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Disruption mitigation using laser ablation of high-Z impurities in HL-1M tokamak*

Zheng Yong-Zhen(郑永真)†, Feng Xing-Ya(冯兴亚),
Guo Gan-Cheng(郭干城), Xu De-Ming(徐德明), and Zheng Yin-Jia(郑银甲)

Southwestern Institute of Physics, Chengdu 610041,*China*

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A preliminary experiment triggering a plasma current quench by laser ablation of high-Z impurities has been performed in the HL-1M tokamak. The injection of impurities with higher electric charges into tokamak plasmas can increase the radiation cooling of the plasma. Resistive, highly radiating plasma formed prior to the thermal quench can dissipate both the thermal and magnetic energies, which is possibly a simple and potential approach to reducing significantly the plasma thermal energy and magnetic energy before a disruption thereby a safe plasma termination is obtained.

Keywords: high-Z impurities, disruption, safe plasma termination, laser ablation

PACC: 5255, 5255G, 5255V, 6180B

1. Introduction

In contemporary large tokamaks, the disruptive termination of a discharge can reduce the lifetime of the first wall materials because they are irradiated by the intense heat flux at the energy quench and bombarded by energetic runaway electrons during the current quench, and generate high electromagnetic forces acting on vacuum vessel components due to the intense eddy current and halo current at the current quench. Thus, it is necessary to avoid or mitigate the energy quench and the current quench, and to control an anticipated disruption or emergency shutdown in the large tokamak machines.

The thermal energy and the magnetic field energy associated with the plasma current must be dissipated safely when a discharge is terminated in disruption.[1] The magnetic energy can be dissipated by impurity radiation if plasma position control is maintained.[2] The thermal energy is usually conducted to the plasma contact points in about 0.2–0.5-ms time period for a thermal quench prior to the dissipation of magnetic energy. Therefore, resistive highly-radiating plasma formed prior to the thermal quench could dissipate both the thermal and magnetic energies and minimize the risk of local deposition. Using the injection of impurities with higher electric charges can produce resistive highly radiating plasma and increase the radiation cooling of plasma to make a safe termination of the disruption. There appears to be an approach to reducing significantly the plasma thermal energy before a disruption. A high-Z impurity (KCl) pellet injection has been used in such an application on T-10[3] and noble gas jet injection has been used for disruption mitigation on DIII-D. In this paper it is reported that preliminary experiments are performed in HL-1M using the injection of Al by laser ablation to investigate this approach.

2. Experimental results

The main idea of the experiments is to obtain resistive highly radiating plasma formed prior to the thermal quench and increase the efficiency of plasma cooling due to high-Z impurity radiation. The radiation source is created by laser ablation of Al or Fe. A laser beam with an energy output of 1–2 J and a pulse duration of 20–30 ns is focused on the metal films with 10 μm in thickness and produces a burst of metal gas, which moves towards the plasma centre. Figure 1 shows the laser blow-off system. The laser spot with a diameter of 3–5 mm contains a few 10^{19} atoms of metalline element. When those metallic atoms move towards the plasma confinement region, they experience

*Project supported by IAEA International Science Foundation (Grant No IS 105123).
†E-mail: yz.zheng@swip.ac.cn

a series of processes: ionization, collision and diffusion. If the ions at various ionization levels of injected impurities wholly distribute in the core confinement region, the ion density is 0.5%–2% of the electron density in the plasma centre region ($r/a < 1/5$),[4] which can be demonstrated by absolute measurements from the VUV (vacuum ultra-violet) spectrometer with the impurity transport code SITCODE simulation.[5] In fact, only a fraction of such ions can reach the centre. The target chamber is attached to the top of the vessel and the injection point is approximately 0.9 m away from the plasma boundary. The injected neutral particles have a measured energy of a few eV and reach the plasma boundary in less than 1 ms. The neutral atoms are ionized on the plasma edge and spread out rapidly along the field lines. At the same time, because of collisions or turbulence, the ions move slowly and radially inwards typically at speeds of 1–10 m/s that are measured with the CCD-camera. The penetration of the impurities into plasma is observed using two soft x-ray imaging cameras and a CCD-camera. The penetration radius is about 20 cm measured by the CCD-camera, or evaluated from the ionization levels of injected impurities (Al^{10+}, Al^{11+} and Al^{12+}) measured with the VUV spectrometer. The impurity particles normally travel inward half of the minor radius and creates a maximum impurity deposition there. The plasma parameters before the injection are as follows: plasma current I_p is 150 kA, toroidal field B_t is $\sim$ 2T, central electron temperature $T_e(0) \sim$ (0.6–1.2) keV, line-averaged electron density $\bar{n}_e \sim 2\text{–}3\times10^{19}\text{m}^{-3}$.

