Analysis of Micromechanical Behavior of AA3003 Alloy - Graphite Metal Matrix Composites Cast by Bottom-Up Pouring with Regard to Agglomeration and Porosity

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Abstract: *AA3003/graphite metal matrix composites were fabricated by stir casting practice and bottom-up pouring technique to investigate the effect of clustering and porosity on their mechanical and wear properties. Tension and wear tests were conducted on specimens reinforced with different volume fractions of graphite. Two types of finite element models were used to estimate the strength of the MMCs. The microstructures of AA3003/graphite composites have revealed the occurrence of particle clustering and porosity. The normalized tensile strength and elastic modulus decrease with porosity and clustering of graphite nanoparticles.*

Keywords: *AA3003 alloy, graphite, unit cell, finite element analysis, clustering, porosity, wear.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Aluminum-based metal matrix composites reinforced with ceramic particles are demanded because of their low density and high specific stiffness. In recent years, considerable work has been done on graphite reinforced metal matrix composites which exhibit low friction and low wear rate properties [1-2]. The graphite in these composites presumably imparts improved tribological properties to the composites through the formation of a graphite-rich film on the tribo-surface which provides solid lubrication. In recent years, nano-sized materials have also drawn much interest as reinforcements in metal matrix composites because of their superior properties compared with those of micro-sized particles. One of the major challenges of nano-sized particles is the formation of clusters in the matrix and porosity [3-16]. Possible reasons resulting in particle clustering are chemical binding, surface energy reduction or particle segregation [17-27]. Another important issue is that the final stages of solidification of the composite may involve microporosity formation in the hot spots of the composite.

Since graphite is having density of 3.54 g/cc, bottom-up pouring technique was developed for synthesizing AA3003/graphite nanocomposite materials wherein the reinforcing nano-sized graphite particles were mixed using stir casting process in a molten aluminum alloy. The micromechanical behavior of AA3003/graphite metal matrix composites was studied. Also, the effects of particle clustering and porosity on micromechanical behavior were analyzed 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 AA3003 alloy. The reinforcement material was graphite nanoparticles of average size 100nm. AA3003/ graphite metal matrix composites were fabricated by the stir casting process with bottom-up pouring technique (figure 1). 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 2a). The wear test was conducted on pin-on-disc machine. In the current work, a unit cell comprising of nine particles was implemented to analyze the tensile behavior AA3003/graphite metal matrix composites at three (10%, 20% and 30%) volume fractions of graphite with 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 graphite 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:

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

$$k = E_m m_m / E_p m_p$$

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.

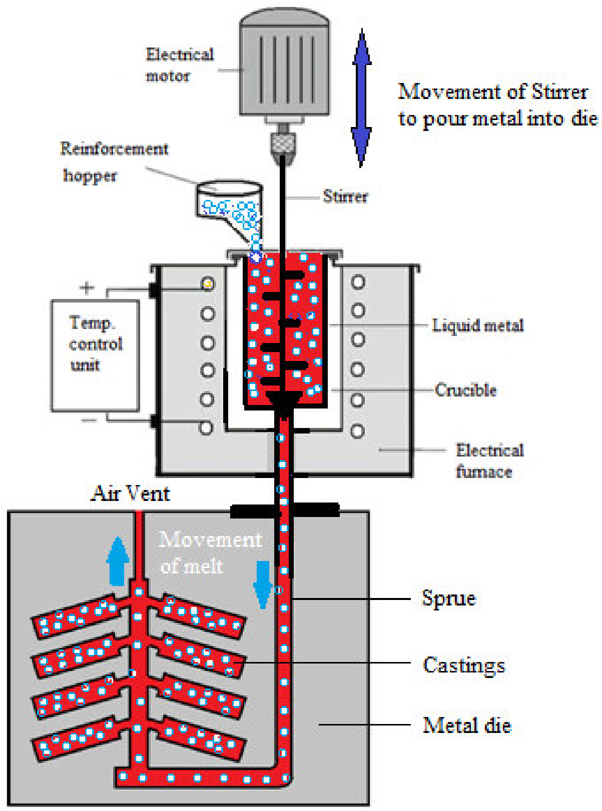

Figure 1: Concept of bottom-up pouring of composite metal.

