Effect of Needle-like Brittle Intermetallic Phases on Fracture Behavior of Bottom-up Poured AA5050/Titanium Carbide Particle-Reinforced Metal Matrix Composites

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Abstract: *AA5050/TIC metal matrix composites were fabricated by stir casting practice and bottom-up pouring technique to explore the effect of clustering and porosity on their mechanical properties. Tension tests were conducted on specimens reinforced with different volume fractions of TiC. Two types of finite element models were used to estimate the strength of the MMCs. The presence of TiC inside the dimples has promoted the interfacial debonding. The intermetallic inclusions fractured by a cleavage mechanism, whereas the remaining composite fractured by a quasi-crystalline mechanism.*

Keywords: *AA5050 alloy, titanium carbide, unit cell, finite element analysis, clustering, porosity, intermetallic phase.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Titanium carbide (TiC) reinforced metal matrix composites are increasingly being used in the automobile, aircraft, cutting tools, and space industries. As reported in [1-3], hard TiC particles help to improve the soft matrix in terms of hardness and wear resistance the improvement depends on the amount and uniformity of distribution of particles of TiC, and the strength of the particle-matrix boundary and the mechanical properties of the matrix. Both liquid phase and solid phase processes are being studied to produce in situ particle composites based on metal matrices. Very large specific surface area and high interfacial energy of nano-size reinforcements result in their poor wetting, agglomeration tendency and poor distribution in the melt {4-15]. Porosity formation has always been associated to casting; among the preferred processing methods in producing metal matrix composites. However, the formation was basically caused by the casting parameters and reinforced particles mixed up with the matrix material [16-28].

The aim of this paper is to estimate the effect of particle clustering and porosity on micromechanical behavior using experimental procedure and finite element method (FEM). Two models were used in the computational framework. The first one is uniform distribution of nanoparticles without clustering and porosity. The second one is with clustering and porosity.

2. MATERIALS METHODS

The matrix material was AA5050 alloy. The reinforcement material was TiC nanoparticles of average size 100nm. AA5050/TiC metal matrix composites were fabricated by the stir casting process with bottom-up pouring technique (figure 1). Magnesium was added at 1%.wt to the liquid melt to improve wettability of TiC nanoparticles. The test samples were machined to get flat-rectangular specimens (figure 2b) for the tensile tests. The tensile specimens were placed in the grips of a Universal Test Machine (UTM) at a specified grip separation and pulled until failure (figure 2a). The test speed was 2 mm/min. A strain gauge was used to determine elongation (figure 2c). In the current work, a unit cell comprising of nine particles was implemented to analyze the tensile behavior AA5050/TiC metal matrix composites at three (10%, 20% and 30%) volume fractions of TiCwith and without clustering and porosity. The large strain PLANE183 element was used in the matrix in all the models. In order to model the adhesion between the matrix and the particle, a CONTACT 172 element was used. The shape of TiC nanoparticle considered in this work is spherical. The periodic particle distribution was a square array. The tensile stress, elastic modulus and shear modulus are, respectively, normalized with tensile strength, elastic modulus and shear modulus of the matrix alloy.

Considering adhesion, formation of precipitates, particle size, agglomeration, voids/porosity, obstacles to the dislocation, and the interfacial reaction of the particle/matrix, the formula for the strength of composite is stated below:

$$\sigma_c = \left[\sigma_m \left\{\frac{1-(v_p+v_v)^{2/3}}{1-1.5(v_p+v_v)}\right\}\right] e^{m_p(v_p+v_v)} + kd_p^{-1/2} \tag{1}$$

$$k = E_m m_m / E_p m_p$$

where, v_v and v_p are the volume fractions of voids/porosity and nanoparticles in the composite respectively, m_p and m_m are the possion's ratios of the nanoparticles and matrix respectively, d_p is the mean nanoparticle size (diameter) and E_m and E_p is elastic moduli of the matrix and the particle respectively. Elastic modulus (Young's modulus) is a measure of the stiffness of a material and is a quantity used to characterize materials. Elastic modulus is the same in all orientations for isotropic materials. Anisotropy can be seen in many composites.

