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Effects of Alloying on Aluminium-Silicon Alloys – A Review

O.O. Joseph[1], P.A. Olubambi[2], Olakunle O. Joseph[3], B.M. Edun[4], J.O. Okeniyi[1], O.P. Abioye[1]

[1]Department of Mechanical Engineering, Covenant University, P.M.B. 1023, Canaanland, Ota, Nigeria
[2]Centre for Nanoengineering and Tribocorrosion, School of Mining, Metallurgy and Chemical Engineering, University of Johannesburg, South Africa
[3]Department of Mechanical Engineering, The Federal Polytechnic, P.M.B. 50, Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria
[4]Department of Mechanical Engineering, Ogun State Institute of Technology, Igbesa, Ogun State, Nigeria
Corresponding Author; funmi.joseph@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

Abstract
Some of the factors in which the mechanical, physical and chemical properties of aluminium alloys hinge on are composition and microstructure. The inclusion of specific alloying elements to aluminium in its pure form has been proven to considerably improve its properties and usefulness. Hence, aluminium is substituted with alloys which consist of one or more alloying elements or impurities for applications where it is demanded. Aluminium, as well as its alloys, offers an outstanding combination of properties making it stand out amongst the most adaptable, cost-effective, and appealing metallic materials for a wide scope of employments —from delicate materials like wrapping foil to the most severe engineering applications. Besides steels, aluminium based alloys are most favoured for applications as structural materials.

Keywords: Aluminium-silicon, composition, microstructure, properties

1. Introduction

Aluminium, having a density of 2.7 g/cm^3, has around one-third that of steel of density 7.83 g/cm^3. Owing to this fact, associated with high strength of its alloys surpassing even that of structural steels, aluminium has found applications in design and development of lightweight structures with significant strength such as aircraft and space exploration vehicles, for example [1]. The 5xxx family of Al alloys are commonly applied as metal sheets in transport, marine, and chemical engineering owing to their worthy mechanical properties including good weldability, high resistance to corrosion, good machinability, while offering all these at a very economical cost [2]. Just like other lightweight materials, aluminium based alloys contain increasing applications in the automobile industry, in regard to the protection of the environment and minimization of fuel utilization, where they can effectively replace vehicle parts made with steel and cast iron [3].

Aluminium alloys are the main components for the airplane structure and are still indispensable to the airframe framework because of their numerous advantages, such as manufacturing ease, light weight and economic efficiency, although composites have risen in use over the years. Al-based alloys also have the capacity for heat treatment and for relatively high stress levels [4]. Recently, the use of aluminium has increased in the marine transport industry owing to its lightness and corrosion resistance properties. The 5xxx and 6xxx families of aluminium alloys are the most preferred alloys used in corrosive environment such as seawater due to their adequate strength and great corrosion resistance properties. Al alloys provide good combination of corrosion resistance, strength, freedom from hot shortness and fluidity that makes it suitable for applications in the building and construction industry.

Automobile and aeronautic body structure, power devices modules packing, wind and solar power equipment and electronic technologies are some of the numerous fields that aluminium and its alloys have found application owing mostly to their high conductivity, outstanding processablilty, tremendous specific strength and low environmental hazard [5].

Al-Si alloys, especially at its eutectic composition, are very important engineering materials that provide a variety of uses in many industries (e.g. automotive, aerospace and others). Alloys of this type combine great corrosion resistance and outstanding mechanical properties with good castability. The microstructure and the properties of cast products may differ considerably according to the actual casting parameters and situations [5]. Si-containing aluminium alloys as a main alloy constitute a category of substances, the most important of which are produced by casting with a very good mixture of castability and mechanical characteristics, and good resistance to corrosion and wear, which can provide value for various uses [6]. For instance, A356 is an overall aluminium-silicon cast alloy used in aircraft and automotive industry, specifically for the motor components, like pistons, cylindrical heads and valve lifts, due to its elevated wear strength, excellent corrosion resistance, better casting fluidity, a strong strength-to-weight ratio and a small thermal expansion coefficient.

