Flame speed measurements in turbulent dispersions of liquid fuels

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1 Introduction

The issue of flame speed in spray flows has been reviewed previously [1, 2], showing that the presence of the droplets in the flow as the flame propagates is usually detrimental to the flame speed [3]. This effect is attributed to the additional energy needed to fully evaporate the fuel droplets. Some numerical [4, 5] and experimental [6] works have shown, however, that the flame speed in specific conditions of small droplet size, degree of fuel prevaporization, and turbulence, can be larger than the equivalent flame speed in gaseous systems. Additional phenomena such as droplets surviving the flame front, flame propagation through preferential paths in the gaseous phase, or droplets of multi-component fuels, add to increasing complexity in such systems. Especially for the case of turbulent flow, where the turbulence is expected to increase the flame surface area and hence lead to fast turbulent flame speed – but at the same time may strain droplet-scale reaction zones or promote evaporation – there is no clear consensus on the effect of turbulence on the flame speed in sprays [6–9]. Thus more canonical experiments are needed in order to understand the underlying physics of such processes.

The objective of this work is to measure the flame speed of multi-component fuel dispersions in a turbulent air flow, where the mean and turbulent velocities and the droplet number density and size are homogeneous in space. Ignition is provided at a point and the spherically-expanding flame is observed, allowing for measurements of turbulent flame speed in sprays.

2 Experimental work

The experimental apparatus used in this work is the same as described by [10], and shown in Fig. 1. For the sake of completeness, it is briefly described here. The setup consists of two air lines and a fuel line connected to a divergent-convergent tube [11], i.e. the burner (1). Inside the burner, an air-assisted atomizer (2) injects the liquid into a preheated air stream. The air is prepared using a particulate and a coalescent...
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Three fuels were used: Jet A (codes as A2), and two alternative fuels being studied under the United States’ National Jet Fuel Combustion Program (NJFCP) – an alcohol-to-jet fuel (C1), and a flat-boiling fuel (C5) [12]. C5 presents the highest volatility of the three fuels, while C1 is slightly less volatile and exhibits a distillation curve over a broader temperature span, and A2 is significantly less volatile than the others.

Ignition is performed by focusing the beam of a Nd-YAG laser (10 Hz, 1064 nm, 44 mJ) at the center of the jet and approximately 5 mm downstream of the nozzle. For that, a 30-mm plano-convex lens (11) is used, plus a 75-mm plano-convex (12) lens and a -30-mm plano-concave lens (13), allowing for a very small spark region. The energy at each attempt is before and after the flow with a beam splitter (14) energy sensors (15,16).

Experiments were carried out for the three above-mentioned fuels (A2, C5, and C1) with varying air bulk velocity \( U = 6–15 \text{ m/s} \), and varying equivalence ratio \( \phi = 0.9–2.1 \). The carrier air preheat temperature was set from 50 to 100 °C, resulting in some prevaporization of the fuel.\(^1\) The growth of the flame kernels

\(^1\)The Sauter Mean Diameter in an ethanol spray in the same burner [11] was measured as \( \sim 50 \mu \text{m} \) for similar flow conditions.
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![Figure 2](image_url)

Figure 2: Measured (a) burned and (b) unburned flame speeds for A2, C5, and C1 in terms of the equivalence ratio – \( U = 6 \text{ m/s}, \ T = 70^\circ \text{C}. \)

and its development into a self-sustaining flame was evaluated by high-speed Schlieren as well as OH*-chemiluminescence visualization for 2.6 ms after the spark, at 12 kHz, in a 20x20 mm window. For each test condition, 450 ignition attempts were performed.

The flame speed of the burned gases \( S_b \) was measured from the OH*-chemiluminescence data assuming a spherically propagating flame. By evaluating the maximum width and height of the flame at each visualization frame, the speed of the flame in the horizontal direction, that is, the speed the flame moves relative to the centroid of the kernel, was calculated as being \( S_b(t) = \frac{\Delta w_t}{2\Delta t} \), where \( \Delta w_t \) is the change in width from frame to frame with a \( \Delta t \) time interval. The burned flame speed was also evaluated in the vertical direction. From these calculations, an average value between the horizontal and vertical burned flame speeds was obtained taking into account only successful ignition events (defined by an increasing OH* signal over time [10]). Finally, for each flow condition and successful ignition events, \( S_b \) was averaged in respect to time within a time window where plasma effects were no longer observed.

The unburned flame speed \( S_u \) was evaluated as being, \( S_u = S_b \rho_b / \rho_u \) where \( \rho_b \) and \( \rho_u \) are the density of the burned and unburned gases respectively. Here, a series of approximations were made to estimate \( \rho_b \) and \( \rho_u \), since the local equivalence ratio at which the flame burns is unknown, and there is the possibility of liquid droplets surviving the flame and being found in the burned zone. In this first approach, the unburned and burned densities were calculated based on the density of air at the measured reactants temperature at the nozzle, and at the adiabatic flame temperature evaluated for the given mixture based on the overall equivalence ratio (numerical data were taken from [12]).