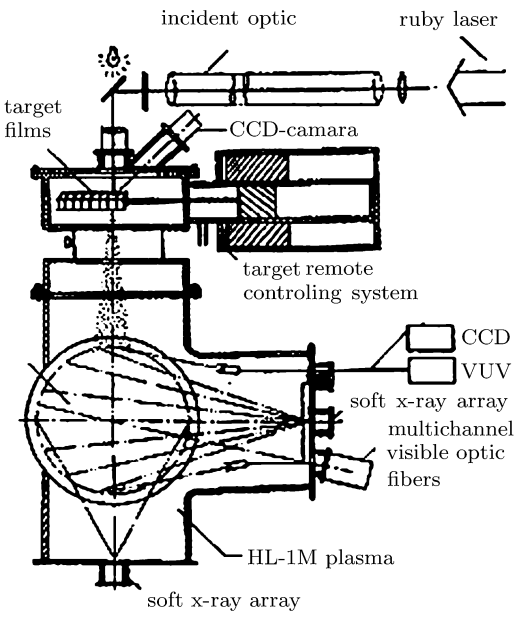


Fig.1. The laser blow-off system.

The plasma behaviour varies with the quantity of injected impurity and the plasma density. The injection of a small amount (<0.01%) of the electron density causes a slight perturbation of $\Delta n_e/n_e \sim 0.05$, and $-\Delta T_e/T_e \sim 0.2$. Such plasma parameters as $T(r,t)$, loop voltage $V_l(t)$ are relaxed in 20 – 30 ms to new steady-state levels which are close to those prior to the injection. No changes in $m = 2$ MHD (magnetohydrodynamic model) activity or in 'Hard x-ray' signal (HXR emission with energy more than 3 MeV) are observed.

The plasma behaviour after the injection of a larger amount of Al can be divided into three phases, as shown by vertical lines in Fig.2. In the phase I-impurity entry, loss of the thermal energy, and the formation of Al plasma. It takes at least 2–3 ms to

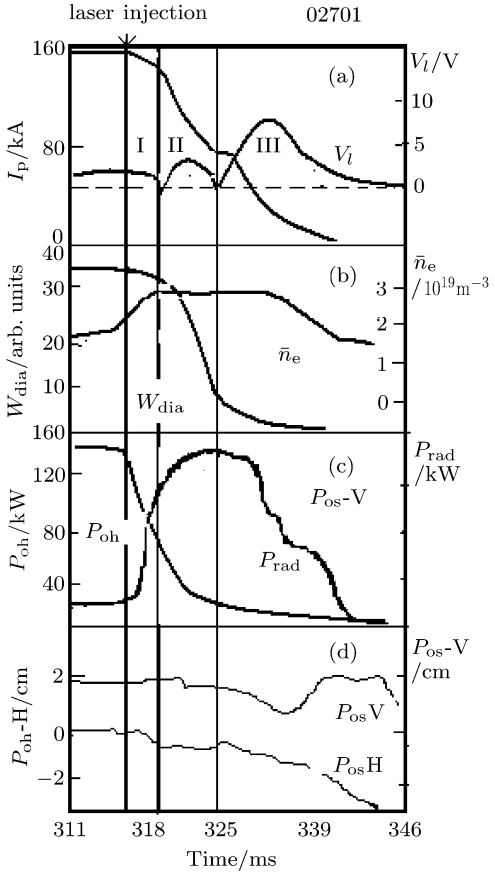


Fig.2. Plasma behaviours after the injection of Al.

