ELLiptical Flux Vortices in YBa2Cu3O7

H. Hickman, A.J. Dekker, and T.M. Chen

Department of Electrical Engineering
University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida 33620

Abstract - The most energetically favorable vortex in YBa2Cu3O7 forms perpendicular to an anisotropic plane. This vortex is elliptical in shape and is distinguished by an effective interchange of London penetration depths from one axis of the ellipse to the other. By generalizing qualitatively from the isotropic to the anisotropic case, we suggest that the flux flow resistivity for a vortex that forms perpendicular to an anisotropic plane should have a preferred direction. Similar reasoning indicates that the Kosterlitz-Thouless transition temperature for a vortex mediated transition should be lower if the vortex is elliptical in shape.

Introduction

The free energy per unit length of an isolated Abrikosov vortex in a type II superconductor is given by [1]

$$\epsilon_1 = \frac{H_{c1} \Phi_o}{4\pi},$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

where $H_{c1}$ represents the lower critical field and $\Phi_o$ represents a single flux quantum. Single crystal YBa2Cu3O7 can be viewed as a type II superconductor that contains one plane in which the superconducting properties are isotropic (ab plane) and two planes in which the superconducting properties are equivalently anisotropic (ac and bc). If $\epsilon_1^{ac}$ represents the free energy associated with a vortex that forms perpendicular to the isotropic plane, and $\epsilon_1^{bc} = \epsilon_1^{ac}$ represents the free energy associated with a vortex that forms perpendicular to an anisotropic plane, then for YBa2Cu3O7 [2]

$$\frac{\epsilon_1^{ab}}{\epsilon_1^{ac}} = \frac{H_{c1}^{ac}}{H_{c1}^{ab}} = 0.05T = 0.1.$$  \hspace{1cm} (2)

Equation (2) indicates that the formation of a vortex perpendicular to the anisotropic plane requires only 1/10 of the energy required by the formation of a vortex perpendicular to the isotropic plane.

But in order for a vortex to form perpendicular to an anisotropic plane, the anisotropic plane has to be incident on a non-superconducting region. This is certainly the case in an a (or b) axis oriented thin film, where almost the entire surface is an anisotropic plane. Further, for bulk YBa2Cu3O7, studies indicate that as many as 75% of the grain boundaries in a "shake and bake" sample contain ab planes [3], while, depending on the density, 18 to 35% of the bulk sample consists of empty pockets or voids [4]. If many of the anisotropic ab planes are incident on other grains, then many of the anisotropic ac and bc planes should be incident on the voids. Evidently there is ample opportunity for the formation of vortices perpendicular to anisotropic planes, even inside bulk YBa2Cu3O7.

Discussion

The London theory solution for the magnetic flux density around a vortex that forms perpendicular to an isotropic plane indicates that [5]

$$B \propto K_o \left( \frac{r}{\lambda} \right),$$  \hspace{1cm} (3)

where $r$ is the cylindrical coordinate, $\lambda$ is the London penetration depth, and $K_o$ is a modified Bessel function of the second kind. The London theory solution for the magnetic flux density around a vortex that forms perpendicular to an anisotropic plane indicates that [6,7]

$$B \propto K_o \left( \sqrt{\left( \frac{x}{\lambda_{yy}} \right)^2 + \left( \frac{y}{\lambda_{zz}} \right)^2} \right),$$  \hspace{1cm} (4)

where $B$ is z-directed and $\lambda_{yy}$, $\lambda_{zz}$ are the London penetration depths in the $y$ and $z$ directions.

Apart from the fact that the contour lines are elliptical in shape, the most interesting aspect of equation (4) is that it predicts an effective interchange of penetration depths around the vortex. In YBa2Cu3O7 for example, measurements by Worthington et al. reveal that the longest penetration depth is in the c direction while the longest coherence length is in the a (or b) direction [2]. These data should lead to a "cat's eye" vortex model as shown in Figure 1a. (Here $x$ is identified with the $c$ direction while $y$ could be either the $a$ or the $b$ direction.) The orientation of penetration depths ought to demand that $B(0, \lambda_{yy}) = B(\lambda_{xx}, 0)$. Instead as shown in Figure 1b, equation (4) predicts that $B(0, \lambda_{xx}) = B(\lambda_{yy}, 0)$. This remarkable shift has actually been observed by Dolan et al., who report oval vortices with penetration depths that are shortest in the $c$ direction [8].

