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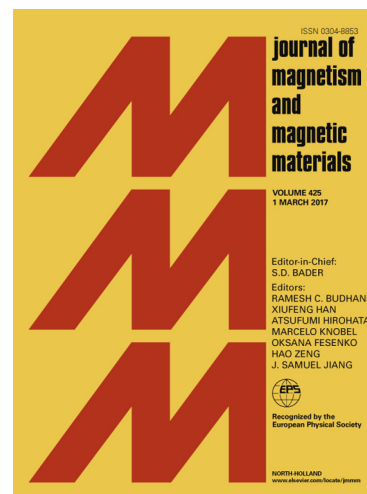
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Typical experiment vs. in-cell like conditions in magnetic hyperthermia: effects of media viscosity and agglomeration

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Abstract

Magnetic nanoparticles (MNPs) can be used to transform electromagnetic energy into heat in hyperthermic treatment of cancer and other thermally activated therapies. The MNPs heating efficiency depends strongly on the combination of the MNPs' structural properties and environmental conditions. MNPs hyperthermic yield is usually studied in diluted suspensions, although, in the actual therapy, the particles end mostly aggregated and fixed into cellular structures.

In this work, the heating efficiency of low size dispersion Fe_3O_4 MNPs, defined as the Specific Absorption Rate (SAR), was studied in two conditions: liquid suspension (ferrofluid FF, typical characterization state) and gel matrix (ferrogel FG, mimicking biological application environment). The samples were characterized by TEM, ZFC-FC and SAXS. Their magnetic response to radio-frequency fields was measured by induction in order to obtain SAR values from the magnetization cycles area. 3D maps of SAR versus field amplitude and frequency were elaborated in order to compare the response of fixed and suspended MNPs. Structural characterization shows FG's MNPs agglomerated in a crystal-like mesostructure with a well defined interparticle distance. SAR results show a clear difference of behaviour between liquid and gel matrices, with larger SAR values for the FG sample indicating a lower

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resonance frequency, inside the studied region, for fixed MNP. Additionally, the local maximum suggested in FGs SAR map indicates a behaviour outside linear response regimen as expected for the applied field amplitudes.

Keywords: Specific Absorption Rate, Magnetic nanoparticles, Magnetic Hyperthermia

1. Introduction

Magnetic nanoparticles (MNPs) are being extensively studied for their applications in biomedicine.[1] In cancer treatment, the MNPs are used as a heating agent for thermoablation and magnetic fluid hyperthermia.[2] In these therapies, the particles are introduced inside the tumor and the region is exposed to a radio-frequency electromagnetic field (RF) with frequencies around 100 kHz and amplitudes up to 15 kA/m.[3] The MNPs absorb energy from the field and release it to their surroundings as heat, producing thermal damage to the tumor.[4, 5] In order to deliver an adequate thermal dose, a key aspect for these therapies is a thorough and trustworthy knowledge of the MNPs heating efficiency. This efficiency is quantified by the Specific Absorption Rate (SAR) *i.e.* the amount of power the particles absorb from the field per unit mass. For a set of MNPs, the SAR value is not only determined by the particles properties, but also by the viscosity of the supporting medium, the interaction between particles, and the frequency f and amplitude H_0 of the applied field. So it is that two identical MNP assemblies supported in different media and exposed to the same RF could exhibit different SAR values. This effect has been studied by comparing the thermal dissipation for a single applied field frequency of MNPs supported in liquid with MNPs supported in hydrogel[6], glycerol[7] and gelatine[8], and for many frequencies in agar[9]. Also, it has been shown that MNPs are fixed rather strongly to the tumour tissue after injection into experimentally grown tumours in mice.[8] In all cases results indicate a noticeable diminution of the power dissipation for the fixated MNPs. This effect is generally attributed to the cancellation of Brown's dissipation mechanism although this cancellation will provoke a SAR diminution only for frequencies larger than the resonance frequency of the sample. In this direction, a recent publication by Cabrera et. al[10] suggests that the principal effect of the internalization of MNPs by living cells is due the increase in agglomeration rather than immobilization. The typical method for SAR determination is the calorimetric measurement

31 of the power dissipation of MNPs in liquid suspension. This method provides
32 a direct result from the temperature increase of the studied ferrofluid (FF)
33 but presents several limitations for the characterization of solid and biolog-
34 ical samples. In recent years an alternative method based on the inductive
35 determination of the RF hysteresis loops has been developed by several re-
36 search groups with very good results.[7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14]