ionize the injected Al and undergo the mass toroidal deposition and then achieve the toroidal–poloidal symmetrization of the electron density, which can be estimated from the rise and saturation times of the interferometer signals $\bar{n}_e$ (see Fig.2(b)). In this phase, current starts to decay and then the plasma horizontal position moves about 1.2 cm at a roughly constant rate, which is indicative of loss of thermal energy. The

current decreases by ∼20 kA in 2 ms and the negative loop voltage spike with a 0.3-ms duration is observed. The perturbations in poloidal and radial fields appear and grow but only up to a moderate amplitude. In this stage, the total power radiated significantly increases (see Fig.2(c), signals are measured by the barometer) and the loss of thermal energy occurs, then significant temperature perturbation in the ambient plasma reaches $(-\Delta T_e/T_e) \sim 0.5 - 0.9(\Delta\bar{n}_e/\bar{n}_e \sim 0.15 - 0.5)$ due to deposition of impurities. The electron temperature drop is measured by using the electron cyclotron emission (ECE) receiver as shown in Fig.3(a) and the soft x-ray pulse height analyser (PHA). The magnitude of the temperature drop is roughly proportional to the number of electrons deposited. The loss is also indicated by the plasma β in the equilibrium reducing to vicinity of zero and the resulting horizontal shift of the plasma. The loss of total plasma pressure measured by diamagnetic loops is observed as shown in Fig.2(b). It is indicated in this cold, high density, post Al-injection discharges that both electron and ion thermal energies are lost on the same time scale. The phase I ends with a minor disruption. The duration of the phase varies with 2–25-ms time range and increases with the decrease of laser power and thickness of metal films or the plasma density. The phase II-Current beginning to decay at a decay rate of ∼ 30 kA/ms. It corresponds to a Spitze resistivity temperature of ∼ 10 eV. The loop voltage becomes positive and significantly increases. We have observed a significant reduction in the plasma energy content Δ W / W, the reduction is measured to be about 80% of its maximum value in shot #02701. In this phase, the growth of the perturbed magnetic field is essentially completed. As a result of plasma cooling the vertical position control is switched off, but the vertical position is essentially unchanged. The horizontal position shifts inward (see Fig.2(d)). It is seen from Fig.3(c) that before disruption, the amplitudes of mode $m = 2(q = 2)$ and later mode $m = 3(q = 3/2)$ grow up and are measured by using MHD Fourier techniques. The second sharp drop in the electron temperature T_e and a steady increase in hard x-ray rate are observed. The increase is presumed to reflect a gradual buildup of energetic electrons during the initial current decay. With the further increase of the loop voltage, the electron temperature reaches its minimal value. We simulate the evolution of the current density profile $j(r,t)$ after the impurity injection by using the diffusion equation for a poloidal magnetic field. The neoclassical plasma conductivity is calculated using experimental profiles $T_e(r,t)$ and $n_e(r,t)$. The simulated $j(r,t)$ profiles then serve as the input data for the code to calculate stability and parameters of magnetic islands.[6] The simulation results have shown that all modes with the poloidal number $m > 4$ are stable at all the time while the $m = 2, 3, 4$ modes are still developing. The time behaviour of the external boundary position of the $m = 3$ $(q = 3/2)r_{3/2}^{\mathrm{ext/a}}(t)$ island and the internal boundary position of the $m = 2(q = 2)r_2^{\mathrm{int/a}}(t)$ island are shown in Fig.3(c). It is seen that the disruption occurs at the moment when the $q = 2$ and the $q = 3/2$ islands are intercepted. This implies an appreciable influence of the $j(r,t)$ evolution on the disruption development.

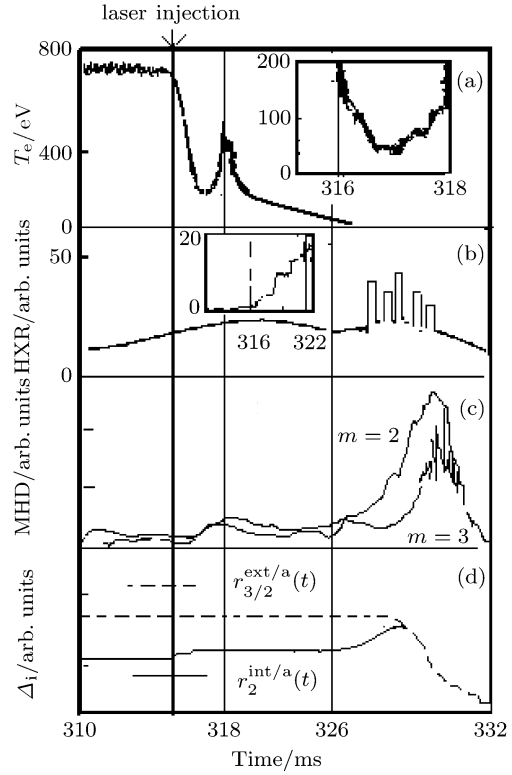


Fig.3. Te from ECE emission at centre (a), hard x-ray signal from NaI scintillator (b) MHD behaviour and $q = 2$ and $q = 3/2$ islands intercepted after the injection (c).

