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# Measurement of the human cadaver ossicle vibration amplitude by fiber-optic interferometry

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**Abstract** – In this paper we present the results obtained by contactless measurement of vibration of the incus inside the middle ear of a human cadaver, exposed to an external calibrated sound source. The measurement configuration was a Michelson fiber-optic interferometer based on a 3x3 fiber optic coupler, with a VCSEL source. The interferometric signal fading was solved using two quasi-quadrature signals and specialized signal processing. The ossicle reflection was augmented by a very light piece of retroreflective material attached to the bone. We measured the amplitude of vibration at different sound pressure levels, independently monitored by a decibel meter placed in the proximity of the cadaver ear. The accuracy of the measurement technique was proved by using a calibrated piezo transducer exposed to vibrate with amplitude of 7nm at 1kHz. We performed the experiments on 8 cadavers in total. The measured amplitudes were found to be in the range between 1 pm and 1 nm, under the sound excitation of 40-90 dB SPL @ 1kHz, respectively.

**Keywords** - fiber-optic sensors; vibration measurement; implantable microphone; hearing aid;

## I. INTRODUCTION

Two main hearing insufficiencies, middle ear otosclerosis and sensorineural impairment, lead to partial or total hearing loss in millions of people all around the world [1-2]. Very often, they can be overcome by common external hearing aids. However, some patients, having sensorineural malfunction, need to have an implantable hearing device such as cochlear implant (CI) [3-4]. Most implantable cochlear devices today can operate thanks to external microphone that receive the ambiental sound pressure and transmit the processed audio signal through the skull bone to the CI. Basically, this helps a lot to the patients, especially to children to develop the speech in the early age [5]. However, the external microphone is always associated with some drawbacks such as difficulties to perform common life activities including sleeping and swimming as well as social stigmatization.

Many groups in the art [6-10] trying to develop a totally implantable hearing aid having implantable microphone within the device. It is a challenge task, since several requirements have to be fulfilled including high sensitivity and robustness in terms of long-term application in biologically active environment [11]. In this scope it is very important to meet a few clinical requirements including biocompatibility, hermeticity, corrosion resistance against body fluids, overall size and energy consumption and safety application [12].

It appears that fiber-optic sensing technology can fulfill many of aforementioned demands. We already demonstrated capability of this technology [13-14] to be applied for the design and manufacturing of implantable microphone. However, we also met some issues, which require improvements in order to claim a list of technical demands of an implantable microphone. For this reason, we investigated sensitivity and dynamic range of a fiber-optic interferometric technique aimed to be used for manufacturing an implantable microphone as a part of a totally implantable hearing aid.

In this paper we present the results obtained by contactless measurement of vibration of the incus inside the middle ear of a human cadaver, exposed to an external calibrated sound source. We measured the amplitude of vibration at different sound pressure levels (SPL), independently monitored by a decibel meter placed in the proximity of the cadaver ear. The accuracy of the measurement technique was proved by using a calibrated piezo transducer (PZT). We performed the experiments on eight cadaver heads in total. The amplitudes of vibration at 1 kHz were found to be in the range between 1 pm and 1 nm, under the common speech range of sound pressure level.

## II. PRINCIPLE OF OPERATION

The sensing configuration, based on modified Michelson interferometer using a single mode 3x3 fiber-optic coupler (FOC3x3), is presented in Fig.1. The middle input arm of the FOC3x3 is connected to a pigtailed laser diode (LAS).

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This work was sponsored by the NÖ Forschung & Bildung (NFB), Austria and ACMIT Gmbh in the frame of the project: "Totally implantable fiber-optic sound sensing system for cochlear- and middle-ear hearing aids", Life Science grant: LS14-026.

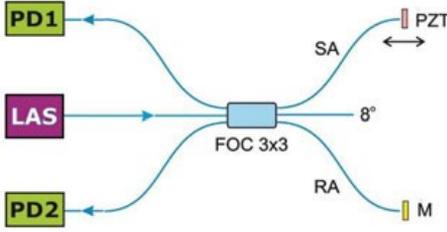


Figure 1. Principle of operation: the fiber-optic Michelson interferometer based on a 3x3 coupler. LAS – laser source, PD1, PD2 – photodiodes, FOC3x3 – single mode 3x3 fiber optic coupler. SA – sensing arm, RA – reference arm, M - mirror, PTZ – vibrating target.