37
38 In this work, the SAR dependencies with H_0 and f of magnetite MNPs
39 ferrofluid (FF) and ferrogel (FG) are studied using RF hysteresis loop area
40 determination by induction measurements. This method allows to perform
41 several measurements in a short time, so it was used to construct colour maps
42 of SAR values versus field amplitude and field frequency by sweeping through
43 several RF generator configurations. These maps are used to compare the
44 performance of two samples that *a priori* differ only in their supporting me-
45 dia: the FF represents the typical and simplest media for studying MNPs,
46 while the FG constitutes a high viscosity matrix where MNPs are fixed and
47 usually present some degree of agglomeration. This fixed-agglomerated par-
48 ticle condition is similar to the final state of the MNPs in biological media
49 after their incorporation by the cells as reported in [15].

50 2. Materials and methods

51 2.1. RF generation

52 The RF field is generated by a power source-resonator set *Hüttinger TIG*
53 *2,5/300* with a [30; 300] kHz nominal frequency range and a 2.5 kW max-
54 imum output. The resonator's RLC circuit can be configured with up to 4
55 parallel connected capacitors and an up to 4 turns internal inductance in
56 series with the external working coil. A set of capacitors of different values
57 allows to generate up to 80 resonance frequencies for every working coil. Each
58 resonance frequency determines a maximum generated field proportional to
59 the maximum circulating current.

60 The intensity of the working coil longitudinal field was measured for sev-
61 eral generator intermediate DC currents (IDC) in function of the longitudinal
62 position z inside the coil. The observed dependence was the expected for this
63 4 turn inductor, presenting a maximum field intensity of 55 mT in the center
64 of the coil for the maximum IDC value (fig. 1).

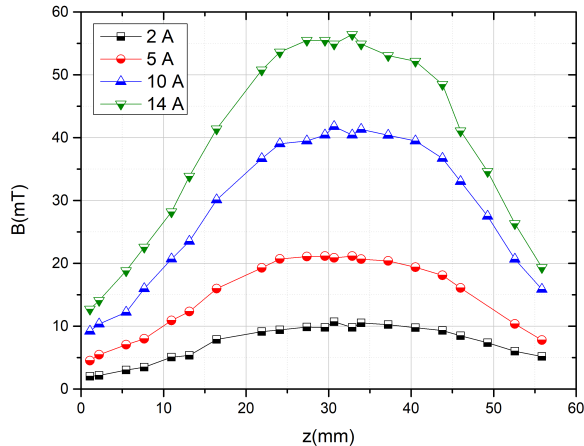


Figure 1: Magnetic induction intensity versus longitudinal position z in the working coil for several IDC values.

65 2.2. RF cycles measurement

66 In order to measure the magnetization M of the sample during the ap-
 67 plication of the RF field, an *ad hoc* device was constructed in a similar way
 68 to Bekovic and Mehdaoui[16, 17]. Two 10 turns, 5 mm radius, contrariwise-
 69 wounded pick-up coils c_s and c_f , connected in series were coaxially mounted
 70 on a plastic screw-like positioner with a fixed separation of 23 mm between
 71 them (fig. 2). 60 μm thick copper wire was used for the coils. The positioner
 72 fixes into a second plastic piece with an internal female thread. This second
 73 piece is attached to the working coil so the axial position of the pick-up coils
 74 can be precisely controlled by rotating the positioner.

75 The pick-up coils circuit is completed by a low pass RC filter with a 2
 76 MHz cut-off frequency and a 5 GS/s oscilloscope (*Tektronix TDS 3012*).
 77 A third coil is placed around the external plastic piece to measure the time
 78 dependence of the applied field $H(t)$. The absolute instantaneous field value
 79 in the sample position is obtained from a previous calibration.

80 The coils output signal is conditioned and integrated numerically in order
 81 to obtain the RF loops area and then, the corresponding SAR values.

