WEAVING AND BONDING METHOD TO PREVENT WARP AND FILL DISTORTION

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A method to prevent fiber distortion in textile materials employed in a modified weaving process. In a first embodiment, a tacifier in powder form is applied to the yarn and melted while on the fabric. Cool air is then supplied after the tacifier has melted to expedite the solidification of the tacifier. In a second embodiment, a solution form of a tacifier is used by dissolving the tacifier into a solvent that has a high evaporation rate. The solution is then sprayed onto the fabric or fill yarn as each fill yarn is inserted into a shed of the fabric. A third embodiment applies the tacifier in a liquid form that has not been dissolved in a solvent. That is, the tacifier is melted and sprayed over the fabric or fill yarn as it is being extracted from a fill yarn spool prior to the fill yarn being inserted into the shed of the fabric. A fourth embodiment employs adhesive yarns contained as an integral part of the warp or fill yarn. Additional tacifier material is not required because a matrix is used as the tacifier. The matrix is then locally melted using heating elements on clamping bars or take-up rollers, is cooled, if necessary, and solidified.

19 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets
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ORIGIN OF THE INVENTION

The invention described herein was made by an employee of the U.S. Government and may be used by or for the government for governmental purposes without the payment of royalties thereon or therefor.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention is directed to a method to prevent fiber distortion in textile materials. In particular, the present invention is directed to locally bonding warp and fill (weft) yarns of a fabric together to eliminate fabric skewing during a modified weaving process for weaving net-shaped tailored fabrics where fiber orientations may be non-orthogonal. These fabrics can be used to create optimally designed curved frames or other skeletal structures as well as skin type structures having compound curvatures.

2. Description of the Related Art

In general, fabric used in composite materials is very tightly woven together and does not readily skew due to a change in the spacing and orientation of fill yarns relative to warp yarns. Skewing can become a significant problem when a substantially unidirectional (uniweave) fabric having warp yarns. Skewing can become a significant problem when a substantially unidirectional (uniweave) fabric having warp yarns as non-orthogonal, such as curved frames and other skeletal structures, is woven. This is described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 017,205, filed Feb. 10, 1993, issued as U.S. Pat. No. 5,394,906, on Mar. 7, 1995, and incorporated by reference herein. Skewing significantly impacts the economical and structural performance of net shaped tailored fabrics and hence necessitated the development of this technology.

Weaving fabric with fill yarns at non-orthogonal angles to the warp yarns can cause the fabric to skew after the fabric is removed from the loom. When the fabric skews, a considerable amount of manual labor is required during a layup process to correctly reorient the fabric. Even after the fabric has been reoriented, the uniformity of the fibers may have been significantly compromised.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to provide a method for making skew-resistant fabrics used in composite materials by weaving the warp and fill yarns in which the warp and fill yarns are bonded together at their points of contact. Another object of the present invention is to provide a method for making skew-resistant fabrics by using a tacifier compatible with a reinforcement fiber (matrix or sizing) as the bonding agent. Yet another object of the present invention is to provide a method for making skew-resistant fabrics by using a matrix as a bonding agent when weaving powder coated, combed, and filament coated structural yarns. Still a further object of the present invention is to provide a method for making skew-resistant fabrics by using a tacifier dissolved in a solvent and sprayed onto the fabric or fill yarn such that when the solvent evaporates, the tacifier is deposited onto the fabric bonding the warp and fill yarns together. Alternatively, the tacifier can be put on a fill yarn while it is being inserted into the shed of the fabric (a "V" shaped region formed by lifting warp yarns).

Yet another object of the present invention is to provide a method for making skew-resistant fabrics by using a melted liquid tacifier sprayed onto a fabric or fill yarn. The tacifier solidifies and bonds the warp and fill yarns together.

Objects of the present invention are achieved by a method to prevent fiber distortion in woven materials comprising the steps of weaving fabric with warp and fill yarns concurrently with a weaving process for fabricating one of a straight, curved, planar and three-dimensional fabric that can be formed into a preform, depositing a tacifying material on the warp and fill yarns, and bonding the fabric together. The tacifier material can be deposited as a powder, in yarn form, sprayed as a solution onto the fabric or as a liquid. The tacifier material is then melted using heating elements in the tips of clamping bars or take-up rollers or by applying a hot gas. If a solvent based tacifier is applied to the warp and fill yarns, the solvent must be evaporated. Evaporating the solvent requires using only a room temperature air jet. The clamping bars or take-up rollers may also be used for fabric takeup. If clamping bars are employed, however, they may be used to ensure that the warp and fill yarns come into intimate contact, and not necessarily to be part of the takeup system. The clamping bars or take-up rollers may be heated or not heated. Including a heating element in the clamping bars or take-up rollers is optional depending on the type of tacifier employed. If take-up rollers are employed, they may be long continuous rollers or a row of many short rollers.