In the phase III, current decay ending. A small non-thermal current appears and the total current increases by 10 kA that is above an extrapolated value from the resistive decay. An extended period of negative loop voltage appears. The vertical position then returns to vicinity of the vessel centre, the current decay rate returns to 20 kA/ms and the discharge terminates on the inner wall. The electron energy content is not restored after the disruption.

The soft x-ray emission during the injection remains in two stages, illustrated in Fig.4. After the

ablation of the injected impurity, the radiation profile is built up at minor radius immediately, with no growth in radiation from the centre. In the central region no sawtooth crash occurs.[7] Then it takes 2–3 ms for the radiation profile to become peaked on axis.

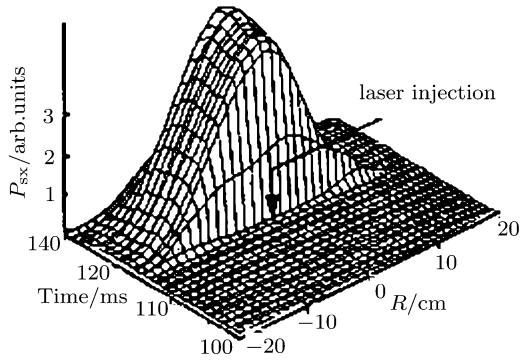


Fig.4. The soft x-ray emissions during the injection remains in two stages.

3. Discussion

The experiment demonstrates a possibility of fast (3 ms) plasma cooling and losing about 80% of plasma energy before disruption occurs. The plasma resistance before the current decay is calculated by equating the ohmic dissipation to the known input power. If the plasma resistivity is Spitzer resistivity of this kind, taking $Z_{\rm eff} = 4$, the electron temperature in HL-1M in 2 ms before the current decay is inferred to be ~ 10 eV. The lowest $T_{\rm e}$ is<40 eV, which could be achieved by anomalous conductivity before the disruption. The drop in $T_{\rm e}$ at the moment of disruption is due to not only the enhancement of transport across the minor radius but also the radiation cooling. Before the disruption an influx of impurity atoms would cool the plasma while they are ionized, causing the temperature to drop. Figure 2(c) shows a comparison between ohmic heating power ($P_{\rm oh}$) and radiation power ($P_{\rm rad}$). Both thermal energy and magnetic energy appear to be dissipated largely by radiation. The electron temperature drop is simulated by a simple code.[7] The plasma equilibrium calculations are obtained at the end of phase II using the ZYZ equilibrium reconstruction code[4] with a high time resolution (∼0.2 ms). The plasma equilibrium is well maintained through the loss of thermal energy and the initial loss of magnetic energy in the initial phase of current decay. The horizontal position of plasma shifts inward during the loss of thermal energy and plasma current, and the vertical position is essentially unchanged.

The current plateau during the current decay shown in Fig.2 has a standard feature of fast disruption with a low density ($\bar{n}_{\rm e} \sim< 0.8 \times 10^{19} {\rm m}^{-3}$) in HL-1M. The plateau results from a current carried by runaway electrons, and the number of runaway electrons generated can be used as an indication of $T_{\rm e}$. Calculations of the rate of generation of runaway electrons show the Dreicer field, $E_{\rm D}$, induced. If $T_{\rm e}$ is dropped during the impurity injection, a larger electric field is induced, and then growth of a small thermal current is observed. Simulations using the Parail–Pogutse approach[8] and the 'avalanching effect'[9] have shown that when the large drop in $T_{\rm e}$ has occurred, the runway generation should take place just after the minor disruption. The current carried by runaway electrons is low, so the total current increases only by 10 kA that is above an extrapolated value from the resistivity decay. Since runaway electron current touching the components of the first wall can cause their damage, it must be careful to use the mitigation technique that suppresses the generation of runaway electrons during the impurity injection. Some experimental techniques such as intensive massive neon or helium puff have been applied. The experiment with an erroneous magnetic field externally applied and auxiliary plasma heating will be carried out in HL-2A. Unlike the external magnetic field perturbations, the massive neon or helium gas puffs into disruptive plasma, which can efficiently prevent the runaway electrons from being generated in HL-1M. The analysis of experimental data has shown that these disruptions are characterized by a very fast increase in plasma density, thus a reduction in generation rate of runaway electrons also can extend the current quench stage, with the induced plasma current decreasing (Fig.5). These methods need to further study.