82 2.3. Sample preparation

83 Since no actual biological media is studied in this work, a non biocompat-
 84 ible organic based FF was used for the experiments. The utilized suspension

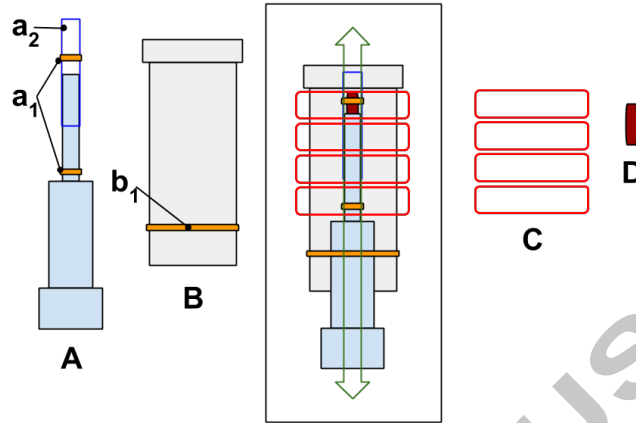


Figure 2: Inductive magnetization sensor. (A): central piece with the pick-up coils a_1 contrary wounded in series. Sample coil c_s is wounded on a plastic straw a_2 . (B): external piece with internal female thread and applied field sensing coil b_1 . A fits inside B and both fit inside the working coil C. Sample D is placed inside the top end of the plastic straw as shown in central picture.

85 presents several experimental advantages such as high stability, small size
86 dispersion and light coating.

87 2.3.1. Synthesis

88 Magnetite nanoparticles were synthesized by high-temperature decompo-
89 sition of 10 mmol of Fe(oleate) (procedure described here [18]) in the presence
90 of 4 mmol of oleic acid and using 20 mL of trioctylamine and 80 mL of ben-
91 zyl ether as mixed solvent (boiling point 295 °C). The reaction was refluxed
92 for 1 hour under vigorous stirring and N_2 atmosphere. Then the particles
93 were washed several times with hexane and ethanol. The final magnetite
94 concentration of the suspension was 11.7(5) kg/m^3 .

95 2.3.2. Ferrogel preparation

96 A ferrogel (FG) was elaborated from the same MNPs. 500(5) μL of the
97 FF were mixed with 390(1) mg of melted commercial paraffin gel wax. A
98 final magnetite concentration of 1.2 kg/m^3 was obtained. A portion of this
99 sample was placed inside a gelatin capsule, filling it completely. Another
100 identical capsule was filled with clean gel wax for background measurements.

101 2.4. Structural characterization

102 TEM images of a dry droplet of the FF were taken in a *FEI Tecnai T20*,
103 *200 kV*.

104 ZFC-FC experiments were performed on both, FF and FG samples at a 2.4
105 K/min rate and a 8 kA/m field.

106 SAXS measurements were performed using a *XEUSS 1.0* system from *XENOCOS*
107 equipped with a 2D photon counting pixel X-ray detector *Pilatus 100k (DEC-*
108 *TRIS, Switzerland)*. The scattering intensity, $I(q)$, was recorded in the range
109 of the momentum transfer $0.04 < q < 1.4 \text{ nm}^{-1}$, where $q = 4\pi \sin(\theta)/\lambda$, with
110 2θ the scattering angle, and $\lambda = 0.15419 \text{ nm}$ the weighted average of X-ray
111 wavelength of the Cu $K_{\alpha 12}$ emission lines. All measurements were carried
112 out using a quartz capillary as sample holder.

113 3. Results and discussion

114 3.1. TEM

115 TEM images show quasi-spherical, crystalline particles with a narrow
116 Lognormal size distribution of 9.5 nm mean and 1.7 nm standard deviation
117 (fig. 3). Clusters of MNPs were not detected in the images.

118 FF presents years-long stability in hexane suspension at 10 g/L concentra-
119 tion. The interparticle distance obtained from concentration and size dis-
120 persion indicates a separation larger than the 3 radius limit established for
121 dipolar interaction[19].

123 3.2. ZFC-FC

124 The blocking temperature T_B distribution of each sample was obtained
125 from the derivative of the ZFC-FC difference respect to temperature as re-
126 ported in Bruvera et al. [20]. From the comparison between frozen FF and
127 FG results it can be seen that FG T_B distribution is narrower and has its
128 maximum at a lower temperature (fig. 4). This modification is compatible
129 with an increase in dipolar interaction between MNPs in the FG in regard
130 to FF as reported by Denardin et al. [21].

