Evaluation of Primary Dendrite Arm Spacings from Aluminum-7wt% Silicon alloys Directionally Solidified aboard the International Space Station – Comparison with Theory

Samuel Angart – The University of Arizona
Mark Lauer- The University of Arizona
David Poirier – The University of Arizona
Surendra Tewari – Cleveland State University
Ravi Rajamure - Cleveland State University
Richard N. Grugel – NASA-MSFC
MICAST
A NASA and European Space Agency (ESA) Collaboration:
Microstructure Formation in Castings of Technical Alloys under Diffusive and Magnetically Controlled Convective Conditions

• A systematic analysis of the effect of convection on the microstructural evolution in the directional solidification (DS) of engineering alloys.

• Experiments are carried out under well defined processing conditions.

• Sample analysis conducted using advanced diagnostics and theoretical modeling.
Previous Investigation
Al-26.5 wt. % Cu: Primary dendrite arm spacing increases in microgravity

Terrestrial: Solutally unstable
Primary spacing = 450 ± 20 μm

Terrestrial: Solutally stable
340 ± 10 μm

Microgravity
1540 ± 10 μm

Microgravity Processing

- Rods of Al-7Si cast at Alcoa Technical Center
- DS-ed at CSU to obtain aligned dendritic structure
  - <100> parallel to axis
- Precision machined and shipped to ESA-contractor
- Inserted into alumina “crucible-molds”
- Put into Sample-Cartridge-Assembly (SCA)
Expectations: Solidification Processing in a Microgravity Environment

Advantages: Mitigate Thermo-Solutal Convection

Intent: DS Samples under Diffusion-Controlled Conditions that are Free of Macrosegregation

Purpose: Better Understand the Relationship between Processing and Microstructural Development

Application: Benchmark measurements applicable to modeling efforts, improve ground-based processing
Comparison of ISS and Ground-based Experiments

MICAST6 / 6Ground
- DS growth rate increase (5 μm s\(^{-1}\) to 50 μm s\(^{-1}\))
- Temperature gradient: \(\sim 20\) K/cm

MICAST7 / 7Ground
- DS growth rate decrease (20 μm s\(^{-1}\) to 11 μm s\(^{-1}\))
- Temperature gradient: \(\sim 26\) K/cm

(MICAST12, Constant growth rate is currently being evaluated)
Microstructural Comparison: Earth and Microgravity

Terrestrial:
Al – 7wt.% Si
$G = 15 \text{ K cm}^{-1}$

$V = 5 \mu\text{m s}^{-1}$

$V = 50 \mu\text{m s}^{-1}$
MICAST6:
Al – 7wt. % Si
\( G = 20 \text{ K cm}^{-1} \)

Microstructural Comparison: Earth and Microgravity

\[ V = 5 \mu m/s \]

\[ V = 50 \mu m/s \]
Theoretical Model (diffusion-controlled growth),
J.D. Hunt and S.-Z. Lu, 1996

- Based on diffusion in the liquid around the dendrite tip.
- Calculates PDAS assuming no convection in the liquid.
- Physical constants for Al-7Si are well known.
- Final Equation: \( \lambda' = 0.15596 V' \left( a - 0.75 \right) \left( V' - G' \right)^{0.75} \left( G' \right)^{-0.6028} \)
- Calculates the spacing as the tip-to-tip spacing.

MICAST6- Primary Dendrite Arm Spacing

![Graph showing primary dendrite arm spacing data with different methods and metrics.](image-url)
MICAST6G- Primary Dendrite Arm Spacing

![Graph showing the variation of dendrite arm spacing](image-url)
Separation may result in Marangoni convection in the liquid during DS at 60mm mark.
Marangoni Convection Effect- Continued

118.1 mm from the seed

149.4 mm from the seed
MICAST7G- Primary Dendrite Arm Spacing
Conclusions

- The primary dendrite spacing increased in microgravity.
- The “array stability limit” of the Hunt and Lu model successfully predicted dendrite arm spacing.
  → Based on nearest-neighbor spacing measurements.
- Comparison of the results implies that dendrite arm spacings respond quicker to growth rate changes in μg than on the ground.
- Separation was observed between the crucible and alloy in the ISS sample.
  → Presumed Marangoni convection disrupts steady-state dendrite growth.
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