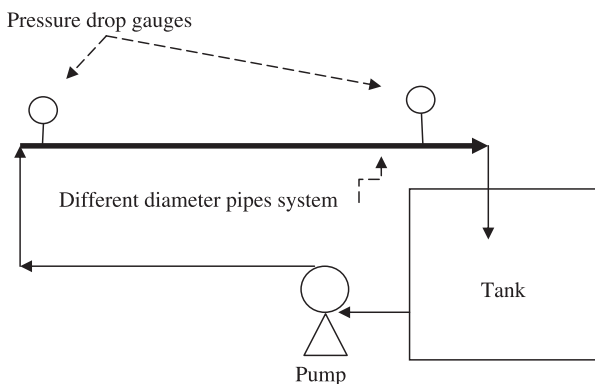


Figure 1 Schematic diagram of flow system.

experimental procedure, then the solution is added into the reservoir tank of crude oil to use in the recirculation closed system. The operation starts by pumping the solution through the testing section for the same pipe diameter and additive concentration. For each run the flow rate of solution was controlled bypass section to a certain value, while pressure drop readings were taken. Readings of pressure drop were taken again when the flow rate of solution was changed to another fixed value. This procedure was repeated for each pipe diameter and additive concentration.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Results calculations

Factorial experimental design with 145 runs was used. The following equations were used to calculate Reynolds number (Re), percentage drag reduction (%*Dr*), percentage flow increase (%*FI*) [4] and friction factor in terms of fanning friction factor [5] respectively:

$$Re = \frac{\rho \cdot v \cdot d}{\mu} \quad (1)$$

$$\%Dr = \frac{\Delta P_b - \Delta P_a}{\Delta P_b} \quad (2)$$

$$\%FI = \left(\frac{1}{1 - \left(\frac{\%Dr}{100}\right)^{0.55}} - 1 \right) \times 100 \quad (3)$$

$$f = \frac{\Delta P \cdot d/4L}{\rho \cdot v^2/2} \quad (4)$$

where ρ is density, v liner velocity, d pipe diameter, μ viscosity, ΔP_b ΔP_a pressure drop before and after addition of polymer and L is pipe length. Table 2 shows the percentage of drag reduction, friction factor and percentage flow increase for 50 ppm PAM at different Reynolds numbers. While Table 3 shows the maximum values of %*Dr* (%*Dr*₁ in pipe with elbows, %*Dr*₂ in straight pipe lines) and %*FI* for PAM polymer reducing agents with Kirkuk crude oil solution, maximum %*Dr*₂ of 40.64% was obtained using Kirkuk crude oil containing 50 ppm of PAM flowing in straight pipes of 5.08, 2.54 and 1.91 cm I.D. respectively. While the maximum %*Dr*₁ of 38.46% was obtained in the pipes of different lengths (i.e. 1.1 m for 5.08 cm I.D., 0.6 m for 2.54 cm I.D. and 0.35 m for 1.91 cm I.D.) each joined with two elbows of standard radius.

3.2. Effect of polymer concentration

Fig. 2 shows the effect of polymer concentration on drag reduction process. The same figures can be obtained at different conditions. These figures show that the %*Dr* increases with increasing the additive concentration. The increment in %*Dr* is ascribed to increases in associated additive molecules in the process of drag reduction. Also, it shows that there is no limited value of concentration after which no further drag reduction occurs within additive concentration 10–50 ppm of polymer. In order to check that the additives do not affect the physical properties of used crude oil, the viscosity of crude oil was evaluated; the results indicate that there is no change in

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