131 3.3. SAXS

132 A SAXS measurement was performed on a FG sample in order to verify
133 MNP aggregation. The scattering of the clean gel wax was also measured

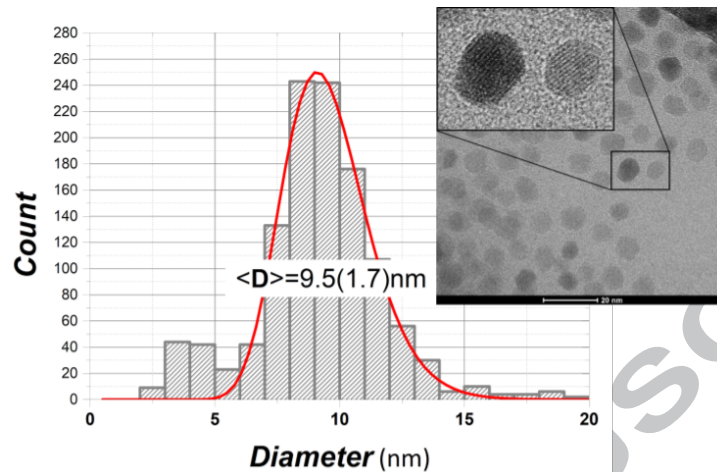


Figure 3: Size distribution from TEM images. Inset: TEM image example with a magnification showing the crystallinity of the particles. The fitting left out the smallest MNP with small incidence in volumetric magnetic response.

134 to distinguish its signal from the MNPs'. Figure 5 shows SAXS patterns for
 135 both FG sample and gel wax. The FG SAXS pattern presents two diffraction
 136 peaks in the positional ratio $1 : (4/3)^{1/2}$, corresponding to reflections [111]
 137 and [200] respectively of a face centered cubic (fcc) lattice (Fm3m symme-
 138 try). It is possible to calculate a cell parameter $a = 19.4(3)$ nm from the first
 139 order reflection at $q = 0.56(2) \text{ nm}^{-1}$. The cell parameter yields a distance
 140 between nearest neighbours $d = 13.7(2)$ nm. From this results, it can be
 141 inferred that nanoparticles in the FG were organized as a fcc mesostructure,
 142 a simple regular lattice that achieves the highest average density, with pre-
 143 cisely defined interparticle spacing.

144

145 The consideration of all the structural information strongly suggests that,
 146 besides the immobilization in the gel matrix, the particles in the FG present
 147 also a considerable degree of agglomeration, possibly promoted by the lamel-
 148 lar molecular structure of the gel. The differences between FG's and frozen
 149 FF's T_B distribution, together with the regular interparticle distance arisen
 150 from SAXS results, constitute clear indications of MNP agglomeration in the
 151 gel matrix. On the other hand, the stability and concentration of the hexane
 152 FF, together with TEM images, indicates a mean interparticle distance of
 153 more than three diameters. This value is large enough to disregard dipol-
 154 ar interactions in the liquid suspension. In parallel with this, TEM results

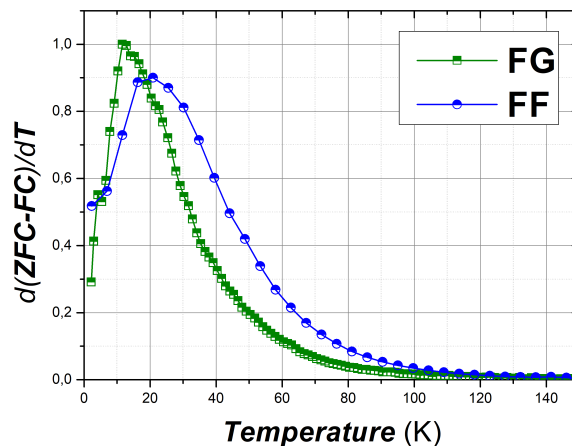


Figure 4: Blocking temperature distribution of FF and FG samples obtained from ZFC-FC experiments.

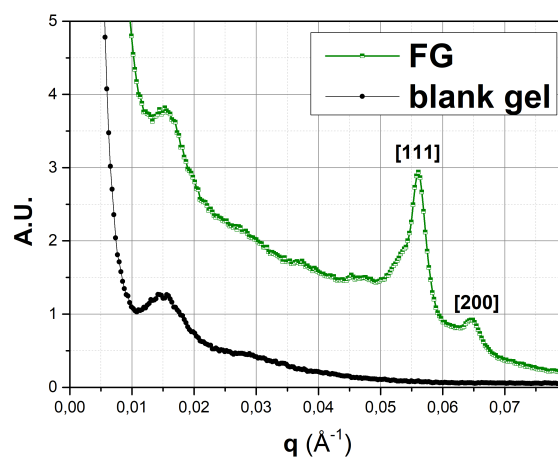


Figure 5: SAXS pattern of FG and clean gel wax samples. The nanoparticle organization in the FG sample is demonstrated by the presence of two diffraction peaks corresponding to reflections [111] and [200] of a face centered cubic lattice.