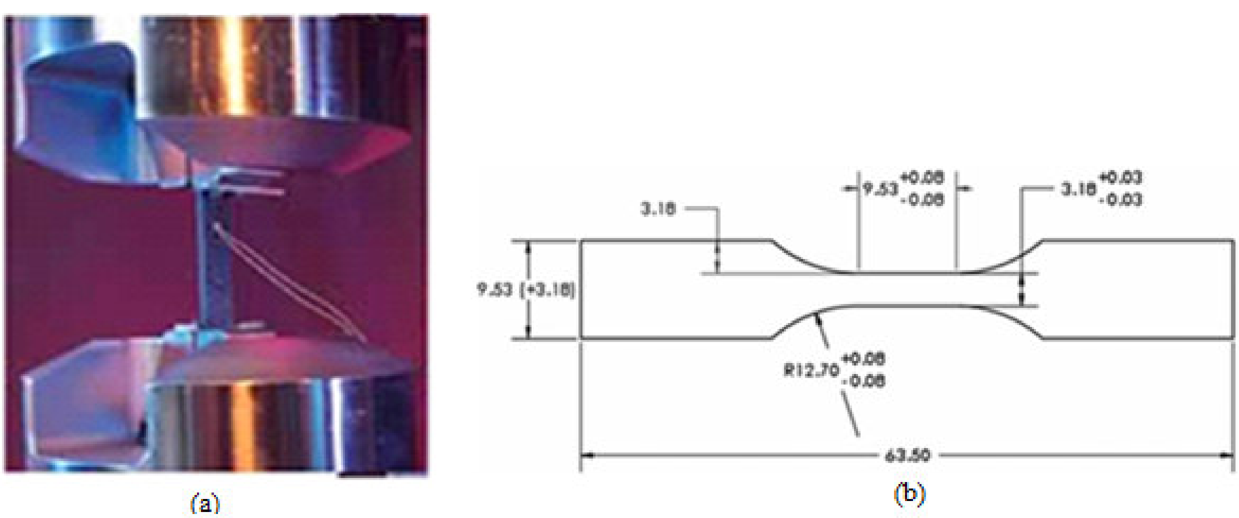

Figure 2: Testing of composites: (a) tensile testing and (b) dimensions (mm) of tensile specimen.

The upper-bound equation is given by

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

The lower-bound equation is given by

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

where, $\delta = E_p / E_m$.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The clustering of graphite particles and porosity are seen in the microstructures. The porosity and clustering of nanoparticles increased with increase of volume fraction of graphite.

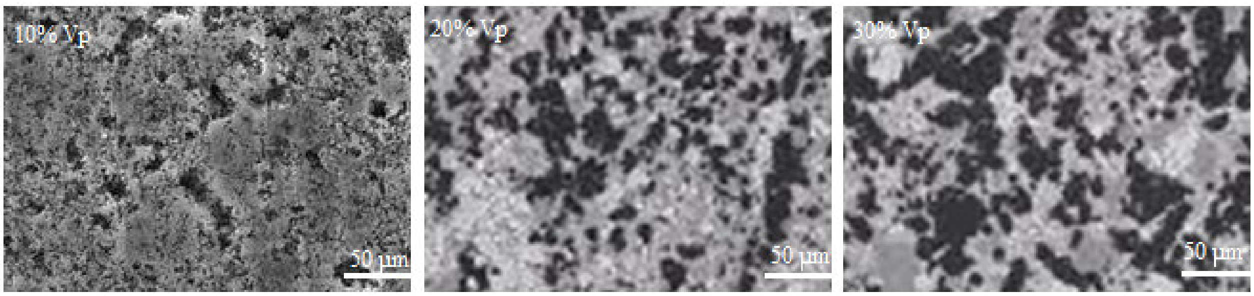

Figure 3: Microstructure showing distribution of graphite nanoparticles, clustering and porosity in AA3003 alloy matrix.