According to [7], the mechanical characteristics of A356 are greatly affected by the microstructural features like SDAS, eutectic silicone parts, micro-porosity as well as heat treatment. The as-cast microstructure of A356 is usually distinguished by disperse silicon particles, porosity and harsh dendritic composition. Such micro-structural characteristics bind the mechanical characteristics of cast metals particularly with regard to fatigue strength and strength. Since aluminium alloys are characterized by their main alloy components, silicon is realized to have great usefulness in metal alloys. It enhances the fluidity of the rock, decreases the melting temperature, lowers the shrinking throughout solidification and is quite cheap as a commodity. The reduced density of silicon minimizes the overall part weight. Silicone has rather minimum aluminium solubility, which is why it precipitates as almost pure silicon, which is difficult consequently enhances the abrasion resistance [8-10].

2. Alloying Elements and Impurities with Their Respective Effects

Minute quantities of alloying elements are sometimes added to a metal so as to improve the metal's characteristics. Listed below are some of the elements with their respective effects.

- Arsenic: Arsenic must be regulated to very minimal levels for certain applications of aluminium due to its greatly toxic nature. A common example is As AL, which is a compound used as a semiconductor material.
- Beryllium: In aluminium based alloys containing amounts of magnesium, beryllium in small amounts aids in reducing oxidation at elevated temperatures because it diffuses to the surface and forms an oxide of high-volume ratio. In quantities up to 0.1%, Beryllium is implemented into aluminium baths for steel to enhance fastening of the aluminium film and control the development involving the harmful iron-aluminium complex.
- Calcium: In aluminium alloys containing silicon, calcium can be added to silicon to form a nearly insoluble compound, $CaSi_2$, which slightly increases the conductivity of commercial-grade metal. It enhances the strength and decreases elongation of aluminium-silicon alloys;

however, it does not make them heat-treatable. Very minute quantities of calcium improve the propensity of molten aluminium alloys to gather hydrogen.

- Copper: Aluminium based alloys comprising of between 2 to 10% of copper, form important families of alloys. These alloys, both cast and wrought, exhibit increased strength and hardness as well as a reduction in elongation when put through solution heat treatment and consequent aging. Maximum strengthening occurs between 4 to 6% Cu, depending on the impact of other additions and/or impurities.
- Copper-Magnesium: Insertion of magnesium to aluminium-copper alloys increases strength subsequently after heat treatment and quenching and in wrought alloys of this variety, an improvement in ductility also accompanies the increase in strength on aging at room temperature. As little as 0.5% Mg changes the aging characteristics of both cast and wrought Al-Cu alloys.
- Iron: Iron is regarded as a frequently found impurity in aluminium. Its high solubility in molten aluminium allows it to be dissolved at all molten stages of creation easily. In solid state on the other hand, iron exhibits significantly low solubility. For the reason of this restricted solubility, it is implemented in electrical conductors where it offers more strength as well as better creep characteristics at high temperatures. When added to Al-Cu-Ni alloys, iron causes an increase in strength at raised temperatures.
- Manganese: In primary aluminium, manganese is a commonly found impurity present in small concentrations. Manganese increases the re-crystallization temperature as well as strength, decreases resistivity, and facilitates the formation of fibrous structure subsequent to hot working of aluminium based alloys. There is non-existing noticeable effect on corrosion resistance of aluminium alloys. It is applied in the control of grain structure.
- Molybdenum: In aluminium, molybdenum is an impurity present at very low levels of 0.1 to 1.0 ppm. At 0.3% in aluminium and its alloys, it acts as a grain refiner as well as a modifier for the iron constituents, although it is not presently in application for these purposes.
- Silicon: After iron, silicon is the most prevalent impurity in commercial aluminium. Silicon used in levels up to 1.5 percent alongside magnesium generates Mg_2Si in the 6xxx series of heat-treatable alloys. Minute quantities of magnesium when added to any aluminium alloy containing silicon make it heat treatable, but the reverse is not the case due to the excess magnesium needed to create the Mg_2Si which decreases the compound's solid solubility.
- Zinc: Al-Zn alloys comprising other components offer the greatest mix of tensile characteristics among wrought aluminium alloys. However, the use of Al-Zn alloys is limited owing to its vulnerability to stress corrosion cracking of wrought alloys and hot cracking of casting alloys. Zinc improves the aluminium solution potential which makes it useful in sacrificial anodes and protective cladding.