155 reported by Coral et al. [15] show MNPs agglomerated in endosomes after
 156 their incorporation by a cell culture. Thus, MNPs suspended in the gel ma-
 157 trix present a spatial distribution similar to those incorporated by cells and

158 rather different from the same particles in suspension.

159 3.4. SAR maps and RF cycles for FF and FG

160 A series of RF magnetization cycles measurements was conducted on
161 both FG and FF samples in order to construct and compare specific power
162 absorption SAR vs. RF-field-amplitude H vs. RF-field-frequency f maps.
163 The practicality and speed of the inductive measurement system over the
164 typical calorimetric method enables the realization of several experiments
165 in a short time (less than 10 s per measurement) with little effect over the
166 sample since temperature increase is less than 5 K for all measurements.
167 Figures 6 and 7 show SAR values maps for FF and FG samples subjected to
168 several RF fields.

169 FF map shows a mostly monotonic increase in the direction of larger H and
170 higher f with a maximum measured value of 94(5) W/g for [268.0(5) kHz;
171 48(1) kA/m].

172 FG map presents several differences with FF results. FG's SAR values are
173 larger for every [f, H] point comparison between samples. The maximum
174 value of 363(85) W/g was measured at maximum field amplitude, not for the
175 higher 268.0(5) kHz frequency but for a lower one of 207.9(5) kHz. Moreover,
176 SAR values at 260 kHz are higher than those at 268 kHz for all measured
177 field amplitudes suggesting the presence of a local frequency maximum in
178 the region that is not present in the FF map.

179 The use of the inductive SAR determination allows not only to obtain
180 dissipation values but also to measure the actual magnetization cycles of the
181 samples. Studying this cycles enables to a better understanding of the be-
182 havior showed in SAR maps. Figure 8 shows the comparison between FG
183 and FF cycles at 268.0(5) kHz normalized by iron concentration. Suscepti-
184 bility, maximum magnetization, remanence and cycle area are systematically
185 smaller for FF while coercivity does not presents a well defined relation be-
186 tween samples. This cycle characteristics are similar for all the frequencies.

187
188 The differences between FF and FG cycles can be understood as an effect
189 of two factors present in the FG: the agglomeration-driven dipolar interac-
190 tion between nearby particles; and the cancelation of Brown's dissipation
191 mechanism due to MNPs fixation. The effects of particle agglomeration on
192 SAR may vary, as it has been shown that in the presence of dipolar in-
193 teractions SAR is not a homogeneous function of MNPs concentration (i.e.
194 inter-particle distance) [22, 23, 14]. Moreover, the cited work of Cabrera et al.