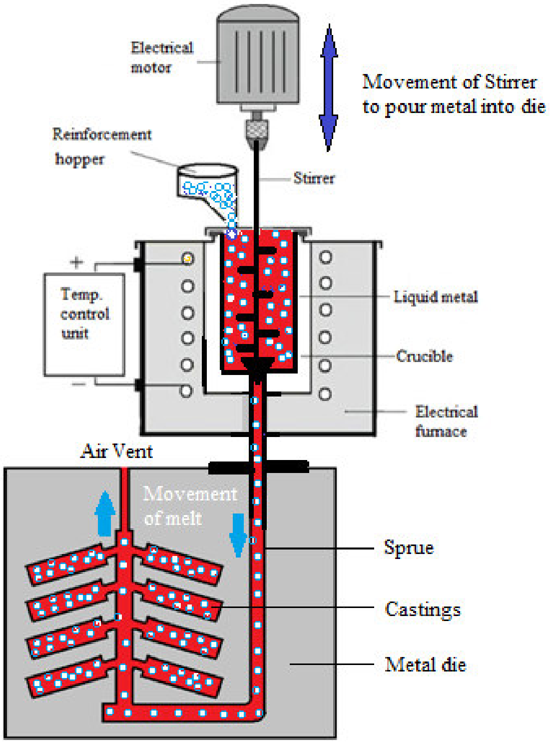

Figure 1: Concept of bottom-up pouring of composite metal.

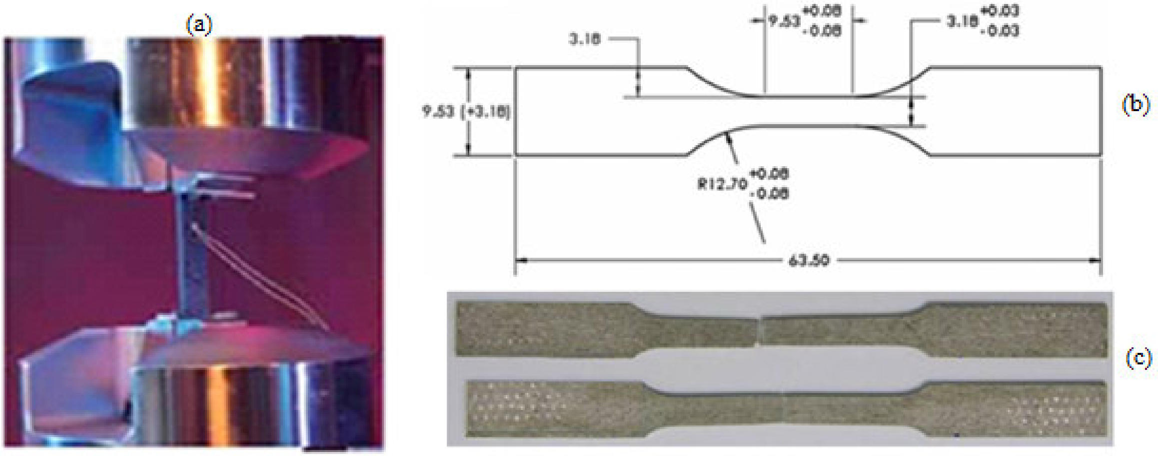

Figure 2: Testing of composites: (a) tensile testing, (b) dimensions (mm) of tensile specimen and (c) tensile specimens.

The upper-bound equation is given by

$$\frac{E_c}{E_m} = \left(\frac{1-v_v{}^{2/3}}{1-v_v{}^{2/3}+v_v}\right) + \frac{1+(\delta-1)v_p{}^{2/3}}{1+(\delta-1)(v_p{}^{2/3}-v_p)} \tag{2}$$

The lower-bound equation is given by

$$\frac{E_c}{E_m} = 1 + \frac{v_p - v_p}{\delta/(\delta-1) - (v_p + v_v)^{1/3}} \tag{3}$$

where, $\delta = E_p / E_m$.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The clustering of particles and porosity are seen in the microstructures shown in figure 3. The clustering of nanoparticles increased with increase of volume fraction. Porosity voids are also seen in the inter-grain regions and inter-nanoparticle regions. The XRD patterns of AA5050/TiC composites reinforced with 10, 20, and 30 vol.% of TiC are also shown in figure 3.