The third arm, which is not necessary, is obliquely cleaved, in order to suppress back reflections. The other two input arms, acting in this case as the outputs, are connected to photodiodes (PD1, PD2), providing two quasi-quadrature interferometric signals [15].

The probe beam in SA is directed to the target, a vibrating PTZ, which is independently calibrated. The RA, being approximately equal in the optical length to the SA, is directed to the fixed mirror (M). A vibration of the target changes the length of the optical path in the SA and, consequently, the optical phase difference (OPD) between the two coupler arms. This OPD's changes generate the raw interferometric signals in both photodetectors, which can be represented by:

$$V_{PD1}(t) = V_{DC1} + V_{A1} \cos(k \cdot A \sin \omega t + L(t)) \quad (1)$$

$$V_{PD2}(t) = V_{DC2} + V_{A2} \cos(k \cdot A \sin \omega t + L(t) + \Psi)$$

where  $A$  and  $\omega$  are the amplitude and the frequency of the target vibration;  $\Psi$  is the phase shift ( $\sim 120^\circ$ ) introduced by the 3x3 coupler;  $V_{DC1}$  and  $V_{DC2}$  are DC signal levels at PD1 and PD2;  $V_{A1}$  and  $V_{A2}$  are interferometric amplitudes, which depend on the target reflection, the coherence degree between the beams and the alignment and state of polarization of the probing beam.  $L(t)$  is a random motion of the target, mainly caused by external vibrations. Since  $L(t)$  causes the change of the working point in the interferometric sinusoidal transfer function, neither photodetector signal alone can provide a stable amplitude detection. However, the constant phase shift  $\Psi$  between coupler arms allows elimination the influence of  $L(t)$ , by the suitable signal processing algorithm, based on the phase extraction from two photodiode signals [13]. The dependence on variable amplitudes  $V_{A1}$  and  $V_{A2}$  is also removed in this phase demodulation process. Two signals and its processing are absolutely necessary if the amplitude of measured vibration is smaller than half of the wavelength, which is certainly the case of human middle ear bone vibrations.

### III. EXPERIMENT

We employed the sensing configuration presented in Fig. 1 in the measuring set-up (Fig. 2), used for determination of amplitude of vibration of middle ear ossicles, examined on human cadavers.

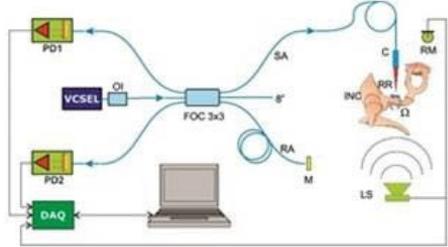


Figure 2. Setup for investigation of fiber-optic sensing configuration based on the miniaturized 3x3 coupler; VCSEL- Vertical Cavity Surface Emitting Laser, OI-optical isolator, SA, RA-sensing and reference arm, C- collimator, RR-retroreflector, M-mirror, PD-photodiode, DAQ-acquisition system, LS- loudspeaker, INC-incus, RM-reference microphone/decibelmeter

Experiments have been performed in a dissection room under the relatively quiet conditions at the Anatomy Division of the Medical University Vienna.

A pigtailed VCSEL diode, emitting at 1310nm, was used as a high-coherence light source. The laser pigtail was connected to the input arm of a single mode 3x3 fiber optic coupler via an optical isolator (OI), in order to suppress backreflections. The VCSEL was driven by low noise driver, with a current of 3mA, giving an optical power of about  $240\mu\text{W}$  out of the pigtail. Two lateral arms were connected to two InGaAs photodiodes (PD1 and PD2), which were further connected to the accompanied low-noise transimpedance amplifiers. Sensing and reference arms were very short, just about 100 mm in length, that was an acceptable length for the implantation. On the other hand, such a short length significantly contributed to decreasing the polarization effects. The sensing fiber was terminated by a spherical collimator (C), with  $450\mu\text{m}$  in diameter, aimed to the target. The reference arm was terminated by a 100% reflective golden surface layer (M).

The surgical procedure was performed in order to assure access to the incus of a human cadaver skull. It included a mastoidectomy and posterior epitympanotomy, with exposition of the short process and the body of the incus, which was the target in these experiments. The incus was equipped with a small piece of the retro-reflecting tape (RR), attached to the bone by a specially designed clip ( $\Omega$ ). The fiber-optic probe composed of reference and sensing arms, packed in a medical steel guiding needle, was directed and adjusted versus target in order to obtain the maximal signals on the PD1 and PD2. The use of the RR has been necessary to provide sufficiently amount of the reflected radiation [16].