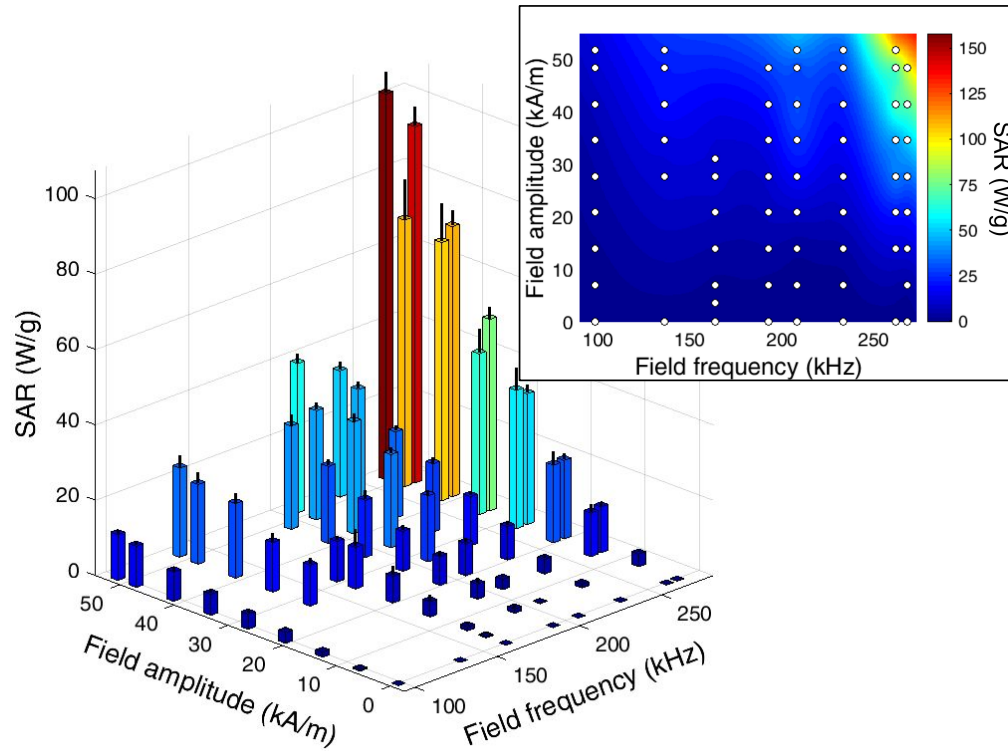


Figure 6: SAR values of FF sample. Bar position indicates applied field's amplitude and frequency. Bar height indicates mean SAR value from three measurements with black line at the top the standard deviation. Inset: colour map interpolated from SAR values. White dots mark the position of the 3D bars in the colour map.

195 [10] concludes that magnetic dipolar interactions, taking place within ran-
 196 domly ordered MNPs clusters, play a central role in the decrease of magnetic
 197 heating losses. In our case, the structural information indicates an agglom-
 198 eration of MNPs with a well defined and compact spatial distribution that
 199 could be partially responsible of the measured increase in SAR values.[24] In
 200 parallel, as shown in the appendix, the absence of Browns mechanism leads
 201 to a longer relaxation time and a subsequently smaller, in this case inside the
 202 measurement range, resonance frequency between MNPs relaxation and the
 203 magnetic field. In addition, the presence of a local maximum is consistent
 204 with a behaviour outside linear response regime which is also evident from
 205 the non elliptical RF magnetization cycles measured at high field amplitudes.

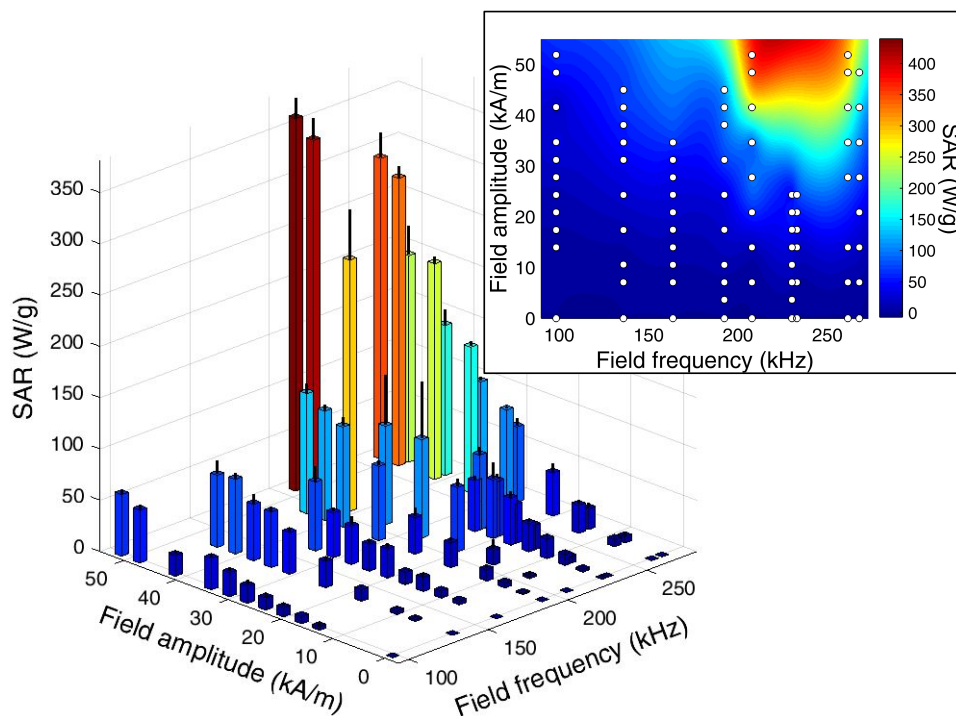


Figure 7: SAR values of FG sample. Bar position indicates applied field's amplitude and frequency. Bar height indicates mean SAR value from three measurements with black line at the top the standard deviation. Inset: colour map interpolated from SAR values. White dots mark the position of the 3D bars in the colour map.