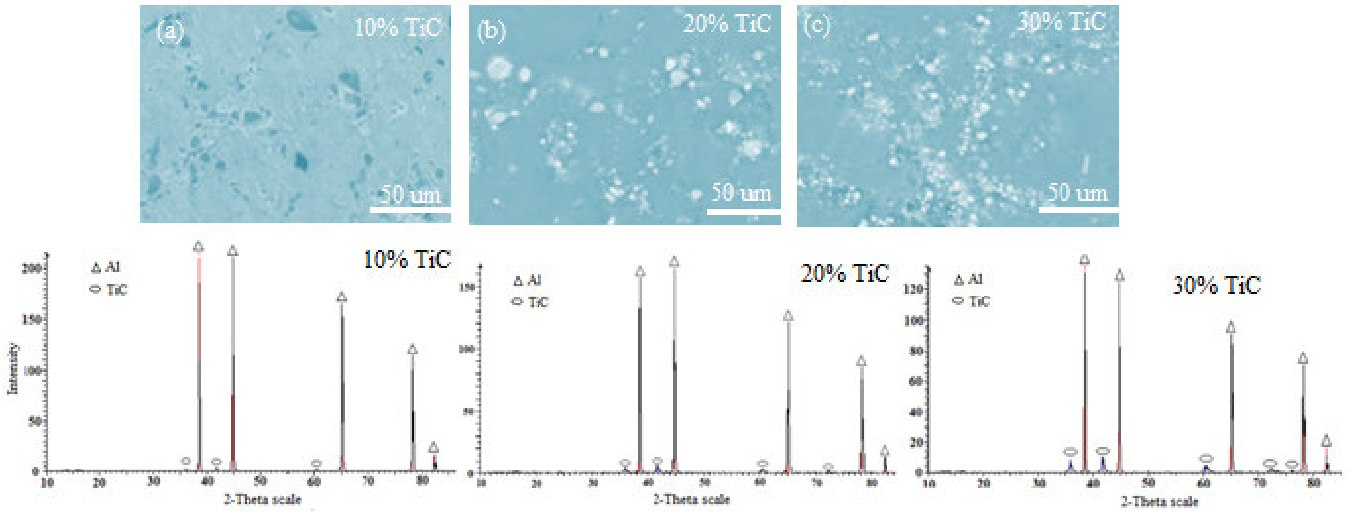

Figure 3: Microstructure and XRD analysis showing distribution of TiC nanoparticles, clustering and porosity in AA5050 alloy matrix.