The acoustical measurements have been performed by Affinity audiometer of Interacoustics Co. The calibrated system for generation of acoustic signals use the loudspeaker from JBL Incorporated®, Northridge, CA, control® CM52, set to be of about 70-80cm far away from the skull, capable to produce a pure acoustical stimuli in the range from 40 dB to 90 dB SPL re  $20\mu\text{Pa}$ . The reference microphone signal and two raw photodiode signals have typically been acquired with 32ks/Ch/s, in time duration of about 31 s, that makes 1 million of measuring points.

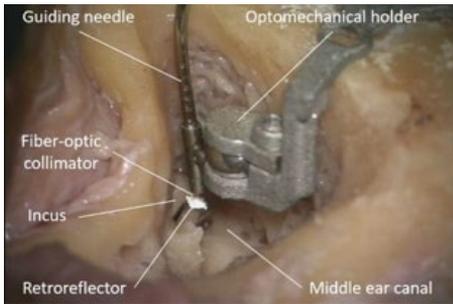


Figure 3. Close look at the middle ear canal and retroreflector firmly fixed over incus; fiber-optic probe set into the guiding needle

The decibel meter values have been recorded manually as an average data. The raw signals have been later offline processed by arctan algorithm, using the specially made software packet.

Before any measurement, the system was tested using a calibrated PZT actuator (Fig. 4), placed at the same distance from fiber-optic probe where the incus will be, about 2.5 mm from the fiber end. An identical piece of retroreflective material was adhesively bonded to the PZT actuator. The PZT was driven by a sinusoidal signal at 1kHz@1Vp-p, producing an amplitude of 7.4 nm.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The acquired photodiode signals by DAQ system obtained in the prior checking experiments, with the calibrated PZT, can be seen in Fig. 5, graph down right, in the form of Lissajous figure, after the first stage of processing. The PZT was driven by sinusoidal voltage 1V @1kHz, in the time interval from 1.5 s to 5.5 s. The very beginning of the period of acquisition is used to calculate the noise. Top left graph in Fig. 5 shows the demodulated and stabilized interference signal, i.e. the interferometer phase, obtained by the offline signal processing while the pilot signal is on, using the arcus tangent algorithm.

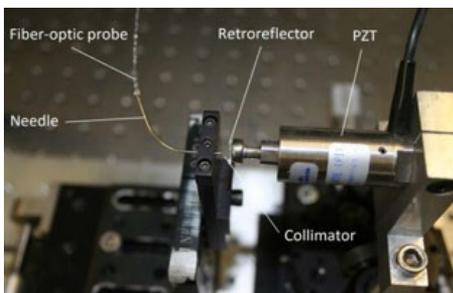


Figure 4. Close look at the fiber-optic sensing probe directed to the retroreflector bonded onto a calibrated PZT driven at 1 kHz, 7.4 nm amplitude

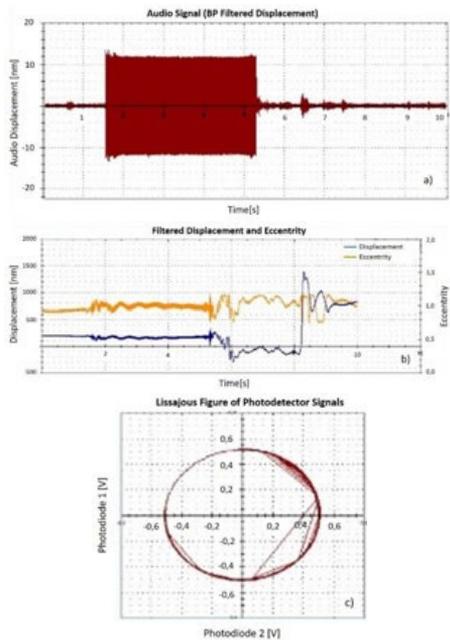


Figure 5. Processed data of PZT vibrations at 1Vp-p, 1kHz, representing: a) overall displacement, b) overall change of OPD of interference arms (blue line) and eccentricity of circle after processing (orange line) and c) Lissajous presentation of the processed signals

The processed signal reveals an RMS amplitude of PZT vibration of about 8 nm, that is in a good agreement with calibration data for 1kHz@1V of 7.4 nm. The accuracy of the measurement technique can be estimated to be better than 10%.