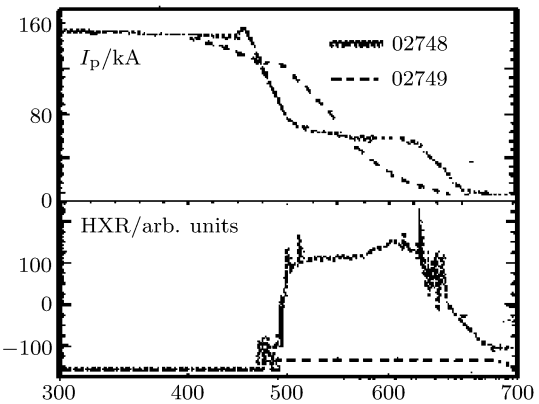


Fig.5. A comparison between temporal evolutions of plasma currents and hard x-ray signal (HXR) for disruptions #2749 with for neon puff and those for #2748-without gas puff.

The radial vessel displacements at the top and bottom of the vessel, measured at 4th toroidal locations with an accurate vibration measuring instrument (precision: 0.1 mm), show that the magnitude of the displacement produced by laser ablation of high-Z impurities that can cause current termination is small and almost symmetric, indicating that a little impact of the laser ablation of impurities takes place. Though, vessel has ripple sections, the received power is symmetric, as a whole, the influence of displacement is less. The vacuum vessel displacements indicate the severity of the force that is toroidally symmetric during a disruption as shown in Fig.6.

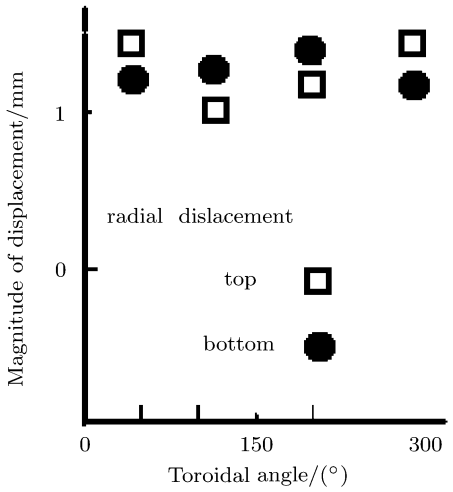


Fig.6. Radial vessel displacement.

If assisted by some disruption warner by using MHD Fourier analyser, a method to avoid and soften the energy quench and the current quench and to control an anticipated disruption or emergency shutdown can be developed in the present tokamak machines.

4. Conclusions

1) The injection of high-Z impurity into the ohmically heated HL-1M plasma shows a possibility of fast ($\sim$3 ms) plasma cooling and losing about 80% of the energy before the disruption occurs.

2) Large amounts of high-Z impurities are chosen, with the purpose of enhancing the $Z_{\rm eff}$ in the plasma centre at high $T_{\rm e}$, and producing a large electron density perturbation, both of which can provide a strong radiation source and reduce the background electron temperature immediately below 0.1 keV by dilution.

3) The experimental results indicate that a resistive, highly radiating plasma formed prior to the thermal quench, could dissipate both the thermal and the magnetic energies, with little MHD activity present, and minimize the risk of local deposition.

4) The growth of a non-thermal current due to runaway electrons is observed. The runaway electrons occur during the minor disruption due to the larger Dreicer parameter $E/E_{\rm D} \sim 0.0025$ before the impurity injection, and experiments using additional methods to suppress this current should be tested. The generation of runaway electrons can be reduced easily by using an intensive massive neon or helium puff and an externally applied magnetic field perturbation or decreasing the background electron density.

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