The fact that the most energetically favorable vortex in
(a) (b)

Figure 1 An Abrikosov Vortex in the Anisotropic Plane of YBa$_2$Cu$_3$O$_7$

(a) Anticipated Structure Based on Measurements of $H_{c2}$
(b) Actual Structure Based on London Theory and Observation

YBa$_2$Cu$_3$O$_7$ forms perpendicular to an anisotropic plane and is elliptical in shape, ought to have important physical consequences. By way of suggesting directions for future study, we now examine two expressions that were derived from isotropic considerations, and, in lieu of presenting a rigorous anisotropic treatment, we will qualitatively extend these equations to the anisotropic case.

Working from the Bardeen-Stephen model, Tinkham gives the following expression for flux flow resistivity in an isotropic superconductor [9]

$$\rho_f \propto \rho_n \left( \frac{B}{H_{c2}} \right),$$

where $\rho_n$ is the normal state resistivity, $B$ is the space averaged magnetic flux, and $H_{c2}$ is the upper critical field. For YBa$_2$Cu$_3$O$_7$, $\rho_n$ along $c$ is large compared to $\rho_n$ along $a$ (or $b$) [10], while $H_{c2}$ along $c$ is small compared to $H_{c2}$ along $a$ (or $b$) [2]. Applied to (5), these differences lead to

$$\rho_{fc} > \rho_{fa} = \rho_{fb}.$$  

Equation (6) indicates that the flux flow resistivity in the $a$ (or $b$) direction is less than the flux flow resistivity in the $c$ direction. Equation (4) indicates that the vortex is elongated in the $a$ (or $b$) direction. Evidently, under the influence of a driving force, the vortex will move most easily in the direction of its own elongation. This prediction appears compatible with an argument given by Clem, in which the entropy flow from the trailing to the leading edge of a moving vortex results in dissipation [11]. An elliptical vortex should create the least amount of entropy flow (and hence the least dissipation) when it moves in the direction of its own elongation.

The phase transition of an ultra thin superconducting film is another phenomenon that might be affected by the formation of elliptical vortices. For an isotropic thin film, the Kosterlitz-Thouless transition temperature, $T_{KT}$, is given by [12]

$$k_B T_{KT} = \frac{\Phi_0^2}{32 \pi^2 \lambda^2},$$

where $d$ is the film thickness, and $\lambda$ is the bulk penetration depth. In a $c$-axis oriented thin film, $\lambda = \lambda_a = \lambda_b$. For an $a$ (or $b$) axis oriented film, it seems appropriate to replace $1/\lambda^2$ by an effective value. For example,

$$\left( \frac{1}{\lambda^2} \right)_{\text{effective}} \approx \frac{1}{2} \left[ \frac{1}{\lambda_a^2} + \frac{1}{\lambda_b^2} \right].$$

Since $\lambda_c > \lambda_a$, one concludes that

$$(T_{KT})_{a\text{ axis oriented}} < (T_{KT})_{c\text{ axis oriented}}.$$  

If a vortex mediated KT transition does in fact take place in high $T_c$ superconducting thin films, then the above argument suggests that the transition region in an $a$-axis oriented thin film would be wider than the transition...
region in a c-axis oriented thin film.

Conclusion

The fact that the most energetically favorable vortex in YBa$_2$Cu$_3$O$_7$ is elliptical in shape should have important physical consequences. By qualitatively generalizing from the isotropic to the anisotropic case, we note for example, that both the Kosterlitz-Thouless transition temperature and the flux flow resistivity could be affected by vortex shape.

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References