Figure 6 shows the signal and noise spectral density expressed in (nm/ $\sqrt{\text{Hz}}$ ), obtained by FFT analysis of processed signal over the acoustic frequency range. A sharp peak at 1kHz relates to the PZT vibration at this frequency. Several curves (gray and purple) correspond to the noise and pilot signal (green and magenta) parts of acquired data, with and without A-weighting. Based on these results, we calculated the minimum detectable amplitude of vibration of about 1,2  $\mu\text{m}/\sqrt{\text{Hz}}$ .

Fig. 7 presents the measured amplitudes of incus vibration of eight human cadavers, measured at 1kHz for SPL over 40 to 90 SPL. We can see that amplitude of incus vibrations at 40 SPL span from about 1 $\mu\text{m}$  to about 10 $\mu\text{m}$  depending on the cadaver specimen. Similarly, for 90 SPL the amplitude of incus vibrations take values from about 150 $\mu\text{m}$  to about 3nm depending on the subjected cadaver specimen.

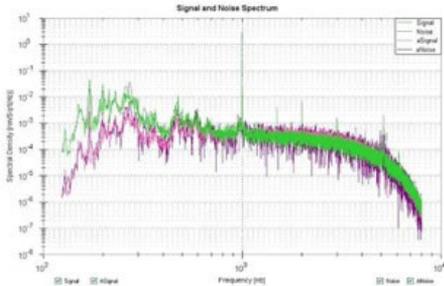


Figure 6. Signal and noise spectrum of PZT vibration at 1V@1kHz, with and without A-weighting

These results show a difference between the measured amplitude of vibrations that is in the range of one order of magnitude among the subjected cadaver specimens. It can be explained by various anatomic characteristic of the middle ear, age and previous health history of human cadavers as well as method of preparing of specimens (e.g. if they were deep forsen or not).

Generally, the obtained results are in relatively good agreement with literature data, which are obtained by amplitude measurement on temporal bones utilizing the Laser Doppler Vibrometry [17]. However, there is a discrepancy between the literature and our data concerning the amplitude measurement at 90 dB SPL and 1kHz. We obtained for about 10 to 20nm smaller amplitude of vibrations. Although, it is difficult to explain this difference without knowledge of the exact measurement and analysis techniques applied, we believe that the main reason is different hitting point of laser light. The literature data relate to the umbo instead incus displacement. The presented fiber-optic sensing technique demonstrated a high sensitivity. The minimum detectable amplitude of vibrations is about 1pm i.e. slightly below of 40 dB SPL.

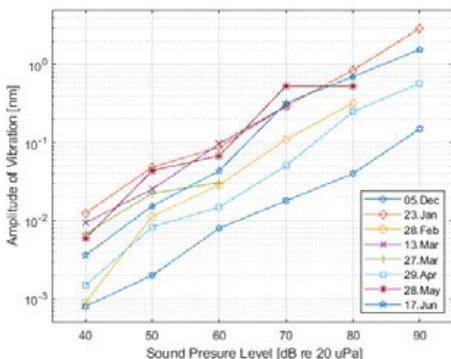


Figure 7. Amplitudes of eight human cadaver incus vibrations measured by fiber-optic interferometry at 1kHz

## V. CONCLUSION

The presented fiber-optic sensing technique, investigated by the human cadavers, demonstrated some promising features necessary for a prospective implantable microphone in terms of small dimensions and high sensitivity. The minimum detectable amplitude of incus vibrations of about 1pm corresponds with required technical demand of a totally implantable hearing aid [12]. It was experimentally found that amplitude of incus vibrations at 40 SPL spans from about 1pm to about 10pm, depending on the cadaver specimen. Similarly, for 90 SPL the amplitude of incus vibrations takes values from about 150pm to about 3 nm. The incus response shows a high linearity to acoustical excitation, with a sensitivity of 1-5 pm/mPa @1kHz.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors thank to the ACMIT GmbH and NÖ Forschung & Bildung (NFB), Austria, which sponsored this work in the frame of the project: "Totally implantable fiber-optic sound sensing system for cochlear- and middle-ear hearing aids", Life Science grant: LS14-026. Many thanks to Miss Nina Tomic for creating some of the figures.

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