3. Effects of Alloying on Aluminium-Silicon Alloys

3.1. Effects of Alloying on Corrosion Behaviour

As the electromotive force series has shown, aluminium is a thermodynamically reactive metal, this is due to its place on the series. Aluminium is the most reactive structural metal in the world, second only to beryllium and magnesium. The outstanding resistance to corrosion and the application as one of the primary trade metals in aluminium are due to the oxide film barrier that is fiercely attached to the surface. Silicon is available in wrought alloys of the series of 4xxx as second phase components, in brazing and welding alloys but also 3xx.x as well as 4xx.x casting alloys. In essence, Silicon is cathodic to the solid aluminium solution matrix. But the impact of silicone on the corrosion resistance of such alloys is miniscule due to the low density of the corrosion current caused by the high polarization of silicon particles. The carbon content, which in some mixes and impurities can exceed 5%, is heavily influenced by the resistance to corrosion shown in 3xx.x metals [1].

3.2. Effects of Alloying on Wear Behaviour

Iron can be provided up to 1.5% to 2.0% Fe as the popular alloying element. By adding several Al-Fe-Si stages, iron improves the silicon structures. The α and β stages are the most prevalent. The α stage contains a cubic crystal shape and is eutectic in the microstructure which it occurs in as a "Chinese script". As needles and/or platelets in the framework the less prevalent stages of β usually occur. These alloys can also contain other iron-bearing stages, like Al_6Fe and $FeAl_3$. Aluminium-silicon alloys typically have greater minimum iron content for die-casting uses to decrease sticking to the mould and casting.

Magnesium will be introduced to enhance the matrix by Mg_2Si precipitation. The inclusion of magnesium will not influence the Al-Si-Fe stages in an Al-Fe-Si-Mg alloy. Magnesium can, however, be combined with insoluble stages of aluminium-iron, which lead to a decrease in strengthening potential. Copper offers the most popular wear-resistant aluminium alloys. The copper addition provides for further enhancement of the matrix by the aging or precipitation hardening method ($AlCu_2$ phase) or by alteration in these inter-metallic stages of the hard, brittle stages Al-Fe-Si by replacement. As magnesium and copper additions cause increase in strength of the alloys, sacrifice occurs in ductility and corrosion resistance.

The majority of important Al-Si alloys also comprise small but significant manganese quantities. The presence of manganese is observed to decrease the solubility of aluminium iron and silicone, and to change the composition and morphology of the primary component phases Al-Fe-Si. Additions of manganese also enhance the aluminium-silicon alloy's high-temperature characteristics. In short, aluminium alloys which are resistant to wear are based on hard, brittle silicon alloys. In order to improve wear resistance compared with binary aluminium-silicon alloys the volume fraction of the inter-metal silicon-carrying stages is improvedwith alloys, like iron, manganese and copper. Furthermore, magnesium and copper further enhance the production of sub-microscopic precipitates through the aging process within a matrix.

3.3. Effects of Alloying on Processing

3.3.1. Forming

Formability, as far as a material is concerned, can be defined as the degree to which this can be disfigured until failure begins. The forms and sheets of aluminium generally fail either by localized necking or caused by ductility fracture. The necking is mainly driven by the characteristics of mass materials like work hardening and strain-rate and greatly relies on the strain route taken by the forming method. Lately, appreciable progress has been made in the production of high formability alloys, but an alloy cannot in particular be optimized solely on these grounds. The feature of the shaped portion also needs to be taken into account and changes in functional features like strength and convenience of machining sometimes decrease alloy formability. The main alloys that are reinforced by strong solution elements (often combined with cold work) are those in the 0.5 to 6 weight percent Al-Mg (5XX) series.