206 4. Summary

207 An hexane ferrofluid (FF) and a paraffin ferrogel (FG) were prepared
 208 from the same batch of Fe_3O_4 nanoparticles (MNPs) in order to compare
 209 the power dissipation of the same MNPs in the FF typical characterization
 210 media with the response in the highly viscous, agglomerated, in-cell like con-
 211 ditions of the FG.

212 The specific absorption rate (SAR) landscapes of both samples were surveyed
 213 for a [98, 268] kHz x [0, 52] kA/m field-frequency x field-amplitude surface.
 214 Additionally, TEM, SAXS and SQUID measurements were performed on the
 215 samples in order to correlate structural characteristics with power absorption
 216 behavior.

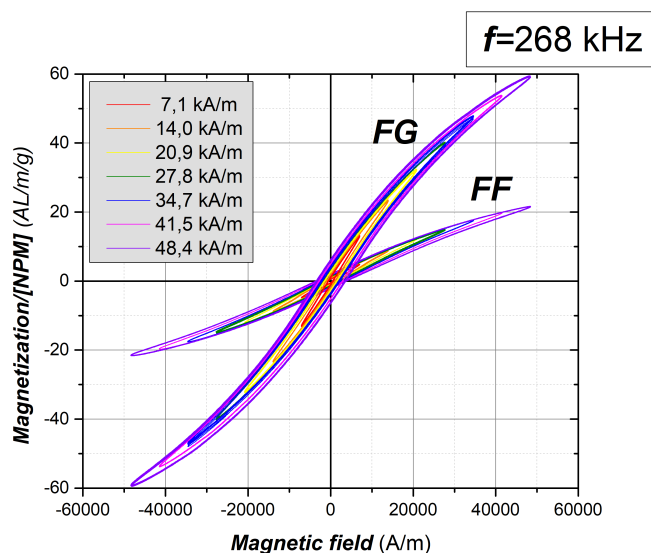


Figure 8: RF magnetization cycles comparison between FF and FG samples for the full field amplitude range at 268.0(5) kHz.

217 All the obtained structural information indicates that, while the MNPs in the
 218 FF stay in stable suspension with a mean interparticle distance larger than
 219 three diameters, the particles fixed in the FG are mostly agglomerated and
 220 separated by less than two diameters in a regular mesostructure. Because
 221 of this, dipolar interactions between particles should be negligible in the FF
 222 and considerable in the FG.

223 The comparison between both samples' hysteresis loops and SAR values
 224 shows a consistently larger power dissipation for the MNPs in the FG with
 225 a local SAR maximum in frequency that is not present in the FF's results.

226 All this can be understood as the combined effect of the dipolar interactions
 227 and the cancellation of the Brown mechanism in the FG.

228 5. Conclusions

229 The difference between 9.5(1.7) nm diameter MNPs response suspended
 230 in hexane and fixed in paraffin gel to RF in the range [98, 268] kHz - [0, 52]
 231 kA/m has been proven. SAR values for MNPs in FG are consistently higher
 232 than in FF by a factor 2 or more. Additionally, the presence of a local SAR
 233 frequency maximum was detected only for FG.

234 The agglomeration of the MNPs in the FG matrix has been proven with a
 235 precise determination of the interparticle distance. This constitutes a condi-
 236 tion much closer to the particles incorporated into cells than in the previously
 237 reported experiments where MNPs were homogeneously dispersed in FG ma-
 238 trix.

239 The SAR differences between FF and FG can be understood as an effect
 240 of the agglomeration-driven dipolar interaction between nearby particles and
 241 the cancelation of Brown's dissipation mechanism due to MNPs fixation. The
 242 ordered spatial distribution observed in the FG sample could be partially re-
 243 sponsible for the increase in SAR values together with the absence of Browns
 244 mechanism that leads to a smaller, in this case inside of the measurement
 245 range, resonance frequency between MNPs relaxation and the magnetic field.
 246 Finally, inductive SAR determination has demonstrated to be a reliable and
 247 practical technique with several advantages over the calorimetric method.
 248 The possibility of *ex vivo* SAR determination of MNPs incorporated to bio-
 249 logical samples is promising and will be tested soon.

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 254 technical assistance and advice for our experiments and Dr. Marcelo Ceolín
 255 from INIFTA for his assistance with SAXS measurements.