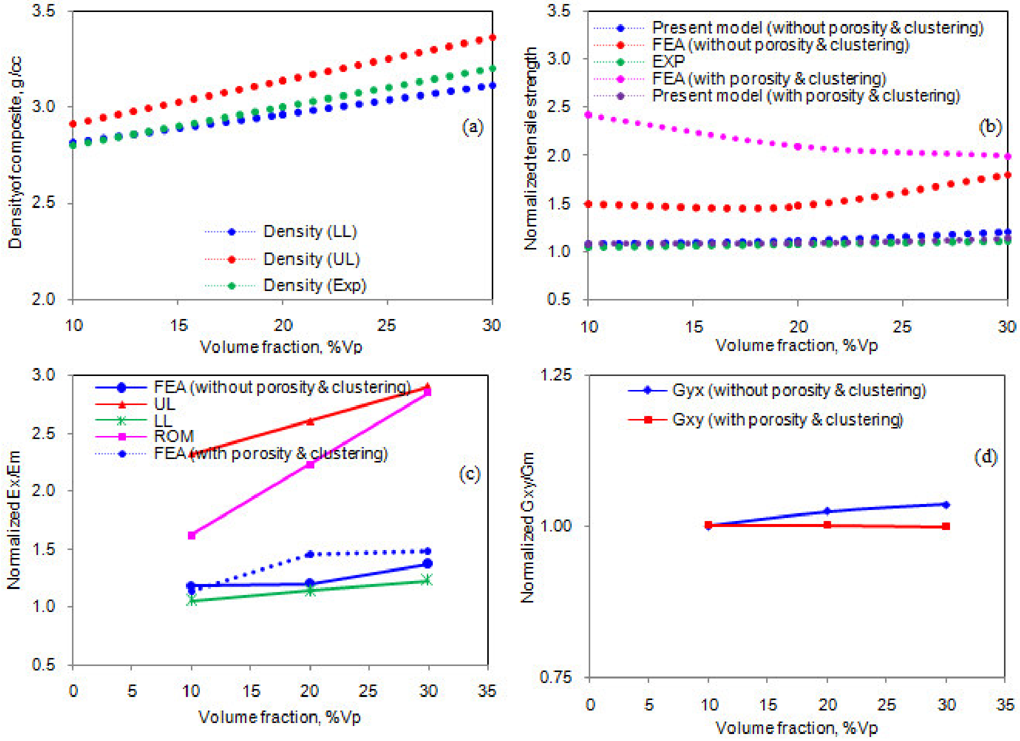

Figure 4: Effect of volume fraction on (a) density (b) normalized tensile stress, (c) normalized tensile elastic modulus and (d) normalized shear modulus of AA5050/TiC composites.

The density of AA5050/TiC metal matrix composites increased with increase of volume fraction of TiC nanoparticles in AA5050 alloy matrix (figure 4a). The densities of AA5050 alloy matrix and Si_3N_4 nanoparticles are, respectively, 2.69 g/cc and 4.93 g/cc. The tensile stresses obtained from the finite element analysis (FEA) were higher than those obtained from the mathematical expression mentioned in Eq.(1) and the experimental procedure as shown in figure 4b. This is owing to the occurrence of stress concentrations at voids and clustered regions. The clusters of TiC nanoparticles have a major effect on the tensile properties of the composites. As shown in figure 4b, the normalized tensile strength was very low at higher TiC contents, mostly due to the increased amount of clustering and voids. The normalized elastic modulus increased with increase of volume fraction of TiC nanoparticles in AA5050 alloy matrix without porosity and clustering in the composites; while it was low with porosity and clustering (figure 4c). The normalized shear modulus is constant with increase of volume fraction of TiC without porosity and clustering; but, it increased in the presence of voids and TiC clusters (figure 4d).

In all the finite element models (figure 5), the amount of porosity and volume of clustering were maintained constant. With porosity and clustering in the composites, the stress intensity was decreased with increase of volume fraction of TiC nanoparticles. This indicates that the stress intensity exceeds the allowable stress in the composites with porosity and clustering for the same load as that applied on the composites without porosity. This is attributed to the fact of the stress concentration in the vicinity of the porosity and clustering.