Reductions of the forming boundary generated by magnesium and copper additions tend to be linked to solute atoms' inclination to move to dislocation (strain age). This appears to boost work hardening in small strains where dislocations involve solute atoms, but reduces work hardening in large strains. The strain-hardening rate is also reduced by small quantities of magnesium or copper, reducing the helpful quantity of diffused necking that happen after standardized elongation. Figure 1 shows that adding magnesium further decreases fracture strains because of the greater fluid stresses that contribute to the creation and development of voids in inter-metallic particles. Magnesium also encourages the localization of strain into shear bands in solid solution, which concentrates void in a thin plane of strongly localized strain.

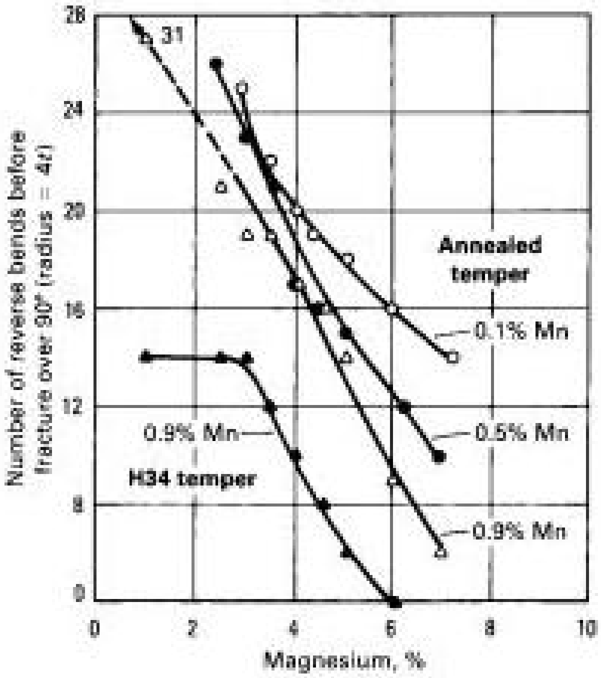

Figure 1: Effect of magnesium and manganese on the formability of aluminium alloys in the annealed and H34 tempers; 1.6 mm (0.064 in.) thick sheet [1].

3.3.2. Forging

Commercial aluminium purity can easily be forged to complex forms over a variety of temperatures. While a lot of aluminium alloys can be easily forged, difficulties tend to rise as the inclusion of alloy components improves the flow strength. Copper, magnesium and silicone are alloying components that greatly enhance solid solution strength. The insoluble phases include chromium, manganese, titanium, vanadium and zirconium. The existence of such components reinforces the temperature of the aluminium but has less impact than the greater solid solubility components [1].

3.3.3. Machining

Pure, unalloyed aluminium is related to a comparatively smooth, ductile forming a built-in surface, and aims to hold up to a cutting tool. To prevent the production of tough surfaces and hard burrs, unique machining methods are needed. The machinability of aluminium alloy increases. Solid solutions that enhance or toughen the hardness of the aluminium matrix by making the alloy heat-treatable or hard to work; thus, decreasing the bonded edge of the cutting tool; the creation of burrs, ruggedness and folding of the machine surface, and the chip duration.

3.3.4. Welding

Magnesium-silicon alloys of the 6xxx series offer mild strength and excellent corrosion resistance compared to certain heat-processing aluminium alloys. Due to their easy extrusion, they are offered both as sheet and plating products in a variety of structural forms. The versatility of such alloys can be seen in 6061, one of aluminium's most widely utilized alloys. The 6xxx alloys usually are well-formed and weldable.

3.4 Effect of alloying on grain boundary

[11] estimated the effect of alloying elements on grain boundary binding via η, a parameter equivalent to a deviation in the fracture work of the aluminium grain boundary. Cr, Si, Ni, P, B, Mg and Zr develops the grain boundary. With respect to firming up the grain boundary binding forces, Cr, Zr, Mg and Ni are effective, B and Si are unbiased, and phosphorus provides a weakening effect.

4. Conclusions

Aluminium is substituted with alloys which consist of one or more alloying elements or impurities for applications where it is demanded. In engineering applications, pure aluminium and its alloys still posesseveral challengessome of which are: uneven mechanical properties and fairly low strength. Modification of the microstructure and improvement of the mechanical properties can be achieved by heat treatment,cold working andalloying. Selection of alloying elements is therefore based on their special effects and appropriateness.

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