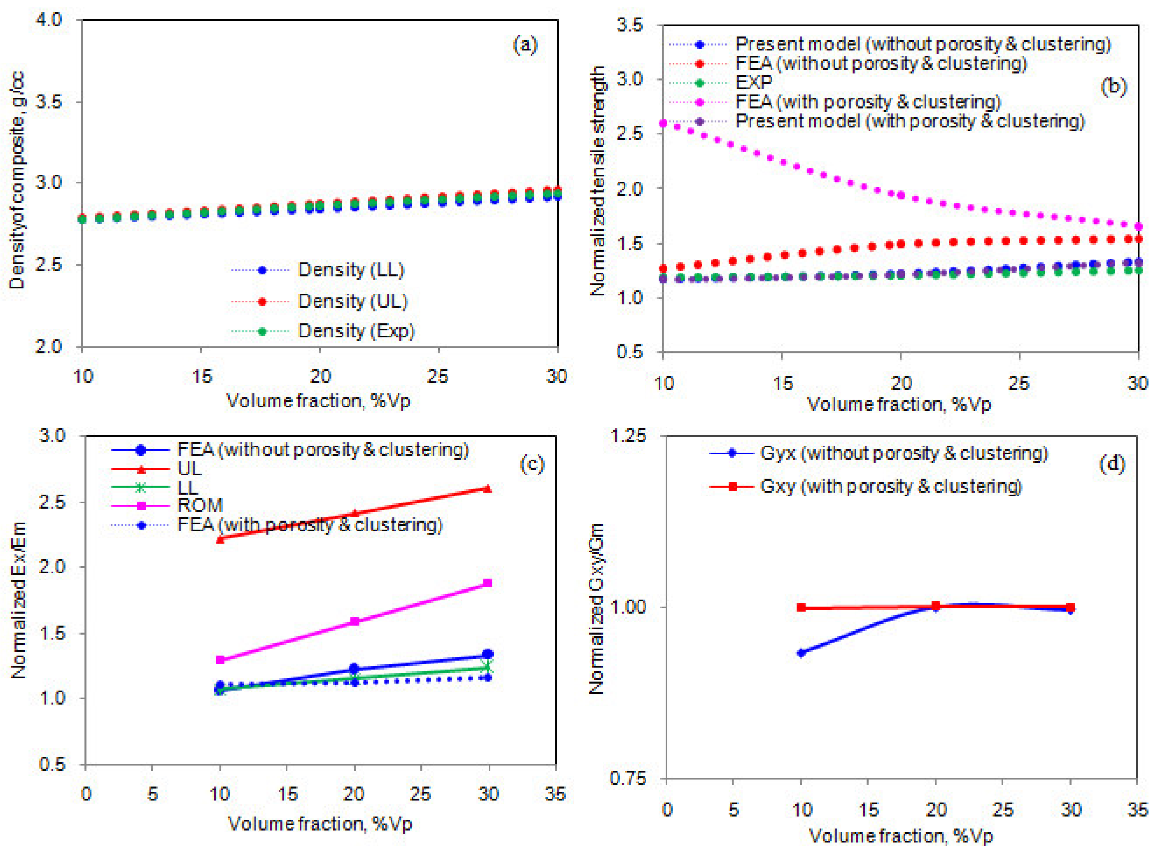

Figure 4: Effect of volume fraction on (a) density (b) normalized tensile stress, (c) normalized tensile elastic modulus and (d) normalized shear modulus of AA3003/graphite composites.