256 Appendix A. MNPs power dissipation

257 In a linear response theory framework, the specific power absorbed by the
 258 MNPs from the field can be expressed as

$$p = \frac{\pi\mu_0^2 M_s^2 V H_0^2 f}{3kTn} \frac{\omega\tau}{1 + (\omega\tau)^2}, \quad (\text{A.1})$$

259 [25]

260 depending on thermal energy kT , material properties like saturation mag-
 261 netization M_s , *mass/volume* concentration n and MNP volume V , and
 262 RF parameters as amplitude H_0 and frequency f . The resonant factor
 263 $\omega\tau/(1 + (\omega\tau)^2)$ is called frequency factor (Φ) and depends on the relation
 264 between the angular field frequency $\omega = 2\pi f$ and the relaxation time τ . For

265 small frequencies ($\omega \ll 1/\tau$) this factor is proportional to $\omega\tau$ so, the SAR
 266 is proportional to $\tau H_0^2 f^2$ by a factor independent of RF parameters :

$$\omega \ll 1/\tau \Rightarrow SAR \propto \tau H_0^2 f^2 \quad (\text{A.2})$$

267 If a MNPs assembly is exposed to a constant magnetic field and then
 268 the field is removed, the total magnetization of the assembly decays ex-
 269 ponentially with a characteristic time τ , whose expression depends on the
 270 relaxation mechanism. There are two relaxation mechanisms typically con-
 271 templated for monodomain MNPs:

272

The fluctuation of the magnetization between the two opposite orienta-
 tions determined by the so called “easy axis” within the particle is known as
 Nèel mechanism. Its characteristic time is

$$\tau_N = \tau_0 e^{KV_M/kT}$$

where $\tau_0 = 10^{-9}$ s, V_M is the particle’s magnetic volume and K is the
 anisotropy constant.

If the MNPs are suspended in a fluid media, the relaxation can be achieved
 by the rotation of the particle itself. In this case, the characteristic Brown
 time is determined by the fluid viscosity η , the MNP hydrodynamic volume
 V_H and the thermal energy kT

$$\tau_B = \frac{3\eta V_H}{kT}$$

If the two mechanisms are accessible, the effective relaxation time is a com-
 bination of both:

$$\frac{1}{\tau} = \frac{1}{\tau_B} + \frac{1}{\tau_N} \quad (\text{A.3})$$

273 predominating the smaller time *i.e.* the fastest mechanism.[26] By determin-
 274 ing the τ value, these very distinct mechanisms governed by particle volume,
 275 directly conditionate the response of a MNPs sample to the RF. It can be
 276 noticed that while the Nèel mechanism depends only on temperature and on
 277 the intrinsic properties of the MNP, K and V_M ; the Brown mechanism is
 278 determined by temperature and a media property as is viscosity.

279 if the Brown mechanism is dominant at least in one of the media (fig.
 280 A.9).

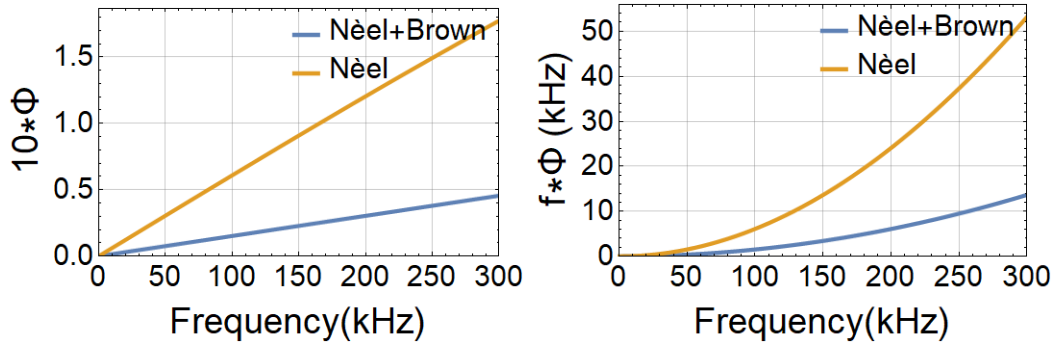


Figure A.9: Frequency factor $\Phi = \omega\tau/(1 + (\omega\tau)^2)$ (left) and $f\Phi = \frac{SAR}{\pi\mu_0^2 M_s^2 V H_0^2} 3kTn$ (right) versus field frequency f for a MNP of diameter $D_M = D_H = 9.54$ nm and effective anisotropy constant $K_{ef} = 30$ kJ/m³ suspended in hexane, $\eta = 0.28 \times 10^{-3}$ Pa s at $T = 303$ K.

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