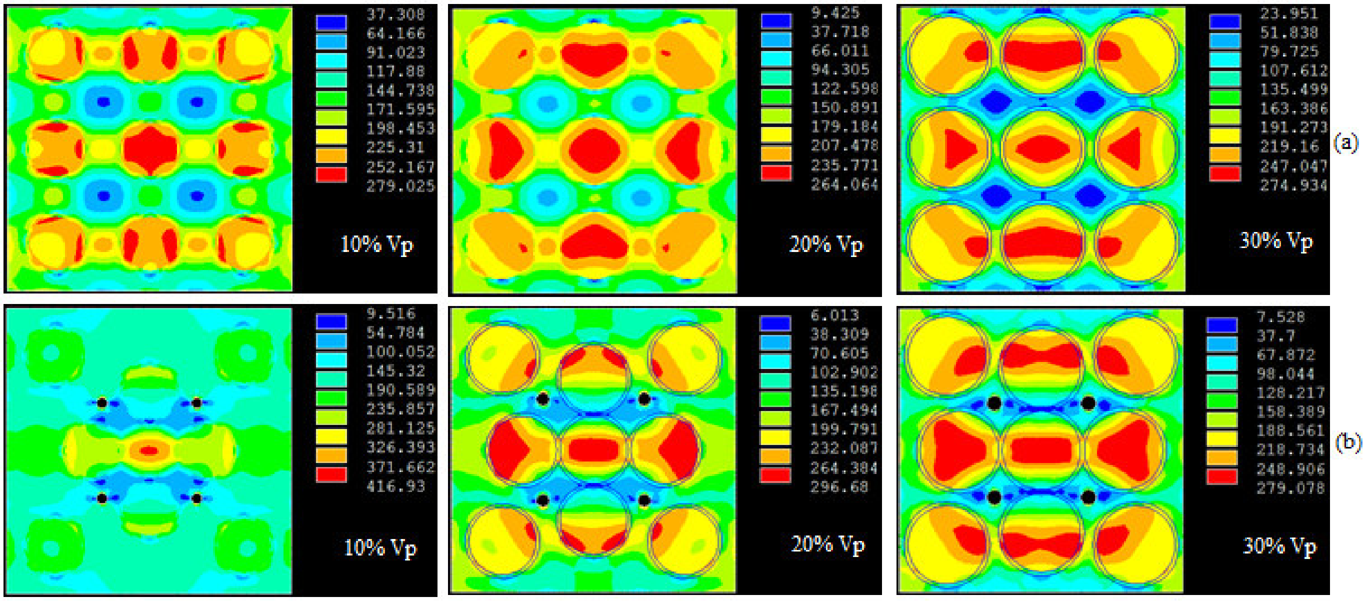

Figure 5: Images of von Mises stresses obtained from FEA: (a) without clustering and porosity and (b) with clustering and porosity.

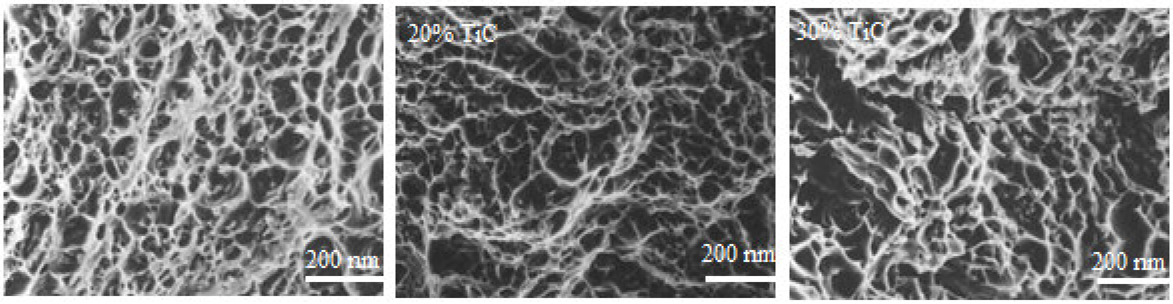

Figure 6: Fractured surfaces of AA5050/TiC composites.

In the fractured surface AA5050/TiC composites (figure 6), the grain cracks probably result from the needle-like brittle Al_4C_3 phase particles (figure 7) by interconnection of the cracked Al_4C_3 particles through micro void coalescence of matrix ligaments, and results in its inferior tensile strength and toughness. The presence of TiC inside some of the dimples, indicating the interfacial debonding, is the important factor causing the failure of the materials. The intermetallic inclusions fractured by a cleavage mechanism, whereas the remaining composite fractured by a quasi-crystalline mechanism.

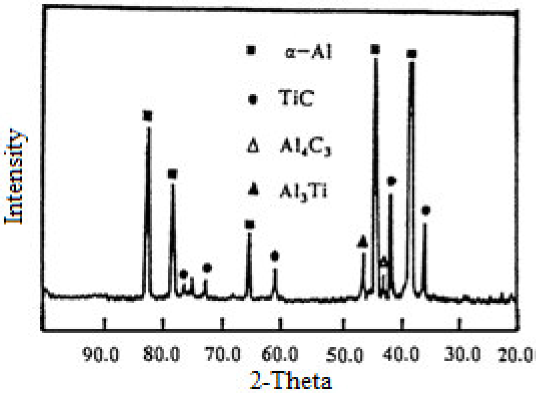

Figure 7: Formation of intermetallic compounds in AA5050/30%TiC composites.

4. CONCLUSION

AA5050/TiC metal matrix composites had clusters and porosity voids. The voids are typically located at the interface of clustered particles. The presence of TiC inside some of the dimples has promoted the interfacial debonding. The intermetallic inclusions fractured by a cleavage mechanism, whereas the remaining composite fractured by a quasi-crystalline mechanism.

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