The density of AA3003/ graphite metal matrix composites increased as shown in figure 4a with increase of volume fraction of graphite nanoparticles in AA3003 alloy matrix. The densities of AA3003 alloy matrix and graphite nanoparticles are, respectively, 2.71 g/cc and 3.54 g/cc. In order to characterize the mechanical properties of AA3003 alloy/graphite composites, the tensile strengths have been normalized with respect to AA3003 alloy matrix. 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 tensile strength was increased without porosity and clustering in AA3003/graphite metal matrix composites. As shown in figure 4b, the normalized tensile strength was very low at higher graphite contents, mostly due to the increased amount of clustering and voids. The normalized elastic modulus increased with increase of volume fraction of graphite nanoparticles in AA3003 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 above 20% volume fraction of graphite with and without porosity and clustering (figure 4d).

In all the finite element models (figure 5), the amount of porosity and volume of clustering were maintained constant. With or without porosity in the composites, the stress intensity decreased with increase of volume fraction of graphite in AA3003 alloy matrix. However, the stress intensity levels were higher in the composites having porosity and clustering than those in the composites without porosity and clustering. This is attributed to the fact of the stress concentration in the vicinity of the porosity and clustering. This trend is in agreement with the results obtained from experimental procedure and mathematical computation.

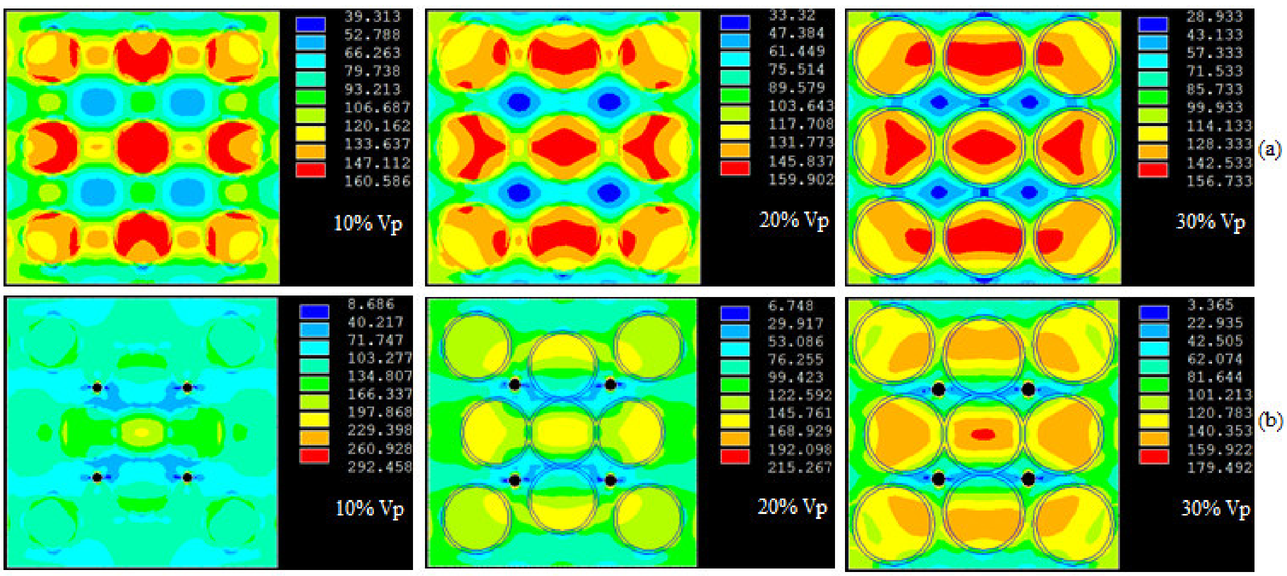

Figure 5: Images of von Mises stresses obtained from FEA: (a) without clustering and porosity and (b) with clustering and porosity.

4. CONCLUSION

AA3003/ graphite metal matrix composites had clusters and porosity voids. The density of the composites increased with increase volume fraction of graphite nanoparticles. The stress intensity was increased with porosity and clustering of graphite nanoparticles.

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