These objects, together with other objects and advantages which will be subsequently apparent, reside in the details of construction and operation as more fully hereinafter described and claimed, reference being had to the accompanying drawings forming a part hereof, wherein like reference numerals refer to like parts throughout.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional view showing the tacifier applied in powdered form to the warp yarns in accordance with a first preferred embodiment of the method of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional view showing the tacifier dissolved in a solvent and sprayed onto the fabric or melted and sprayed in liquid form onto the fabric in accordance with a second and third embodiment of the method of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional view showing the warp yarns including an unmelted tacifier yarn in accordance with a fourth embodiment of the method of the present invention; and

FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view of a system employing take-up rollers rather than clamping bars for use in the embodiments of the method of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention prevents the skewing of fabric during a weaving of curved frames and other skeletal structures in a modified weaving process, as set forth in U.S. Pat. No. 5,394,906. Warp and fill yarns are locally bonded by applying a tacifying material thereto. The warp and fill yarns are bonded together concurrently with the weaving process. The weaving process fabricates one of a straight, curved, planar or three-dimensional fabric. This prevents the fabric from skewing. The fabric can then be formed into a preform. The tacifying material can be a glue, adhesive, etc., that is compatible with a matrix, the matrix being the material that
to a third embodiment of the method of the present invention, a tacifier is applied in a liquid form as shown in FIG. 2, rather than dissolved in a solvent as in the second embodiment. That is, the tacifier is melted and sprayed as a liquid onto the fabric 26 or fill yarn 22. The system is set up the same as shown in FIG. 2. The tacifier can be applied to the fill yarn 22 at any time during a fill insertion and beat up operation or thereafter. If the tacifier is applied directly to the fill yarn 22, the tacifier 42 is sprayed onto the fill yarn 22 as it is being extracted from the fill yarn spool prior to the fill yarn 22 being inserted into the shed of the fabric 26. The fill yarn 22 can be inserted by a variety of mechanisms including a shuttle, a rapier, water or air jets in high speed looms, or projectiles devices if the yarn is very heavy. After the fill yarn 22 is beat up into the fell of the fabric 26, the fabric 26 is clamped together using clamping bars 28 (or takeup rollers 38 shown in FIG. 4) to ensure bonding between the warp yarn 20 and fill yarn 22. A cool air supply 40 is then sprayed onto the fabric 26 to expedite solidification of the liquid tacifier. An alternate approach is to embed heating elements 30 into the clamping bars 28 (or takeup rollers 38, shown in FIG. 4).

As shown in FIG. 4, according to a fourth embodiment of the method of the present invention, in addition to resin powder coated structural yarns 44 (adhesive yarns), combed thermoplastic and structural yarns and coated yarns having a thermoplastic matrix are employed. The arrow shows the direction in which the process is performed. In all of these cases, the matrix, whether thermoset or thermoplastic, is contained as an integral part of the woven yarn. The adhesive yarns 44 can be run as separate independent yarns wrapped around the warp yarns 20, or a sleeve of material can encase the warp yarn 20. The sleeve of material can be a thermoplastic composite material. For example, warp yarn 20 can be pulled through a die (not shown) where the thermoplastic composite material is coated on the external surface of the warp yarn 20. If a sleeve of adhesive material is placed around the warp yarn 20, this allows a predetermined (prescribed) amount of adhesive in the proximity of warp yarn 20 and fill yarn 22. Thus, when the adhesive is melted, it is localized to where bonding is required. After the fill yarn 22 is inserted into the shed and beat up into the fabric 26, clamping bars 28 containing heating elements 30 at their tips press against the fabric 26 to melt the tacifier and bond the warp yarn 20 and fill yarn 22 together. This same function can be achieved using heated takeup rollers 38 (shown in FIG. 4). The clamping bars 28 or heated take-up rollers 38 are then opened and the fabric is advanced. A hot air supply 35 as shown in FIG. 1 can be used in place of the heating elements in the clamping bars or heated takeup rollers. Because the matrix (reinforcement fibers) is used as the tacifier, it is not necessary to apply any additional tacifier in powder, liquid or solvent form. The matrix is then cooled using a cool air supply 32 and solidified. Solidification of the matrix locks the warp yarn 20 and fill yarn 22 together preventing the fabric 26 from skewing. If a heating and cooling process is rapidly performed, then a thermoset matrix is not significantly advanced in cure. Using matrix coated yarns provides the advantage that it is only necessary to slightly warm a small portion of the matrix to soften the matrix. Once the yarn is beat up using a reed, adjacent yarns are locked together. That is, it is not necessary to melt all of the matrix. Further, depending on the operating speed of the system and type of matrix used, it may or may not be necessary to provide cooling for the matrix. The use of matrix coated yarns allows for reduction in fabrication cost of the structure.
FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view of a system employing take-up rollers 38 rather than clamping bars 28 for use in the embodiments of the method of the present invention as described above. As mentioned above, the take-up rollers 38 can be used interchangeably with the clamping bars 28 in any of the above embodiments. Additionally, it shows a reed 46 which pushes the warp yarn 20 and fill yarn 22 together to form a fabric 26. The reed 46 moves in the direction shown by the arrows. Reference numeral 48 shows the point at which the fabric 26 is formed.