3 Results

The results of the time-averaged burned flame speed and the unburned flame speed were plotted in terms of the equivalence ratio, and are shown in Figure 2. In both figures (a,b), the effect of the fuel volatility can be clearly observed: C5 is the most volatile fuel, and presents the highest flame speed at \( \phi = 1.2 \), followed by C1, and finally A2 that is the fuel that presents the lowest saturation pressure. The differences
between the fuels decrease as the mixture becomes richer. This results can also be interpreted in terms of
the gaseous equivalence ratio $\phi_g$, that is, the “effective equivalence ratio” seen by the flame propagating in
the gas phase [13]. In the case of C5, as $\phi$ increases $\phi_g$ may have reached stoichiometry at about $\phi = 1.5$ –
then, further increase of the overall equivalence ratio $\phi$ resulted in a rich gaseous phase and, therefore,
a decrease in flame speed. Additionally, both C1 and A2 should be below stoichiometry in the gas phase,
since there is an overall increase of the flame speed as $\phi$ increases. Also, the lower volatility of A2 results
in a much lower flame speed than C1.

Figure 3 shows the unburned flame speed for C5 for varying (a) flow bulk velocity and (b) preheat temper-
ature. The effect of the bulk velocity and temperature was seen to increase $S_u$ for the present experimental
conditions as both parameters increase. The values shown in Fig. 3 are slightly higher than the laminar burn-
ing velocity of the gaseous stoichiometric flame for a similar temperature ($\sim 0.6$ m/s). Thus, it suggests that
the accelerating effect due to turbulence overcome the detrimental effect due to the presence of the droplets
and the fact that the residence time of the droplets decreases as U increases, resulting in a lower amount of
prevaporized fuel. As temperature increases for a constant U (Fig. 3b), the degree of prevaporation of the
fuel increases. Thus, a larger flame speed was observed as $\phi_g$ likely approached stoichiometry. In order to
further explore these results, measurements of turbulence and prevaporization are needed.

The visualization of a single ignition event in C1 was performed using Schlieren and OH* (Fig. 4a). The
Schlieren camera was positioned opposite and tilted in relation to the OH* camera, and resulting images
were flipped in the vertical axis for convenience. Both image sequences (with $\Delta t = 250$ µs) show the growing
toroidal kernel created by the spark just before the first frame at the bottom (laser beam from right to left).
Observing the Schlieren sequence, one should note that the focused beam gave rise to a number of ignition
sites in the vicinity of focus point, mainly on the right side of the figure (i.e., closer to the source). However,
two main points should be noted. First, these smaller kernels did not grow nor merge with the main kernel
produced in the focus point. Second, these small kernels were not observed in the OH* visualization, thus

\footnote{Due to the shear produced at the meshes upstream of the atomizer and at the spray, the turbulent intensity at the exit of the
burner is approximately $u'/U = 10%$ [11].}
indicating that although the Schlieren shows a significant decrease in density of that region, the temperature was not high enough in order to initiate the vigorous burning of the flame. Other comparisons between the OH* and Schlieren visualizations were performed, as in Fig. 4b, that shows the area of the kernel calculated based on both visualization techniques and plotted in terms of the time after the spark. Small differences in the area calculated by both methods were noticed. A supplementary video of OH* visualizations of different fuels and flow conditions is available online.

### 4 Conclusion

The present work experimentally evaluated the flame speed in three multi-component fuels – a conventional Jet A, a (alternative) commercial alcohol-to-jet fuel, and a flat-boiling curve surrogate fuel – by looking at the problem of a spherically expanding flame in a uniform turbulent droplet dispersion. The burned flame speed was measured, and the unburned flame speed was estimated based on these measurements and additional data for each fuel. Overall, the experiments have shown that the flame speed was lower in A2 (Jet A), probably due to its lower volatility, and increased with an increasing equivalence ratio. However, the same was not observed for C5 due to its higher volatility; for this fuel, the flame speed decreased with an overall increase of the equivalence ratio, likely due to rich conditions of the gaseous mixture. In order to precisely evaluate the flame speed and the effects of the spray and turbulence in such flows, a more detailed characterization of the flow in terms of droplet size, velocity, and degree of prevaporization is needed.

Acknowledgments

PMO would like to thank the financial support of the Brazilian Space Agency and Brazil’s National Council for Scientific and Technological Development. TH is grateful for the support of GESL Program of Keio University funded by Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. The authors also thank Dr. Tim Edwards at the US Air Force Research Lab for providing the fuels under the auspices of the NJFCP, Dr. Med Colket, and acknowledge the funding from the EU Clean Sky project AMEL.

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