The above-mentioned methods of the present invention can be applied to other textile processes such as braiding or knitting where a preform geometry and fiber architecture produces a fabric that distorts.

As set forth above, the preferred embodiments of the present invention include local bonding of warp and fill yarns of a modified weaving process by a bonding agent. The bonding agent can be a tacifier or a matrix. These features provide the advantages that skewing of the fabric is prevented and cost of fabrication of the woven structure is decreased.

The foregoing is considered as illustrative only of the principles of the invention. Further, since numerous modifications and changes will readily occur to those skilled in the art, it is not desired to limit the invention to the exact construction and applications shown and described, and accordingly, all suitable modifications and equivalents may be resorted to, falling within the scope of the invention and the appended claims and their equivalents.

We claim:
1. A method to prevent fiber and fabric distortion in woven materials when weaving fill yarns at a non-orthogonal angle to warp yarns, comprising the steps of:
   (a) weaving fabric with warp and fill yarns concurrently with a weaving process for fabricating one of a straight, curved, planar and three-dimensional fabric, the fill yarns at a non-orthogonal angle to the warp yarns;
   (b) depositing a tacifying material on the warp and fill yarns; and
   (c) bonding the warp and fill yarns together.
2. A method according to claim 1, wherein in said step (b) the tacifier material is deposited as a powder and step (c) further comprises the substeps of:
   (i) melting the tacifier material while on the warp and fill yarns; and
   (ii) supplying cool air to solidify the tacifying material.
3. A method according to claim 2, wherein in said substep (i) the tacifier material is melted by providing heating elements in the tips of clamping bars.
4. A method according to claim 2, wherein in said substep (c) the tacifier material is melted by providing heating elements in take-up rollers.
5. A method according to claim 2, wherein in said substep (c) the tacifier material is melted by applying a hot gas.
6. A method according to claim 1, wherein in said step (b) the tacifier material is deposited in a yarn form and step (c) further comprises the substeps of:
   (i) melting the tacifier material; and
   (ii) supplying cool air to solidify the tacifying material.
7. A method according to claim 6, wherein in said substep (c) the tacifier material is melted by providing heating elements in the tips of clamping bars.
8. A method according to claim 6, wherein said substep (c) the tacifier material is melted by providing heating elements in take-up rollers.
9. A method according to claim 6, wherein in said substep (c) the tacifier material is melted by applying a hot gas.
10. A method according to claim 1, wherein in said step (b) the tacifier material is deposited in a solution form by spraying the solution onto the fabric and step (c) further comprises the substep (i) of applying pressure to the fabric to bond the warp and fill yarns.
11. A method according to claim 10, wherein step (c) further comprises the substep (ii) of supplying air to increase evaporation of the solution.
12. A method according to claim 1, wherein in said step (b) the tacifier material is in liquid form and step (c) further comprises the substeps of:
   (i) melting the tacifier material; and
   (ii) spraying the melted tacifier material, as a liquid, onto the fill yarn after being extracted from a fill yarn spool prior to the fill yarn being inserted into a shed of the fabric.
13. A method according to claim 12, wherein said step (c) further comprises the substeps of:
   (iii) clamping the fabric to bond the warp and fill yarns; and
   (iv) supplying cool air to the fabric to expedite evaporation of the liquid.
14. A method to prevent fiber and fabric distortion in woven materials when weaving fill yarns at a non-orthogonal angle to warp yarns, comprising:
   (a) supplying yarn containing adhesive for forming a fabric;
   (b) inserting fill yarn into a shed of the fabric;
   (c) beating the fill yarn into the fabric such that the fill yarn is non-orthogonal to the warp yarn;
   (d) melting the adhesive in the yarn;
   (e) advancing the fabric; and
   (f) supplying cool air to the fabric to solidify the adhesive.
15. A method according to claim 14, wherein said step (c) comprises the substeps of:
   (i) pulling the fabric through heated clamping bars; and
   (ii) opening the clamping bars.
16. A method according to claim 14, wherein said step (c) comprises the substeps of:
   (i) pulling the fabric through heated take-up rollers; and
   (ii) opening the take-up rollers.
17. A method according to claim 14, wherein in said step (a) the yarn containing adhesive is selected from a group consisting of one of resin powder coated structural yarns, commingled thermoplastic and structural yarns, and coated yarns having a thermoplastic matrix.
18. A method to prevent fiber end fabric distortion in woven materials, comprising the steps of:
   (a) weaving fabric with warp and fill yarns concurrently with a weaving process for fabricating one of a straight, curved, planar and three-dimensional fabric; and
   (b) depositing a tacifying material on the warp and fill yarns to bond them together, wherein the tacifier material is in liquid form;
   (c) melting the tacifier material; and
   (d) said depositing step including spraying the melted tacifier material onto the fill yarn after being extracted from a fill yarn spool prior to the fill yarn being inserted into a shed of the fabric.
19. A method according to claim 18, further comprising the steps of:
   (e) clamping the fabric to effect said bonding of the warp and fill yarns; and
   (f) supplying cool air to the fabric to expedite evaporation of the liquid.